

Interview with Barbara Flynn Currie

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Interview #1: December 16, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, December 16, 2014. I'm in Chicago, on the south side of Chicago, sitting right next to Representative Barbara Flynn Currie. We're just talking about what the appropriate title is. Good afternoon.

Currie: Good afternoon.

DePue: This is going to be a fairly long interview because you've had a long career and a distinguished...

Currie: A long and storied career, I think is what we say.

DePue: Storied, yes.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: I'm all about the stories, the unvarnished stories. That's what I want to hear.

Currie: Yes, of course, absolutely.

DePue: I'm delighted to talk to you. You are currently the majority leader for the Illinois House of Representatives and Mike Madigan... I don't know if you'd refer to him as your boss, but he's the house speaker.



Barbara Flynn Currie 2002

Currie: He's the house speaker, and he appointed me majority leader—the first woman to hold the post—in 1997.

DePue: We're just about, what? A month away from our last election.

Currie: Right.

DePue: So we're in between sessions.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Let me start with a peculiar question. What are your reflections on the last election?

Currie: I was disappointed that my guy, Pat Quinn, did not win. I think that he is a really good person, and his priorities are priorities I share. One of the stories I told about him during the campaign, and that sticks with me, is that when there was a lot of enthusiasm for a helping hand, bailing out, CME [Chicago Mercantile Exchange], the trader group, they felt they were being overtaxed. And Sears was in trouble, and in order to keep them in Hoffman Estates, there were various deals, proposals, subsidies.

Pat Quinn said, "Ok, I understand why CME believes it needs helps, and I understand why we should try to keep Sears in Hoffman Estates. But along the way, we're going to expand the earned income tax credit." He was able to get that done. The earned income tax credit is targeted tax relief for working families. It is a sliding scale, so the less income you earn, the more value it has for you, and it is refundable. It is a very good way to help alleviate poverty, and it's an encouragement to stay or to join the work force. So, hats off to him.

The people who get the earned income tax credit are, by definition, the little guys, and Pat **always** had his eye out and his heart open to the little guys. So the big guys were getting theirs, and Pat Quinn saw to it that the little guys got something to take home too.

DePue: How long have you known Pat Quinn?

Currie: Probably, as long as I've been in politics. I've never known him particularly well. I've seen a lot more of him as governor than I had when he was either lieutenant governor, state treasurer, or any of those stints. But I'm not personally close to him.

DePue: Well, here's a curve ball for you. Are you willing to make any kind of predictions about this next term, since you've got Bruce Rauner coming in as governor? You've got the income tax increase expiring and a huge budget hole now that's going to have to be filled.

- Currie: Well, my hope is that Mr. Rauner will understand the fiscal facts, and he will take a kind of leadership role in figuring out some way to resolve our fiscal problems. I've worked with Republican governors before, Jim Thompson, George Ryan, Jim Edgar. I was able to work effectively with all three of them, and I hope that Mr. Rauner is cut from that same cloth and that he will be a moderate, reasonable, responsible leader for the people of the State of Illinois.
- DePue: Spoken like true majority leader (both laugh). Let's start with a very familiar subject to you, that's when and where you were born.
- Currie: I was born in 1940 in La Crosse, Wisconsin.
- DePue: On May 3rd?
- Currie: On May 3rd.
- DePue: Tell me a little bit about...
- Currie: I'll tell you, it's harder and harder when you're going to fill out a form electronically, and you scroll forever before you get to your own birth year (both laugh).
- DePue: Well, that's the disadvantages of ...
- Currie: Right of age, right?
- DePue: Now that you've got all that wisdom, as well. Tell me about your father.
- Currie: My father was from the East Coast. He was born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. I think he was the first in his family to go to college. He won a scholarship to, I believe, St. Joseph's in Pawtucket.
- DePue: What was his name?
- Currie: Frank T. Flynn, Junior. He was the oldest of four.
- DePue: I saw someplace Thomas...
- Currie: Yeah. But he went by Frank T, T for Thomas. In fact, it was Francis Thomas Flynn, Junior, but he used the name Frank. After college he went to Notre Dame, where he did graduate work in sociology and then taught there for a time as well.
- DePue: A sociology professor.
- Currie: He was in social work actually, but I think he taught on the sociology faculty at Notre Dame.
- DePue: What was he doing in La Crosse then?

Currie: My mother's family was from La Crosse. We often were there in the summertime. I guess May was not the summertime. She had a sister who was a nurse at the local hospital, and maybe she felt more comfortable birthing her children in La Crosse. I really don't know.

DePue: But otherwise, the family was in Indiana?

Currie: By that time we were living in Indiana. I have an older brother, four years older than I, and I don't know that he was born in La Crosse. He may have been born in South Bend.

DePue: Born in 1940, the obvious question is, did your father end up serving in the military?

Currie: He did. He was in the Navy. I don't know that I know the years, although I probably someplace have information that would tell me. He did sign up, and he was in the military, and at some point, we lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, while he was doing his Navy service. At some point later, he was in the Far East. I don't know if he went... I don't know exactly how far east he went, but he was on a ship that did deploy to the Far East conflict.

DePue: Do you know what kind of ship he served on?

Currie: I don't, but I might have information about that someplace.

DePue: I was just wondering if he talked much about his military experience.

Currie: He did not. That happened when I was pretty young. I never heard much about his military experience, except he enjoyed stories about crossing the International Dateline.

DePue: The other stories that old salts like to tell is about crossing the equator with the...

Currie: Right. I think he did that too.

DePue: How would you describe him? What was his personality?

Currie: He died when I was fifteen, so I'm not sure how apt my recollections are. He was a person who was hardworking and very interested in politics and in the world. He was a pretty strict disciplinarian with his kids; he had five of them.

DePue: So you were the second.

Currie: I was the second oldest. But he did have a very good sense of humor, as well. He was an academic all the time I knew him. That's not true because he was in the Navy when I was small. But then, we moved to Chicago in 1947, the fall of '47, which is when he took up... He may have already been teaching at

the University of Chicago [U of C] in the School of Social Service Administration, [SSA] but we joined him from La Crosse in the fall of 1947.

DePue: So his job in Chicago was always at the university?

Currie: Yes.

DePue: You lived in South Chicago though.

Currie: No.

DePue: That's not correct either?

Currie: No, no. My district includes part of South Chicago. We always lived in Hyde Park when we came to Chicago, and we lived in various parts of the neighborhood. We lived in prefabs in 1947 and then the barracks; these were all built for the military during the war. Then we moved to an apartment in about '50. I think that my parents bought their house in '52.

DePue: And always in Hyde Park?

Currie: Always in Hyde Park.

DePue: I'm going to have to go back and change the record on your family then.

Currie: Yeah, I don't know where that would have come from.

DePue: Let's talk about your mother then.

Currie: She was born actually in England to a family of German immigrants, I think from the south of Germany. They were part of a very vibrant German community in London. I think that they...

DePue: When did they leave Germany; do you know?

Currie: I think it was not her parents who left Germany. I think her parents had left Germany, but they met as young adults in London, I believe. Her father was a butcher. I think he had a shop in Rotherhithe and was also a lay Methodist minister. During World War I, tensions were pretty high because, of course, her family was German. And even though he had done all kinds of wonderful things for poor people in the neighborhood, this was not a good time to be a German living in London.

Other parts of my mother's extended family had moved from England to Iowa and Wisconsin. Ultimately that's where her parents came; they came to La Crosse, Wisconsin.

DePue: Where did your parents meet, then?

Currie: They met at the University of Chicago. Now how did that work? They met at the University of Chicago. Maybe my father was then doing graduate work at SSA and so was my mother. I think that's where they met. Before my father was teaching at Notre Dame, he was back at the University of Chicago as a student. Then he got a job teaching at Notre Dame, and they got married. They went to South Bend for the next several years, until he upped for the war.

DePue: What's your mother's name?

Currie: Her name was Elsie Rose Gobel, G-o-b-e-l.

DePue: And you say she was Protestant, Presbyterian or...

Currie: Methodist, I believe, although she became a Roman Catholic. My father's family was Catholic.

DePue: With a name like his, you would think that it would kind of go with the territory.

Currie: Yeah, it did.

DePue: How long had his family been there?

Currie: Well, I should know the answer. They were not recent. His parents were themselves, I think, more than one generation removed. I think both sides of his parent's families had come... I want to say the '40s, or the '50s, the '60s from Ireland, but I'm not sure about exactly when. I'm sure that his parents were not first generation. I think both of them had come from families whose forebears had already come to the United States.

They were quite Irish, except for my grandmother who always said... How did she put it? She said, "I'm Irish, but with a little Scotch on the side" (DePue laughs).

DePue: Those are the stories that are told around Thanksgiving tables.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Tell me a little bit more about your mother. It sounds like she [had] quite a bit of education; did she?

Currie: She did. She was one of, oh gee, six or seven surviving children and very bookish. The vision of mother was always... She was the one that it was hard



Currie's parents, Frank T. Flynn, Jr. and Elsie Rose Gobel, were married in a Notre Dame University chapel, South Bend, Indiana, December 29, 1934.

to get her to really pay attention through the vacuuming because she was reading a book.

Her oldest brother, Harry, was also a butcher. He served in the RAF [Royal Air Force] during World War I. But he then settled, not in La Crosse, Wisconsin, with the rest of the family. By then he was, I think, a grown man, and he settled in Chicago. I think it was partly because Harry and his good wife Mary were in Chicago that the family felt comfortable sending my mother to the University of Chicago. So that's where she met my father. She was an undergraduate.

DePue: What was her major?

Currie: I somehow think that they did meet each other taking social service classes, but I'm not quite sure why she would have been doing that, since she would have been an undergraduate.

DePue: Did she earn a degree?

Currie: She did, but I think she may have also got a master's degree in social work. So maybe they met later. Maybe it was not when she was an undergraduate but a little later.

DePue: Your father earned a PhD, I assume?

Currie: Yes, he did. I think he didn't do that, though... He didn't finished the PhD until after the war.

DePue: So he probably used the G.I. Bill a little bit.¹

Currie: I'm sure he did.

DePue: Did your mother have her career then?

Currie: She did. I don't know exactly when she started because she did have these five children to bring up, but at some point along the way, she took a job with what was then the Scheil School of Social Studies [1943-1954]. Bishop Scheil created an adult education program, named after him. It was populated with fairly progressive teachers, probably fairly progressive students. My mother did not teach there, but she did some of the administrative work.

Later, I think that the school disappeared. I'm not sure why. I have some recollection that the politics of Bishop Scheil became less popular with

¹ Officially the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, the G.I. Bill was created to help veterans of World War II. It established hospitals, made low-interest mortgages available and granted stipends covering tuition and expenses for veterans attending college or trade schools. (<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/gi-bill>)

the hierarchy, the Chicago hierarchy, when people like Cody [Coomes] came on board. So it may have disappeared.

And then she taught at St. Thomas the Apostle, which is where all the Flynn kids went to school, also in Hyde Park, in the neighborhood. Then she also taught at the Lab School.

DePue: Was the family a practicing...good Catholics?

Currie: Yes. And as I say, she was a convert. At some points during her life, she went to mass every day. So in some ways, as it so often happens, more Catholic than the Catholics, showing a greater degree of religiosity than the chap who invited her to join.

DePue: What were her expectations for the kids, as far religious training was concerned?

Currie: We all went to Catholic grammar school. When I went to University of Chicago Laboratory High School. I was still doing CCD classes as an extra.²

DePue: CCD is...

Currie: Confraternity of Catholic Doctrine or something like that. I never felt any pressure to turn up at church on a daily basis. I think we all felt some pressure to be there on Sundays.

DePue: How would you describe your mother's personality?

Currie: She was warm and very nice. I think we all thought of her as being something of a patsy, a little bit of a pushover (DePue laughs). If you just said the right thing, then it was going to be alright.

DePue: And you described your father as the disciplinarian.

Currie: Bit of a disciplinarian, yeah. At least that was my perspective. Mother was much more forgiving, much softer, much easier. And she had a really good sense of humor. She was great with all of my friends. Everybody liked her. She was just, you know, a terrific person.

DePue: Here's the tough question. Which one do you take after?

Currie: I think I'm tougher than my mother. I don't know that I'm really identical to my father, but I think when it comes to suffering fools gladly, I don't think I'm as high on the Christianity chart as my mother was. I think I'm more likely to assess people, and I'm not as easy going as she was. She was the kind

² Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) is an association established in Rome in 1562 for the purpose of giving religious education. Its modern usage is a religious education program of the Roman Catholic Church, normally designed for children. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confraternity_of_Christian_Doctrine)

of person who, if you brought home a paper, an essay, she always said it was wonderful. She was very proud of you, and she felt terrific that you had done such a great job. My father was likely to be a little more critical, a little more likely to say, "But what did you think about?" or "Had it occurred to you that maybe...?"

DePue: Would he take the red pen out and start correcting the paper?

Currie: Not that bad, no (both laugh). But he was more likely to challenge what further you might have done or thought about and so forth and so on.

DePue: What's your earliest memory?

Currie: Oh dear. When I was in Cincinnati, I remember being with a friend, and I don't know why, I just remember the house. It was a white house. It was just confusing to me because her last name was Brown, but she lived in a white house, and it just...you know, random, stupid memories.

DePue: You mentioned that your father died when you were fifteen years old. How did your life change after that?

Currie: Quite significantly. He was only forty-seven. He died really, quite, quite young, and my youngest...

DePue: Was it a complete surprise?

Currie: Heart attack, a very sudden heart attack. My youngest brother is nine years younger than I, so he would have been five. My oldest brother was four years older. He was nineteen, and he had recently joined the navy, probably not my parents' favorite thing for him to be doing. So it hit everybody in different ways. My middle brother had a particularly hard time. He was thirteen. It's a really hard age to go through something like that. I think he became more... He acted out his unhappiness, his upset, a little more than the rest.

But it made a huge difference for my mother that suddenly she is the breadwinner for this family that extends down to a five-year old.

DePue: So five through fifteen and then your brother...

Currie: Five through nineteen, right.

DePue: But he had already left the home?

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Still, four kids still in the household. Did she find work?

Currie: She was already teaching at that point. I think she was at St. Thomas's and then she moved over to Lab School. I don't know... I was still in high school at Lab School, and my brother, Michael, was in eighth grade. He wasn't yet in high school. Anyway, so she moved over to Lab. She talked a lot about the poor house, but I don't think any of us quite believed that that was actually going to happen.

My father had a Fulbright when I was thirteen and my brother Michael was eleven, and we went to live in England for three months.³ In fact, we lived with some of my mother's extended family, relatives who had not come across to the United States. We got to know a lot of cousins who were contemporaries of ours and the older generation on the German side of the family. That was quite a lot of fun.

DePue: What did you think of that English adventure then?

Currie: It was great. At thirteen, I was quite anxious when I got there, and in the early days, fearful. I missed my mother; it was hard getting to know a whole new set of people at school, figuring out the transportation system, all of that. By the time I was ready to leave, I was really sad to leave all my new friends. It was a typical adolescent response to travel in strange places.

My father was not with us all the time. His topic had to do with the reform school movement in Great Britain. So Borstal Boys was what they were called, and he did a lot of visiting of reform institutions around the country.⁴ He was often away for five, six days, a week at a time.

DePue: When your father died, as the oldest child who's still at home, my guess is you ended up having a lot more responsibilities around the house.

Currie: I would say emotional responsibilities too, in terms of care of the younger set. My sister is four years younger than I, and when I got married—I got married when I was nineteen—when I was leaving home, she was going to move into my bedroom because it was a nicer bedroom than her own. I remember hearing (laughs) that she said to my oldest brother, who was back at home for whatever reason, “I have taken Barbara's room, but I have not taken her place. So all the problems that you brought to Barbara, you can't bring them to me.” (both laugh) I thought that was an interesting perception of the role...her perception of the role I played in the family.

³ The Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program sends American scholars and professionals abroad to lecture or conduct research for up to a year. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fulbright_Program)

⁴ A Borstal was a type of youth detention center in the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland. In India, such a detention center is known as a Borstal school. Borstals were run by HM Prison Service and were intended to reform young people. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borstal>)

DePue: You think that experience, the whole experience of having that extra responsibility and the tighter budget and everything, affected your outlook on life?

Currie: I'm sure it did, but I can't begin to articulate how. I don't think that it changed the basic me. I think I was an optimist, and I think that didn't change. I don't mean to say that I was stupidly unrealistic but that I think I always had a notion that things will be okay.

DePue: Was there the expectation, given the parents that you had, that you would be going to college, you would have a career?

Currie: Yes. I'm not sure that I remember about the career part because, at the time at which I was going through high school, most women didn't have "Careers." More likely, as with my mother, to find herself, find oneself doing something, working outside the home.

I don't think it was ever expected that I would not find work, but whether they were as grandiose as to think of it like a career, I really don't remember. I would say that my teachers certainly seemed to think that I should contemplate something career-like. And my parents would not have been opposed to that at all. They treated me as a person who had skills and possibilities and all the rest of it.

DePue: Was that the same for the rest of your siblings as well?

Currie: Um-hmm.

DePue: Tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in.

Currie: When we were growing up in Hyde Park, it was undergoing significant changes. This was the period, I believe, urban renewal began, maybe as early as 1952, when I was twelve, maybe a little bit later. There were great tensions in the neighborhood. There were a lot of new people moving in, people who were black and some Latino as well.

There was a decision made in the City Council to do some clearance programs, slum clearance. The alderman at the time, Leon Despres, was a vociferous critic of the mayor. There were large swathes of housing that came down. Some of it was really quite ghetto-like, quite slum-like. This was not because of blacks, really. It was very low income, white people. But it was often called the poor removal, not slum clearance.

Mike Nichols and Elaine May had a great line.⁵ It was not as early as '52, I'm sure, but they were back doing a show, some place in the

⁵ Nichols and May was an American improvisational comedy duo act developed by Mike Nichols (1931–2014) and Elaine May (born 1932). Their three comedy albums reached the Billboard Top 40 between 1959 and 1962.

neighborhood, the Piccadilly Theater I think.⁶ Their line was that Hyde Park was black and white, shoulder to shoulder against the lower classes. That was very much many people's perception of what was happening.

At the time, it was thought the university was not going to stay in Chicago unless there was some effort to fix up the neighborhood. There was talk of them taking the campus to George Williams College, which was somewhere in the suburbs, or even picking up stakes and moving to some other state altogether. Whether the threat was real, I don't know. As I say, there were tensions in the community about the degree to which there were significant physical changes.

I think my parents tended to be supportive of the idea that we needed to make it a safer, better neighborhood. But they would not have been unsympathetic to the perception that we needed also to help people who couldn't help themselves find a better way.

DePue: I can't imagine how traumatic it would have been for the rest of the community if the university had moved out of that neighborhood.

Currie: Oh yeah, it would have been very difficult. But I don't know how real those discussions were. All I know is that the idea is that they might have moved. I don't know.

DePue: I'm trying to remember, was it '55 or '57 that Daley became mayor for the first term?

Currie: I don't know, '55, I think. And his opponent in that race, was that Bob Merriam, who was the sociology professor at the University of Chicago?

DePue: Well, I'll defer to you on that one because I don't recall.

Currie: I know he ran for mayor at some point, and I think he gave Daley a bit of a run for his money. But I don't think it was real close at the end of the day.

DePue: Was that renewal that was going on in the Hyde Park area something that the Daley administration was doing, or was that previously?

Currie: Yeah, it was Richard J., but I don't remember when that race was. It could have been even before. It could have been Daley's first term, which I don't remember what that was... I think Daley had to already be in in '52, '53 because... I think maybe he won in '51 because I think he was in large part the...

Many comedians have cited them as key influences in modern comedy.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nichols_and_May)

⁶ Built and operated by the Schoenstadt circuit in the Hyde Park neighborhood, the Piccadilly Theater was the flagship and the largest and most ornate house of their chain. (<http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/2512>)

DePue: I know he wasn't mayor yet at that time.

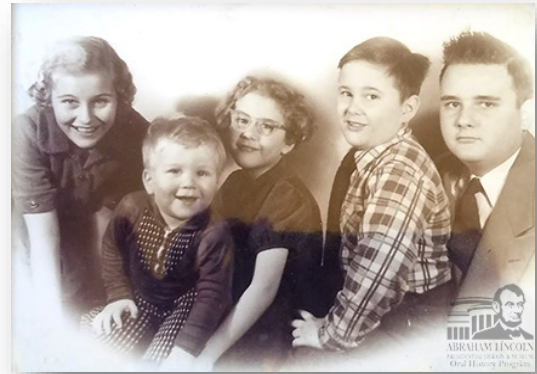
Currie: I'm pretty sure that the urban renewal programs started like in '52, and it certainly had his fingerprints all over it. Whether that was right or not, I don't know.

DePue: He was certainly a rising star at that time.

Currie: But Merriam's campaign would have been based much more on issues like ethics in government, patronage politics. It would have been that kind of approach to the contest, rather than a local issue.

DePue: When you were growing up, was the neighborhood considered too dangerous for the kids to be running loose on the streets?

Currie: No, we pretty much ran loose on the streets, I would say. There were incidents. People's bicycles got stolen from time to time. But I don't feel that I was real circumscribed in ways that I would not have been, had I been living in La Crosse, Wisconsin, perhaps a bit.



Barbara with her brothers Frank, Michael, Terry, and sister Patricia in 1952.

Yeah, I'm wrong. We were a little more circumscribed than were the kids that lived in La Crosse, Wisconsin. But not so that we couldn't navigate, couldn't go off to the library or to the movie theater without parental supervision.

DePue: Our generation tends to get nostalgic about growing up, compared to what kids experience today. Would that be true in your case, do you think?

Currie: Oh, absolutely. I think I had more freedom than my kids did, and then I see parents of even younger children offering even less freedom today.

DePue: You've described this to a certain extent, but the economics of the neighborhood...

Currie: It is fair to say that there was an increasingly large group of low-income people, and race became part of the equation because I think there was more African American movement into the neighborhood. There were very middle class African Americans living in the neighborhood when I was growing up. But I think it was shifting, so that more of the blacks who were moving in were less likely to be quite so stable, quite so professional, quite so middle class.

DePue: This is the era of white flight as well, the beginning of it. Was that going on?

Currie: Yes it was, and I think some of the people that I knew from grammar school were moving out to Palos Park or Hickory Hills or wherever, or moving just further west in Chicago. I think part of that was in response to some of the racial and economic change.

DePue: With the parents you had, sociologist and your mother was leaning in that direction as well sounds like, what was their opinion about those kinds of trends occurring in their neighborhood?

Currie: They would not have been at all happy. I think they felt very much... They always felt a very strong commitments to stand up for civil rights and civil liberties and the idea that people would be making life decisions, based on the color of the skin of the person who had the apartment next to them, would have been very uncomfortable for them. On the other hand, I also did say that I think they were not people who thought that the whole idea of urban renewal was a terrible mistake.

DePue: Was your father or your parents involved in politics at all?

Currie: Not directly. They were, I would say, active members of the civic community. That doesn't mean that they were doing door-to-door precinct work, but I think they were active in the kinds of organizations that grew up, the Hyde Park Kenwood Community Conference, Southeast Chicago Commission. My father served on some boards for both the city, having to do with juvenile delinquency, which was one of his issues, and for the state, for state government as well as city government. In fact, I don't remember this myself, but I remember people talked about at my father's wake the mayor came because my father was on some commission that was advisory to the city council.

DePue: Would politics have been a subject of discussion around the dinner table?

Currie: Constant, constant. Not so much state politics but politics generally. Yes, that's what we talked about all the time (DePue laughs). You know, issues of race relations, issues of civil rights and liberties, the Rosenberg trial, the death penalty, all of those things were front and center.

DePue: Did you get bit by politics at that time then?

Currie: Not for myself, not as an idea that this is what I would like to do. But I certainly found that I was real interested in public policy. That was real, and that was earnest, but I didn't attach it to a career in politics or anything even close.

DePue: Were the Flynnns Stevenson supporters?

Currie: Absolutely, totally.

DePue: Tell me more about the St. Thomas the Apostle School.

Currie: We called it St. Thomas the Impossible, but yes (DePue laughs). It was the Sinsinawa Dominican nuns who ran the school. It was, I would say, really quite a progressive school for being a Catholic grammar school. I think that had to do with the character of the Sinsinawa Dominicans and also...

DePue: Sinsinawa?

Currie: Sinsinawa. I think their base is someplace in rural Wisconsin, and many of the nuns themselves were women who had been farm girls and who had found a vocation and gone off and become nuns, not all of them.

There was one woman I know who came from New York City, from a well-to-do family on Park Avenue. I think it was perhaps partly a function of the neighborhood, the kind of neighborhood that it is, but the church and the school both had reputations of being fairly progressive during the time that I was coming along.

DePue: Do you know about the decision your parents obviously made of sending you all to parochial schools versus the public schools?

Currie: I don't know. I think that's because it would have been part of the tradition, that if you're Catholic, you go to the parochial schools. There were some good public schools in the neighborhood, certainly good enough for the Flynn kids. Ray School at that time—I think that we were much of the time in the Ray School attendance area—was a good school, and a lot of faculty sent their children there. Some faculty sent their kids to the Lab School, which would have been a great deal more expensive than the tuition at St. Thomas.

DePue: The Lab School being the University's grade school.

Currie: University's grade and high school, yeah.

DePue: Lab as in, it was somewhat experimental?

Currie: Yeah, it was a Thomas Dewey... It was very much the ideas of Thomas Dewey. I don't know that it was all that experimental by the time I went to it, but that was its model and its sense of its own mission. The school became very big, about the time I went to high school. It had been a pretty small school.

DePue: What, the Lab School or...?

Currie: Lab School, yeah, doubled in size, I think. That was perhaps a function of a lot... Again, the African Americans had moved into South Shore, and a lot of

South Shore kids came to Lab School as an alternative to Hyde Park High School or South Shore High School. I don't know to what extent the university consciously made the school bigger in order to be responsive to people in its community who felt that the neighborhood public schools were not good enough. I don't know.

DePue: I'm afraid I have the standard stereotypes about kids going to Catholic schools in the 1950s era. Were some of these nuns good disciplinarians as well?

Currie: Mostly they were not. Mostly they were pretty open, real people. I remember one of my favorite tales. Two of them were talking about being on a train, going to the mother house in Sinsinawa. They had put the books they were reading into brown paper covers because they didn't want to give... I don't remember what the titles were. They were whatever the bestselling, slightly salacious novel at the time might have been, *Payton Place*? They didn't want to cause a crisis of faith on the part of any of the passengers that they were reading things that were a little salacious, really, quite adorable. They covered them in brown paper, you know, the racy pictures on the racy book that they were reading. They didn't want to make people feel that somehow the Catholic standards were not what they should be or used to be. Our nuns were very real, very fun.

DePue: Did you go all the way through the eighth grade then?

Currie: I did.

DePue: And where was high school?

Currie: The high school at St. Thomas' was an all-girl school. It was small and not very good. I think that my parents actually had thought I might go to Aquinas, which was a Catholic girls' school in South Shore. It was a bigger school and by and large had a better reputation. I didn't get in; they said it was because I didn't live in the attendance area.

Now my brother's friends, the next-down brother, two years younger, they were of the view that Aquinas didn't want kids who came from St. Thomas the Apostle because they (whispers) "might be black." I don't know if they were right. I do not know. I think their theory was that their catchment area didn't include us because we had a high school of our own, and they were full up with people coming from Catholic grammar schools within their...Anyway so I had to go to University High School.

DePue: You had to go.

Currie: No other option...

DePue: That sounds just absolutely horrid for you.

- Currie: ...that my parents found acceptable. So I did.
- DePue: Well, I would think that going to the University School... That had the reputation of being relatively elite as well.
- Currie: Yeah, right, it did. But I think they were perfectly happy for me to go there, as it turned out.
- DePue: Did they have to pay tuition then for that as well?
- Currie: Yes, but I think it was half price.
- DePue: Because your father was teaching there.
- Currie: He was on the faculty, yeah.
- DePue: Tell me more about going to University High School.
- Currie: It was great. I loved it. It was a different experience, a scary one because how do you know if you're really going to like a place? And are you really well prepared? And because it did have a slightly elite reputation, was I going to measure up?
- But as I say, I think it was a time when there were a lot of add-ons, a lot of new people coming in. So it was not coming into a closed community where everybody had known everybody since kindergarten. There was a large influx of newcomers. And I held my own quite well. I was a top student and a good hockey player, and I was the editor of the school newspaper.
- DePue: What got you into doing the editing business?
- Currie: Well, I liked writing, and I liked... I don't know; I just did.
- DePue: What kind of things were you writing about then, national level or school?
- Currie: No, mostly school stuff.
- DePue: You graduated what year then?
- Currie: Fifty-eight.
- DePue: Were you paying attention at that time? These last few years, '54 through '57-'58 time frame, there's the early civil rights movement going on as well.
- Currie: Yeah, and I was not real alert to that. Although, as I say, in my family the issues of race and civil rights were really quite high priorities. But I don't remember that I noticed the specifics of a developing civil rights movement at that time.

DePue: What were the demographics of the school?

Currie: I would say 98 percent white. There were a handful of African American kids. I think earlier, the bulk of the kids would have been faculty kids. I don't think that was true by the time I signed on. I think there were a lot of families who had used the public schools and for whatever reason, the choice was move to the suburbs, which is what many people leaving South Shore did.

Many people left South Shore around the time I started high school and went to the suburbs. The others sent their kids to Lab School. South Shore was a much wealthier community when I was growing up than was Hyde Park. It was sort of divided between Catholics and Jews. It was fancy stores on 71st Street. There were places... My mother couldn't shop at the stores in South Shore.

DePue: Because they were too expensive?

Currie: They were too expensive, yeah. And that changed. In fact, today if you drive down 71st Street, it's rubble. It changed very dramatically in terms of race, probably during the years I was in high school. I had many friends who lived in South Shore and were colleagues of mine at Lab School.

DePue: Which would suggest—you can correct me if I'm wrong in this—that the fact that the University of Chicago was there in Hyde Park was the anchor that kept a higher percentage of well-to-do whites there in the neighborhood?

Currie: Yes, that's absolutely right. Now there were other... It was just not the university but the university hospital [University of Chicago Medical Center]. There also was an osteopathic hospital, which was a major employer and something of an anchor in Hyde Park. But yes, I think there's no question about that.

DePue: Was there a percentage of Jewish kids who went to University School as well?

Currie: Yes, and a lot of them had come from South Shore. And as I say, I think from the perspective of their families, it was either going to be Highland Park or Lab School.

DePue: Did the kids pay much attention to that?

Currie: I don't know that they did.

DePue: As far as you're concerned, it didn't make any difference?

Currie: No.

DePue: You mentioned that you got involved in extracurricular activities. Did you say hockey?

- Currie: Field hockey, absolutely.
- DePue: Oh, field hockey.
- Currie: Yeah. No, we didn't do ice hockey. We did field hockey.
- DePue: This is in an era though when there weren't a lot of athletic opportunities for girls in schools.
- Currie: Yeah, in fact, I don't think I did the competition. I think we just did intramural stuff. My point only was that I was very good at it.
- DePue: You would have been happy to accept a scholarship someplace in field hockey?
- Currie: (laughs) I don't think I would have quite gone that far.
- DePue: Did you work at all?
- Currie: You mean outside school. Yeah, I did. Our dentist needed help on Thursday afternoons and evenings and on Saturdays. So I was a dental assistant during most of my years in high school or at least the last two or three.
- DePue: Now after your father died, were you expected to help out with the family budget?
- Currie: No, except that I was earning some money for myself by virtue of working Thursday evenings and Saturdays.
- DePue: What were your favorite subjects?
- Currie: English and social studies.
- DePue: And did you have any aspirations beyond "I want to go to college" at that time?
- Currie: Not really. I suspect that I saw myself—to the extent that I saw myself as a grownup—as likely a teacher, probably an academic type. That's because I had very narrowed, blindered eyes in which that's what I saw. I saw people who were teachers. I saw people who were academics, and so to the extent that I thought of anything beyond college, that would have been it.
- DePue: Teaching at the college level or just teaching period?
- Currie: Teaching, but I thought of teaching at the college level as a distinct possibility.
- DePue: Do you remember any mentors who had the biggest influence on you growing up?

- Currie: Some of my teachers, I think, were important influences, yeah, in that they were challenging, and they certainly thought that I should be pushed. And they were nice people.
- DePue: I would assume that your mother had a much bigger impact on your life than your father did?
- Currie: Because she was there for a lot longer, I suppose the answer is yes. But I think that when I talked about their different styles of parenting, I think that probably that had some impact on me too.
- DePue: Were you dating already in high school?
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: Were you dating your future husband in high school?
- Currie: Yeah, in fact, when I was a sophomore in high school... Is that when I met...? Yeah, he was a fraternity brother of my older brother's.
- DePue: At the University?
- Currie: Yeah. So I think that I began dating him when I was a sophomore.
- DePue: What's his name?
- Currie: David Park Currie.
- DePue: P-a-r-k.
- Currie: P-a-r-k, Currie, so you know how that's spelled.
- DePue: What was he majoring in?
- Currie: He was actually... In college he was majoring, I think at one point, in chemistry, then at another point, in physics, and then at some point, in German. I think he actually got his degree in German. But then he went to law school.
- DePue: At the University as well?
- Currie: No he went Harvard. His father taught law at the University of Chicago.



Barbara and her boyfriend and future husband, David, under the Christmas tree in Chicago.

- DePue: I'm trying to get the timeline here. Was that during the time... You said you got married when you were nineteen. You graduated in '58.
- Currie: Yes, from high school. I got married after the first quarter of my second year in college.
- DePue: So you started college right away?
- Currie: I started college right away, at the University of Chicago.
- DePue: Well, that's part of my curiosity because you got your degree in what year?
- Currie: Not until many years later, because I had to stop school when I got married. I had a year and one quarter, and then we got married. We lived, first of all, in Cambridge, Mass and then in New York and then in Washington. Then, when we came back to Chicago, I continued work on my degree.
- DePue: Cambridge, New York, Washington, D.C.
- Currie: Washington, D.C.
- DePue: What took him to New York?
- Currie: He was clerking for a federal judge, a judge on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals.
- DePue: In Washington D.C.?
- Currie: He was clerking for Felix Frankfurter.⁷
- DePue: Well, that's a very impressive resume to fall on.
- Currie: Um-hmm.
- DePue: Was the decision then to stop school because you were following him?
- Currie: Yes. Well, he was finishing his... Now why we got married in December, rather than waiting until June, I don't remember (both laugh). You know, maybe it was because it was important for both of us for me to be part of his



Barbara Flynn and David Currie were married at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Chicago, December 29, 1959. With them are Barbara's brother Frank, mother, Elsie Flynn, and David's parents, Elmyr and Brainerd Currie

⁷ Felix Frankfurter was an American lawyer, professor, and jurist who served as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Frankfurter served on the Supreme Court from 1939 to 1962 and was a noted advocate of judicial restraint in the judgments of the Court. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felix_Frankfurter)

law school experience, and the only way to do that was to hang around with people while he's still in law school.

DePue: Were you working at all these various locations, each step of the way?

Currie: I worked in Cambridge. I was working in the Admissions' Office, the Graduate Admissions' Office. That's what I was doing, 9:00 to 5:00.

DePue: But you didn't do that either in New York City or...

Currie: I got pregnant. So by the time we got to New York, it was just about time for our first child to be born. I did not work while he was an infant. I wouldn't have earned enough to make it worthwhile.

DePue: Well, what was it like... Did you have any direct dealings with some of the other Supreme Court justices as well?

Currie: Yes, and their clerks, actually more with their clerks than with the justices.

DePue: I would think that was a fascinating experience.

Currie: It was; it was really, really interesting.

DePue: Do you have any stories or memories of that?

Currie: Frankfort was himself a riot. He was about this tall. A very peppery kind of person. When I met him, he wanted to know all about... Like, "If you go out, who takes care of the baby?" He just peppered me full of questions about "How do you spend your time? Where do you get your groceries?" He also lived in Georgetown, as we did. "And do you shop here?" It was like an incredible experience in minutia, I think I would say.

But it was interesting to get to know David's colleagues in law school as well. In fact, I would say this. That was my first real experience of what I would describe as a sexist way of life. That is to say, if we were at a party or hanging out with friends, and people began talking about interesting topics, if I piped up with something, people tended to ignore it. Then, if somebody else said something similar, then people often glommed right onto it. I never was sure, actually, whether it was a function of the fact that I was nineteen and hadn't even finished college or whether it was just kind of a general perspective that says that women don't have as much to contribute to the life of the mind as men do.

At that time, actually, there were not large numbers of women in the law school. David had one colleague who was a woman, who I became kind of friendly with, but there were just not very many women. So, again, I wasn't sure whether it was because I was a kid or whether it was because I was a

woman, but I tended to not be taken very seriously in ordinary discussions of the issues of the day.

DePue: Was there any doubt in your mind that you'd figure out a way to get back to college somewhere down the road?

Currie: Oh yeah, no doubt in my mind, none. I just couldn't figure it out right then. I tried in Washington, D.C. to figure something out, but it became too difficult.

DePue: What did you want to major in? What did you major in?

Currie: Political science.

DePue: And what were you going to do with political science, again, teach?

Currie: Probably. I was very unimaginative, and that would have been the likeliest outcome. You know, in the '50s there were very few women in elective office, and the ones who were there were primarily there because their husband died, right? So most of them were the... Even Olympia Snowe got her political start when her husband, then a state representative, was killed quite young in a car accident.⁸ She inherited his seat. The idea of a woman being a United States senator or being in any elective office was just not something that I saw very much of, so it was not something that struck me as the sort of thing one does.

Throughout... In college and in my early married years, to the extent that I thought of elective office at all—and I did—my fantasy, however, would have been to find oneself in a rock-solid Republican area in Arizona or wherever and run for public office to inform and educate the electorate, not to win. I had not only no real idea of doing anything like this, but to the extent that I did, it was a kind of a fantasy land, in which the goal would have been to improve the understanding of the populace, rather than winning the seat.

DePue: What year was your husband doing the internship with Frankfurter?

Currie: That was... Let me think. So, '60 to '61 was Friendly, '61, '62. In fact, Frankfurter had a quite serious stroke during the spring of David's clerkship year.

DePue: Of '62?

Currie: Of '62.

DePue: Did that terminate or end that particular clerkship?

⁸ Olympia Jean Snowe is an American businesswoman and politician who was a United States Senator from Maine from 1995 to 2013. Snowe, a member of the Republican Party, became known for her ability to influence the outcome of close votes, including whether to end filibusters. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympia_Snowe)

Currie: He did end up working for some of the other justices during the... I think that happened in May, maybe. The term was over in the early part of June, so it was not a real long period. He was then assigned to other justices too.

DePue: That gets us up to the summer of 1962. Where to next?

Currie: He came to the University of Chicago and started teaching here.

DePue: So he was able to get a position right away?

Currie: Which was standard for the time. He'd finished quite high in his class; he was on the *Law Review*; he had a lot of really good credentials. But at that time, many people who taught went directly into teaching from law school. Not all, some went into practice for a time and then came back...

DePue: That was my question. Why not go into private practice or even go into one of the big firms?

Currie: He did interview a few firms. But whether he did that at that point or whether that was earlier...? I remember when he was in law school, he did interview at a few firms. There was one big one in Milwaukee, I remember that he did. They took him out and wined him and dined him. I think he thought that some of the firms were looking for people with various kinds of social skills, rather than intellectual ones. So he was a little dismissive of some of the places where he interviewed. But I think the idea of doing academic work was one that was very appealing to him.

DePue: So he had more of that temperament than going out and making big money?

Currie: Exactly.

DePue: And I assume that was fine with you? Did you have one or two children by that time?

Currie: Two. Three years later, Margaret was born. Stephen was born in 1960 and Margaret in 1963.

DePue: Where did you move back to then in Hyde Park? I assume that's where it was.

Currie: Yeah, we moved back to Hyde Park. We had an apartment on Kimbark Avenue.

DePue: Close to your family?

Currie: Yeah, close to my mother's home, yeah.

DePue: And was David's family in the neighborhood as well?

Currie: Yes. They were still in the neighborhood. They lived two blocks from us and my mother lived four. They were here for a few years when we had come back to Hyde Park, and then they moved to Durham, North Carolina. His father moved from U of C [University of Chicago] to Duke.

When David started teaching, his father was not here. His father had gone to Duke, just in time for the law school to find itself with a replacement Currie. They didn't have to go for a single term without a Currie onboard (DePue laughs).

DePue: Pretty convenient, in that respect.

Currie: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: When did you actually start going back to college?

Currie: I actually did that the summer after we got married. We were in Chicago. David was working for a law firm, and I took courses that summer. That was when I was pregnant, before we moved to New York. Then, when we moved back to Chicago... If I didn't start the fall quarter, I did start the next quarter. So, pretty quickly.

I remember having a quibble with Edward Levi, who was then...the provost, the president?⁹ I'm not sure. As a faculty child, I of course, got half price, half tuition. But now I was a faculty wife, and the same rule didn't apply. I remember we had a little contrary talk about how it would only be fair if I didn't have to pay full price. I think I didn't, at the end of the day, have to pay full price.

DePue: In other words, you won the fight.

Currie: I think so (DePue laughs).

DePue: He might have a different memory about it (laughs).

Currie: Yeah, right.

DePue: You got there. You're in social studies or political science?

Currie: Political science.

⁹ Edward Hirsch Levi was an American law professor, academic leader, scholar, and statesman. He served as dean of the University of Chicago Law School from 1950 to 1962, president of the University of Chicago from 1968 to 1975, and then as United States Attorney General in the Ford Administration. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_H._Levi)

- DePue: Then do you remember the Cuban Missile Crisis?¹⁰
- Currie: I can't remember if it was for the summer or whether this was when I was finishing my undergraduate career. I remember somehow seeing the dean of admissions notes. It said, "In her usual lackadaisical fashion..." Oh well.
- DePue: How did you earn the reputation of being lackadaisical because up to this point, I didn't hear anything on lackadaisical?
- Currie: I don't know. I didn't think so either. I was quite taken aback. And I suppose it was just that he wasn't used to people who were dropping in and dropping out and then dropping back in again. But I had such a good reason. How he could have thought I was lackadaisical I do not understand.
- DePue: Well, I was about to ask you if you remember the Cuban Missile Crisis.
- Currie: I do. I do. What I remember about it was that the people were quite terrified. I remember all my brothers and sisters calling me and asking, "What's going to happen?" Not that I had any particular insights. But there was a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty about what really was going on.
- DePue: And I'm sure you can remember what happened when [President] John F. Kennedy [J.F.K.] was assassinated.
- Currie: Yes. Actually he was assassinated the day after Margaret was born. It was a totally surreal experience because the whole thing felt very different to me. Being a brand new mother made that whole thing not nearly as front and center as it otherwise would have been. We were in the maternity ward, kind of removed from the general grief, the general horror that everybody else was experiencing. We were so engrossed in this new life that we didn't quite understand why the doctors and nurses were weeping. It was really a very interesting phenomenon.
- DePue: Had you been a strong J.F.K. supporter?
- Currie: Absolutely. In fact, I thought I voted for him. I didn't because I wasn't old enough when he ran.
- DePue: Twenty-one would have been the age at that time.
- Currie: Yeah, twenty-one would have been the age, and I was twenty. So I didn't have a chance to vote for him, but I was sure that I had.
- DePue: Your husband probably would have been able to vote for him.

¹⁰ The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 was a direct and dangerous confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War and was the moment when the two superpowers came closest to nuclear conflict. (<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis>)

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: This point in time is also the time period of the Freedom Rides and the voter registration drives in the south, lunch counter...¹¹

Currie: Much more alert to the civil rights movement at this point than I would have been when I was in high school.

DePue: Were you at all active in any of these things?

Currie: I'm not sure if I... I don't think I joined any marches. I think having small kids made it a little hard to get out there. I do remember watching the Martin Luther King march on television...

DePue: The 1966 march?

Currie: Yeah, the big one, right...with kids at a friend's house, being totally taken in...

DePue: Do you mean the one in Washington D.C.? Sixty-six was when he was in Chicago.

Currie: No, no, no. I'm talking about... And that was earlier. Wasn't that...?

DePue: I think so.

Currie: That was before Kennedy was assassinated, I think. Wasn't it? Was it just after?

DePue: I don't think so.

Currie: We just had the fiftieth anniversary—right?—the fiftieth anniversary, just last year? So that was '63; it was '63.

DePue: Same year then.

Currie: Yeah, it was, right. Because it was Lyndon Johnson who was president and who was doing the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act.

DePue: Momentous times all the way through the '60s, and that's something I always like to talk to people like you about. When did you actually get your degree?

Currie: Sixty-eight, I think, because I was going to school slowly on the motherhood plan. When I came back to school, I was not doing it as a full-time student.

¹¹ Freedom Rides, in U.S. history, were a series of political protests against segregation by blacks and whites, who rode buses together through the American South in 1961. (<https://www.britannica.com/event/Freedom-Rides>)

DePue: How would you describe your own political views at this time?

Currie: Very much a... I thought of myself as not being particularly partisan. I didn't think of myself as being a Democrat, but the reality is, I was a very strong Democrat. I was a very liberal, very strong Democrat. But I didn't think of myself that way. I thought of myself as having grown up in a kind of nonpartisan fashion. But it's not true.

DePue: Did you always know which way your parents were voting?

Currie: Yeah, pretty much. Sometimes they were not on the same page when it came to alderman, for example, but I think that they generally voted for the Democrat. Although one of them might have voted for a Socialist at one point. Norman Thomas. I don't know; I'm not sure.

DePue: The 1950s, all the way into the early 1960s, there was a strong emerging movement of people who identified themselves as independent Democrats.¹² Were you aware of that movement?

Currie: Oh yeah, and I think coming from Hyde Park, where we had what was the beginnings of a group called the Independent Voters of Illinois, which actually predated ADA (Americans for Democratic Action) and featured such stalwarts as Paul Douglas, who later became a United States senator.¹³ I think that group was formed sometime in the '40s. Anyhow, it was a group that prided itself on being neither Republican nor Democratic but being by and large progressive.

Many of the fights, internal to the City of Chicago, had to do not with broader ideology, like "Are you for the poor, or are you for minimum wage increases?" or what have you. But it had largely to do with the way the city government operated. Questions of patronage, questions of ethics, questions of transparency were very much at the head of the game.

So I think I grew up feeling that I was nonpartisan, in the sense that Democrats, machine Democrats, were kind of bad guys. That was the sort of the progressive politic style of the progressive era that would have had some impact on me. But I was wrong; I was really a Democrat.

DePue: You just didn't want to be a Chicago machine Democrat.

¹² In U.S. politics an independent Democrat is an individual who loosely identifies with the ideals of the Democratic Party but chooses not to be a formal member of the party. Independent Democrat is not a political party. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_Democrat)

¹³ Americans for Democratic Action is a liberal American political organization advocating progressive policies. ADA views itself as supporting social and economic justice through lobbying, grassroots organizing, research, and supporting progressive candidates. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americans_for_Democratic_Action)

Currie: I think that's right.

DePue: How much of that how do with the persona of Richard J. Daley?

Currie: Quite a lot.

DePue: Did you remember your folks talking about that or being exposed to that?

Currie: I don't remember very specifically. I think they didn't think the city was badly run.

DePue: Which would suggest they thought it was well run.

Currie: Yeah. I'm not sure I would go quite that far. Could they have quibbled? Could they have carped? I expect they could have. But they were not major detractors, I would say.

DePue: Did you do any precinct work at all, in that time frame when you were in college?

Currie: I did some work, because I was in college for such a long time. In aldermanic campaigns, I remember having a coffee for Al Raby. I don't know that I did a lot of door to door stuff, but I did work in campaigns, to the extent of doing a coffee or adding my name to a list, what have you.

We had a very active group in Hyde Park/Kenwood in '68, trying to bring some enthusiasm to the Hubert Humphrey race for president. His was not a happy name in many of the circles in which I traversed in 1968 because of the problems with the [democratic] convention and the Vietnam War.¹⁴ A lot people, like me, were not so much deciding they were going to be for Richard Nixon, but they were definitely turning their backs on the Democratic standard bearer, and there was a real concern that many of them might not come out and vote. I worked with a group of locals, really quite local Hyde Park/Kenwood people, to try to gin up support for Humphrey and the Democratic ticket.

DePue: Do you recall in the years that you were at the university—and mind you, it sounds like most of the time you had your hands full with trying to raise kids and being a part-time student—was there a students' rights movement going on in the University of Chicago?

¹⁴ Protest activity against the Vietnam War took place prior to and during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Counterculture and anti-Vietnam War protest groups began planning protests and demonstrations in response to the convention, and the city promised to maintain law and order. The protesters clashed with officers of the Chicago Police Department in the streets and parks of Chicago before and during the convention. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_Democratic_National_Convention_protests)

- Currie: I don't remember that. I do know that there were some sit-ins having to do with race issues and the war. I think that there were sit-ins that reflected a concern on the part of students that the university needed to divest from big oil, companies doing business in apartheid South Africa, needed to whatever the issue was. And I know there were concerns about whether African American students were adequately encouraged and whether the university's response to the larger community made it difficult African American in the community to feel comfortable. That's still an issue.
- DePue: You mentioned the war. Obviously, this is the Vietnam War. What were your thoughts... I want to talk in more detail about 1968. Prior to '68, what were your thoughts about the war?
- Currie: I thought it was probably a mistake. I would not have thought this was a good idea. Did I think that I should go and march about it? I didn't. Although there was one time when my husband did, kind of late in the game, wearing his suit, of course.
- DePue: As a university professor at the time.
- Currie: Yes, yes. No, the war never seemed to me to be a good idea, but...
- DePue: Was that because you were more comfortable being an observer or because you felt you had other obligations?
- Currie: Other obligations, right. I'm not much of... I've never have been much of a marcher.
- DePue: Is that because there's better ways?
- Currie: Well, probably because I did see other ways to accomplish things. But also other responsibilities.
- DePue: And how about... This would be the very early stages, but you'd already expressed what you encountered when you were in Washington D. C. This is the early stage of the second wave feminists, if you will. Were you paying attention to that?
- Currie: I was actually in Cambridge, where I experienced more of that. Yeah, but I don't think I'd define myself as a feminist at that point. I'm not quite sure why. Maybe because I was living a very maternal life, focused on children and husband, hearth and family, hearth and home. I didn't think I had quite the right credentials to make too much of a fuss.
- DePue: This might be another thing that I'm going to get wrong, based on where I was getting my research. I read that you were a vice president, from 1965 to '69, in the Chicago League of Women Voters.

Currie: Yes, oh yes. But the league was not a stone throwing organization. The league was a very deliberative organization. Actually I got involved in it in Washington D. C. The reason I did that was because my mother had, early in her life, become involved in the League of Women Voters and thought it was a wonderful experience. Unlike many membership groups, you don't join it because you already agree with everything that the group stands for. They did study groups and strove for consensus, developing new policies. It sounded like a good thing, and I enjoyed it very much.

DePue: Officially nonpartisan or...

Currie: Yeah, officially nonpartisan.

DePue: But the study groups would suggest that they're leaning one direction or the other...

Currie: They never took stands for and against candidates. But, for example, when I was in Washington, the big issue was whether the sales tax ought to begin including services rather than just goods. It was an interesting topic because, of course, the economy... And we're still talking about it in a place like Illinois forty years later.

DePue: That gets me up to 1968, and I always like to go through a series of events. You were right here in Chicago. A lot of attention, obviously, in Chicago, but it started with the Tet Offensive.¹⁵ Obviously, it looked on the surface like the war was going very badly.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Even though the United States—South Vietnam I guess you could say—was victorious in that campaign. But it looked bad for the country. Did your views about the Vietnam War start to even solidify at that time?

Currie: Well, I think I had already decided that this was not a good adventure, and here we were, seeing the results of what turned out to be a serious misadventure. Yeah, maybe I felt more... I had more arguments to amplify or solidify my position, but I don't think the position itself was new.

DePue: Does that mean that you're still wedded to the political process as a solution for this?

Currie: I still am; I still am. I can't help it.

¹⁵ The Tet Offensive was a coordinated series of North Vietnamese attacks on more than 100 cities and outposts in South Vietnam. The offensive was an attempt to foment rebellion among the South Vietnamese population and encourage the United States to scale back its involvement in the Vietnam War. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tet_Offensive)

- DePue: Was then and are today (Currie laughs). April 4, Martin Luther King is assassinated. You remember that day?
- Currie: I do.
- DePue: What was your reaction then?
- Currie: Shocked and appalled, as everybody else was. I think I shared absolutely... It was interesting; that was just such a shock, such a jolt, so unacceptable.
- DePue: Do you remember the rioting and your reaction to the rioting here in Chicago?
- Currie: I was unhappy about the rioting because I think it didn't help us focus where we should have focused, that is how this man could have lost his life at the hands of, obviously, somebody who, everybody was clear, was a racist. Of course, what the riots also did—and I wasn't quick enough to see that—was to expose some of the underlying problems that make it very difficult for African Americans to move forward in society.
- We saw some of the same things in the recent death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, [Missouri].¹⁶ The looting, the pillaging that went on, in one way is a terrible mistake because it makes it easy for people to say, "Yeah, see." But it also is an important way of explaining what some of the underlying problems are. But I didn't believe it at the time.
- DePue: Now much of the rioting destructiveness in Chicago was on the West Side, the near West Side.
- Currie: Yes, most of it. Almost all of it.
- DePue: Was there anything going on in Hyde Park or the South Shore places...
- Currie: No, but they did bring in the National Guard, and I found that quite terrifying, the idea of the National Guard being around, in their trucks with their weaponry. It was a little like the first time I found myself in a German airport where all these twelve-years-olds were hanging out with their Uzis. I found that uncomfortable too.
- DePue: As a young mother?

¹⁶ The August 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown, an 18-year-old black man, by a white police officer in Ferguson, MO triggered weeks of protests and led to the founding of the Black Lives Matter movement. Following a five-month re-examination of the case, prosecutors said they had not found enough evidence to bring charges of murder or manslaughter against the former officer. In 2015 the Justice Department concluded that the officer had fired in self-defence. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53603923>)

- Currie: Yeah. But no, we didn't have any looting in this part of the world. It was almost all West Side and downtown.
- DePue: In the early stages of the Democratic primary, who were you supporting?
- Currie: I think I was a Eugene McCarthy person.¹⁷ It would be like me.
- DePue: Why do you say that?
- Currie: (laughs) I tell you, I didn't have a great deal...a very high regard for Robert Kennedy because, in his brother's administration, he was generally viewed as the enforcer, the crude, not very thoughtful, not well focused on public policies that made sense, like civil rights, but a power organizer. I think that stuck, even though he then went on to have a pretty illustrious career in the United States Senate. I had him already set into a little pigeonhole that probably wasn't fair but made me less open to his candidacy than to that of Eugene McCarthy.
- DePue: Was McCarthy more vociferous in his condemnation of the war?
- Currie: I thought so.
- DePue: That leads us up to June 6 in Los Angeles when Robert Kennedy is assassinated.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: By this time you've got to be thinking, What's going on in our country?
- Currie: Right, absolutely. The whole place was falling apart.
- DePue: And then the next step is the Democratic National Convention.
- Currie: Right. And I was out of town. We were at the beach with my husband's family while all that was happening. Desperate as I was to go wander through Grant Park, I was not in the position to do so. We saw it all on television. John Chancellor being carried out of the hall.¹⁸ We were glued to the tube. And I don't know what I would have done if I'd be in town. Again. I'm not much of

¹⁷ United States Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota launched his 1968 presidential campaign in the latter part of 1967 to vie for the 1968 Democratic Party nomination for President of the United States. The focus of his campaign was his support for a swift end to the Vietnam War through a withdrawal of American forces. The campaign appealed to youths who were tired of the establishment and dissatisfied with government. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene_McCarthy_1968_presidential_campaign)

¹⁸ John William Chancellor (July 14, 1927 – July 12, 1996) was an American journalist who spent most of his career with NBC News. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Chancellor)

a demonstrator, not much of a bomb thrower. I don't know if I would have been part of the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] crowd.¹⁹

DePue: So you're watching like everybody else.

Currie: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: The whole world's watching. What did you think of the SDS and some of the—shall we call it—the rabble rousers that were there?

Currie: I think there were differences among them. I had a very good friend who'd been part of SDS at the very beginning. She later asked the University of Michigan to expunge it from her record. I couldn't quite make out why, but I think she was looking for some kind of respectable job in corporate America. But again, I think there were some people who were clearly just rabble rousers, and there were people who were outraged and were expressing their outrage by virtue of what they deemed to be a peaceful demonstration. It's very hard.

DePue: That was such a traumatic experience for Americans in general that it became one of the main issues of the '68 election, as you well know.

Currie: Right. Well, that's, as I say, why we got ourselves together and said, "Ok it was terrible, but let's move on, and let's not let Richard Nixon have the White House."

DePue: But he basically won on a law and order campaign.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Your support for...

Currie: And a lot of my friends stayed home, I think. I never actually looked back to see what the statistics tell me.

DePue: Because they had to swallow hard about Humphrey?

Currie: I had a lot of friends who could not get Hubert Humphrey down their craw.

DePue: Why? Because he had been LBJ's VP?

Currie: Right. He was an enabler. He didn't stand up to Johnson, and he didn't stand up for the protesters.

¹⁹ Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was a national student activist organization in the United States during the 1960s and was one of the principal representations of the New Left. Disdaining permanent leaders, hierarchical relationships and parliamentary procedure, the founders conceived of the organization as a broad exercise in "participatory democracy." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Students_for_a_Democratic_Society)

- DePue: Much of the discussion for years afterwards has been about the way the police handled all of that...
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: ... and the National Guard, but especially the police.
- Currie: Right. “A police riot” I think they called it.
- DePue: That was Dan Walker’s term in his report.
- Currie: Yes, and I think my brother-in-law, David’s brother, worked on that report. He was a sociologist.
- DePue: Where were your sympathies?
- Currie: My sympathies were with the demonstrators, but not to the extent of either—As I say, I couldn’t join them because I wasn’t there—but not to the extent of saying that violence is a good response to difficult situations.
- DePue: Were you then also paying attention to the trial of the Chicago Seven afterwards?²⁰
- Currie: Yeah, not as much as I might have. Again, I don’t know why I wasn’t paying closer attention, but it certainly sounded like a circus.
- DePue: It might have had something to do with having a couple of kids at home and a husband with a career and...
- Currie: Yeah, well and...
- DePue: ...and going to school yourself?
- Currie: ...and a judge who was clearly playing to the bleachers and a bunch of defendants who (laughs) were also playing to the bleachers.
- DePue: You said you graduated in 1968.
- Currie: I believe that’s right.
- DePue: So this is before the convention, but there was an awful lot going on in that particular year.

²⁰ The Chicago Seven were seven defendants charged by the United States federal government with conspiracy, crossing state lines with intent to incite a riot, and other charges related to anti-Vietnam War and countercultural protests in Chicago, Illinois during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Seven)

Currie: Yes.

DePue: That's a decision point for you. What's next for...?

Currie: Graduate school, unimaginative. I said I thought I'd probably be a teacher or an academic teacher or a regular K-12. But you need to do graduate work to do that, so I quickly signed up to go to graduate school in political science.

DePue: And David was supportive of that?

Currie: Sure.

DePue: Did you envision yourself, "David and I can both be professors here at the University of Chicago?"

Currie: No, I never quite got to that point. I did some part-time teaching at DePaul, along the way. It was fine, but I didn't love it.

DePue: You didn't love the teaching?

Currie: Not as much as I expected I would.

DePue: If you get to the point of actually teaching, this is what you've been gearing towards for many a year...

Currie: Yeah, I don't mean to say that I didn't enjoy it. It's just that I wasn't sure how good a fit it was. But, in fact, in my lexicon the research and writing would have been a very important part of it too. I don't know whether the fact that I didn't love the teaching would have meant that the other part would have been the same. I don't know; I never got that far.

DePue: But you did finish your master's degree?

Currie: Yes.

DePue: When did you finish the master's?

Currie: I think '72 or '73.

DePue: Did you immediately then start to work on the coursework for the PhD?

Currie: Yes, I was already doing the prelims and stuff like that. I took a foreign language course. I remember one summer, spending the whole summer doing a foreign language course so that I could meet the doctoral requirements. But I never really quite got to the point of writing a dissertation or even establishing what I would write a dissertation about. I was working on that.

DePue: That suggests that your heart wasn't really in that.

- Currie: Well, I'm not sure. The timetable was such that it would have been difficult to expect me to have got a whole lot farther down the road, although maybe so... lackadaisical? What can I tell you?
- DePue: (laughs) Maybe that professor knew something after all.
- Currie: Oh, he may have been on to me.
- DePue: I suspect that he was dead wrong. Here's another event that was traumatic for the American public, and that was Kent State in May of 1970.²¹ Do you remember that?
- Currie: Yes, I do. I do. And, of course, we were having student unrest here at Chicago also. It didn't end up the way Kent State did, but there was an awful lot of rage, anger and sit-ins, taking over the administration building as I recall.
- DePue: This might be a gross generalization, but a lot of the people with your kind of political views and sensibilities growing up in that time frame were watching all of these particular events, all the way through the civil rights movement and then the anti-war movement, the student rights movement and things like Kent State and the Chicago riots and those kinds of things and became somewhat radicalized by the process.
- Currie: I don't know that I would say I became radicalized. I certainly was on the side of the people who felt they had axes to grind, but I don't know that I felt that the way in which people were responding to those axes was the most useful way to do so.
- DePue: Did you find your political views evolving during that—this is a big time frame—by the end of '60s, early '70s?
- Currie: I think that I'd started in a place where I valued civil rights and opportunities of free expression, and I don't think that changed. I don't know if that's an answer to your question, but I don't think that I became less committed to those values. I suppose a way of saying it also is that it wasn't that suddenly these values became... Maybe they were a higher priority because they were so much the focus of all that was going on, but in terms of basic allegiance to those values, I don't think that changed in any significant way.
- DePue: You graduated in '72 with your master's degree?
- Currie: Yeah, either '72 or '73; I'm not sure. It did take me a long time to figure out what I was going to write a dissertation about.

²¹ On May 4, 1970, members of the Ohio National Guard fired into a crowd of Kent State University demonstrators that were opposing the expanding involvement of the Vietnam War into Cambodia and the presence of the National Guard on campus. Four were killed, and nine Kent State students were wounded. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kent_State_shootings)

- DePue: Then you mentioned already that you were teaching at DePaul for a little bit. Was that strictly a part-time?
- Currie: Yeah, that was part-time, and that while I was a graduate student.
- DePue: What was your job or career once you did finish with college or left the university environment? Maybe that really never happened.
- Currie: No, I was still there, (laughs) still taking courses and still bringing up children.
- DePue: I know that there was a period of time that you were in the National Opinion Research Center.
- Currie: Yeah, that was part of my graduate work. I had a NIMH fellowship, and the fellowship...
- DePue: NIMH?
- Currie: National Institutes of Mental Health. That funded my college experience to at least a significant degree, if not altogether. I think maybe altogether. It was one of those work-study fellowships, where you were supposed to work. So I did some work at NORC [National Opinion Research Center].
- DePue: While you're talking about this, you're thrusting your arms in the air.
- Currie: No, just because of...
- DePue: So it wasn't physical work necessarily.
- Currie: No, no. It was survey research, and so I was working on some of the projects that the NORC people were about. I don't remember how many hours a week I was to give them. It was not huge.
- DePue: Was that challenging or fun work for you?
- Currie: It was kind of fun. It was interesting. It was kind of up my alley.
- DePue: What was the particular subject that you were working on?
- Currie: One of the things I was working on was... Or was it somebody else who was doing this? We were involved in the general social survey, which I think maybe now is done at the University of Michigan. It's a kind of a check in on public opinion at various points along the way.

I also was working with a colleague on a study—she was the major investigator—of working class women and attitudes about policy. It was a

new model/old model, the Saul Alinski style organizing.²² How did that relate to women in working-class neighborhoods, and how did their development of political values compare with those who were part of more traditional organizations within that same blue-collar community?

DePue: You mention Saul Alinski. Was he somebody that you knew personally?

Currie: No.

DePue: Was it somebody that you would have studied his techniques when you were in college?

Currie: Oh yeah, for sure.

DePue: I guess I'm at the point now where we need to start talking about how you got into politics, because I'm not seeing the connection here yet.

Currie: No, it's a complete accident. That is the story. I did not decide to become a politician. It was never in my to-do list. As I told you, when I was growing up women were not running for public office, so I didn't have any sense of this is a legitimate career path for me. And to the extent that I thought of politics as a way of life, it was a completely unrealistic notion that I would use the opportunity to run to educate and inform, change peoples' minds, not win a seat, so, no idea of doing that. You want me to tell you what happened? We're not there, okay.

DePue: Before we get there, there is one other question I want to ask you. Nineteen sixty-nine, but in especially in the 1970s, the State of Illinois is writing its new constitution.

Currie: Right. I was very engaged with the League of Women Voters, and we spent a lot of time on the road, first of all, encouraging people to support the call to a convention and then trying to encourage people to vote to adopt the constitution, after the delegates finished their work.

DePue: So everything leading up to this is an intense interest in politics.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: And when you're doing that one, you're even interested in state politics, which most people aren't paying much attention to.

Currie: Right, I know. It's really odd.

²² Saul David Alinsky was an American community activist and political theorist. His work through the Chicago-based Industrial Areas Foundation, helping poor communities organize to press demands upon landlords, politicians and business leaders, won him national recognition and notoriety. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saul_Alinsky)

DePue: I'm talking to a lot of state politicians. There's usually some regret that we aren't more engaged in the state level politics.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: We're at that point now. Tell me how you got involved in politics.

Currie: I'd been working in NORC and doing my NIMH stuff, and I finished my master's degree, but I was still doing coursework, although I may have finished the coursework for the prelims, and I did do the language thing but whatever.

I started work for a professor in the Sociology Department who was doing some kind of analysis of economic development in South Shore. I had just begun that when a long-time state representative from our area, an independent-minded, reform style democratic state representative, Bob Mann, decided at the eleventh hour he was not going to run for reelection. So the question was... It was late. It was, I think, end of October, early November. That is late if petitions need to be filed by the middle of December or whatever it was.

I was walking home from work, which was not terribly far from my house, and I ran into a friend in whose campaign for Con-Con [Constitutional Convention] I had worked. He lost, and he'd been over at the law school, recruiting for his law firm. I ran into Mike [Shakman] and I said, "So Mike, are you interested? Are you going to run for Bob Mann's seat?" He said, "No, why don't you?" And I thought, Sure, why not? He said, "Think about it."

He was someone who'd been active in reform politics in the area, and he then, of course, became the Shakman Decree.²³ That is to say, he filed the lawsuit that led to the end of patronage...or it was supposed to lead to the end of patronage practices, in all the public bodies in northeastern Illinois.

DePue: I'll throw in a quick promotional here. I have had the opportunity to interview Michael Shakman.

Currie: Oh, really. For what purpose?

DePue: About the Shakman decree. It's an important political event in Chicago history, in Illinois history.

²³ The Shakman decrees were a series of Federal court orders regarding government employment in Chicago, which were issued in 1972, 1979, and 1983, in response to a lawsuit filed by civic reformer Michael Shakman. The decrees barred the practice of political patronage, under which government jobs are given to supporters of a politician or party, and government employees may be fired for not supporting a favored candidate or party. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakman_Decrees)

Currie: Absolutely, yeah, although it was Mary Lee Leahy who filed the Rutan case against...²⁴

DePue: I've interviewed her as well.

Currie: Yeah, okay. Anyway, I ran into Mike Shakman. We walked the rest of the way home together. He said, "Why don't you think about it?" So, I thought about it, and I asked my husband what he thought. He said that was a great idea. Why didn't I do it? I checked with various other people, family, friends and whatever.

In the meantime, Mike had talked to some of the people who'd been particularly active in, not just his campaign for Con-Con, but other contests as well. People seemed to think it was a good idea. So, we actually met, David and I, with Mike and with a few other people to talk about how you put together a campaign, how you pay for a campaign, what the chances are, why it might be a good idea to throw my hat in the ring. We said, "Okay, let's do it." So we did it.

DePue: I think I've missed something here because up to this point, you're working on a PhD. You're teaching at DePaul.

Currie: Yeah, but I haven't got far enough to actually do a dissertation.

DePue: Right.

Currie: I just had done the teaching at DePaul during an earlier period, while I was taking courses. Now I'm working at this other academic research program.

DePue: But my question here is, why you? What did they all see in you?

Currie: They saw the obvious in me, which is not that I'm so terrific. What they saw is somebody who is of the community, who has been part of the community, who has been active in the community, whose family had been active in the community before her. They saw somebody that they thought could be sold as someone who shares our values, shares our concerns, is a competent, able person, who has done various worthwhile things in politics, working in campaigns and so forth, but at least as importantly, part of the civic life of the community. She's a respectable person. Her husband teaches at the university. They have two perfectly nice school-age children. What's not to like? The missing link in my mind about thinking of running for public office had always been the idea that you would run to win (both laugh). And suddenly

²⁴ Rutan v. Republican Party of Illinois, 497 U.S. 62 (1990), was a United States Supreme Court decision that held that the First Amendment forbids a government entity from basing its decision to promote, transfer, recall, or hire low-level public employees based upon their party affiliation. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rutan_v._Republican_Party_of_Illinois)

they were saying, “Yeah, we think you might be able to win.” So there you go.

DePue: Well, I know this much about Chicago politics. Normally the machine would want to help find the candidates. Was that the case?

Currie: Sure. In fact, it was really an interesting election. This was when we still had multi-member districts, the three member districts. And this district, the one that I would be running in, was represented by Bob Mann, who decided not to run for reelection, also by Louis A. H. Caldwell. Those are the two Democrats, and the Republican was Bernie Epton who later, as you know, ran for mayor, but at this point he was a state representative.

DePue: Why was Mann bowing out at this time?

Currie: He was having some health problems. I don't know if they were mental, emotional, whatever, but he had some serious difficulties, and he just did not feel he could run again. But the local Democratic organizations were not willing and able to work together. You had the 20th Ward, which was its own territory, its own committeeman. And the 8th Ward was John Stroger. [Joseph] Bertrand was the alderman committeemen in the 7th Ward. So what happened was you had...

DePue: These were all wards within the 24th.

Currie: Yeah, within the district. You ended up with a field of ten, running for two slots in the Democratic primary.

DePue: Ten.

Currie: Ten, ten contenders, one of whom was the incumbent, Lewis A. H. Caldwell. There was no other incumbent because Bob Mann had not run. We had a very large field, and some of the committeemen were for this one over here or that one over there. I think what happened was everybody split the vote. In fact, Carol Braun and I were the two winners in that primary.

DePue: Carol Moseley Braun.²⁵

Currie: Yeah. Here's a political footnote: the first and last time in Illinois political history that two women from the same political party were elected to the Illinois House of Representatives. Last time, because two years later we had

²⁵ Carol Moseley-Braun was the first African American woman Senator, also only the second Black Senator since the Reconstruction Era. During her single term in office, Senator Moseley-Braun advocated for civil rights issues and for legislation on crime, education, and families.
([https://history.house.gov/People/Listing/M/MOSELEY-BRAUN,-Carol-\(M001025\)/](https://history.house.gov/People/Listing/M/MOSELEY-BRAUN,-Carol-(M001025)/))

the Cutback Amendment, and there never was a second opportunity to elect two women from the same party in the same district.²⁶

DePue: These are some of my favorite subjects to talk to people like you about, the cumulative voting process to begin with. And we'll get to the Cutback Amendment later on down the road here, absolutely. It sounds like, because the vote had been split in so many ways, that two dark horses were able to emerge.

Currie: I think that's right. Both of us, however, did have strong backing. Both of us had legitimate claims to frontrunner status. Carol had the backing of the Independent Voters of Illinois, the IVI group that I talked about earlier. Winning their support was fairly hard fought. We tried to get our people there too. Both of us had pretty good reputations among the people who live in Hyde Park/Kenwood, and they would have been significant voters in the primary election. Turnout tended to be higher in this part of the district than in other parts of the district.

DePue: That explains her backing. Where was your support coming from?

Currie: It was coming from a lot of people who'd been active in the civic life of the neighborhood. We did a good job raising money. We did a good job trying to extend a large net, and it paid off. I came in second, but second is...

DePue: Good enough.

Currie: Good enough, if you're nominating two.

DePue: Tell me about the campaign that you ran for the primary.

Currie: Okay. It was very energetic campaign. The person who organized meet-and-greet coffees for me managed to put on maybe 110. It was an unheard of number, just unheard of. We were very active. We had a lot of good people who had been active in other campaigns helping us craft a strategy. We had a person who'd not been doing much politically, but she was a good writer, and she drafted our literature. Mike Shakman was one of the campaign co-chairs, and he has a very strong strategic mind and certainly understood the nuts and bolts of campaigning.

I brought in all my brothers and sisters (DePue laughs). At the end of the day, actually, I was only 101.5 votes ahead of the third-place finisher. I credit my brothers and sisters for those 101.5 votes.

²⁶ The Cutback Amendment is an amendment to the Illinois Constitution that abolished multi-member districts in the Illinois House of Representatives and the process of cumulative voting. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cutback_Amendment)

- DePue: What did your mom think about this?
- Currie: She was no longer alive by the time I ran. Yeah.
- DePue: Oh, that's too bad.
- Currie: I think she'd have loved it.
- DePue: And your husband?
- Currie: My husband? He thought it was great. He thought it was terrific, very anxious for me to win.
- DePue: What I'd like to have you do now is explain as best you can the cumulative voting process.
- Currie: Okay. This was unique to Illinois. It was the brainchild, as I understand it, of Joseph Medill, who became the Medill School of Journalism. The problem was that, following the Civil War, passions still red hot tended to divide geographically. And people south of Springfield—or wherever it was, maybe even including Springfield—tended still to be very partisan, very much opposed to Mr. Lincoln. People in the northern part of the state were unionists. Partisanship went with geography, and it was very difficult to find any kind of consensus.

In the state legislature everything was gridlocked. Medill's thought was that, within an area that is predominately one party, if there is direct representation of the ideas of the other party, that it might be possible to break the logjam. So, the idea was that every legislative district, which was co-terminus with senate districts, every legislative district would have three members, two from one political party, presumably, but one from the minority political party. Apparently, it worked. Apparently, there was a greater deal of cooperation following upon the adoption of the cumulative voting system than there had been before.

That's the way Springfield operated when I first went there, both for my first term, which began in 1979, and my second, which began in 1981. I found it a comfortable system. It was possible to make allegiances with some of the Republicans who represented city territory. They understood why the CTA is important, and that information, I think, they were able to share with their Republican colleagues from other parts of the world.

Democrats from areas that were predominately Republican did a good job of establishing the value of a fiscally conservative approach to some of the problems facing the state. There really was, I think, cross pollination because some of the members of that delegation came from territory that was not particularly homogeneous or particularly Democratic or Republican.

Now there were some areas where there were not enough members of a minority party actually to elect somebody, so you had some shadow Democrats and occasionally a shadow Republican.

DePue: Where was Hyde Park at that time?

Currie: The district was more Democratic by a fair bit, although some portions, not so much so. But I think that nobody doubted that the two winners of the Democratic primary would win election in the November general.

DePue: This was the 24th District, right?

Currie: Right.

DePue: Hyde Park and Kenwood?

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Anything else?

Currie: Oh, South Shore, Woodlawn, South Chicago, yeah. But again, there was heavier voting, disproportionately. In Hyde Park and Kenwood, people are more likely to vote than might be true in other parts of the district. To the extent that people come out in the general that didn't come out in primary, that would have favored the Democrats.

DePue: Who was the Chicago political machine supporting?

Currie: Well, at the end of the day, they pretty much were supporting us, the Democratic nominees.

DePue: Why wouldn't they support Caldwell?

Currie: Because he didn't win the Democratic primary.

DePue: I know. I mean in the primary.

Currie: Well, because this committeeman had his guy, and that one had... It was just a failure on the part of the party to provide the kind of unity and discipline that made it possible for them to continue to compete.

DePue: The kind of discipline that Daley became famous for.

Currie: Right. Right. But it was lacking on the south side of Chicago, in the primary of 1978.

DePue: So in the general election you've got two Republicans on the ticket and two Democrats. You don't really have to worry about the primary electorate or the general election, do you?

Currie: No, although there was some wrinkle. I don't remember exactly what it was. Was there a third party-candidate? I don't really remember. I'd have to go back and assess, because there was some reason to think that we needed to do some real campaigning. I can't remember what the circumstances were, but we did more than we'd expected us to have to.

DePue: Tell me about Bernie Epton.

Currie: Well, he was an odd chap. I'd never met him before I was elected to the legislature. He was an insurance person, and he always, when there was an insurance... I think he chaired the Insurance Committee. But every time there was a bill involving the insurance industry, he would get up and announce that he had a conflict of interest, and "As usual, I'm going to vote my conscious." Others who announced a conflict of interest chose not to vote.

I was not terribly engaged with Bernie. He didn't actually live all that far from me, but I had never met him, never really knew him. I didn't have a whole lot to do with him, in or out of the legislature. He seemed like a perfectly pleasant chap.

DePue: How much campaigning did you do in the general election?

Currie: I did more than I would've been expected to. I can't remember whether it was because there was a third party on the ballot or what.

DePue: Did you campaign harder during the primary?

Currie: Yes. In the primary it was a full-time job. I visited every school in the district, bus stops, train stations in the early morning hours. Yeah, and we raised a lot of money.

DePue: How old were the kids at that time?

Currie: They were... This was '77, so Stephen was sixteen, and Margaret was thirteen. And Stephen was a bit distant. I remember taking pictures for the first brochure and Stephen lagging behind the rest of the family. I remember his father saying, in a particularly dramatic voice, "Stephen." And Stephen hopped to.

DePue: So he wasn't too crazy about Mom being in politics?

Currie: Well, no he was, but he was a...

DePue: He was a typical teenager?

Currie: I have a funny story. When I'm thinking about running and talking to my family, to David, to my brothers, to friends, I stopped and visited the children, as they were getting organized for bed. I started out with Stephen. I said,

“Stephen, I’m thinking of running for state representative. What would you think about that?” He said, “Oh Mom, that would be very... Oh, wait a minute.” He said, “You don’t stand for anything I believe in.” He was going through (laughs) a fairly Republican phase. He’s completely left those years behind, and he’s now, in the last five, at least, general elections, gone to Pennsylvania or wherever they need him to stump for the Democratic ticket.

Margaret, on the other hand, at thirteen, said, “Great.” She said, “But what would you do about tennis? What would you do about talking on the phone with your friends?” She said, “I think that’s a full-time job, and you’re a part-time person.” (both laugh) With that support, I jumped right into it.

DePue: How would you describe your platform, or was that something that wasn’t all that necessary at this stage of your political...

Currie: Well, sure it was. I don’t think we had position papers, but we certainly did have some pretty clear principles. And they were things like gun control, eliminating the death penalty, civil rights, civil liberties, fair shakes for people, regardless of gender, race, so forth and so on. Transparency, ethics in government, that was certainly a priority item on my agenda, as well.

DePue: Were there fiscal issues in discussion at that time?

Currie: I’m sure there were, but I don’t think that we focused a lot on those in the campaign. I don’t think that the people that I ran into were particularly focused...

Well, that’s not fair. Sure, a high proportion of teachers and social workers [live] in this neck of the woods. I think there were people who were concerned about adequate funding for the social service agencies, for Children and Family Services, Human Services. Welfare was a very big issue; many supported increasing the size of the welfare check. The focus on fiscal issues had more to do with “more” than it did with “what’s the over-all approach to budgeting in Illinois state government?”

The first question I got at my very first coffee, however, was... I can remember it; it was quite a stunner. “What do you believe is the appropriate role for state government in the issue of research into recombinant DNA?” (both laugh) I was more than a little taken aback. It was from a biologist or microbiologist or something at U of C. I gulped and said, “Bob, I’d really be interested to know what you think should be the appropriate role” (both laugh).

The issue was... This was early in the days of genetic investigations, so there were some legislatures that were rushing to judgment on the whole issue of stem cells and genetic research. This was in the very early days of that debate.

DePue: So, already skilled at deflecting questions, huh? (both laugh) Any memories about Election Day?

Currie: Election Day was fast and furious. We had me in various parts of the district. Then the strategists thought that it was really a good idea for me to come home and to stand at the door to my own precinct, which was housed in Ray School with three other precincts. We had four precincts smack dab in the middle of Hyde Park. And they thought it was a good idea for me to shake hands and smile at the voters as they were on their way in. Then look them in the eyes as they came out, to make sure that they had done the right thing (DePue laughs).

DePue: You mentioned Michael Shakman was involved with the campaign. Who else was there helping you? You mentioned the family as well.

Currie: Yeah, yeah. Other people who'd been active in political things in the neighborhood: Bob Ashenhurst, Nancy Levner, Cal Audrain, Herb Kadden and his wife, Leah Kadden, Alan and Lois Dobry, Bob Picken. Leah was the barn boss at the Ray School Election Day activity. She was in charge of all four precincts. Who else did we have? We had a bunch of people who had been active in politics, and we were able to entice them into giving us a helping hand.

DePue: How did you feel then election night, when you found out you'd won?

Currie: I didn't discover I'd won, no. We thought we'd lost (laughs). We felt quite good going into election day because we had counted our pluses, and we had people reporting on what they had done in the precincts. Things looked pretty good.

Then election night... We were having a party. It was supposed to be sandwiches, chips and stuff. But we had a campaign volunteer who wanted to make a lovely salmon mousse. We had quite an elegant spread for our campaign victory party for our workers.

DePue: Are we talking about the primary or the General Election?

Currie: Primary is the one that counts. Then the numbers began coming in, and we had a volunteer at the adding machine. People were reporting numbers from each precinct and putting them up on butcher block. All of a sudden, we're losing. So, what was a victory party, became a defeat party. It was pretty sad.

The next day, the family was going on a trip to the Bahamas, a trip that we had planned before I decided to run, before we knew there was even a vacancy to run for. We're on the plane, and I'm writing people notes—with the occasional tear, making the ink run—thanking them for all their help.

Well, three days later, we're in some kind of resort where they don't have telephones in the rooms. Office staff is knocking on my door. There's a phone call for me. I find it's the campaign. They're calling to tell me that our adding machine was wrong and that actually I'd won (both laugh), with this margin of a 101.5 votes. You know, in the first election, I had tried both winning and losing. I'll tell you winning's better (DePue laughs).

DePue: Did you have any of your doubts?

Currie: We had the real victory party when we came back. Campaign volunteers commandeered an arrival lounge, lots of people, salmon mousse and the streamers and the balloons. It was great.

DePue: By this time now you can start to at least try to visualize what life is going to be like as a legislator.

Currie: I discovered that I had really enjoyed campaigning. I did like the opportunity to educate and inform the voters, which is what you do when you have coffees and when you meet people at the train station. But I didn't know if I'd really like the work. It was interesting to... I mean, "Yeah, okay. Now what?"

DePue: How much did you know about the legislative process?

Currie: Well, I knew a fair bit because people were helpful in making sure that I did, that I didn't call agencies by the wrong name and that I have good answers for the people who say, "Well, she's not a lawyer. How can she possibly be a law maker?" I knew a lot about the process, but that didn't mean that I knew that I'd really like it.

DePue: Once you got the general election, was there any doubt in your mind you'd win that one?

Currie: Again, we did campaign. I don't think there was a serious threat, but there was some reason, some wrinkle, some problem. But no, I think I expected to win.

DePue: I'm going to end today's session, I think, this way: It's been a great start to it, but there was interesting twist...

Currie: Oh, oh.

DePue: ...at the end of the election that you weren't directly involved in. It involved the people who were currently sitting. That was, I'm sure you recall... At the end of the election, one of the topics of discussion for the gubernatorial election—and Thompson was running for the second time, two years after his victory in '76...

Currie: Because he ran in '76, and then he ran in '78.

DePue: ...and one of the topics of discussion was whether or not legislators should get a pay increase...

Currie: Right, oh!

DePue: ...and executive should get a pay increase.

Currie: Right. Oh, I loved it (DePue laughs). For me this was just terrific. The legislators in the lame duck session, of which I was, of course, not a part, voted to give us a salary increase (DePue laughs). I was in the happy position of not having voted for a salary increase but finding that the job I'd run for was now worth almost twice as much money as it had been when I sought it.

DePue: Forty percent increase.

Currie: Forty percent increase. As I say, almost twice as much. It was pretty nice.

DePue: The way it worked the legislature passed that legislation. Thompson had promised that he would veto any such legislation. He vetoed it a couple of hours after they passed it, while he was on vacation in South Carolina. So he used the auto pen to veto it. And the legislature immediately overrode it. Then what happened in Illinois?

Currie: Well, then some people lost their seats in the next election.

DePue: Because a huge outcry from what I understand.

Currie: Yeah, although actually not very many lost their seats, I believe. I'm not sure, but I think it was the *Peoria Journal Register* which really led the fight. They had little black boxes on the front page, with a banner headlining the number of days since the legislature had taken this terrible vote.

I'm not sure that more than one or two people actually lost the next election because of their vote for the salary increase. Whatever happened to them, I'm golden. I didn't vote for the salary increase, but I got it (DePue laughs).

DePue: And Thompson had to deal with the fallout from that.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Next time around we'll start by talking again about the cumulative voting and the Cutback Amendment. And I guess we start for the second time... Our first two sessions, we get to start talking about Pat Quinn.

Currie: Okay, alright.

DePue: Thanks very much.

Currie: Thank you. Good heavens, I do like to talk about myself.

(end of transcript #1)

Interview with Barbara Flynn Currie

#ISL-A-L-2014-049.02

Interview #2: January 27, 2015

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, January 27, 2015. This is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm in the Capitol Building with Representative Barbara Flynn Currie. Good afternoon, Representative.

Currie: Good afternoon. It is good to see you again. Happy New Year.

DePue: And same to you. You had a good Christmas, I hope?

Currie: I did, and you as well?

DePue: Yeah.

Currie: Good.

DePue: It's been a while though, hasn't it?

Currie: Uh-huh.

DePue: But you have the kind of schedule that I'm sure on many days you say, "I wish I had a little bit more control over my schedule."

- Currie: I frequently do. I sometimes feel as though I'm in the Army, hurry up and wait.
- DePue: But I'm sure in those moments when you're waiting, you're busy doing something.
- Currie: Right. For sure.
- DePue: The last session, we talked about your growing up in Chicago and got you all the way through that first election in 1978, but you said you wanted to correct the record on a couple of things.
- Currie: Yes, I had not been really focused on the fact that we were going to start so early in my life, and I made some mistakes with respect to my parents. First of all, they did meet at the University of Chicago, in the School of Social Service Administration. Both of them were doing graduate work. I know my father's led to a PhD in social work. I gave you the wrong college. He was born and grew up in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and he graduated from Providence College. In fact, he won a Knights of Columbus scholarship to do graduate work at Notre Dame, where he also taught.
- They did meet at the University of Chicago. I think I was unclear about that. I gave him the wrong college. The right college is Providence College. I believe it's a Jesuit school, and he won a Knights of Columbus scholarship on to do more work at Notre Dame, where ultimately, he became a member of the faculty before finally getting his PhD from the University of Chicago after World War II.
- DePue: Excellent. Now let's switch gears and move up about, I don't know, thirty-five, forty years (laughs).
- Currie: A few years, a few years.
- DePue: Again, we finished off last session with you winning the election, something of a surprise for the primary but not for the general election it sounds like.
- Currie: Exactly. Although there had been a third party candidate, and so there was some question about—what with the opportunity for bullet voting—whether there might have been some shenanigans going on. But it didn't happen. As expected, the two Democratic nominees won the general election. That was Carol Moseley Braun and myself.
- DePue: Bullet vote. There's a term that makes sense in Illinois. Maybe it doesn't elsewhere, huh?
- Currie: Right. And the Republican who was the third person to represent the district was Bernie Epton, the incumbent.

DePue: We're towards the tail end of January. I think the session starts tomorrow here. I know that we've got a new governor, and I assume that you already had a swearing-in ceremony, not just for the governor but for the legislators as well.

Currie: The governor was inaugurated on Monday, the 12th of January. That's a constitutional date. And the legislature—again, under the constitution—was sworn in on Wednesday, January 14. For us it's always the second Wednesday in the start of the new year, and for the governor it's the second Monday.

DePue: Do you remember 1979, your swearing in ceremony?

Currie: I do. It was on the floor of the Illinois House, a crowded venue, filled with children, parents, spouses, brothers, sisters, lots of flowers, quite a bit of pandemonium but wonderful. Wonderful chaos I always thought.

DePue: Was your family suitably impressed by the whole ceremony and that Mom was now a representative?

Currie: I think they were... Actually, I think my son wasn't with us. He was already away in college, but my husband and my daughter were both there and some people who'd been very involved in the campaign, good friends who also were volunteer Currie campaign workers.

DePue: One of the things that all the representatives, especially people as far away from Springfield, as you are, have to figure out is what you're going to do for residence in Springfield.

Currie: Right... I'm not sure if I actually looked while we were here for the new members' conference in December. I found an apartment, unfurnished but an apartment, that was about two blocks from the Capitol on Lawrence. In fact, actually my then district mate, Carol Braun, took an apartment in the same complex. I took one right across the corridor. In fact, I stayed in that apartment for the next twenty-five years or so. She moved out quite quickly.

DePue: How about your husband? Did he stay up in Chicago?

Currie: Yes, he taught at the University of Chicago Law School, so he was busy with his own responsibilities. I assumed, when I rented this one bedroom apartment with a pull-out couch in the living room, I thought that my daughter, who was then in high school, would spend a lot of time with me. She didn't spend as much time as I anticipated. And I thought that once the quarter was over, my husband would come trotting down to the state capital. But that didn't work out very well either.

DePue: So it sounds like you might have been a little bit lonely at first, trying to adjust to life.

Currie: Well, except that we were practically always home on weekends. It was not nearly as isolating an experience as it might have been. Being home on the weekends made for a very different experience from what it otherwise would have been.

DePue: Were you driving that?

Currie: No, I mostly flew. There was a... I can't remember. Was it Air Illinois? There were a couple of different operators during the time that I went back and forth to Springfield. I generally flew up. If we were going in session on a Tuesday, I generally flew up in the morning. And if we were finished on Thursday, I flew home Thursday afternoon. So it wasn't even just Saturday, Sunday that saw me back in my home district, but frequently I was able to skip the night before and skip the night after in the capital city.

DePue: Does that mean you had time to do district business back in the district as well?

Currie: Yes, and that was important.

DePue: What would that consist of?

Currie: Well, it would be going to meetings. For example, if there were organizations, parks' groups or League of Women Voters or parent groups that were interested in an issue or that were just having an ordinary meeting, it was my job to turn up. Sometimes, of course, I was specifically invited to make a talk or to report on what was happening in Springfield.

But even when I wasn't particularly invited, it was worth my time and their time for me to stop by and just see which way the winds are blowing, find out what people's concerns are, make sure that I know what my constituents care about when I try to represent them in Springfield.

DePue: Did you have a staff at that time and an office in Chicago?

Currie: I had an office in Chicago and a staff. We also did a lot of operating out of my family home. We had a first-floor study. I'm not quite sure what one would call it, but we pretty much turned that over to the district operation. The staffer—we only had one staffer at the time—he tended to use my house as his home base, operations base, usually in the afternoon and evenings. And then for a time, we had a real office.

At that time it was multi member districts, as we said, and my district extended pretty far south, from 4700 South on the north end of the district to, I don't know, 92nd or 96th on the south. We had an office in South Chicago, which was pretty far to the south of the district, but then we had the outpost that was my house in Hyde Park.

DePue: South Chicago is the name of the neighborhood?

Currie: A neighborhood, yes. It's not a different city. It's part of the city of Chicago. Never was any part of my district outside the city of Chicago.

DePue: We talked, I think a little bit last time, about the process that was happening in the Illinois State Legislature in the late '60s, all the way through the '70s, where I think this would be fair to characterize it: It was increasingly a professional organization.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Professional, in part, meaning that people didn't feel like they needed to have another job beyond being a legislator.

Currie: I think that was increasingly true. By the time I came in, in 1979, there was enough money in the district account to be able to hire an office, hire staff. And in Springfield itself, there was office space. My understanding was that in the '60s there really wasn't much. People operated on the floor of the House itself. That became their Springfield office.

By the time I came in, we had offices here in Springfield. We had access to secretarial help, not necessarily a whole secretary for each representative, but we certainly had access to secretarial help.

DePue: The secretarial help you had, was that through the Speaker's office or...?

Currie: Yes, through House operations. I don't know if each... I suspect that the hiring happened through the office of the Speaker, on the one hand, or the minority leader, on the other. But it was all pretty much the same operation.

DePue: One of the things that... If you're not familiar with the way Illinois does it—Maybe other states do it differently; I don't know—in Illinois at least, the four top leaders, the four tops, each have a fairly robust staff.

Currie: That's exactly right, and each has what is clearly a partisan staff. So there is the senate Democratic staff, the senate Republican staff. There are also some shared activities. For example, the Legislative Reference Bureau operates, not as an independent organization controlled by the House Democrats or the Senate Republicans; it is responsible to all four staffs. Same is true of the Legislative Research Unit. There are several other legislatives... The Joint Committee on Administrative Review, that too operates with fealty to all four caucuses, rather than in a partisan way. And, whatever we call it now (laughs), the Government Forecasting and Accountability, COGFA. That too is...

DePue: COGFA?

Currie: COGFA, the Committee on Government Finance and Accountability? Yes, I think that's it...Forecasting and Accountability. So that too is a service agency, service to the legislature, that is not controlled by any individual caucus but is responsible to the overall General Assembly.

DePue: How long does it take a freshman legislator to figure all of this out?

Currie: A little while (both laugh). But it's not that complicated. You know, it's one of those things wherein, once you begin doing it, it becomes pretty much second nature. It's a little like, in my view, computers. They have all these complicated whatevers, but if you use them day by day, it's very easy. And if you don't, if you do something once, then you come back a month later, you have to go through the learning experience all over again.

DePue: Did you ever consider having any outside employment, along with being a legislator?

Currie: I did not. There were many people, of course, who did. Many people came into the assembly with outside employment, and depending on one's status, economic status, there were probably some good reasons for people to have done that.

Now remember, when I was elected, the job paid about \$17,000 a year. By the time I took office, it was paying closer to \$27,000 a year. Well, that makes a very big difference in terms of one's ability to bring up a family. And at \$17,000, people might have been hard pressed to say, "This is all the income I'm going to have, all that I'm going to be able to rely upon." A little easier at \$27,000. And of course, I was in a very different situation, having a spouse who was out in the real world earning money, earning a salary. It wasn't incumbent upon me, in terms of our family financial structure, to try to find further employment than what I had when I first took office.

DePue: We finished the last session last time, discussing that legislative pay raise, and I alluded to the huge controversy that erupted because the governor signed the legislation. Excuse me. He **vetoed** the legislation. Then it was immediately overridden...

Currie: Right.

DePue: ...afterwards. It wasn't too long after that, that the huge grass roots uprising... thousands of people sending tea bags to the governor's office and...

Currie: Good old Pat Quinn.

DePue: ...corn cobs. And Pat Quinn decides that it's time to cut back on the legislature.

Currie: Right. He did indeed. I opposed his efforts at the time, and I still think they were not clearly in the best interest of the people. He did have support from some reform minded quarters. The League of Women Voters strenuously supported what he was trying to do. Their argument was, I think, a very straight forward one. It's a complicated system. Multi- member districts with cumulative votes is very hard for people to understand.

I agreed with the league that it's certainly difficult to explain. But I don't think it was difficult for people to act upon it. I think people understood pretty well when they went in the voting booth what their options were and how those options could translate into their preferences for members of the Illinois House of Representatives.

While, theoretically, the league made good arguments, I don't think that, as a practical matter, the difficulty of understanding the system was anything like as serious as they thought. In my view, the reason that the amendment was as successful as it was at the ballot box, was not because the system was too complicated, but because it was a way to, with the single stroke of a...the flick of a finger, to throw fifty-nine rascals out. (both laugh) So you've got the opportunity to un-elect a large number of people.

At the same time, of course, you could pat yourself on the back and explain that you were saving money, hand over fist. Each of those fifty-nine legislators, after all, commanded a salary and all the support staff that go into the workings of the individual legislator. All of a sudden you were saving this enormous amount of money for the state.

Actually, in terms of the State budget, it would have been just a drop in the bucket. And as things happen in the real world, as many of us know, what you save over here, you often spend over there. So in terms of the support staff, I think there were certainly increases in numbers and in professionalism and salaries. I don't think that the savings that Mr. Quinn and the other advocates touted turned out to be real. But I do think that was the big motivating factor in the vote to change the constitution to give us single member districts.

DePue: I'll put you on the spot here. What do you think Pat Quinn's motives were when he pushed this?

Currie: Well, Pat Quinn's very much a populist. He was then; he is now. I think that he saw this as a way to save money, which would be a nice populous goal. He saw it also, along with the league, as a way to make political life a little more transparent, a little more accountable. He was an organizer. This was an opportunity to develop a large number of names and addresses of people whose interest in things political he might want to seek in later campaigns.

DePue: You left out of the discussion any political ambition. Did you think that was part of what he was doing?

Currie: Well, I just said that he was using this as an organizing tool. So, you have all these people who've signed petitions. Now you've got names and addresses of people who have shown some interest, however slight, in the world of politics and government. What an opportunity to go back and begin to organize with those same names, those same addresses, and try to use them for some other event, including, of course, his own runs for public office.

DePue: Last time you talked pretty eloquently about the benefits of the cumulative voting system and how that leads to a more... I think you used the words or described it as a more of a collegial environment.

Currie: And a very diverse environment. I think that the opportunity for members of minority parties to have direct representation is a good thing for democracy.

DePue: Moving ahead then... This is 1979; the amendment got on the ballot in...

Currie: In '81.

DePue: ...in 1980...

Currie: In '82, '80. I'm sorry. You're right, '80.

DePue: ...and it won rather handily.

Currie: It did. And, as I think I just explained, my own view was that it was not so much about anything, except saving the money and throwing the bums out.

DePue: So punishing the legislature.

Currie: Yes, a favorite American spectator sport (DePue laughs). Or not even spectator; this is participatory democracy.

DePue: So the big changes are going to happen in 1983...

Currie: Yes.

DePue: ...and in the ballots in 1980. So we can probably wait to another session to talk about the impact, once we get to that point. I wanted to move next then... This is, I assume, your first real exposure to Governor Thompson. Do you remember the first time you met him?

Currie: I really don't. I'm not even... As a lowly back bencher, it may have been several years before I had the opportunity (laughs) actually to meet the chief executive.

DePue: What was your initial impression though of the man and his administration?

Currie: He had not been in office very long before I ran. He took office in '77, I believe. Remember, he first ran in '76, but we had changed the constitution to change the schedule. He had been in office for two years when I first ran in 1978. My first term was—I think I'm right—his first full term, full four-year term as governor.

DePue: Correct.

Currie: I didn't have a very strong impression. I did admire his stand for reproductive rights. I thought that was a good thing. He seemed to be pretty outspoken on that score, and he seemed to have a pretty good record of ethical behavior in government. I don't remember finding anything to quarrel or quibble about on that front.

My impression of him as time went on was that he was fairly moderate with respect to the positions that he took. I got to know Paula Wolfe, who was one of his senior policy advisors, and she has long been one of my personal heroines. She is really remarkable. She is amazing, and she did some very good work with Governor Thompson, guiding him in what I thought were very appropriate directions.

DePue: What was the prevailing opinion among your caucus in the House?

Currie: I don't know that there was a prevailing opinion. I think that a lot of my downstate colleagues were very much chomping at the bit, feeling very much as if, "Again, it's the Republicans that are in charge, and our people can't get jobs." It was a very strong... My recollection is that there were many people in my caucus who came from south of Springfield, who saw government as spoils, that those spoils were being denied them because the person in charge of the executive branch was a Republican. Now whether they were right or not, I don't know. And whether I'm remembering that accurately, I don't know that either. But I think there was often a sense in downstate that people were forgotten and that jobs were not as available to Democrats as they would be to Republicans. I think that was less true upstate.

But upstate I would say that, at least in the House Democratic caucus, the more relevant figures tended to be mayors of the City of Chicago. I think many of them would have started out before I did with a strong allegiance to Richard J. Daley, who then died, I think, in my first year, my first...1979, I believe.

DePue: He died, I think, December of '76. So, was it [Michael] Bilandic or Jane Byrne who would have...?

Currie: It would have been Bilandic, right. Yes, I've got the terms wrong. Then Bilandic took the reins and became the person to whom my colleagues from

the northern part of the state would have been responsive. And then we had the great blizzard.²⁷

Then we got Jane Byrne in 1979. Exactly my first term she became mayor, and I never quite understood what that meant for the structure of the relationship between the Democratic members of the House and the City of Chicago...

DePue: It's interesting...

Currie: ...because she clearly didn't have very good relationships with some of the people who had been important cogs in the earlier administration.

DePue: It's interesting. You talked about patronage and its importance to party leaders. The only reason I say that is because we just have a new governor from a different party, and the comment was made that Illinois is not used to this because we don't change parties in the governor's office all that often.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: For twenty-six years the Republicans were in office, I think.

Currie: That's right.

DePue: And then there were eight years...

Currie: Twelve.

DePue: How many years? Well, twelve years, I think, for the Democrats.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Back in those days, there were a lot more patronage positions to be...

Currie: Absolutely right.

DePue: ...working on.

Currie: Absolutely right. And then, of course, there was the Rutan Decision.²⁸ Mary Lee Leahy, another heroine of mine, was the lawyer, the lead lawyer, in that case. Things, I think, at least to some degree, changed.

²⁷ During January 1979, a blizzard struck Chicago and effectively closed down the city; dropping a total of thirty-five inches of snow over a two-day period. The city's slow response to the debilitating storm was publicly blamed on Bilandic. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Anthony_Bilandic)

²⁸ *Rutan v. Republican Party of Illinois*, 497 U.S. 62 (1990), was a United States Supreme Court decision that held that the First Amendment forbids a government entity from basing its decision to promote, transfer, recall, or hire low-level public employees based upon their party affiliation. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rutan_v._Republican_Party_of_Illinois)

DePue: What committee assignments did you want, going in?

Currie: I wanted the human service committees, although I'm not sure I got it. But for reasons unclear to me, I decided I wanted to be on the Revenue Committee. Now, why I wanted to be on the Revenue Committee, I don't know. I had never made economics or state budgeting a high priority. I think the reason is because, at that time, the Revenue Committee was considered to be a fairly controlled committee, not a place where people were invited to exercise independent judgment. So it would have seemed to be a challenge. Of course, I did not get appointed to the Revenue Committee.

I was part of an internal caucus revolt that happened sometime during that first spring. At the end of the revolt, there was a truce. Everybody got something, and one of the things I got was to be a member of the House Revenue Committee. I wondered, years later, why in the world I wanted it (both laugh).

DePue: But isn't there a considerable amount of influence or power over... Well, revenue and the budget are two different things.

Currie: Yeah, yes.

DePue: So this is the money coming in?

Currie: This is the money coming in. And the reason it was thought to be so heavily controlled had partly to do with property tax issues and assessment issues in the City of Chicago, not just a question of general state taxation but more specific issues about property taxes, assessing, and things like that. That was why I think it was thought to be fairly well controlled and why I thought it would be kind of fun just to see if I could make some trouble. (DePue laughs)

DePue: You mentioned a revolt. Can you elaborate on that?

Currie: Yes, I think it was Glen Schneider who started it. Glenn was a Democrat representing Naperville. He was the minority party member from that district, and he was very engaged in education policy. I think he was a high school history teacher. I'm sure he was a teacher, but whether it was high school history, I don't remember. He'd been involved for years in education policy. The question had to do—I'm not even sure I can remember precisely the issue—it had to do with the way you budget and whether the formula money, the money that just goes into the formula, is treated differently from the money for categorical spending.

Categorical spending would mean transportation, special ed, bilingual, those kinds of things. And the categoricals were always separate, almost a sense of reimbursement. If you've got transportation costs, then you're going to get some portion of that reimbursed. Whereas the formula was based upon the question, "What's the property tax wealth of the district?" At some point

along the way, the relative affluence or poverty of the children in the district became part of that equation too.

I believe Mr. Schneider wanted to separate out the categoricals from other things, but I'm not even sure I'm right about that. But he was part of a group, the Democratic Study Group, which tended to pull in reform minded Democrats, people like Dawn Netsch, people like Abner Mikva, Paul Scariano, Paul Simon had all been members of the Democratic Study Group. From that perch, Glen Schneider was able to pull a fair number of independent reform minded Democrats...Woody Bowman. I don't remember who else was part of the evil cabal.

DePue: But you were one of those?

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: How does this get you at odds with...?

Currie: Because everybody was making demands. Well, at the end of the day, when there's a truce, then the question from the people who started the revolution is, "So what did you want?" (laughs) So, I said, "I want to be on the Revenue Committee." (DePue laughs) So I got to be on the Revenue Committee.

DePue: That was a couple of years down the road?

Currie: No, I think that was my first term.

DePue: First term, okay. Would revolt be maybe a little bit of an overstatement?

Currie: Yeah, probably. On the other hand, we all got what we were looking for. There was a truce. As is usual, when there is a truce, you figure out who gets what for his or her...

DePue: You just described what I would consider the normal legislative process.

Currie: Right. On the other hand, it's not usually that well organized.

DePue: Oh, okay.

Currie: That is to say, it's often people out on their own, asking for this, that, or something else. But here it was a group asking for something, and I assume that we had something that we were not doing along the way. I really don't remember what; I wonder if Woody would remember. Glenn Schneider since has died, but I wonder if Woody would remember. I bet Woody would.

DePue: Well we're in the neighborhood of some the other legislators you dealt with. I wanted to ask you about the leaders at that time. I think Bill Redmond from DuPage County was the speaker.

Currie: Yeah, he was the speaker.

DePue: Your impression of Bill Redmond?

Currie: I liked him very much. When I first met him, (laughs) he told me that it was my husband who cost Ogilvie his reelection in...

DePue: That would have been '72.

Currie: ...against Walker. Yeah, right. It was my husband who did it. I was quite amazed because I had never heard that before. Ogilvie had hired my husband... not hired him, had invited him as a member of the University of Chicago faculty, to come and work on issues environmental. So David spent one spring—I suppose it was in 1970—spending a lot of time in Springfield, crafting, drafting the state's first environmental protection act. That became a very big issue for Republicans. This is around the time of the first Earth Day. I think Nixon was doing some stuff on that front as well.

So, David led the charge for Ogilvie. And it was because George Ranney, who'd been a student of David's in the law school, was working in the Bureau of the Budget at the time, along with... I'm not sure if Paula Wolfe was there, but Wayne Whelan, who became her husband later, was working there too. So they plucked David from the law school environs and sent him to Springfield, where he drafted the Environmental Protection Act.

It was quite an eye-opening experience, as he was given authority by Ogilvie to negotiate with all of these various and sundry people. "Yes, we'll do this, but no, we're not going to do that." He really had quite a lot of authority. Ogilvie made sure that the bill finally did get passed.

But what Bill Redmond said was that the farmers didn't like it because, under the way the bill was crafted, the Illinois Pollution Control Board, [of] which my husband actually became the first chair, had the authority to limit burning, limit all kinds of things that the farmers didn't much like. At least they didn't like the prospect of it. So Redmond's view was that it wasn't the income tax. It was that the farmers all stayed home.

DePue: Do you think there was some tongue in cheek or he actually believed that?

Currie: I think that he was probably right, that there was some of that. That Ogilvie's support within certain elements of the Republican party, and probably particularly the farm community, was eroded by virtue of his support for stronger measures controlling run-off, open burning, whatever it might be.

DePue: I think it was the...

Currie: I don't know that he meant it, that that was the... There were seventeen straws that were breaking the camel's back (DePue laughs), among other things, the

Crosstown Expressway, the income tax, many, many different ways to skin that particular cat. I never went back to look at the numbers, but he may well have been right, that the farm vote was a little lower than it would otherwise have been expected to be.

DePue: Do you remember the election of the speaker? Was that contentious at all that year?

Currie: No.

DePue: Maybe that's because they had such a contentious time the time before, when after about one hundred votes...

Currie: Hundred and one, whatever it was, right. Aaron Jaffe, I remember was voting for...for the other guy. And for his pains he got put on the Agriculture Committee (both laugh). But no, that was before my time, so I missed all of that hoopla. Although it did sound like an awful lot of fun.

DePue: The reason I'm asking about that is that some have said that—I don't want to mischaracterize anybody in here—that Redmond wasn't that active of a speaker, that the real power in the Democrat party, even at that time, was Mike Madigan.

Currie: People did say that ,and I wasn't close enough to what the leadership decisions were to have an independent view on that topic. But yes, the general thought was that Madigan was more important than Redmond. Now again, that had partly to do, I suspect, with the Chicago connection, with the big city Democrats having a larger say than many others. And Redmond, of course, did come from DuPage County, hardly a powerhouse of Democratic votes.

In fact, just an interesting little aside... When they had that huge brouhaha that I missed, Lee Daniels, of course, voted for Bill Redmond because they were, after all, district mates. And people at the time said, "Oh, there goes his career, right down the tubes. He'll never amount to a hill of beans." Then, of course, some years later he became the speaker.

DePue: I've had a chance to interview the Speaker Daniels, and he's told that story.²⁹

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: And he enjoyed telling that story (DePue laughs).

Currie: It was Eugenia Chapman, who told me that story.

²⁹ Lee Daniels oral history interviews, conducted by Dr. Mark DePue, are available for viewing and downloading at <https://presidentlincoln.illinois.gov/oral-history/collections/daniels-lee/interview-detail/>

DePue: What was your initial impression of Mike Madigan?

Currie: I don't think I had much impression of him. He was a quiet person. I knew that he was very important, and I think it was thought that he was the one who was calling the shots on the Revenue Committee.

DePue: Is that because of his Chicago connection?

Currie: I think so. I mean, just there was a general perception.

DePue: That he was speaking for the mayor and the Democratic machine from Chicago?

Currie: I think that would have been a general sense. I'm not sure if it was accurate, and I'm not even sure I've remembered it appropriately. One of the things that happened... I think it was during my first...certainly my first term; whether it was my first year, I'm not so sure. But if you remember, the 1970 constitution had abolished the personal property tax with respect to individuals. But when it came to corporations, it survived until such time as the legislature saw fit to replace it.

Well the Illinois Supreme Court said, "It's gone. If you want to, legislature, go ahead and replace it, but we're abolishing it as of the date certain." So that pretty much put the legislature on its mettle to get something done. It was Mike Madigan who led that effort within the House Democratic caucus. And, of course, there were various views. It was not an easy issue.

DePue: That's one of those issues I want to develop a little bit more fully, shortly. But let's go through some of the other figures in the Illinois House at the time. The minority leader... I don't suppose people said that George Ryan was quiet.

Currie: No. No, I don't think he had very much presence.

DePue: George Ryan did not have much presence?

Currie: I don't remember that he did.

DePue: Even as minority leader at the time.

Currie: Right. Now maybe that's not true, but I guess as a newcomer, the minority leader didn't seem to me have a whole lot of stuff. But that may be just because I'm myopic. It may be because I was still figuring out the ropes within the Democratic caucus.

DePue: Did you think there was more influential or more important Republican leaders in the House at the time?

- Currie: Actually, the person that I thought was particularly powerful was Art Telcser, who was close to George Ryan and was... I don't know what his actual position was, but he seemed to me to be...and maybe it's only because he represented territory in the City of Chicago.
- DePue: Wasn't he one of the casualties of the Cutback Amendment later on?
- Currie: Yeah, yeah, Elroy Sandquist. He was also a cutback victim. But Elroy was not part of the Republican leadership, whereas Telcser, I believe, was. Pete Peters is another who was, I believe, close to George and seemed to carry some heft within the minority party circle.
- DePue: How about your colleague from the 24th, Bernie Epton?
- Currie: Which?
- DePue: Bernie Epton.
- Currie: Yeah, Bernie was... I never knew Bernie at all well. He was an insurance person, and he, I think, generally was on the insurance committees. But he generally, when there was a bill on the floor that had to do with insurance, he would stand up and say that, "I have a conflict of interest, and as usual, I will vote my conscience." (Currie laughs) He was an interesting chap.
- DePue: So he's from the same district, but you didn't really have that...?
- Currie: Didn't have a lot to do with him. I don't know how actively he participated in district things. I don't remember seeing him at meetings. It just wasn't what he did. I don't know how Republican politics worked in that area in that time, but it was a Democratic district, and it may well be that the person who was likeliest to be the chosen representative of the minority party was somebody who had good skills within the local party apparatus, rather than necessarily good skills with the populous.
- DePue: How about your colleague, Carol Moseley Braun?
- Currie: We were, as I told you before, a footnote in Illinois history, the last time, first time that two women from the same political party in the same district were elected to serve in the House of Representatives. Carol and I had had some competitive qualities. She had been...whatever. Anyway, we shared very much the same progressive agenda. I think we voted pretty much the same way, and I think that we basically worked pretty well together.
- DePue: You were one of, I think, twenty-two women in the legislature at the time, out of a 177.
- Currie: One hundred, seventy-seven. I thought it was twenty-six, but twenty-two could be right.

DePue: I saw that someplace so you could be right on that.

Currie: Yeah, no. And it was actually a big increase from what it had been. I think when Susan Catania first won in '72, I think she would have taken her seat in '73. I think that there were only about five women in the House at that point. By my time, we were beginning to see a real improvement in the numbers of women participants in the General Assembly... It's not a very long period of time. On the other hand, '73 to '79 is something.

DePue: Let's move on to some of the major legislative initiatives that were being discussed and that you were involved in that first year. I'm going to make a confession here. You mentioned these articles that you wrote, so much of what I'm going to be asking you about is based on the things that I saw you writing about in the articles.

Currie: Good. This way I might remember them (laughs).

DePue: I hope I can prod your memory in some respects, as well. But it certainly was very helpful to me in getting a sense of what you thought were important issues at the time. The first one that we've talked about a little bit is the revision of the legislative and executive pay. In fact, we've talked about that quite a bit. Didn't that come to vote rather early on, that there was a minor restructuring of that legislative pay increase? Do you remember that at all?

Currie: I don't remember. I think you're right. I think it was bifurcated. So it was not a chunk all at one time; it was over a longer period. But I don't remember that that was a huge issue.

DePue: I think we've got about an hour left for today. Is that enough time to talk about the next issue that I wanted to address, which is the Equal Rights Amendment?

Currie: We can certainly start, (laughs). I would like to see if I can find my files because I did have a lot of written material at one point about issues like the appropriate number of votes for ratification of federal constitutional amendments and so forth and so on.

DePue: Well then, I'm going to make recommendation that we table that and pick that up maybe the next time around and talk about some of the other issues.

Currie: I hope I can find my files.

DePue: (laughs) Well now you're obligated to go looking at least.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: You mentioned you later got to the Revenue Committee.

Currie: During that first term, yes.

DePue: What was your general view then and perhaps now, your philosophy, if you will, about revenues, about what are good sources of revenue, versus what are not so good?

Currie: I am a progressive. I was a progressive. I still am. So, for example, I think income taxes tend to be a more progressive way to go than sales taxes or user fees or whatever you want to call them. Even in a state that had a flat rate income tax, I think that there are reasons to say it's better than relying primarily on sales taxes. So, I start from a perspective that says that revenues ought to be general, and they ought to, to whatever degree, be not as harsh on lower income people as they are on higher income people.

I started out as someone who was not a major fan of business loopholes, of tax breaks for one kind of entity as against another, in part because again, I think that a tax base ought to be general; there ought not to be all kinds of carve-outs in order to be fair.

Secondly, I don't know why the legislature should be choosing which people are winners and losers in a basic capitalist enterprise. So, I started out not supporting many of the tax breaks that businesses came, hat-in-hand, asking for, of the members of the Revenue Committee, and I continue on that merry path.

DePue: One of the types of taxation, which is very prevalent in Illinois, you could say, "Well, it doesn't have that much to do with the legislature," are property taxes.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Illinois has the reputation for having high property taxes.

Currie: The problem here, I think, is primarily that Illinois has done a relatively poorer job of funding public education through general state resources than have most of our neighbors. I think what that does is put a lot of pressure on the property tax. I don't know that this number is still accurate, but I do remember some years ago, approximately sixty cents of every property tax dollar in Illinois goes to fund public education. Nationwide that number is closer to forty cents. So we disproportionately rely on property taxes to pay for public schools, and I think that puts a lot of pressure on the property tax.

Whether it means our overall bill is higher is not as clear to me. But it does mean that the reliance on property taxes to pay for schools has an unfortunate effect on the size of the property tax bill, and it has a very unfortunate effect in terms of the distribution of resources for public education. So, the kids who come from areas where there isn't much value in

that property tax base are going to find themselves with fewer resources than the kids who come from areas where the property tax base is worth more.

Even when a poor community taxes its property to the hilt, it doesn't bring in very much. That's a continuing problem in the area of school finance, and it may be that it also puts real pressure on the property tax bill across the board.

DePue: This is way ahead of the timeline we're talking, but 1994, that particular gubernatorial election, I'm sure you remember Dawn Clark Netsch was advocating, "Let's raise state income tax, and that means that local communities can lower the property tax."

Currie: And then Governor Edgar proposed the very same thing just two years later (laughs).

DePue: I take it you would have been in favor of what...

Currie: I was in favor both times. In fact, I sponsored the governor's bill in the House. We passed it in the House, and unfortunately it came a cropper [struck misfortune] in Pate Philips' Senate.

DePue: How about sales tax? That's another major source of income.

Currie: Sales taxes will be with us. Many find them more palatable. People don't notice the sales tax the way they notice the income tax and the property tax. But the reality is that sales taxes hit harder people at the lower end of the economic spectrum because they're people who have to spend their money. And one of the things they spend their money on is commodities. They buy goods, and it's the goods that are taxed. So relatively more affluent people don't spend as much of their income on disposable items that are subject to the tax.

I was a strong supporter in those early years in the legislature of the effort to take food and medicine out of the sales tax base. That, of course, was an effort led by Rich Daley and opposed by the governor and by Jane Byrne. Now it's a pretty costly thing. At the moment I think it's worth close to \$1 billion.

DePue: In today's dollars.

Currie: Yeah, \$800 million. Maybe it's closer to a billion.

DePue: In other words, if you're going to do that...

Currie: But that was a way of saying that we will make the sales tax less regressive because of the things people have to buy. We know that lower income people

are spending a lot of their money on groceries, and we know that the relatively more affluent people are not.

DePue: I want to set the stage here a little bit. I think it was 1978. I know it was 1978. California passed Proposition 13.

Currie: Proposition 13.

DePue: Governor Thompson figured he needed to do something. Proposition 13 is a strong public protest against increasing property taxes. So Thompson has his Thompson Initiative. So you've got a tax protest in the background. At the same time, the size of Illinois state government is growing. It had been for the last ten years, in terms of the number of employees and what it was doing in terms of the public sector. You also have, in the year of 1979, 11 percent inflation.

Currie: Oh, I forgot that.

DePue: So what's a member of the Revenue Committee to do, in terms of how you're going to find the revenue you need to operate government? What were you advocating?

Currie: Well, I always advocated for a progressive income tax or a graduated income tax. Of course, in Illinois, the general theory is that we have a flat rate tax and so you can't graduate it. But that to me...

DePue: That's a constitutional issue as well.

Currie: Right. So I supported the concept of a constitutional... Actually there were people who thought that you didn't have to change the constitution if you change personal exemptions in a way that you get larger ones if your family income is under X, and you get a less... Now, whether that would withstand court scrutiny, with respect to the constitution, nobody knows. But there have been some efforts along that line. So that would have been one thing.

I don't think I ever stood up and said that the state doesn't need any more revenue. But I was willing to forgo some state revenue, in terms of the effort to eliminate food and medicine from the sales tax base.

DePue: In fact, one of the things you were arguing, and I saw in the article, was that the money was there in the budget.

Currie: I don't remember that.

DePue: Anyway, that was one of the things you suggested that was not necessary... I had to read that closely. It says, "...in the budget or in the revenue that was coming in."

Currie: Yeah, so, what I said, yeah.

DePue: It would make more sense to me if it was in the revenue issue. But wasn't this at a time when the state was starting to really feel some revenue shortfalls?

Currie: I don't remember specifically. I expect you are right.

DePue: I know that's going to get more severe a couple years down the road.

Currie: Yes, exactly.

DePue: The next is an issue that you had to know, going in, there were going to be plenty of opponents. That's the bill to ban the sale and manufacture of handguns in Illinois.

Currie: I did know that. I did. But it also was something that was very important in my community and very important to me as someone who is a civilized person, that we need to get guns off the street. It seems to me that people kill with guns in ways they would not if they just had a baseball bat or something else to throw, a rock to throw. It was an important issue in my constituency, and it was a battle worth fighting.

DePue: Did you have an expectation you'd be successful?

Currie: No. I knew that I was up against very long odds, but it did seem to me important to... I think I said to you before that one of the things that had always motivated me, in terms of politics, was not just the solution but the opportunity to educate and inform the electorate. I'm a creature of the League of Women Voters. To me this was an issue that needed to have a bright light shown upon it, a lot of chapter and verse, a lot of explaining and informing the general public why this was an important issue.

At that time, the mayors, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, was quite on my side on this issue. They were doing all kinds of statistical reports. A handgun bought to protect someone in the home is six times more likely to kill a friend or a family member than it is to ward off an intruder. There were a lot of good statistics coming out.

More and more people were seeing gun violence as a public health problem, and that continued to be true. People were still... In fact, one of the most recent Obama nominees for Surgeon General got knocked out of the box because he did define gun violence as a public health problem, a public health epidemic.

Anyway, I did not expect to win, but I did expect to be able to use the issue as one to expand people's understanding and perhaps expand the pool of people who supported the idea that we could do something about guns that are out of control.

DePue: What was Chicago's position on guns?

Currie: We already had had a mayor who had gone to Washington to argue they should ban Saturday night specials. So, I think Chicago was pretty much in line with the idea that we need to do something to stop gun violence.

DePue: Were Chicago's regulations on gun ownership much stricter than the rest of the state at the time?

Currie: I don't know that they were. That, really, I think came in later. I think it started with Skokie and some of the other suburbs. Then Chicago, of course, did follow suit. But my recollection is that in the early days, police commanders came to Springfield to testify for the bills that were introduced that would have limited guns in one way or another.

DePue: What was your response then to the arguments that I suspect you heard at the time, that you could make guns illegal, but it wouldn't prevent the criminals from getting the guns and using the guns?

Currie: That was a consistent argument, and it's always a hard one to answer because we do not do as good a job as we might in seeing to it that people who should not have guns really don't have them. That's a police issue; it's an enforcement issue. But it also has to do with the underlying laws.

If it's easy for people to go to the gun show in the suburbs in Illinois and buy guns and then flood the streets of Chicago with those guns, then it's hard to stop them. And if it's easy for people to go to Indiana, once you begin closing some of the loopholes in Illinois, if it's just as easy for them to go to the gun shows in Indiana and bring those guns across the border and sell them to the people who are going to misuse them, that becomes an enforcement issue too.

It isn't just as simple as saying the cops aren't doing their job. It also depends upon what kind of framework we set for the distribution of guns from one person, one group, to another, and we have never done a very good job on that front.

DePue: I'm sure this is another one that you consistently have heard; it's a persistent issue in American politics, that the legislation you were proposing was unconstitutional.

Currie: Well, I think that was completely wrong at the point at which people said that. Now, the Supreme Court's most recent decision says that, yes, people ought to be able to have guns in their homes and in their castles and what have you. I think that's a misreading of the Constitution.

But at the time, the prevailing wisdom was that the constitutional language in the amendment had to do with the militia. "In order for there to be

a militia, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.” So, I think all the earlier readings had clearly tied guns, the ability of people to have guns, to own them, to their responsibility to serve in the militia rather than as an individual right on my own property, in my own home. Until the most recent case, I think that was the prevailing view of the constitutionality of gun control measures.

DePue: Were you hearing arguments at the time from some elements that the second amendment wasn’t just about militia, that it was about the public’s right to protect themselves from the government?

Currie: Yeah, except that I think the way framers had drafted it, they defined it as a state militia against the federal government rather than an individual against the larger government itself. So, I think that until the Supreme Court decision, in whatever the name of the case was, I think that my view was, in fact, the prevailing view among constitutional scholars.

DePue: Did your bill come up for a vote on the floor?

Currie: I don’t think so. I think it was stuck in committee.

DePue: It didn’t make it out of committee then?

Currie: Right.

DePue: Were there any opponents that surprised you? Were there some Democrats who opposed it as well?

Currie: Oh, Democrats, definitely. And people from other than the urban parts of the state were definitely against it. I don’t remember the specific votes. I do think that, in later years—and this maybe goes back to the cutback amendment—it always seemed to me that some of my suburban friends, who ought to have been with me, my suburban Republican friends, sometimes were not. I think that was partly because, in a contest, a single member contest, in a Republican primary, they were fearful that they might lose to somebody more conservative on an issue like that. I think that was my analysis because I don’t know that that was so likely to have been an issue when we still had multi-member districts.

DePue: Do you remember if the governor weighed in on the issue at the time?

Currie: I don’t. I do remember that in later years George Ryan, then secretary of state, became a big fan of the ban on assault weapons. But I don’t remember that Thompson took a position on the gun control issue. I just don’t remember.

DePue: The next issue—again this is from the columns that you were writing—was teen pregnancy and sex education?

Currie: Um-hmm.

DePue: I'm going to set this one up this way and read a quote that you had in one of the articles. "Traditional values are in trouble. The family, the church and the school are in heavy competition with *laissez-faire* sexuality. And in that competition, early sexual activity seems to be winning,"

Currie: Doesn't sound like me, but I'll buy it (DePue laughs). Alright, the context is, in part, that I was a member of...in fact, it began when I was a freshman, the Conference of Women Legislators, spearheaded by Genie Chapman, Democrat of Arlington Heights and Giddy Dyer, Republican of Hinsdale.

This was a bi-cameral, bi-partisan group. We stayed away from the most hot-button issues, where we might be divided. For example, basic reproductive rights. Are you for or against Roe v Wade? But we did adopt agendas and issues that we focused on that we thought mattered to women and children.

One of the early things we looked at was teen pregnancy. We had hearings in various parts of the state. We were concerned, and I think legitimately so, that we had very young people having babies. And everybody did know at that time that your chances of success in life were, in terms of economic independence and the ability to make your way in the world, very limited, to the extent that you had engaged in developing babies before you stopped being a baby yourself.

We were very concerned about how to create ways for schools, parents, the community in general to support the idea that getting pregnant is not a good idea when you were a freshman in high school.

DePue: So the focus, from your perspective, was on sex education classes in high school and junior high?

Currie: In part, yes. Yep.

DePue: At that time or maybe today, when would you think is the appropriate time to start that kind of education?

Currie: Early, and in fact, it took until two years ago before we adopted a policy in Illinois of comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education in the schools. Still, with an opt out for parents who decide they don't want their children to participate. But it wasn't until this last term that we finally did adopt that as a general principle. So I'd say early.

I think Barack Obama had been one of the sponsors when he was in the state senate. It's an issue we've been working on for many, many years. At one point in the presidential campaign, people were accusing him of wanting

to teach kindergartners how to masturbate. Well, that really wasn't the idea at all.

DePue: You said age appropriate early...

Currie: Age-appropriate, comprehensive age-appropriate sex education.

DePue: Is that the way the legislation read in this reading?

Currie: Yep, yes.

DePue: Does that mean that the local school districts get to interpret that, get to decide what that means?

Currie: To a degree, but I think there were some standards that would come from the State Department of Public Health. Schools always have the capacity to emphasize, deemphasize, but there were some general standards that came, I believe, from the Department of Public Health. All I'm saying is that it's a long, long battle.

But in 1979 and 1980, the Conference of Women Legislators was hearing from schools and from young people and from public health advocates about the problem of kids having kids and then dropping out of school and finding themselves behind the economic eight ball for the rest of their lives.

DePue: Was that conference... Is that a national conference?

Currie: No, this is our local group, and it's been going strong since 1979. We still have it today. It's been more and less visible, depending on the times. There was a moment... As I say, it was led, initially created by Genie Chapman and Giddy Dyer, and participation has been up and down. I think it's been pretty active.

We have a staff person. We raise money for scholarships for college bound women who are going to college in non-traditional ways, women who are already in the labor force and so forth. We do a great program in conjunction with the Institute of Government and...

DePue: Public Affairs.

Currie: ...Public Affairs at the U of I [University of Illinois]. In June, we take...I think it's fifteen; it could be eighteen, young women, mostly juniors and seniors from colleges and universities in Illinois, put them up in the dormitories at UIC [University of Illinois Chicago] and two or three days of... In fact, it may be almost a week of workshops, discussions, meetings with the important people, particularly women in the state. It's called the New Leadership

Conference, and we get good participation from public and private institutions.

Those two things are a little external to the legislature, but we also have always had an agenda politics, in which we try to work on things that we think are going to matter to women and children across the state. One of the first ones was teen sexuality and teens having children.

And then, I think, strip searches were also a very big deal. There were a lot of strip searches going on in 1980 or 1981 in the Cook County Jail. We had a whole...

And then one of my favorites was when Edgar was governor, and we were doing the budget. He had adopted, his administration adopted, a program called Work Pays in which, for every couple of dollars you earn in the real world, you still keep a bit of your welfare benefit.

It was under attack from the Republicans, and the Edgar people came to the conference and said to us, "Are you still with us? Are you standing tall with us?" And we were. It was good that here was an administration that saw some value in women who were going to stand up for women, because they're primarily the ones on welfare.

DePue: You mentioned in this discussion that the concern was children having children. Then you were surprised by the quote that I read.

Currie: Yeah, because it sounded a little harsher than I thought I would have been. I didn't think I would...

DePue: When I read it, it sounded like something that Phyllis Schafly would...

Currie: (in unison with DePue) Phyllis Schafly would have said. That's why I was quite surprised to hear that it came from me. You sure there weren't quote marks with it? (laughs)

DePue: Well, I think I can find it here someplace.

Currie: No, I'm sure you're right. But it was a problem, and the problem was that women, at that point in their lives, who were choosing, for whatever reason, whether it was because they didn't know they had a choice or for whatever other reason, they found themselves pregnant and keeping children that their life paths were severely curtailed. Their decisions then led to a lack of economic independence and a lack of real opportunities in the outside world.

DePue: So the question, the underlying question then is, how do you prevent the teen pregnancies?

Currie: Well, part of it was a question of sex education because, I think, for many of these young women, they may not have had enough information to know what the risks were of becoming pregnant and what the other options might be if you are pregnant. There are also, I think, in some cultural settings was a sense that “There aren’t very many opportunities for you anyway, honey, and you might just as well enjoy a baby. Maybe that will be good for you.”

So it was partly a question of whether there are ways that the schools and the families could operate to try to make sure that young women had enough sense of themselves and sense of their own opportunities in the world not to take this particular route to feel important and needed.

DePue: You started this quote with traditional values, and that is, today at least, always identified with Republicans and conservatives.

Currie: I know, but I used to wear red. There was a time when red became a Republican women’s color, and it was all during the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] days. And the ERA supporters wore green, and the Republican antis wore red. I never bought into it. It was also during the time when people talked about moral majorities, and somehow the idea was that liberals couldn’t wear the American flag because Democrats and liberals were disrespectful. I always wore American flags. “Can’t take that away from me,” I said.

DePue: Staying with the issue of teen pregnancies, and I’m sure these were the challenges you were getting from the Phyllis Schlaflys of the world—she had legions of supporters in that respect—that they would have blamed, in part, teen pregnancy rise on women’s liberation.

Currie: Well, they would have been dead wrong because that was not what was happening. In fact, I think the incidence of teen pregnancy was greater in an earlier era than it was in the 1970s and ‘80s, when we began work on this front.

It may be that the result of a teen pregnancy was different in 1951 than it was in 1981, in terms that, for example, there were many more shotgun weddings, I suspect, in 1951 than there were in 1981.³⁰ But I have seen some statistics that said that the problem of sexual activity and pregnancy was really a much bigger problem in earlier eras than it was later.

DePue: Now maybe...

Currie: But also, I guess I would have to say this, that to the extent that you want to blame women’s liberation, I would say the problem is women’s liberation hadn’t got to the point where we were able to show young women, girls, that they had other avenues, opportunities that could lead to success and that they

³⁰ A shotgun wedding is a wedding which is arranged in order to avoid embarrassment due to premarital sex which can possibly lead to an unintended pregnancy. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shotgun_wedding)

did not need to turn to motherhood when they were too young to understand it, as a way of showing that they were loved and needed.

DePue: I think I probably mixed up a couple... I went looking for a statistic here, and it's not the same thing at all as teen pregnancy. But the statistic is non-marital births.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: What we used to call illegitimate births.

Currie: Right (laughs).

DePue: Nineteen sixty at 23 percent and 1980 something like 58 percent and on the rise. Was that...

Currie: That surprises me. Well, that may also reflect the fact that there might have been more shotgun weddings in the 1960s.

DePue: Or that these teenagers were getting married as a result of pregnancies.

Currie: Yeah, right. Well, that's what would have happened in an earlier era and in the 1950s. But I'm pretty sure, if you look back in the '40s and '50s, there'd be a lot more of it. But they may have ended more often in marriage than they would later on in the... I mean, there's a whole analysis of poor communities and the economic futility of marriage.

DePue: The other thing I'm sure you heard then and you continue to hear today is that part of the reason for the rise in teen pregnancies, part of the reason for illegitimate births, would have been the existence of the welfare state.

Currie: Again, there's no evidence to support that, not one iota. There was never any evidence to support that that was why people were having babies out of wedlock. There were those who said, "You have a family with two children, and here's the welfare check. And if you have a third child, then the welfare check increases. So let's not let you have more than enough to bring up two."

But the reality always was that if anybody could do the math, they would understand that that third increment wasn't enough to bring up a child. The fourth increment wasn't either and the fifth increment wasn't. The idea that people were having babies to increase the size of the welfare check doesn't really match with the reality that the dollars aren't adequate for the task.

DePue: Maybe I wasn't listening closely enough. How did you understand the increase in teen pregnancy at that time?

Currie: You know, I don't really remember. But yeah, it's hard to put myself back in that... Again, what you quoted was non-marital births, which is a different kettle of fish. So I was probably conflating things I shouldn't have.

DePue: Well, I think I did. (Currie laughs) I was the guilty party.

Currie: But I probably started it. But I do think a sort of breakdown in some social institutions and the fact that opportunities were not perhaps what they ought to be and the people living in close proximity, without role models that give people hope and opportunity, families are not together in ways they used to be.

DePue: To go to the quote again: "the family, the church, the school." Those were the social institutions you're talking about.

Currie: Right. Now I wasn't suggesting, I don't think, that we go back to a time when, if you didn't behave in school, Sister Mary Arthur would rap you over the knuckles with her ruler or that everybody had to conform to a very narrow interpretation of what it is to be female in society.

DePue: You grew up in Catholic schools...

Currie: I did.

DePue: Did you get rapped on the knuckles?

Currie: No, I went to a very progressive Catholic school (DePue laughs), as I think I told you.

DePue: Yes, I know you did. I couldn't resist. I'm sorry (DePue laughs).

Currie: Of course.

DePue: Any other comments that...

Currie: But I knew a lot people who had, because when we dealt with corporal punishment, I remember some of my colleagues saying, "Wait, what's wrong with that, corporal punishment in the schools? They were forever batting me about." (both laugh) "And I turned out alright," they would say. And you'd say, "Hmm." (both laugh)

DePue: You weren't so sure they had turned out alright?

Currie: (Currie laughs) No, of course I was. I just...

DePue: Another issue that was obviously dear to your heart at that time—I'm sure it is still today—is the environment.

Currie: Yes.

- DePue: And this is in the early days of environment being a political issue.
- Currie: Right. Well I told you my own personal experience with all of that, when Ogilvie was governor. So, yes.
- DePue: And some of that also, maybe this is not directly related, but parks and recreation, that there was a concern that we weren't putting aside enough money for that as well.
- Currie: Yes, that was a very big concern. And I was concerned as a resident of the City of Chicago with not only general resources in the parks but, to an extent, a concern that the local resources were not used as fairly as they might be, a sense that south side parks didn't enjoy some of the same amenities that you might find in north side parks. So that was a local, a local concern about parks administration in the City of Chicago, rather than just a resource issue.
- DePue: Were there any hot environmental concerns that first session, do you recall?
- Currie: I don't.
- DePue: Would coal have been part of it?
- Currie: If I didn't write about them, there wouldn't have been. Coal was a continuing issue, and it had been, long before I had got to the legislature. And the effort to find a way to clean coal is one that has been with us forever, always a tension between environmental concerns and jobs. I think those were overrated.
- It always seemed to me—it still does—that there are... In the first place, when you do impose some environmental regulations, they often bring jobs with them. But the economic benefits of failing to adequately regulate result in people dying prematurely of asthma, heart disease and so forth. So the simple equation that says it's either jobs or the environment fails to take into account some of the long-term and really quite expensive risks that are associated with pollution run wild.
- DePue: You made the comment about the trade-off between environment and jobs. I'm thinking that a lot of those coal jobs were in central and southern Illinois.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: I assume some of those areas were represented by Democrats, but they also would be concerned about labor and labor support for coal. Would that be part of the equation?
- Currie: Oh, yes, absolutely. Now remember though, in the upstate areas, no coal but lots of issues about steel, about other manufacturing activities and some of the old coal generators, the electric...the utilities that were reliant upon coal in

ways that themselves contributed to haze and pollution in the northern part of the state.

DePue: Especially since Illinois...

Currie: So we were not... Pardon me?

DePue: Especially since Illinois is producing high sulfur coal.

Currie: Exactly. There was always a, "Well, we'll figure it out with scrubbers, or someone will figure out a way to scrub the coal clean." It's been a fight that's been going on certainly long before I came to Springfield, and I still don't see the end. Although there was an article someplace recently, maybe the *New Yorker*, about some promising new developments, some people...

Oh, I know. It was in the [*Chicago*] *Tribune*. People at the University of Chicago working with some Israeli counterparts on some new approaches to...That's right. It was desalination, not coal. Oh, well.

DePue: Were you essentially an opponent to coal mining?

Currie: I wouldn't say I was an opponent of coal mining, but I certainly was an opponent of strip mining, leaving the places where the mines happened desolate after the mining was over. I was in favor of very stringent regulation when it came to strip mines.

When it came to coal mines, I was anxious that the coal that came out, the high sulfur Illinois coal that came out, not be burned in the state without adequate scrubbers, without adequate pollution control devices. I certainly had been in favor of scientific efforts to try to find ways to make our coal economically and environmentally competitive.

So it's not that I'm opposed to coal, but I'm opposed to the misuse of coal. And I'm opposed to the misuse of the extraction of coal to damage the physical environment.

DePue: If you have a coal fired electrical plant that has good scrubbers on it, are you opposed to that?

Currie: I'm not. Some of my green friends are. But my concerns have been... Of course, in the long run I'm worried about using up resources that are not themselves sustainable. So yes, wind, solar, all of those things are good things. But in the meantime, the idea that you can just ignore all the things that might be usable, might be worthwhile, I'm not quite in that camp.

DePue: Back in the late '70s, early '80s I don't know that the renewable sources would have been part of the discussion.

Currie: No, they would not.

DePue: But nuclear would have been.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Your position on nuclear energy?

Currie: Well, I'm not sure that... I think I was not a fan of nuclear energy in those days. I'm not sure I'm as much an opponent today as I was, in part because nuclear doesn't bring with it the polluting that goes along with coal. On the other hand, the risks of accidents are certainly very real and to the extent that one is putting energies into nuclear when maybe ignoring opportunities in wind, solar, biomass and other renewables.

DePue: You've already addressed this to a limited extent, the repeal of the corporate personal property tax. First of all, maybe we should start with saying, what in the world is that?

Currie: Right, well that was what I talked about with the 1970 Constitution...

DePue: Right.

Currie: ...that said the legislature shall repeal and replace. Well, the legislature didn't get around to it, and the Illinois Supreme Court said, I believe in 1979, "It's gone. If you want to do anything to replace it, now is your chance because as of whatever date, it won't be there." The effort was to try to figure out a way to replace the revenues without reliance on the corporate personal property tax.

It was that effort with members of the House Democratic caucus that Michael Madigan led. He was not the speaker at the time. He was an assistant leader, I guess, for Bill Redmond. But he was the one who led that discussion, led those negotiations.

DePue: Part of the confusion, I guess for me, I understood what personal property tax is; that's like...

Currie: Okay, so corporate personal property amounted to all the real estate. If you're a nuclear power plant, and you've got the real estate, then that becomes personal property. The realty is still the realty, but the stuff on top of it then was, in the eyes of assessors, considered to be personal property. So some of the stuff that went onto your property was corporate personal property. For example, if you think about it from the individual perspective, I have a boat. That's personal property. It doesn't sit on the land like my house does, but it's my personal property, and I'm paying a tax on it.

That was abolished in the 1970 Constitution. Indiana still has a personal property tax. So for all the talk about competitiveness with our neighbors... Anyway, so the corporate personal property tax was add-ons to your realty that were significant, substantial and that were assessed as personal property. It was that which the Supreme Court struck down and which the 1970 Constitution envisioned as something that might well be abolished. But the question is, how are you going to replace the revenues? The revenues were important to local communities because if it's a realty, if it's the...

DePue: The communities get some of that tax dollar?

Currie: Yeah, in fact, most of it. I'm not sure most of it is right, because the state got its share as well. But it funded schools, funded all kinds of things. At the end of the day, we replaced the corporate personal property tax with an additional tax on income. So income became the substitute for personal, not an income tax. We have a corporate income tax in Illinois, and then we have a corporate personal property tax replacement, which is measured as a percentage of income.

DePue: I know the corporate income tax didn't go up at that time.

Currie: No.

DePue: That didn't go up until '83.

Currie: No, no, but what happened was that we replaced the corporate personal property tax with a tax measured against income.

DePue: Corporate income.

Currie: Yeah, for corporations. Here we had a corporate personal property tax. Actually, the corporations hated it. There was not a lot of uniformity. One assessor would do it this way. Another assessor might do it a different way. This got taxed, but that didn't. So there was a lot of confusion. And the business community was in favor of abolishing the corporate personal property tax, and they were, at the end of the day, in favor of replacing that tax with a tax measured against income.

DePue: Corporate income.

Currie: Corporate income. Because that's all we're talking about here. We're only talking about the corporate tax. And then the fight, the fight...

DePue: That wasn't the same thing as an increase in the corporate income tax?

Currie: No, because it was defined as a replacement for the corporate personal property tax.

DePue: Well it still sounds like a corporate income tax by another name.

Currie: Yeah, but on the other hand, it started life as a corporate personal property tax. Now, if you want to find another way to replace it, go right ahead, be my guest. And for all the flak about the corporate rate in Illinois is so high; that's really not accurate. In other states, like Indiana, there still is a personal property tax.

Anyway, the business community was very much behind the effort. The issue was "What's the rate? So how much are you going to replace? What's it going to amount to?" This was an example of the legislature coming to agreement on the rate. I don't know, one point eight three, whatever. I don't remember what it was. Then Thompson used his amendatory veto pen to lower the rate.

DePue: To 1 percent, or do you remember?

Currie: Whatever the number was. He reduced it by some fraction.

DePue: Does Illinois still have this tax in place?

Currie: Yeah, yeah, but it is not technically an income tax. Although it's measured against income, it is a replacement for the corporate personal property tax. And then there was a lawsuit filed about whether the governor had, in an overly broad way, misused his veto, his amendatory veto power.

DePue: What's your opinion about that?

Currie: I think he had. But I think that the court didn't agree with me. The court opinions have been on all sides on the question of what is the appropriate use of the amendatory veto power? My impression is that this was probably a put-up case. I mean, that is to say that the arguments were ready to go at the point at which the governor made the change. I don't know if that is right. But the court upheld the amendatory veto in that case.

DePue: I've heard it explained by those who were involved in the drafting of the 1970 Constitution or the research for it, that the assumption was that this is to change grammar or to put in a comma where there was a comma left out or something like that.

Currie: Right, right, but there were others who didn't see it that way. I think Dawn Netsch's quotes from the constitutional convention itself had a slightly more expansive view.

The first case involved—Was it Ogilvie?—had to do with private school funding. I think between the time the legislature adopted some language, the United States Supreme Court had come down and said...The legislature said, "A, B and C," and then the Supreme Court came back and

said, "You can't do A, B or C." So the governor changed the language to say, "not A, B and C." (laughs) The court said, that was... "Turning it on its head is not acceptable."

DePue: It's a bit of an abuse.

Currie: Pretty much after that, the courts have let the governor do what he wants to do. Of course, one of the arguments would be, "Look, if the legislature thinks that the governor has exceeded his authority, all they had to do was override it." Which is, of course, technically true. But the politics make that not always an acceptable, easy solution. And of course, if you can pass something with sixty votes, but it takes seventy-one to override, already you've changed the calculus.

DePue: It's an interesting discussion we've been having on the corporate personal property tax. I go back to the food and medicine tax, lowering that sales tax.

Currie: Right.

DePue: You were obviously concerned about replacing the corporate personal property tax.

Currie: Yes, I was.

DePue: It doesn't sound like you're nearly as concerned about replacing that tax?

Currie: I think the dollar amounts were quite different (Currie laughs), much more substantial if you're talking about the corporate personal property tax. And for many schools and local governments this was pretty much the lifeline.

Now, let me just tell you that, here we are all these years later. What happened at the point at which we did the replacement, was that the allocation of the dollars, because no longer is it that smokestack over there or that printing press over here. Now you're talking about income. What happened was there was an allocation that was based on what units of government got at the point at which the corporate personal property tax was abolished. There's not today, I think, a very good fit between need or what might have happened had we retained the corporate personal property tax and the way the proceeds are allocated today.

DePue: Maybe I'm making more of this than I should because I do recall that in those early years of the Thompson administration, at least they were making the argument that they were balancing budgets.

Currie: Right.

DePue: So, the money was there.

Currie: Right.

DePue: In the same category, welfare, you were advocating an increase in payments of 7 percent, but you actually wanted more. That's what one of your articles stated.

Currie: Yeah. Well, because the reality is that to manage on the amounts that the public was supporting was pretty much impossible. We're having the same argument today about the minimum wage.

DePue: I think, if I recall correctly, the figure that you stated was \$333 for a family of four per month.

Currie: I don't remember, but that's...yeah.

DePue: How successful was the legislature to get that increased? Do you recall?

Currie: I don't remember that we did it in my early years, but there were times later on where we, I think, did increase benefits.

DePue: And again, one of the pressure points in the economy at the time was a high inflation rate, 11 percent.

Currie: Right.

DePue: So that 7 percent's not even going to keep up with the inflation rate.

Currie: Right. But you have to start somewhere, and again it's partly an opportunity to educate, to make people understand the realities are of everyday life for people who come from a different place on the economic spectrum from where I come from.

DePue: Any other issues you recall being especially important to you that first session?

Currie: The death penalty was one that I cared a lot about.

DePue: And, of course, that was shortly after the death penalty had been re-imposed.

Currie: Had been reinstated, right.

DePue: Yeah.

Currie: And I was not in the legislature when that happened. That preceded me by about two years.

DePue: Was there legislation that got out of committee on the death penalty?

Currie: I don't remember. But the death penalty had been reinstated in Illinois by the time I was elected in '79. I think it was in '77 or '78. Then there was... I think there was a state senator who was pushing lethal injection. So there was some talk about alternative ways to execute. But I'm fuzzy about what...

DePue: What was being done at the time, electrocution?

Currie: I think so. But maybe that was not true by this time; I don't know. It was maybe dealing with... But it's always a hard one for people like me, is lethal injection. Do you sanitize this so that people find it more acceptable, or do you accept that what you're doing is totally brutal and totally inhumane? Just the idea of sanitizing the process by which we put people to death has always been an interesting conundrum for people who want to abolish the death penalty.

In a sense, the worse it is, the more people are likely to reject it. It's so uncivil, so inhumane. On the other hand, the idea that you are treating an individual with the maximum amount of horror is not very acceptable either.

DePue: Was abortion an issue at all during your first session?

Currie: Oh, yes, definitely.

DePue: There was legislation that was being proposed?

Currie: I'm sure there was, and I'm sure that there was legislation that succeeded. I believe any number of times, Thompson vetoed bills that made illegal... You know, threw everything at abortion, almost including the kitchen sink.

DePue: You mean an omnibus bill?

Currie: Yeah, I think so. My recollection...

DePue: That they would slip abortion into some...

Currie: No, they would just completely overturn Roe, completely go back to the dark ages, which actually made it easy to vote against and made it easy for the governor to veto. But my recollection is that, session after session, there were efforts to overturn and that many of them not only got out of committee, but got out of the House and got out of the Senate and found their way to the governor's desk.

DePue: After that first session, what was your general impression of the legislative process that you experienced? You're smiling.

Currie: Oh, that's a very tough question. It's hard to remember. I enjoyed it very much. I enjoyed the challenges, and I certainly enjoyed the opportunity to help shape legislation. I was involved in all those discussions about the

replacement of the corporate personal property tax, and I enjoyed that opportunity. And I enjoyed very much the opportunity to press for the bills on the issues that I cared about, whether I was able to succeed with them or just to use them as an opportunity to refine and enlarge the public opinion.

I did think that the special interests had a fair bit of sway in the assembly. And I wasn't so happy about that. I was concerned about the lack of a major focus on the public interest, where there were organizations that would speak to a general interest. There was a welfare...What was the name of it? Julie Hamos worked there for a time. Chet June was involved as well. I don't remember the name of it, but it was around for a couple of years when I was new. Really, its mission was to try to represent poor people, people who didn't have a voice. Organizations like Common Cause, like ACLU, League of Women Voters, they were out there but unclear that they had the same kind of influence as did the bankers' association or the medical society.

Now, frequently in the world of politics and government, competing interests that are themselves narrow, battle it out, and the general public good doesn't get damaged too badly. But you can't count on that. So that was of concern to me.

And I remember...This is wonderful. One of my colleagues who had been there longer than I, said that at one point, there was a debate going on, and he couldn't see who was speaking. He got recognized, and he asked, "Whose bill is this?" And the sponsor said, "It's the township officials' bill." It's that this isn't a legislator's bill. This is a groups' bill. This is the bankers' bill. This is the doctors' bill. That was surprising to somebody who had not been engaged in the corridors of the legislature.

DePue: But hearing that was a sign of a healthy legislative process in your mind?

Currie: No, I'm saying...That's a way of saying that the special interests are fairly important in this process. There's nothing wrong with saying, "Well, this is the bill from the..." In fact, John Cullerton and I, at one point... He came in when I did.

Not early but at some point, we had this little kind of fun thing, where we tried to use a word. We decided to use the word "*rapprochement*" [reconciliation]. It was in the context of, "So are you saying, representative, that this has been a *rapprochement* between the independent bankers and the community bankers?" You know, that was the stuff of legislative action.



Senator John Cullerton and Representative Currie appeared on a cable news show together in the mid-1990s.

DePue: Did you have any doubts after that first year and a half that you wanted to run again?

Currie: No, none. I was enjoying it. When I ran, I really enjoyed that because it was an opportunity to talk to people about important issues in government. Again, (laughs) my League of Women Voters background had been a little debating society. It was great. And then when I won, I thought, Oops, what if I don't like it? Well, I did, very much. But it was a very different experience.

DePue: Were your columns being well read?

Currie: You never know, but I think so.

DePue: Getting feedback on those?

Currie: Yeah, I did from time to time, not a lot but enough that I had the sense people at least knew they were there (DePue laughs).

DePue: Enough to write another one, huh?

Currie: One time I remember somebody saying to me, "Too much levity. Tone it down." I don't remember what column it was, but it was something about... Maybe it was baseball; maybe the House/Senate softball game. I was being snarky, and so one of my constituents said, "I don't think you want to do that. You want to be careful. Just be a little careful."

DePue: Well, I'm going to introduce a point of levity, I think.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: And read a quote that I got from an article by Diane Strand. Does that name ring a bell? A journalist, I believe.

Currie: Yeah, it should.

DePue: I don't know what paper it was from, one of the Chicago papers I suspect. Here's her description of you: "The petite, young woman with glossy, honey brown hair, provocative smile, and aggravatingly assertive demeanor packs a real wallop."

Currie: Oh, woaaa? Woo, woo. That is pretty good! (both laugh) I don't remember that. I should have clipped it.

DePue: You're okay with that?

Currie: Oh yeah, absolutely. I'm not sure about the petite. But you know, the rest of it absolutely on target.

DePue: And then here's a quote from you. At an American Association of University Women meeting, you were quoted as saying, "A woman's place seems to me to be in the House, the Illinois House and the Senate, as well." (Currie laughs)

Currie: Why not? (both laugh)

DePue: That pretty much sums up your view?

Currie: Pretty much sums it up, absolutely.

DePue: At this time in your life and your family's life, now that you've had the taste of the legislative process, what were your long-term political ambitions?

Currie: I enjoyed what I was doing, and I enjoyed it in part because it was an opportunity to make a real difference in public policy. So, what I got to do in the House was terrific from that perspective. It also... I liked the idea of being able to move from one policy issue to another. That is to say, I liked being able to look at a revenue issue one day and education policy another day. So not being a specialist was perfectly okay with me. I enjoyed being a generalist, and that's one of the things you get to do if you're part of a policy-making body.

Opportunity to think about other offices? To a degree. There was a brief time when I flirted with the idea of running for a state-wide office. The disadvantage of so doing was, first of all, chances of winning might have been really, really low. Secondly, I'd have to give up what I was doing. To give up something that I very much enjoyed and felt that I could have a real impact in favor of doing something that was iffy at best became less than totally thrilling. Third, any of the state-wide offices, as far as I could tell, would be valuable to the extent that they might steppingstones.

To be governor, for example, would certainly have been much on my radar screen. Talk about being able to be a generalist and to make a real difference in people's lives! But the chances of success on that front are indeed very, very small. And I was not naïve enough to think that I had a significant base or a significant ability to raise money or any of the other things that made me seem a natural for the steppingstone office and indeed at the end of the day for the one that really counted.

Although I flirted with it, and we did talk about it in my campaign inner circle, I never quite had the fire in the belly. I was never quite prepared to run. I felt that when it came to Congress or what have you, that felt kind of land-locked, in terms of the geography. Didn't seem to make a lot of sense.

DePue: The political geography in the City of Chicago?

Currie: Yeah. Well, given the population, the demographics and so forth, it just didn't seem to make a lot of sense.

DePue: That's probably a pretty way for us to finish today, with the promise that next time we get to start with ERA.

Currie: ERA, alright! All the way with the ERA! Gotcha.

DePue: And I think you'll have a few things to say about that.

Currie: I think so. I don't know if I can find my files (Currie laughs).

DePue: Thank you.

Currie: Always fun. Thank you so much.

(end of transcript #2)

Interview with Barbara Flynn Currie

#ISL-A-L-2014-049.03

Interview #3: February 24, 2015

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, February 24, 2015. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today's my third session with Representative Barbara Flynn Currie. Good afternoon.

Currie: Three, wow! Yes, okay. Nice to see you again.

DePue: It has been a while, but you're a busy woman nowadays.

Currie: Right.

DePue: And it's only going to get busier for you in the next couple months, isn't it?

Currie: That's a fair statement.

DePue: Any reflections on having a new governor [Bruce Rauner] now and how things are going to sort out?

Currie: Well, I was very unhappy with his budget address. I thought that the proposals he's making for slashing important parts of the social safety net were not the only way to go. And I do think that the problems we face, they are legitimate; they are real. There's no question we are in a fiscal quandary. But I believe you can't solve them with cuts alone.

I think we may need some new revenue. Even during the campaign, this governor was heard to say that you probably can't get rid of the income tax surcharge, the temporary...so-called temporary income tax in a single sitting. But now he seems to think that's quite doable.

At the same time that he accused all those who have preceded him of fiscal chicanery, it seems as if he's going to count \$2 billion in projected, but unclear savings, from his pension plan as money that's available in the next fiscal year. That's, of course, exactly the kind of thinking that helped get us into the problems we face today. So I was disappointed.

DePue: A more ambitious program of pension cuts than is currently working its way through the Illinois Supreme Court.

Currie: Through the courts, exactly, exactly. So whether he would even have the votes to make further pension cuts, whether his fiscal projections bear any relation to reality... But I think the most important thing is that we've said to governors, "You're not supposed to count revenue you don't have when you are proposing budgets for the coming fiscal year." And he doesn't... Under anybody's estimation, he does not have that \$2 billion.

DePue: Do you think any part of that signals the beginning of negotiations?

Currie: I hope so, but he certainly didn't sound that way. He certainly sounded as if he's dug himself into some cement somewhere, and I just don't know that that's going to get us very far.

I remember one year when Jim Thompson—I think it was Jim Thompson—was making a budget speech. He made his proposals. He said, "This is what we should do." I don't remember all the specifics by any stretch of the imagination, but at the end of the speech he said, "Okay, I just told you my priorities, and I know that you're going to tell me yours. And I know some places we'll agree and some places we'll disagree. And we'll figure out how

to make the priorities work together. But the most important thing is that, at the end of the day, this is how much money I think we have to spend. And I hope you will agree with me that this is what we have to spend. I hope you will agree with me that we aren't going to spend dollars that we do not have."

To me that was exactly the right approach. "Here are my priorities. Your priorities may differ in at least some respects. We will discuss and figure out how to meet them. But let us be grownups and not try to solve the differences between my views and your views by spending dollars that are not there."

DePue: What's appropriate to you, you mentioned Governor Jim Thompson...

Currie: Wasn't that a good one?

DePue: ...because that's why I sat down with you to begin with.

Currie: That's right.

DePue: This is much bigger than just Jim Thompson. This is your entire legislative career, and that's why we're into the third session and today the topic is going to be exclusively equal rights...

Currie: Okay.

DePue: ...and the Equal Rights Amendment. Let me set it up just briefly here. Then I think we'll have plenty to say. I'm sure you'll have plenty to say on that. Originally passed, it'd been bouncing around in American politics for a long, long time, but finally passed in the U. S. Congress in 1972. October 1971, 354 yeas, twenty-four nays, so an overwhelming majority.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Fifty-one decided they didn't want to vote or probably weren't present or whatever the case is. In the Senate, in March 22, 1972, eighty-four yeas, eight nays and seven didn't vote. So that's a 90 percent margin.

Currie: And it was, as I recall, a very bi-partisan margin in both chambers.

DePue: And the bill went out with seven years to pass. Now, obviously, you came to the Illinois House long after that. About the same time you were being elected for the first time around, Congress had decided to extend that deadline, which was to expire in 1979, and moved it out to the end of June of 1982. So that gets us into your timeframe now.

Currie: Right.

DePue: And we did mention this a little bit before, but how big an issue was that on the initial campaign that you ran?

Currie: I don't think that it was a huge issue in that campaign. Clearly, I was for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. It's not clear to me that most of those who were standing against me had said they were opposed to it. So I don't remember that it was a major highlight in the campaign debate. And again, I don't remember that there were people running... There were ten of us in that primary, and I don't remember that any of them were against ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment at that point. It became a bigger issue for me in a later campaign.

DePue: Let's start out with an issue I know that you took on personally, as well. This was a two-tiered battle every year battle in Illinois. And it was a battle every year, as I understand. In the House and in the Senate, it was always taken up. Before we get into the specifics, did you think that ERA tended to take too much time and energy away from other issues in the legislature?

Currie: I did not. I thought the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment was a very important addition to the United States Constitution. I thought that before I ran for the office, and I thought the same, once I'd been elected to serve in the Illinois House of Representatives.

While we had good protections in the Illinois Constitution, some gender equity provisions, not every state did. And it seemed to me very important to establish as a general, basic, guiding principle of our constitution that equal rights is the law of the land.

I think constitutions are for the statement of general principles. They're not for minutia. They're not for the things that can change legislatively, ideas that are different from one ten-year period to the next. But to establish as a basic right, the right of equality without respect to gender, seemed to me exactly what constitutions are for.

DePue: And worth spending a lot of time year, after year, after year.

Currie: Well, I'd have preferred it if they done the right thing in 1973 (DePue laughs) and taken it off our plate long before I got there. But as they hadn't, I thought it was something we needed to spend time on.

DePue: You mentioned the constitution. In the Illinois State Constitution there was a measure that said that you had to have a 60 percent majority to pass a, I think, a state amendment to the state constitution.

Currie: And also, I believe, it referenced the federal. Did it not?

DePue: Maybe it just didn't mention one or the other. But it was interpreted that it applied to both, long before you came into the issue.

Currie: Right, that is right.

DePue: But as I understand, this was an issue that you personally took on.

Currie: I did.

DePue: Explain your rationale for that.

Currie: Well, partly I believe there had been a federal court decision in, I believe, Indiana. I don't know that it involved Equal Rights Amendment, but the question was whether or not the state could trump the federal Constitution when it comes to procedures that deal with federal constitutional changes and so forth.

I think the court in that case said that never mind what the state itself might say as a matter of the constitution, that only works if it's consistent with the federal Constitution. So for example, when it comes to qualifications for federal office, that's set by the Constitution. If we want, at the state level, to say we're going to do term limits, we can't apply that to people who are running federal office because the feds get to set their own rules.

The issue here is, had the feds basically set a rule different from the one that was in enshrined in the Illinois Constitution? And if so, or at least if arguably the people who make that determination of what the feds meant are sitting legislators rather than the constitution itself, then that's where the decision should be made.

So my recollection is that taking a leaf from the federal court ruling in a case that arose in Indiana—not, I think, about the Equal Rights Amendment but something else—it was my view that the constitution, the state constitution, should not have discussed or decided what's the appropriate level of participation from Illinois law makers in ratifying changes to the United States Constitution.

DePue: What I'd like to do here—and we'll do this two or three times today—is read from an editorial that you wrote. I think your editorials appeared in lots of newspapers. This one looks like it appeared in the [*Daily Herald*, [suburban Chicago] this one is...

Currie: Um-hum. That's where I did most of my writing.

DePue: ...March 4, 1981. I'm going to read portions of this and then hand it over to you. This is how it starts: "I have asked the House Rules Committee to recommend to the Illinois House abolition of the legislative rules requiring a three-fifths majority for ratification of federal constitution amendments." And then jumping down, "The U.S. Constitution, the founding fathers, also gave us a process for constitutional amendments that both recognizes the possibility of emerging agreement on additional principles and yet constrains hasty and

reckless alternation of our basic statements of democratic governance. Amendments originating in the Congress must be adopted by two thirds vote in each house. They then must be ratified by three-quarters of the state legislature.”

That’s a fairly high bar to initiate the process of adopting an amendment to the U. S. Constitution. Before we read further into this, my question for you is, it sounds like you’re okay with that, that you accepted the logic of having that high bar.

Currie: Yes, I think that is appropriate. I think you don’t want to mess around with fundamental guiding principles because somebody is concerned about what happened a week ago yesterday and says, “Now we must change the fundamental doctrine.”

What happened yesterday or a week ago yesterday, those are the stuffs that often lead to legislative changes, but they should not, generally speaking, be the basis for constitutional change. Those are generally issues that may create a lot of passion, a lot of heat, a lot of fervor, a lot of angst, but they may not lead to appropriate changes in the underlying document that sets the framework for governance and sets the principles that should guide that governance.

DePue: That’s one of the reasons I started with the votes in both the U.S. House and the Senate, because it was an overwhelming majority in both cases.

Currie: Right.

DePue: My next question is, why doesn’t that principle apply at the state level?

Currie: Well, the fact that three-quarters of the states have to ratify a federal constitutional amendment is a pretty high barrier itself. And if anybody were to suggest that a smaller number than a constitutional majority in each of those legislatures would be adequate, I think I might have a question about whether that’s the right standard. But to say, “Three-quarters of the state legislatures,” does not to me say, “And in each of those legislatures there ought to be an extraordinary majority vote requirement.”

DePue: What I’d like to have you do now is to continue reading, if you don’t mind, the parts that I have highlighted here and here and then finish up with that.

Currie: Am I reading out loud or just for my own pleasure?

DePue: You are reading out loud, yeah.

Currie: Okay, alright. “In 1970, Illinois imposed upon itself an additional and extraordinary requirement in the constitutional amendment process. The three-fifths rule first appeared in our new Illinois Constitution, that both the federal

district court and the Illinois Attorney General have held that the federal Constitution gives the state legislatures, not the state constitutions, the authority and the responsibility for setting federal ratification requirements.

“The three-fifths rule is destructive and unreasonable. First, it denies a majority of Illinois voters a voice equally effective in the amendment process with majority voters in most other states. Second, the rule is more than a bar to amendment by whim. It is a roadblock to any constitutional change at all.” I like those words and I **stand** by them.

DePue: Any elaboration beyond that?

Currie: I think that the first point is important, that in most other states there were not these extraordinarily high vote requirements to ratify federal constitutional amendments, which means to me that the consensus across the country is that if you have three-quarters of the states, but in most of them it is not a major hurdle to ratify, then perhaps that is good enough. I think the reality that the majority of our voters should be allowed to speak on this issue, that their votes should be the ones that count, compared to the vote majorities in most of our sister states is a pretty compelling one.

DePue: I think you mentioned that there were five states that...

Currie: Had some kind of different, yes.

DePue: ...had something similar the Illinois, yeah. You're brand new to the Illinois legislature in 1979 but a woman from a very liberal district. How soon was it that people started to approach you and had expectations that you would take an active role in pushing for them?

Currie: Very soon. One of the things that was quite interesting to me about the beginning of my tenure in the Illinois House was the expectation that, as a woman, I would speak for women, that I would be about women's issues primarily. That was not the way I campaigned. They were not the issues that particularly motivated me to run in the first place.

But once in the House, I became a lightning rod for people on the inside and on the outside of the assembly. Many of my male colleagues assumed that my primary interest would be in women's issues. And many of them would say things to me like, “Well, Barb, you know, I can't be for the Equal Rights Amendment, but I voted for that domestic violence legislation the other day.” So it was kind of willingness to see me as the arbiter of all things women, gender equity and gender fair play. And so it was kind of “Well okay, I may have let you down here. But let me tell you what good things I did for you over there.”

DePue: Did you resist those kinds of efforts or kind of go with the flow and embrace it?

Currie: Hey, if people expected this of me, and if I was capable of performing, and if others were not so happy to step up to the plate, I was more than glad to fit the bill.

DePue: I wonder if you can identify... I want to separate the early years from 1982 because I want to spend some more time on 1982. So, in those early years, who were the people who were strong proponents and opponents in the House?

Currie: Of the Equal Rights Amendment?

DePue: Of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Currie: Okay, we had people like Eugenia Chapman and Giddy Dyer. Eugenia was the Democrat from Arlington Heights. Giddy was a Republican from Hinsdale, I believe. People like Susan Catania, a Republican from the South Side of Chicago. My male buddies, like Harold Katz, Alan Greiman, Woody Bowman, Aaron Jaffee. These were all strong...Dan Pierce. These were all strong supporters of ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Many of them had worked on the issue over the years, long before I was even here. So they were happy, I think, to have another pair of hands to pick up the cudgels and go back to work. But they also were very helpful in establishing, developing arguments and working with me.

DePue: You mentioned a couple of the women that were involved in fighting for this were Republicans, but was this primarily an issue that divided along party lines?

Currie: When I first came to Springfield—I think it was the first year that I was here—I'd spent time in graduate school and political science, and I did some survey research and other kinds of statistical analysis. One of the things I did was to look back at the votes on the Equal Rights Amendment. I'm not sure if I confined myself to the House or if I looked also at the Senate.

Starting in 1973, when the Equal Rights Amendment came to the states—I think the first votes in Illinois were in 1973—I tracked the partisanship with the vote. And in the early years you couldn't tell who was a Republican and who was a Democrat by virtue of their support for or against the Equal Rights Amendment. By the time we get to 1979-1980, especially '80 and '81, there's a much bigger differential. Republicans, by and large, are leaving behind support for ratification, and Democrats are coming, if late, to the party. So there was a real partisan shift in support and opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment.

Initially it was a very bi-partisan program and maybe you could tell who was likely to be for it or against it, not based on party but maybe geography, of race and ethnicity, but not party. But later, over the eight, ten

years, there was a stronger correlation between partisanship and support or opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. So the Republicans began turning their backs on the Equal Rights Amendment, and Democrats were coming into the fold.

DePue: Early on, perhaps especially early on, it's my understanding that there were some within the black caucus, at least, who were more socially conservative, who were voting against it. Is that...?

Currie: I'm not sure about that. I don't remember. I'm not even sure I kept my papers from that time. There was an issue in 1981, when a fair proportion of the black caucus that were expected to vote to support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment did not. They were, I believe, unhappy about something else, and the ERA became their, as it were, whipping boy.

I think that was a surprise, and I think that it was not expected. I don't mean to dispute your proposition that there may have been members in the black caucus who have consistently voted against ratification. My recollection is that most of them had supported it when they had the opportunity. In fact, among the Democrats from the city—and most of the African Americans caucus was from the city—the opposition was more likely to come from some of the more white ethnic parts of the delegation than from the African American.

DePue: Which I would understand would generally be Democrats, would they not?

Currie: I'm saying among Democrats, yes. That's why I say, initially you couldn't... This was not a way to read your scoreboard. You couldn't tell who the players were, whether they were Democrats or Republicans, just from looking at their vote on the Equal Rights Amendment because a lot of Democrats were for it. A lot were against it. Same was true of the Republicans. It was not a defining difference.

Over time, it became more of a defining... I don't mean to say that there was 100 percent support for ratification among Democrats. There never was. Nor was there 100 percent opposition among Republicans. But there was a distinct, a measurable tendency for Republicans to move away from ratification and for Democrats to move toward it.

DePue: Again, for this entire battle, you're basically talking about cumulative voting still being in effect?

Currie: Yes, yes.

DePue: So you had that aspect of the nature of the Illinois Legislature.

Currie: Right.

DePue: How about some specific names in opposition? Any come to mind?

Currie: In opposition to ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment? Many downstaters were opposed to ratification. If I can remember who some of them were, hard to do. I think a lot of the downstate contingent, whether Republican or Democratic... Again, geography was more important at some level than partisanship. Although that shifted as Republicans became more uncomfortable with ratification. So a large number of the downstaters were opposed to ratification, not all of them but many of them. I don't remember names...

DePue: You said Republicans or downstaters became more uncomfortable, why?

Currie: I don't know. I can only think that the rise of the Phyllis Schlafly approach, the rise of the Phyllis Schlaflys of the world, somehow hit a button, hit a nerve that meant that people who were of a Republican persuasion felt less and less comfortable with ratification. I don't know why.

I do think that there were some issues with the media. I think the media was, in that period, very anxious to do what they would like to think of as fair and balanced. But if you don't have legitimate opposition, you sometimes elevate what is, in fact, a very minor voice. And because you have gone to that minor voice to express a different perspective, you give it a good deal more credibility, a good deal more legitimacy and currency than it otherwise might have.

DePue: You're describing Phyllis Schlafly as a minor voice?

Currie: I do believe that she did not have a significant share of the support of the electorate at the point at which she became the voice in opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, at least in Illinois. I think her organization was a pretty small organization, Concerned Women of America, whatever it was called. But I do think that she developed quite a lot of credibility through...

Anytime there's a debate, anytime that we're going to talk about the Equal Rights Amendment, you've got to get someone who's for it and someone who's against it. She became the Illinois's voice for opposition, and she was effective as an advocate through many red herrings and many, many dubious arguments on the issue of a constitution that included gender equity. If it looks as if it's creditable, looks as if it's legitimate, then people take it more seriously and think that there's a reality there. That's my own personal view. Maybe others would dispute it.

DePue: I'm going to give you a chance to challenge, point by point, some of the issues that Mrs. Schlafly was bringing forward. But before we get there, I don't want to leave the issue of who opponents and who supporters were. I have a quote,

and this a very brief quote, your quote, on one of the opponents. This is a comment about Thomas Hanahan.³¹ You cringed just now.

Currie: Yes, yes. Well, he was the one who talked about brainless, braless broads. He was a Democrat, I believe—was he not?—from maybe the suburbs someplace? I think he was a member involved with the trade union movement. He was quite dismissive of women as legitimate actors in the political and other worlds. I think he was the one who talked about brainless, braless broads.

DePue: Well, your phrase... You called him a “male chauvinist of the worst kind.”

Currie: I think I might have said that. I was so intemperate in my youth. I can't believe I would say things like that today (both laugh). But that was a totally unacceptable line from him. I was responding to language that I thought was particularly sexist and particularly inappropriate in a legislative context.

DePue: You've already mentioned Phyllis Schlafly. Her argument with the amendment... I'm going to be quoting from an article that she wrote in 1986—when she was relishing in victory from her perspective—explaining why the ERA failed. This first comment is not directly from this article, but I know that this is something that she felt strongly about, that the Constitution, the U. S. Constitution, didn't have any language specific to sex. It was “We, the people.” It was gender neutral in that respect. The second one here, “The fact is that women already enjoy every constitutional right that men enjoy and have enjoyed equal employment opportunities since 1968.”

Currie: I think that's not accurate. I mean, yes, she's right that gender is not specifically mentioned in the Constitution. After 1808, when we abolished the importation of new slaves, there was no direct reference to blacks either. But everybody knew that they were held in slavery, and until passage of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth Amendments, they were definitely second class citizens, not only those who were held in slavery but those who were not.

If you look at the actual behaviors in the United States, nothing illegal about discriminating against women in employment, in education, in many other areas of life. And you could discriminate just because you didn't want to hire a woman or didn't want to accommodate a woman. So there was nothing in the Constitution that prohibited that kind of discrimination, based upon gender, and it happened all the time.

³¹ Thomas J. Hanahan was a leader in the carpenters union and voice for labor during 18 years in the state legislature, where he gained notoriety for branding his opponents in the debate over the Equal Rights Amendment as "braless, brainless broads." (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2009-04-09-0904080796-story.html>)

DePue: How about the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment?

Currie: Well, then the question would be whether that was adequate to make sure that women would be treated fairly. I don't think the courts actually construed that amendment to mean that any discrimination against women rose to a sufficiently high level that required strict scrutiny, as it did for claims of discrimination raised by African Americans. A question: maybe eventually it would have.

In Illinois, in 1970, we decided we wanted language that specifically dealt with gender equity, and that seemed to me a good thing. Nobody showed me any unfortunate social consequences because we did it. So why would we not be prepared in the face of endemic discrimination in employment, housing, and education? Why would we be afraid to say, "Let us treat gender issues with the same respect that we have treated other kinds of discrepancies?"

I don't think there was any harm, any risk, and it didn't have to jump through the extra barriers of showing that the discrimination was such that it required the kind of scrutiny that meant that the Due Process Clause, the Equal Protection Clauses, would come into play.^{32, 33}

DePue: I think Mrs. Schlafly would say, "But it still would be unnecessary, based on what's already existing in the Constitution."

Currie: Except I think she was wrong. If you look at the case law, and you look at what was happening in our country, there certainly wasn't a general view that the Equal Protection Clause was adequate and the Due Process Clause was adequate. In fact, many would say the Due Process Clause is not supposed to be used for things like discrimination of this kind.

DePue: What would you say about it?

Currie: I would say that that's a way to go, but I don't think it was the only way to go. I think enshrining the principle, that there ought to be equality between the genders, is a legitimate point to put into a constitution.

DePue: The next point here is almost turning the argument on its head. She writes, "ERA would take away legal rights that women possessed. It would not confer any new rights on women."

³² In United States constitutional law, a Due Process Clause is found in both the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, which prohibits arbitrary deprivation of life, liberty, or property by the government except as authorized by law. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Due_Process_Clause)

³³ The Equal Protection Clause is part of the first section of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The clause, which took effect in 1868, provides "nor shall any State ... deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws". (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equal_Protection_Clause)

- Currie: It is a little bit turning it on its head; is it not? So which rights was she concerned we were going to lose?
- DePue: She was talking about the practices in divorce courts, the divorce rulings that generally favor women, that custody...
- Currie: Well, they did not favor women. In fact...
- DePue: That custody would generally favor women.
- Currie: Custody may have favored women, but that's because many women were still at home. She was the person who was responsible for the primary care of the child. But they certainly didn't support women when it came to financial settlements at the end of a divorce. The courts at that time were very biased in favor of making sure that the husband, usually the primary bread winner, got to keep proportionally more of the family income than did the spouse, who was at home taking care of the children. So I think she's just dead wrong on the facts.
- DePue: The next point then: "ERA would take away important rights and powers of the states and confer these on other branches of government that are farther removed from the people."
- Currie: I don't see that in terms of, again, if you're talking about general principles that are appropriate to a constitution. It seems to me that the federal Constitution is a place where you enshrine them. So, I'm not worried that the federal government is going to come in and do something wrong in Illinois because we have said, "Yes, federal government, we do believe in gender equity." Similarly, I'm not afraid that the federal government is going to, based upon the Civil War Amendments, come in and do something inappropriate in Illinois because we didn't think of it first.³⁴
- DePue: Next one, and this one I'm sure won't surprise you: "ERA would put abortion rights into the U. S. Constitution and make abortion funding a new constitutional right."
- Currie: People said that. I think most of the proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment did not agree that that would be the effect. So I just think that was wrong. I think that was one of her red herrings that she used to... You're not mentioning about the unisex bathrooms? You're not going to talk about those? (laughs). One of the other fears that she mongered during the discussions of the Equal Rights Amendment, that there might be...

³⁴ The 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, known collectively as the Civil War Amendments, were designed to ensure equality for recently emancipated slaves. (<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-politicalscience/chapter/slavery-and-civil-rights/>)

DePue: Well, maybe that'll be covered in the next bullet comment that I have here.

Currie: I think... Oh, okay, okay, okay.

DePue: Let's talk more about abortion here because you, obviously by this time, had come out strongly in favor of abortion rights. I don't know if that would be the phrase or the terminology that you'd want?

Currie: Reproductive rights I think is the way we described them.

DePue: Reproductive rights.

Currie: Reproductive choice, reproductive rights, yes.

DePue: Was that something that you could say was a clear divide between those who are pro-reproductive rights, those who are pro-life? That there was a distinct divide, and those who were pro-life would inevitably be on the side of Mrs. Schlafly.

Currie: You know, I don't know. What's interesting is that it was, wasn't it in 1973 that...?

DePue: Seventy-three is Roe v Wade.

Currie: ...the Roe v Wade decision. Of course, that's the time that the Equal Rights Amendment is coming to the states for ratification. So it may well be that there was a willingness on the part of lawmakers and the public generally to conflate the two issues, to say, "Well, wait a minute. I didn't like Roe. Therefore, I should oppose ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment." But as a matter of rational discourse and constitutional law, it's really quite a separate proposition.

That is to say, without ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, the court found in Roe an individual autonomy that said that, up to this point during a pregnancy, the states cannot intervene. So if that was the issue for the opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment, I would say the horse was already out of the barn.

DePue: Well, of course, this has been an issue that's been animated in American public discourse ever since Roe v Wade.

Currie: Since then. And I would say, as a separate proposition from the ERA. When I first came to Springfield—and this is now many years after the Roe decision—there were bills after bills after bills that tried to make illegal anything in the reproductive rights arena. The anti-Roe measures, they included pretty much everything but the kitchen sink.

They were invariably vetoed by Governor Thompson. His veto was often overridden, and then they were thrown out by the courts. So that battle continued, but it seems to me it really was a separate battle from ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. I can understand that it becomes easy to conflate the idea that women now have these rights, with the question, Do you want to give them some new ones?

DePue: This is a bit off course for the discussion about ERA, but since we're talking about the always sensitive issue of abortion, what was your response then or now to women who would say, "But how about the rights of the unborn child? They have no rights."

Currie: I thought the statutory scheme that was set up by Roe v Wade was reasonable. It says, "Early in a pregnancy there is no separate fetus with rights." But toward the end of a pregnancy, when the fetus is viable, then you really have to take into account some kind of balance between the rights of the person who is carrying that unborn child in her womb and that which is soon to be born. So I thought viability was not an unreasonable place to set the standard. In fact, if you go back and look at Thomas Aquinas and others, the idea of viability, certainly quickening, but viability becomes a very important standard in figuring out at what point is there an entity whose rights have any meaning at all?

DePue: Do you remember if this issue was one of the foremost issues that was discussed in conjunction with ERA?

Currie: I do not remember that. There were plenty of opportunities to talk about the issues that were raised by Roe in a separate context because there was, as I say, many proposals to undo Roe, and many of them succeeded; many of them succeed over the veto of the governor. So I don't remember them being central to the discussions about the Equal Rights Amendment. They had their own little corner in the legislative halls.

DePue: The next comment—the last one I'll read from her—is, "ERA would put gay rights into the U. S. Constitution because the word in the amendment is sex, not women."

Currie: I think all that that language means is that you can't use gender as a way to discriminate in ways that are inappropriate because there's no rational State interest in so doing. So it has really nothing to do with sexual preference, with sexual orientation. It has only to do with the distinction between whether when you pass a law that says that women can only work four hours a week, and men can work 195, is there a rational basis for making that distinction, based upon gender?

DePue: Obviously, I would think, in this case, this is certainly something that she felt strongly about. But she also knew where her American public was in terms of homosexuality at that point in time.

Currie: Yes, I would say that's absolutely right. I did say earlier on, that she was an effective advocate for her position...wrong, but effective.

DePue: What did you think about the tactics that her camp used, and the group was the Eagle Forum, but I think...

Currie: That's right, the Eagle Forum, and then it became Concerned Women for America or is that...?

DePue: Stop ERA, I think was the official name.

Currie: Stop ERA, right. Again, I thought that the media created her to some degree. She used the focus very well as the spokesperson for the anti-crowd. I don't think that there was a lot of angst and anger in the body politic, but I think that there was enough that she was able—she and her people—to foment what there was and make it seem more powerful, more legitimate than it actually was. That's my recollection. I could certainly be wrong.

DePue: Are you suggesting that the media, in the way they covered it, favored her side of the argument?

Currie: No, what I'm saying is that, in order for the media to think that they were doing the right thing in terms of balanced reporting, giving every side of an issue an opportunity to be heard, I think they essentially created Phyllis Schlafly out of whole cloth. They needed somebody to say, "It's not a good idea," and they helped create her as a forceful voice for the anti-crowd that I think was out of portion to the actual support she had, either on a rational basis, given her arguments, or on a popular basis, given the level of support for stopping the Equal Rights Amendment, that was actually out there in the land.

I'm not saying the media did it on purpose. I'm only saying that the media's perception that it needs to do both sides of anything may give more credence to a side that is not proportionate to the actual strength of the side, either in terms of numerical support or in terms of rational argument.

DePue: That gets back to the question about her tactics. Do you remember some of the things that the Stop ERA forces were doing deliberately, just like the deliberate things NOW and the Pro ERA forces were doing, to garner press?

Currie: Right, right. I don't remember the specifics. I do remember they were all over the place and that they took the color red, which meant we couldn't use red for quite a long time. I personally have taken it back.

We did convene at one time, the committee of the whole, when Phyllis Schlafly was here speaking about how terrible the Equal Rights Amendment would be, and her daughters were much weaker than her sons, and this would only incite them to beat them up. I couldn't tell if she was talking child abuse or ratification of the ERA.

DePue: One of things I didn't read here, that I know was very much part of the discussion, is women in combat roles.

Currie: Yes, right, right.

DePue: Wat was your position on that at the time?

Currie: At the time, I think that we, those of us who were for the Equal Rights Amendment... I'm fuzzy, but my recollection is that we felt that those are decisions that are likely to be made primarily by the people who are in charge of the military. So, while we thought that women belonged in the military, the exact extent of their participation in hand to hand combat was not something that we felt the Equal Rights Amendment itself would settle for once and for all.

DePue: That's very much along the same lines of the comments that Senator Dawn Clark Netsch made when I asked her those questions.

Currie: Um-hmm. I think that was where we were. Yes, we do think women belong in the military, and the precise role may reflect what's going on in the military at that time, what kind of combat. There is a difference between a woman piloting an airplane that is bombing someplace and a woman who's engaged in hand to hand combat, where physical strength may be more important.

DePue: But the language of the Equal Rights Amendment was pretty clear that there is no difference, that men and women are equal in that respect.

Currie: No, no, no. I think that's not the way I would read it. I would read it to say that irrational distinctions are out the window. So if there is a reason for a distinction that is enshrined in law, then let's have a rational discussion to see whether it is, in fact, right or whether somebody is making it up. I don't think it means you can never say that... Let me think.

I can't think of a good example, but there might be circumstances in which you would say a higher weight requirement or a physical capacity requirement is appropriate for this kind of job. You'd be much smarter couching it in those terms rather than "Men can do it, and women cannot." But the question behind all of those rules is whether there is a rational basis. Does this job require someone who can press sixty pounds, or is that really just a stand-in for not wanting to hire women to do that job? That would be the kind of discussion you'd have to have.

So, the law firm doesn't want to hire a woman as an associate because they say their clients wouldn't like it. Well, is that a reason, a rational approach to whether or not they ought to be required to hire a woman with the same qualifications as a similarly situated male? That's the kind of analysis I think you would give, rather than anytime you say, "Women are here, and men are there." It's out the window. I don't think that's the right way to look at it.

DePue: What would be the branch of government that would have the obligation to specify where the lines are?

Currie: As with the Equal Protection and the Due Process Clause, last stop on the road would be the courts. But that was already true. That was not something that would change if we were to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment.

DePue: Going to back to tactics here, and you said you don't really remember the specifics. This one would have occurred before you got here, but I think it was something that followers were doing for most of the time.

Currie: I must have paid attention.

DePue: In June of '78, Phyllis Schlafly and 500 followers took home baked bread to the Illinois Capitol to symbolize their opposition to the ERA (Currie laughs) and delivered it to the separate legislators.

Currie: Yeah, well I think that's just delightful. I'm not sure I wouldn't have expected mine to be poisoned. But otherwise, it's a very nice gesture. But I don't know what it has to do with ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

DePue: Did you ever have visits from opponents?

Currie: I did; I did, and they usually brought pies or cookies or something really quite tasty. And as I say, I was never sure whether mine had been poisoned, so I gave them away. Nobody was ever poisoned. I needn't have worried.

DePue: Did you legitimately think that might the case?

Currie: No (both laugh). No, but it was a pretty good line (both laugh). And it might have been something I'd have thought of, if I had been on their side and looking at me.

DePue: How about those who were supporters? Were they visiting you?

Currie: Yes, and sometimes they were a little over the top as well. The opportunity to express one's self vividly and enthusiastically is an opportunity all of us have in our free society. Sometimes people behave in ways that don't really, I think, move their cause further forward the way they hoped it might. So we

had—I believe late in the game—I think, some of my advocate groups chained themselves to the...

DePue: Yeah, we're going that in the 1982 discussion.

Currie: Yeah, okay.

DePue: Do you remember anybody coming to your office that you thought might have gotten out of line or found another opportunity with you?

Currie: No, no, certainly I'm sure I had conversations with people who were planning to do things that I didn't think was the most effective way to press the case. But never in my office did I encounter—on either side—anybody who behaved inappropriately. The antis, as I say, they just delivered goodies, and the pros were talking about how they might help change minds and hearts.

DePue: What happened to all those baked goods that they brought to your office?

Currie: People ate them. Come on! (both laugh) As I say, even if I didn't myself, there's a secretarial staff; there's a housekeeping crew; there are plenty of people happy to take it home and feed the family dessert because they were all worked too hard and didn't have time to...even before ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

DePue: I wanted to ask you about another woman who, as I understand, was Schlafly's right hand gal in Illinois.

Currie: Penny Pullen, no.

DePue: Penny Pullen would certainly be in the legislature.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: What are your comments about her?

Currie: About Penny?

DePue: Yeah.

Currie: She was very much an ideologue. I think she was an extremely rigid person politically, and I think it showed in her legislative responses. My recollection is she never voted for a budget, never felt that a budget was sufficiently in line with resources that she could support it. I think that's a very odd way to look at government. It's not possible to find that there is not a single budget...

Our basic job as legislators is to fund state government. No matter whether, if it's the Equal Rights Amendment or some other major controversy, abolition of the death penalty, what have you, marriage equality,

we have to fund state government, year by year by year. That's our basic bread and butter. We can't leave Springfield without it.

For one of my colleagues to be of the view that she can never find a budget she can support strikes me as the actions of a poseur, of somebody who is not serious about the job but who is lining herself up with people who'd rather not pay taxes and rather not fund government.

DePue: The person I'm thinking of was not in the legislature.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: This is Kathleen Sullivan. Does that name ring a bell?

Currie: It does, yes. I never really knew her, but she was also somebody who was on the television programs, debating the other side. I never really had much sense of her. I had a bigger sense of Phyllis.

DePue: Let's talk about the supporters, the pro-ERA people. You kind of eluded to this. What do you think of the tactics that they used? Now, let's break it down and start with the National Organization for Women (NOW).

Currie: Well, as an organization, national organization, I think they did a pretty good job of putting the real issues out there, good fact sheets, background materials. But were there people within the organization who were happy to be disruptive, who were passionate enough, as with the... Some not, certainly, handing out cherry pies, which the Eagle Forum did. But there were times when either side might behave in ways that I think were not helpful. But they certainly were not by and large illegal. They just weren't very effective.

DePue: One of the things you've got to start with in a campaign like this is knowing what your objective is.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Much of what some of these organizations did was aimed at turning public opinion.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Was that appropriate? Was that an effective approach?

Currie: I don't think that the raucous "chain yourselves here" and "burn your bras there," I don't think that was a very effective approach to changing hearts and minds.

DePue: How about having rallies? I know there were a couple of occasions where lots of famous people in government, but also a lot of Hollywood “stars” were coming to town.

Currie: Right, okay. First of all, let me just say that, while I don’t think the things I just described were particularly helpful, there’s nothing wrong with people deciding that’s the way they want to share their passion and their emotions. When it comes to rallies, I think those are good. And while it certainly is true that a lot of people don’t care much what Hollywood celebrities have to say, there are people who do pay a lot of attention to Hollywood celebrities.

I know the Oscar [Academy Awards] audience was down this year, 16 percent, but even so, a lot of people like to watch those celebrities. They think, If the celebrity thinks it’s good, maybe I’ll think it’s good too. I think that celebrity support for marriage equality did make a difference, in the long run, in changing hearts and minds. And that is the whole point of the exercise, from the perspective of those who are interested in developing stronger support for this cause.

DePue: I guess one of the questions is, do you go after public opinion, or do you focus your energies and attentions on the legislators?

Currie: I think you have to do both. I think legislators will be responsive to their understanding of their...first of all, **their** public, so two publics. First, what is the general public sentiment? But second, what do my people think? One of the problems, I think, with the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, from the perspective of my people, is that, while I think there still was broad support as time went on, even though it eroded with the development of the Eagle Forums and Concerned Women of America and the tactics of the Phyllis Schlaflys, I think that the people in the legislature tended to hear more from their antis, that the antis were more likely to speak and to speak with a loud voice.

Whether that’s because they had something to fear, they thought they might be giving up something if the Equal Rights Amendment were ratified, I don’t know.

I think the same shows also in the abortion debate, the fact that Roe v Wade was the law of the land meant that people who supported Roe v Wade tended to be kind of quiet. They won. They didn’t need to get out there and proselytize, whereas those who lost saw themselves very much under the gun, and they were a much stronger voice within any individual constituency. So it isn’t just a question of where do I think my people are? It’s where do I think my people are, the ones that I’m hearing from? Who’s talking to me?

Not surprisingly, many legislators were willing to assume that they represent a larger share of the district view than perhaps is warranted. But

they're certainly the people that lawmakers tend to pay attention to, the loud mouths.

DePue: So the vocal minority is what you're suggesting?

Currie: I'm saying that I think... I started out by making the point that it is the smaller constituency, my constituency. Don't tell me what Illinois thinks. Tell me what the people in my district think.

But having said that, figuring out what the people in your district think can sometimes be complicated because people may feel they have different stakes in the outcome. And when it comes to ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, my sense was that people who were fearful tended to be louder than people who thought, This is business as usual; of course everyone should have equal rights.

DePue: In earlier comments, you also suggested that the news media tended to amplify them more than the...

Currie: Not because they were trying to build up this faction, but only because they felt they needed to get a voice to reflect a different perspective.

DePue: Let's talk about... Since this is part of the Governor Thompson project, let's talk about Governor Thompson's position on this.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: What do you recall about his position and your feelings about that?

Currie: Well, my recollection was that he was for ratification, but the governor didn't play a role in ratification of federal constitutional amendments.

DePue: Yeah, he wasn't going to vote on this.

Currie: And could not sign the bill, which as if we were...the same procedures, if we were talking about an amendment to the Illinois Constitution. But my recollection is—and I could be wrong—but my recollection is that he was for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. He certainly used his veto pen on the other issue that we earlier talked about, the anti-Roe legislation. He certainly was willing to go that route.

Again, the connection, if there is one, between Roe v Wade on the one hand and the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment would be only temporal. That is, things happened at more or less the same time, even though there was no clear connection between the issues.

- DePue: A colleague of mine, who's working on this project with me, found a video clip on the Internet of a rally that was held here in Springfield, in the Capitol Building, I believe, and you spoke at the rally.
- Currie: How like me (DePue laughs).
- DePue: And I believe this is from the 1982 battle.
- Currie: Okay.
- DePue: What I'd like to do is to have you read... I thought it was all on the same page...almost. Would you like to read, or would you like me to read?
- Currie: Sure. Oh, I'd be happy to read.
- DePue: It's the portion in blue. It starts right here...
- Currie: Oh, dear.
- DePue: ...and it ends with just this one line on this page here. And obviously to read aloud.
- Currie: Okay, alright. This is me. Okay.
- DePue: You're talking to...
- Currie: I'm talking about the rule's change, okay
- DePue: And you're talking to a large group at a rally.
- Currie: Okay, thank you. (reads)

"I don't understand why Senator Taylor was so hostile to Jim Thompson. As far as I can tell, Jim Thompson has always given the ratification of Equal Rights Amendment effort in Illinois his very strongest lip service support." I wonder why I threw that in. "His announcement in Decatur on Monday that he opposes a return to a sensible majority requirement for ratifying federal constitutional amendments is part and parcel of the kind of lip service support he has given to the ratification efforts since day one. Whether he intended that to be one more nail in the ERA coffin, I don't know.

"But it seems to me it's up to each and every one of you who are here, you whose support is not lip service support, you whose support means a willingness to trek for miles to come to Springfield to see to it that we do ratify

equal rights in this country by June 30, 1982, it's up to you to see to it that he doesn't get away with it.

And even if you can't sway him on the issue—and we all know that, procedurally, he's dead wrong, and in terms of the ratification effort itself, he's dead wrong—even if you can't sway him on that one, make sure that he at least gives those of us who care about the rules change a fair chance to call the issue in the Illinois House of Representatives.” I don't know why I would have said that. I don't know why... Oh, here we go.

“Thompson's hand-picked speaker of the House, his hand-picked choice for lieutenant governor, hasn't given us a fair shake. He hasn't given us a fair shot. I'm not asking for George Ryan to vote with us on this issue. I know he won't. But I am asking him not to bend procedures to see to it that **this** state, that the legislators, that the elected representatives and the people in this state, people of the state, don't have a chance to talk for the vote back home, to do something for the vote back home on this critical issue.

“Do stop by the second floor to tell the governor what you're here about. Tell the governor what kind of support you bring to the ratification effort. We will make it because of your help, because your support is as strong as it is deep. Thank you very much.”

I'd forgotten entirely that Thompson spoke on the question of the appropriate majority for ratification.

DePue: I've heard this criticism about Thompson from others as well. Thompson said, “I supported it.” When I've interviewed him, it was, “I supported it.” And then a couple times in my—if I can take the liberty to mention this—then he says, “But it was unnecessary because the Fourteenth Amendment already gave them that right.”

Currie: But if you look at case law, and if you look at what was happening, in fact, in this country, I think that's not the right conclusion.

DePue: And that was not what he was saying at the time.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: So, it sounds to me, based on this comment and this comment I'll just read here, that you didn't think that—this is a crude way of saying it—that he had skin in the game, that he was really strongly supportive of it.

- Currie: Well, as I said earlier, lip service support. So I think that pretty well defines where I was. I did not remember that, on the issue of the rules change, he had become so intractable.
- DePue: This is from another editorial, June 16, 1982. So this is during the last gasps of ERA in the entire United States. "Thompson is identified neither as a proponent or opponent. Perhaps wishy washy is the most accurate designation. He favors ERA, but he takes no position on the return of the majority rule requirement, essential for ratification in Illinois."
- Currie: And I had not remembered that, so...
- DePue: Does that bring back any other memories?
- Currie: Well, just that George Ryan, of course, by that time, the Speaker of the House, was certainly not in our corner, and he certainly seemed willing to use his office to stymie us every inch of the way.
- DePue: Any other comments about George Ryan, in terms of how he was... He was speaker for the last two years.
- Currie: Yes, he was.
- DePue: That was the only two years he had that opportunity. Before that, the Democrats had the majority.
- Currie: Right. And my recollection is that he was very much willing to throw his weight around to stop issues, like the rules change, from coming up. He was very much associated with the antis, and he permitted people who were... My recollection is that one of our members stepped on the hands of people who were, perhaps inappropriately, trying to hang around the podium in the Illinois House. They shouldn't have done it, right, but you don't let people run roughshod over them. I don't think that George Ryan took the need for decorum as strongly as he should have.
- DePue: I have been told by somebody who's a strong proponent of ERA that George Ryan is now suggesting that he wasn't really all that opposed to ERA at the time.
- Currie: Maybe that's right. I never... But you'd never prove it by talking to me because, at the time, he seemed to be very much, my recollection, in the anti-camp. And he certainly didn't make any pronouncements to suggest otherwise. I don't know that he ever voted yes. In fact, I'm quite sure he never did.
- DePue: That he voted no.

Currie: Yeah, that's my recollection. Show me a roll call, and I'll be proved wrong. That's easy enough.

DePue: That's certainly something else that we need to dig out, all the roll call votes for all ten years that this was going through the legislature.

Currie: I should look and see if I've got the little study that I did because that, I think you'd find interesting, the change over time in the connection between partisanship and support for ratification.

DePue: We're into 1982 now, and that's the last year. Things get... Would it be fair to say that Springfield, Illinois, was in the national spotlight?

Currie: Very much. I think there may have been another state or two that shared the spotlight with us. There were three states I recall who hadn't yet ratified but who might have, and Illinois was certainly right up there.

Now, I was not in the legislature when... Was it Jimmy Carter came to...? Yeah, right, and he apparently was quite an effective speaker at the podium. But I wasn't here when that happened. That preceded me. But yes, things were certainly heating up.

DePue: And several first ladies had been weighing in on the issue as well. So 1982, May 18, Sonia Johnson. Does that name ring a bell? She started her hunger strike at that time.

Currie: I forgot that.

DePue: And again you cringe.

Currie: I just didn't remember that. And again, I don't think that's the most effective way to win hearts and minds. It certainly is an effective way of saying, "I feel very strongly. My passion on this issue knows no bounds." But whether that's an effective way to encourage people to join you, I don't know.

DePue: I've got a question here, but I'll throw this next one out as well. June 3, the Grass Roots Group of Second Class Citizens, and you've alluded to this already. That's the day, on June 3, that they chained themselves to the railing outside the Senate chamber.

Currie: Right.

DePue: I even have a picture, a couple pictures, of that for you. Does that bring back any memories?

Currie: Yeah, wow.

DePue: You said you don't think that was an effective way.

- Currie: It was a legitimate way. I just don't think that it was very effective.
- DePue: Was it counterproductive?
- Currie: That's a harder question to answer. I'm not sure I would go so far as to say counterproductive, but I do think that it didn't have the effect that the protesters had hoped. That is to say, we didn't ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. What can I say, proof in the pudding? No, I don't think so. I don't think that, but I do think that that kind of antic was not the sort that was likely to be effective with those people who have already allied themselves against ratification.
- DePue: I'm going to put on the spot. I should know myself; I don't know for sure. Did the issue ever come up for a vote in the House that year, in 1982, or had Ryan effectively blocked that from happening?
- Currie: I thought there was... When was the vote when the African American legislators...?
- DePue: I think that was in '81. It wasn't in 19...
- Currie: That was '81, okay.
- DePue: It wasn't in '82; I know that.
- Currie: Okay, it was '81. I don't remember that we voted in '82. I don't remember.
- DePue: As I understand it, there are those who remember strongly the way it did end in the Illinois Senate, and you'll probably recall this as well when I mention this, that it was in committee. Phil Rock, I guess, was chairing that particular committee, and he realized that it didn't have enough votes to clear committee. So he never even bothered to bring it forward for a vote, in committee. So, basically, in the Illinois Senate it died in committee.
- Senator [James C.] Taylor said, "I certainly do feel I've been stabbed in the back." I assume he was a strong proponent for ERA in the Senate. And Dawn Clark Netsch said, "I don't like to see it go out with a whimper." That's where it ended, and that vote was in mid-June of 1982.
- Currie: Eighty-two.
- DePue: Right after that, on June 25, ERA supporters—Here's a picture of this—ERA supporters sprayed pig's blood on the marble floor outside the Senate chamber.
- Currie: Yeah, yep.

DePue: I think they were trying to write Ryan's name and Thompson's name on the floor?

Currie: Their handwriting is not very good. Yeah. Again, I don't object to their decision to go forward with that particular approach, but I don't think that it was very effective.

DePue: If you ask people today about ERA, the two things that they always can remember are the chaining themselves in the Senate and the pig's blood.

Currie: Pig's blood.

DePue: For better or worse, that's what they recall about the ten year fight.

Currie: Right. Right.

DePue: How did you feel at the time, when it went down for defeat, and you knew that it wasn't going to pass?

Currie: I felt very unhappy. I really had put a lot of time... Well no, that was not why. I felt very unhappy because I thought the United States Constitution needed this amendment. And I thought that what we had in Illinois, with our own language, should apply to the women of Alabama and Arkansas and right across this land.

I also thought it was important as a symbol of a willingness to respect people, regardless of gender. The fact that we failed to ratify, to me was a symbol of our unwillingness to regard the issue of gender equity with the respect that it deserved.

DePue: Do you still feel that way today? Do we still need to pass ERA?

Currie: I think it would not be a bad thing. I don't know that, given more recent court decisions, it is as critical as it looked to be in the 1970s and the '80s. I guess I would say this, however, that the winds of the political world change, and that's one of the things that you look to in a constitution. The Constitution is supposed to set some bedrock principles, so even when the political winds are blowing in the wrong direction, there is some kind of fire door so as to keep the winds from blowing too strong, blowing too hard, and blowing too long.

I wouldn't say the fact that I can't think at the moment of examples wherein our current laws...and the fact that we have much stronger laws about gender equity than we used to means that they're in any way permanent parts of our establishment or our firmament.

DePue: I have a couple of other questions on more contemporary issues. In the last presidential campaign, there was lots of discussion about women, and there

were allegations that there was a war on women that the Republican Party was waging.

Currie: Um-hmm.

DePue: What did you think about that whole discussion?

Currie: Well, I think that the discussion was a legitimate one. I think that there have certainly been people, many of them Republicans, who have been particularly antagonistic to women's ability to make choices about reproductive issues, who have been less than supportive of women in the quest for equity in the workplace and all the rest of it. But I would have to say that, as a central focus of a fair number of the recent campaigns for seats in the United States Senate, I don't think it turned out to be a particularly effective approach.

DePue: That sounds like a comment that's based on the last off-year election, where a lot of Democrats ended up leaving.

Currie: [Mark] Udall, and we had Colorado, North Carolina, where there was a good deal of focus on the part of the Democratic incumbents, on the record, and the willingness on the part of their challengers and on the part of the party in general to be disrespectful of women in various aspects of our roles in this society.

But as a central theme it doesn't seem to have won enough of the hearts and minds of the people to carry the day. Now, one can parse, as a political scientist, the question whether that is the right interpretation or whether the people who were making that argument were so far behind the eight ball that they needed a good deal more ammunition, many more arrows in their quiver, than this particular focus gave them. I wouldn't say that it means it was ineffective, but it was not effective enough to carry the day.

DePue: Let's look a year and half ahead then and assume that Hillary Clinton...

Currie: Is the nominee.

DePue: ...is the nominee. Do you think we are we going be hearing more about war on women?

Currie: I don't know. I think the Republicans are in an interesting role, an interesting place. And I know Rand Paul, my impression is, is trying very hard to deflect that kind of argument. I just don't know what the voice of the Republican Party will be when it comes to women's issues and gay marriage and all the other panoply of human rights issues.

Immigration is another issue that one could define as a human rights issue. And so far at least, the members of the Republican Party, at least in Congress, seem to be not very...to have ears that are not very open to the pleas

of those who have been in this country for a long time and are keeping their noses clean and only want to be able to stay in close touch with the kids in their own families. So, it will be interesting.

DePue: Today, as I promised, it was almost exclusively about the Equal Rights Amendment. I think it's been a very interesting discussion, an important discussion to have with somebody who played such a central role in the last four years fight over ERA in Illinois. And isn't it interesting that these issues just don't go away?

Currie: They do not go away. They won't.

DePue: Any final comments for me?

Currie: I've enjoyed reliving this history. I still think I'm right about the appropriate place to make determinations about ratification requirements for federal constitutional amendments. I had forgotten that Jim Thompson became a little weaselly there at the end. I'm glad that George Ryan thinks he was not so strenuously opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment. I wish I'd seen evidence in 1981 and 1982 otherwise, because I didn't.

But this is good reliving, and I will look up that little analysis. I mean, it was really a little analysis, but I will look that up and see if I can find that about the change in support for and against the Equal Rights Amendment connection to party.

DePue: We'll certainly have more sessions. There's a lot more in your career to cover, so maybe we can start with that next time, if you'd like to.

Currie: Okay, if I can find it.

DePue: Thank you very much.

Currie: Well thank you. This is great as always, and I'm glad you are hale, hearty and well.

DePue: Thank you.

(end of transcript #3)

Interview with Barbara Flynn Currie

#ISL-A-L-2014-049.04

Interview #4: September 10, 2015

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, September 10, 2015. This is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This is my fourth session with Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie. How are you this afternoon?

Currie: Well, thank you. Damp but well. It's raining in Chicago.

DePue: Not too hard.

Currie: No, not like two days ago.

DePue: The Chicago River looks to be full, though.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Last time we had a great conversation that was all about the Equal Rights Amendment.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: And you had mentioned to me before we started today that you had some notes someplace about pay equity.

Currie: I did, and my note just said, "Pay Equity, e.g." So "For example, pay equity." The last time we talked was so long ago that I don't remember what I was

thinking of. So, maybe something will trigger a recollection, or maybe it isn't relevant.

DePue: Let me explain why, because it was me who wasn't contacting you to set up the next interview session.

Currie: Oh, okay. Whew!

DePue: But as I mentioned earlier, I was waiting for you guys in the legislature to decide what the budget was going to be for fiscal year 2016.

Currie: Sixteen, right, oh well, wait, wait.

DePue: September 10.

Currie: Yep.

DePue: No budget.

Currie: And no end in sight.

DePue: No end in sight. What's different now than in the past?

Currie: I think the new governor is accustomed to running things his way. My understanding is that, as a private equity guy, he's not just amassing money to share among all the other venture capitalists, but he is pretty much calling the shots. And I think that that's a hard background to bring with you into public governance, where nobody calls all the shots and where the order of the day is compromise and negotiation. So for him, I think, it's been a very difficult place to find himself. When he says, "We're not going to talk about this until we talk that," and other people say, "No, let's just talk about this," he finds that very difficult. He's accustomed, I think, to snapping fingers and everybody else hops to.

DePue: From your perspective, as one of the Democratic leaders—and this might be something you don't want to answer right now, but it will be a while before anybody has access to this interview—what of his turn-around agenda is negotiable?

Currie: We certainly have made proposals when it comes to, for example, workers' comp. There are specific proposals on the table. The House passed a bill. We could certainly talk further about that. Well, one of the things he talked about, maybe not the turn-around agenda, but he was interested in separating the Abraham Lincoln Historic Library and Museum from the Historic Preservation Agency. The House has passed a bill that would basically do that.

So, we have shown a willingness to work with him on some of the items on his agenda. But I think it's increasingly clear that his agenda is his way or the highway, and I think some of the items on his agenda are just plain not acceptable to the majority members of the Illinois House and the Illinois Senate.

DePue: Like the pieces that deal with unions.

Currie: Yeah, I think he really wants to destroy collective bargaining in the state, and I don't think most of us want to do that. There was an article in the *New York Times* today, in fact, that showed a correlation between the successes of children who grew up in union household versus those that didn't. The reality is that collective bargaining, the opportunity to work collectively for a better working environment, better wages, better quality of life turns out not just to be good for the parents but it's good for the kids as well.

Any governor, anybody who says we can just do away with that kind of opportunity is not going to find very many, very receptive ears in the General Assembly, certainly among the Democrats. But I would argue, among many of the Republicans as well.

DePue: I'll play devil's advocate in this case. What would you say to the argument that, "Well that's all fine, but in part because of that, now the State of Illinois has something like a \$111 billion short fall in the pension fund?"

Currie: I don't buy that that's the reason. I do buy that, starting with Jim Thompson, the governors of Illinois, including the legislature as well as the executive branch, have failed to do the job we should have done to make sure the pensions were funded.

I would say that some of the major increases in the pension program, the things that made it a particularly rich program, came in when there were Republicans in charge, who were the governors, not Democrats. That doesn't mean that we should, any of us, be absolved from responsibility. I think we should have done a whole lot more than we did.

In fact, the pensions that go out to the people who work for the State, my recollection is that the average State pension is \$24,000 or \$25,000 a year, without social security. The average teacher pension—downstate teachers are, as it were, wards of the State, even though the State doesn't hire them—Their average pension is \$43,000 a year. Again, that's without social security. So it's hard for me to see that there's a problem with the level of benefits.

There is no question there is a problem with the willingness of the State to step up to the plate and see that the long term obligations are adequately funded. And remember, we had a terrible crash in 2008. So the problems we already knew existed were way exacerbated because the pension funding comes not only from the appropriations that the State puts in and that

the workers put in on an annual basis, but also comes from the earnings in the stock market that the reserves bring in. Well, all of a sudden, everything plummeted, went to hell in a hand basket, and what was a pretty serious pension problem became a really dreadful pension problem.

DePue: Since we've gotten into this territory, I want to ask you about the two other issues that strike me on Rauner's turn-around agenda. The next one is redistricting.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Did you think there's some room to negotiate on redistricting?

Currie: There might be, but I guess I would say this. I don't see any reason to think that states that operate differently when it comes to redistricting are more or less better attractions for people who do business, who want to move their factory, their operations from one state to another. So, if he's trying to make the argument that this will make Illinois a healthy, vibrant economy, there's absolutely no basis for that kind of statement.

DePue: How about if the argument is—this is probably something he would never state—"The Democrats have an absolute lock on power in this state. We need to change the dynamics of that so that's no longer..."

Currie: I think that's exactly what it is. And if you look at what's happening in other states, where is this whole idea of independent, fair map, whatever you want to call it...where is it happening? It's happening in the states where there are Democratic legislatures, not in states where there are Republican legislatures.

DePue: Well, Iowa is often times a model. I don't know if Iowa is controlled by the Republicans or Democrats.

Currie: Well, Iowa... Its system is a really old system. It's been in place for a very, very long time. I guess I would make two points. It's been in place for a very long time, but very few other states emulated the Iowa system. Iowa is a very small state. It is a state totally lacking in diversity. There are very few African Americans. There is not much variety, in terms of the kinds of populations that are Iowa. And

I think that it becomes much more difficult to do a job on a computer if you're trying to make sure that you're giving adequate voice to those groups that have been underrepresented in the political process. By that, I would mean, in particular, minority groups.

The other thing, of course, is that in Iowa it's an all or nothing proposition. You can't just change this line and that line. But I know there have been times (laughs) when the computer has accidentally done something

hostile to the... I don't know if it was the president of the senate or the speaker of the house. That map disappeared pretty quickly (DePue laughs).

DePue: How about that.

Currie: So, the idea that it's this very totally pristine, no fingers, no human fingers involved, may be a little bit of an exaggeration.

DePue: Would you agree with Mike Lawrence, long time journalist and one of Edgar's closest advisors? His comment about redistricting is that there is no more political decision or action than redistricting.

Currie: Well, in fact, that's basically the tack that the United States Supreme Court has taken. So when people come to the court, and they have argued that there is a partisan thing going on with map making, people like Justice [Antonin] Scalia say, "Fine. That's what it's about." Yep, politics.

So, while the court has been perfectly willing to say that you can't use the map to discriminate against, for example, under-represented minorities, there has not been, so far at least, a willingness on the part of the Supremes [Supreme Court Justices] to say that taking partisan advantage is a no-no. That could change, but to date, the courts have recognized that map making is pretty much a partisan issue. And I think that the court, so far, has been willing to say, "Let the chips fall where they may."

DePue: Did the Democrats take partisan advantage in 2011, after the last census?

Currie: I would say we didn't take partisan advantage. We did respect the requirements of diversity, of trying to keep communities of interest together, of making sure that the maps met all the requirements, one person, one vote. I think the variation was like point zero five, so basically less than one person a district—Maybe it was one person a district—difference in population. That's pretty good, and it's pretty tough.

And yeah, we were not always able to keep communities of interest together, but that's partly because we also had a responsibility to see to it that under-represented minorities had an opportunity to have a say at the ballot box. And, of course, the population has changed. Over each ten year period, we have seen significant changes. Here's an example: There was actually a decline in the African American population in the City of Chicago, from 2000 to 2010, about 180,000 net loss.

DePue: That's significant.

Currie: It is significant. I think the total net loss was like around 200,000. But the great majority were African American departures, not replaced by other African Americans. Then you're faced with the question, "Does that mean that we can reduce the number of African American districts?" I think there

was an unwillingness to do that, a willingness to try to make sure that those voices continued to be able to have a significant effect on the outcome, not that, "Okay you elect who you want," but that you have a significant effect.

So, I think the answer is that the actual majorities in the majority, African American districts following the 2010 remap, were smaller by and large than they had been ten years earlier. That decline reflected population changes, but it did not reflect a willingness to say, "Okay we're going to just throw them under the bus. And now we're going to pack larger numbers of those that remain into a smaller number of districts."

DePue: Are compact and contiguous districts part of the goal of redistricting?

Currie: That's part of the Illinois Constitution, and we take it seriously.

DePue: Then how do you explain a lot of the...let's call them oblong legislative districts?

Currie: Partly because you have other things that you have to take into account, like population equity, communities of interest, minority participation and representation. All those things play a role. It isn't a cookie cutter program. And in Illinois, where you have lots of rivers, even in Southern Illinois some hills, you have a hard time drawing things so that...

You know, what are you going to do? Do the cookie cutter, so that it divides the river or straddles the river? Sometimes you end up doing just that. But that's because there are competing interests, besides compactness. And contiguity, we've never missed on contiguity. Although every once in a while, I think, Well, there might be some attractive part of Wisconsin that would be kind of nice to snick into. (DePue laughs)

DePue: They're probably still complaining that Illinois grabbed a chunk of the Lake Michigan lakefront.

Currie: Right, right, right.

DePue: That was only a century or two ago.

Currie: And wasn't there something between Kentucky and Indiana, some little piece of river territory?

DePue: You're probably right. I don't recall that.

Currie: It may have been an island. I don't remember.

DePue: So there's nothing to the allegations that Republicans make, that a lot of these oblong districts, especially in the Chicago area, were carved out to make sure there are more favorable Democratic districts in that region?

Currie: I think that it's a criticism that misses the point about making sure that other important redistricting goals are met in any given map. So I think that they're overreacting. I also would remind them—and I'll remind you too—that under our Constitution, there's a pretty strong incentive, a pretty strong inducement for the two parties to come together and agree upon a map. Because if you don't, then you have this winner take all situation.

DePue: But not this last time around, when the House and the Senate and the governorship...

Currie: This time, this time that did not come into play. But every other time, I believe, since the 1970s...

DePue: Correct.

Currie: ...it was the flip of the coin that made the determination.

DePue: Just the exact opposite of what the constitutional authors thought would happen.

Currie: Right, exactly. It's really amazing. Let me also say that, in this remap, we did... I mean, I chaired the redistricting committee in the House, and we did hearings all over the state. So ours was a very open process. And there were people from all different communities who came and offered... I don't want to say different axes to grind, but people who had very different perspectives.

So some people may say, "Well, wait a minute; it's stupid that you did it that way." But some other voice may be saying, "Look, we can connect to a community of interest that is just across the small hill, and that's an important way for us to have a meaningful voice in choosing our representation."

DePue: When did the Democrats have a super majority in both the House and the Senate? Did that happen following the 2010 or 2012 election?

Currie: Yeah. No, no. I think we did have that in 2010. I think we did; I'm not sure. But I think what happened was that there was agreement; so there was no question about needing a super majority because we had a Democratic governor as well.

DePue: And the last area...

Currie: And he signed our map (DePue laughs) and our legislation that made it clear that you can't discriminate against...

DePue: Democratic Governor Pat Quinn.

Currie: Yeah, yeah, and he signed the bill that said that you can't discriminate against people, that you've got to take into account the fact that minority groups have been underrepresented.

DePue: The last area I wanted to ask you about, that's part of Rauner's turn around agenda, is term limits.

Currie: Yeah, again, I don't see any reason to think that there is any evidence to back up the proposition that states with term limits do better, economically, than states without. I personally feel very strongly that term limits are a mistake.

We have term limits in the state of Illinois. It's called elections. Every two years for members of the House, most of the time four years for members of the Senate and the governor. And people who don't like it are perfectly free to throw the rascals out. My concern is that, with term limits, what you really do is empower two other groups of stakeholders. One is the bureaucrats, the bureaucracy, and the other are lobbyists. The lobbyists aren't term limits. And when they're the only ones who have institutional memory, I think you've got a problem figuring out how best to govern.

I also think that the incentive for the members, who themselves are term limited, may be a little bit headed in the wrong direction. What do you do when you leave the legislature? Well, maybe you're looking for a job somewhere in the private sector. And maybe you work with lobbying groups, and you find yourself a nice sinecure in one of the industries whose issues you have immersed yourself in during the short time you've been in the state capital.

As a matter of public policy, it makes zero sense to me. And as any kind of argument for economic development, it makes even less sense. In fact wasn't there... No. I thought I remembered something that showed that term limiting legislatures led to some very unfortunate outcomes. But I can't remember if I did or not.

DePue: So from what I'm hearing, Governor Rauner has less than 0 percent chance of getting things like union or redistricting or term limit issues through in this negotiation.

Currie: Right, except I would just go back to what I started out saying, and that is that the fact that we are not going to buy his whole agenda doesn't mean that there are not ways we could work with him so that some of the items... I gave you an example of workers' comp, of the Abraham Lincoln Library. And I think we could work on some of the other areas, as well. But I don't know what he wants, less than what he's been asking for. And what he's been asking for does not make for good public policy.

DePue: How many conversations have the leaders had with the governor since oh, the end of June?

Currie: I don't think they've had any. But I don't know that for sure. You should ask them.

DePue: Well, we're going to be at these interviews for a while. We'll see if there's a resolution to this by the time we finish (both laugh).

Currie: Oh, I can only say I hope so.

DePue: Yeah, for the State of Illinois's sake.

Currie: I'm tired of going back and forth, back and forth, back and forth.

DePue: Let's go back to where we started with this. We ended our last conversation with ERA, and you wanted to talk a little bit about pay equity.

Currie: I thought I did, Mark, but I do not remember what the meaning of my note was. So maybe it will come to me. This was not a general... I don't remember that we discussed generally women's issues. This was the context of the last days of the opportunity for the Equal Rights Amendment to be ratified in Illinois. I don't remember the specifics of the conversation.

DePue: Okay. Well then...

Currie: But I was very strongly for the Equal Rights Amendment, and I was for changing the three fifths rule requirement, so that Illinois would have a better chance of respecting democratic principles and ratifying.

DePue: I don't think we have discussed your 1980 election. Would that have been your third election for the legislature?

Currie: Seventy-eight was my first. Eighty was my second.

DePue: I think then we did talk about that. What I want to ask you about the 1980 election is that you had, at the national level, Ronald Reagan, a different kind of a Republican, a different kind of conservative, coming in. Do you have any reflections on that change?

Currie: You know, I wasn't paying very close attention to national politics at that point, because I was so focused on state politics. We did have several Democrats in the legislature even, who organized themselves as... I don't think they called themselves Democrats for Reagan. But it was Veterans for Reagan. It was whatever...firefighters for Reagan. So there certainly was a way in which Reagan's... Either himself, I mean his persona, or his issues resonated with a lot of people who ordinarily considered themselves Democrats. I should have been more alert to that than I was.

I also think that he was, as president, not nearly as bitey as his bark had been. That is to say, I think he did not press on some of the issues that were resonating with the electorate as president as he might have done.

DePue: One of the things that he did accomplish, twice, was a significant income tax decrease.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: You're feeling about that? In one case it was from 70 percent to... I'm not sure where it went.

Currie: Yeah, it went way down. I think that was not good for the country. I think that when we're looking today at income inequality, you can trace a lot of that back to Reagan. You can trace it then again back to Bush. The ratio of taxes paid by upper income people has dropped significantly over the last x years, and our competitors in the other western democracies don't seem to have been following our lead. So, I don't think that it's been really good for the health of the body politic to put as much... to shuffle the deck, so as to give even a greater edge to the people at the top of the spectrum, because, at the end of the day, the people who are losing out in that program are the less well-off. And the income inequality numbers, I think, are shocking and scary.

That's why I think things like this attack on the union movement... Collective bargaining had been traditionally a way for workers to be able to have a sufficient presence at the bargaining table so that their wages, their working conditions and so forth, stood a chance. The decline in union membership is, I think, cause for concern as well. I think it may partly connect to the income inequality that is reflected in our tax policies.

DePue: At the beginning of the Kennedy administration, the top marginal tax rate, and this would be for a tiny percentage of Americans, was 90 percent.

Currie: Right.

DePue: He decreased it, I believe, as something in the neighborhood of 70 percent.

Currie: That sounds right.

DePue: And in a two-step process, Reagan took it from seventy. After the second significant tax cut, it went down to twenty-eight. It's now higher than that.

Currie: It's now thirty-six, maybe?

DePue: Thirty-six sounds right.

Currie: I think that's right, yah.

DePue: Maybe thirty-nine for the top tax rate.

Currie: Yeah, maybe so.

DePue: What would you think is the appropriate for the top marginal tax rate?

Currie: You know, I don't know. I'm not an economist, and I don't know the answer to that question. But I do know that we did pretty well, even in the '60s, when Kennedy was president. The economy was not going to hell in a hand basket. And I don't think that the idea that people are taxed at rates that are higher than the ones we have today are so disadvantaged that they're going to stay home, sulk, and stop working.

DePue: Different subject: sunset legislation. You apparently had some strong feelings about sunset legislation.

Currie: I did; yeah, I did; I did. I thought the legislature should just plain do its job, and you don't need to sunset various programs. The Appropriations Committee should be looking at those programs, and to the extent that they're not working effectively, cancel them. What I think that the sunset program does is to give lobbyists a third bite at the apple.³⁵

JCAR [Joint Committee of Administrative Rules], I feel even more strongly about than the plain sunset, sunset of various things, because that really is a third bite at the apple.³⁶ So here you have a process in which the lobbyists have tried with the legislature, and they've tried with the governor's office, and now there is an opportunity to come in yet one more time and say, "No, no, no. They weren't doing what the legislation said they should do," in the case of JCAR. Or, "We don't like the..."

I would say, the Sunset Commission really did kind of look at, not just, "Shall the program continue?" but it did consider all the intricacies. It's there that, I think, that you may give an edge to the lobbying crowd. In fact, some of them said to me (Currie laughs), "It was their third bite at the apple. They were very happy to have it."

DePue: The first two bites at the apple?

Currie: Legislature, governor.

DePue: JCAR. That's an insight baseball term here.

³⁵ Sunset laws put state regulatory agencies on the line for periodic review and automatic extinction unless the legislature decides the agency is worth saving. (<https://www.lib.niu.edu/1977/ii770221.html>)

³⁶ The Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR) is a bipartisan legislative oversight committee created by the Illinois General Assembly in 1977. The committee is authorized to conduct systematic reviews of administrative rules promulgated by State agencies. (<https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/>)

Currie: Joint Committee on Administrative Rules. It was very popular in this country in the... I don't know if it was the late '70s or the middle '80s. I think it happened at the federal level as well. The idea is: Are the agencies, the bureaucracies of government, out of control? So when the legislature passes a bill, does the agency take that bill and turn it into something much larger than the legislature ever had in mind by virtue of the rules and regulations it adopts, presumably under color of the legislation?

So the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules has been a place where people can come in and quibble and quarrel over whether agency A interpreted the language in this new bill appropriately or not. And that's when I talk about the lobbyists getting the third bite at the apple.

DePue: And that was going on, even in the early 1980s or especially...

Currie: I believe so. I remember voting against it, and I know we've tried to strengthen JCAR since. I think it happened at the federal level. My recollection is that the courts may have thrown out the idea of JCAR, the joint committees like ours, having an absolute veto.

As I understand, the way ours works is that if there are some rules the agency promulgates, if there are twelve members of the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, four from each caucus, so eight Republicans. No, three from each caucus. So it should be twelve members altogether, equally divided between the parties, equally divided between the House and the Senate. Then, if there are nine votes to oppose a particular rule, on the grounds that it doesn't meet what the legislature had set as the goal, then the agency has to delay implementation of the rule. But I don't think that it's allowed actually to veto it.

DePue: I'm obviously missing something here. The connection between JCAR and sunset legislation...

Currie: We had a Sunset Commission at the time I was complaining. And what the Sunset Commission was doing was something very much like what the Joint Committee was doing later. It was kind of overlooking all these things and not being... My recollection, my complaint, was that there were lots of more efficient, effective ways to carry out this mission. And that there is a risk that, in the process of examining these items, you throw out babies with bath waters.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that the Sunset Commission was about getting rid of redundancies and inefficient legislation?

Currie: If had just done that, I think I would have been perfectly okay with it. But I think it was actually a whole lot more than that. It wasn't getting rid of as many redundancies as it might, unless I'm misremembering the whole thing, which is certainly possible.

DePue: And JCAR, would it be a correct characterization that JCAR, in part, was to make sure that the prerogatives and the powers of the legislature were being preserved and not usurped by the executive branch?

Currie: And that was exactly the argument that the proponents made. My concern is that, because you end up with a lot of minutiae, that it's very difficult to decide, was that the will of the legislature, or wasn't it? What happens in these circumstances, in my view, was that the lobbyists came roaring back in and sometimes won in JCAR what they couldn't win in the legislature itself.

You had examples where the Medical Society came in, and they felt that the rule from whatever department was more favorable, perhaps, to chiropractors than it should have been. So you end up with a battle royale on that front.

While the idea of making sure the legislative prerogative is upheld, I'm not sure this is the best way to do it. A very small group of lawmakers are now standing in for the legislature as a whole. And as we know, what Danny thinks Barbara meant when she voted for the bill may not be what Barbara actually thought. So figuring out legislative intent is very difficult to do, beyond its actual language. To the extent that the argument is that the language doesn't permit this, then okay. But I think often the arguments in JCAR are not really about what the language is but what a particular group would like to have seen instead.

DePue: If not JCAR though, does that mean that it goes to the courts to decide those issues?

Currie: Yes. If somebody has a beef that is big enough to go to court, yeah. And again, as I understand it, JCAR does not have a permanent veto. Thank goodness. But I think that came from court decisions, not because of the will of the legislature.

DePue: One of the things that was being discussed in 1981—I don't think you and I have talked about this; I could be wrong. If that's the case, we'll get some redundancy here—is that George Ryan, who was speaker of the house during that time frame, was pushing right-to-work legislation.

Currie: He was. We talked a little bit about this, yeah, because Jim Thompson had a field day. This was absolutely red meat for Jim Thompson, and he put on his union jacket, and he invited everybody... I think I may have said, to the capitol, but it may have been the mansion. He had buckets of beer for all the good laboring men and women of the state of Illinois.

I don't know where George Ryan picked this idea up, but it was one that didn't really fit well with the politics of the day or the political culture of the State of Illinois. Now remember, that was at a time when union membership was a whole lot higher than it is today. I mean, that was about the

time there was beginning to be a precipitous decline in union membership. So things are different today, no two ways about it.

DePue: In the private sector, yeah.

Currie: Private sector particularly.

DePue: Yeah. That gets us to 1982. The national economy... Illinois's economy was in the doldrums and heading south. Just to throw some numbers out here to put a frame of reference on it, January 1982, inflation rate was 8.4 percent. In today's terms, people wouldn't begin to comprehend that level of inflation.

Currie: Right, that's right.

DePue: Unemployment.

Currie: But it had already been growing. I think that's partly the reason that Jimmy Carter lost. I know there many other reasons, the attractiveness of morning in America, the style of Ronald Reagan, and the Iran hostages.^{37, 38} But I think inflation had a large role to play as well.

DePue: Absolutely, the misery index.

Currie: Right, right. I forgot that's what we called it, but yeah, right.

DePue: Inflation connected with unemployment.

Currie: Unemployment, right.

DePue: Unemployment for Illinois was at 11.3 percent, up from the previous year, higher than the national average, a couple points higher than the national average. So there's your misery index in Illinois at the time.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Thirty year loan rate, this is the one that I always try to... It boggles my mind. The thirty year loan rate was 16.04 percent.

Currie: Oh, boy. Those are tough, though pills to swallow.

³⁷ "Prouder, Stronger, Better," commonly referred to by the name "Morning in America," is a 1984 political campaign television commercial, known for its opening line, "It's morning again in America." The ad was part of that year's presidential campaign of Republican Party candidate Ronald Reagan. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morning_in_America)

³⁸ The Iran hostage crisis was a diplomatic standoff between the United States and Iran. Fifty-two American diplomats and citizens were held hostage after a group of militarized Iranian college students who supported the Iranian Revolution took over the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. The hostages were held for 444 days from November 4, 1979, to January 20, 1981. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran_hostage_crisis)

- DePue: So, the American economy is weak. The state economy is weak. That means it's going to be a tough budget year. And you've got a sitting Republican governor. This would all look to be a great year for a Democrat to win the governorship.
- Currie: That was '82? That was Adlai; wasn't it?
- DePue: Adlai Stevenson III, that was his first campaign. That's where we're going with this conversation.
- Currie: Okay, okay.
- DePue: It's not hard to realize the main issue in the campaign was the economy, absolutely the economy.
- Currie: Was that when he ran with Grace Mary?
- DePue: On the ticket with...
- Currie: Or was that when he ran with George Sangmeister?
- DePue: The first name, what was the first name?
- Currie: It was '82 and '86, and I...
- DePue: I know '86 he ended up running with George Sangmeister, but that was the Larouche year, and we're not there yet.
- Currie: No, okay. So '82, I'm trying to remember me in that. I worked with Grace Mary in that campaign. So I did a lot of work with her on speeches and traveling and all that kind of stuff. It was fun.
- DePue: Well this might be exactly the kind thing that's unfair to ask of you because you weren't running for governor. You had your own campaign to run.
- Currie: Right, but I was working in that campaign, not much with Adlai, because I was working with Grace Mary. But also his...not easy (laughs).
- DePue: Remind me who Grace Mary is.
- Currie: Grace Mary Stern was the clerk of Lake County. She later went on to have a career in the legislature, first in the House and then in the Senate. She had a column in the Lake whatever, some newspaper out there, a very bright, bouncy, energetic woman, coming from an area that would be good for the Democrats. So we should have on the ticket, someone from Lake County, which is traditionally a fairly Republican base. And here's somebody who brings gender diversity, who brings geographic diversity, who is smart, who is whatever, all those good things. And she was a great attack dog, which is one

of things you want in a lieutenant governor candidate. She played the role to the hilt. Adlai, on the other hand, was stuffy.

DePue: That was my next question. This is the election...

Currie: I want to... I loved Adlai. I thought he was great. But as a candidate, he fell maybe a little short.

DePue: This is the election, as you recall, that was razor thin.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: It was a long time after the election before we knew the outcome. So tell me more about your impressions of Adlai. What about his campaign style didn't work?

Currie: Well, I think he did not seem very much like his father, not very much a man of the people. I think he...

DePue: Did you say, unlike his father?

Currie: But also like his father. His father was also pretty cerebral. On the other hand, I think he had very much a human touch, and I think our Adlai really came to this race with a sense of entitlement. He was tired of the Senate. He wanted to do something different. He was all those things.

And he was in some ways very narrow in his viewpoint. So it was hard to get him to see some of the issues in reproductive rights, in pay equity. Those kinds of things were not his meat and drink. They were kind of new concepts to him. Even when it came to things like "buy American," which was certainly still important to the steel industry, which we still had in Illinois at that time. He didn't buy into it. I think he actually didn't drive American cars (laughs).

I think of him, and maybe it was in the next campaign, but we often called him the tank commander. So we may have had some advertisements featuring him in a large car, looking very sort of Dukakis.³⁹ Remember when Dukakis did that? I think, I think that he was...

³⁹ The presidential campaign of Michael Dukakis began when he announced his candidacy for the nomination on March 16, 1987, in a speech in Boston. After winning the nomination, he was formally crowned the Democratic Party's nominee at the party's convention in Atlanta, Georgia on July 21, 1988. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Dukakis_1988_presidential_campaign)

- DePue: Now, the Dukakis election, that was the '84 election. And, of course, what sank—well you can argue this a lot—was that picture, the famous picture of him with his...⁴⁰
- Currie: Right, right. Maybe it was in the next campaign that we talked about Adlai as our... But in any case, I think one felt that he needed to be more human, more a man of the people, and that was not an easy role for him to play. I don't think that's why he lost. I think it was a very close election, and it was difficult economic times. But even though the other side of that is Jim Thompson...
- DePue: But should explain his win.
- Currie: Jim Thompson got us into trouble, and so therefore... But, you know, with that close an election you can explain it fifteen ways to Sunday, and you'll never get it absolutely right. There were some who felt that there ought to have been an automatic recall. I'm sorry...
- DePue: Recount.
- Currie: ...recount because of the closeness. But that, of course, went to the Supreme Court and didn't happen. And there were people who felt that the court was perhaps wasn't following the law quite as clearly as it ought to have. I have no idea, and I do not take sides in that debate.
- DePue: I was just going to ask you what your opinion was.
- Currie: I have no idea. All I know is that there were some people who felt that one of the justices on the Supreme Court should have been more willing to say yes to the recount, didn't, and they felt that there was just some sense that that justice was perhaps closer to the governor than maybe he should be.
- DePue: I'm hazy on the specifics, but there was a Democratic judge, justice...
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: ...who ended up making the decision...
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: ...and went with Thompson.

⁴⁰ A 1988 campaign ad, featuring a photo of candidate Michael Dukakis in uniform, standing next to a sixty-eight ton tank was meant to bolster the candidate's credibility as a future commander-in-chief. Instead, it would go down as one of the worst campaign backfires in history. (<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2013/11/dukakis-and-the-tank-099119/>)

Currie: Right. Then, as I say, there were people who said, “Oh yes, well, in the pocket.” But I’m totally, totally...

DePue: As I recall, the tanker suggestion was because Stevenson served in Korea shortly after the Korean War, and I think he was in an armor unit or in a tank unit.

Currie: I think he was. I think he was.

DePue: And he was not shy to suggest that perhaps Thompson was dishonorable because he’d never served. He was a draft dodger after all.

Currie: Right. We also went after the state air force in that campaign (Currie laughs).

DePue: What was your function in that campaign?

Currie: My function was primarily working with Grace Mary, the lieutenant governor candidate. So I did some accompanying of her to various places. I worked on speeches with her. But I also had something to do with whatever was happening in the campaign.

I do remember that one of themes was that “Illinois has a larger air force than, I don’t know, 30 percent of the member nations of the United Nations.” It was quite dramatic. It was not, of course, an air force. It was just a state fleet. Anyway, that didn’t win the day. We had some very...people who were really quite good at the jugular, and yet we didn’t win. I don’t know why not (Currie laughs).

DePue: Do you think Stevenson was good at the jugular himself?

Currie: No, but I think that he had people around him who were pretty good at it. I don’t know that you have to be so good at it yourself. In fact, as I say, one of the things you look for in a lieutenant governor or the vice president is someone who’s going to go out there and do the jabbing so that the candidate can be a little bit above it all, above the fray.

I think Adlai may have been a little too much above it. I don’t think that he had the kind of persona that came through to people as being totally with you.

DePue: And yet he wasn’t so above it all that he wasn’t willing to criticize Thompson.

Currie: Oh, no. He did his fair share of criticizing. As I say, there was one example.

DePue: And it was pretty clear to everybody to conclude that both candidates didn’t like each other.

Currie: Right, they did not like each other. That came through loud and clear.

DePue: Do you think that hurt? It should have hurt both of them the same.

Currie: And it probably did. Again, with that close an election, I don't know how you parse what was the explanation, why the one...

You know actually, going back to Walker and Ogilvie, there are fifteen ways to explain that as well. There are people who say, "Well, it was the Crosstown [proposed expressway in Chicago]. Ogilvie was for the Crosstown, and Walker came out against it." Everybody parses these. And then Bill Redmond used to say, "Oh no, no, no. The problem was that Ogilvie was in favor—he would say to me—of your husband's air pollution regulations, and the farmers didn't like it. So they stayed home." That was like about a 50,000 vote difference. The other, the Thompson/Stevenson was, in fact, far closer.

All I'm saying is that even with the slightly larger margin, there are many ways to figure out what happened, why it came out the way it did.

DePue: Well, something in the margin of about 5,400, in that neighborhood...

Currie: Yeah, that's right 5,000.

DePue: ...which is as close as it's ever been.

Currie: And, I think, impossible to explain, one way or the other. I suppose the question one could raise is: "But shouldn't it have been such a strong showing for Adlai, given the state of the economy?" That it isn't so hard to explain. The fact that it's small belies the fact that he ought to have gone romping through. But Illinois has always been a two-party state. And again, I think Thompson did a good job of campaigning.

DePue: Some people would say it's no longer a two-party state; it's pretty darn blue.

Currie: I hope they're right. But, on the other hand, we just elected a Republican governor.

DePue: Well, there would be lots of explanations for why that happened too (laughs).

Currie: Right.

DePue: But that's not why we're here today, even though I started off with that note.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: How would you characterize Thompson as a campaigner?

Currie: I think he was good. I was not very close to what he was actually doing. I was busy with my own candidate. But it struck me that he was the kind of person

who... Mr. Clean, Mr. Integrity. He went after bad people. That's always popular, a U. S. attorney type. At the same time, he could be a good glad-hander. I think that that's shown when it came to things like his response to George Ryan's right-to-work proposal.

So, I don't think he'd made many enemies as governor. He was not at all ideologically right wing. He was not, for example, opposed to reproductive rights. He didn't... Some segments of the community, who might have found a Republican a little hard to swallow, didn't find Thompson hard to swallow. In fact, when he first ran, I think it was [Michael] Bakalis who was the opponent in '78. Remember he had the one two-year term. My recollection is Bakalis was anti-choice, was not willing to live with *Roe v Wade*, and Thompson was. He was able to appeal to moderates. He was able to appeal to women. He was able to appeal across what might today be understood to be traditional partisan ideological differences.

DePue: Thompson, definitely, always has viewed himself as that moderate Republican that you're talking about.

Currie: And I think that's fair. I think, as governor, as he went into the election against Stevenson, I don't think that there were scandals in his past. At least I don't remember any. I don't remember that there were issues in governance, such that there would be big pockets of the population that would be firmly opposed to him. To me that means he's a good candidate.

DePue: I think you've already said you didn't want to offer an opinion on this, but do you believe Stevenson's charges, that there was major vote fraud going on in DuPage County?

Currie: I don't know. I really don't.

DePue: Did you think... I think you've already answered this one but I'll ask you again. Do you think that there should be a recount?

Currie: Yes, I do think there should have been a recount. I think a razor thin margin demands a recount. I had a very good friend who worked in the Kennedy-Nixon campaign—this is many years before—What she maintained—and I never went to look myself to see whether it was accurate—in the face of the whole thing about how Daley stole the election for Kennedy in Illinois, that it wasn't true. She was absolutely insistent that, if you looked at some of the downstate counties, there were more votes than there were registered voters in some of the downstate Republican counties. So I (laughs) don't know whether...

DePue: In the 1960s, you're talking about?

Currie: Yeah, yeah. So I, you know...

DePue: One of the results of the 1982 gubernatorial election was that Dan Webb, who is now the U.S. Attorney, initiated a major investigation out of his office about vote fraud. At the beginning of that investigation, it was going to be both on DuPage County and Cook County. It ended up that he claimed that there was something like in the neighborhood of 100,000 fraudulent votes for Cook County, and eighty people... I can't remember the exact number, but something like eighty people were convicted. Does that ring a bell at all?

Currie: I don't remember it. I'm sure it happened. I just rolled my eyes a bit because I'm not sure exactly what evidence he used. Somehow it seems to me that the idea of vote fraud has always been charged against Chicago Democrats. And as I say, the Kennedy-Nixon election is one wherein Daley got credited by the Republicans with having stolen it for Kennedy. I don't think anybody ever had any evidence of that. I don't remember what evidence...

DePue: So, even though there were convictions, lots and lots of convictions...

Currie: Yeah, but for what? But for what?

DePue: For various aspects of vote fraud.

Currie: Yeah, but, but... I guess I'd like to know how much impact that may have had on the election. So is this when somebody helps somebody vote, when someone from the other party should have been in there as well, looking over their shoulder?

DePue: Well, I think this is a 100,000 votes that were for Stevenson that shouldn't be for Stevenson.

Currie: I find that hard to believe. But I should go back and look and see what I can find about the...

DePue: Why is that...?

Currie: Because, by that time, the voting apparatus itself was much more difficult to tinker with than it might have been in some earlier era. Were people being... Some of it was bribery, "Here's five bucks. Come on, and vote my way," maybe. That's certainly illegal.

But, on the other hand, it's quite possible that people who were taking the five bucks would have voted exactly the way they did, had they not been paid. I really don't remember.

DePue: Did you have an opponent yourself in '82?

Currie: Yes, I did.

DePue: Did you spend more time helping out Grace Mary Stern or working on your own campaign?

Currie: I think I worked more on my own campaign. This was the first time we had single member districts. I think I was paid to do some staffing for Grace Mary. So I think I was actually there a fair bit.

This was the first single member district election. My opponent in the Democratic... No, I'm sorry, no. The only thing that mattered to me was the primary. So I came to help Grace Mary in the general election. For me, the issue was the primary, the first time we had single member districts. And my opponent—I had one opponent in the primary—and he was also a sitting member of the House of Representatives. It was...

DePue: Who was that?

Currie: His name was Ray Ewell, E-w-e-l-l, and he'd been there for some years before I came along, so he'd been a long term incumbent. He had support from the sitting state senator, Dick Newhouse, and the person who'd been my Democratic district mate when we had multi-member districts, and that's Carol Braun. So he had some pretty heavy fire power working for him. But I smashed him.

DePue: So how did the new kid on the block smash him?

Currie: Well, because we worked really hard. We were diligent. We did our homework, and we put together a real campaign. I think that the people who supported him were not very helpful in doing the kind of organizational work you need to do if you want to win.

DePue: Do you remember if there were any particular issues that help sway people?

Currie: One of the things that was an issue was that he'd... I can't remember if he voted no or sat on his hands when, I think before I got there, there had been a vote on the Equal Rights Amendment. And there were a few African American members of the House who... I really don't remember if they voted no or just didn't vote. So that was quite offensive to a lot of women who were supporting the Equal Rights Amendment, and I think that marred his image with that particular part of the population.

There had been a bill that had to do with... I think the bill actually had to do with some manufacturer of guns, believing they needed some kind of change in the law. And what the law did, what the change did—I don't think it was their intention—but what it did was, it made legal in the state of Illinois, machine guns. Well, I had voted no, but my opponent voted yes. That was probably not a very good vote for him, as it turned out. I don't think he intended the outcome. I don't think he intended to make machine guns legal, but that was the effect. We had what you might call a field day with that.

Then finally, this was the time when the question was the sales tax on food and medicine. Rich Daley was then a member of the Senate, and he led the charge to eliminate the state sales tax on food and medicine. Thompson was opposed to that idea, and Jane Byrne [Chicago mayor] was standing up with Jim Thompson. My opponent voted to keep the sales tax on food and medicine, and I voted to abolish it. So we had little radio ads about how Barbara votes for the people and not with the folks at city hall. That was pretty effective.

DePue: To harken back to the beginning of our interview today, the voting populous voted the rascal out (laughs).

Currie: Yeah, yeah, yeah (both laugh).

DePue: Very good.

Currie: I did come out of the League of Women Voters. That was my first foray into politics. But in that campaign, I think I said to somebody, "I don't think I was wearing my white gloves." (DePue laughs)

DePue: Not for then. You didn't have to sweat much for the general election.

Currie: No, no. And I think I won the primary with better than 60 percent of the vote.

DePue: That is a significant...

Currie: Which is a pretty healthy...

DePue: After that election then in '82, now you have single member districts, and now you have a majority in the House, and Mike Madigan becomes the speaker. Do you recall that election in the House? Was that a foregone conclusion?

Currie: I think it was a foregone conclusion.

DePue: Because Bill Redmond was bounced out...

Currie: Right.

DePue: ...after that.

Currie: Right. Wasn't he gone by that time? The first issue was in '81, when George Ryan became speaker. Bill Redmond had been the speaker, and then he became the minority leader. And the question was, was he going to stay the minority leader, or was Mike Madigan going to come in and depose him as minority leader. And there was some effort to do that. I don't remember whether it succeeded. I should, but I don't.

DePue: That would have been, I think, in '78.

- Currie: Eighty-one. No, no. Seventy-eight was Bill Redmond. Bill Redmond was '79. I mean, the term...
- DePue: Maybe I'm confusing that.
- Currie: Bill Redmond was the speaker in '79, when I first came in. Then George Ryan became speaker in '81. There was some effort to... I don't know if it was just an idea to ask Bill Redmond to step down as minority leader and give that job to Mike Madigan. That was what was happening. I think that it happened, but I don't remember.
- DePue: That's the story.
- Currie: We could look at an old blue book, and we could find out in a heartbeat.
- DePue: Yeah, that's the story I'm not familiar with.
- Currie: And then, by the time we came to the '83 term, the term that began in '83, Bill Redmond wasn't there anymore because now we had single member districts, and he, if you recall, was a minority party member from a DuPage County district and was out.
- DePue: There was no way he was going to win...
- Currie: I don't think he ran.
- DePue: ...an election in DuPage County.
- Currie: I don't think he ran, right.
- DePue: You're right; I'm thinking that.
- Currie: But there was this interregnum issue about whether he should stay as the leader of the Democrats during the period after he had been deposed or whether Madigan should take that over. By the time we come to '83, Redmond isn't even there, and Madigan has pretty well consolidated his authority.
- DePue: The next question then is, did your status... Did you get assignments. Did you get any kind of a leadership role?
- Currie: No, not specifically. But, in my first term, we all got to ask for committee assignments, and you got whatever you got. Then there was some kind revolt, led by Glen Schneider, who was from Naperville and was Mr. Education among the House Democrats. It had to do with how we fund...not how much, but the formula for funding public schools. The question was: Do you adjust the formula and include in that transportation and everything else, or do you separate those things out? I don't really remember what the issue was. But I

remember that I stood with Mr. Schneider and the other self-styled independent Democrats, the members of the Democratic Study Group. We all stood together, and we were voting against something, or I don't know, behaving the way rabble-rousers do.

Ultimately there was a settlement, and I do not remember how the settlement happened or what was involved in it. But one of the things I had wanted to be on was the House Revenue Committee. I wanted it, in part, because it was a heavily controlled committee, and I thought it would kind of fun to be on the Revenue Committee and maybe kick up my heels. So, I got to go on the Revenue Committee.

DePue: Heavily controlled?

Currie: Well, it was generally thought that that was a committee that was pretty important, so the leadership didn't let people just follow their own predilections. Actually it was not so controlled as I thought it was going to be. It was an interesting experience, and I learned a lot about revenue. I'm not sure why the hell I ever wanted to (both laugh), except that it was a way of saying, "Okay. I can play with the big boys."

DePue: That leads us into 1983 and the budget year 1983. This is going to be for fiscal year '84. Of course, for Stevenson and Thompson, it was all about the economy and the election. To say that you're going to go for an income tax increase, or a tax increase of any kind, would not have been a good idea, but Thompson is going to request an income tax increase that year.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: Let's again start with the economy. Inflation was at 3.2 percent. So it's way, way down...

Currie: Much better. Much better.

DePue: ...by that time. And unemployment was still high at 11.7 percent, about the same. But it's going to be going down for that year, throughout the year. And the thirty year loan rate was still high, but down to 13.2 percent.

Currie: Better than a sixteen, right.

DePue: It's still seems unimaginable by today's standards...

Currie: It really does; doesn't it? Boy.

DePue: What was your position about Thompson's proposal to increase income tax, a **temporary** increase?

Currie: I was for it. In fact, I probably would have been for permanent.

DePue: That was one of my questions for you.

Carrie: Yeah, I never understood why we go through the rigmarole of saying it's temporary. Then what happens is it turns out you actually needed it for longer than you thought. And then you're pilloried, because you promised temporary, and now you can't keep your promise.

DePue: I'm sure that the rationale for being temporary is, "We've got a recession. We're not always going to have a recession. We'll be out of the recession."

Carrie: Right, and people can say, "Oh, I didn't vote to permanently raise your income tax." It gives people a kind of an out when they deal with their angry electors [who] say, "How did you dare?" "Oh, I only did it for a little bit, just to get us through."

As a matter of public policy, the smarter move is to go ahead and say, "Here's an increase in the income tax." Then if it turns out, down the road you don't need it, give it back. I understand people would say, "Oh, they never cut taxes." But that's not actually true, as you just pointed out, with the example of Reagan and Bush and so forth. They do cut taxes.

DePue: Let me read from an article. This is an undated article; I couldn't find the date on it, but it's in this time frame, from your article that you wrote.

Currie: Oh, oh.

DePue: "The tax package, with a price tag close to one billion, will not provide state government with enough new revenue to buy back all the programs hard times have cut. While the tax hike seems huge, it is not enough to maintain public aid programs as they were a year ago. It isn't enough to make up for earlier cuts, the reduction in the General Assistance Grant levels, from 162 to 144 million, for example. And it surely is not enough to pay for..."

Currie: But wasn't that a 162 a month to a 144 a month? I think that's what it was, the value of the General Assistance Grant.

DePue: Well, maybe I got that wrong. I do recall seeing that.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: "It is surely not enough to pay for increases in rates or grants, though the buying power of the Illinois welfare family has declined over the last five years."

Currie: See, I'm a tax and spend liberal. What did I tell you? (Currie laughs)

DePue: And reiterating what you said that you would not have been for just a temporary increase.

- Currie: Right. I would have preferred a permanent increase for the reason that it is a safer public policy bet than a temporary one. Since you don't know what's going to happen to the economy at the point at which that temporary tax disappears, you have caused a lot of grief to a lot of programs and a lot of people, if you guessed wrong.
- DePue: The operative phrase in all of this, "not enough."
- Currie: Yeah.
- DePue: "Isn't enough." How much more did you need? You're now on the Revenue Committee.
- Currie: I don't remember (laughs), but I pretty clearly was standing with the liberals on that one.
- DePue: Were the liberals... Was there an alternative tax increase?
- Currie: I don't remember whether anybody introduced a bill that would have done that. I think this may just have been more at the general level of discussions. I don't remember. But I do know that mine was not... I was not the only person that was of the view that, while this is certainly a help, it isn't enough to put back into place the programs that we thought were important.
- DePue: You would have been for higher taxes.
- Currie: I would have been for higher taxes.
- DePue: Would you have been concerned that that might cause a negative impact on the economy that the state is just growing out of?
- Currie: Yeah, there's always that tension. But Illinois then, as today, had one of the lowest income taxes in the nation. I think it's hard to say that Illinois was going to suffer significantly when most of the other states, where you might want to pick up and go to operate your business, had higher tax rates than we did.
- DePue: Would you have been okay with a, say, a higher personal income tax, but lower the corporate tax rate?
- Currie: I thought it was important to stick to the ratio that the Constitution prescribed that you can't go beyond, which is eight to five. I understand the argument that says, "You don't need corporate taxes because ultimately people pay the taxes. So all you're doing is a sham, wherein it's the corporation that's paying. But who is the corporation? It is the people."

I've always been of the view that, in fact, that the decision, what you do with taxes, is not entirely elastic, that corporations often eat some portion

of taxes because it makes them uncompetitive if they don't, particularly if they are in a competitive environment with other similarly situated corporations, that is, you're both selling the same tiddlywink. Even if they aren't, there may be reasons why, in order to establish your foothold, you need not to charge so much that the customers will never get around to trying you because your prices are too high. I've always thought that there was plenty of room to believe that the corporate community actually did eat some portion of those taxes, even if not all of them.

DePue: When you say eat, do you mean accept lower...?

Currie: Pay, pay.

DePue: ...profits?

Currie: Yeah, yes.

DePue: But that's an argument for, corporations who are looking to build a new plant or going someplace other than Illinois.

Currie: On the other hand, I'm saying, again, we still had very low corporate income tax rates, as well as individual income tax rates. Where Illinois is expensive is the property tax. If I were the corporations, I'd be more worried about that than I am the income tax. Of course, what we've seen over the last twenty years is a very significant decline in the entities that pay the corporate income tax, because everybody is figuring out some other way to...

DePue: Like through lobbyists, perhaps.

Currie: No. And this is partly the feds. So, subchapter S corporations, limited partnerships, these have come very much to the fore.⁴¹ And under federal tax law—and of course, we incorporate much of that in Illinois—they pay the rate for the individual taxpayer, rather than for the corporation.

DePue: Illinois gets its...

Currie: It is complicated. I don't mean to say that there's a simple answer. Yeah, tax... I'm not, you know, tax the rich to the hilt, and tax corporations out of the state.

DePue: Illinois does get its funds just like almost every other state, from a variety of different kind of taxes. So this question ultimately will be, which type of tax did you generally favor? But, as I understand, you got the income tax; you've got sales taxes, and you'd already talked about sales taxes...

⁴¹ **S corporations** are corporations that elect to pass corporate income, losses, deductions, and credits through to their shareholders for federal tax purposes. (<https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/s-corporations>)

Currie: Property.

DePue: ...being removed from food and medicine. You've got property taxes; you've got gasoline taxes.

Currie: Utility.

DePue: Utility taxes. You've got all kinds of fees and services. So, of that whole group of different kinds of taxes, which type would you generally favor and why?

Currie: I would generally favor an income tax, and I would particularly favor it if it were graduated by rate. I do think that this a fairer tax than most of the others. I think part of the reason that our property taxes are as high as they are in Illinois—And they are. They're much higher than most other states—is because we don't bring in enough to do an adequate job of funding public education.

Of the average property tax dollar in Illinois, sixty cents goes to public schools. The average property tax dollar in other states? Only forty cents goes to public schools. We do, I believe, rely too heavily on the property tax. That has not only the effect that property doesn't always signify wealth, but because that's the way we fund public education, you exacerbate inequities in education.

So, children who grow up in communities with low property wealth get the short end of the stick. Those kids have a very hard time getting the resources they need to give them an adequate kind of education, even if the property tax rates are exorbitant. Children who grow up in communities with significant property wealth don't have to hit it very hard in order to come up with an adequate sum.

So, I would like to see less reliance on the property tax. The only way you do that is through general taxes. And I think income taxes, by and large, are fairer than sales taxes, utility taxes, and gas taxes. Gas taxes, you might argue, are useful for other social goods, like encouraging people to buy more fuel-efficient cars. But as a way of measuring who can pay; what is a fair way to make sure people do pay, I tend to prefer the income tax to most of the others.

DePue: I suspect you know the answer to this. I believe that the Illinois State Constitution says that the state should pick up the majority of the educational expenses.

Currie: Yeah. I think it says, "Takes primary responsibility for financing the system of public education." There was a lawsuit that was brought early, arguing that that means 50 percent plus one. The Illinois Supreme Court said, "No, no, no. It's hortatory language. It just means that the state ought to try."

DePue: Hortatory language [language that urges some course of conduct or action; exhorting; encouraging].

Currie: Hortatory, which I think is a wonderful word.

DePue: It sounds like a word you learn in law school.

Currie: I didn't go to law school, so I didn't learn it there. But anyway, the point that the Court made was that the responsibility was for figuring out how to finance public education, not actually paying for it. So that was basically how the Court interpreted that language, as I understand it.

There have been several lawsuits filed since, but I don't think any of them has got as far as the Illinois Supreme Court, based on other principles, equity principles and so forth. Early on, there was a lawsuit specifically on the language you cited and that failed.

DePue: It sounds like you would have preferred if that lawsuit would have been successful?

Currie: I can understand why a court would look at that language and say, "It doesn't say the state will fund the majority of the cost of public education." I can understand that the Court could have decided it the way it did. I would like the state to take on more responsibility for financing public education than the state ever has, and I think my figures about property taxes are exactly why.

Again, it isn't just that you're relying too heavily on the property tax, which is not a great reflection of wealth. To a degree it is. People who have more expensive houses pay higher property taxes. So there is a correlational, but it isn't as clear a correlation as income and taxes. Because there is such disparity in property wealth, you exacerbate inequities in education, unless you take general taxes as the measure of how you do the primary part of the financing.

DePue: Your comments about property taxes are interesting for a state that is so dependent on agriculture and all that expensive farmland as well.

Currie: Of course we have a special way of assessing farmland (Currie laughs).

DePue: Very different.

Currie: Yeah, very different, and that certainly has made the property tax issue a bigger one than it otherwise would have been. In fact, we just changed... This was sort of interesting. It turned out that, because we hadn't changed the formula... The basic point is that agriculture is taxed, not on the value of the land, should you decide to sell it. It is taxed on the productivity of the land itself. If it's going to make a lot of soybeans, well then that helps figure out what the value is.

But there had not been a change in the formula for figuring out what land values are worth here and how much they're worth there. There was a concern that someone was going to take the state to court and argue lack of uniformity in taxation of the agricultural land. And there was a change in the statute, so...

DePue: As you talk about that, I have this vision of all these farmers lobbying somebody in the government, saying, "No, no, it doesn't produce nearly that much."

Currie: (laughs) Right, right, right.

DePue: "Come on, give me a break here. You're killing me." I'm sorry. I got too... (laughs)

Currie: No, that's perfectly right.

DePue: Here's something else that came up in 1983. I know you're very aware of this, that unions had had collective bargaining rights in the state since 1975, I believe. But that was by executive order of...

Currie: That was Walker. That was Dan Walker.

DePue: ...of Walker. And in 1983 then, there is a piece of legislation doing the same thing...

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: ...that Governor Thompson was more than happy to sign.

Currie: Right. This is the public employee collective bargaining.

DePue: Yeah.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Your position on that?

Currie: I was certainly for it.

DePue: I have heard an interesting critique of that piece of legislation, not over the overall piece of legislation, but perhaps how it was crafted in respect to the teachers. I won't divulge the name, but this is from a fellow Democrat, whose critique was that teachers are required to teach; students are required to attend x number of school days per year. Teachers can go on strike and...(audio interference)

Currie: It sounds like Jim McPike. That sounds like who you're quoting (Currie laughs).

DePue: Well, and...

Currie: And at the end of the day, you have to settle. That means that the kids have to have that same number of days in school, so the teachers don't lose anything, right? That would be the argument?

DePue: Correct, and the other part of it is you have superintendents that are negotiating in local school districts, and the state ends up paying the bills for the pension, especially.

Currie: Well, that's for sure true. But I don't think, at the point at which we approved collective bargaining, people were paying very much attention to the pension issue. My sense is the pension for Chicago teachers, I think, came in in the 1890s.

I think that when the state began picking up the downstate teachers' pensions, that was in the '30s, I think, at a time when we were looking at Social Security and all manner of other changes. I think that there was not a sense in 1983 [of] that the disparity. The unfairness between the Chicago teachers' pension and downstate, was not front and center, in part because at that time the Chicago teachers' pension was very well funded, and the downstate was not. Any effort to try to merge would have the Chicago teachers up in arms, right? Completely. I don't think that played anything like the major role it has since come to play.

DePue: But do you think that critique is valid?

Currie: Maybe to a degree, but wouldn't that... I guess I'm not sure that I buy it, as against other groups that might be unionized. That is, most of the time when there is a settlement of a strike, there is something that helps make the workers who struck whole. That's really all you're talking about here. So, does that mean the teachers are totally different from every other kind of employee? I don't know. If you look at the history of strikes or the threats of strikes and what happens when there is a settlement, I don't know that it's so very different.

Now, maybe it makes a difference that the state is picking up the pension. But take that part away, because it was not an issue at the time. What you still have is that the bulk of the money that's going to be used to fund the final contract is coming from the local property taxpayer. So, I'm not sure I buy it, that this is so totally different from every other kind of union collective bargaining experience.

DePue: I believe it's also in the 1983 time frame that RTA [Regional Transportation Authority] was very much in discussion.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Can you describe very quickly RTA, what the argument was about and your position on that?

Currie: This is way... When was RTA... '70s, '70s?

DePue: Regional Transit Authority.

Currie: Yeah, I really don't remember, but I think the issue was whether CTA [Chicago Transit Authority] was getting too much money and that the CTA patrons were not paying their fair share. There was a settlement, which I don't think was a very particularly good one, that required—if I'm right about the year—that required a significant portion of CTA funds to come from the fare box.

I think that, given the amount of transportation services provided by the CTA, compared to Pace [Suburban Bus, Chicago suburbs] and Metra [Chicago area commuter rail system], I think there were people who felt, from the outset, that it was not a very fair formula, in terms of the operation of the whole system.

It was kind of an anti-Chicago move, and I don't really remember how the politics played out. I do know that, at that point, of course, we had Pate Phillip [Republican, DuPage County] as president of the Senate, and he was happy to beat up on Chicago. I really don't remember all the politics that went into it. Whether there were other items on the table that made this give away match against some other debt, I just don't remember.

DePue: This is something I think you and I have talked a little before as well. You've often been critical of Governor Thompson's use of amendatory vetoes.

Currie: Oh, I love it. I love criticizing his use of amendatory vetoes. I criticize every governor for the misuse, abuse of amendatory vetoes.

DePue: I'm going to read another quote here. This is from an October 15, 1983 article. "I think the amendatory veto, rather than improving the legislative process, impairs it." Then you've got a specific here, "The governor's amendatory veto of HB 234 [Freedom of Information Act] undid the compromise so carefully hammered out in the legislature. He deleted criminal penalties against those who would initially flout the law."

Currie: Oh, that was the Freedom of Information Act.

DePue: This is Freedom of Information Act, yes. I'm sorry; I didn't mention that.

Currie: Yep, yep.

DePue: “He hid architectural and engineering plans for public buildings from public view. He drew a curtain of secrecy over even the non-sensitive operations of Department of Corrections.”

Currie: That’s right. He did all of those things, and I thought it was abusive. But you know what? We didn’t have the votes to override, and we decided to go ahead and accept the amendatory veto, rather than have the bill die.

DePue: Now, amendatory veto is one of the factors that came into play after the Illinois State Constitution of 1970.

Currie: Right.

DePue: The line item veto, amendatory veto, gave quite a bit of power to the executive. Earlier you talked about JCAR as that firewall, if you will, from executive abuse. Having said all that, could you kind of elaborate on your objections to his use of the amendatory veto.

Currie: Okay. Part of it is political, with a small p, in the sense that there’s a tendency on the part of lawmakers to want to support the governor of their own party, when it is the governor of their own party who is exercising his or her authority. It undoes the balance, the balance that may have made it possible to pass the bill in the first place has now become somewhat unbalanced because people who might have supported it now want to be helpful to their governor in power, and so they become less supportive.

I think the more important issue is that often bills that have been heavily negotiated do represent a kind of a consensus, a kind of a negotiated settlement. And when you begin giving governors the authority to take out step number one or a very important block of the total, that upsets the balance in ways that I think do not reflect the legislative will and can’t.

Sometimes governors use the amendatory veto to make changes that should have been made, and maybe that’s an appropriate use. “There was a mistake.” “We didn’t say it artfully.” “We didn’t say what we meant.” But in the example of the Freedom of Information Act, in the example of the replacement tax, the... Remember the ’70 constitution said that the personal property tax must be replaced, and then the Supreme Court in ’79 said, “Yeah, and they meant it.” (DePue laughs) Then we went, and we did. We set a rate, and the governor, Jim Thompson, reduced the rate. Well, the rate was a very important part of the compromise that led to passage of the replacement.

DePue: Abuse of power, an unconstitutional abuse of power?

Currie: Then there was a court case. But some have argued that it was a friendly court case. That is to say that it was kind of a setup, so the people who were benefited because the rate was reduced were happy to go to court and make a

flimflam case that it shouldn't have happened, but they didn't really mean it. So, we were kind of stuck.

That was, I think, an example wherein the reason that it passed in the first place was because there were elements that made everybody comfortable with the outcome. When you give the governor the authority to unsettle those elements, at the same time that the governor has some way of attracting members of his or her own party because they like to support their governor, I think you've upset an important legislative balance.

In a way, I think, that's what I was saying actually about JCAR too, that yeah, okay, yes, of course agencies should not be adopting rules and regulations that are not in concert, not respectful of and responsive to, the legislative language. But to interpose another layer, another way of dealing with the problem, may not be the best way to do that.

Now, having said all that, when it comes to the amendatory veto, I'm not on nearly as solid ground, from the court's perspective, as I might be. The first time the amendatory veto was used, I think, was by Ogilvie, and it had to do with parochial school funding. What had happened was the legislature passed a bill that permitted spending public money on parochial schools. In the meantime, before the bill got to the governor's desk, the United States Supreme Court had ruled in a way that made the bill look unconstitutional.

Ogilvie inserted the word not, n-o-t (both laugh). The Illinois Supreme Court said, "You cannot turn on its head the meaning of the statute." Right? But then, in later court opinions, the court had been actually pretty willing to let the governors use the amendatory veto as they liked.

There was an effort, I think in the early '80s... What was his name? It was a legislator, Dwight Friederichs. His was an effort to put on the ballot a constitutional amendment that, I think, took away or made it [the amendatory veto] much tougher to use, and it failed. So my objections to the amendatory veto haven't found a responsive ear on the Court.

DePue: How about the use of amendatory veto on a budget bill, to reduce the amount of money that various agencies and programs are getting?

Currie: Well, I feel less strongly about that; although, as a matter of principle, I don't like it. But as a matter of practical reality, I don't think it does the same kind of damage, to say, "Okay we're going to spend less here. We're going to cut out this line. We're going to reduce." It just hasn't operated the same way that the substantive amendatory veto has. But as a matter of principle, I don't think the governor should be able to do that either. They should be...

DePue: But it does the legislators to criticize the governor, "I didn't reduce that; the governor reduced that."

Currie: Um-hmm, that's true. So, if I were the governor, I'd be careful how I used it (both laugh). And, of course, there are different majorities for restoring money that the governor cuts from a budget. If it's a reduction veto, it takes fewer votes to restore than it does to override, if he takes an entire line out.

DePue: I'm going to violate my own principle and pull us right into the contemporary era and right into national politics and the current discussion about the overuse of executive orders by the current president and the bureaucratic state, in terms of regulations and how much power the Congress has given to the bureaucracies.

Currie: That's been a long-term issue. And remember, it was actually Bush who got in trouble first with executive orders. And we should talk about signing statements too, because that's quite an interesting arena. There are obviously places where presidents can do executive orders, governors as well. Parsing which ones are okay and which ones are not, I think that has to be left to the courts.

Again, back to bureaucracies and whether they are running rough shod. I do think the Clean Air Act of 1970 gave enormous scope to the Environmental Protection Agency. If Congress didn't like it, then they should have passed legislation to rein in that agency, rather than now crying foul that they've gone too far.

DePue: Let's pull it back to 1984 and Illinois then.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: We're not going to go too much farther because we're both getting close to the time that we wanted to close today.

Currie: And besides, I'll probably lose my voice.

DePue: I wanted to get your thoughts on Thompson's desire to have the 1992 World's Fair in Chicago.

Currie: Oh, oh my god.

DePue: This wraps right into this discussion about McCormick Place too, I believe.⁴²

Currie: I don't remember McCormick Place being connected. The idea was to do a world's fair, and the location would have been Northerly Island. It was very much the 1893 World's Fair all over again and, to a degree, the '33 World's Fair. I'm not sure. I was kind of in the thick of that because it was... I chaired

⁴² McCormick Place is the largest convention center in North America. It's located on and near the shore of Lake Michigan, about 2 mi south of downtown Chicago, Illinois, United States. McCormick Place hosts numerous trade shows and meetings. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McCormick_Place)

the committee, the House committee, whose responsibility the World's Fair discussions were.

DePue: Is that your district or close to it?

Currie: No. No, north of my district.

DePue: That's what I thought.

Currie: It's a very tough, a very tough issue because what you have is, on the one hand, a world's fair gives scope to imagination and vision and wonderful new ideas and new techniques for dealing with old problems and opportunities for different ways of dealing with transportation, housing and all the rest of it, the Montreal, whatever that habitat thing was called. But there also was a fair amount of tension because most world fairs were not, in fact, leaving behind anything as valuable as what the taxpayers had ponied up to stage them in the first place.

It's also fair to say that World's Fairs were not bringing in the kinds of numbers that might have been true in an earlier, more golden era. My concerns were, among others, that although... And I used to have these fights with my husband who thought, "Have a world's fair. Let's do something imaginative. Let's see something big, visionary." But the problem, I kept telling him, was that no one was coming up with visionary, new and exciting things to do.

He said, "Then why don't you do it yourself?" And I said, "Well, I'm not a planner. I don't know how." I didn't have the impression that, while the business community was pretty staunchly for it, I didn't see grand schemes that were going to leave in their wake significant improvements that were going to make the lives of the people of Chicago better.

The cost issues were certainly real. My impression at the end... And then there were people who very concerned about the use of Northerly Island, environmental questions, environmental concerns. At the end of the day, my...

Oh, and then there were all the economic analyses, which were not very effective. It's the kind of idea that, if you don't spend... If people don't spend the money on the world's fair, they'll take the money, and they'll put it in a sock and put it under the pillow, and the money will never be used to improve, increase or goad economic activity. That's just plain, patently false. You had a lot of projections that were based on assumptions that I think were not real. That happens often when you get economic projections about what this or that is going to do. Always there's an assumption that, if you don't do this, the money won't get spent. Which is, as I say, not accurate.

DePue: Where was the money going to come from in the first place, a bond issue?

Currie: Bond issue. And there were all the corporate types who were going to do their part, but it was never very clear exactly what that would mean. My recollection is that the mayor did not show... I don't remember that Harold Washington ever came out and said, "Don't do it." But I don't have the impression that he was really leading the charge.

Basically, Michael Madigan pulled the plug. We went to Northerly Island. We went to Meigs Field. And he said there's not going to be a world's fair.

DePue: One of the aspects of your critique, at the time, was also—and this is where the link with the McCormick Place—He said, "Okay, you said it was going to cost this much. There were \$50 million in additional costs. Why should we believe..."

Currie: Right, right, right.

DePue: "...to be the price tag, when you have that kind of a track record?"

Currie: And it's not just our track record, but if you looked at other cities that were hosting World's Fairs, you saw that kind of imbalance. I don't think things have improved since 1993.

DePue: Or Olympics...

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: ...which has kind of replaced World's Fairs in many respects.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: Let's go back to the income tax increase that now is ready is to expire by the time we get to '84, '85. I want you to read—instead of me reading and doing a poor job on your quotes—something from October 25, 1984.

Currie: I wasn't there.

DePue: It's in bold print.

Currie: Okay. "Four years of human service budget cuts, four years of fiscal sleight of hand,"—It should have had a "so." Never mind—"four years of penny-wise but pound-foolish federal policy. The deck's been stacked against the poor. The safety net's been slashed to ribbons. Four years, a lot of misery for a lot of Illinois families. What will the next four bring?" Oh, pretty strong minded. Do you want it back? (both laugh)

DePue: This is certainly...

Currie: Was the year when Ronald Reagan was classifying ketchup as a vegetable? I think it was.

DePue: It could be. I don't know.

Currie: Yeah '84, sure.

DePue: Why was that such a...

Currie: School lunches, right. You have to make sure that the school lunches that the public is paying for meet nutritional goals. Well, if you reclassify ketchup as a vegetable, I think many people thought that was probably not great nutritional advice for our children.

DePue: We said many people, to include Barbara Flynn Currie?

Currie: Absolutely, absolutely. Liberal credentials right out there, on my sleeve (both laugh).

DePue: I'm going to finish today's discussion with maybe a little bit more difficult subject. I've got written down here—Maybe I'm taking some editorial license—"The chronic failure of the state to adequately fund public sector pensions systems, 1983, a very tough budget year. The State University Retirement System, 26.7 percent funded at what the actuary said should have been there."

Currie: Should be.

DePue: So, it's not statutory. I'm using what the actuaries are saying.

Currie: Right.

DePue: (continues reading) "Teachers' Retirement System, quite a bit better but 43.8 percent." Would you say that's not nearly enough to adequately fund it?

Currie: Right, I would say it's not. I would also say, I don't think that government has to fund government pensions at 100 percent. I would say, you can certainly go down to 80 percent. You don't have to deal in stratospheric numbers because I don't believe you're going to go out of business.

Unfortunately, when we did decide that we were going to jump into the business of really funding our pensions systems, we said we're going to go to 95 percent. I think that was probably not necessary. But that's a separate discussion.

DePue: And teachers' is always a sensitive one because, as you mentioned before, they don't get Social Security.

- Currie: And neither do most state workers.
- DePue: I think the next one SERS, State Employees' Retirement System, and that includes myself..
- Currie: S-E-R-S. Yeah, yeah and then S-U-R-S [State Universities Retirement System].
- DePue: Thirty-nine point eight percent...
- Currie: Yep, yep terrible.
- DePue: ...that I am contributing to Social Security. I think most state employees do.
- Currie: Ah, okay. No, most state workers haven't. Most state didn't, and that may have changed.
- DePue: You could very well be right there. Judicial Retirement System, 54 percent and...
- Currie: The General Assembly Retirement System.
- DePue: At?
- Currie: Thirty-two? Twelve?
- DePue: Ninety-one point three percent.
- Currie: Really? Ninety... That's not true today.
- DePue: There is consistency through most of the Thompson years that you guys were funding your own system at a much higher level than the other ones.
- Currie: That I did not remember. I don't remember that being a political issue. In fact, it was during the Thompson era, I don't remember pension funding being a huge issue. I think that was truer when we got to Jim Edgar.
- DePue: It wasn't on most people's radar screen. And when we interviewed Dr. Bob Mandeville, he says, "Well, what are you going to do? Are you going to pay things right now? Are you going to tell that mother that she can't get her welfare payment? Or are you going to put into pension funds then?"⁴³ That's probably a gross simplification of what he was saying, but...

⁴³ After many years working in the aerospace industry and NASA, **Dr. Robert Mandeville** began a second career working in the Illinois Bureau of the Budget, first for Governor Richard Ogilvie in the early 1970s. From 1977 through 1990 Dr. Mandeville served as Governor Jim Thompson's Budget Director, successfully steering the state's budget through the deep recession of the early 1980s, and into the boom years of the later 1980s. (<https://www2.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/OralHistory/illinoisstatecraft/Thompson/Pages/MandevilleRobert.aspx>)

Currie: But, that's basically it, right? And at that time there was not the kind of concern about the long-term health of the pension system that there is today, because we hadn't gone through the recession of 2008, because the benefit levels may not have been so...

I think many people think that the decision to do a 3 percent compounded annual COLA [Cost of Living Adjustment] is what has created a lot of our problems. I don't think that happened until '89 or maybe even a little later.

DePue: But that's only an issue if the inflation rate is at 2 percent instead of 10 percent, right?

Currie: Right. Well that's right; that's right.

DePue: One other question then, for today. How did your re-election bid go in 1984?

Currie: Eighty-four. Did I have an opponent in '84? I don't remember that I had an opponent in '84.

DePue: So, not a challenging year for you.

Currie: Well, I'll double check before we talk again, if I can make a note and I can remember why I made it (DePue laughs). What was I thinking when I did the pay equity note to myself? What was that about?

DePue: I normally listen to the end of the last interview session. I don't recall that that came up specific...

Currie: It may have been earlier in the conversation. Oh, no, I think I did have an opponent in '84. I think that was a woman who had been a member of the Chicago Board of Education and very active in my neighborhood, lived in my neighborhood.

DePue: You say opponent, a Republican opponent or the Democratic primary?

Currie: No, no, for me it's almost always the Democratic primary because it's a district that is not... It's not **only** Democratic, but it is...

DePue: Well, it's what is called a safe district.

Currie: Yes, as most districts are, no matter how they're remapped.

DePue: Which allows the leaders to focus their resources.

Currie: Yeah, right. And actually, again, I think the idea... Well, I'm not good enough at that to figure out how to find '84 to find out who my opponent was. but I

think it was Florence Cox. That could have been later. I should remember these things.

So remember that the Illinois Constitution puts pressure on remap; if there is division, it encourages a compromise. What happens when you do the compromise is, "Okay, I'll take my areas of strength. These are yours, and now we're just going to fight over these five in the middle." So, the idea of safe districts is not a function of one party rule. I mean, I think that happens a lot.

DePue: It reminds me of the... I think it was the 2000 congressional district map for Illinois. To me, you look at the map, and it says, "Here's the ultimate definition of gerrymandering." And it wasn't the City of Chicago; it was some of the downstate districts.

Currie: Sure, yeah, and then the 2010 wasn't so very different.

DePue: Yeah (Currie laughs), exactly. Well it's been a lot of fun for me. Hopefully it's not been too painful for you.

Currie: Oh, absolutely. Oh, no, not at all. It's just that it's annoying to not remember as well as I should, all of these things.

DePue: Thank you.

(end of transcript #4)

Interview with Barbara Flynn Currie

#ISL-A-L-2014-049.05

Interview #5: March 23, 2016

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, the 23rd of March 2016. This is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I’m with Legislator Barbara Flynn Currie. I guess we should call you Leader Currie, right?

Currie: Oh, I hate that. I hate that. I hate that.

DePue: Why?

Currie: It just drives me crazy. I can’t tell you why; it just does. Just plain old Barb will do (laughs). You know, you wander all over, and it’s all these people saying, “leader this,” “leader that.” It becomes very... I don’t know; I just don’t like it.

DePue: But what title would you prefer to use if there was a title?

Currie: Representative. That would be good. I wouldn’t mind that. When I first started out in Springfield, the lobby corps called all representatives “senator,” which I thought was just very funny. I wouldn’t mind if people just called me representative. If they feel a need to speak to me by title at all. There’s a way in which... Because they call you leader; they feel they have to keep saying the word leader. It becomes extremely repetitive, monotonous, and why?

DePue: In part because its two syllables less than representative.

Currie: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

DePue: We are in your office, the speaker's complex of offices in the Bilandic Building in downtown Chicago.

Currie: Indeed we are.

DePue: And it works a little bit better for me than the office that you had down in your district.

Currie: Right, right. I know, that was terrible (laughs). Your equipment didn't work.

DePue: Well that was a unique experience. I kind of enjoyed it. Let's start with two things that aren't related to the outline I've got here. Let's start with the loss within the last couple weeks of Senate President Phil Rock.

Currie: Yeah, yeah. He had been ill for quite some time, and the ailment had kept him from being a strong participant in public discourse and public dialogue. He'd been pretty much out of it, I believe, for the last several years. But he certainly was the last of an important breed in Illinois state politics. He was very much a statesman. He was somebody who could operate well in a bipartisan fashion, but he also had a very strong sense of some issues...

The first time I was in Springfield, after I had won the primary, which in the district I was representing was pretty much tantamount to winning the November election, there was a bill up having to do with the decision of the Nazis to march in Skokie. It was a measure that was intended to stop them from the people who come from that area. I happened to be in the Senate when Phil Rock spoke.

He spoke against that measure, and he did so on clear civil libertarian, free speech grounds. He was pulling no punches. He was not making himself a large number of friends within the Jewish community in particular and on the North Shore, but he spoke from the heart. He spoke about things that obviously mattered.

I was impressed that somebody whose reputation at that point was not so much that of a statesman but, you know, a partisan, machine Chicago Democrat, even though, in fact, he was from Oak Park. I was quite impressed.

DePue: You've mentioned that he was the kind of person that was bipartisan, that could cross the aisle.

Currie: Yes.



Representative Currie in front of her newly opened district service office on East 53rd Street in Chicago in the late 1990s.

DePue: That gets me to the next question here, or maybe I can get your comments on the current state of affairs, as far as the budget's concerned in Illinois.

Currie: Well, there is no state of affairs. We have no budget, and I see no reason to think that there is a budget anywhere in sight. My understanding is that people like former Governor Thompson, former Governor Edgar have all said to the current incumbent, Governor Rauner, it's time for you to get serious and put together a budget.

There are real consequences for real people in that there is no budget. Many court orders, many continuing appropriations mean that there are lots of groups that are protected. State workers continue to get paid, even if they can't actually do the job for which they were hired. The Medicaid payments to providers, coverage for clients, that continues under earlier consent decrees in federal court. [The] same is true of much of the work of the Department of Children and Family Services [DCFS]. And, of course, the governor signed the elementary and secondary education budget, but higher ed goes without appropriations. The Monetary Award Program, the scholarship program for low income college students, that has not seen a penny.

Many services for disabled adults, many other programs are just left on the cutting room floor. So, it is not inconsequential that there is no budget. Just in and of itself, it is, I think, a dereliction of duty that the governor is not able to come to terms with the need to govern, to fund Illinois state government.

DePue: You're speaking as a loyal Democrat. Is there anything that the Democrats are willing to give, in terms of what Governor Rauner's turn-a-round agenda is?

Currie: We have consistently been willing to compromise on all kinds of issues. For example, three years ago, we did adopt a major reform in the workers' comp program. Did we do enough? It's always hard to know, but I can't believe that there is not further room for compromise on many of the issues that the governor has talked about.

I don't have the impression... I've not been in the meetings between the leaders and the governor—There haven't been very many of them of late—I've not been in those meetings, but my impression is that when people begin trying to talk about the actual specifics of a workers' comp program, that it's not really what the governor is interested in. He's not interested in a compromise. He wants a very different system from that which we have. I don't think it is a sensible place for him to stand, and it seems to me that to risk the budget and important services to people who depend upon Illinois state government for their livelihood, for their ability to survive in the world, I think that's the wrong way to go.

So, yeah, I am a strong Democrat. I don't think there's any reason... I've served under three different Republican governors, and yes there are differences in priorities; there are with Democratic governors as well. At the end of the day, there is usually some accommodation to the priorities of the legislature, to the priorities of the governor. But that doesn't mean that either side gives up everything. It doesn't mean that either side says, "Okay, I capitulate. You can have it all your way."

That's not the way government works. It may be the way this governor has made his fortune. It may be that he is able to come in and, you know, "Off with their heads," heads roll, and he's done. But that's not the way government works.

DePue: I'll ask you one other question here. Then we'll move on to the outline I've got, with 1985. This might be grossly over simplifying things, but you can either have a scenario where the legislature and the governor agree on a budget for fiscal year 2006, which is the one we're in right now...

Currie: Sixteen.

DePue: ...2016, or maybe just kind of move right beyond that and do a budget that's agreed upon for fiscal year 2017, or continued grid lock. Which of the three would you think we're going to have, up to June?

Currie: I would say continued grid lock. I don't see any, any reason for optimism, that there is a willingness to go beyond the position that the governor has taken, and I think it's unfortunate.

DePue: I just fibbed a little bit. Are we paying the utility bills for this building right now?

Currie: I don't know that we're paying all of them, but I... (both laugh) That's a question. Our vendors are not happy.

DePue: Yeah, much of Springfield depends on that.

Currie: Much of Springfield is very unhappy.

DePue: Okay, let's dive into 1985. I don't expect you to have a comment on all of these. You're welcome to offer your opinions on some of these. On the new seat belt legislation. Back in the '80s, that was a contentious issue with a lot of folks.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Do you remember anything about that? Would care to comment on that?

Currie: Well, I actually supported the legislation, and the whole experience was an interesting one. The automobile safety people, the insurance people, were the major pushers behind seat belt legislation, as a safety issue.

There were two forms of opposition. It actually started out with Giddy Dyer. She had a bill that I think required car seats for babies. I think it was only that, rather than the general proposition that all front seat passengers have to wear one. And she got about twelve votes. It was really quite discouraging. The arguments against her were all based on the “nanny state,” and “Are they now going to say we can’t ski off high mountains?” The bill was about small children.

Then, just a very, very, very few years later, suddenly we’re looking at legislation that mandates seat belts for everybody in the front seats, again pressed very hard by the safety council. And the arguments against it continued the same: Nanny statism, “I don’t want people telling me I have to wear a seat belt. I don’t like to. It takes too much time. It’s too much trouble.”

The other issue that surfaced was a concern on the part, particularly of members of minority groups, giving the police one more opportunity to stop you for essentially driving while black or brown was not a good idea. So one of the things that was added to the legislation was to say that the failure of the driver to wear a seat belt would not be a primary means for enforcing the law.

The first bill that passed only said, “If you stop a car because the headlights are out, and it turns out that the driver isn’t wearing the seat belt, then you can charge him with that offense, as well as the primary offense of not having head lights on in the dark.” That was a very contentious issue, and it took a long time before the legislature said, “Okay. We’re going to make this a primary opportunity for the police to stop a motorist, and that then becomes the reason for the ticket.” But the concern on the part of members of minority groups was that “Giving the cops one more reason to stop me is only to encourage them in a pattern of racist stops on the highway.”

DePue: Was that a concern you personally had?

Currie: It was, yes, although this is what I said to myself, Look, there are plenty of excuses that the cops are already using to stop people on the highway who are brown or black. Since the ‘80s, in the early 2000s, we required the state police and the local police to begin recording traffic stops, and low and behold, yeah, there were a lot of stops that were not made because there was some serious problem with the motorist. There were racial disparities in the stops that the police made. But my thought was that that happens, even without this additional excuse. And I didn’t think the additional excuse was reason enough to stop the safety issue from moving forward.

- DePue: As I recall, that was an issue though that Jim Edgar, who was the secretary of state at the time, was promoting as well. They wanted to be able to tout that that was one of his accomplishments.
- Currie: He would have been. Secretaries of state are generally very concerned about mayhem on the highways. John Cullerton was the principle sponsor and principle spokesman in the assembly for the measure. I don't remember Edgar's involvement, but I would imagine that you're absolutely right, that yeah, that would have been an important thing to him.
- DePue: The next thing I have on here is another call on your part about gun control, an appeal for gun control. You and I have talked about that before. I don't know if you have anything specific to say about that particular year on this.
- Currie: I don't remember. I just don't. I should be looking at what I introduced one year after another, but I didn't.
- DePue: But it's not realistic on my part to expect that kind of a memory, any more than...
- Currie: Well, I continued to press for gun control. At one point we were talking about taxes on the sale of ammunition, as well as other kinds of ways to stem the trade in weaponry. When George Ryan became governor, he really kind of led the charge for a possible ban on military style assault weapons. That became very much his crusade, and I was very happy to be part of that.
- DePue: This one, I suspect, you will remember. It's around this time in '85 that the McCormick Place expansion was in the works. But you had an article where you're talking about the projections that it was coming in at \$187 million, and now its \$50 million beyond that.
- Currie: Right, but I also was highly skeptical of the economist's reports about the tourism and the convention business that would come along with it, because there were other developing convention centers, Orlando, Las Vegas. And it wasn't clear to me that the rosy picture about how well we'll do if we do this expansion was likely to be substantiated.
- DePue: What have the numbers proven since then?
- Currie: Well, in fact, actually McCormick Place has struggled from time to time, not so much because of space but because of union rules and the costs of running a convention in Chicago, as against Orlando, as against Las Vegas and some of the other places that were cropping up.

Now many would point out that, in fact, in both Orlando and Las Vegas a lot of the people who are running conventions like to hire people from Chicago because they have the skills, the expertise to know how to make it work. But there were concerns that very rigid work rules made it difficult to

attract all the conventions that might have been available to Chicago had we had slightly different rules. And those have undergone all kinds of change over time.

DePue: Were you, in general, in favor of the expansion, just critical of the over cost of it?

Currie: I was critical of the cost, and as I say, I wasn't convinced that this... I think there was a report that maybe [there were some things] Kent Redfield had done, at what was then Sangamon State University, that did throw some pretty cold water on the projection.⁴⁴ I was concerned about it on that score as well.

DePue: On kind of a related subject, this is about the time that Governor Thompson and others are pushing the notion that Chicago might be a good place to have another World's Fair.

Currie: Oh right. Oh boy. I was very much engaged in that controversy [she pronounces it "con-trov'-ersee"] since I headed the House committee.

DePue: What was that word? I don't know...

Currie: Controversy [repeats the word as she said it before], it's the Anglophile pronunciation. My mother was born in England, so it happens...

DePue: So that one rang a bell with you, the subject does.

Currie: Yeah, controversy we would say, but anyway. I chaired a House committee, I think over the course of two separate General Assembly, on the issue of a World's Fair. It was a very complicated, very difficult topic, and there were certainly lots of arguments for and against it.

I think one of the problems that we had with the fair...one of the problems that made the fair, at the end of the day, not sustainable, was that there was not a very clear vision about how this fair would operate and what the leftovers would be, in terms of improving the lot of the people of Chicago.

My husband never forgave me, actually, that we didn't do it. But I kept telling him if there were people who have real imagination, real grit, and knew what they were doing, I might have felt quite differently.

⁴⁴ **Kent Redfield**, Professor Emeritus of political science at the **University** of Illinois at Springfield (formerly Sangamon State University) has published a number of reports, articles and books focused on his research interests, which include state campaign finance, legislative redistricting, legislative behavior, policy analysis and municipal government and special districts, authored **McCormick Place Expansion Funding Options in 1984**. (<https://chipublib.bibliocommons.com/v2/record/S126C816722>)

But World Fairs in that era were not doing particularly well economically, and the public benefit that they left in their wake was not looking all that sterling, all that strong. And there were real questions about how the financing would work, and if you haven't drawn the people that you hoped to draw, then who picks up the additional cost? Those questions were never, in my mind, satisfactorily resolved.

DePue: That means you did not support it.

Currie: No, at the end of the day I stood with the Speaker at Meigs Field. We made an announcement that the World's Fair was dead. There would not be one, and there wasn't.

DePue: Well, this is jumping ahead about three or four decades, but when the issue came up a few years back, early in the Obama administration, putting forth the notion that Chicago would be a great place to have the Olympics, what did you think about that?

Currie: Well, was that Obama? I thought that was Daley.

DePue: I'm sure it was Daley, but it was during the early years of the Obama administration.

Currie: Right. And I know Michelle went off to wherever it was they were making the final decision.

DePue: Denmark or someplace.

Currie: Yeah, yeah. Speaking as, in part, a south-sider, I wasn't sure it was a great idea. There was talk about doing all kinds of things in Washington Park, which is just outside my district. It's an Olmsted [Charles Olmsted, famed American landscape architect] park.⁴⁵

With the Olympics, one of the things you again have to do is to leave a residual, leave something behind. And one of the things they wanted to leave behind was a stadium in Washington Park. I agreed with park advocates that this was not the best legacy for a Charles Olmsted park.

There were also concerns, the usual kind. Will it be a money loser? Will it be a money maker? Will it be so difficult to organize transportation and so forth that the city is going to grind to a halt? I was surprised that we didn't make the second cut. I suspect that our mayor and the others were pretty good

⁴⁵ John Charles Olmsted (1852–1920), was an American landscape architect. He and his younger brother, Fredrick founded Olmsted Brothers as a landscape design firm, which became well known for designing many urban parks, college campuses, and other public places. John Olmsted's body of work from over 40 years as a landscape architect has left its mark on the American urban landscape. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Charles_Olmsted)

at counting noses, but they failed to count noses in the first round. My impression is that...Who was the guy? Sam...Samaranch, something like. He was the outgoing head of the Olympic Committee. He wanted it in Spain or wherever it was he was from, and there were a lot of people who voted with him on the first ballot.

DePue: That might have been Brazil's year.

Currie: Everybody knew that Brazil was going to be a principal opponent. And Olympics' people were making the argument, "It's time for South America to be able to be a destination." So it looked as if it was going to be a Chicago-Brazil contest. But Chicago didn't make the second round. And so it was Samar, something like that?

DePue: Samarkand?

Currie: Samaranch, something like that.⁴⁶ And I think some of the analysts later said that what happened was a lot of people were casting their first vote, kind of a sympathy vote, for whatever country he was from and that Chicago didn't do a very good job counting first votes. [They] counted second votes pretty well but not the first votes. So we were out before the second round. It was quite an embarrassment.

DePue: In June, I think there's legislation that Thompson signed for a public utilities act. This is during the time frame when the utilities are being reconfigured to a certain extent.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: Do you remember anything about that legislation?

Currie: I served on the committee that was dealing with the public utilities stuff, and there was one central issue. There was some particularly consumer issue that people were concerned about, whether we were selling out the consumers. There was one issue in particular that stood out. Was that the bill that [Congressman] Denny Hastert sponsored?

DePue: I believe it was.

Currie: I think it was.

DePue: I believe it was. He was very active in that.

⁴⁶ Juan Antonio Samaranch was elected President of the IOC on 16 July at the 83rd IOC in Moscow, that was held prior to the 1980 Summer Olympics – between 15 and 18 July 1980. He officially assumed presidency at the end of the Moscow Olympics.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_International_Olympic_Committee)

Currie: Right, and he was part of this regulatory overview about the telephone biz.

DePue: This might be unrelated, but it gives me an opportunity to ask you for your opinion on Pat Quinn during this time frame, the Public Utilities Board, the agenda that he was trying to push at the time.

Currie: Right. Well, I always thought that Pat was a bit of a bomb thrower. I would certainly say that he was the kind of populist who was going to be with the consumers, however well or ill advised. I think what happens in this whole arena is that there are people who stand, through the Citizens Utility Board or with the public utilities...

DePue: I said that wrong, didn't I?

Currie: Yeah.... at the attorney general's office or the Chicago City Council tend to be very strong supporters of what is deemed to be a consumer interest. Sometimes, I think that that interest should not have been as forcefully pressed because you sometimes miss things, like the importance of a less regulated market.

I always thought that Pat was very passionate, as he is always about everything. But I wasn't sure that he always had the right answer. I think he was in favor of an elected Commerce Commission also, which is something that I opposed.

DePue: Nineteen eighty-five was an important year in a couple of respects. One of the big pieces of legislation was the Education Reform Act.

Currie: Right, and I was very engaged in that. I had, since I first went to Springfield, introduced measures to provide for funding for a full day of kindergarten and funding for preschool programs for educationally disadvantaged youngsters. In 1985, that [the Education Reform Act] happened. But it happened in a kind of unusual way. That year, the committees in the House and the Senate kind of took possession of the reform bills that were out there, and it was basically a committee bill.

But they didn't want to do the preschool bill as part of the committee bill because Phyllis Schlafly was rearing her eagle head, and the Eagle Forum people were coming to Springfield and beating up on legislators. So they were afraid, maybe the whole thing falls apart if we keep the early childhood education piece as part of the larger proposition. So that was a separate bill, and I continued to claim ownership and authorship. At the end of the day, it actually passed both chambers pretty handily. So the eleventh hour push by the Eagle Forum did not derail us. And Thompson, of course, happily signed the bill when it got to his desk.

DePue: So both the main bill and the childhood...

Currie: Yeah, early childhood, yeah.

DePue: Were there any portions, other portions, of the education act that you especially were happy to see?

Currie: Yeah, because I had worked on a lot of it. I think one of the things that is important in education generally is that you're in a better position to make important changes if you're actually putting a little more money in the pot. One of the things that this bill did, or that the whole project did, was we did increase revenues. I can't remember which taxes we raised, but there...maybe utility.

There were some improvements in funding for public education. It is a lot easier to sell the idea of important changes when you're offering the carrot of additional money.

DePue: A couple of the other things...

Currie: I could also add this comment. One of the things that happens in education is you never finish. You reform education year after year after year. And every five years or eight years or whatever it is, somebody starts screaming that we need to reform education. So we're never done.

DePue: One of the curiosities in Illinois—maybe this is the case in other states as well—that's rearing its ugly head right now, because of the pension crisis we've got...

Currie: Yes.

DePue: ...is that the Chicago school pension system, the Chicago school system, is really separated from the rest of the state.

Currie: The reasons, I think, are lost in the mists of history. Chicago, I believe, had its own pension system long before there was a pension system for downstate teachers. So Chicago was already ahead of the game. At the point, I think—I'm not certain about this because I've never really done the research—but I think that the downstate teachers' pensions probably came in around the time of Social Security.

The idea was that you could either put money into Social Security for your public workers, as for your private workers, or you could establish your own pension system. Then, if it were good enough, then you wouldn't have to do Social Security. I think that's what happened with the downstate teachers. Well, as Chicago had its own system, there would have been resistance, I imagine, for them to participate in this brand new system instead. I think that's why the state system for downstate teachers was established. And I think it was not unusual.

I think there were other states too that did create their own pension systems, with participation shared by the state, as well as by the school district and the teachers themselves. So, periodically in the '80s, '90s, there were suggestions that Chicago might be folded into the downstate system. Those suggestions were roundly disliked in Chicago among the pensioners and among the teachers because at that time, Chicago's pensions were well funded, and the downstate pensions were not. The funding disparity was such that the Chicago teachers, the Chicago government basically, thought it would be a losing proposition for them to jump on board a system that was funded at only 40 percent, rather than... There was a time when Chicago's was funded at more than 100 percent. So that went nowhere.

Then, of course, in the meantime, in '95, when Daley took over the operation of the schools, all the levies were folded into one. So, instead of having a separate levy for pension funding, it was one levy for everything. Then funding levels began to decline. That's why it's become such a political issue today.

DePue: When you say levies, revenue sources.

Currie: Yes, yeah...

DePue: Revenue taxes, when you see your tax bill.

Currie: There used to be a specific tax that was meant... Chicago school taxes were not just one tax. It was for curriculum, for a physical plant, for pensions. And the pension levy was very specific. It was when the Republicans were in control of both the House, the Senate, and the Governor's Office, in '95 with Edgar, there was an effort to turn over control of the schools to Mayor Daley. Part of that was to merge all the individual levies. It was at that point that things began to go downhill for the teacher pension fund.

DePue: Kind of an aside here, but my interview tomorrow is with Paul Vallas.⁴⁷

Currie: Oh, that'll be fun.

DePue: But I think we'll be talking about his years as Director of Revenue and Budget Director for Daley.

Currie: Yeah. Okay, that'll be a... Yeah.

DePue: In future days we'll get to that.

⁴⁷ Paul Gust Vallas is an American politician and former superintendent of the Bridgeport Public Schools and the Recovery School District of Louisiana, former CEO of both the School District of Philadelphia and the Chicago Public Schools, and a former budget director for the City of Chicago. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Vallas)

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: I'm looking forward to that conversation from his perspective.

Currie: Oh, that'll be fun, yeah.

DePue: Had the Chicago school system taken themselves out of Social Security, just like the state teachers had?

Currie: Yes, because they had a system that was as good as, and in some ways, possibly better than. I think that's generally the Social Security standard, that you're not allowed to opt out if you're not providing something that is comparable.

DePue: I am not going to be able to site the specific editorial or letter that you wrote, but I did see mention of a strike, the Chicago teachers' strike, about this time, the '84, '85 time frame, that Thompson stepped in and resolved. I think you were critical that... I don't want to put words in your mouth. I got the impression that you thought he might have been too generous with them.

Currie: I really don't remember that.

DePue: Then it's probably unfair to pursue it any more than that.

Currie: Yeah, sorry.

DePue: Now here's one near and dear to my heart.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Also in 1985, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency was created.

Currie: Right.

DePue: That was something that was dear to the heart of Governor Thompson too.

Currie: Right. I don't know why he was so concerned about it, but you're right; he was.

DePue: It's just his love of history, if I can put words in his mouth in that respect.

Currie: Yeah, okay. I forgot he was an antique collector, of course.

DePue: Yes. So was that something that you were involved with at all?

Currie: Not deeply, no.

DePue: Build Illinois.⁴⁸ It was a busy year.

Currie: Yeah, that's right (laughs). I don't think I was deeply involved in Build Illinois.

DePue: Do you have comments one way or another on its effect?

Currie: No, I really... I don't remember much about the debate or the discussion, except that I think there was a general... I certainly shared the perspective that says we had then, and we do today, have serious infrastructure needs, and it's important to try to figure out a way to pay for them. We can't go on with crumbling roads and bridges and so forth.

I had worked in Adlai Stevenson's campaigns for governor, and, of course, he kept making the point that our bridges are falling apart (laughs), and the roads are dying and whatever, our school buildings are crumbling. There was no question in my mind that there was a need for some serious attention to the infrastructure deficits in the state of Illinois.

DePue: Now one of the sources was... It was a bond issue.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: And one of the sources of money was the sales tax on private used car sales.

Currie: Right. That was important. There's no theoretical justification, I would say, for saying that, if you buy a car from the car lot, you have to pay the sales tax, but if you buy it from your neighbor down the street, you don't. So, to me it made perfectly reasonable sense to say that however, wherever, from whomever you buy a car, you should pay the sales tax.

DePue: But, not too surprising perhaps, the income didn't necessarily meet expectations in some respects.

Currie: And then, of course, what happens is you end up taking from the general sales tax fund. One of the things I certainly did learn, with discussions about world fairs and Build Illinois is that the bond community always gets first crack on whatever revenue is available. If the revenue source you specify—whether it was for Build Illinois or for infrastructure for a world's fair—if it doesn't measure up to expectations, then you have to provide them with an opportunity to grab from another pot of money.

DePue: That's certainly consistent with the comment that you made in one of your letters in October 1986. "The funding source has failed to meet its promise. Failed revenues don't jeopardize Build Illinois program. They do, however,

⁴⁸ Build Illinois is an all-encompassing attempt to deal with the state's crumbling infrastructure, disappearing jobs and shrinking tax base. (<https://www.lib.niu.edu/1986/ii860115.html>)

jeopardize other worthwhile state projects. General revenue funds, in other words, make up the difference.

Currie: Right. That's exactly right. I'd make the same point today.

DePue: You did. So, I'd say you have a wonderful memory after all (both laugh). How about this one? There were apparently some cuts to the Parents Too Soon program.⁴⁹

Currie: Ah, okay. I ran into, just the other day, at the theater, the women who used to run that program, Linda Miller. Her husband, Jeff, ran the Department of Public Aid.

DePue: There are a lot of Linda Millers out there, aren't there? Did you have a conversation about that by chance, or...?

Currie: Not when I saw her on Sunday. We were just, you know...

DePue: Any comments about the importance of the program at that time?

Currie: I thought that was a very important program. One of the things we don't do very well in state government is check to see how really efficacious our programs are. Somebody has a bright idea, and we do it. And there isn't always good follow-up to make sure that how we are spending our money really does make a difference.

But I think there were some external people, Irving Harris kinds of people, his kinds of researchers, who were looking at programs like Parents Too Soon and finding that they really were effective.⁵⁰ To cut a program that is really likely to decrease the number of unwanted pregnancies among the young, particularly those for women who don't have the economic resources to do well by a new child, would not sound like a good idea to me.

DePue: Do you recall the specifics of how they are trying to decrease unwanted pregnancies?

Currie: I think they were focused on certain areas where there were high pregnancy rates. They were trying to provide services to young women to discourage them from getting pregnant in the first place but also supplying them with services when they did, so that there was kind of a cushion, a kind of a safety net.

⁴⁹ A multi-faceted initiative, the Parents Too Soon program, mandated in 1983 by Illinois Governor James R. Thompson, is designed to reduce teenage pregnancy and to mitigate its negative consequences. (<https://www.innovations.harvard.edu/parents-too-soon>)

⁵⁰ Irving Harris established the **Irving Harris** Foundation in 1946 primarily to make grants to organizations supporting policies, research, and programs focused on issues pertaining to early childhood development. (<https://www.whi.com/pages/3067>)

I think that the point was, in part, to make sure that the women who found themselves pregnant, but without much in the way of resources to do a good job bringing up the child, would have access to some of those resources. The hope, of course, was that with those resources there might be a lessened likelihood that that same young woman would turn around very quickly afterwards and have another. So it was kind of...

DePue: That without that support, they would have another child?

Currie: So yes. The idea was that you try to help a woman figure out what her life chances are, how she might organize her life, by helping her bring up this baby or by helping see that maybe this is not a good time, as a sophomore in high school, that she ought to decide to become a mom.

DePue: I think just to put a specific to it—I probably got this from one of your editorials— “Roseland Adolescent Parenthood Project cut from \$81,000 to \$48.6 thousand.”

Currie: Yeah, and that would have been one of those areas where the problems were apparent, where there was a high percentage of young women having children before they were in a position to bring them up. That would have been one of the demonstration points. Englewood [Health] would have been another.

DePue: This was kind of a broader topic. One of the things that Governor Thompson did a lot during his administration is foreign travel and set up foreign offices to enhance trade.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: That was something that hadn't been happening as much before, and Governor Edgar backed away from that concept a little bit.

Currie: He did.

DePue: The question is, what did you think about that as a general policy or proposal?

Currie: I didn't have a whole lot of connection to our foreign trade offices. I guess I always wondered whether they really are very effective. There certainly are all kinds of ways in which one would want to encourage more trading, but it never was clear to me that having foreign trade offices was the best approach.

I don't know what is better, but occasional delegations going... For example, George Ryan did that with Cuba. He took a big delegation of businesspeople and so forth. I don't know enough to know which of these approaches is more likely to have a better effect.

DePue: Does that mean that these things weren't generally an issue that the legislature had to weigh in on because it...?

Currie: Well, we must have because it was certainly a budgetary issue; we did fund those trade missions. I don't remember anything very pointed in the discussions or very final in people's perception of which is the right way to go.

I think there's generally a fair degree of deference on the part of legislators to executive decisions about how best to accomplish particular goals. I would say that this is one of those examples, wherein I would imagine that there isn't such passion or certainty about the best approach. The chances were good that lawmakers would be willing to give the governor a fair bit of leeway to do it his way.

DePue: He would say that we wouldn't have gotten the Mitsubishi plant without that kind of approach.

Currie: Of course we've lost it; haven't we?

DePue: Yeah. That was...thirty years later perhaps.

Currie: Yeah, well right, right.

DePue: But yes, we have.

Currie: Well, of course, we gave a lot to get the Mitsubishi plant. The other issue that this all raises—not so much when you're talking about actual foreign investments—we spent a lot of time offering businesses incentives to come to Illinois. Thompson certainly did. It's hard not to do it. I haven't seen a governor who doesn't, trying to encourage economic development by taking from other states to bring people to us. We see it all the time, billboards, you know, "Come to Indiana," "Come to..."

At the end of the day, from the national perspective, this is not a particularly useful approach because what you have is a race to the bottom. How do you get these companies to come your way? Well, you offer them the sun, the moon and the stars. You say, "You guys don't have to pay taxes. You're going to get this kind of credit. You're going to get that. You're going to get something else." In the meantime, of course, they are using services, and they are not paying their fair share.

So, I understand the politics in which a governor wants to be able to—and mayors do the same—tout the accomplishments of these wonderful companies coming to my state, rather than staying in your state. But at the end of the day, I don't know that it means that we end up as a stronger national economy.

DePue: The next question has very little, if anything, to do with the state legislature.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: January 26 of 1986, remember what happened that day?

Currie: No.

DePue: The Bears won the Super Bowl (both laugh).

Currie: Oh, goodie! I'm sure I thought that was great (both laugh). In fact, I think I may even have watched part of the game on television.

DePue: It sounds like that would have been a rare occasion of watching a football game, huh?

Currie: It was. It was, yeah.

DePue: Do you have a preference for a sport other than that?

Currie: No, I'm a little more familiar with baseball. But I'm a Chicago fan, so I'm a fan of the Cubs and the Sox and the Bears and the Bulls, and the whatever, you know the Hawks, whoever, right?

DePue: As I remember, Senator Netsch was a big baseball fan.

Currie: She was.

DePue: White Sox, wasn't it?

Currie: Yeah, and a pool player too. Yeah, she was very much a White Sox fan.

You know who else is? [Illinois State Senator] John Cullerton. Everyone thinks of him as a north sider. Of course, he's got to be a Cubby. No, he's a White Sox fan. I don't mean to say he doesn't like the Cubs too, but his heart is with the Sox.

DePue: That's not unusual for people who grew up in the city though.

Currie: Yeah, but I think he grew up in Wheaton or someplace; didn't he?

DePue: Oh, okay.

Currie: I'm not sure.

DePue: The next thing here is kind of a continuation on what we were talking about before. You've got some of these initiatives, like Build Illinois, like the Educational Reform Act, and now you're just a year out. I thought I'd let you read this time from an article that you wrote on February 15, 1986 and kind of reflect back on some of this.

I've highlighted some stuff that I would prefer you read, but I'm handing to you with full knowledge that you're going to read the portions that you find relevant here.

Currie: Alright. Well, no. I'll read what you've highlighted. So it says, "Last Week..." You're right, 15 February 1986. "Last week the Illinois General Assembly, for the second time in six months, sent the governor legislation approving a small increase in public aid grant levels. The governor, for the second time in six months, is expected to veto the additional welfare funding. Yet these dollars, about \$6 million for the remainder of the fiscal year, would bring grant levels up to only 52 percent of the standard of need.

That standard, set by the state itself, represents the price of a bare bones life, the cost of a minimal diet, shelter and clothing requirements for an Illinois family. The value of cash grants is now pegged at less than 50 percent of the standard of need. Two years ago, grant levels provided 54 percent coverage. Fifty-four percent isn't good enough, but less than 50 percent is a lot worse.

Certainly, dollars aren't the only issue. The system's new slogan, "A Chance As Well As a Check," underlines the need to break the cycle of poverty and offer a way out of welfare dependency. Evidence from other states shows a well-crafted employment program can be effective. Key elements include training for job opportunities that are real and providing support for childcare, transportation, and health care. 'A Chance As Well As a Check' makes social and economic sense. But a chance without a check is as hopeless as the reverse." All right.

DePue: This issue, and let's put it on the rubric of welfare reform....

Currie: Right.

DePue: ...and trying to balance budgets as well. It's been part of American politics for decades.

Currie: Absolutely.

DePue: And certainly it's going to be an issue ten years down the road from this as well...

Currie: Right.

DePue: ...at the national level and as well as the state level. So, a couple of questions for you. Obviously, you thought that the funding levels needed to be increased.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Where did you think the additional money would be coming from for that? From where would you have preferred that it come?

Currie: Well, I would say that \$6 million, even in that budget year, was not, I would have thought, such an enormous cost that we couldn't accommodate it with small cuts in other places.

I'm not someone who can cheerfully go around talking about waste, inefficiency, and fraud as the answer to all of our fiscal problems, but we do spend a lot of time, and we need to spend time every year, making sure, through our appropriations committees, that we are actually getting a bang for our buck.

I do think also that you can trim some other places where perhaps, from my perspective, the needs are not quite as great as they are for the people that are the beneficiaries of the welfare grants.

DePue: This is very unfair, as how many years are we removed from this? Thirty years now?

Currie: Yeah, right.

DePue: Do you have any sense of where you might have been looking, at the time, that could have been cut?

Currie: No, I don't. I really don't. As I said before, when we subsidize businesses to come to town, I appreciate the arguments people make in favor of that, that new sources of revenue, new taxes and so forth... But when we give away the store in order to bring them to town, I'm not sure that's always a great policy.

I think also that the... We have many exemptions from sales tax, for example, in the State of Illinois. Large combines used in agriculture or big equipment in a steel plant, those are all exempt from sales tax. I'm not sure they should be. I'm not sure that the economic benefit actually is worth the cost that it means to the State Treasury.

DePue: This probably wasn't an issue at that time. It is kind of something that's being kicked around right now, the notion of having a sales tax for services.

Currie: Right, right. I think there was some discussion of that at that time. There was always—but in the background—a discussion of taxing retirement income, which of course, the feds do, and most of the other states do. But not, of course, every state has an income tax. So, among the states that do have income taxes, more tax retirement income than don't. It's very much a third rail of Illinois politics, but it was discussed in that era as well.

DePue: You're mentioning these things. Would you have been in favor of a tax on services?

Currie: Yes, I would have been. Actually, Thompson proposed, at one point, a tax on services. He got shot down pretty quickly. I think the real question is how you craft it. I think that, politically speaking, if you include advertising, if you include legal services, medical services, you're doomed from the start.

I would start from the approach that says, "Why don't we see what neighbor states are taxing when it comes to services?" Perhaps we should use that as kind of a rubric of figuring out how we might want to start because, among the states, we tax fewer services than almost any other in the country. That's got to be slightly odd.

And there is no rational basis for saying the service economy, in which we now live, is totally different from the economy of the '30s, when the sales taxes generally first came in. There is absolutely no excuse for saying that, if instead of buying a lawn mower, you're buying lawn services, means you shouldn't be taxed. There's no reason, in my mind, for saying that the one should be taxed, and the other should not.

DePue: And it's doomed from the start because, in proposing something like this, you can manage to antagonize both the Republican base and the Democrat base?

Currie: Right. And the worst, of course is your barber, the car repair shop (laughs). They're very quick to hear news that people are talking about taxing their services. So that's why it might sense to look at what other states...

DePue: Would they be quicker than the legal community to start complaining?

Currie: I'm just telling you the politics. We do have a tax on photo processing. We used that for... I don't know if it was the McCormick Place expansion or something. That's one of the few places where we actually have a tax on a service.

DePue: The phrase here, the new slogan, is what you had in your article.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: "A chance as well as a check."

Currie: I can't remember when it came in, but there was a Work Pays program.⁵¹ And I remember Edgar being very keen to protect it from various kinds of cuts. The idea was that, if you go out and get a job, instead of losing your welfare check as soon as your salary reached the level of your welfare check, we'd let you keep some of it.

⁵¹ Under the Work Pays system, you can get a job and still receive your Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) assistance. (<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=32182>)

So the idea was for every... I think it was for every \$3.00 you earned, you got to keep \$1.00 of your welfare check, up to a particular level. And it seemed to me that that had two advantages. First of all, it really is an incentive to go to work, because why wouldn't you increase rather than decrease the amount that you're able to bring in? And second, at a time when the welfare grant was not providing an adequate coverage, it made sense to say, "Okay, we're going to let you keep some of the money that you're earning in the real world, so as to make the value of the welfare check actually go further." Both of those were important to me.

DePue: I'm going to be provocative here, but I think it's important, in terms of the dialogue and kind of a larger perspective. During the '80s and '90s, there are some definite trends, where a lot of the social welfare programs are very much on the ramp up. Medicaid is one of those. Medicare was another one. I think also welfare. What I wanted to turn to here is what needed to happen to ameliorate, to slow down, that level of poverty, to decrease the percentage of poverty in the country.

Currie: Well, I would have to go back to saying that I think that an adequate sustenance while one is in poverty is really important, but that in addition, there ought to be a much greater focus on job training programs, to the extent that you're training people for jobs that exist, and providing people with the support in terms of child care subsidies or transportation.

That means that, to the extent that there is a job out there, they have the opportunity to take it. Now, poverty is always with us, and whether there are any strategies that can permanently end poverty as we know it, I don't know the answer to that. But I do know that we have a lot of people in this country who are living below the poverty line. And I think that we have not been as attentive as we might to various kinds of strategies that might ameliorate some of that problem.

DePue: This would be the conservative critique, and they would point to percentages like this, that in 1960 there was about 3 or 4 percent of white children who were born out of wedlock, and there was about 20 percent for African Americans in that particular year. By 1980, that was about 11 percent for whites and 55 percent for African American. And the trend was going upwards, higher than that.

Currie: Right, right, right.

DePue: I think there's certainly an argument to be said that the increase in welfare payments...that this fact was a burden that was increasing welfare payments as well.

Currie: And that would be fair. But the question is, why is there this kind of increase? I guess I would argue that it isn't because there are welfare benefits available.

People do not have children for welfare benefits, because they'd be crazy from a rational, economic perspective to do that.

My argument would be that there were changes in social mores, in the culture generally, that meant that the importance of the wedding ring began to decline in both white and African American communities. I think it's also possible that one could argue that for African American communities, the lack of real opportunity made the percentage of people who needed to turn to welfare benefits larger than it might have been in an earlier time.

DePue: Was it a worthwhile trade off that one of the things people look at here is that there was much less stigma to being born illegitimate during this time? There was a cultural...

Currie: Yeah, I'm saying social mores. There was really a very big change in the social background. Out-of-wedlock births stopped being the kind of thing that people couldn't possibly put their face out in public and so forth and so on. But that would have had effect on both white and black.

Now, some would also argue that part of the reason for the lack of the marriage equation in the African American community was a function of the fact that the African American male was often not a particularly valuable commodity from an ordinary economic perspective. There is some research that suggests that, as was true in the white community to a different degree, what you had are African American men who don't have any chance of getting a job, and they're spending their time in jail. There's not a lot of percentage in the wedding ring for a woman in that situation. I don't know how far that goes, but that certainly has been...

DePue: Then the percentage of blacks who are married, in a stable relationship, that have a job is relatively the same as those who have been raised in families where there isn't a stable father figure?

Currie: Wait, I'm not sure I said that. I think what I said was that there was a time when lack of opportunity for, particularly African American males, may have made them less attractive as a marriage prospect.

DePue: Would you say that it's a fair trade-off, if there's no longer that stigma of being an illegitimate child, that we would never even say that today? That's the trade-off to having much higher illegitimate birth rates?

Currie: I don't think you can control it. I don't think it's a question of what public policy makers can or should do. I think it's a reality. It's a reality of everyday life, and we don't live in the 1950s anymore. Anyone who thinks that we should go back there should think again.

DePue: I think you started by saying there's no correlation between the nation's welfare structure and the percentages I was talking about.

- Currie: I really don't think so. I could certainly be wrong, but as I say, most of the stuff that I've read has suggested that part of the reason for the decline in marriage has to do in impoverished communities, with the lack of economic value that the other party brings to the relationship. But it's also happening in the white community too. It's not just a function of impoverished communities.
- DePue: Moving along, in June of '86 you wrote in an article that Thompson's budget was "way too rosy," a projection of funds that were going to be promised for the Education Reform Act in 1985, and now there are short-falls. Here's what you had to say about it. This is the time frame when you were talking about the Chicago schoolteachers' strike of the previous year. "Chicago only gets \$32 million of the proposed new state dollars. "When is a pledge a promise, a promise a pledge?"
- Currie: Flowery.
- DePue: Did the governor mean it when he single-handily settled Chicago's schoolteachers' strike last fall? Did the governor mean it when he dubbed 1985 the year of school reform in Springfield?"
- Currie: I was having a good time (both laugh).
- DePue: And you're going to leave it at that?
- Currie: Well, yeah. Obviously, our revenue projections were too rosy, and what are you going to do about it? So are we going to try to find some way to make up the deficit? Well, I would have hoped that we would have.
- DePue: I guess that's why I was making the point. There's so much more pressure on the budget, an incredible period of budgetary growth while Thompson was governor...
- Currie: Yep.
- DePue: ...because of the things that, in many cases, the State had little or no control over.
- Currie: Right, exactly.
- DePue: Medicaid was a big issue.
- Currie: Medicaid is another issue. There certainly were all manner of providers who were very keen for us to spend more money on the Medicaid program. There were also federal constraints, because the federal government required, for its participation, that you provide some level of service.

Now Illinois provided more services than many other states did, but Illinois was an industrial, relatively affluent community. It would have been expected to do a better job than Arkansas or Mississippi. I don't think there was anything shocking in that. Maybe the real issue is that the cost of medical care continued to rise. There was no way that we had, within our toolbox, no way to... No one's figured that out yet, even at the federal level, let alone at the state level.

DePue: I've read this, so I'll ask you this question then. Were you generally in favor of expanding the pool of people who were eligible for Medicaid benefits?

Currie: Yes. For example—I can't remember when we did that—there was a point at which we increased the eligibility threshold for pregnant women from 100 percent to, I think, 135 percent, ultimately to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. Again, the rationale was precisely so that these women would birth healthier babies if they had access to these resources than if they didn't. So yeah, I was in favor. I was pretty expansionist when it came to Medicaid programs.

DePue: I think in that same article, I read that you also made the same argument in reference to infant children as well.

Currie: Yes, yes, right.

DePue: Now let's turn to politics...

Currie: Okay.

DePue: ... Because 1986 is an election year for the governor.

Currie: Right, right (DePue laughs).

DePue: You're smiling. You remember that year.

Currie: Yes, I do. Oh god, yes. Was that the year of the LaRouchee?

DePue: The Lyndon LaRouche candidates.⁵²

Currie: Yep, yep.

DePue: So, do you want to take there or would you like to have me provide just a little bit of background for this?

Currie: Yeah, well, I remember what happened was that George Sangmeister was the Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor. At that time we selected

⁵² **Lyndon** Hermyle **LaRouche** Jr. (1922 – 2019) was an American political activist, convicted fraudster who founded the **LaRouche movement** and its main organization, the National Caucus of Labor Committees. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyndon_LaRouche)

separately the nominee for governor and for lieutenant governor, and a Lyndon LaRouche person beat out Sangmeister and became the Democratic nominee. The same thing happened with secretary of state. The LaRouche candidate beat out the slated Democratic candidate, and it threw everything into a total tizzy.

DePue: Mark Fairchild won the Democratic election for lieutenant governor over Sangmeister, as you said.

Currie: Right.

DePue: So, Fairchild, Sangmeister.

Currie: Right.

DePue: And the secretary of state candidate for the Democrats, the party had put up Aurelia Pucinski.

Currie: Aurelia Pucinski.

DePue: Aurelia Pucinski,

Currie: Yeah, her father had been in Congress and had been in the city council after Congress, I believe. It was a powerful name within the city's Polish and Eastern-European ethnic community. But it didn't sell real well downstate.

DePue: And Janice Hart.

Currie: Right.

DePue: So you had Hart versus Pucinski. I can't even say it right; I apologize.

Currie: Right, Pucinski, Pucinski.

DePue: And Fairchild over Sangmeister.

Currie: Right. And the whole party went into a complete tailspin, a complete tizzy.

DePue: Were you involved in the discussions of what to do next?

Currie: I think I was. I know I worked in the campaign. We created this new party, the Solidarity Party or whatever we called it.

DePue: When you say, "the campaign," the campaign for the general election?

Currie: For Stevenson, the campaign for the general election. Was it the Illinois Solidarity Party?

DePue: Yes.

Currie: Yes, I remember that. And we had Michael Howlett, Jr. as the lieutenant governor nominee. There was a lovely woman, Jane somebody or other, from Glen Ellyn or Elmhurst, for secretary of state. I can't remember what her...

DePue: Jane Spirgel.

Currie: Jane Spirgel, yes. Spirgel we called it, yeah. I'd say pretty much doomed (Currie laughs).

DePue: You knew that going out?

Currie: Yeah, I think everybody was pretty clear that this was... It was a very tough sell. People tend to vote the parties they know, and peoples' level of understanding of what's going on in politics tends to be pretty limited to the surface.

DePue: Were you one of those who was, let's say, surprised, that the LaRouchees won in the primary?

Currie: I was. I did not see that coming. I suppose, looking back, that there are all kinds of things one could say about how it happened. One thing one would certainly say is that Sangmeister was neither an exciting candidate nor was there much focus on his race.

And Pucinski, I think the argument would be that, while she had great appeal in a segment of the City of Chicago, it was not a statewide appeal, so there needed to have been a much more focused, energized, get out the vote program. And I think with Sangmeister, no one really kind of thought about it.

But I do think that he was a pretty bland candidate from start to finish. And maybe if there had been somebody running who had more... I don't know who that would have been, but somebody with more of a name or [who] would have created some excitement, a woman, a black. I don't know.

DePue: Going into the election before the primary day, how did you count the Democrats' chances for regaining the governorship?

Currie: I thought they were pretty good. It'd been a very close election in '82. And so I thought this would be a repeat and that maybe we would end up with not the same problem with recounts that we had in '82 and that this might work. I think everybody felt, after the election result, that it was going to be a very tough proposition. And the problem was clear. You can't very well run on a Democratic ticket that includes LaRouchees. So you really had to do something different. And unfortunately, that something different was not good enough.

DePue: Explain to me why Stevenson couldn't possibly run on that same ticket.

Currie: I think it would have been an embarrassment to the party, and I think it would have been a difficult sell. I think just in the matter of practical politics to say, “Yes, I want Mark Fairchild—this total loon—to be the lieutenant governor, a heartbeat away from the governorship.” I think that’s a very tough sell. But in addition, it also would be a very, very mud in the face, a very bad mark for the statewide Democratic Party.

DePue: Once you get to the general election, something that Stevenson was consistent in his criticisms of Governor Thompson was the allegations of pinstripe patronage. First of all, how do you define pinstripe patronage?

Currie: I think that the state was already, at that time, under the Rutan decision, so like the...

DePue: It was not.

Currie: Was not?

DePue: That was 1990.

Currie: Oh, okay, alright. Okay. I thought it was much earlier. Anyway, I think whether or not there was a sense that there is ordinary, everyday patronage politics as we all know and love it—that is, the county chair says, “Hire this person,” so the person gets hired—I think there was increasingly a sense that when it comes to the lawyers, the accountants, the banks that provide different kinds of services than the employee provides, that there was perhaps a willingness to go with the biggest campaign contributor.

So that was the idea behind pinstripe patronage, that the well-heeled, tassel-loafed crowd was gaining with opportunities to do the bond deals, to provide the legal representation, those kinds of things, because of their participation in the world of candidate support. Now how true, how deep? Always a question, I don’t have an easy answer.

DePue: I was struck by the phrase “well heeled, tasseled-loafed.” (laughs) That sounds like it was in campaign literature somewhere down the...

Currie: It must have been (both laugh). I don’t know where else I would have picked it up.

DePue: Brilliant thought on your part. It is descriptive though, isn’t it?

Currie: Yeah, it is, yeah.

DePue: But it wasn’t quite as effective as you probably were hoping for, the party was hoping for. Fifty-two point seven percent for Thompson, only 40 percent for Stevenson, 6.6 for Frank Broven.

Currie: I don't remember who that was.

DePue: I'm ashamed to say, I don't remember that either.

Currie: No, uh-huh, I don't remember that at all.

DePue: So it did not bode well for that election year. Did you suffer much, in terms of the legislature though that year?

Currie: You know, I don't remember. But since the legislature was not running under this peculiar party label, I doubt it.



Barbara Flynn Currie takes the oath of office as a member of the Illinois House of Representatives in 1987. She was already an experienced legislator by that time.

DePue: I know that the Democrats held the majority in both houses of the legislature.

Currie: Yep, right.

DePue: Do you remember anything about your reelection bid that year?

Currie: I think I mustn't have had a problem, or I wouldn't have been working in the Stevenson campaign.

DePue: What did you do in the Stevenson campaign?

Currie: You know, I think I did sort of advance and strategy stuff. I worked a lot with Michael Howlett, Jr., who was the lieutenant governor candidate after the disaster of Sangmeister. Wasn't at all involved in the primary. It was only in the general that I was active, and I thought that he did a great job.

DePue: Howlett did?

Currie: Yeah, he was great. He was great on the campaign trail. He was just terrific.

DePue: Wasn't he the one who went down to defeat in '76 though...

Currie: No, that was his father. This is the son, who then went on to become a judge, died very recently of a brain cancer. But he was a great guy, very smart in a very street cred way. I don't know how... I'm sure he was a fine lawyer and so forth, but he had a very easy manner with people on the campaign trail. He was ever so much more—I don't know—graceful, effective than Stevenson. That was one of the problems too; Adlai was not the easiest campaigner.

- DePue: Going back to the theme we were talking about before, stresses on the budget. July '86, that's about the time there's a new budget for the new fiscal year, Thompson has to cut \$350 million from the budget. I assume that was the year that was in effect, \$350 million. Cuts included mental health, alcohol and substance abuse, and \$60 million from elementary and secondary education.
- Currie: All tough choices.
- DePue: Here's what you said in November. "I wonder whether those who applauded our initiatives in 1985..." I assume you're talking about the education reform.
- Currie: School reform.
- DePue: "...have checked to see how we're doing in 1986. I think they'd be dismayed at the extent to which state government has frittered away the promise of a better education for our children."
- Currie: Yeah, and I would stand by that. I would not argue that money alone is what makes education effective. But I would say that if you don't have adequate resources, you're not likely to be doing a very good job.
- DePue: So, \$350 million is a significant amount of money.
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: Again I'm asking you to reflect thirty years back. Were there \$350 million of cuts that could be made?
- Currie: You know, I don't remember the specifics. The problem, of course, is that there are all kinds of things I'd be happy to cut. But all those things that are there had their own constituency. That's how they got there in the first place. Whether it's agriculture, education, or tax breaks for manufacturing equipment, agribusiness and so forth, they had a constituency, and that's how they got to be part of the spending process or the tax break process.
- It's easy in some ways to identify things that I wouldn't be for. But to say that, isn't to say that there isn't enough of a constituency that was for it in the first place, that that's not a place that we are going to succeed in making cuts.
- DePue: You said agricultural education. Are you talking about the programs in high school level?
- Currie: Yeah, for example, I don't know how... Gifted education is something that I'm not real keen on either. But these have constituencies, and so they're not easily shorn from the spending proposal.

DePue: Speaking of gifted programs, where did you stand in terms of the Math and Science Academy, which was part of that '85 legislation?

Currie: Right. I was not as critical as many of my colleagues. But I did have concerns, and the concerns were primarily the concern that you're unleavening the loaf. If the brightest kids in this school district are now off to IMSA [Illinois Math and Science Academy], and the effect on the kids they leave behind is to have a smaller bounce in creativity, in the ability to learn from one another...

I also was a little fearful that what you'd find is that the principals who had a kid that was difficult would encourage that child (laughs), smart but difficult, to go to IMSA...

DePue: Difficult?

Currie: ...and maybe not the child who was equally smart but was also a team player and a good athlete and so forth and so on. I wasn't at all sure that the pedagogy of that approach was going to result in the best and the brightest or whether it was going to be the nerds and the misfits (DePue laughs). I've no idea what happened.

DePue: This is probably something that wasn't addressed—I could be wrong—but how about the whole issue of... You talk about preferring not to take the brightest kids out of that classroom. How about the other side of it, the disadvantaged, the disabled in some respects, mainstreaming them in education?

Currie: Yeah. Well, I've always been in favor of mainstreaming to the extent that we can.

DePue: Was that a factor at all part of the '85 legislation, do you recall?

Currie: I don't remember. I know we've been moving toward mainstreaming for years. I just don't remember whether that was part of that program.

DePue: You must have had the budget on your mind because in '87, January 14, 1987, which would really been right before the legislature normally would get into budget discussions, right?

Currie: Yeah. Well, that's the beginning of the term.

DePue: Yeah.

Currie: So, it is. It's before we would have been offered a budget, before we would have...

DePue: So, here's the title of this article: "What Illinois Residents Can Expect From the 85th General Assembly." You wrote that the governor's March budget

message, you expected to side with austerity, neither tax increase nor major new spending initiatives. Yet the problems plaguing the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities and Child and Family Services surely warrant serious address this session.

Currie: Okay, right. It's probably right. In fact, people have argued for years that our mental health spending, our mental health services fall far behind those of most other states. I don't remember what particular problems were with DCFS [Department of Children and Family Services] at that point, but we did have huge problems with DCFS, in that the number of kids in care skyrocketed before Jess McDonald came in. It was really kind of a scandal of its own. The case workers were terrified of not pulling a child from a home. And then 50,000 at one point, and I think that, within some period of time, it went down to fifteen.

DePue: One of my favorite interviews for the Governor Edgar series was with Jess McDonald. That was the Edgar administration...

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: ...and addressing that ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] lawsuit at the end of the Thompson administration. And as you just said, the skyrocketing caseloads...

Currie: Was it Leticia Wallace? What was the name of the...? No, that's not right. But you remember the three-year old, Joey, a crazed... A woman who had serious, serious mental health issues strangled him with a light cord or what have you. You take a couple of those cases, and then everybody says, "You've got to..." And you do have to do more. But the question is, what's the right thing to be doing?

DePue: Obviously, even a couple of years before the biggest crisis and some of these high-profile cases, you're already identifying this as a serious shortfall.

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: How about other priorities you might have had, in terms of welfare grants or welfare programs? You're looking at your watch.

Currie: What time is it?

DePue: It's 2:19.

Currie: Okay, alright. Wait, I'm sorry. Say the question again.

DePue: Any other concerns you had in the nature of social welfare programs at that time, that you recall?

- Currie: Well, I generally was very concerned about social welfare. The plight of the welfare recipient, the opportunity for people to move out of poverty through job training, childcare. Those kinds of issues have always been ones that have animated me. I don't remember specifically what we were talking about at that time.
- DePue: I'm going to pick on you again, and this is mainly some things that came up in articles that you wrote. I don't have any quotes for some of this. January 25 article, an issue on the Illinois Pollution Control Board.
- Currie: Oh. I cared about that because my husband created and was the first chair of the Illinois Pollution Control Board.
- DePue: And I thought I saw something that said you had 100 percent rating from some kind of a green or environmental group?
- Currie: I usually do. I do pretty well with them. Anyway, so I cared about that agency because he himself had run it.
- DePue: Well, it's kind of obvious, but explain why.
- Currie: Explain why what?
- DePue: That you cared so much about the...
- Currie: Well because I felt a little family connection here. Under Ogilvie, David was invited to come in and... This was right after the first green day or whatever it was, Earth Day.
- DePue: When he first came to that position.
- Currie: So my husband was teaching at the University of Chicago Law School, and he'd been doing some work on environmental things. One of his students was George Ranney, who was working, I think, for the Bureau of the Budget in the Ogilvie administration. And I think Governor Ogilvie, for reasons perhaps partly political—I mean the environment was a coming thing—decided he wanted to make his mark. And they invited David to come in and draft legislation to deal with matters environmental. He had a three pronged approach, the Pollution Control Board, which was setting standards and also adjudicating case, the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] was there.
- There was something called the Illinois Environmental Council, tasked with research. So the legislation passed, not without difficulty. And then Ogilvie invited David to be the first chair of the Pollution Control Board.
- DePue: I'm not clear on when the Federal EPA was created. Was that before this?
- Currie: We already had a state EPA, but I think that David's legislation beefed it up,

set higher standards. But this was also at a time when Earth Day was coming in.⁵³ There was a much increased focus on environmental issues.

DePue: And we're talking the early '70s now, correct?

Currie: Well, no, late '70s I think this was. When did Ogilvie lose?

DePue: Seventy-two.

Currie: Oh, then I'm sorry.

DePue: Walker won in '72.

Currie: Okay, right. This would have been late '60s then. So it's even earlier than I thought.

DePue: Well, kind of a related...

Currie: So what was I talking about, with the Pollution Control Board?

DePue: Well, again I had to race through some note taking here at the end of the day, so I apologize for not having the specifics I need here. But let me ask you about the issue of nuclear energy.

Currie: Um-hmm.

DePue: Are you, were you at the time generally supportive or an opponent to increasing nuclear plants?

Currie: I think that I was not keen on nuclear energy. I think at that point, environmental groups had a lot of concerns about increased reliance on nuclear. And Illinois at that time had and still has greater reliance on nuclear than any other state. It doesn't take very many disasters to make people very anxious about nuclear. I never saw an energy policy that didn't have some reliance on nuclear, but I was not anxious to see a lot more of it.

DePue: Trade-off. If the trade-off is another nuclear power plant or a couple more coal fired power plants...?

Currie: Yeah. Well, I'll tell you that was never really the issue at that time. I think that the cost of building another nuclear facility was way too high. I think it never became an issue with that kind of balance. But I certainly was concerned

⁵³ Every year on April 22, people around the world celebrate Earth Day. The day marks the start of the environmental movement in 1970, and for the past 51 years has resulted in policy change and a greater awareness of the environment. (<https://people.com/human-interest/what-is-earth-day-and-why-do-we-celebrate/>)

about the lack of scrubbers, the lack of standards that meant that coal fired plants could go about poisoning the air.

DePue: I'm not 100 percent sure, but this would be about the time that they would have been planning for and construction for the Marseilles nuclear power plant.

Currie: Is that right? I don't remember.

DePue: That might be about the last one in the state that was constructed.

Currie: Yeah, yeah, I don't remember.

DePue: On February 9, an article about the passage of comprehensive health insurance and Health Maintenance Organization Guaranty Fund, if that helps you at all.

Currie: Yeah. Was this when Hartigan was the attorney general?⁵⁴

DePue: Yes.

Currie: He was very supportive. His mission was to create the CHIP [Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan] program. And unlike in other states, our CHIP program did not require the insurance industry to help pay for it. So, ours was a bit of a hit on the budget. And it was also a program that, at the end of the day—and this may be true of most state programs—was not very helpful to people who were not particularly affluent, because the insurance premium that they paid tended to be 30, 35 percent higher than what they would have paid if they were able to find insurance on the private market.

So mostly what happened was people were changing jobs, or somebody already had a preexisting condition, and so their insurance wasn't able to take care of them. You had basically middle class people who could afford the extra coverage but couldn't find it. And this was a program that created the opportunity for coverage for people with these preexisting conditions, people who had moved from one job to another. I don't mean to say that I think it was a bad program, but it could have been, I think, a better program if we had a broader funding stream to help pay for it and if the premiums had not been so high as to drive out people who were not middleclass people.

DePue: But this is not a public health insurance program, is it?

Currie: No.

⁵⁴ Neil F. Hartigan is an American lawyer and politician from Illinois. He served as the Attorney General of Illinois, the 40th Lieutenant Governor, and a justice of the Illinois Appellate Court. Hartigan was also the Democratic nominee for governor in 1990, but lost the race to Republican Jim Edgar. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil_Hartigan)

DePue: It's directing it to a private corporation?

Currie: Yeah, well, the State ran the insurance part of the program, but it did so using general revenue funds, as well as premiums from the... And there may have been an insurer behind the state pool. I don't remember. All I mean is, it was not like, "Here is a program; anyone can apply." It only worked for you if you had... First of all, if you met the criteria that you can't get private insurance because blah, blah, blah. But also, it's costly. Unlike a Medicaid program, for example, this is not something that is available for every Tom, Dick, and Harry. It's only available for those who can afford it.

DePue: Is there any conversation about health care that doesn't get complicated very quickly?

Currie: Yeah, no there isn't. There isn't.

DePue: Speaking of health care, how well do you think the Thompson administration did to address the issues that grew out of the AIDS epidemic, those years?

Currie: I would say better than most. For example, we were the only state in the nation that adopted a policy that said, if people want to get married, they have to have an AIDS test, blood test, before they can march down the aisle. From a public health prospective, it made zero sense, because people who were marching down the aisle, heterosexual couples, were very unlikely to be looking at AIDS infections. And, of course, it made it more costly (laughs) to get a marriage license in Illinois.

The governor vetoed that bill. But, of course, the legislature promptly overrode because, as with most things having to do with public health, we are more knowledgeable because we met somebody at a cocktail party who said, "I'm really worried that my son is going to marry this girl who might have AIDS." Right?

DePue: So, did you vote to override his veto?

Currie: I did not, no. I stood with the Department of Public Health. John Lumpkin was then the director. He made very cogent arguments about why we shouldn't do this. I stuck with him, and I certainly didn't... I didn't vote for the bill in the first place, and I didn't vote to override it...

DePue: Does that mean that you broke with the party?

Currie: No, it wasn't a party issue. It was certainly a bi-partisan push to make all these people... And what killed it finally was, in the first place, no other state did a thing like this. And the people in—was it Lake County, Wisconsin?—began advertising in Illinois newspapers: "Come get married in Wisconsin. You can (both laugh) bring your diamond ring, and we'll let you get married on the diamond, of the whatever baseball team." Whatever. It was like...

DePue: Was that a tourism thing for Wisconsin?

Currie: Yeah, absolutely. Indiana was doing the same. The county clerks were beside themselves. The county clerks were losing money, particularly those on the borders, the people who were... The North Shore people, going to Wisconsin and the southside people, going to Indiana. Yeah, so I thought the reaction of our state was perhaps ahead of the game compared to others. I can't speak specifically to whether we provided adequate programming. But I think that when it came to education and information, and when it came to not supporting a folly like this, I think the Thompson administration did well.

DePue: February 25, you had an article on welfare to workforce, the continuation of a theme that we've talked about quite bit already. And then, in September, an article about the issue of Shedd Aquarium legislation. Does that ring a bell?

Currie: Yeah. What happened was, they wanted to expand the Oceanarium or maybe create the Oceanarium. And somehow, I got involved in sponsoring the bill that basically did a little trade of underwater land so that the Shedd could encroach on the waters of Lake Michigan. But I think they gave something back to the state at the same time. It was not a huge issue. I don't think anybody sued about it. I do know that when something comparable happened for Loyola or Northwestern, there was a lawsuit, and I think that that did not happen.

DePue: That they also wanted lakefront?

Currie: I think that, yeah. I don't remember who sponsored that. I don't remember when that was. I think it was after this but I'm not certain. It was either Loyola or Northwestern.

DePue: Now here's one...

Currie: Oh, I'm sure... I must have talked about the otters. I wanted the otters. Did I? That would have been why I would have been happy to support the bill.

DePue: Because there were otters at Shedd Aquarium.⁵⁵

Currie: Otters are so cute (laughs). They are, you know.

DePue: Yeah.

Currie: I don't know if they actually have any otters, however.

DePue: This one surprised me even. And maybe every once in a while, you have to have something that's a little bit out of the mainstream, but it's just the kind of

⁵⁵ Shedd Aquarium is an indoor public aquarium in Chicago, Illinois, in the United States. Opened on May 30, 1930, the 5 million US gal aquarium was for some time the largest indoor facility in the world. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shedd_Aquarium)

thing that can capture the public's attention. There was a debate in 1987 over what the state fossil should be (laughs).

Currie: The Tully Monster (both laugh).⁵⁶

DePue: Okay, you got to explain that one for us.

Currie: Apparently someone, I don't know if he was a professional or whether he was an amateur geologist type, had found this little vertebrae kind of thing in...Was it DuPage County, Kane County? And apparently several others were found, so the question was... They called it after him. His name was Francis Tully, and so they called this little thing a Tully Monster.

Well, at some point the geology community decided that it was really important to have a state fossil, just as we had a state bird, state flower, and so forth. Ordinarily, to get the state animal, the state bird, the way it happened was the legislature would propose a bill, and then the school children of the state of Illinois would vote. So that's why we have the white tailed deer.

But the geology people were very anxious that the Tully Monster wouldn't win. If you put a vote to the children, they would be for dinosaurs. They would be for T-Rex. They would be for all kinds of things that we don't even have in Illinois. So this legislation identified the Tully Monster as the state fossil.

Now people from the Field Museum recently announced their finding.⁵⁷ I think it turns out it's not a vertebrae at all. It's some other kind of creature. But the geologist won the day. I had several people in my own district who wrote to me saying, "Please support the Tully Monster bill." (DePue laughs)

DePue: But it seems to me just the kind of thing that the columnists and cartoonists would have a field day with.

Currie: They may well have. I wouldn't be surprised. We recently did popcorn as the state snack food. And always there's somebody who writes a column about what the legislature did this year, this term, and they always pick up on something like this.

DePue: Maybe I'm just being way too cynical, but let's say the state legislature working on a fossil (laughs).

⁵⁶ Tullimonstrum, colloquially known as the Tully Monster, is an extinct genus of soft-bodied bilaterian that lived in shallow tropical coastal waters of muddy estuaries during the Pennsylvanian geological period, about 300 million years ago. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tullimonstrum>)

⁵⁷ The Field Museum of Natural History, also known as The Field Museum, is a natural history museum in Chicago, Illinois, and is one of the largest such museums in the world. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Field_Museum_of_Natural_History)

- Currie: Yeah, yeah, that's too easy (both laugh).
- DePue: Yeah, I'm sorry. I had to go there.
- Currie: That's okay. That's okay.
- DePue: June 3, an article in the [*Hyde Park*] *Herald*, and I guess most of these were published in the *Herald*?
- Currie: Yes, they were mostly in my own local neighborhood newspaper.
- DePue: Here's the title, "Representatives Pray for Sanity in a Whirl of General Assembly Turmoil."
- Currie: What happened?
- DePue: I guess some of these issues we've been talking about all along here.
- Currie: Ah, okay. Yeah, okay.
- DePue: And the unresolved issues in that article that were addressed: teen pregnancy, AIDS, and I'm sure there were some others as well. But reflect back in your memories of 1987 versus 2016. How would you make a comparison there?
- Currie: Well, I would say that the problems in 2016—the fact that there is no budget—is more serious than the questions about whose ox is gored and who's getting cuts and who's not and whether or not we're dealing with things like the Tully Monster. I would just say that the failure of budgeting for the current fiscal year is little short of a disgrace.
- When it comes to problems with budgets and so on, in the years preceding, yeah, you can certainly say, "I would rather fund this; I'd rather spend on that." But the reality is that, if you were the governor, you would be in charge of all those programs. Then at the end of the day, you provide—even if some would charge inadequate funding for some services—you do provide funding for services across the board.
- DePue: Let me ask you this then. You've been in the legislature since what year?
- Currie: Seventy-nine.
- DePue: Seventy-nine.
- Currie: January of '79.
- DePue: And over the time you've been there, what would you look at as the halcyon years of the Illinois legislature, when things were working as the citizens of Illinois would be proud of their legislature?

Currie: As I said earlier... I don't remember specifically which period was an easier period. When the economy is good, it's always easier to be a legislator than when the economy isn't. And I know that when Jim Edgar became governor, we did have to make some pretty serious cuts because we had been spending money and the economy was not humming along as nicely as it might. But I also...

DePue: But it was in '87.

Currie: Well then why... Then I'm not remembering.

DePue: I shouldn't have interrupted you. Go ahead.

Currie: I guess I would just say that there's always stuff undone. I used earlier the example of education reform. You can always go back and reform the schools yet one more time. And the call to do that will be continuous.

I would say that, as a general proposition, I think that what's happened in the legislature has improved the lot of ordinary Illinois citizens. We do have preschool programs for educationally disadvantaged children. We've expanded—and now, of course, we have Obamacare—but we had expanded some of the health services provided to low income people. We talked about pregnant women, infant care. And we had, until very recently, a model childcare assistance program in the State of Illinois. So I think over time, incrementally, we have made some major improvements.

Compare when I first came into the legislature and where we are today. Other things, like abolishing the death penalty. To me that was a very important issue as well. We used to have a death penalty, and we don't anymore. Again, preschool programs, more mainstreamed kids with disabilities. I think those are all good.

But I don't think it was a moment in time, when suddenly the sun shone, and the revolution was upon us. I think it was rather the value of incremental change and continuing advocacy for the people who tend to be left out, without a bit of a boost from their own government.

DePue: I guess part of the question though is, was there a time when the Republicans and Democrats were able to come together and find some accommodation to make some decisions and to move forward?

Currie: I think the experience mostly was exactly that. At the end of the... In May of every year, there was accommodation. We passed budgets. And generally speaking, there was a willingness on the part of lawmakers to accommodate, to a degree, the priorities of the executive.

And the executive also was willing to accommodate, to a degree, priorities of the legislature. Jim Thompson said it in one budget speech, and it

really stuck with me. What he basically said is, “Okay, these are my priorities. These are things that I think it’s important for us to do. I know you have your priorities as well. And at some point, we’ll figure out how we’re going to do it.” But he said, “The most important thing is there is a bottom line, and we can’t spend what we don’t have.”

It was a very straight forward statement that said that, yes, we’re going to build a budget and it will include some of things that I care about. It’ll include things that you care about. But the most important thing is we can’t spend money that we don’t have. We have to agree that we will respect the bottom line. That to me was exactly the essence of what good government is supposed to be.

DePue: We’ve talked about the Cutback Amendment...

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: ...and the impact of the Cutback Amendment. Do you think the abilities of the late 1980s legislatures to come together and to solve issues had been affected by the changes that were wrought by the Cutback Amendment?

Currie: I think to a degree but probably not like an earthquake hit. I think what happened was, that by virtue of trying to respond to district needs, I think that there were some very vulnerable people in both parties who were less willing to take tough votes, to stand up for things, because they didn’t want to offend other people. I think that was less true when you had the multi-member districts. I think people were able to be a little freer with their sense of what their vote responsibilities might be.

Since the Cutback Amendment, for most people, if it’s a safe district in the primary or in the general election, it gives people a little bit of... It bolsters their ability to be a little more responsible.

But, of course, the difficulty with that analysis is that in a Republican primary, for a district that is leaning and likely will go Republican, you can have problems with your right flank. Because of the primary problem—Democrats, it’s the same way—somebody who’s further to the left than the Democrat may be waiting in the wings. So there’s maybe little bit less strength of political purpose reflected in votes in the House of Representatives.

DePue: In 1983, going back a few years, Harold Washington was elected as Chicago’s mayor. You end the year in 1987, November 25th, 1987, Harold Washington dies. That was a surprise, wasn’t it?

Currie: Yeah, yes. He had not been ill, not in the hospital. He had a sudden heart attack.

- DePue: Your response, your reaction to hearing that news?
- Currie: I was devastated, absolutely devastated. Of course, the next thing that happened was the council went completely berserk.
- DePue: In what way?
- Currie: The question was, what was going to be the succession? We had the deputy mayor. Maybe that was David Orr?
- DePue: David Orr is the name I've got here.
- Currie: Yeah, but he was not the favorite candidate to succeed Mayor Washington. And I think things split with Eugene Sawyer on the one hand and Tim Evans on the other. Sawyer eventually won the day.
- DePue: Did they accelerate when the next election was going to occur?
- Currie: I don't think that we did.
- DePue: Were you one that was involved in the city politics as well? Or did you usually try to stay out of it.
- Currie: Not as much, no. I did go down to City Council to watch the antics. That was not the day he died; it was a week or two later. Dick Mell [was] on his desk.⁵⁸ It was quite wild.
- DePue: Paint me a better picture of that. I'm curious.
- Currie: Well, it was complete, complete chaos. And as I say, Dick Mell standing on his desk, pounding, carrying on. For people who were in the sort of reform community, certainly [Alderman] Eugene Sawyer was not thought to be the right standard bearer. But many of them weren't so crazy about [City Council Finance Chair] Tim Evans either, as he had been thought to be very much less independent, progressive, a standard bearer than he apparently was.
- DePue: Which person was Dick Mell favoring?
- Currie: Oh, I'm sure Eugene Sawyer. Unless he was favoring the other third candidate, who might have been white. I just don't remember. But Eugene Sawyer would have been his choice.
- DePue: But you remember the show apparently.

⁵⁸ Upon Mayor Washington's death in 1987, Richard "Dick" Mell, Democratic member of the City Council, famously stood on his desk in the City Council chambers, demanding to be recognized as the divided council wrestled with the question of who would succeed Washington. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Mell)

Currie: Absolutely. How could you skip it? And I have to tell you, when Blagojevich decided he was going to run for governor, all I could think is the campaign advertisements involving the footage of his father-in-law, [Dick Mell] (both laugh). Didn't seem to stop him, but there you are. I thought, "Whoops!"

DePue: Horse racing legislation. That comes up occasionally, and it did in '87 apparently. Where in general were you at then, in terms of expansion of gambling?

Currie: Mixed. I don't remember how I voted on any of those bills. There's a libertarian streak in me that says, "You know people want to gamble. Let them." I don't think I would have voted for the lottery if I'd been in the legislature when the lottery was approved. In part, that's because the idea that the state itself is (laughs) running the gambling game strikes me as really kind of beyond the pale. But the idea that people should be able to gamble is not one that I find morally repugnant. On the other hand, there always are questions about the probity of the people who are running the private sector gambling, and so there are questions about whether...

DePue: There have been politicians that have gone down because of that issue.

Currie: That's right, absolutely right. So, I've always been a little tentative. On one hand, I don't want to interfere with people's decisions about how they want to spend their entertainment dollar. But on the other hand, I don't want it to go overboard.

DePue: This was an issue then. It certainly is continuing to be an issue today. The horse racing industry has always argued that you have all these other alternatives. That only weakens our position.

Currie: Right. Well, it does. To me, there's something totally inconsistent or totally lacking in rational theory, that the fact that horse racing is a dying industry means that we should make the casinos (laughs) subsidize the horse races.

Well, excuse me, if you haven't been able to sell your product, is it really appropriate for us to subsidize you? I know we do it many arenas, but I always think that there's something questionable about it.

DePue: I guess that means you haven't been caught up in the romance of horse racing?

Currie: No, I have not. I know Jim Edgar was very much caught up in the romance of horse racing. But I myself have never been.

DePue: I'm going to finish with this one, and it's going to take us pretty to close to the end of the Thompson years.

Currie: Okay.

- DePue: In 1987, for fiscal year 1988, Governor Thompson pushed hard for a temporary income tax increase.
- Currie: I'm your girl. I'm certainly right there with the governor.
- DePue: One point six billion dollars. A gas tax increase, nine and a half cents a gallon increase over five years, to top at thirteen cents. An increase in services, as we were talking before, particularly for some of those (laughs) you just mentioned: dry cleaning, haircuts, auto repairs, sales tax on computer software, which would have been the thing right about that time.
- Currie: Absolutely right.
- DePue: Brand new industry.
- Currie: Yep.
- DePue: Over the counter medicines and health aids. Seventeen dollar increase in license plate fees, above what was already charged, I guess at that time, of \$48. That gets everybody's attention when they pay that.
- Currie: It sure does; it sure does.
- DePue: And an income tax increase, a 20 percent temporary income tax increase. This is going to be a three-year discussion. Do you remember the discussion that first year?
- Currie: I don't remember the specifics, but I'm certainly a tax and spend kind of person. I was not of the view that Illinois' tax structure is so punitive that we have to worry about any additional tax burden. It still is true today, among the states that tax income, we're still at the bottom. So that was not my particular...
- I also would argue that the property tax is in many ways more burdensome than, certainly, the income tax. The fact that we do not do an adequate job funding public education means that there is a greater reliance in Illinois than in most states on the property tax. I would have been perfectly happy to work with the governor and to support much of what he was proposing.
- DePue: Where were you in terms of the Democrat leadership in the legislature at that time, 1987?
- Currie: I wasn't in leadership.
- DePue: But there would have been several majority leaders, right?

- Currie: Well, but that would have been... Was that Mike McClain? I don't remember who was in.
- DePue: I don't know.
- Currie: I don't know.
- DePue: Well Jim McPike. Was he still there?
- Currie: Yeah, no. He became majority leader much later. Isn't that right?
- DePue: I think he was already the majority leader.
- Currie: Oh, okay.
- DePue: Certainly Madigan was the speaker at the time.
- Currie: Yes, right, right. I don't think that I was actually in leadership, but I played a kind of a behind the scenes leadership role.
- DePue: And that's what I was anticipating, because of your role today. So here's the question for you: Why was Madigan opposed to the income tax increase, to this general, the tax increase that Thompson was pushing for?
- Currie: I don't remember. Ordinarily you can make it all work with some kind of structured roll call. So I'm not sure why he would have been so opposed.
- DePue: The end result, since Madigan did not go along... Do you know how you would have voted that year if it came up for a vote? You would have voted yes.
- Currie: Yes, yes. Now, I'm not going to say that I would have voted for every piece of his proposal but I would have voted for a temporary income tax increase. I would likely have voted for some expansion of the sales tax to include at least some services. License plates fees, we've done that several times.
- DePue: I would guess that here's the governor, the Republican governor, proposing income tax increases. So many of the Republicans in the legislature would vote against their governor to vote it down. Maybe this is speculation on your part, but which of the Democratic members, if you can make a broad brush comment, the kind of members in the legislature that would have supported their boss, Mike Madigan, and voted it down as well?
- Currie: I suspect a fair number. But I suspect they would also have been reluctant to vote for it. I mean, I would think that people like me would likely have been willing to buck the leadership and vote for a tax increase. But I think a lot of the people who are encouraged to vote for a tax increase—and certainly there have been many tax increases under Madigan's speakership—those people

weren't real anxious to do it. They would do it if they had to (laughs). But if they had a really good reason not to, they were perfectly happy not to.

DePue: Would you speculate it was downstate Democrats that would have voted with the speaker to vote down the income tax increase?

Currie: You know, I don't remember. I really don't. I expect there would have been a fair number of city folks as well.

DePue: I think it resulted in \$390 million in cuts that Thompson then had to find, a 5 percent cut in many of the state agencies. There were no cuts in public aid, as I understand.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Thirty-one hundred layoff notices were sent out. And obviously, in most cases, the agencies prefer to do that in attrition, and many times they're able to do that.

Currie: Right. Right.

DePue: But there's, obviously, pain involved with that.

Currie: Right, right, right. I really don't remember why Madigan was opposed. It was '87, you said?

DePue: Yeah, 1987 for the '88 fiscal year.

Currie: Fiscal year.

DePue: In '87 Thompson vetoes eighty-four bills, and he claimed that it saved \$378 million. So, let's go to the next fiscal year. It's also an election year.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Not for the governor...

Currie: No.

DePue: ...but for the legislature.

Currie: Yes, the legislature.

DePue: In February, the governor proposes a 1989 budget of \$22.2 billion. Again, this is a significant increase of where he started to begin with.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: And he again recommends raising the income tax from 2.5 to 3.5 percent and corporate rate from 4 to 5.6 percent, a 40 percent increase.

Currie: Um-hmm.

DePue: Again, Madigan...

Currie: Resisted.

DePue: ...resisted, stands in opposition.

Currie: I really don't remember. Did I say anything in my columns?

DePue: I don't know. Now, tell me this. I looked in this box that I was going through yesterday.

Currie: Um-hmm.

DePue: Unfortunately, I was running a workshop, so I only had a very little bit of time.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: But the last articles I saw were 1987.

Currie: No, I went on writing them. And actually I think that that newspaper, the *Hyde Park Herald*, has digitized. So I think that the sons of the publisher, for his eightieth birthday or eighty-fifth birthday, paid to have everything digitized. So I think that it's all online. And I think I wrote about every two weeks. I may have stopped sometime around late '97.

DePue: So I need to probably go to another archival box then. My apologies for not being as ready as I should have been here.

Currie: Oh, not a bit.

DePue: So let's go to the next year then, in 1989 for the 1990 budget.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: And that year inflation is 4.8 percent. We look at that today and think that's an astoundingly high number.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: That was much lower than it had been, as you know...

Currie: Right.

DePue: ...from previous years.

Currie: Right.

DePue: The Illinois unemployment rate was 6.1 percent, which was higher than the national average by a significant number, .50 percent or more. And the thirty-year loan rate was at 10.32 percent, which again, in today's figures, is astoundingly high but a dramatic decrease from what it'd been a decade before.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: So, the economy was generally on the increase. Economic times were good. But as we talked before—talking too much now, I'm afraid—there were a lot more strains on the budget...

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: ...because of the trends in society. Do you recall any specifics about the change of heart? Why Madigan, now in this year, is willing to support it.

Currie: I really don't remember. I mean, I have to figure out what that was. I really don't remember, Mark.

DePue: So Governor Thompson comes in with a budget of \$21.8 billion, which is lower than the previous one.

Currie: Right, lower, right, right.

DePue: His comment: "This budget is a far better budget than in any recent years. It is a muscular budget, neither malnourished nor bloated with fat. It has the strength to lead us into the '90s." No request for income tax. So this time around he doesn't go after it.

Currie: Right.

DePue: It's \$400 million less than was requested for '89. This is the 1990 budget.

Currie: Yeah, yep, yep.

DePue: Then there's an article that says, "Thompson and others have cited '84 expiration of a similar eighteen month income tax as the reason the state education needs have not been met in recent years." So this an issue that you had been arguing all along.

Currie: Right, right, right.

DePue: So instead—I need to take a look at my own notes here.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: An income tax increase from 2.5 to 3 percent—This is what Madigan now is recommending—the corporate income tax from 4.4 percent to 4.8 percent. Half of that supposedly for education and the other half of this increase to local governments.

Currie: Well, that's kind of a loser (laughs).

DePue: The local governments part?

Currie: Well, if I'm the governor, yes, I'm happy to see more money for education, but I think I wanted some money for own agencies as well.

DePue: And what do you think about temporary versus a permanent income tax increase?

Currie: Well, I was always of the view that you should do permanent because you just get cudged until you're black and blue, when you say temporary, if it turns out you need to make it permanent after all. It's just that you're creating political problems for yourself, would be my view.

If you really have the resources to say, a year and half later, "We don't need to keep this increase that we'd imposed upon ourselves. We're going to cut it back." Dandy, do it, take the credit.

Unfortunately, when people say, "Let's do temporary," it's not usually because they have some real reason to think that you're not going to need it a year and half or two years down the line. It's because they think that they can sell it. I don't really understand the mentality of somebody who, in the legislature, would vote for temporary but could not be encouraged to vote for permanent.

DePue: Sell it to get it passed through the legislature?

Currie: Yeah, I'm just...

DePue: Or sell it to the general public until the next election?

Currie: No, sell it to get it through the legislature. I think that's usually the issue that there are lawmakers who say, in smaller groups, "Oh, I can't vote for anything that's permanent, but I could maybe support a temporary." Why they think that, I don't know. All I know is that they then get beaten up black and blue when it's time for the temporary income tax to go away, and we still need the resources. So I don't know why you want to vote for it twice, I guess is what I... (laughs) I always argued the other side of that issue, but I rarely won.

DePue: And that was, I assume, the case here in the most recent go around with it?

Currie: Yes, absolutely.

DePue: I'm going to read a couple of quotes here that kind of add a little bit of spice to the discussion.

Currie: Okay (laughs).

DePue: And then maybe we can start with this whole issue again next time when we talk about it and get together.

Currie: Okay, okay.

DePue: Rick Pearson [journalist]. I'm sure you know Rick Pearson.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Wrote in the *Illinois Issues Magazine*, reflecting back at this. He wrote in 1997. "But perhaps the most dramatic example of Madigan's power came on a single day, May 17, 1989. After putting Thompson off for two years on the governor's push to increase the state's income tax, Madigan changed his mind and conceived, organized, and led what came to be known as Operation Cobra." Does that ring a bell?

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: Then he continues, "Madigan was able to gather support from his Democratic members and keep them silent while seductively leaking the story to the press the night before, so that in a matter of six hours, he'd accomplished the introduction, committee approval, and House passage of a temporary 18 percent income tax hike, using only the votes of his House Democrats. The political *tour de force* stunned Thompson, who was left to read about it in the morning newspapers." Do you remember that?

Currie: I remember, but I never really understood why Madigan wanted to do it that way, except that I think he would never have had support from the governor to do a tax increase that didn't help fund the governor's own agencies.

DePue: Do you remember how you voted?

Currie: I'm sure I voted yes.

DePue: Along with Madigan.

Currie: Well yeah. I mean, you know...

DePue: So finally, he was coming around to your side.

Currie: ... I'm a tax and spend Democrat, as I told you.

DePue: I love this quote from Thompson. "It was bold. It's audacious. And it might even be diabolical." (both laugh)

Currie: Oh, that's a good one. That's a good one.

DePue: So that's probably a good way to finish and maybe prompt your...

Currie: Yeah, I love it. I will do my best to see if I can figure out the explanations there.

DePue: And I'll do my best to be better prepared next time for you.

Currie: Don't be silly. No, you do a great job.

DePue: I just want to finish with the specifics: sales tax from 5 to 6.2 percent on January 1, 1990. Cigarette tax went up from twenty cents to thirty cents per pack. Gas tax went up from sixteen cents to nineteen cents, diesel from nineteen to twenty-two. So, a lot of pieces to this legislation, but the income tax was one that got everybody's attention.

Currie: Right, of course.

DePue: Thank you very much...

Currie: Well, thank you.

DePue: ...representative.

Currie: (laughs) or Barb.

DePue: Okay, it was fun.

Currie: Actually, I don't go by Barb. I go by Barbara. But I much prefer that to leader.

DePue: Thank you very much.

(end of transcript #5)

Interview with Barbara Flynn Currie

#ISL-A-L-2014-049.06

Interview #6: April 1, 2019

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Monday, April 1, 2019. This is Mark DePue with the Oral History program at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm sitting across the table from former leader, Barbara Flynn Currie. For your title I always have to think about it for a second.

Currie: Majority leader.

DePue: Majority leader. Is that how you should be referred to officially?

Currie: Yeah, House majority leader, the first woman to hold the job, and I think the longest serving majority leader of either gender in Illinois House history.

DePue: I don't even think we're going to get that far today.

Currie: That's all right. That's okay.

DePue: Last time we spoke was, Majority Leader, was March 23, 2016.

Currie: Oh wow. Okay, so that's two, three years.

DePue: So it's been three years.

Currie: I thought it was two. See, now my memory's going to be a lot worse (DePue laughs).

DePue: But there's a lot of water under the bridge since that time. We've got a new governor now, and you're now officially retired.

Currie: As of January 9, 2019.

DePue: We typically like to have people retire before we do an oral history, but I had other reasons to want to get to you before you retired, especially to talk about the Thompson years. I was working on that Thompson project.

We got up through his years, so I'm going to start with this. In 1990, and it's August 2nd of 1990, the Iraq War begins. Actually Iraq invades Kuwait. I don't know that we need to spend too much time, but I did want to hear your reflections on that chapter of American history.

Currie: Well, clearly, we made some mistakes. I wasn't paying close attention to what was going on in Washington, particularly with international policy, because in the first place, I'm a state legislator, and in the second place, I never had been involved in international things as a state... That's not quite true. Periodically people from foreign countries come in and ask, not me particularly, but ask people to introduce resolutions about the Armenian genocide or recognizing Taiwan. So, I guess I'm not sure which... No, it was the...

DePue: This is the first Gulf War.

Currie: Yeah, the first Gulf War, and that was when [George] H. W. [Bush] was president. I don't remember that I had strong views at that point. It looked as if my recollection is that I thought what we were doing was okay. It was the weapons of mass destruction that got us in trouble.

DePue: And that was over a decade later.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: So you started by saying, "Clearly we made mistakes," but are you referring to this...

Currie: But not to that war.

DePue: Do you recall—again, I don't want to spend too much time on this—the reaction of the American public when the war was so short. The combat, the ground phase, was about only four days old.

Currie: That's the way we like it.

DePue: And then the troops came home. Do you remember the response the American public gave to the troops?

Currie: No, I do not. I do not. Remind me.

- DePue: Well, it's only because it was quite different [from the Vietnam War], a lot of parades, a lot of accolades.
- Currie: Four days. We like a four-day war. And we're always promised four-day wars, and then when they don't happen, we're very cranky.
- DePue: The American public is like that. But that was somewhat a...
- Currie: Yeah, I think any public does.
- DePue: ...yeah, a response to what had happened with the returning Vietnam veterans.
- Currie: Yes, yeah. But very different to be slogging in Vietnam for all those years and a four-day war.
- DePue: Let's get to the 1990 election.
- Currie: Okay.
- DePue: And it was at that time—I think my notes are a little bit wrong here—Neil Hartigan is running for governor against Jim Edgar. For fourteen years now, Thompson had been governor. As far as you're concerned, was it time for a Democrat?
- Currie: Well, I was certainly for Pinky.
- DePue: Pinky?
- Currie: Strike that, Mr. Hartigan. But I must say that Mr. Edgar ran a respectable campaign. On the issues that I cared about, Mr. Edgar made a pretty good showing, but I was for Mr. Hartigan.
- DePue: The issue of that campaign was the income tax.
- Currie: Right, and I remember that Mr. Hartigan said, "We're not for it. We're not going to do it." And Mr. Edgar said, "I'm open to it," that there are revenue needs unmet in the state because there are responsibilities of the state that without additional revenue cannot be met. He sounded like a Democrat (DePue laughs). I did not vote for him, but he sounded like a Democrat.
- DePue: And you recall what Hartigan was saying in reference to the budget problems at the time?
- Currie: I know that he was ruling out a tax increase. At least that's my recollection, that he ruled out a tax increase, the Democrat. The Republican did not rule out the tax increase and said there may well be good reasons to do it because we have unmet needs; we have unmet responsibilities. I don't remember if Hartigan had a different way of dealing with those issues.

DePue: I believe his common approach was a 2 percent reduction, across the board.

Currie: Oh, I'd forgotten that, yeah. Well, what can I tell you? I think probably a lot of Democrats voted for Edgar.

DePue: But you did not.

Currie: I did not, no, a party girl from start to finish (DePue laughs). My husband might have—I'm not sure—but I didn't.

DePue: But apparently you saw the logic to Edgar's position versus Hartigan's, right?

Currie: Yes, absolutely. We did need additional revenue, and I myself was not fearful of saying so. On the other hand, I'm not running statewide. I'm sure that from the polling and from the handlers and all the rest of it, Edgar's position, I thought, was a pretty out-on-a-limb position.

But I think, at the end of the day, I suspect that it did not harm him with some of the traditional Democratic stakeholders. I mean those who work in the areas where the needs are unmet, whether it's schoolteachers, university academic types, or frontline people in DCFS. Yes, we need more hands on deck. Yes, there are needs that are not met. And I suspect that, among lakefront liberal types, that the Edgar message may have resonated better than the Hartigan message.

DePue: It was a very close race.

Currie: Um-hmm.

DePue: And I can't remember the spread.

Currie: But it was not as close as Thompson versus Stevenson.

DePue: No, that was the closest. That was only 5,074.

Currie: Five thousand seven hundred, yeah, whatever, yeah.

DePue: It wasn't nearly that close, but it was traumatic for Edgar, and he didn't know until, I think, about 2:00 in the morning, that he'd won.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: Apparently you weren't too upset that Edgar had won that race.

Currie: No. As I say, what I will continue to say, I would have preferred Mr. Hartigan, but Edgar was not a bad choice for the Illinois electorate to make. And I think he proved himself a respectable, responsible, and responsive governor.

DePue: You got the House controlled by the Democrats. The Senate's controlled by the Democrats at that time. And, of course, you've got a Republican governor. And now it's for sixteen years.

Currie: Sixteen years, right.

DePue: That's a long time. I want to change gears though...

Currie: Oh.

DePue: ...because about the same time, Rutan was passed, the Rutan decision. Rutan versus the Republican Party of Illinois.

Currie: That came down during...What year did that come down?

DePue: Well, I'm seeing June 21, 1991. I always thought it was 1990, but let's say '91. That's a leftover from the Thompson years.

Currie: Right, right. Mary Lee Leahy was the lead lawyer.

DePue: And I've had the chance to interview her about that as well.

Currie: Great.

DePue: Give us a little bit of the background of that, if you would please.

Currie: The Shakman Decree in northeastern Illinois, the Shakman Decree. The person for whom it is named, Michael Shakman, was the co-chair of my campaign. And I had worked in his campaign for delegate to the Constitutional Convention. It was that experience that was the seed of the Shakman lawsuit.

The problem was that when he talked to people and his workers, his volunteers, talked to people, they would say things like, "I'd really like to vote for him, but I might lose my job if I do." There was a general clamping down on people who were beholden to important personages in city, county, and whatever government. And that's what caused him to file a lawsuit. Everybody thought at the time that it was very much a long shot, but the courts did buy it. And the Rutan arguments, my recollection is, were very much along the same line. So I was happy with the outcome.

DePue: So, you are not of fan of patronage of the old school?

Currie: No, I'm not.

DePue: You mentioned the Shakman Decree. I have had a chance to interview Michael Shakman.

Currie: Okay. As I say, my campaign co-chair...

DePue: I guess I didn't know that.

Currie: ...from the very beginning.

DePue: Would you disagree with this? The lifeblood of the Democratic machine in Chicago was patronage?

Currie: I guess I would say, if that's the lifeblood, I don't really want any of it. I think there are other ways to develop internal strength within a political party than doling out jobs. If you go back to the pre-Roosevelt era, it was "Okay. We'll give you a turkey." (laughs) "We'll give you a garbage can." And Social Security, other kinds of programs from the New Deal, really changed that relationship. To me that is a good thing. There ought to be an even-handed approach for government, from government to individuals, whether it's jobs, whether it's turkeys, whether it's garbage cans.

DePue: Of course, you'll recall that one of the decisions that had to be made afterwards is: Yes, there are some positions that the governor should have the opportunity to select.

Currie: And I buy that. I buy that at every level of government. Yes, there ought to be some top aids that the individual feels they can trust, that they know that they're on the same team. It seems to me that's perfectly reasonable. The question is how many, and what are those jobs?

DePue: Name me some that you think are appropriate in that respect.

Currie: Any chief of staff, policy, the people who head the policy department. At any level of government. I'm not real familiar with how the organizational chart reads, so I'm not sure who else. Well, I would say cabinet members, if you're talking about a governor, because those people are implementing policies that are part and parcel of the administration and maybe even some of the next-in-line people in those departments. But I think you have to be pretty careful not to include the secretary or the truck driver or the trooper at the side of the road.

DePue: You think that they pretty much got it right back in the early '90s?

Currie: I do. I think they did. Now whether the administration got it right, in terms of who fits and who doesn't fit in the categories, that I'm less certain about.

DePue: How familiar are you with the rules that came about after the Rutan decision about hiring procedures? They had a whole set of rules now, the Rutan hiring procedures, that you had to get the training and all. How familiar were you with that?

Currie: Not real familiar. I mean, I was watching, but not closely.

- DePue: The only reason I mention it because I think even Mary Lee Leahy was concerned that they were implemented in a way she didn't think was all that efficient.
- Currie: Oh, okay. I don't remember that.
- DePue: Let's move to something I bet you are a little bit more familiar with.
- Currie: Yeah?
- DePue: Redistricting following the 1990 census.
- Currie: Okay, was that one of mine (laughs)? I don't think so. Was it? No, I don't think I did reapportionment in '90. I think I did it in 2000, and 2000... Maybe I did it in '90. Did I?
- DePue: No, because the Republicans won the draw.
- Currie: Oh right, right, right, right. Of course, of course, of course. Dummy me. Okay.
- DePue: So now it's all coming back to you.
- Currie: Um-hmm.
- DePue: Because this, I imagine...
- Currie: But they lost in court.
- DePue: They lost in court. But they still had, essentially—they being the Republicans—had control of the draw; did they not?
- Currie: Well, for example, in my neck of the woods, what they drew in my area, would not have been at all helpful to me. In fact, it would have been pretty tough. It would have been a whole lot of new population in parts of the area that I was not particularly familiar with. And we ended up with a map that was fine for me. And that was because of the court case. So at least in some areas the effect of the court case was to nullify the Republican pen, when it came to drawing the original map.
- Now again, this is within...The more important issues is what happened in those areas where a territory could have been drawn so as to help the Republicans or help the Democrats or make for an open seat. My neck of the woods is a completely Democratic area.
- DePue: Well, that's what I was curious about. Were they attempting to draw the lines in a way that would have made it a toss-up district?
- Currie: No, it wouldn't have been possible to do that. What they were doing, however, was making life tough for incumbent Democrats.

- DePue: Okay. Well this...
- Currie: I don't know what happened in court that made that whole thing go away, but it did.
- DePue: So this is your district in the '80s, in the 1980s, if that looks right.
- Currie: Um-hmm. Yep, that looks right.
- DePue: So there's only a tiny piece of it that's actually on the lakefront.
- Currie: Well no. No, I would have had more. I would have had more of south shore.
- DePue: This is the one for 1990 now, and it's quite a bit of the lakefront, in this case.
- Currie: Yeah, but I thought I had more of the lakefront here too. I did not go as far south as this, but I thought I had more of the...
- DePue: Was it the twenty-fifth?
- Currie: Yeah.
- DePue: And that's from the Blue Book [official publication about Illinois state government published every two year]. We're looking at maps from the Blue Book.
- Currie: Well, you know what though? I think mine is the twenty-fifth, and this is the twenty-sixth, what you've got high lit.
- DePue: Did I get the wrong one?
- Currie: I think I was twenty-five.
- DePue: So, if that's twenty-five...
- Currie: And if I was twenty-five, then it's not very different from... But the proposed map,—Jordan whatever, Al Jordan whatever it was—would have sent me much further west. It would not have meant for a Republican win, but it would have meant likely defeat for me. And I believe that their map generally was a hostile takeover.
- DePue: You're saying that without the lawsuit you could have possibly been defeated by a Republican?
- Currie: No, no, no, by a Democrat.
- DePue: By a Democrat.

Currie: Yes. No, I'm saying that they were having a good time putting their fingers in somebody else's pie.

DePue: So you would have been running with another incumbent in the same district.

Currie: I don't remember now whether there was another incumbent in that district, in their proposed district, but it would have been an awful lot of new territory in parts of the south side, with which I was not especially familiar. I'm not saying I would have lost. I'm just saying that they would have made it much tougher for me. Exactly what their motive was, I don't know. And I thought that happened to some of my other colleagues as well, but I can't give you chapter and verse. But that was not something that would have helped them win the majority. And it was those districts that I think would have been at the heart of the lawsuit, not mine.

DePue: Do you think the Democrats typically play by a different set of rules when they come to redistricting?

Currie: I would say that both parties have a tendency to maximize their strength through map making.

DePue: Would you agree with Mike Lawrence's comment. that there's nothing more political than redistricting?

Currie: Not sure I agree that there's nothing more political, but there's no question redistricting tends to be political. What I find fascinating is that the 1970 constitution thought it was going to take politics out of redistricting, by virtue the tiebreaker, the drawing a Republican or a Democratic name out of Abraham Lincoln's hat. And except for one election, it didn't happen.

There was one election, which was right after, I think, the... There was some reapportionment, I believe, between '70 and '80, and I think I'm right, that they did compromise. But '80, '90, 2000, 2010, unh-uh.

DePue: Now, 2010 Quinn was governor.

Currie: He signed the map, and the map was a Democratic map.

DePue: Because all three...the party controlled all three branches there, okay. So you didn't have to have that drawing from the hat that particular year.

Currie: Right, right. No, but we did have control. All I mean is that, in '80, '90, and 2000, one might have thought that the risk of losing it all would have been enough to bring people together, bring them to the table, divide it up, "This is mine. This is yours, and we'll squabble about that which is in the middle." But it didn't work that way. Each party was willing to cede, winner take all, to the other side.

DePue: So what do you think?

Currie: Well, I'm surprised that human nature is such that that kind of hammer wasn't enough to bring people to the point at which they... I think if you look back, I think there was a reapportionment between '70 and '80, between the constitution of 1970 and 1980, where it did work. But apparently each side thought that it was going to be in good shape, even if the other guys were able to draw the map.

Of course, the '80 map, although it was challenged, Lee Daniels [House Republican leader] did not do terribly well during most of that decade, in terms of returning majorities to the Republican Party.

DePue: Jumping ahead a little bit, I'm sure you recall that there have been at least two, and I think maybe three, concerted efforts to get a referendum, a resolution into the general election. And it has always been blocked.

Currie: Right. Now, there have also been efforts in the legislature, and I believe the House passed a measure that would have... I can't remember exactly the structure, but I think that in the last—not this most recent term but the term before—I believe we had a measure that would have involved the Supreme Court in redistricting, would have made for a more bipartisan approach. It didn't go very far. So there had been...

I know there is also something very much like the proposed constitutional amendment that had not been allowed on the ballot. I think Ryan Spain [Republican House member] is carrying it. I would say just a couple of things. The specifics of the proposal from Mr. Spain and the Fair Map Coalition have been really cumbersome. For example, the numbers of hearings that would have to be held, the large number of decision-makers is so specific that it is not what a constitution should include. A constitution should have principles; it should provide guidance, but it should not do the nuts and bolts, the everyday "This is how you do it."

The other quibble I have is that the effort to do fair map seems to be very concentrated in Democratic states. And I would just say, if we're going to do it, can't we do it across the board? Can't we also make sure that maps are drawn in a different way in red states? It just seems to me that the public opinion and public push from those who are behind this mapping program tend to be people in the blue states. I don't see their counterparts operating similarly in the red states.

There's also a question of whether these new ways of doing business are all that effective. I know when California adopted a commission, the commission was underfunded. Some of the maps that were adopted were precisely the maps that the Democratic congressional delegation were

pushing. So it was a little hard to know that the people who were making these judgments had the expertise or the resources to make really good decisions.

There were some examples, wherein some partisan outcomes happened, not because, I think, the members of the commission were just playing patsies and turning over and saying, "Do it your way." But I don't think they had the tools and the resources to say, "Let's do it differently."

DePue: I know that the last time the... Is it correct to say resolution or referendum?

Currie: There was a referendum, yes.

DePue: Okay, the referendum was written in such a way to respond to why the Supreme Court had rejected it the previous time. Yet it was rejected again.

Currie: Yeah, and I don't remember the exact arguments, but the idea is that you have to change the procedures and the structure of the Illinois General Assembly. I think the court didn't buy whatever finagling they did to make it seem as if it were doing both. The court said it wasn't.

DePue: And you were in agreement with what the Supreme Court did in that case?

Currie: I don't remember the specifics of the argument. My recollection is that I thought the court was right. As I say, you can do some of these things legislatively too. The legislature can propose a constitutional amendment.

One of the difficulties that we've always also talked about in Illinois is that we are a very diverse state. People have always looked at Iowa. Well, Iowa is a state very much lacking in diversity. The question for a state like Illinois is, "How do you make sure that minority groups are not given short shrift, as they have been in other places?"

Now, we do have some constitutional protections, and we did a constitutional amendment that basically says, "Yes, racial interests shall be a very important part of map making." So that's some protection.

DePue: That was an amendment that was made to the constitution after 1970?

Currie: Yes, I believe so. I think I sponsored it in the House.

DePue: In 2010, there was a Democratic governor [Pat Quinn], solid Democratic control in both the House and the Senate. So, the last time the referendum appeared was after that. That was still the situation. Democrats controlled all positions. And most people said... I could be wrong in that, but clearly the House was Democratically controlled, and the Senate as well.

Currie: The Senate was too, yeah.

- DePue: And the prognosticators were saying there's no way that Mike Madigan is going to allow a referendum to go forward on redistricting because that would hit his power base.
- Currie: Well, let me just say, if you look it up, I think Kwame Raoul [Democratic senator for the 13th District] was the sponsor in the Senate. And this is now... I don't know if it's four years ago or five, but I don't think it got through both chambers. But it was a proposal to redo the way we redraw maps. I think that it included some input from the Illinois Supreme Court, and I think it included some of the requirements that the Fair Map people had put on the table.
- DePue: And did it clear the House?
- Currie: I don't remember. I think it cleared the Senate, and I don't remember whether it cleared the House, and I could have the chambers reversed. But it was a legitimate effort to say, "Let's take at least some of the politics out of redistricting." The methodology was different from the Fair Map approach, which was all these citizens coming from God knows where to sit on these panels and then have hearings, 5,942, across the state. So, it was different.
- DePue: From your recollection, do you think that Mike Madigan would have been sympathetic to taking some of the politics out of the process?
- Currie: Yeah, as I say, I'm telling you there was a proposed constitutional amendment. I believe that Madigan backed it, and I believe that his staffers were involved in drafting it.
- DePue: Nineteen ninety-one, Governor Edgar comes into office...
- Currie: Oh, back to him (DePue laughs).
- DePue: I jump around a little bit.
- Currie: That's all right. That's okay.
- DePue: ...and finds out there's roughly a \$1 billion deficit. So he has to address that with some cuts in that particular fiscal year and then look for the fiscal 1991 budget, which goes into effect in July...
- Currie: July 1.
- DePue: ...of 1990 and makes fairly, some would say, draconian cuts.
- Currie: Yes, I think there was generally a sense in the legislature that the cuts were draconian.
- DePue: Something in the neighborhood of \$509 million for fiscal year 1992. Okay, I got the years wrong.

Currie: Yeah, okay, but yeah. I mean, I think there was a sense that it's the old, "Oh, I had no idea how bad it was when I ran for the job. I thought things were rosy. I thought everything was just swell. Now I'm here, and oh my god."

DePue: You didn't buy that line, apparently.

Currie: Well, a little disingenuous. And the question is whether you can fix the problem without making cuts that are going to hurt real people. I think Edgar was basically a responsive and compassionate governor.

He was looking at this from very much the balance sheet and saying, "My responsibility is to fix it, fix it now." And you have limited options. I guess my thought would be that one thing you can do is perhaps fix it over a longer period of time.

DePue: Now, he was the guy who ran on the proposal to extend that temporary income tax.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Which was done. So it went from 2.5 to 3 percent for the personal tax, 4 to 4.8 for corporate tax. So you've got that continuing stream of money.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Would you have been in favor of increasing taxes to fill that gap?

Currie: Yeah, I probably would have. Yes, of course, I would have. I'm a tax and spend liberal (DePue laughs). For all of the hand wringing and all the rest of it, Illinois, when it comes to income taxes, Illinois is now and was then a low tax state.

I understand property taxes are high because the State doesn't pay for public education. Sales taxes are high in some areas. But our income tax is still low, way low, compared to other states. That was true then as it is today.

DePue: Since you have this disconnect, Edgar wants to cut quite a bit from the budget. Obviously, there's disagreement in both the House and the Senate, both of which Democrats controlled at that time. You get to the point where you get to July 1—obviously, you go into the super majority in June—July 1, there's still no budget. Do you remember that budget fight?

Currie: Is that when we stayed in session for all that time because of public aid? I remember that there was a year in which there was a big budget fight over public welfare—it was then called Aid to Families with Dependent Children—and it ended up in court. I can't remember what year it was.

DePue: I'm not going to be able to help you on that. All I know is that the budget was finally signed on July 18.

Currie: I think that was the year.

DePue: So, just about the time the first state payrolls would have been missed.

Currie: Yes, yes, exactly. That has a way of exerting a little pressure on lawmakers.

DePue: At least it did back in the 1990s (laughs).

Currie: Yeah. On the other hand, the workers went to court when we had Governor Rauner and no budget. They went to the right court, and the court said, "Oh yeah, you get to be paid. Never mind, there's no appropriation."

DePue: Having interviewed Governor Edgar about this, he counted that as a victory (laughs).

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: A victory over Madigan.

Currie: That he signed the budget, you mean?

DePue: That he won the budget argument that year.

Currie: Yeah. Now, what I don't remember... There was the year where I thought—and I thought it was early in this term—when, at the end of the day, we gave him more than the usual discretion, in terms of how he made the cuts.

There's basically a 2 percent transferability built into any budget; you can move things around if you need to. But I think we increased it to 4 percent or something like that. So basically [we were saying], "Okay, let him make the tough decisions." I think that's what we did. You'd have to check the record to see if I'm right.

DePue: Yeah. It does sound right to me as well, because he did have that big budget hole.

Currie: Yes. Well, right, and we recognized that.

DePue: Your 13th Senate District, the senator at that time from your district was Alice Palmer. I don't know that we've talked about her.

Currie: Yeah, okay.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about Alice Palmer.

Currie: Well, Alice was an activist. Worked, I think, at the University of Illinois, Chicago. Her husband, Buzz Palmer, was very much a health advocate and activist. I can't remember where he worked. But he was, you know, he was a Bernie Sanders before his time. And Alice had been somewhat active in politics, and I believe she became the committeeman of the 7th Ward. I think she won an election as committeeman.

Richard Newhouse was the state senator. And Richard Newhouse resigned, so the committeemen picked a successor. At that time the 5th Ward committeeman, Alan Dobry, was very much an independent reformer. I believe Alice had been elected committeeman of the 7th, and I think, between them, they may have controlled the votes, although I think Toni Preckwinkle would have been part of that too. So they selected Alice to be the next state senator.

DePue: You'd been around for a while.

Currie: Yeah, no. I admired her, and I thought her positions were sound. I think she was not there very long before she ran for reelection. I don't remember if she had any opposition. If she did, it was marginal. And I think that she may have just escaped under the radar.

DePue: Did you personally ever have any interest in moving over to the Senate side?

Currie: No, I enjoyed being in the House. Yeah, I enjoyed being in the House.

DePue: Why?

Currie: Well, it's fun, more fun. The somnolent Senate? For heaven sake, no.

DePue: Pardon me?

Currie: The somnolent Senate. Well, you know, I was moving up the ladder, in the House. But then Alice ran for Congress, and that was not such a good move.

DePue: Do you remember what year that would have been?

Currie: No, I'm very bad at years. She'd not been in the state Senate very long before there was a vacancy for Congress. Emil Jones ran; Jesse Jackson Jr. ran. It was a field full of many. It was a special election. Who was the congressman? Not Bennett Stewart. I can't remember who it was. Anyhow, Jesse walked away with it, and Alice got...

DePue: Jesse Jackson Jr.

Currie: Yeah. And Alice got about this much of the vote.

DePue: Just a tiny amount.

- Currie: Yeah, very tiny. I guess I would I say that I admired very much her stand on the issues, and she was certainly smart and able. I don't think she was high in political acumen. That she felt she could run and win in this very large district against people like Jesse Jackson Jr., even Emil Jones, who was then, I think, president of the state Senate, would have more name recognition than she, was just unrealistic.
- DePue: Let's talk a little bit more about the '92 election, 1992. It's a presidential year with Bill Clinton, obviously. But at the state level, you don't have a gubernatorial election that year.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: But you're going to have a big turnout.
- Currie: Because that changed with the 1970 constitution.
- DePue: Right. Do you remember that particular election? Any challenges that you had?
- Currie: I don't remember. There were times when I had no challenges at all. And then, starting in the Blagojevich era, I had a challenge from Sharon Latiker, whom we thought might be a serious candidate.⁵⁹ But I don't think I'd been challenged for some period of time before she popped up. And I don't think it was as early as '92.
- DePue: These are interesting elections, maybe more so on the national level. This is the year of the women.
- Currie: Oh, right. Carol Moseley Braun going to the United States Senate.
- DePue: Exactly.
- Currie: Yeah, and it was very much. Everybody said, "This is the year of the woman." And it kind of fizzled, didn't it?
- DePue: I'm sure you recall why it was the year of the woman.
- Currie: Well, it had partly to do with Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas. And I think it also had to do just generally with the—I don't remember what the other factors were in the background—but I think what the electorate was looking for were the kinds of things that traditionally we attribute to women, the kinds of characteristics, the kinds of traits, the kinds of interests that, whether rightly or wrongly, are attributable to women.

⁵⁹ Sharon Latiker, who ran against Barbara Flynn Currie in the primary for the Illinois House of Representatives was a former city Law Department administrator who was convicted for writing bad checks. Latiker later won a pardon and expungement. (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2006-02-23-0602230033-story.html>)

Women did very well in that election, but it did not hold up. And the real question is whether or not the #Me Too movement will have made a difference in the 2018 midterms.⁶⁰ Personally, I think they will. I don't think we're going to go back.

DePue: We had talked a little bit before about Carol Moseley Braun because she's essentially from the same neighborhood, is she not?

Currie: Right, in fact, I told you, we're a footnote in Illinois political history, the only time two women from the same political party were elected to the Illinois House of Representatives. And it can never happen again. It happened because we had multi-member districts and cumulative votes. We are the first and last.

DePue: Were you surprised that she won the Senate race that year?

Currie: Yeah, I was. I was certainly in her corner, and I was really glad that she won. But it was a difficult race. You had Alan Dixon. You had Blair Hull. And wasn't Blair Hull spending quantities of money? Had it been a one-on-one, I don't know that Carol would have won. But she was, I think, helped because Alan Dixon and Blair Hull split the vote, and Carol came in with, I don't know, 38 percent, something like that. So it was a very...

DePue: You're talking about in the Democrat primary then.

Currie: Yes, I'm sorry. I am talking the Democratic primary. But that was... Without that, she would not have become a United States senator. So it was a pretty evenly split field, in that she did nose out the other two. But I think it would not have been a success had she just been running head on head with Alan Dixon.

DePue: A very well-known name in the state of Illinois at that time.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Al the pal.⁶¹

Currie: Al the pal.

⁶⁰ The #Me Too movement, with variations of related local or international names, is a social movement against sexual abuse and sexual harassment where people publicize allegations of sex crimes. the initial purpose of #Me Too is to empower sexually assaulted individuals through empathy and solidarity through strength in numbers. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me_Too_movement)

⁶¹ Former U.S. Sen. Alan J. Dixon of Illinois, the Metro East Democrat whose nickname, "Al the Pal," arose from an accommodating style of politics. (https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/al-the-pal-dixon-master-of-the-lost-art-of-compromise-is-laid-to-rest/article_f9074a7a-7856-55a2-9be3-662cc5fe346c.html)

DePue: Did you know him very well?

Currie: No, not well. I'd met him, but I didn't know him well.

DePue: What I'd like to do here, this is not necessarily to the '92 campaign, but campaigning in general, if you will. I've been looking at some of your papers, and I wanted to kind of get your sense of what it was like to be on the campaign trail. Some years were tougher than others. You've already suggested that. Did you like to campaign?

Currie: I did. It always is hard to start a campaign. You get out there on the Metra platform or the bus stop, and it's early in the morning, and here's this poor hapless person who just wants to get to work. You march up to them, and you say, "Hi (DePue laughs), I'm Barbara Currie, and I'm running for state representative." You give them a piece of campaign literature, which they do not want, and that is painful. That is painful. But after you've done it to the first hapless soul and the second hapless soul, you just forge right ahead.

In my campaigns, we did a lot of coffee meet and greet. So, those were opportunities to really talk about what's going on in Springfield. I cut my political eye teeth with the League of Women Voters, so the opportunity to inform and educate was always at the very top of my list. In these little coffee groups, you've a chance to expound upon why it is we need to do better at school funding or why the tax structure is not as fair and progressive as it... I enjoyed that part of campaigning very much, less so, the accosting strangers on the street (DePue laughs).

DePue: When you were, "accosting strangers on the street," was that generally during the Democratic primary or the general election?

Currie: Yes. Oh, definitely the Democratic primary.

DePue: Does that mean you didn't have to do much campaigning after the primary?

Currie: Right. Very rarely was there even a Republican opponent.

DePue: So in most years, did you need to do much campaigning at all, even in the primary?

Currie: Not unless I had an opponent, and there were many years when I didn't. My toughest race was in 1982, when Ray Ewell, an incumbent legislator, was my opponent. And that was the first year of single member districts. He was thought to be a very tough opponent, but I creamed him (DePue laughs). I won with a very significant vote...

DePue: That's a colorful verb.

Currie: ... 56, 58 percent, something quite impressive.

- DePue: Did the party ever try to put a candidate in that was more moderate? The Democratic machine, did they ever try to take you out?
- Currie: No, the first election was still multi-member districts, cumulative votes. There were ten running for the two nominations for the House seat. And the regular Democratic organization was somewhat split. John Stroger, committeeman of the 8th Ward, had his preferred candidate. Cecil Partee from the 20th Ward had his preferred candidate. Joe Bertrand in the 10th Ward had his preferred candidate. I think what happened was, they couldn't get their act together, and I think that's why Carol Braun and I were able to slip through.
- DePue: In most cases, even with the redistricting, you always ended up with a solidly Democratic district.
- Currie: Oh yeah, because I come from a part of the world where it would be practically impossible to draw me anything else.
- DePue: How much time then, if you don't need to do much campaigning, did you spend on campaign financing, on fundraising?
- Currie: Not a lot.
- DePue: Did the party want you to go out there and try to raise funds for the caucus?
- Currie: No, although I'm not a bad fundraiser. Frequently the party would say, "Could you help out this candidate come November?" I was always willing to do that, in part because I think that many of my contributors were people who may have been encouraged to contribute to other House Democrats.
- DePue: Were you generally working with groups or individuals when you're trying to do the fundraising?
- Currie: I generally did it myself, but I did ask for money from IEA [Illinois Education Association], IFT [Illinois Federation of Teachers], yeah.
- DePue: Some of the unions and some of the other organizations?
- Currie: Yeah, yes, and many of my contributors were contributors who would be happy if there were a Democratic majority in the Illinois House. So it was not hard for me to feel comfortable taking money from my campaign, not huge amounts, not huge amounts, more of a tithing system than anything else.
- DePue: When did you become minority...
- Currie: Majority leader, 1997.
- DePue: When did you become assistant majority leader?

- Currie: I think '93. I looked it up, and I think that's when it was.
- DePue: At that time, you're closely affiliated with Mike Madigan, Speaker of the House, and the line has always been that Madigan is a prodigious fundraiser on his own...
- Currie: He is.
- DePue: ...and it goes to the caucus. And then he can—for lack of a better term—dole out that money to close districts. Obviously, you're not going to be the beneficiary.
- Currie: No.
- DePue: My question though is, if you're raising money, does it go to Mike Madigan, who's making those decisions or to somebody else?
- Currie: Generally speaking, I gave money directly to candidates. I did certainly work with the party apparatus on which candidates might be needy.
- DePue: One of the things I found when going through your files, which was fascinating to me, were the surveys from various organizations that you would have to respond to. I'm looking at all of this, and I say, "My gosh, that must have taken a lot of time." I assume that you weren't necessarily the one who was filling these out yourself?
- Currie: Oh, I generally was.
- DePue: You were.
- Currie: Um-hmm. And all the columns that you have seen in the *Hyde Park Herald*, I wrote those.
- DePue: That takes a lot of time.
- Currie: I didn't have staff that... Or if I did have staff, I preferred to do it myself.
- DePue: Do you think that's an effective way for these organizations to take a measure of the politicians?
- Currie: I think it's hard to know. They're very keen on asking questions, and I think their view is they can then hold feet to the fire after. So, if somebody says they're for A, B, or C, and then they don't act upon their answer to A, B, or C, it becomes a, "Oh, well, wait a minute. This is somebody who's not truthful, not fair." A lot of the questionnaires are way too detailed and/or way too simplistic. The one that used to drive me completely crazy was the IVI-IPO, which was like a fifteen-page, two-week, take-home exam.

- DePue: What was the acronym again?
- Currie: The Independent Voters of Illinois Independent Precinct Organization, IVI-IPO. It was page after page after page and you really felt it was a two-week take-home exam.
- DePue: Was that an organization that got its roots back in the 1950s?
- Currie: IVI started here in Hyde Park. I think Paul Douglas was in... It was basically an offshoot of the ADA. And the IPO, the Independent Precinct Organization, I think, happened on the north side. I think Dick Simpson, in his runs for alderman, was helpful in creating IPO. And then the two merged, but I don't know when.
- DePue: The name I also hear all the time with that is Ab Mikva.
- Currie: Yeah, I don't know that he was involved in creating IVI, but I'm sure he would have worked closely with IVI when he was a state legislator and when he ran for Congress.
- DePue: Yeah. I might be overstating that, but his name always comes up when you're talking about independent Democrats.
- Currie: Oh yeah, absolutely.
- DePue: ADA.
- Currie: Americans for Democratic Action. I was not around, but I think in the 1940s, I think, IVI did then affiliate with ADA. In fact, someone one time told me that IVI preceded ADA. I don't think today there is a linkage between our local Independent Voters of Illinois's Independent Precinct Organization and Americans for Democratic Action, but people have said that there used to be.
- DePue: Was American for Democratic Action a national level organization?
- Currie: Um-hmm, pretty far to the left.
- DePue: What I want to do here is just go through some of the surveys that I saw.
- Currie: Okay (laughs). I wonder if I would still answer them the same way.
- DePue: And generally I'm going to name the organization and then just ask you what that organization's agenda would be, what they would be interested in. I'm sure there were some that didn't make the files, and they seem most to be on the left side of the political spectrum.
- Currie: Hmm, okay. I'm surprised at that.
- DePue: Common Cause.

Currie: Oh, they were very much interested in good government. Archibald Cox was their favorite human being. I worked very closely with them on passage of the Illinois Freedom of Information Act and those kinds of issues of electoral access, open records. Those are the kinds of things they've been very involved in.

DePue: Both liberals and conservatives are interested in good government.

Currie: And I think Common Cause is one of those organizations that does actually bring in people from both parties. It is not just a partisan group.

DePue: Illinois Woman's Political Caucus.

Currie: That didn't last very long, but they would have been interested in reproductive rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, those kinds of things.

DePue: By this time, obviously, the Equal Rights Amendment had been defeated, but choice was still very much on the agenda.

Currie: Very much.

DePue: Was it really that much of an issue at the state level in the '90s and 2000?

Currie: Choice?

DePue: Yes.

Currie: Totally. Remember, this is a state... Before I got there, '77, '70—I don't know what year it was—the legislature was accustomed to passing anti-choice bills, throwing in everything but the kitchen sink. Generally those bills got thrown out by the courts. Jim Thompson generally vetoed them, and generally the legislature overrode his veto.

Somebody showed me, not long ago, his veto message—Again, I don't remember what year it was—but it was one of those anti-abortion, everything but the kitchen sink bills. This [bill] had to do with, among other things, funding for abortions for women on Medicaid. I must tell you, his veto message talks about how unfair it is to say you have a right, but because you don't have resources, you can't access it. And the state should take responsibility for helping women make their choices real. That was one of the reasons he vetoed this bill. The legislature overrode by a very significant (laughs) margin in both chambers but nevertheless, just a very different world.

DePue: A decade later, you've got Edgar as the governor.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: At least around '92, the next couple years, you've got both houses controlled by the Democrats. But Edgar also is generally pro-choice.

Currie: Pro-choice. And again, I think that was helpful to him. In, the election, he checked the boxes, when it comes to lakefront liberals, however you want to define them. The tax stance, I'm sure, helped him with state workers and teachers and whatever, people who care about the homeless. But I also think that his views on reproductive rights were helpful with the progressive community, wherever you find it.

DePue: Well, since we're in this neighborhood, the next one I've got down here is NARAL.⁶²

Currie: Yeah, okay, they would have been very much like the Illinois Women's Political Caucus.

DePue: But still in existence today?

Currie: Only abortion rights would have been their...

DePue: That was strictly their...

Currie: I believe. That's my recollection. They're still around. The acronym is the same, but they've changed the words. I don't remember what it was and what it is. Now I think it's National Abortion Rights Action League.

DePue: Looking at the document, I couldn't find what the acronym meant. Maybe I just didn't look far enough. Here's one I think you've already talked about, unless there's a difference between Independent Voters of Illinois and IVI-IPO.

Currie: You got it.

DePue: It's one in the same.

Currie: That's the fifteen-page essay questions, (DePue laughs) two-week take-home test.

DePue: And what were they interested in?

⁶² When NARAL was first founded, the acronym stood for the "National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws." Later, it changed to the "National Abortion Rights Action League" and then later to the "National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League." (<https://prochoicemass.org/about/frequently-asked-questions>)

Currie: They were interested in everything. They were interested in government transparency, anti-patronage, the consumer protection movement, social welfare, election laws. They had a very wide variety of interests. And some of them were things that would have come out of groups like Citizen Action, you know, “Would you support limiting the amount of money the electric company can charge low income consumers?” And some of them were more like, “Would you support automatic voter registration?” It covered the waterfront, very distinct criminal justice, same-sex marriage. I think Barack [Obama] got caught up in that one. I think he answered their questionnaire and said, “Yes.”

DePue: Do you think that same-sex marriage question would have been on the survey in the 1990s?

Currie: I think it might have been.

DePue: Really.

Currie: But my point only is that, at some point, Barack answered. I believe he answered their questionnaire, and his answer was, “Yes.” Then he kind of took it back. And then he took... Evolving.

DePue: Yeah, that was his comment that, “My views have been evolving.”

Currie: Evolving, yeah. But he evolved backwards for a while, and then he evolved forwards.

DePue: The IVI, where would you put then on the political spectrum?

Currie: They started out as a **very** bipartisan organization. In fact, I knew a lot of Republicans who were part and parcel because of the good government stuff, because of reform, the transparency, accountability, no patronage politics.

I think, over time, IVI changed its stripes to a degree. They certainly had a hard time once Harold Washington became mayor, because how can you be... I mean, they were very anti-machine, very anti the whole Daley thing and whatever and whatever. But then when Harold Washington comes along, he's their cup of tea. And even if things didn't go quite the way they ought to, they could hardly say so.

DePue: Was Harold Washington part of the machine?

Currie: Well, yeah, he started out that way. All I mean is I think that it was the kind of organization that would have felt very uncomfortable raising tough questions about the administration of the first black mayor of the City of Chicago.

DePue: Back in the 1990s, would you have said they were liberal or progressive, or...?

Currie: I would say progressive.

DePue: Was that a term that was being used in the '90s?

Currie: You know, I don't remember when we started using it (laughs). I know that there was a time when we called ourselves liberals, and then we stopped. Then we picked up the mantel of progressivism. But when we did that... I think it was in the '90s, interesting how language changes.

DePue: Yes. The next one, I think I know what your answer's going to be, the NRA.

Currie: Right, well, they just wanted to make sure that we couldn't possibly take a gun out of the hands of any living human being or maybe even a dead one. Why I answered their questionnaire, I don't know.

DePue: It was in your folder though...

Currie: Yeah, okay.

DePue: ...and I had mentioned most of them were on the liberal side. That one is clearly not.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Illinois Public Actions.

Currie: That would have been like Citizen Action today, consumer watchdog. They would be concerned about things like making sure utility companies didn't charge more than a penny for low income consumers and make sure they never turn your heat off just because you don't pay the bill. So much of their issues are consumer oriented.

DePue: The Illinois State Council of Senior Citizens.

Currie: Well, they would just be concerned about, you know, making sure that we treat the vulnerable elderly with respect and with cash.

DePue: With respect and with cash.

Currie: Whatever.

DePue: I would imagine. I don't want to imagine. Were Illinois Public Actions and the Council for Senior Citizens, both on the liberal side of the spectrum?

Currie: Yes, yes.

DePue: Impact.

- Currie: I think that was the pact for the Illinois Medical Association, Illinois Medical Society.
- DePue: And what would they have been lobbying for?
- Currie: They would be very concerned about protections for doctors against government regulation. Some of the things they were for, I wasn't. I don't know that you shouldn't regulate doctors, but nevertheless they would have been opposed to that. But they probably were not real keen on restrictions on practice. So in that sense, I could be supportive.
- DePue: I would imagine they were concerned about lawsuits.
- Currie: Yes, oh, totally.
- DePue: What they might say frivolous lawsuits.
- Currie: Thank you, totally, totally. And I was not with them on that. I like frivolous lawsuits, so I don't... Scratch that. Their definition of frivolous is "Anybody who sues me is suing me in a frivolous fashion and for frivolous reasons and for frivolous outcomes."
- DePue: So they would generally be more conservative, you would say?
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: Yes, yeah, on those issues. As I say, when it comes to scope of practice, not so much so. I mean then, when it comes to scope of practice, they wouldn't want people looking over their shoulders and saying, "You shouldn't do this, and you can't do that."
- DePue: The Cook County Democratic Women.
- Currie: That was an organization... I was not part of its founding. I believe it was sometime in the '70s. And Cook County Democratic Women, a little like IVI-IPO, was pressing from the outside to make for changes in county, city government. They also were very anxious to promote women. They were also very involved in the election of Harold Washington some years later. And again, I think Harold Washington's succession to the city's top position kind of undercut part of their *raison d'etre* [purpose].
- DePue: You've mentioned him a couple times. I don't recall...
- Currie: I do remember there were some debates within the group. I was involved with it after I'd been elected, and there were questions about whether Cook County Democratic Women should be supporting women running for public office who were not in favor of reproductive rights. I don't remember what the outcomes were, but that would be one of the discussion points.

DePue: Where was Harold Washington on the question?

Currie: He was for reproductive rights. But my point is again, here is somebody in office that you think is opening doors, is open to opening doors, is not going to give women's issues short shrift. And I think that kind of took the wind of the sails of the organization.

There could have been other reasons. Many organizations come, go. A lot depends on who's there, who the leaders are, and who the next generation of leaders might be.

DePue: If they got their start in the 1970s, as you mentioned...

Currie: I think they were around by the time I won in 1978, I think.

DePue: ... Then that would very much have been the years of the yearly battles, down in Springfield, about the Equal Rights Amendment too.

Currie: Yes. And they would certainly have been on the rights side, the equal rights side of that one.

DePue: Would that also explain why some of the wind went out of their sails after '82, when it was defeated?

Currie: I'm not sure. I wasn't close enough to know. But yeah, that could be. Although, you know, we revived it and just ratified it last...

DePue: What, thirty-some years later.

Currie: ...last May.

DePue: Well, we'll get to that eventually, a few sessions from now probably. You mentioned Harold Washington. I don't know that we had talked about Harold Washington much, back in 2016 when we stopped this conversation. What do you think about his administration?

Currie: My impression was that it was pretty good. My guess is that there were some issues where it was not as strong nor as transparent as it might be. But Harold's rhetoric was totally about transparency and accountability. And I think there was a general sense, especially among members of the minority community, that he **was** opening doors. And I think that he certainly was not anti-woman, no question about it. How that translated into actual picks for cabinet, for other positions, I really didn't close much attention.

DePue: That was my guess. You've got a statewide focus.

Currie: Right.

- DePue: Do you remember when he passed away suddenly?
- Currie: Oh yes, boy.
- DePue: Tell me about that.
- Currie: Well, I was actually... The next day we were on our way to visit children in upstate New York. I was with a friend, and somehow, we were having lunch, and somehow the radio came on. We were all glued to the radio the whole day. It was shocking and terrible. And then Quentin Young gets on the radio and says he shouldn't have eaten so many cheeseburgers.⁶³
- DePue: What was the reaction in the city then?
- Currie: I think the city was very much in mourning and very much confused about what was going to happen next. And the city was right on both counts.
- DePue: They went through some troubled times here, in terms of trying to figure out who the next mayor should be.
- Currie: Ah, I did go. When the city council was choosing, I went down to City Hall and watched from the gallery. Well, Dick Mell got up on his desk and, you know, carried on about how we can't have whatever. It was just... I thought when Blagojevich ran, I thought, "He'll never win the governorship because they'll just play this tape of his father-in-law behaving like a complete jerk at the moment at which we're..." But I was wrong. But oh, the tempers were hot, and the rhetoric was not pretty.
- DePue: In other words, at the time Washington dies, you can see some of the divisions had already been there for quite some time.
- Currie: In fact, some of them were coming back into focus. I think what happened was that the Vrdolyak 29, that battle I think Harold effectively won, by dint of hard work.⁶⁴ I would say, I think Mike Madigan was helpful to him in winning that battle because it was a lot of, "Oh, what are we going to do about Ed Kelly [head of the Chicago parks]?" And there were efforts in the legislature to micromanage Chicago city government. I think Madigan, as speaker, was not about to have us become the fulcrum in which all of these animosities and hatreds would play out.

⁶³ During Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s visits to Chicago, Dr. Young served as the civil rights leader's personal physician. In 1983, Mayor Harold Washington appointed Dr. Young president of the Chicago Board of Health. (<https://www.americanswhotellthetruth.org/portraits/dr-quentin-young>)

⁶⁴ Racist resistance to Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor, was described as the "council wars" and was organized by aldermen, Eddie Burke and Eddie Vrdolyak, and came to be known as the *Vrdolyak 29*. The 29 flexed their muscles in the council from 1983-1986. Today, there are only two survivors left. (<http://michaelklonsky.blogspot.com/2019/04/naming-name-the-vrdolyak-29.html>)

I'm not suggesting that it was that he was for Harold. It was, I think, rather...and he may have been. I would hope he was. But I think more to the point, Springfield should not be the place where battles in the City of Chicago play out.

So I think those differences had pretty much been either papered over or had gone away, and the power disparity was not what it had been when the Vrdolyak 29 was in charge.

DePue: Do you think there was primarily a power component or a policy or racial component to those fissures or divisions you were observing in Chicago politics?

Currie: Oh absolutely, I think power and race. I think that the two are, to some degree, linked. Maybe race isn't quite the right word. But you've got a lot of members of the city council who represent territory that is essentially not very diverse, particularly white. And I think there was a lot of racism at that time. So if the question is about affordable housing—We're still looking at the same issues today—the alderman is responding on the basis of race but also the power to say, “No” to this particular development. So there's an intersection.

DePue: We've been talking about the 1990s, and Harold Washington obviously pulls us back to the '80s. So I'll finish that part of the discussion with Richie Daley who, by the time you get to 1990, he is the mayor of Chicago. What are your views on the job Richie Daley did?

Currie: I think in his later days, not so good. I guess I would share the concern that many people had and have, that his focus on downtown development was a disservice to the neighborhoods. Having said that, I think he ran basically a pretty good ship, but there were some real scandals about patronage hiring. And the Hispanic Democratic Organization sprung up while he was mayor, and that was itself questionable. So there were certainly some black marks.

And I would say, lack of attention to neighborhoods, particularly African American; Hispanic neighborhoods was a black mark. Although having said that, I'm not convinced that the mayor of the city can actually make big differences in respect to economic development.

You know, you look at where development happens, and development happens where people are. Yes, we could have more affordable housing, and that would help break up the segregated nature of Chicago. But it's not going to, by itself, solve the problem because you're not going to be able to do enough of it in the areas where people are already attracted to.

Of course, when they're attracted to here, then the economic development comes along. So, the Office Depots and all the other stores, Bed Bath and Beyond, they follow. So you look at the south suburbs, and you

don't see much going on. But look at the northwest suburbs, and they've exploded in the last thirty years.

Anyway, I agree there should have been greater attention to the question "How can we do economic development in the neighborhoods?" And I think the patronage hiring and the rise of the HDO are black marks.⁶⁵ The parking meter scandal is perhaps one of his worst.

DePue: I don't know much about...When was that?

Currie: That was not terribly long ago, toward the end of his mayoralty. And what he did was... So the idea was that they leased out parking meter revenues...

DePue: I remember that now, yes.

Currie: ...to a firm, And the idea is that we got a bad deal. I think most economic analysts looking at it said, "Yeah, we didn't get enough for it. This was a major asset; we didn't get enough for it." And the mayor chose to spend the proceeds up front and on piddly programs rather than on infrastructure, rather than...

DePue: You were talking about the neighborhoods and economic development of the neighborhoods. It makes me think about—I think this was especially true in the 1990s—things were changing about public housing, these massive...the John Hay Homes [in Springfield], the Cabrini-Greens [Chicago housing project]...

Currie: Robert Taylor.

DePue: Robert Taylor. The bloom was off the rose in those. Those were not good places for most people to live. I think you would...

Currie: I do.

DePue: Was that an issue that was primarily a city and a federal issue or did the State get involved in those kind of discussions as well?

Currie: I don't have a strong recollection as to whether the State got involved in those discussions. I think you're absolutely right that the sense was these are not good places to be. Talking to people with whom I served who'd grown up in Ida B. Wells [Homes] or whatever, people who would be today seventy, eighty years old, in that era, they would say it was a very different place because you had people... Not everybody in public housing lacked a job.

⁶⁵ The Hispanic Democratic Organization (HDO) was a political action committee (PAC) officially started in 1993. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispanic_Democratic_Organization)

I think it was Massachusetts Senator, Edward Brooke, who changed the rules federally and made it very difficult to... It was like, "Okay, we're going to make sure the lowest income, the people with the least, have the best access to public housing." But I think the effect was to keep the working class out. And I think in the old days, before the Brooke Amendment, I think you had a kind of a mixed population.

So, just like in any development, Henry's mom was also looking after Johnny, And if Johnny behaved badly, then Johnny's mom got told. There was very much a sense of community. I'm not sure that that survived the change in which pretty much everybody who is in public housing is down at the mouth. So, the idea of tearing them down and replacing with mixed income, I think was not a bad idea at all.

Questions about implementation, questions also about whether the places they were tearing down, Cabrini-Green, for example, [were] hot real estate (DePue laughs). So let's get rid of the Cabrini-Green, and now we can... I don't know how well the mixed income part of it has worked. There have been occasional stories that make it sound as if there are real tensions between the people whose units are subsidized and those whose units are not.

I do think you're not going to get a large percentage... You're not going to sell well to middle class professionals, unless you've got the kind of ratio that means that, by and large, they feel comfortable, and they don't feel threatened. It's an unfortunate reality, but I think it is reality.

DePue: My impression is that was not a subject that the state level, the legislature, worked on much?

Currie: No, there would have been, I suspect, some subsidies from the Illinois Housing Development Authority, but there was not a lot of talk about it.

DePue: We went through all these different organizations. One I haven't asked about, because I didn't find one for this, was the Chamber of Commerce. I would think that they would have asked you to fill something out.

Currie: I suspect they did from time to time. I don't know why they wouldn't have been in my files.

DePue: Later on—I don't know if we'll get to it today or not—they certainly graded you, and we'll talk about that later. Were there any other organizations that you recall that you had to answer these questions for?

Currie: I did actually answer, early on in my career but then I stopped, were the surveys from the anti-choice people. I did cheerfully fill out (laughs) their questionnaires. Why, I don't know, since I was going to be at complete loggerheads with them. Finally, after a couple of terms, I said, "Why are you doing it that? (laughs) Why are you just giving them ammunition?" So I

started out being very much a Pollyanna; if they want to know what I think, I will certainly tell them. Then finally saying, “This doesn’t make a lot of sense, babe.”

DePue: Maybe it’s a different kind of an exercise, but I would imagine that you went before newspaper editorial boards as well.

Currie: Practically never. I did during the Ewell campaign, ’82. I’m sure that I did then. There may have been one of the Latiker campaigns that I did also, but it was not common practice.

DePue: Is that because they just weren’t interested in your race because they knew you were going to win or...?

Currie: Well, as I say, many times I didn’t have any opposition. In ’82 it was a very hard fought race, although, as I told you, I wiped the floor. And there may have been one interview during one of the Latiker challenges. But she didn’t do real well as it turned out, so maybe with her later challenges, they didn’t bother.

DePue: Were they endorsing or...?

Currie: Yeah, they were. There was one time when they didn’t endorse me because I was not sufficiently devoted to tax increases.

DePue: They being?

Currie: The *Tribune*.

DePue: How about the *Sun Times*?

Currie: They generally endorsed, and they generally endorsed me. But the *Tribune*—I just love this—the *Tribune* thought that I had killed a tax increase bill in the House Revenue Committee. It wasn’t true. The facts were not on their side. But isn’t it interesting that the *Chicago Tribune* was cranky because a tax increase bill did not come out of the House Revenue Committee? (DePue laughs) It’s all right. I got over it.

DePue: We’re kind of in this neighborhood, so I wanted to ask you about the experience of working with lobbyists.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: That’s a very general comment, but did you enjoy working with the various lobby groups?

Currie: Almost all of them. Actually, lobbyists can be very helpful. They have good information, if they choose to offer good information. Some are less

responsible, less realistic than others. The lobbyists that I worked best with were those that understood you were trying to solve a problem and tried to help you figure out how to do it without causing grief someplace else. The lobbyists that I worked best with were those who could really give you arguments in favor of their position but not to the extent that it looked as if there was no argument on the other side.

Lobbyists are an important resource for lawmakers, as are bureaucrats, as are the staffers in the agencies. And yeah, I relied upon many of them. Some, as I say, were less trustworthy, less helpful than others. But by and large, I think they do a good job.

DePue: Were the lobby groups often times helpful in terms of helping to write the legislation as well? That's often times what you hear.

Currie: Well, for example, I remember really seeing this more than being involved in it myself. I remember somebody was trying to do something about housing. My recollection is that the Illinois Association of Realtors helped that individual re-craft the legislation so that it didn't have adverse consequences but did what helped to solve the problem the lawmaker thought was important to solve. And yes, they did help write it.

DePue: I've interviewed a couple lobbyists. I want to ask you about one in particular because this gentlemen served for well over fifty years as a lobbyist, Dick Lockhart.⁶⁶

Currie: Oh yeah, he was a great guy. I didn't actually have a lot of lobby dealings with him but he's terrific, the dean of the lobbyists and a straight shooter, totally. I just didn't have a whole lot to do with him. His clients were not mostly in my bailiwick. But he's great.

DePue: He was one of the most notable of the lobbyists?

Currie: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. Well, his sense of history of the Illinois General Assembly was itself worth having. And, of course, he'd served in World War II. I never got to... He always threw open his house, which is in the south loop [Chicago], after the lobbyist's big party, the December party. The "Third House," I think they call it. He always opened his house which, apparently, is filled with World War II and other Army memorabilia. I never quite got there, but what a great thing.

⁶⁶ Richard Lockhart's oral history interview, conducted by Dr. Mark DePue, is available in the Oral History collection of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. (<https://www2.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/OralHistory/illinoisstatecraft/general/Pages/LockhartRichard.aspx>)

- DePue: It's practically a library. I've had the chance to go there. I did the interview with him at his house.
- Currie: Okay.
- DePue: I've been invited to the same party, but it's a bit of a stretch to drive four hours to go to a party.
- Currie: You're right.
- DePue: But going up the stairs, there would just be a wall of books, up and down the stairways and things like that.
- Currie: Yeah. No, he's great.
- DePue: In 1993, you did mention before, you became the assistant majority leader.
- Currie: Right, I think that's right.
- DePue: Was that a position you sought?
- Currie: Sure. Oh yes, I thought, Yeah. I liked the idea of being in leadership. I had been part of a kind of a kitchen cabinet group that was talking about things that leaders talk about. So to get some recognition was not such a bad thing.
- DePue: How did you go about seeking the position?
- Currie: I don't remember. I expect I asked for it.
- DePue: Just go up to Mike Madigan?
- Currie: Yeah. Isn't it time? (DePue laughs) I think. I was not as good at that as many of my colleagues have been. It's the old woman thing. "Oh wait. Of course they'll notice me because my light is shining so strongly under my gingham bonnet," right. I don't really remember. But the reality is that those who ask for things are more likely to get them than those who don't.
- DePue: You recall that you were asking him? He didn't seek out you?
- Currie: I don't remember. Well, yeah, I just don't remember. But as I say, I was part of a kitchen cabinet leadership group before I became officially an assistant majority leader.
- DePue: What does that mean exactly?
- Currie: It was being involved into policy discussions, where decisions were being made.
- DePue: Where was the venue? Did you actually meet in an office or...?

Currie: Yeah, in offices, yeah.

DePue: Did you do much work in restaurants, after the session was over that day?

Currie: No, no.

DePue: You weren't one of those people.

Currie: No.

DePue: Is that how business sometimes got conducted?

Currie: I know, but that was not my cup of tea.

DePue: How often were you staying in Springfield overnight?

Currie: All session days. So if we were there Tuesday through Thursday, I was there Tuesday and Wednesday. Frequently I came in on Mondays because a lot of the leadership meetings happened on Mondays, or I needed to be there first thing on Tuesday for other committee hearings. So I frequently had an extra...

DePue: Did you have an apartment?

Currie: I did. I did.

DePue: Just yourself, or were you with other legislators?

Currie: Me, yeah. I started out in a slum, and then I moved up in the world.

DePue: (whispers) Where was the slum?

Currie: It was what we call an English garden apartment, on Lawrence, but for me it was actually off the alley. English garden means that mostly it's underground (laughs), but there's a window. It was fine. It was perfectly fine for a while. But then it became... There was no doorbell, so people couldn't come and visit easily. The landlord just seemed less responsive. There were scuzzier people in my alley between me, Cook Street and the capitol. And then I had an infestation of some nasty little bugs.

So I moved to the fifteenth floor of Lincoln Towers [across from the capitol grounds on 2nd Street]. And I justified it on the grounds that having spent twenty years or twenty-five years or whatever it was in my really cheap, English basement apartment, if I amortized, then I could justify spending a whole lot more for Lincoln Towers.

DePue: Twenty-some years in the English...

Currie: English garden, yeah. I don't remember when I... Well, I should be able to remember.

- DePue: Well, you paid your dues then.
- Currie: I did. I paid my dues.
- DePue: Were you cooking for your meals afterwards?
- Currie: Not much, mostly went to restaurants.
- DePue: Any particular restaurants you visited?
- Currie: Most of them. All the ones downtown, Sebastian's, Maldaner's, Augies. My favorite is Old Lux [Inn].
- DePue: Old Lux.
- Currie: Quite scuzzy. It's in a nasty part of town. I don't know where, 15th and something. [South Street]
- DePue: Were you usually taking dinner with other legislators?
- Currie: Yeah, yeah.
- DePue: But you didn't talk business.
- Currie: Mostly with friends. Well, yeah, we did, but not serious business, more gossipy business.
- DePue: Once you became the assistant majority leader, what was the role that you took on?
- Currie: Well, working again on policy, what policies should the House Democratic party promote? What ought to be our signature issues? As I say, I had been part of a kitchen cabinet, working in that framework beforehand, so there was not a major change. I did get more money. There was that to be said for it.
- DePue: Did you also get money by serving on various committees, or did you have to have a leadership role on the committee?
- Currie: You had to have a leadership role.
- DePue: How about the role of vote counter? Did you do some of that?
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: Was that a function of the assistant majority leader?
- Currie: Yeah, yeah. I didn't do a lot of it, but I did some.
- DePue: Were you dealing strictly with the Democrats?

Currie: Yes. I mean, sometimes I dealt with Republicans, if I thought there was an opening.

DePue: I think I know the answer to this. Did you enjoy the extra responsibilities?

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Why?

Currie: I like shaping, molding policy outcomes. I'm a policy wonk. So the opportunity to... And I also enjoyed the opportunity—like the lobbyist I described to you—I enjoyed the opportunity to help people solve the problems that their constituents faced, without creating problems for everybody else's constituents. Trying to get into the nitty-gritty and figuring out how we can translate what Davey Phelps needs for his home people, without creating a ruckus someplace else was something that I enjoyed doing.

Now I would say, we spend quite a lot of time in Springfield, fixing the mistakes that we made (both laugh). The last time we helped old representative so-and-so, we didn't pay enough attention to the unanticipated consequences. So, much of what we do in Springfield is to reverse course and redraft the legislation that should have been drafted properly the first time out.

DePue: It's interesting, I was thinking when you were talking, the unintended consequences, and you said the unanticipated consequences.

Currie: Well, both, both unintended and... If we'd anticipated them, we'd have fixed them in the first place (DePue laughs).

DePue: I'm going to put you on the spot, but I'm here to help you.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: Do you recall, in the '90s at least, what committees you were serving on by that time?

Currie: Revenue.

DePue: Which is one, as we talked before, that you had the most interest in?

Currie: No, but it was thrust upon me. When I was new, Revenue was at that time a very controlled committee. And I was involved with the Democratic Study Group, which were the independent Democrats, Woody Bowman, I think Harold Katz, Glenn Schneider... I can't remember who all else.

There was some school issue that Glenn was very exercised about, and we all stood with Glenn. And at the end of the day, when whatever it was was settled, when his hash got settled, the rest of us had to have our hash settled

too. I said I wanted to be on the Revenue Committee because I knew that would cause grief. So I got to be on the Revenue Committee, not because I had a particular interest in revenue but because it was a committee that was kind of denied to people like me.

DePue: So and that's why you said you wanted to cause grief.

Currie: Well, yeah (laughs).

DePue: To tweak them a little bit.

Currie: Yes, yeah, oh yeah. And then I ended up being the revenue maven, so there you go. Talk about unintended consequences (DePue laughs) and certainly unanticipated.

DePue: You said it was the committee that was controlled. What does that mean?

Currie: Well, it meant that there were very sensitive issues that came before the Revenue Committee, and the leadership was very reluctant just to let people vote however they wanted. In fact, when it came to reforms of various kinds of systems, there was not a lot of enthusiasm for that. Don't step on the toes of the local this or the property tax buyers, whatever.

DePue: I'm looking at the '93-'94 *Blue Book* and your entry in there. Here's something... I hadn't looked at it close enough before this.⁶⁷

Currie: How about the World's Fair?

DePue: That was later, wasn't it? I thought that was...

Currie: Okay, yeah. Well no, it was certainly in...

DePue: Thompson wanted to do that, and the...

Currie: No, no, no, but the big push was when... I think Harold [Washington] was mayor. So it would have been sometime between... Maybe it was earlier, okay. Anyhow, I chaired a committee to look at the question, whether we ought to support...

DePue: Well, Washington and Thompson. So talk about that then.

Currie: Well, we ended up actually pulling the plug. There was a lot of enthusiasm in some areas to do a World's Fair, but it never seemed as if the promoters had a

⁶⁷ The *Illinois Blue Book* is one of the most comprehensive sources of state government information. It is a nationally recognized source for information about Illinois' executive, judicial and legislative branches of government. (<http://www.idaillinois.org/digital/collection/bb>)

very clear idea what it would look like, how it would be funded, and what residuals would be available.

My husband was really cranky with me because he thought it was my job to do just that. Well, that wasn't my cup of tea. I'm not a developer and I don't understand land use planning. But the reality is that the promoters did not have a deep enough proposal to put before us. And, in fact, Michael Madigan and I flew into Meigs Field one day and said, "There will not be a world's fair."

DePue: It would certainly take a lot of money to do that.

Currie: And a lot of careful planning. My husband's idea was, you could do it, and I'm sure he was right. It's just that nobody was doing it. The idea of sort of funding a pig in a poke is not a particularly attractive one.

DePue: Here are your assignments. This is the year you're assistant majority leader. Legislative assignments: Committee on Revenue, which we talked about. And then it's *ex officio* members of all House committees.

Currie: I think that all leaders are *ex officio* members.

DePue: So there are no other committee assignments, except those two. And what did it mean to be an *ex...*

Currie: Because generally leaders don't serve on many... They do if you need them, because you need bodies. But generally we don't serve on many committees.

DePue: So it wasn't like you were the liaison to various committees, anything like that?

Currie: No. No, no, no.

DePue: How many assistant majority leaders would there be?

Currie: A lot. Let me just think. At that time there may have been eight, nine. There would also have been two deputy majority leaders and the Speaker and the majority leader. So the Speaker, the majority leader, two deputies, and maybe five or six assistants. We don't have associates.

DePue: That moves us up then to the 1994 election. Let's start at the state level. Is there anything in particular that you remember about that election for yourself?

Currie: No (laughs).

- DePue: It was an interesting year for the governor's election. I'm sure you remember some of this. The primary, it was between Roland Burris, Richard Phelan, and Dawn Clarke Netsch.
- Currie: And Dawn Clarke Netsch. Yep, yep, yep. I was for Dawn.
- DePue: You remember much about that primary race?
- Currie: Not a whole lot, except that she had that amazing pool commercial.⁶⁸
- DePue: I was going to ask you about that. It has to be one of the most famous political commercials in the state's history.
- Currie: Absolutely. And I had supper last night with a woman who lives now in the Upper Peninsula but was stranded in Chicago. She was the campaign manager during that primary. So she takes some—She didn't say it was her idea. She never said that—But she takes a little credit that it did happen on her watch.
- DePue: What was her name?
- Currie: Kappy Laing, L-a-i-n-g, Kappy, with a K. She did not stay campaign manager after the primary, but she was the campaign manager up to primary night.
- DePue: Now, I think maybe beforehand most people did not think that Netsch was going to be able to win that primary.
- Currie: I think that's right. I'm not sure who the favorite was. I would have thought Phelan, but I'm not sure.
- DePue: Why do you think that ad was so effective?
- Currie: Because it was such a knockout. She's a straight shooter. And look at that, she can play pool. So she stood out from the crowd. And I think that was important. It was, after all, only two years after the Year of the Woman. So there was some residual enthusiasm for all those things that we think women can do maybe better than men.
- DePue: Edgar started his governorship on a couple down years. That was the recession in the early 1990s. By '94, things were humming along pretty well. So Netsch is going to have that to overcome.
- Currie: Total uphill battle from start to finish, total.

⁶⁸ During the primary, Dawn Clarke Netsch aired a campaign ad showing her playing (and winning) a game of eight-ball pool, reflecting a lifelong hobby of hers and also playing on her reputation as a "straight shooter." The effectiveness of this ad, in contrast to the far more flashy ones aired by her much better funded opponents, was seen as contributing to her surge in the polls in the final weeks of the primary campaign. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dawn_Clark_Netsch)

DePue: You think she ran an effective campaign?

Currie: Yes, I think she got a little too policy wonky, and when it came to school funding...⁶⁹

DePue: A policy wonk's criticism of her?

Currie: Yeah, yeah. I think that the intricacies of her school funding program seemed to dominate and because it was intricate, it was easy to poke holes. But I think that she was doomed from the start. You've got a moderate Republican governor running for a second term at a time when the economy is looking good. The state is not in dire financial straits, and he's popular.

So I think knocking people out, knocking incumbents out when they are moderate, popular, things are going well, it doesn't happen. So whoever won the Democratic primary [Dawn Clark Netsch], I thought, would not be a winner on election night.

DePue: I don't know if we've talked much about your views or your relationship with Dawn Clarke Netsch. To a certain extent, at least today, from the perspective of you as being a leader for long standing in the House, and her prominent role in the Illinois Senate for so many years, kind of your counterpart.

Currie: Actually, by the time I think I got to the more exalted positions, she was already comptroller. There's not as much intermingling between the House and the Senate, as any sensible person would think there is. So we generally see the senators when they have bills they have passed, and they're looking for a sponsor. They generally see us when it's the reverse.

We have very few committees that are bicameral [comprised of both houses]. The support committees, the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, the Legislative Research Unit, those committees are procedural really, and they are bipartisan and bicameral. But when it comes to the Appropriations, Human Services, it's not one committee. It's the House committee and the Senate committee, and there is not nearly as much comingling as one might expect and hope that there would be.

DePue: Would this be a fair characterization? You knew each other, but were not friends?

Currie: I would say we were friends, but we were not close. We didn't work very closely together because we didn't need to. I certainly was not very close to her just on a kind of everyday, pick-up the phone, "How you doing, Dawn?"

⁶⁹ A policy wonk is a person who studies or develops strategies and policies, especially one who has a keen interest in and aptitude for technical details. (https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/policy_wonk)

DePue: You've already referred to this in a general sense, but she proposed in that election to raise state income tax from 3 to 4.25 percent and then, at the same time, to reduce property taxes. That's, I'm sure, what you're talking about. That's where she got a little bit too wonky, trying to explain how that was going to play out?

Currie: Right. I think what happened was that many people said, "Yeah, she says she's going to reduce property taxes, but we know they're not going down," that if you take this piece of the property tax and spend it from... If you replace it with state dollars, whoever imposed that property tax to begin with is going to say, "Hey, wait a minute. We'll continue that tax, even if we use it for a different purpose." There was a general unwillingness to believe that you can trust politicians who say they're going to reduce your taxes actually to do it.

And, of course, it wouldn't have been the state that was in charge of property taxes. The reason the property taxes were high was because the State didn't spend very much on public schools. But it's the locals that raise the property tax, and the State says, "Well, we're going to spend more on schools. We're going to reduce your property tax." The locals can come back and say, "Well, we think we'll raise them."

DePue: So does that mean that you think she might have been a bit disingenuous by saying, "We're going to reduce property taxes," when she didn't have any control over that if she was elected?

Currie: I'm not sure disingenuous, but I think that that argument was one that made it harder for her to sell her proposal, that an increase in the income tax, even if you're offering me this decrease, I'm not sure I buy it. But again, back to basics, I don't think she was going to defeat him, no matter what.

DePue: The death penalty was another issue. She was opposed, and Edgar generally was in favor of it.

Currie: Yes, yes. And then we abolished it in 2015, I think it was.

DePue: Of course, George Ryan, his one claim to fame as governor. We'll get to that later.

Guns and crime. Now here's an important topic for you. But I'm sure you recall this is about the time period when sentencing laws were being increased. That was very much a national issue in the 1990s as well.

Currie: Yeah. Terrible.

DePue: Does that mean it's another issue that's not going to play well for Netsch in that respect?

- Currie: Absolutely. And it's unfortunate because today we're now beginning to talk about how it isn't being soft on crime. It's being smart on crime. There's a real sea change happening, but it isn't happening fast enough. And it's happening after a great swing to the right. It's difficult to undo those years of enhancements.
- DePue: So, as you've already suggested, Edgar wins by a wide majority. He polls 60 percent to Netsch's...
- Currie: That's a killer. I mean, that's amazing.
- DePue: Yeah, she only polled 34 percent that year. So Edgar's win was a landslide by anybody's measure.
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: That was also an important year for the Republicans at the national level, I'm sure you recall, and for the rest of the State of Illinois. Edgar had coattails in that respect. It's the year that Newt Gingrich, the Contract with America...⁷⁰
- Currie: And Lee Daniels.⁷¹
- DePue: ...and Lee Daniels now becomes the majority leader. So there are two years, as I don't need to tell you...
- Currie: Yeah, we talk about two years in the dessert (DePue laughs).
- DePue: Is that the way that the Democrats looked at it?
- Currie: Oh, absolutely.
- DePue: You had control of the House since 1982 until 1994.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: Those two years. Tell me about your relationship with Lee Daniels.
- Currie: Well, I think that the power went to his head and his leadership team's head. They were very hostile to bills sponsored by Democrats, most Democrats, even if it was not a Democrat that they were... I can sort of understand if Sally

⁷⁰ The Contract with America was a legislative agenda advocated for by the Republican Party during the 1994 congressional election campaign. Written by Newt Gingrich and Dick Armey, and using text from former President Ronald Regan's 1985 State of the Union Address, the Contract detailed the actions the Republicans promised to take if they became the majority party in the United States House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contract_with_America)

⁷¹ Lee Daniels' oral history interview, conducted by Dr. Mark DePue, is available in the Oral History collection of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. (<https://www2.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/OralHistory/illinoisstatecraft/legislators/Pages/DanielsLee.a.spx>)

Sue is in a district where we think Robbie Joe can beat her next time around. You're not happy that she's sponsoring the most popular bill in the State of Illinois. I get that. But they were very hostile to most Democratic bills, even mine. They're not going to win my district. And I had some very everyday bread and butter bills that were locked up.

I think it was a mistake, a tactical mistake. They didn't know how to exercise power. In fact I remember one of my bills, Jack Kubik, who was a Republican and served on the Revenue Committee, resuscitated because it was basic good government. It had to do with property tax incentives for restoration of historic properties. It already applied to single family residences and condos.

I have a lot of co-ops in my area and some of them were beginning to do restoration. Couldn't get that bill moving. But Jack Kubik, Republican from someplace in the western suburbs, was able to intercede and move the bill along.

But the effect of being so draconian was to unite the House Democrats. The House Democrats were totally united during this period. We were completely on our program and our speaker's program, and we were very unhappy with Daniels' leadership. I think he didn't do himself a favor. Maybe it was that he'd never really been in a position to exercise that kind of power, but it was not a good idea. And besides, they kept passing things that were unconstitutional.

DePue: In the Senate, Pate Philip is the Senate president, and It probably happened before that, but he changed the rules for how the Senate conducted business.

Currie: Right.⁷²

DePue: Did Lee Daniels do the same kind of thing?

Currie: Yes, I believe he did because we ended up, when we came back into power, guess what? We said, "Well, this is a pretty good template. Why don't we adopt them ourselves?" So we didn't go hook, line, and sinker, but with that kind of pedigree we said, "Not bad. We'll go for these."

DePue: What were the rules? Do you remember the specifics?

Currie: I don't. But there was a lot more authority on the part of the Speaker to set the agenda. There already was pretty much authority, but this only expanded it and the gateway committees. So the Rules Committee ended up with more

⁷² Pate Philip's oral history interview, conducted by Dr. Mark DePue, is available in the Oral History collection of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. (<https://www2.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/OralHistory/illinoisstatecraft/legislators/Pages/PhilipJam.aspx>)

authority, more power. Amendments can't just come to the floor. They have to go to the Rules Committee and then to a substantive committees. So after railing about the rules for several years, we said, "Ooh, not so bad." (DePue laughs)

It was Tom McCracken [R-81, Downers Grove], who had gone from the House to the Senate, who had actually bucked Lee Daniels's leadership, a very smart guy. I think he was the drafter. He and others were the drafter of the Senate rules that then came across the other way.

DePue: Now you're the assistant minority leader.

Currie: Yes. No, then no; we changed the name. Nomenclature is so important. I became the assistant Democratic leader (DePue laughs). Isn't that interesting? Madigan became the Democratic leader, and we were the assistant Democratic leaders or the deputy Democratic leaders.

DePue: Who changed the names?

Currie: I don't know if it was Madigan's idea or one of the staffers, but we changed. We didn't ever call ourselves minority. We said Democratic.

DePue: Now you're in a position to watch this more closely in the assistant position. What was the relationship between Madigan and Lee Daniels?

Currie: I never really knew. They were cordial to one another, but I don't know that they ever talked a whole lot. Again, we were kind of irrelevant because you had Republican control at the governor's level and both chambers of the legislature. That's why, when I say you couldn't get ordinary, everyday bread and butter bills moving, even if the sponsor was not a Democrat you're trying to quash in the next election, but just because we can do it. The power plays were rather more than was useful.

DePue: I'm going to ask this question; it might be misplaced. I probably should have asked it earlier. But when talking to Governor Edgar, he said this was an opportunity now for him to push some things through that he had always wanted to do, that the Republicans always wanted to do. But he said, in a general sense, he preferred to have split House and Senate, versus to have control of both the House and the Senate.

Currie: Probably they were pushing him too hard in a conservative direction. I don't remember that he said that, but I would not be surprised. He certainly operated very much in a bipartisan fashion.

DePue: He probably didn't say that during that time, but that's what he told me during our interview, after he stepped out of the political arena. Do you think that's a healthy way of doing business?

Currie: It's not unhealthy. I guess I would say that, if you're going to make for real change that is going to last over time, the more bipartisan the better because, if you end up with my way or the highway, then the next time the other side is in charge of that highway, things get undone, and perhaps they don't get just a little bit undone. They may get thoroughly undone.

I don't know that you have to be a split chambers to do that, but I do think that the point is that there needs to be bipartisan support for any major changes. I think that's not wrong.

DePue: I wanted to talk about some of the specific agenda items that the Republicans had for those two years. Let's start with this one, which probably was near and dear to your heart. That's Chicago school reform.

Currie: Um-hmm, right.

DePue: I believe at that time there was \$150 million budget hold. There had been several times in the past twenty, thirty years that the State would have to come out and bail out the Chicago schools. So there was a real sense that some significant reform needed to happen that year. Do you want to talk specifics there?

Currie: Yeah, so the idea was to give a lot more control to the mayor, in lieu of major cash payments. A lot of people were not very comfortable with that, unclear that the mayor would be making the best decisions for the children of Chicago, maybe just making...

DePue: How was it that he didn't have control?

Currie: Well, he did, but this was to give him more control and give more control to the Chicago Board of Education over certain contractual issues, for example, class size. There were a couple of others like that, [that] were explicitly taken out of collective bargaining opportunities.

So there was more control on the part of the mayor to choose people who were going to run the schools. It had been a larger board, and there were three names coming from a large number of civic groups and all the rest of it for any specific vacancy. The mayor was supposed to choose among them, but this gave direct control, a smaller board to the mayor, and it took out of the collective bargaining procedures several items that were certainly in the mayor's interest.

[It] also took away—and this did come back to haunt all of us—the pension levy. They combined all the levies. So instead of having an education, a transportation, a pension, they were mostly just one levy. The pension...

DePue: Not sure I understand the term levy in this case.

- Currie: The taxes. You had a specific purpose for raising this tax. At the point at which the mayor was given control of the school, these levies were collapsed. The Chicago teacher's pension fund was then funded at 95 percent, 105 percent. Well, what happened was, of course, the mayor didn't fund pensions, once he had the opportunity to decide where that money, the property tax money, is going to go. So what had been the levy for pensions became a levy for some... It was used in some other way. And that was not helpful, I think, to the school system nor to the citizenry.
- DePue: I understand that before the reform was passed in '95, there was a school superintendent. How was the superintendent selected?
- Currie: By the mayor.
- DePue: The mayor's appointment.
- Currie: I believe. I can't remember if they had City Council approval or not.
- DePue: My understanding at least was that the superintendent had an awful lot of power, and the mayor didn't have as much oversight.
- Currie: I don't remember that. I just don't remember that. No, I think it was the structure of appointment that was to make the mayor less empowered and the structure of the taxes and the structure of the permissible items in collective bargaining.
- DePue: Do you remember who the mayor then selected? He didn't select a superintendent. He selected a chief operations officer, chief executive officer.
- Currie: Was that Paul, Paul Vallas?⁷³
- DePue: Paul Vallas.
- Currie: I spent quality time with Paul.
- DePue: What's your impression of Paul Vallas?
- Currie: He was great. I think he did a great job. I think he really did a very good job trying to run a very difficult operation, the Chicago public schools. He's very smart. He understands finance. He had been the head of the state's Economic and Fiscal Commission. I had great respect for him. But he also had difficulties. He was responding to a mayor who wanted A, B, or C to happen and also to community group stakeholders who didn't want that to happen.

⁷³ Paul Vallas' oral history interview, conducted by Dr. Mark DePue, is available in the Oral History collection of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. (<https://presidentlincoln.illinois.gov/oral-history/collections/vallas-paul/interview-detail/>)

We had a whole issue involving principal selection. I think the mayor had discovered a principal whom the mayor felt had been improperly discharged or not rehired by the local school council. Well, that's a hard-fought battle because the local school councils were very keen on maintaining their authority in this arena. The mayor, on the other hand, is saying, "Well, it doesn't make sense. She's a wonderful person. How is it?" So I spent much of one spring working on legislation with Paul (laughs) trying to figure our way out of this one. At that point, he wasn't flying, so he had to come down to Springfield by auto.

DePue: I know he was in that position...

Currie: You know, I admire him, and I thought he did a really good job.

DePue: He stayed in that position from '95 until about 2002, when he did run for governor on the Democratic ticket. In interviewing Paul—I've been in the process of interviewing him as well—it was pretty clear towards the end of that, his relationship with Daley was starting to sour in a pretty serious way.

Currie: Yeah, I'm not surprised. I'm not surprised. It would have been, I think, about things like that. You know, the mayor throws out, "We should do this." Well, it turns out it's really difficult to do that.

DePue: But some of the initiatives included things like streamline teacher dismissal procedures?

Currie: Yes, I don't remember the specifics. Oh, you mean in the reform bill?

DePue: Yeah.

Currie: Yeah, and some of it was good, you know. Some of it would have been good.

DePue: And you would have been in favor of that.

Currie: I might have been in favor of that. I don't remember the specifics. You can streamline until no one has any due process rights. I don't remember that in particular.

DePue: Well, that would have put you at odds with the Chicago Teachers Association.

Currie: Yeah, right. But my question is: Would it have streamlined, or would it have actually made a barrier to due process rights during dismissal procedures? I don't remember the specifics. All I can tell you is there was enough that was not attractive in the bill that I was a "No" vote.

DePue: And empowering principals, which I think you've already touched on a little bit, giving them more power.

Currie: Yeah, well, I would not have objected to giving them some more power, but I would not have totally gutted the local school councils.

DePue: And here is an issue that's been very much in the debate between conservatives and liberals, I think, ever since. Privatize some school services but also more school choice, charter schools.

Currie: Those are both difficult issues. I would say...and I'm not opposed to the idea of privatization, but I would ask the people who are privatizing to make sure they do a good cost-benefit analysis and that they make clear that the resulting private service is as good as what the public was. I understand a lot of it is turf battle, no question about it.

The easy answer is privatize. Well, are you really going to save resources if you do that? And are you going to make sure that the level of delivery, service delivery, is as good? You look at privatized prisons in this country, and they are by and large a disaster. Now the idea, of course, is the same thing. Privatize, we're going to save money. But what you're doing is you're running institutions that are completely trashing the rights of the inmates.

So privatization has some pluses, but I'd rather make sure that we're doing it right and for the right reasons, rather than just to make sure that we're saving two pennies in the city budget and telling people who've held that job, "You're out on your ass."

On the other, charters is really difficult. I'm not adamantly opposed to charters. They did start, of course, in Margaret Thatcher's Great Britain as a way to circumvent labor councils at the local level. The first charter school in the United States was...Was it Winona, Minnesota? It was a Montessori school, and the parents couldn't continue affording the cost. So it became a charter, with state funds, which was probably not the idea behind charters.

So I have the impression that Chicago has not done real badly with charters. Although now we have the state commission, that when Chicago says, "This one has to close," the state commission comes in and says, "Oh no, no. You may stay open." I don't have the feeling that the charters are all effective. There's no question, if you look at the national literature, charters by and large are not more effective than local public schools. Yes, you can point to ones that are, but you can also point to ones that do not do as well.

People argue, "Parents want charters." I would say parents want options. If you look at what parents want, they want more magnet schools. They want to have their kid go to a specialty school. It's not just charters versus my local neighborhood schools. It's charters, magnets, specialty. I don't know that the fact that parents may want charters means that that's the only solution to parental choice.

DePue: I think that is one of the things that Paul Vallas was doing. There were a lot more specialized schools, magnet schools that were being established.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Are you generally in favor of those?

Currie: I am, but this is also a very difficult question because once you begin creating these other opportunities, you're turning your back on the neighborhood school. And the neighborhood school ends up with fewer students, students who are less well prepared for learning. Then you end up with the fifty schools that were closed in the second year of [former Chicago mayor] Rahm Emanuel's administration.

Now, [there are] really two questions. If you didn't say, "Okay, we're going to have these other options," are parents going to vote with their feet and go live someplace else? Certainly I would say that for upper middle class professional families, no question, they will.

If you don't have a selective high school, I'm moving to Skokie (both laugh). I prefer New Trier, right? It's a real tension, both in terms of the diversity of the city, and I think economic and racial diversity is important. But the downside is that, when you create these other opportunities, you really make the neighborhood school a less attractive choice. I don't know what the answer is.

DePue: This is just kind of a reflection; you have lived in the period and observed the white flight because of a lot of these kind of issues.

Currie: Right. And I think the selective enrollment schools, the magnet schools, were all an effort to try to stem white and middle-class flight. I don't think that's a bad thing. I think that a city that is diverse is a good city, economically as well as racially.

DePue: I'll really put you on the spot here.

Currie: Oh-oh.

DePue: Do you recall whether or not you would have voted in favor of the Chicago reform bill?

Currie: I voted no.

DePue: Because...?

Currie: For a concern about whether collapsing all the tax rates would mean that we would still get some accountability about how those individual rates that were originally established for a reason would be treated. I was concerned about

leaving off the table, the collective bargaining table, some of those items like ...class size. Class size, I'm not sure was one of them, but there were a couple of others. So yeah, I was in with the Chicago Teachers Union. What can I say? I think Judy Erwin might have been the only House Democrat who voted "Yes."

DePue: I was just going to ask if the bulk of the Democrats voted no.

Currie: Yup.

DePue: Erwin with an i?

Currie: E-r-w-i-n. She represented the Gold Coast.⁷⁴

DePue: I cut you off.

Currie: I was going to say that I think there was also a sense that Republicans shouldn't be telling us how to run our schools. You know, a "Wait a minute. They're coming in from here. They don't have a stake in the outcome. The fact that the mayor thinks it's a good idea doesn't mean that I should think it's a good idea."

DePue: I'm glad you said that because my understanding was that Mayor Daley definitely wanted it.

Currie: Oh, he did. The mayor was involved, no question about it. But not everybody thinks that the mayor makes the best decisions. Let's go back to the parking meters (DePue laughs).⁷⁵ And collapsing the tax rates meant that all of a sudden, the teacher's pension fund goes way down the tubes.

DePue: According to Vallas, he said that he was able to maintain those pension funds at that level, the 90 percent range, through his tenure at least, up to 2001, 2002.

Currie: But then it didn't last beyond that, and I'm not sure that I... I haven't looked at his books.

DePue: Fair enough. A couple other quick questions about some of the other things that the Republicans were doing during that time frame. One was—this would have been '95, early in that time—the Department of Natural Resources was created.

⁷⁴ Bordering Lake Michigan, Gold Coast is an affluent, mostly residential neighborhood defined by its stately homes and high-rise apartment buildings. (<https://cindisodolskigroup.com/neighborhoods/gold-coast/>)

⁷⁵ Through a widely maligned 2008 deal crafted by then-Mayor Richard M. Daley, the city was paid \$1.15 billion in exchange for ceding 75 years' worth of parking meter revenue to a private company, Chicago Parking Meters, LLC. (<https://news.wttw.com/2019/11/29/chicago-parking-fees-increasing-city-set-save-millions>)

Currie: Okay.

DePue: Would you have been in favor of that; do you recall?

Currie: I think so, yeah. I don't recall a vote, but I would imagine that I would have been.

DePue: And here's one that I think it was probably on the opposite side, a tort reform bill.

Currie: No, I would not have been in favor because it would have been draconian. And that would be one of the things that was struck down in the courts. There were several others. There were a couple of things that the Republicans put together in a package, and I think the court decided that they had violated the single subject rule. There was one having to do with leaking underground storage tanks. Also limits on... I can't remember what the other items in the bill were.

DePue: What's the single subject rule?

Currie: The single subject says that the constitution says that, except for appropriations, legislation can cover only a single subject. That's always like in the eye of the beholder. But the courts occasionally do say, "You've gone too far, and you've put together a Christmas tree in which there's no relationship between the individual branches and the trunk."

DePue: My thought is that's not a rule that's applied at the national level.

Currie: No. I don't know if they have it or not. We do.

DePue: Yeah, because they have monstrosities of collections at the national level.

Currie: Right. But appropriations, we don't have that same rule. So any appropriation is legitimate to include in an appropriations bill.

DePue: Well, it's been a fun conversation today. We're right at two hours. You believe that?

Currie: Okay.

DePue: Generally, I think, that's enough for one day.

Currie: Yeah, I think that's right. Now when are we meeting again?

DePue: It's a couple weeks. It's a Monday and Tuesday. Let me go ahead and just stop it, and we'll take a look at that. Thank you very much.

Currie: Thank you.

(end of transcript #6)

Interview with Barbara Flynn Currie

#ISL-A-L-2014-049.07

Interview #7: April 15, 2019

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Monday, April 15, 2019. This is my seventh session...

Currie: Good god.

DePue: ...with representative Barbara Flynn Currie. I should say, Majority Leader Barbara Flynn...

Currie: Former majority leader. I **was** majority leader in the earlier conversations but no longer.

DePue: We left off last time, we were in the midst of the Jim Edgar administration. There's still some more territory I wanted to cover on that, a couple of the more significant things that he worked on during his administration. But I wanted to start with this and take a look at your voting record.

When I was going through your papers, I found this to be very interesting. You had a series of documents that were grading you on your issues and some of your issues. The one I ran across first was from 1994, the Illinois Citizens for Handgun Control. They gave you a letter grade. What do you suppose your letter grade...?

Currie: A.

DePue: No, it was A+.

Currie: Okay (both laugh).

DePue: So you were probably number one on their list, in terms of support for their agenda.

Currie: Yeah, yeah, they were great.

DePue: What I thought might be fun here—and I might have to take a little time to go through this—is to have you take a look at a couple of editorials that you wrote on some of these subjects as well.

Currie: Okay, all right.

DePue: This one dates from the winter of '97; there it is. And I wonder if you want to take a look at that or read passages from that. Do we need to pause before?

Currie: I better look at it, yeah.

DePue: I will pause very quickly (pause in recording). Okay.

Currie: This is really an article about how to organize and how not to. It discusses particularly a ballot initiative in the state of Washington that failed pretty miserably. All it would have done would have required the installation of trigger locks before handguns could be sold and required safety training for gun owners. The points that I'm making is that the campaign to pass that measure was woefully underfunded. The NRA [National Rifle Association] had the resources to outspend the proponents by four to one.

Second, some leading law enforcement organizations and many everyday police officers came out against the measure. It's always hard to do gun safety if the cops are not with you. Then third, the NRA started the campaign with a large and vocal network. People who are for gun safety, gun sensibility, are much harder to organize. So that's what we need to do. We need to make sure we have the resources. You don't have to match the NRA in terms of actual dollar amounts, but you do have to be competitive. You need to have law enforcement on your side, and you need to do a better job of organizing. That's pretty prescient I thought, from '97.

DePue: Ninety-seven, that means it's a time period when...

Currie: Yeah, twenty years later, it's still the same message.

DePue: ...the Democrats are in control of the House. At that time, the Republicans had control of the Senate. Does that mean that you've got enough to block the NRA, enough though they've got the money for it?

Currie: The problem is that gun control issues tend not to be so much partisan as they are regional. So the people who live in the City of Chicago tend to be very strongly for gun control. People who live in the downstate sections are not quite so keen. So you have splits. We had people in our party who had been very strong proponents of more access to guns. And when we did the—in response to the Supreme Court decision in the—I guess it was the McDonald case, we now have conceal carry in Illinois.⁷⁶ That was largely led by downstaters, and many of those were Democrats.

DePue: We're jumping way ahead since that's just within the last few years, but your position on concealed carry.

Currie: I was opposed to concealed carry.

DePue: Strongly, vocally opposed?

Currie: Yes, strongly, vocally opposed.

DePue: I'm sure you've heard this argument, maybe 1,000 times, (laughs) that if you have strong gun control, then the only people who have guns are the criminals, and the public can't protect themselves.

Currie: Right. Well, first of all, I don't think the guns turn out to be very protective. Any time a burglar comes to your house, he generally comes when you're not there, and the first thing he steals is your gun. So the idea that this is a useful way to defend oneself, I think is just nonsense. The numbers, the statistics do not support that proposition.

Yeah, there may be criminals who will still have guns. But it's going to be a lot easier to find those criminals when they are using their guns than it is today, when people have a right to have guns, and many have a right to conceal them, as they wander through our city neighborhoods.

DePue: One of the things that New York did, about this time frame I believe—when Rudy Giuliani was mayor—was stop and frisk.⁷⁷ What would your position be on that?

⁷⁶ On July 9, 2013, Public Act 98-63, the Firearm Concealed Carry Act became Illinois state law (430 ILCS 66). This law requires an Illinois Concealed Carry License to carry a concealed firearm in Illinois. (<https://www.ispfsb.com/Public/CCL.aspx>)

⁷⁷ **Stop and frisk** refers to a brief, non-intrusive police stop of a suspect. The Fourth Amendment requires that before stopping the suspect, the police must have a reasonable suspicion that a crime has been, is being, or is about to be committed by the suspect. (https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/stop_and_frisk)

Currie: Well, I think that, again, what we know now is that it was not very effective. That in fact, I think they stopped the stop and... I think a judge made them stop stop and frisk, and their crime numbers have gone down since that happened. So stop and frisk was a very popular... I don't remember what I thought at the time, but it was very popular. But I think it turns out that the research doesn't support the idea that that's a very effective way to combat violence and combat crime. And it hurts especially people of color.

DePue: But the crime rate did drop significantly during the time that was being enforced.

Currie: But it dropped even further once it wasn't enforced. And there were other communities that were also showing a decrease in gun violence and in crime, without having done stop and frisk.

DePue: Was part of that perhaps a matter of just plain old demographics, that you'd gotten past that baby boom; you'd gotten past that surge of youth?

Currie: I think that's exactly right. I think that does help explain a lot of it.

DePue: I'm going to read from the Illinois House of Representative's house majority leader... This is June 23, 1998. "News from Springfield." This is something that you had put out.

"Early this month, the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence presented me with its first ever lifetime achievement award.⁷⁸ I'm honored, and I'm proud, but I don't plan to rest on my laurels." (laughs)

Currie: All right.

DePue: Well, that's not a shock; is it?

Currie: No.

DePue: (continues reading) "I'll continue to do all I can to stop the bloodshed. The Council can take credit for keeping Illinois off the list of states that permit ordinary citizens to carry concealed weapons. The Council has worked hard to make sure lawmakers don't deny local communities the power to restrict weapon sales and handgun ownership within their own borders."

Currie: Now, unfortunately when we did concealed carry, that prohibition was also reinstated. So communities that didn't already have legislation against certain kinds of guns or certain kinds of behaviors, they were grandfathered in, the ones that had it. But the ones who didn't have it by a certain date, couldn't

⁷⁸ The **Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence** (ICHV) is the oldest and largest statewide organization in the U.S. working to prevent the devastation caused by firearms. It was founded in 1975 by four suburban Chicago women, concerned about the tragic consequences of handgun proliferation and availability. (<https://concealedcarryandme.com/illinois-council-against-handgun-violence/>)

impose new limits. I think that was a real mistake. That was one of my reasons for voting no on concealed carry.

DePue: The next one I've got here is the National Association of Social Workers. They all have a different way of scoring. They were looking at particular bills. I'd have to dig a little bit deeper to find the particular bills, but you got a score of seven out of eight.

Currie: Okay. Well actually, the National Association of Social Workers presented me with an award, right about that time.

DePue: This would have been 1993, a little bit earlier.

Currie: Yeah, that could well be. I just don't remember what year it was. But it was unusual for a state lawmaker to get an award from the National Association of Social Workers. I also got one from the National Public Health Association.

DePue: Do you remember any specific bills or issues that were especially important to that group?

Currie: I don't remember.

DePue: Chicago Urban League.

Currie: They named me a "beautiful people" (DePue laughs), which is really quite nice. I was quite excited about that.

DePue: Again, there's a series of votes. I don't know what the votes were on, but across the board in about fifteen of them, you were yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. I'm sure yes meant that you were in line with their views?

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: So you were at 100 percent.

Currie: Good.

DePue: What kind of issues were they taking up?

Currie: Well, I expect they were looking at civil rights and liberties. They may have been looking at things like gun control as well. I don't remember, but economic development in minority communities has always been high on their agenda. Training opportunities for minority youth, in terms of finding the skills to become tradesmen, you know, carpenters, plumbers. So, it could have been any a number of things. But it was that agenda that they cared a lot about.



Barbara Flynn Currie received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Illinois Environmental Council October 2014 presented by Allen Grosboll and Jen Walling.

DePue: Housing issues?

Currie: Voting rights. Yep, affordable housing.

DePue: The Illinois Environmental Council.

Currie: I'm sure I did very well by them because they gave me a lifetime achievement award in 2014.

DePue: You've gotten awards from almost all these organizations.

Currie: Yeah. I'll tell you, it was a banner year when I announced I wasn't running for reelection. My brother said it was the longest wake for a living human being in the history of humankind (both laugh).

DePue: In 1992, they gave you a score of 86 [percent], and in 1991, 90 percent. Let's see, who got 100 in 1992, [Representative Clement] Balanoff.

Currie: Ah, Clem. Or was it Miriam? Yeah, no, it would have been Clem.

DePue: Otherwise, you're right there at the top of the list.

Currie: Yeah. Well, sometimes I disagreed with them. There were times when I think they were not right. But we can all have our disagreements.

DePue: Can you think of any specific incident where that might have been the case?

Currie: Let's see if I can remember one. There was one in which I thought they were just plain wrong. But that was a long time ago, and I'm not even sure I can conjure up the specifics. No, I can't. I'm sorry; it just escaped me.

DePue: This is a magazine. I believe the title is *Illinois Politics*. Does that ring...

Currie: It's certainly not around at the moment.

DePue: Their issue was on effectiveness and performance. How do you measure effectiveness and performance?

Currie: I can't imagine.

DePue: They gave you a pretty high total of 130. Let's see, [Representative Jay] Huffman was at 156. So you're close to the top. A 172 was...it looks like [Representative] Lou Lang.

Currie: Hmm. I have no idea what that was.

DePue: This would have been 1993. So maybe it was a matter of how much legislation you're initiating and how successful you are at getting it adopted or pushed through?

Currie: Maybe so.

DePue: I won't put you on the spot on anything more. Here's a group that I think you'll be able to identify with and know what their agenda was, the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations].

Currie: Yep, I had been a pretty strong labor person. I wouldn't say I'm 100 percent. I have not always supported Buy American or Buy Illinois legislation, but I have been with them on the things that I think reflect their core values.

DePue: And this is from 1997. There were twenty-one issues that were dealt with. Two of them were held in committee, it looks like. And every other one, you were at 100 percent. You voted right.

Currie: Good.

DePue: Scaffolding Act restoration. That's an interesting one because that was one that the Republicans were trying to overturn.

Currie: Very, very, very, very hard, yes.

DePue: Why don't you talk a little bit about that one, if you can.

Currie: Yeah, okay. I don't remember the specifics, but the issue had to do with what happens to people who are injured on the job. It's basically Worker's Comp. I don't remember what the specifics of the scaffolding legislation would have done, but there had been very strong efforts on the part of the business community and Republicans to dismantle our Workers' Comp system. We did do reforms in 2011, I believe, some pretty major ones, but we never got any credit for it. The effort to make it so that people who are injured on the job have the opportunity to go to the emergency room and not much else has been one of the strong rallying points of the business community and the Republican Party.

There are states in the nation in which that's really all you get. You get to go to the emergency room, and there's not much in the way of follow up

care or rehabilitation or any effort to make you whole. For me, this has always been a pretty core issue because I think that workers should be treated with the kind of respect that means the job injury should not leave them high and dry, should not leave them without the ability to sustain their families.

DePue: Of course, the Republican argument?

Currie: Is save business costs. And of course, it would. It's costly to provide proper care for people, and you can certainly save money if you don't.

DePue: I'm sure part of their argument has always been that you're driving businesses out of the state.

Currie: Right. Although I don't think that's what drives businesses out of the state. My reading of the economic literature is that businesses tend to go, first of all, where they can do what they do. So, if it's selling cars, they go to places where there are people who want to buy cars. They also pay a lot of attention, not to loopholes in the tax law, but to the overall financial stability of a state. They like to go to places where people want to be. That means, when there are cultural amenities, art institutes, symphonies, all that kind of thing, that's where people want to be. Today they're particularly responsive to the millennials, who do not want to live in the suburbs but want to live in town.

DePue: How do you explain then, jumping up to our present circumstances, Illinois being at the very bottom of the states that are losing population?

Currie: I don't know what the answer is. I've never seen any really good demographic analysis. We are an aging state. I think what that means is a lot of people, as they come to retirement, decide to go live someplace else. They go back to be with their family. They go to Florida because it's warmer, the many things that drive the population loss.

New York is also losing population. I know people who have told me that, as they came to retirement, they decided to go back to North Carolina. That's where they were from. I surely know many people who, when they come to retirement age, decide to go to Florida. For most of them, it's because it's warmer.

DePue: It's not a factor of the state not being business friendly?

Currie: I don't think so. I really don't. I mean, if you look at the corporate headquarters that have come to Chicago in the last ten years, it's pretty remarkable. So I don't see... Again, if you're a 7-Eleven, you have to be where the customers are. So we're not driving 7-Elevens out of the state. We're not driving the big companies, as far as I can tell. I think it has more to do with retirement decisions, but I don't know that because I've not seen any good demographic analysis.

DePue: How about the fiscal climate of the state?

Currie: Well, I think that's definitely a factor, that if I were a businessperson and had many options, I would look at. I think the fact that we went for more than two years without a budget or almost two years without a budget would give me pause. And the fact that we still have very significant unfunded liability in the pension system would give me pause too. On the other hand, we are a low tax state.

DePue: Personal or income tax?

Currie: Yeah. Among the states that tax income, we're still very, very low.

DePue: And among the states that have property tax?

Currie: Our property taxes are high. And they're high, in part, because the State has never done a good job at funding public education. [Of] the average property tax dollar in Illinois, sixty cents or more goes to fund public schools. Across the nation, that average is forty cents.

DePue: Some would say the property tax rates in Illinois are very high, right at the top for the country as well.

Currie: I'm sure they're not as high as they are in New Jersey. But I would say that, to the extent that we pay a lot in property taxes, it's partly because the state doesn't educate our children. It's also because people may think it is worth spending property taxes in order to make sure they have good services, whether that's police services, fire services, or a comfortable environment.

DePue: We're going to pick up the subject of property taxes in just a bit. I've got a few more questions here along the same lines, but soon we'll be getting to Edgar's efforts at educational reform. Then I'll come right back to it.

But while we're still talking about the AFL-CIO—and we probably discussed this when we were in 1982 as well—Illinois has always been opposed to being a right-to-work state.⁷⁹ Governor Rauner tried to change that, had no success at all. And I assume that I know where you're positioned on right-to-work.

Currie: Yeah, I've always been opposed. When I said that I'm usually with labor, but not always, but on the core values. I think right-to-work would be one of them. As we say, it's right-to-work for less, right? So the right-to-work for less money, for less in wages, is what I believe that workers have the right collectively to bargain.

⁷⁹ A **right-to-work state** is a state that does not require union membership as a condition of employment. (<https://www.mcraizlaw.com/getting-your-terms-right-right-to-work-vs-at-will-employment/>)

- DePue: I'm jumping way ahead. Just recently there was a landmark Supreme Court case...
- Currie: The Janus case, yeah.
- DePue: ...Janus versus AFSCME of Illinois, which dealt with public sector unions. My understanding of that is it did...
- Currie: It did say that you do not have to pay union dues. If you're not a member of the union, you don't have to pay for the basic collective bargaining things that unions do for you, right. I think that was an unfortunate decision.
- DePue: Why?
- Currie: Because I think that, if I'm going to benefit from this collective bargaining agreement, I should put my money into making sure that we have a strong collective bargaining team that can stand up for the best things for all workers. To me, that was pretty basic. The court obviously didn't agree.
- DePue: Janus's position was that he didn't agree with many of the positions that AFSCME [American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees] was taking. And he didn't feel that he should be compelled, forced, to contribute to something, when he disagreed with their core positions.
- Currie: Except that he was benefiting from... When it comes to their political endorsements, there was never a requirement that he help fund that. That was always separate. The idea is that you pay this minimum... Your non-member contribution is minimum, compared to what everybody else pays because you're only covering the basic core services that the union provides all the workers, not the question whether or not they're for [Governor] J. B. Pritzker or [Governor] Bruce Rauner.
- So, I thought that the case was decided wrongly. I think that all the people who benefit from the collective bargaining agreement ought to have to help pay their fair share.
- DePue: That was the point, especially I believe, that the Court determined, five to four, that no, they were being forced to pay, in an indirect or even a direct way, into campaigns.
- Currie: Yep, and I think the Court was wrong. I'm with the four, but what can you do? I don't know what the impact has been on unions, whether there's been a sharp decrease in membership because it's now free or whether it has not had much impact. I don't know that we'll know for another year or two what kind of impact it's had.
- DePue: I've heard that there were quite a few who went from being a fair share to being a full union member.

- Currie: Okay. I didn't know that.
- DePue: And there are some who obviously have gone the other direction.
- Currie: Went the other way, yeah.
- DePue: The next one here is Critical Small Business Voting Issues.
- Currie: Oops. (DePue laughs) This may not turn out well (laughs).
- DePue: Well, they had you at 17 percent...
- Currie: Whoops.
- DePue: ...of ten things that you had voted on.
- Currie: I wonder what they were, things like Worker's Comp, I suspect, and maybe right-to-work.
- DePue: I think the Scaffolding Law was one of them.
- Currie: Yeah, and right-to-work may have been there as well.
- DePue: School choice.
- Currie: Yeah.
- DePue: Small employer insurance reform.
- Currie: I don't even know what that means. It probably wasn't.
- DePue: This is all the way back to '93. So I'm only tweaking your memory from twenty-five years ago. Income tax increase...
- Currie: Yeah.
- DePue: ...small business low cost health insurance.
- Currie: Oh, that probably just meant sort of the way that Trump people have... So what that would be about would be about, you can offer health insurance, but you don't have to meet the minimum requirements that the state has legislated. So that's not a good idea in my view.
- DePue: This one sounds pretty similar to the Scaffolding Act, Punitive Damages. "The Human Rights Commission may order a respondent to pay punitive damages if the respondent is found to have engaged in sexual harassment in employment."
- Currie: Um-hmm. I would be for that.

DePue: You did vote “Yes” on that. Illinois Chamber of Commerce.

Currie: Oops, not my best friends.

DePue: Why not?

Currie: Because they are for, you know, destroying the Workers’ Comp system. They want right-to-work, you know. They don’t want to pay taxes, you know. It’s the usual.

DePue: They want to promote the business climate of the state. What’s bad about that?

Currie: Nothing’s bad about promoting the business climate of the state, but you don’t want to promote the business climate of the state by destroying the opportunity for workers to have a fair shake.

I was appalled, during the Rauner years, that the major business organizations, the Manufacturers Association and the Chamber of Commerce, all came out, just aping the language that Bruce Rauner was using. I thought that was unfortunate. So instead of standing up for the state, the business groups were bad mouthing Illinois as a place to do business. Well, excuse me. That’s not what governors ought to do, and it certainly isn’t what major trade associations, representing the business community, should do. If they’re driving businesses away from the state of Illinois, I would say, “Thank you, Governor Rauner. Thank you, State Chamber of Commerce and thank you, IMA.” I’ve never seen anything like it.

To say that over the previous years... Yes, there were complaints about, “Well, we could do this to make the business economy better. We could do that.” There always have been tensions between the business community and the workforce, but I have never seen organizations like those come out against the very state in which they’re organizing. And I’ve never known a governor to take potshots at his own state.

DePue: The issue, I’m sure... Their argument would be, Indiana, Wisconsin, Missouri, Iowa, these are right-to-work states—I’m not sure about Iowa.

Currie: I don’t think... Yeah, I’m not sure about Wisconsin either. Oh yeah, maybe it is now, with Scott Walker, sure.⁸⁰

DePue: The Chamber of Commerce would say, “A much friendlier business climate as well” and that places like Indiana were actively encouraging businesses in Illinois to move to Indiana.

⁸⁰ Scott Kevin Walker is an American politician who served as the 45th Governor of Wisconsin from 2011 to 2019. He is a member of the Republican Party. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott_Walker_\(politician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott_Walker_(politician)))

Currie: Right. Well, we should maybe be doing some encouraging of Indiana businesses to come to Illinois.

DePue: How would you do that?

Currie: Well, do you remember when the Illinois Supreme Court struck down the medical malpractice changes? They had all these ads, all these people saying, you know, "Come to Wisconsin. You're welcome here." "Doctors, you can come over." I don't think it had much effect, but there were ad campaigns. And I'm sure that there are ways you can court individual businesses, like Amazon.

DePue: Was there anything—and this is jumping way ahead in the last five or ten years that you were in the legislature—anything that the legislature was trying to do to address the problems of out migration?

Currie: Not specifically, except that we did talk about the business climate. And when it comes to tax incentives, there certainly were a whole lot of items on everybody's plate to encourage businesses to stay here and to come here.

You know CME [Chicago Mercantile Exchange]. There was a big, big push on the part of CME to figure out a way of paying taxes that was less than what they were paying, and people somehow bought it. Their threat was they were going to move someplace else if we didn't. Nobody ever had really good numbers about whether what they were asking for made financial sense, in terms of really being taxed at a higher rate than others, or were they not? Nobody really knew. Yet we jumped on board. We do want to save this business.

DePue: I appreciate your addressing this, as I went through case by case. Let me ask you this question. These are all special interest groups. Do you think the special interest groups play a vital role in American politics and Illinois politics...?

Currie: I do.

DePue: ...or do they have an over-sized influence in what happens?

Currie: I think they play an important role. It is disconcerting that people who are not part of those organizations may have little or no voice in state legislative chambers. There are some groups, of course, that are out there representing the voiceless. The Sergeant Shriver Center on Poverty Law is certainly one. Voices for Illinois Children is another, many groups that are working to transform the criminal justice system. Through these other not-for-profit organizations, there is an opportunity for some voices that otherwise would be without representation to be heard.

But they pale in comparison to the strength of the actual trade associations and other interest groups that are able to do a pretty good job for their members and their interests in state legislatures and in the federal government.

On the other hand, let me just say this, that I found that many of the lobbyists for those special interests actually gave good information, were willing to help people figure out how to solve a problem that they had back home, without upsetting the apple cart for everybody else. So I considered lobbyists to be a useful source of information, some clearly better than others. But many of them were really quite solid and quite able and I didn't think were doing anything mischievous, in terms of representing the interests that they were sent to Springfield to represent.

DePue: I'm going to turn now to a couple more editorials and just get your thoughts, reflecting back some twenty-five years or so. This one is June of 1994, an interesting case. I'll be interested to hear your comments about Illinois and the helmet law.⁸¹

Currie: Oh right, right. I have no idea why we can never pass a helmet law in the State of Illinois. It's insane, just completely crazy. The insurance industry is for it because, of course, it means they'll have less in payout. I just never could figure out how the motorcycle people were able to prevent us from passing it. This was an issue [Illinois Senator] John Cullerton worked just tirelessly for, and all the national police and insurance organizations were for it. Yet, somehow, we could never get it done.

DePue: For most of the 2000s the Democrats have had a lock on both houses.

Currie: Well again, like gun control, I think this is an issue that separates people by virtue of region rather than by virtue of political party.

DePue: The downstaters, where all these accidents are happening, are the ones who are opposed to it?

Currie: Yeah, they're the ones who want to ride with the wind in their hair. They don't want to put that helmet on, you know.

DePue: Maybe people who are watching *Easy Rider* too many times or something.⁸²

⁸¹ Illinois law does not require motorcycle operators or passengers to wear helmets. The law does, however, require drivers and riders to protect their eyes with glasses, goggles, or a transparent shield. (<https://www.edgarsnyder.com/motorcycle-accidents/state-helmet-laws/>)

⁸² *Easy Rider* is a 1969 American independent road drama film about two Harley-riding hippies who travel through the American Southwest and South, carrying the proceeds from a cocaine deal. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easy_Rider)

- Currie: Yeah, yeah, right. But that's a really interesting issue, and I could never understand it.
- DePue: Here's another one that will come up later, when we get to the 2000s, but Meigs Field.⁸³ You wrote a couple things on Meigs Fields.
- Currie: What did I write about?
- DePue: Let's see, "I'll put my cards on the table. I'm a Meigs Field frequent flier."
- Currie: Oh, the issue there was the closure of Meigs Field. Now that...
- DePue: This is '96 though.
- Currie: Well, wasn't that Daley?
- DePue: Yeah, that was Daley.
- Currie: Didn't he close it down?
- DePue: Yeah, but that was in the early 2000s, though he was certainly pushing for it earlier. "Our lakefront parks are indeed the jewel of the city's crown. No other Great Lake city has treasured its lakefront as we have. Most have permitted industry use to make eyesores of downtown lake shores. There's no question Meigs Field is a convenience for those of us who use it, but our numbers were never large and they seem to be shrinking. There are 40 percent fewer flights in and out of Meigs today than there were fifteen years ago."
- Currie: Oh, okay. And the other point that I may have made, and certainly was true, was that about a third of the time, you can't even get in or out of Meigs Field because of weather.
- DePue: And here's a line. "Meigs runs a \$200,000 annual deficit, and its runways need lengthening."
- Currie: Yeah, okay. So even before Daley shut it down, I was sounding the trumpet.
- DePue: Now there are some others here that I might get back to tomorrow, because I need to go through and have a little bit more time myself to find the **jewels** in some of your editorials that we can cite. But let's go to what I had threatened you all along, and that's Educational Reform during the Edgar years. Do you want to start with your general views on that?
- Currie: Well, he was making a very good proposal. It was one that I think preceded him. I think Dawn Clark Netsch made pretty much the same argument in her

⁸³ Merrill C. Meigs Field Airport (Meigs Field) was a single runway airport in Chicago that was in operation from December 1948 until March 2003, on Northerly Island, an artificial peninsula on Lake Michigan. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meigs_Field)

unsuccessful campaign for governor against him. But he did pick up a lot of the ideas that she presented. Essentially what he offered was an increase in the income tax, coupled with the decline in property taxes to fund public schooling. I was the principle sponsor of his measure in the House, and in the House, we did pass it.

We had pretty good Republican support, not from the suburbs but from downstate Illinois, wherein school funding is a major issue and where incomes don't tend to be very high. We did have Democratic support, even from the more affluent suburbs because these were people who believe that geography should not determine education quality. And without these kinds of changes, without more state funding directed in the right way, then the children in property poor areas were going to continue to lose out in the educational sweepstakes.

So I was the sponsor in the House. We did pass it, and it wasn't just by a single vote. I think we had a pretty good vote. But then it got shut down by Pate Philip in the State Senate.

DePue: You were the sponsor or co-sponsor?

Currie: I think I was the sponsor.

DePue: There wasn't a Republican that was signing on to the Republican governor's initiative?

Currie: You know, yeah, but it was my bill. I think maybe [Republican Representative] Bill Black would have signed on as a principle. I just don't remember. But I know that all those downstaters, like Bill, from Danville and from other places, did support the measure.

DePue: Well, Lee Daniels, as well as Pate Philip were from, at that time, solidly Republican DuPage County.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: Was Lee Daniels opposed to what the governor...

Currie: I really don't remember the details. I doubt he voted for it. My guess is I only had support from the downstate Republicans.

DePue: Here are just a couple figures, and since they're figures, anybody could challenge this somewhere down the road. In general, something like 70 percent funding from property tax for education. Yet the constitution said that the majority should be coming from...

Currie: ...the state. But the way the Illinois Supreme Court interpreted that language was to say, "It's hortatory. The state shall take major responsibility for

financing the system of public education.” It just means you tell us how to do it. It doesn’t mean you pay (DePue laughs).

DePue: Did you agree with that particular Supreme...

Currie: No, I didn’t.

DePue: (laughs) I didn’t think you would.

Currie: And then we did have a constitutional amendment proposed to clarify that when we say majority, we mean more than 50 percent. But it failed in the general election.

DePue: So this was something that was initiated in the legislature?

Currie: I think it was. I don’t remember whether Edgar was pushing... No, I don’t think he was. In fact, he may have come out against it at the very end. I was not the sponsor. I don’t remember. It would have come from the teacher’s unions, I’m sure.

DePue: There are some districts where it was upwards of 95 percent of public education money was coming from property tax.

Currie: Yeah, well, yeah. Some of the more affluent parts of the hood.

DePue: Like DuPage County and the north side of Chicago?

Currie: Well, I’m not sure that... No, in the north side of Chicago, no because remember, Cook County has—What do you call it?—We have different rates for different classes of consumers. And in Chicago, the homeowner pays only on the basis of 10 percent of the assessed value. That’s how they’re assessed.

DePue: I was thinking more in terms of the rich, northern suburbs, like Skokie and...

Currie: Yeah, I think in places like Winnetka, I suspect they were paying a higher share. They did not get as much support from the state as some of the poorer communities. But the issue has always been that we never did enough for the poorer communities. Even when we were slighting the richer, we were not doing enough to aid the property tax poor areas.

DePue: There were some districts that got maybe \$3,000 per student and some—I suspect there’s some that are lower than that—some were upwards of \$15,000 per student?

Currie: Yeah, well but, again, that’s also a choice that the people are making. Now the \$3,000 is not... I would argue that, in fact, in some of the property tax poor areas the rates are confiscatory [resulting in confiscation]. I mean, you’re spending ever so much more for every dollar of value than are the people,

even in Winnetka. It's just that their dollars add up to a whole lot more than yours do.

DePue: You know, you've already stated that—I'll put it in a blunter way—that Governor Edgar basically skewered Dawn Clark Netsch because of the tax issue. She was for raising the income tax at the same time you could possibly reduce property tax. He skewered her for that and won in a...

Currie: ...landslide.

DePue: ...landslide and now comes up with this plan. So May 4, 1995, just a few months after the election, he appoints U of I President Stanley Ikenberry to head a blue ribbon commission. Do you think that was the right kind of move?

Currie: Yes, I do.

DePue: That's the right approach?

Currie: I do. I do. I do. Certainly people had a good time at Edgar's expense, pointing out how much of what he was proposing resembled what he'd complained about in Dawn Clark Netsch, but he was doing the right thing. And I'll tell you, he was also... He was very... He used to go about all the time saying, "Look at the polls. Look at the numbers." He was carrying around numbers of people who supported his proposal, and it was very strong. He really did have quite a lot of public support. But he didn't have Pate Philip at the end of the day, and there you are.

DePue: So it was the Republicans in the Illinois Senate that were primarily the log jam on that?

Currie: Yes, and it was specifically Pate Philip, I believe.

DePue: How would you describe Pate Philip? I don't know if I asked you that before. Paint me a picture of Pate Philip.

Currie: I never really knew him. I really didn't know him at all, personally. First of all, he was very, very conservative. I know that [from] people who traveled with him on various kinds of educational things or whatever, he certainly was not afraid to use racial epithets. He was not at all afraid of being politically incorrect. In fact, I think he rather reveled in it. But he was a businessman. I think he was a Pepperidge Farm or a Sarah Lee businessman. I'm not sure which.

DePue: Pepperidge Farm, I believe.

Currie: That's where he came from, and that's who he was. Finesse was not the name of his game. And as I say, I know that he was not unfamiliar with language that today we would say is not acceptable.

- DePue: People always point to Mike Madigan and how well he holds his caucus together on some important issues. People have said the same thing to me about Pate Philips.
- Currie: About Pate, okay, okay. Yeah, I was not familiar enough with how that operated.
- DePue: March 21, 1996, the Ikenberry Commission issued its report. Their findings were that the State needed to ensure the funding level at \$4,225 per pupil and—Okay, here it is—that there were some that were funding at \$2,950, which is well below that point.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: So then the issue is, again, how you're going to finance that, if that's the thing? It would require a \$1.9 billion increase in state funds, state taxes of some type. Was there ever any doubt in your mind that the best way to do that was to do that through an income tax increase?
- Currie: Yes, yes. Now I also would say that there are other sources of revenue that we have been slow to embrace. One would be sales taxes on services. You know, in the '30s, when the sales taxes came in, people bought lawn mowers. Today they hire landscaping services. So we've seen a real shift in the economy, from people doing it all themselves to people relying on others, the dry cleaner. People don't sit in their kitchen with a bowl over their head, while wifey does the haircut. They go to the barber, right?
- The whole economy shifted very significantly from 1930s to the 2000s, but the tax structure didn't reflect those changes. I've always thought that would have been a good place for Illinois to go. And if you look at our surrounding states and just say, "Well, let's just tax the services they tax," there are probably thirty-five or forty that you could tax, without putting yourself at a competitive disadvantage.
- DePue: Would one of those be legal services, which was a block that always supports the Democrats?
- Currie: No, the trial lawyers do but not the legal community.
- DePue: That's a good point. Thank you.
- Currie: There was very strong resistance on the part of the lawyers and the doctors to being included as a service. The idea is that legal services and medical services are vital to the health of the people.
- DePue: And your position on that?

- Currie: As I say, I would tax what the other states around us are taxing. I would start from that base, rather than reinventing the wheel.
- DePue: It sounds like you would be hesitant to anger the doctors and the lawyers, who would be opposed to that.
- Currie: Not for that reason, no. My rationale would be that it's going to be an easier sell. This is a very hard thing to do. Everybody does have a barber or a beauty salon. Everybody goes to the dry cleaner. What you would find, if you were actually seriously considering any of those proposals, that anybody, any legislator, going to the dry cleaner or to the barber is going to get an earful, or the car repair shop. My point only is that it's an easier sell if what you're selling already has happened in your surrounding states and there has not been a massive movement of barbers or dry cleaners out of the state because they're taxing the service.
- DePue: So was that ever seriously discussed at that time?
- Currie: It was discussed. I'm not sure it was discussed that early. It's been discussed a lot more lately, but there's been no real action on it.
- DePue: There was talk about the Commission's recommendation that the state share be raised to 50 percent, that the states step in to equalize grants for areas that are low property wealth. Again, the ultimate question, as we've been discussing here, is, Where does that money come from?
- Currie: Right. The proposal from Edgar was that it come from the income tax. And there is again no question that Illinois, among the states that tax income, had at that time a pretty low rate. We're still pretty competitive, even at the higher rate that we've adopted, of 4.9 percent or whatever it is, last year.
- DePue: March 22, 1996, would that be his annual budget address perhaps?
- Currie: It could be. It could be.
- DePue: He proposed state increased taxes up to 1.9 billion with a 1.4 billion swap with property tax. How do you do that?
- Currie: Well, because you make it much more difficult for the locals to raise property taxes. And, of course, a lot of people didn't believe that you could do it. They believed that the people who always have their hand in your pocket and your property will find another way in. They'll find a way around it.
- DePue: So, how do you?
- Currie: I don't remember how the specifics worked. I just don't remember how the mechanics worked.

DePue: I'm no expert on property taxes. There are caps that some of these communities place on it, and yet your assessed value seem to keep going up and up and up.

Currie: Yeah, but then what happens is you still have to stay within the cap. The assessed value just means who's going to pay the larger share, rather than how much money is going to be collected.

DePue: I'm going to pause here very quickly and dig up an editorial on this.

Currie: Okay, so this is a comparison between the Edgar original plan, which would have raised the income tax and provide property tax relief, with his plan B. And plan B did ultimately pass. It was not as comprehensive; I make that point. What it relied upon, however, were telephone, cigarette, riverboat gambling taxes and higher penalties on people who don't pay their taxes on time. Those are not indefensible, but the important thing about the first plan was that it also provided property tax relief, and it raised more money. This one does not raise as much money. It would guarantee minimum funding levels for every student, and that was an important part of his plan A.

That was retained in plan B, but it did not go nearly as far as plan A would have done to provide a quicker source of relief for underfunded school districts that were not able, because of the lack of resources, to do an adequate job funding their children's schooling.

DePue: Was this still your bill in the House?

Currie: I don't remember. I'm not sure I did it in the House. I'm sure they could have found somebody else by this time who would have.

DePue: But you were generally supportive even though it...

Currie: Yes, I voted for it, yes. Yes, "The governor's second best plan is a good deal for Illinois. We should support it," not the best, but good enough.

DePue: Isn't it interesting? This one is one of those perennial issues that keeps raising its head, doesn't it?

Currie: We just did it. Two years ago we established another comprehensive school reform funding bill.

DePue: I have a colleague who is doing a series of interviews on that very subject. So I wouldn't be surprised if he reaches out to you and focuses in like a laser beam on that specific topic.

Currie: Yeah, boy, that was a very interesting process.

DePue: But you were successful in that just this last year?

- Currie: Two years ago, was it? Maybe it was 2018. Ay ay ay ay, I think it was 2018.
- DePue: Speaking of perennial issues...
- Currie: There's so many.
- DePue: ...(laughs) the next thing on my list. October '95, I believe, is when Edgar proposed to fix the public pension system in Illinois with a pension wrap, what became known as the pension wrap. I can't believe this was the number at the time, but I've read that it was only a \$15 billion shortfall in the public pension system, at the time.
- Currie: Wow.
- DePue: Now it's what, \$130 billion or something like that?
- Currie: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But remember that part of what makes up the unfunded liability are the returns that the investments are bringing into the system. So in 2008, when we had a stock market crash, the value of the assets in the pension systems plummeted and the unfunded liability grew.

Two interesting things: First, during all the fourteen years of the Thompson administration, there was never any effort to deal with the unfunded liability of the pension plan. It was pay as you go. We're going to fund the benefits that we need to pay today to retirees, teachers, state employees, what have you. So there was never a concerted effort on his part or anybody else's to try to deal with that issue. So I think Edgar gets some credit for trying to focus on the issue.

The difficulty with his plan—my second interesting point—is that it was one of those wherein the upfront costs are very low. So you're dealing with this ramp, and when you get to the end of the ramp, suddenly every second dollar in the state treasury is going to have to be spent on funding the pension liability. So it was not well-crafted. If we had put more resources in the front end, in the early part of the ramp, I think that would have worked a whole lot more effectively than the proposal that he actually made.

- DePue: Did you vote in favor of this?
- Currie: I'm sure I did.
- DePue: By the time you get to '96, '97, certainly '98, at the end of his term, these are very good economic years for the state and for the entire country. There's even a surplus at the end. Why wouldn't you dump in more money into that system?
- Currie: We should have. That's exactly my point about the ramp that Edgar proposed is that it didn't take enough of our current resources to begin solving the

problem. It relied upon taxpayers, way down the line, to pick up the slack. And I'm not sure why he didn't. Maybe it's just that everybody was so keen on their own bright new ideas for adding to state programs that the old programs we had, like the pension system, just didn't seem attractive enough. But it would have been much smarter, as I say.

Maybe there were some political reasons why the legislature would not have bought it. But had there been more money in the early years, going into the system, we'd have been a whole lot better off today.

DePue: By some of this time frame, you were in a leadership position in the Illinois House. Was that something that was discussed among the Democrats in the Illinois House?

Currie: You know, I don't remember that it was. I'm not sure anybody really noticed how ineffectively the ramp was created, until we were well on our way up its path, yeah (DePue laughs).

DePue: Well, we're there now.

Currie: Yeah, we sure are. We sure are. Governor Pritzker has proposed a revamp of the ramp, and he's not wrong. But the problem today is that so much money is required to go into the pension funding, that it's going to be very difficult to provide early childhood education, mental health services, you name it. It's going to be very tough to do it.

So, unless there's a restructuring... To say to a three-year old, "You're out of luck because we don't have any money for early childhood education because we've got all these pension payments." That's a whole life that you're clouding, and I think that's pretty important.

DePue: Your voicing the same comments that Bob Mandeville, who was Governor Thompson's budget director for all fourteen years of his administration, was saying.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: When you've got this choice of putting money towards the pension system or doing something for the people, you always make that second choice.

Currie: Well, except that to the extent that you end up with this really quite crushing debt, you really, at some point, do have to look at it, I think. I do appreciate that the other items are really important too, so how you figure out how to pay for the pensions is important. What Edgar did was to at least start the discussion. But his proposal fell on the issue of the ramp, of making sure that the money would be spent by all those lawmakers who voted for the bill, like me.

DePue: Well, Majority Leader, you won't be surprised. You'll hear this subject come up again, especially for Blagojevich and for Quinn and for Rauner, over and over and over again.

Currie: Over and over.

DePue: That's the issue that won't go away in Illinois politics.

Currie: That's exactly right.

DePue: Speaking of being a majority leader, that occurred in 1997. I'd like to have you take some time and explain to us how you became majority leader.

Currie: Well, the majority leader in our system, in the House of Representatives, is appointed by the Speaker. In the past, the majority leaders had always been white males (laughs), and they had always been from downstate Illinois. They often were different in their political views from those of the Speaker.

I think it was quite a shock to the system when a person who was female and was from the City of Chicago was selected. I think that the boys never quite got over it because it really was a very different approach, and I think people did not expect it.

DePue: The rationale for having a downstate Democrat be the majority leader was...

Currie: Well, I'm not sure there was ever an argument. It's just that, as it turned out, most of the time there had been a downstater who held that position, if the speaker were somebody from upstate. It's just a trade-off, a tradition. I don't know that anybody ever made any strong arguments that you have to have somebody from downstate because everything is different downstate, but that was sort of the accepted notion. So it was, as I say, a shock to the system.

DePue: You mentioned a couple times when we went through some of these issues, issue by issue, "Well, that wasn't a Democrat or Republican issue. That was a downstate and upstate issue."

Currie: Upstate downstate, yeah, yeah.

DePue: Wouldn't that be part of the rationale for somebody who's a good, effective speaker, who can visualize the political game of strengthening your hand?

Currie: It could be. But there also are ways to give voice to the people representing that perspective, even if they're not the majority leader. What Madigan always said is that I had the right credentials because I was a hard worker, and I knew the issues.

DePue: By that time, you had been one the leaders, in the leadership team for several years.

Currie: Yeah, I think four.

DePue: Were you lobbying for this job?

Currie: I did lobby. I did. I did ask him to appoint me because it became clear to me that it was never going to happen if I didn't. So (laughs) I did. Then I encouraged some of the other women to also make a pitch for me, and I think some of them did do that.

DePue: Again, 1997, in your competition, who were you competing against?

Currie: [Illinois Representatives] Lou Lang, Kurt Granberg. There were, I think, five who had their hats in the ring. I can't remember. I know both of those were definitely lobbying. I can't remember who the others might have been. I don't know if [Representative] Gary Hannig put his... I just don't remember. But I'm pretty sure there were a couple more who were understood to be interested.

DePue: Is this a position that has to be voted on, like the House Speaker?

Currie: No, the House Speaker appoints the majority leader.

DePue: Which happens first?

Currie: The Speaker gets selected Speaker and then gets to appoint the majority leader.

DePue: But your lobbying for the position has to occur even before he's...

Currie: Sure, yeah, with the assumption that it's likely it'll be he. If there were somebody else, I'd have been lobbying whoever else that was.

DePue: How long before the 1997 vote for Speaker were you lobbying for the position?

Currie: I think really it was only then. Remember, for the two-year term that preceded it, the Democrats didn't have a majority leader because the House was in Republican control. And the person who had been the majority leader was Jim McPike. I would certainly not have tried to topple him. I think he did a great job, but he was no longer in the legislature.

So we come to 1997. The Democrats are back in control, so the majority leader position is open to us, and there's nobody around who already had the position because Jim McPike was no longer there. It was an open seat, open territory, open sesame. So I went for it.

DePue: Here's what I'm fishing for. I want the inside baseball story of the maneuvering and the machinations to become the majority leader.

- Currie: Well, as I say, I did not try to get organizations to make a pitch for me—I don't think I did—But I did definitely try to get my female colleagues on board. Some of them, I know, did speak to the Speaker in my behalf.
- DePue: Was it not just the female members but some of the more liberal members in the House?
- Currie: I'm not sure because, as I say, Lou Lang was also in the mix. I know he was very hopeful that it would fall his way. He would have a pretty progressive record too. So I'm not sure who was around in '97 that would have... I can't remember. Was [Illinois Representative] Woody Bowman still there? I don't think so.
- DePue: It's a name I'm not familiar with. Mostly your lobbying was to Speaker Madigan himself?
- Currie: Yep. Well, he's the one who's going to make the choice.
- DePue: Did he come to you then and announce to you, or was it when you were asking him?
- Currie: I was asking him. No, I asked him. Then it was a long time before he actually made the decision. I think we'd already been in for at least a month before he decided to go ahead with the appointment. In fact, two funny things. First of all, I think he would have liked to have been the one to tell me, but Lou Lang had just come out of his office. I saw people going into Mike's office this particular afternoon, and I thought, These are the people who want to be majority leader. I was kind of hovering. So Lou Lang came out and said, "Congratulations." (laughs)
- Also, some of my girlfriends were on the way back to Chicago. I called them to say, "Look..." It was like 4:00 in the afternoon; we'd already finished our work for the week. They whooped and hollered. They pulled off the side of the road because (laughs) they were so excited; they were afraid they were going to crash the car. So it was really a very...a big surprise. When I say, a shock to the system, I think that's not overstating it.
- DePue: When Representative Lang came out and told you "Congratulations," was he smiling when he said that?
- Currie: Well, sort of (both laugh).
- DePue: Who are some of the women who were supporting you?
- Currie: [Congresswoman] Jan Schakowski, [Illinois Senator] Carol Ronen. I think [Illinois Representative] Nancy Kaszak was still there, [Representative] Sarah Feigenholtz. I don't remember which ones actually spoke up for me, but there was a goodly number of women that I worked closely with.

DePue: How does that work? They would have to approach the Speaker and say, “We want you to select...”

Currie: Yes, yeah. I asked them to. Some of them might have written notes, and some of them might have said, when he asked for their vote for Speaker, “Gee, you can have my vote for Speaker, but I sure hope you’ll ask Barbara to be the majority leader.” Maybe they didn’t do it, but I was hopeful that they would, and I think they did.

DePue: When you’re jockeying for these kind of positions, was there some *quid pro quo*, saying, “Hey, I’ll support you, but you need to do this for me?”

Currie: That can happen. That’s not the way I operate. For example, when the Speaker would call to say, “Will I have your support for my election as Speaker?” I never would have said, “Well, only if I get to go on being majority leader.” I would just not have done that, no. I suppose it shows you that I’m kind of dumb when it comes to politics, but there you go.

DePue: You’ve only had how many years in the Illinois...?

Currie: Well, I know. But, as I say, I think that most people would be more transactional than I.

DePue: Let’s spend a little bit of time... I might have done this before, but I think this is the appropriate time to get a more in-depth look at who Mike Madigan is.

Currie: Can I go back to Edgar for just one minute...

DePue: Sure.

Currie: ...because I have a very cute story to tell. There was a program that was initiated during his term that was called, like, Make Work Pay. The idea was that, for people on welfare—most of whom were women and all of whom had children under the age of eighteen—if somebody gets a job, let her keep \$1 of every \$3 she earns and still keep the welfare benefit because the welfare benefit was not very large. The Republicans didn’t like this—or Pate Philip didn’t like it—and during budget negotiations this was very much on the table.

Well, the governor’s legislative liaison came to the Conference of Women Legislators and the Democratic women in the House and said, “Can you support Make Work Pay?” So we did. We put out a press release, and we were absolute stooges for Jim Edgar. It was great. It was a wonderful experience. It was clever of them to know that we were there and to know that we would support this initiative. They used us, and we were very happy to be used.

DePue: And you were successful.

- Currie: Yes, it did survive the budget cut, and we still have it, I think.
- DePue: That illustrates the importance of... It all comes down to the budget fight every single year, doesn't it?
- Currie: Yeah, yeah, right, but it shows you how people can maneuver differently, depending on the issue, depending on the circumstances. It was an unusual thing for the governor to rely upon this group of Democratic women.
- DePue: Before we go on to Mike Madigan then, since you mentioned Edgar, a successful governorship?
- Currie: I think so. I thought he paid attention to his knitting, as one might say. I think he was a good steward of state resources. I think, although as his first years were pretty rocky with respect to the budget, I think, by and large, he did a pretty good job. I think his values were not very different from my own.
- DePue: You were dealing with a very different kind of personality from Governor Thompson, all those fourteen years.
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: Which one would you rate as being more effective?
- Currie: Ooh, that's hard.
- DePue: Because Thompson was clearly a very popular governor.
- Currie: Yes, he was. But Edgar was as well. I think Edgar was much more attentive to governing, to the details of state governance, than had been Thompson. Thompson had some very good people around him, very good people with very good ideas, and he certainly was popular. But I think Edgar did pay more attention to the nuts and bolts of state government. The things he'd said about Bruce Rauner and the budget reminded me what a careful steward he had been. So, in some ways, I think, if you look at the budget, I think he was perhaps more effective than Jim Thompson. But it's a hard one because they each had different kinds of strengths, and of course, they were different times.
- DePue: So, the question now again is Mike Madigan. I want you to paint a picture of Mike Madigan as a person and then Mike Madigan as the Speaker.
- Currie: Okay. As a person he's pretty straightforward. He's a Notre Dame graduate, and he is married with four children. He's very much a family man, very devoted



Currie with Illinois House Speaker Michael J. Madigan at a retirement party in her honor, hosted at Montgomery Place in Chicago, fall 2018.

to the children and to his lovely wife Shirley. A homebody is essentially what he is. He's a voracious reader. He particularly likes books about war times and other kinds of major shifts in populations, the fall of the Soviet Union, for example. He's actually quite well read in those arenas.

He's a nice man. He's not somebody who goes about deliberately upsetting people or laying traps in their way. He's just a kind of straightforward chap. He gets to the office every morning, very early, 7:30, 7:00, and he's usually the last one to leave at the end of the day. So he's a hard worker, as well as being a family man and being... What do I want to say? Yeah, I mean, that's pretty much Mike Madigan. What you see is what you get.

DePue: Is he intense?

Currie: I'm not sure what that means. When he feels strongly about something, you're likely to know it.

DePue: Have you ever seen a flair of temper?

Currie: Practically never, not his style, sometimes, but not very often.

DePue: Most people comment that he doesn't like to be in the public eye very much.

Currie: Right, he does not. He doesn't have a cell phone (both laugh), doesn't have an email [account]. If I want to reach him, I either have to... I can call him on a landline. I'm sorry, no, I don't think he has a cell phone, and he certainly does not have an email account.

DePue: My impression is that you didn't mind being in the public eye more.

Currie: No, I didn't mind it. I kind of like it.

DePue: Did he have that understanding? Was it fine for you to do that, or did he want you to be a little bit more reserved in your...?

Currie: I don't think so. I think he was okay with who I was and how I reacted to the press. I would think that his view would be that the less you're in the public eye, the safer you are, the better off you are, that people get in trouble when they are very public. It just was not something that was appealing to him.

One of the people who's a newcomer in the General Assembly— Here's an example—during the campaign, he tweeted that it was a terrible thing that old people were being pushed out of their apartments because of rising rents and that he would vote to lift the prohibition against rent control for municipalities in Illinois. So that's what he said. Then, when he got to Springfield, guess what? He didn't vote for the bill (both laugh). You can get into a lot of trouble. I suspect that if you're Danny Solis [former Chicago

alderman], you're a little concerned about what you might have been saying in all those phone calls that the feds were busy listening to.

DePue: The next part of the question is, tell me about Mike Madigan, Speaker of the House, his leadership style as Speaker.

Currie: First of all, remember the reason he gets to be Speaker is because he is very responsive to the members of his caucus. They are the ones who are selecting him. While a couple of times people have said, "I'm not going to vote for him," I think it's because that has more to do with the public perception that Mike Madigan is evil, than it has to do with anything that Mike Madigan himself has done to earn that kind of label.

He is good to his caucus, in terms of helping people with what they want. If somebody wants to chair a committee, he's open to that. He's helpful to people when it comes to resources for political campaigns. And I think people respond to him by virtue of saying, "Yeah." I also think that people think well of his ability to establish the values and the standards that should be the House Democratic values and standards, in terms of legislation. I think on all those fronts he's someone who has appeal to the members, and they are happy to support him, except for the couple of times a couple of people who didn't.

DePue: Were there frequent caucus meetings?

Currie: No, there were not. I think there are now many, many, many caucus meetings. We traditionally did not caucus a lot. And I guess I would tell you, I think that the same thing that has happened to Nancy Pelosi has happened to Michael Madigan. That is to say, they are both favorite Republican whipping boys. And it doesn't have very much to do with what they really are about or who they really are. They become convenient shorthand for the Republicans who want to defeat the Democratic majority in the Illinois House or in the United States House. It's easy to paint Nancy Pelosi as this liberal from San Francisco. It's easy to paint Mike Madigan as this evil character from the southwest side.

But I think the reality of each of them is not that at all. I was disconcerted, I guess I would say, that a fair number of the newcomers were reluctant to back Nancy Pelosi, not because they didn't think she would be the right leader at the right time, but because they had made either statements in the campaign or because they were buying the Republican rhetoric, essentially. And that, I thought, was unfortunate.

Now, most of them did fall in line, and she was elected handily. But I think that the... And the people in the Illinois House, who chose not to support Madigan, I think they also were responding to Republican attacks. And either

they bought it or they thought politically it would be a good thing for them to do.

DePue: Do you think that Madigan is politically savvy?

Currie: Yes, I do, a lot more than I am.

DePue: He's one of those guys who's thinking four or five moves forward on his chess board?

Currie: I think he is. And I think he enjoys strategy very much.

DePue: He's from a district that has changed dramatically since his tenure.

Currie: Yes, it's mostly Hispanic today, and it was not when he first was elected at all. It was Irish. It was Polish, you know, very ethnic. And today it's primarily Hispanic.

DePue: If I remember correctly, he had a serious challenger in the last election, but the word was that he found somebody else to split the Hispanic vote.

Currie: That was the charge, yeah. But on the other hand, the two candidates together didn't come close to his majority. I mean, so even if all the votes from candidate C had gone to candidate B, candidate B still would not have won. And Madigan's suggestion is that for the first candidate that you're talking about was basically a put up by Rauner, that he was really a Republican. Whether that's true or not, I don't know.

DePue: There are Republicans in that district? (laughs)

Currie: Yeah, just a couple.

DePue: Now I forgot what I was going to ask (both laugh). Tell me about the relationship that you had with him.

Currie: A pretty comfortable one. I mean, I think of him as a friend, as well as someone that [is] a comrade, a colleague. I wouldn't say we were really, really close but I've always been close to his family. And it was a comfortable relationship. We talked a lot about issues, trying to figure out what the best way forward is for the House Democrats, what kind of legislation we ought to be supporting, what kind of legislation we should be crafting. He's not a warm and fuzzy kind of guy. Which is fine.

DePue: Well, that kind of goes back to my question about being intense.

Currie: Yeah, but I don't think that he's intense. I think he's just rather a bit reserved, so I would say that, rather than being intense.

- DePue: When he first sat down with you, after selecting you as the majority leader, was there a conversation about, "This is what I want you to do as my majority leader?"
- Currie: I don't think we ever had that conversation. I don't remember that conversation. But I think we certainly worked closely together to figure out what kind of programs we might support, what kinds of things we could sell to our caucus, what kinds of things would be good things for us to champion.
- DePue: Were you the vote counter?
- Currie: I did some of that, yes.
- DePue: Were there others that did that as well?
- Currie: Yeah, but I think Madigan also relied a lot on staff to do vote counting.
- DePue: Tell me about his staff and your relationship with his staff.
- Currie: They're great. There are several different staffs. One is the issue staff and they do a lot of press release writing. Most of them leave state employment when it's campaign time because they go out and work on campaigns. The research staff does bill analysis and works more specifically on legislative issues. So we have those two different kinds of staffs. And then there's also the staff that are the, legislative aids, legislative assistants to members of the House. So there really are three.
- DePue: A couple that are more prominent would be the chief of staff position, and I'm embarrassed to not be able to recall the name.
- Currie: Jessica Basham? Tim Mapes?
- DePue: Tim Mapes.
- Currie: Yeah.
- DePue: Tell me about Tim Mapes.
- Currie: Well, I've always been quite fond of Tim. I would say he's not someone with a lot of filters. So what you see is what you get. Some people liked him a lot. Some people were not so crazy about him. He could certainly be a little dictatorial when it came to how we run the House. For example after the major renovation, he was death, absolutely death on people eating popcorn or eating anything else on the floor of the House. In fact, we did a skit, the Conference of Women Legislators one year, focusing particularly on Tim and his, you know, breathing down people's necks to make sure they were not eating a candy bar at their place.

I think some people felt that he was not as responsive as he should have been to their interest in pushing a particular bill at a particular time. I don't even know if that's true. It's just that I know that we have a very busy, a very full agenda and not everybody is going to get the top spot on the morning call. So a certain amount of that just goes with the territory. But I personally got along well with him and personally I like him.

DePue: The chief of staff is often times the person who controls access to the boss.

Currie: Yeah. He did have a sign in his office that said, "No one gets to see the speaker. No one. No way, No how." And so people thought of it that way. I don't think that really was true. I think Mike has been very open to meeting with, not to meeting with lobbyists, but to meeting with members certainly. I think if there were staff people who feel the need to speak to him directly, I don't think that he would turn them down.

DePue: It was Tim Mapes who recently got himself in some serious hot water, right?

Currie: He did. Yes, he did.

DePue: Sexual harassment charges.

Currie: Yeah, and I'm not even sure I would define it as sexual harassment. Was it inappropriate behavior to a staffer? Yeah, I think it was. But was it a firing offense? I'm not sure. I don't think there was anything sexual in his conversations with the woman who did the press conference calling him out.

DePue: It sounds like some of them did think that though.

Currie: Well, yeah, it's hard to know. I mean, he was gone immediately. Though there was one thing that people picked up on. It was the only thing that had anything that you could even define as being sexual and that was... This was, I think, for swearing in. We were about to do a swearing in and he said to the staffer, he said, "You got to dress right. Important people are going to be around. I don't want to see any pink bra straps hanging out." Well, I think if he'd been talking to a male, he would have said, "I don't want to see any t-shirts. I want to see collared shirts and a tie, tucked in." But that was one of the things he said that she pointed to that I think everybody thought was icky. And it is. You know, again, it's kind of unfiltered, right?

DePue: It's old school.

Currie: I mean, instead of just saying "dress appropriately." When you say, "Your pink bra strap," no. Yeah. So anyway, that's what happened to Tim.

DePue: You probably would have had access to him as a female member of the legislature as much as anybody in the building, right?

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: And you didn't see that.

Currie: Not a bit. Not a bit. No, as I say, I got along with him very well. I think we were friends. I think I was in Springfield toward the end of March. The governor was giving me... This is back to the wake. The governor was giving me an award in honor of Women's History Month and my sister-in-law was with me. And we took Tim out to dinner and we had a great time.

DePue: This is all going on about your last year in the legislature, correct?

Currie: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, no it was right after the legislature finished its work in May or June, May that the charges against him came down. And it was pretty scary.

DePue: Do you think he should have stepped down?

Currie: I don't know. I think that's between him and the Speaker. I think that it would have been difficult for him to carry on with the sense that he had behaved in ways that were harassing. That is to say, I don't think it was sexual harassment, but I think it certainly was just not the kind of proper respect for an employee that he should have shown. And that made his departure, I think, probably the handwriting on the wall, but devastating for him. He's in his middle, maybe early sixties; he's had this great career, and suddenly he's a pariah. It was, I think, very hard for particularly his kids, who have seen him as whatever, to be sent away in disgrace. That's never a good thing. So I felt very sorry for him.

DePue: Did you ever have a conversation with Speaker Madigan about it?

Currie: I did not because by the time this happened, we were already out of session. So I was not seeing Mike on a regular basis.

DePue: I wanted to ask you a little bit about the press secretary position because that's also very... Obviously it's public, and Brown...

Currie: Steve Brown.

DePue: ...Steve Brown. Tell me about Steve Brown.

Currie: He's been on Madigan's staff for many years. When I first went to Springfield, he was a young reporter with the... I think it was the *Daily Herald*, an Arlington newspaper. He was very close to Eugenia Chapman. I don't remember exactly when he went on the Madigan staff, but I know that in '79, '80 he was certainly a reporter and then went to work for Madigan. I don't know whether it was in the early '80s, the middle '80s.

I think he does a good job for the Speaker in that he is able to reflect upon the things that Madigan says. So I think he does a good job. Many of my colleagues have felt that he's not been strong-minded enough, that he's not been out front with Democratic priorities. On the other hand, it seems to me that may be more a job for the Speaker than for the Speaker's press spokesperson. And I've always got along with him well.

DePue: My last question about the speaker is a comment, a comment that you heard, not so much from the 1990s, but certainly by the time you've got Rod Blagojevich as governor, and I think beyond that time frame as well, for Pat Quinn as well, that the most powerful politician in the State of Illinois was Mike Madigan.

Currie: Well, I remember, even when I was a newcomer, there were many who called him one of the most powerful politicians. That was when the late, great Richard J. Daley was alive. I don't think many people would have said that Mike was more powerful than he. But he, of course, didn't live long after that.

They've always called him...Who was it? There was a reporter for the *Chicago Sun Times*, Basil Talbot, since retired. I remember a column in which he referred to Mike Madigan as the velvet hammer, which I thought was kind of fun (laughs).

DePue: Not a bad nickname to have.

Currie: No, not bad, not bad.

DePue: Well, do you agree with that?

Currie: Actually, it's probably a pretty good description, because he's not someone, as I say, who goes into temper tantrums and beats up people publicly. But he certainly does think strategically, and he certainly does organize his shots. But velvet? He's not, as I say, a rabble rousing, shouting politician.

DePue: I'm not sure you answered the question I was thinking. Do you agree that he was the most powerful politician in those crucial years?

Currie: That I don't know. I just don't know because I don't know who else is out there. I would say in Springfield he certainly has been a very powerful force. And I don't remember many people who could stand up to him in a fight. In fact, he did all kinds of things when Jim Thompson was governor that were not what the governor had in mind, but Madigan generally got his way.

DePue: And we mentioned that Edgar was excited that that first year in the budget fight he felt like he walked away the winner. And he was the winner against Mike Madigan.

Currie: Right, right.

- DePue: Well, the comment I was hearing in the 2000s was in reference to Blagojevich, that Madigan was a much more powerful political leader than the governor of the state.
- Currie: He was certainly more disciplined. That is one of the things I should have said about Mike, that his discipline is just amazing. I did mention he gets to work early; he stays at work late. He really is a very disciplined person. I think that that showed when Blagojevich was governor because one of the things that Rod never was, was disciplined at all.
- DePue: (laughs) We'll get more about that tomorrow.
- Currie: Okay.
- DePue: But we're going to finish off today. Have we still got some time here?
- Currie: Yeah, sure.
- DePue: I wanted to talk about the George Ryan administration, those years. The 1990 gubernatorial election, George Ryan versus Glenn Poshard.⁸⁴ I don't remember much about the primary election for the Democrats. Do you remember?
- Currie: I don't either. I know I worked on the Poshard campaign. It was painful (laughs).
- DePue: How so?
- Currie: Well, because he was, you know, kind of a whiner, and he also was anti-choice, or at least not good enough on that issue. I was supposed to be out there, helping to organize women to support Glenn Poshard, and it was a pretty heavy lift.
- DePue: But you don't remember who the other candidates might have been that year?
- Currie: I didn't work with them in the primary. I don't remember. We could Google. I'll Google it.
- DePue: Well, you got to take the mic off. (pause in recording) A short break here, but we've got Poshard versus George Ryan who'd been around for a long time, Ryan had. You worked with him when he was in the Illinois House when he was speaker, 1980 to '82, I believe.
- Currie: I think that's right.

⁸⁴ Glendal William Poshard (born October 30, 1945 in Herald, Illinois) is a former Illinois State Senator, U.S. Congressman, gubernatorial candidate, and president of the Southern Illinois University system. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glenn_Poshard)

DePue: Your impression of George Ryan as a politician.

Currie: Well, he was a good politician. He was a glad-hander, a hail-fellow-well-met. He ran a drug store in Kankakee, and that's what... He became the darling of the local Republican party and found himself in the Illinois House and found himself Speaker of the House.

We had our disagreements, but there were times when he came through as something more than I might have anticipated. I was on a task force that he created to look at Medicaid. I think his concern was, as a pharmacist, he didn't think he was getting reimbursed sufficiently for medicines provided to people on the Medicaid rolls. It turned out to be quite a good commission. We actually had some very reasonable suggestions in our final report. But it stemmed from his concern that, as a pharmacist, he wasn't getting paid enough.

DePue: Was this something going on while you were both in the legislature?

Currie: This was my first term in the legislature, I believe. It was '79 and '80, I think, or maybe it was '80, '81. He was definitely against the Equal Rights Amendment. He was definitely anti-choice. Both of those are items that I care strongly about, and I'm on the other side.

On the other hand, when he became governor and when he decided to have a moratorium on the death penalty and commute people who were on death row, I thought he did exactly the right thing. Some say, "Well, that was a real political pitch on his part." I don't buy it. I think it was not at all helpful to him politically, but I think it was the right thing to do.

And I do think that when he encountered somebody who was on death row, and it became clear to him... I mean, he was in the legislature when they reinstated the death penalty. He voted for it, as somebody from his background you would expect absolutely would do. But I think that what happened was that the enormity of the decision, when it came to... Was it George Kokoraleis? I think [that] was the name of the person who was on death row. I believe that Ryan did not intercede, but I think it was that experience that made him reassess his whole lifetime of support for the death penalty, and I thought it spoke well for his character that he was willing to do what he did.

DePue: Do you think he was an effective governor in working with the legislature?

Currie: I think so. I didn't do a lot of work with him. I did work with some of the people around him, [Illinois Representative] Pete Peters. What's his name?— Oh damn. I'm so bad at names these days—Arnie, Arnie, Arnie. I can't remember his last name...Kanter, Arnie Kanter [Governor Ryan's legal counsel], I think. He'd worked with Edgar, and he also was close with George Ryan. So I didn't have any real interactions with Ryan himself.

The other thing that George Ryan did that I admired was he was the one who really pressed for, initiated, a ban on military style assault weapons. That was, again, not something that you would expect from a pharmacist from Kankakee, a Republican pharmacist from Kankakee.

DePue: Even during the election in 1998, there were rumors that were out there about some corruption within the secretary of state's office. He'd been secretary of state for eight years.

Currie: Right, yeah, yeah, I'm sure I heard them. Yes, yeah, but I don't know that any of them were true.

DePue: So at that point in time, you weren't concerned about that?

Currie: No.

DePue: One of the things you hear from others was that George Ryan liked to make deals.

Currie: Yeah, and again, I didn't have any real interactions with him myself. Was he somebody who was a pragmatist? Yes. I think that means that, if you need to get votes here, you may want to offer votes there. So in that sense, if he was a log roller—and I think he probably had been in the legislature—I would not be surprised if he still adopted those practices and strategies as governor. But there's nothing inherently evil about it.

Just, how do you get something done? Well, sometimes you compromise. And what you had in mind at first to do, you go to plan B, as Edgar did on school funding. Sometimes it means you're just working with people who may not share your vision but who are willing to go along if something that they care about gets prime status as well.

DePue: Do you think he was fiscally responsible? I'll preface this by saying, he took office with a \$1 billion surplus—this is obviously some very flush economic times; 98 through 2001 were very strong economic years—He had \$1 billion surplus; he left with a \$1 billion deficit.

Currie: Well, I don't think he was fiscally very responsible. But as I say, except for Edgar, I think most governors have not been fiscally very responsible. And I think most legislatures have not been either. Legislators love to come up with new programs and new ways to spend the peoples' hard earned cash.

DePue: One of his initiatives was the Illinois First bond initiative. Every few years a governor takes that on as an issue. "We need to build infrastructure." His was Illinois First. Were you supportive of that?

Currie: Yes, I was. I was. It was patched together with funding from various sources, gas tax increase, license plate increases, state ID increases. I can't remember.

There may have been some utility taxes in there as well. I can't remember if it was telephone or other. It was kind of a hodgepodge of revenue sources, but that may have been the only way to sell the program.

DePue: Did your district benefit from any of that?

Currie: I don't remember.

DePue: Is that the kind of initiative where everybody has something on the plate?

Currie: Yeah. Now, that came in when Steve Rauschenberger was still in the [Illinois] Senate. I don't remember whether that was before or after... I think that was probably during Ryan. Yeah, yeah, individuals had the opportunity to spend money on infrastructure programs. How much individuals got was pretty much a decision by the legislative leader—I'm looking him up. That'll tell me—Nineteen ninety-three to 2007, so yeah, that was probably while Ryan was governor.

I myself didn't think the member initiatives program was a great idea because I think that lawmakers are not in the best position to decide which of the projects in their turf is the most needy. They are more likely, I think, to be responding to what they hear about, and we may not hear from everybody across the district. We may hear from the local people there and skip the ones that are over here. Secondly, I do think that bureaucrats, when they're making decisions about where we need to redo a road or redo a bridge or install better water filtration; they do have standards. They have to, at least to some degree, give a rationale for determining what the priority list should be. Lawmakers on the other hand don't. So I was never one who thought it was a great idea.

Did I spend money? Absolutely. I mostly spent money on public schools and parks, some social service organizations, not-for-profit organizations, like the Hyde Park Neighborhood Club, or there was one in south shore that I was pretty helpful to. But as a matter of principal, I don't think that was the right way to run government.

DePue: So you would prefer, rather than a legislator who's hearing from constituents having input, you'd prefer to have the bureaucrats from IDOT [Illinois Department of Transportation] and IEA [Illinois Education Association] and other agencies?

Currie: Yeah, because they have standards. They have standards to use that they employ, and they have to have a rationale for deciding what their priority list is. Lawmakers don't, and you can certainly get very loud, very busy constituents, but they're not responsible for the whole district. They may be concerned about something very specific in their neighborhood, but it doesn't mean that somebody doesn't actually have a greater need, who is not quite so good at organizing, not quite so loud a mouth, not quite so willing to beat up on the lawmaker.

- DePue: Here's something that I think most people were surprised that George Ryan would do. He took a trip to Cuba...
- Currie: Yeah, right.
- DePue: ...when that wasn't being done very much.
- Currie: No, that was not, and it was great. He had, apparently, just really quite a fine time. It sounded like... I did not go on that trip, but apparently Fidel was very garrulous. They had some state dinner that went on until 3:00 in the morning or something like that. He was also some... I do remember this story that Ryan told, that Fidel prided himself, at whatever age he was—he was not a young chap then—on his amorous activities. He had these little pills, and he seemed to attribute a lot of his success to these little pills. So he gave a couple to George, who then went and had them analyzed (laughs) by one of the pharmaceutical companies in Illinois (DePue laughs). It turned out they were, like, you know, like sugar water. Right, it was nothing; there was nothing there at all. This was before Viagra.
- DePue: If anybody would have had the...
- Currie: Yeah, maybe Fidel didn't give him the right pills. I have no idea. All I know was, it was a pretty funny story.
- DePue: I had not heard that one before. He had the reputation of having—maybe not like Pate Philip—he had a gruff side to him as well.
- Currie: Yes, he did. He did. Well, yeah, he was a small-time pharmacist from Kankakee. I think he was a good old boy. That's why I mention particularly the gun bill and the moratorium because those were things that I would not have expected from somebody who came from his background. He was gruff. He was not one to suffer fools gladly.
- DePue: Did you have a problem with that style, his personality?
- Currie: No, no, I didn't. No, just with his values (laughs), the ERA and reproductive rights.
- DePue: How about the values of the political corruption? When did you start hearing that there were serious issues that had occurred prior to the time he was governor and during the time he was governor?
- Currie: I don't remember what we heard about the secretary of state stuff. He was indicted only for things that happened while he was governor. And I don't remember the litany of items that they used in order to convict him and send him to jail. One of them had to do with using a beach house that belonged to a lobbyist and not paying, as I recall. I don't remember what the other individual items were.

- DePue: The one that most people are familiar with is the issuance of drivers licenses in secretary of state's offices—because he's responsible for doing that—and that there were bribes being taken or contributions to his campaign...
- Currie: Oh, you're right. You are right. You are right.
- DePue: ...especially for truck drivers.
- Currie: Um-hmm, but he wasn't indicted on that. Wasn't he only indicted on things that happened while he was governor?
- DePue: I don't think that's the case. I'll have to check on that tonight.
- Currie: Yeah, I will too. I will too. But you're right. There was a big scandal.
- DePue: But it sounds like you weren't too wrapped up in that side of the story?
- Currie: No, no, but I would tell you this. To the extent that there were bribes or contributions and so forth and so on, I would be very surprised if that began with George Ryan. So I would suspect that Jim Edgar, his predecessor, would have been involved in those same kinds of activities and whoever preceded him the same.
- DePue: Some people, when they're looking at George Ryan, they like him personally, and they say he just didn't choose his supporters, his friends very well.
- Currie: I've heard that too, and I don't know if that's right.
- DePue: Or this is a very common one, that he was playing by the old rules, and the rules had changed.
- Currie: I think that's absolutely right. You think of people like Rostenkowski, who was definitely playing by the old rules, and the rules changed, and he never saw it.⁸⁵
- DePue: You've already addressed the other issue, and this was very much in the midst of all of these challenges about corruption in his administration, that he made the decision to—How would you phrase it?—not send somebody for the death penalty.
- Currie: Right. And as I say, to me that was an example of George Ryan's principles winning the day, principles that he developed late in the game because, as I said, I don't think he ever would have thought twice about the death penalty,

⁸⁵ Daniel David Rostenkowski (January 2, 1928 – August 11, 2010) was a United States Representative from Chicago, serving from 1959 to 1995. He became one of the most powerful legislators in Washington, especially in matters of taxation, until he went to prison. **Rostenkowski's political** career ended abruptly in 1994 when he was indicted on corruption charges relating to his role in the Congressional Post Office scandal. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan_Rostenkowski)

having voted for it, just who he was and where he came from. But I think the responsibility of being the last person to stand between a convicted criminal and the death penalty, I think that that had to make him rethink what exactly he was about.

I think that he learned enough about the death penalty to know that the chances are good that it is being applied in ways that are not rational, that the same people committing the same crime, one gets the death penalty, and the other gets ten years in prison. That it is racially discriminatory, and certainly people who are poor have a much greater chance of facing the death penalty than do others. I really thought, I really thought that he came to this conclusion because he started out with Kokoraleis and wasn't at all happy about it.

DePue: Do you have any other comments you want to make about George Ryan as governor?

Currie: I don't think so. It seems to me that that was just a really brave decision that I don't think helped him electorally or any other way, but I think it was the right thing to do.

DePue: During his administration, September 11, 2001 hit. I want you to reflect on your memories about that day.

Currie: Oh boy. (pause) Yeah, it was pretty horrible.

DePue: How did you find out about it?

Currie: My grandson was in the hospital at that time. At the age of five months, he'd been diagnosed with liver cancer. So I was spending a lot of time with my daughter and with the baby at the children's hospital in the neighborhood.

DePue: You were in the—

Currie: Yeah, and I think somebody... I think one of the nurses or one of the staff people saw it on television and pretty much broadcast the news.

DePue: Did you watch a lot of the news that day?

Currie: No, I did not. I don't know why I didn't. I don't know. I remember that Margaret... My daughter did not either.

DePue: What other memories do you have of that time period?

Currie: Just that it was just such an incredible thing to happen to us. It shook the psyche, the national psyche, of us, and that was very difficult, difficult to comprehend, difficult to wrap your mind around. How could we become so hated that people would, in fact, do what they did?

- DePue: Have you thought about that, come to a conclusion about that?
- Currie: No, I haven't.
- DePue: So it still doesn't make sense.
- Currie: It still does not make sense.
- DePue: Was that an important turning point for American history?
- Currie: I think it was. And I think a lot of what we're seeing now, the anti-immigration rhetoric and the hatred of people who are "the other" is in part a result of that. Although having said that, if you look at what's going on in other countries, other western democracies, you see a lot of the same, a lot of anti-immigration, a lot of anti "the other." So this may not have been as formative for us as I suggested.
- DePue: One of the things I came across in your records was an article in the—Where the heck was it?—the *Hyde Park Herald*.
- Currie: Yeah, that's where I wrote all my columns, my editorials.
- DePue: It's got state politicians and local politicians. I want to give you the chance to read what you had written about it at the time, small print.
- Currie: Oh okay, all right. Okay, yeah.
- DePue: When I said read, read aloud if you could.
- Currie: Okay, sure. "I am proud of the response of the American people who have aided in the search and rescue efforts, donated blood and other supplies, and joined us in vigils with prayers and thoughts of support for the victims.
- "We must join our global partners in finding the means to bring a complete and total end to terrorism and all of its manifestations. I support the president and the congress in their efforts to punish those responsible for these crimes and bring an end to senseless acts of terrorism. Our domestic and foreign responses to these criminal acts require us all to ensure that we act in accord with the core values that make this nation a beacon of freedom the world over."
- I still buy that (laughs).
- DePue: Do you think that the nation, especially the first couple years, fought that new war on terror—what we called the war on terror—effectively?
- Currie: I don't know. I don't know. I think we were all hopeful that we were, but I don't know whether we did.

- DePue: Are you saying that because that was really outside of your purview?
- Currie: Yeah, really outside my purview, and I don't know enough about issues of security and all the rest to know whether our responses were effective or was it, as it so often seems to be, shutting the barn door after the horses have escaped?
- DePue: Here's another issue that we've talked about several times; 2000, of course, is the census year, so now it's time again for redistricting. And you're now the Illinois house majority leader.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: Do you play a role in redistricting that year?
- Currie: I think I did. Did I? I know I did in 2010, but I thought I did in 2000 as well.
- DePue: I think you did as well. I'll see if I can find...
- Currie: But that was...wait.
- DePue: ...the redraw that year.
- Currie: Yeah, no. Because it was in 2010 that Pat Quinn was governor, so we didn't go to a commission. We just did a regular map vote in the House and the Senate. Yeah, so I was like a chair of the Redistricting Committee.
- DePue: I don't know if you remember much about that process.
- Currie: Oh, I do. I remember that we had a lot of conversations. We held hearings all over the state. And I remember also calling my Republican colleagues. Wait, this would be...
- DePue: We got a couple maps from the blue book, 1993, 94, and then 2003, 2004. So this is prior to the redistricting. This is after the redistricting that you now have a hand in.
- Currie: Yep, yep. Yeah, and I remember talking to members to find out what their particular wishes and hopes were, and that included Republicans. I didn't just talk to Democrats. I called my House Republican colleagues to find out what was vital to them, and we tried to be responsive.

The core values of making a map are to, first of all, respect communities of interest, political boundaries, to the extent that it makes sense. And be sure that you're not trying to undercut the opportunity for members of minority groups to have a significant say in the outcome of elections.

- DePue: Of course, the '90 map was controlled by the Republicans because they won the draw, exactly what the constitution didn't anticipate. And the Democrats controlled the remapping because you guys won the draw.
- Currie: That's exactly right.
- DePue: It came down to the draw because you had a Republican governor.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: And I think Pate Philip was still in the Senate as the...
- Currie: I think you're right.
- DePue: ...majority leader. Speaking of Pate Philip, this is from the *Chicago Daily Defender*, an interesting place to have a letter to the editor from Pate Philip about the Currie Two Map. I'm going to read this one.
- Currie: Okay.
- DePue: I'll spare you the...
- Currie: Thank you.
- DePue: "The State of Illinois is nearing a conclusion on creation of the redistricting map that sets the Senate and the House district boundaries for the next ten years. Although there have been some media attention focused on the process, the upcoming federal trial has not garnered the attention it deserves. The decision of three federal judges will be pivotal to Illinois politics and government for the next decade. Under the Democrat redistricting plan, now being challenged in federal court..." —Which pretty much happens every time, does it not?
- Currie: Right, yup.
- DePue: "...the balance of power will be shifted to the City of Chicago and its Democratic party leaders. Republican suburbanites, downstaters, and minority voters will be ignored. Democrats have already proven that, with the Currie Two Map..."
- Currie: That's me (DePue laughs).
- DePue: "...it created a cruel illusion of African American voting strength that will not translate into actual success at the ballot box. The Currie Two Map fractures African American voters from their suburban communities so that the Democrat party political power can be extended into the suburbs."

If you look at some of these districts on the 2002 map, some of them are elongated; some of them are not.

Currie: Yep, yep. Well, the federal court decided that our map did not discriminate against members of minority groups and did not fault us for the boundaries between suburbs and city. So, he may have complained, but he didn't win his day in court.

DePue: And they generally do not win their day in court, Republican or Democrat, when it's being challenged. Would that be a fair assessment?

Currie: Right. But my recollection is that, in the '93, '94 map, my recollection is that there were, as I told you the last time we talked about it... I think they originally had proposed a very different kind of district for me. Whether that got changed into this district in the court suit or whether they had actually made the change before they adopted the final version of the map, I don't remember.

DePue: He's clearly saying it's your fault; it's your map. How much are you actually sitting in a dark room someplace...

Currie: We're not.

DePue: ...and drawing lines on a map?

Currie: No, what we're doing is taking demographic information and other kinds of information, information about political boundaries, natural boundaries, rivers and so forth, and trying to craft a map that, as I say, is virtually identical in population. In fact, I don't think we had a variance of more than one person in all the districts across the state and is reflective of the value of making sure that minority voters have a significant say in the decision about who will represent them.

I think we did a pretty good job. Certainly, when it comes to a point when people are wondering what the map looks like, there's often a willingness to kind of share possible drawings with individual members. But that usually is pretty late in the game.

DePue: Who actually is doing the hard, heavy lifting on this?

Currie: So we have always relied upon some of the national experts to give us a helping hand. They do a lot of the work with the computers and with the raw data. Then we have staff who are adept at using the computer programs and who understand the basic demographics.

DePue: Who is we in this case?

Currie: Well—and I’m sure the Republicans did the same—but each party was allotted a certain amount of money in the budget that preceded the census to try to prepare for redistricting. And I know that we hired people who were expert in that activity and organized computer programs so that we would be ready to not only create maps, if it came to that, but also criticize and understand maps that might have been created by others.

DePue: Now, he’s not saying that this is the Currie-Cullerton_map. He’s saying that this is the Currie map.

Currie: No, I was the one who was in charge of the... And I think we did call it the Currie Map, as amended by Bilandic (DePue laughs).

DePue: So this is something Mike Madigan comes to you and says, “Barbara, I want you to be in charge of this?”

Currie: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: And you said?

Currie: Sure.

DePue: Because?

Currie: It was a learning experience.

DePue: Isn’t it that we mentioned this as well—I mentioned it—I think you kind of tacitly agreed that this is the ultimate political act in the system, drawing the map.

Currie: Yes, but that doesn’t mean that it is done only for partisan superiority. It means... Because, as I say, there are other values that have to be enshrined in the decision where you draw those lines.

DePue: Those other values, you’ve stated before, but...?

Currie: Community of interest, respecting communities of interest, natural boundaries, political communities as well, but also making sure that members of minority groups are not given short shrift in their opportunity to make sure their voices are heard loudly and strongly when it comes to who will represent them.

DePue: You and I grew up in an age where gerrymandering, that was a dirty word.

Currie: Right.

DePue: That doesn’t seem to be the case.

Currie: Well, I think it is. There's a big effort. There has been in Illinois and there have been in a number of other blue states, particularly blue states, to change the redistricting process, to take it out of the hands of politicians and give it to some amorphous other, who presumably will not take into account any partisan information at all when it comes to drawing a map. I think the concern would be, in Illinois, whether if you did that, whether you would still have as much attention to the values, for example, of respecting race in the redistricting process.

Other states who have done some of these things... Iowa has long been named as an example of a place where they've... Two things I would say about Iowa. One is they have virtually no minority population, or at least they haven't until recently. Second, I think there was a time when the mappers actually drew—it was the Senate president or the speaker of the House—drew him out of his district (both laugh). And guess what? That map didn't survive. That map went down, and they went back to the drawing boards.

DePue: Did you have a colleague or colleagues from the Senate that helped you out in drawing the map?

Currie: Yeah, but I think each caucus had its own resources. I'm trying to remember how that worked.

DePue: But clearly the Senate district is going to determine the House districts because there are two House districts in every Senate district.

Currie: Right, right. Yeah, well, John Cullerton has been very engaged in reapportionment.

DePue: How much would you be involved with the drawing of congressional districts?

Currie: Well, I'll tell you what happened on that score, the last several times at least. The congress people generally divide up their own maps. Now, whether that will happen again this time, I do not know. Their tendency has been to draw up maps that are respectful of the wishes of the incumbents. Now, how that will work when we're losing a district, I don't know. But the last two times, at least, we have basically been shown a map that they would like. And if there's bipartisan support for the map, there generally has been bipartisan support for the map in the assembly.

DePue: In other words, the congressmen and women get together to make sure that their congressional district is protected....

Currie: You got it.

DePue: ...and they get reelected.

Currie: You got it. You got it.

DePue: And if you think gerrymandering at the state level is bad, take a look at the congressional.

Currie: Take a look at the congressional. But they also have to be careful of exactly those values that I described because people can sue about that map too. And you can lose in the federal courts if you've done something really egregious.

DePue: You just hit on something. It gets really dicey when you lose congressional districts.

Currie: Yeah, and that's what's going to happen in Illinois.

DePue: One or two?

Currie: We don't know. Demographers have not told us yet whether it's going to be one or two.

DePue: Obviously we won't know that for a couple years.

Currie: But definitely one, definitely one.

DePue: Which goes back to the issue of losing population in the state.

Currie: Yes, it does.

DePue: Any other comments about redistricting?

Currie: I don't think so (DePue laughs).

DePue: I'll let you off the hook then.

Currie: Phew.

DePue: I think probably this is a clean way to break for our next conversation, which will be about the Rod Blagojevich administration.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: I'll bet you'll have things to say about that.

Currie: You know, I wasn't real close to... Yeah, we'll find out. Yeah. All right?

DePue: Thank you very much.

Currie: Thank you very much.

(end of transcript #7)

Interview with Barbara Flynn Currie

#ISL-A-L-2014-049.08

Interview #8: April 16, 2019

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, April 16, 2019. This again is Mark DePue, and I've got my... Is it our eighth session perhaps?

Currie: I don't remember. You told me yesterday. I think you're right. I think you said yesterday that was our seventh.

DePue: Yes, that's right. That is correct, our eighth session with Barbara Flynn Currie. I should say, now Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie.

Currie: Right.

DePue: We got you to the majority leader position yesterday in our conversation.

Currie: We did indeed.

DePue: And now that we are there, I thought I would ask you and start off today with a few of the initiatives that you have sponsored and embraced over the years. I wanted to start with a couple. We finished off yesterday, talking about George Ryan. Now we're going to backtrack a little bit and go back to the late 1990s. I think 1998 was when KidCare was moving through, and I wanted you to talk a little bit about KidCare.

Currie: I thought it was a very important program, and we still have a KidCare program in Illinois. We may call it CHIP [Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan] instead. But in any case, the idea was to provide health insurance for low-income children who were not low enough in income that their families qualified for Medicaid. So this is the people just up a notch, but likely the parents are not in a position to afford individual health insurance, or they don't work in a job setting where the employer offers employee coverage.

DePue: Talk a little bit about Medicaid and the funding mechanism for Medicaid. Then lead into KidCare in that respect.

Currie: Okay, Medicaid is... The federal government funds, basically, Medicaid. We pay part of the cost too. We pay about half the bill. States vary in what their actual reimbursement rate is. For reasons unclear to me, Illinois is stuck at a level that is not as generous as many other states. We thought, when Denny Hastert was the speaker of the United States House, we might see some relief.

But I think there was so much oxygen that was pulled out, because that was also at the time when Cook County was trying to establish CountyCare and use Medicaid dollars to provide general healthcare for low-income people, that the question of the level of reimbursement got lost in the shuffle.

In any case, the idea behind Medicaid has been for many years that people who are low income and have children, people who don't have much income and have children, are entitled to, for themselves and for their underage children, medical care. Illinois has a reasonably generous set of benefits that are available.

States have a lot of room to set their own standards about what kinds of things will be covered. Under the Affordable Care Act, Obamacare, Medicaid was expanded significantly. It became available to people who were low income, but they didn't have to have children. So you found a lot of adults who were then qualified for Medicaid. People who are on disability, they're already covered in a different way.

People who are on Medicaid are presumably people who do not have a disability significant enough for them to qualify for disability under the federal rules. And, as I say, the expansion occurred in 2010, when people without kids were suddenly eligible for Medicaid.

DePue: So you've got that time period in '98, '99, when KidCare was approved. You've got a whole decade...

Currie: And we had made other changes. For example, we worked to see to it that pregnant women who, instead of being at 100 percent of poverty or 150 percent of poverty, we went up to 185 percent of poverty. The rationale behind that was that prenatal care, good birthing experiences, are very important in the development of healthy children. So we had done some work

on our own to expand eligibility for Medicaid benefits, and pregnant women was an obvious place to go, and KidCare, kids, were another.

DePue: Who picks up the tab? Medicaid was roughly half and half, you said, but now for these additional people...

Currie: You know, I can't remember whether initially we were able to get some money from the feds or whether we'd been pretty much funding that program ourselves. But it's been a pretty good program, and we still have it.

DePue: This is about the same time that, on the federal level, they had passed welfare reform. I know there were initiatives at the state level as well.

Currie: Right, there were. I was very involved in those discussions, and it was a very trying time. It was very difficult for people like me, who had been a supporter of Bill Clinton. When I found that he was busy dismantling welfare as we knew it, I was not a happy camper. Peter Edelman, who had been one of his high ranking people—I'm not sure if he was in Health and Human Services—a close advisor to the president, husband of [Congresswoman] Eleanor Holmes Norton, distinguished in his field, which was poverty and poverty law, quit (laughs) in distress at the change that the president was making.

DePue: You're talking about a person at the federal level?

Currie: Yes, yeah, well, a highly regarded person, who'd been part of the administration.

DePue: You are free to correct me on this, but my understanding is that the Republicans were really sponsoring that welfare reform, and Clinton got behind eventually.

Currie: Yes indeed.

DePue: Was that intended to get away from welfare becoming a lifetime choice, that it added a time limit to it?

Currie: Right. The problem is that people don't choose to be on welfare a lifetime. The benefits are low. They're not really adequate to sustain people in any kind of reasonable fashion. And the difficult thing was the five-year, lifetime limit on benefits meant that you have to have a good economy. You have to have people in a position to get good jobs.

Now, there were—I don't want to say loopholes—possible waivers. If unemployment in a particular state or unemployment in a particular region of the state was particularly high, you could stop the clock from running. So there were some safety nets, even with this program, but there was a real concern that there would be people who would use up their benefits and then find themselves basically on the street.

Since the whole welfare program used to be called Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the focus was the children, not the parents. Then when we changed it to temporary assistance for needy families, people lose sight of the idea that the program, begun in the 1930s, was meant to be a cushion, a support system for children.

DePue: What then did the state do to kind of pick up the gap?

Currie: Well, we had to implement the program. At that time, the Republicans were still in charge in the Senate, and I had to deal with Dave Syversen and Steve Rauschenberger.

I ended up being the lead negotiator for the Democrats, and I was very glad to have, at my side, people like John Bouman, who is now president of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. I knew a fair bit about the whole welfare system. I'd been involved in human services issues since I'd come to Springfield. But he knew much better the nuts and bolts, the mechanisms.

He had a very good idea about what we could live with and what we couldn't live with, what would we be willing to give up, because we had to make changes—no two ways about it—to comply with what the feds had done, but what we should hold on to because, if we made this or that particular change, it was going to mean real harm for large numbers of people.

I think we did a pretty good job in Illinois of establishing a program that fit within the new TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] program but did not risk immediate harm to a lot of our citizens.

DePue: It sounds like you're putting in more money to make up the gap that you perceived to be there with the federal welfare reforms?

Currie: No. No, I don't think that we're spending more of our own money. It's always been a shared program, or at least the Medicaid section has been.

DePue: The next one is quite a different kind of subject.

Currie: Okay, I like it to shift around.

DePue: Earned income tax credits.

Currie: Yeah, that was great.

DePue: This is something that there's a federal program...

Currie: The feds started it. Gerald Ford was president when the first earned income tax credit language was adopted by Congress. The idea is that people who are of low income but are working would be enabled to keep a little more of their

hard-earned money in their own pockets. Your income was set as a percentage of what you would get as a credit. You wouldn't have to pay the taxes on it, so it let people keep more money in their own pockets.

It's a very popular program, and it was particularly popular with Republicans, in part because it's a subsidy for employers that are not paying much in wages. So it's a kind of an interesting thing. Liberals like me (DePue laughs) like it because it helps real people who are low income, and Republicans like it because it helps the employer continue to pay low rates because the rest of us are helping pick up the slack.

Anyway, it started under Ford. When Ronald Reagan signed an expansion of the program in whatever year it was, he called it the most family friendly piece of legislation he'd ever encountered. Initially, when our state adopted our earned income tax credit, we did not make it refundable, which is what the feds had done. What that means is people who had not earned enough to get the value of the credit, in terms of a cash give back—you could do that at the federal level—couldn't at the state level.

It was some years later before we were able to make our credit, which is set as a proportion, a percentage of the federal credit, make that refundable too. And the value of the refunding program is that it helps the lowest income workers.

DePue: I think I might have gotten lost somewhere in that description.

Currie: Uh-oh.

DePue: It wasn't because you didn't do a good job of explaining it. But it's kind of a complicated mechanism.

Currie: It is. It is.

DePue: Is this your initiative? Was that specific to state income tax?

Currie: Yes, yes, because there already was a federal credit. That had been expanded over the years, and that was refundable. So the lowest income workers... If you didn't have 100 bucks, against which to take the credit...if you only had eighty, you get twenty bucks in return from the feds.

But in Illinois, when we started the program, it was a percentage of what you got at the federal level. It did not have a provision that said, "If you earn less than you would be otherwise entitled to, we'll make up the difference." We didn't make it refundable until... Well, Barack Obama was then in the State Senate. It was my bill in the House that expanded it, and we did make it refundable that year. But I don't remember which year it was, 2000 something.

DePue: My understanding then is, that you've got a job. It's not paying that well, but you're having taxes withheld, both at the federal and the state level. At the end of the year, you can compute your taxes, and you actually get a refund check from the feds and from the State that's greater than what you had contributed.

Currie: Yes. Well, for most people, it'll be whatever you'll get. So if you earn \$100, and your benefit is \$20, you'll get to keep the \$20. But for people whose income isn't big enough to provide them with a return, they get the supplemental.

But as I say, that was the way the federal tax credit operated. But when Illinois first instituted the earned income tax credit, Pate Philip was still the president of the state Senate and he found refundable credits anathema, so we were not able to get that done. Then when Barack Obama sponsored a bill in the Senate, that I had passed in the House, and—I think Emil Jones was then the Senate president—we were able to get it done.

DePue: We're going to pick up a lot more about your association with Barack Obama in a little bit. But the next one on my list is the Illinois Freedom of Information Act.

Currie: Yeah, I'd been involved in freedom of information issues pretty much since I got to Springfield. In 1983, we passed the state's first Freedom of Information Act. We beat out Mississippi—the last state in the nation that didn't have a Freedom of Information Act—by about two months. When we did pass it, the governor—then Jim Thompson—did an awful lot of amendatory vetoing. And the question at the end of the day was, did we still have a good enough structure to say, "Let's do it. Let's take our marbles and go home or take our marbles and stay put"?

Ultimately the groups I'd worked with [were] Common Cause, ACLU, there's a national group of reporters; I can't remember what their acronym was. The conclusion was we should take our money and come back to fight another day.

DePue: And you did.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: If there's a federal Freedom of Information Act, what's the difference with the state level?

Currie: Because what the state level does is... The federal thing only applies to federal government, only applies to federal agencies. So, at the state level, then, this gives you access to information from the State Department of Human Services, the State Police, all the other agencies of state government because they're not covered by the federal. Our act applied to local governments as well.

DePue: What enforcement provisions were put into place?

Currie: There is the opportunity for a state's attorney to take a case, just as with the Open Meetings Act. And I believe that there's the opportunity, in some cases, [when] private parties also can go to the court. The problem is that there's not a very good system for providing the kinds of damages that make it easy for small groups to go ahead and press their case. [It's] hard to find a lawyer.

DePue: In other words, a lot of state agencies can drag their feet?

Currie: Yes.

DePue: And have dragged their feet?

Currie: Yeah. And it's not just state. This also applied to local communities.

DePue: The state law did?

Currie: Yes, yeah. They can drag their feet, and if there's not an easy way for a lawyer to recoup at the end of the day, you don't have much of a chance of good legal representation.

DePue: I'm looking for a document—I probably put it in a different stack—showing that you got a couple of awards because of this.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: IPA, does that sound familiar?

Currie: Illinois Press Association. That is the local group.

DePue: So they're recognizing... If anybody would be supportive of this, it would be the press corps.

Currie: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: They're recognizing your work in that respect.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Here's another natural, I would think, given your background, for fights over the minimum wage increase.

Currie: Yeah, okay. I was certainly supportive of an increase in the minimum wage. I sponsored one of Governor Blagojevich's measures to do just that.

DePue: Did that pass during the Blagojevich years?

Currie: Yes. Before this most recent pass, our... Wait a minute. I had the number, yeah. So the feds were at whatever, and we were maybe a \$1.25 above the federal limit. I think we were at \$8.50, and the feds were at \$7.25.

There was another. I'm sorry. Between the time I passed one, I think there had been another one that Kimberley Lightford had passed in the Senate.

DePue: I know that this was part of the argument against it this last go around, and I assume it's always been part of the argument, that it's one thing to argue for a minimum wage increase in Chicago. It's another to argue for a minimum wage increase in places like Cairo [Illinois] and other depressed communities.

Currie: Right, and that was a very big part of the discussion most recently. It was part of the discussion earlier, but I think the disparity, the degree... Now when you talk about the \$15 minimum wage, the argument that you're suggesting may have a lot stronger appeal. When we were raising it by a little, I don't think that argument had nearly the staying power that it did later on. And, of course, the people in those communities, who are anxious for jobs, are anxious for jobs that pay adequate wages. The whole point of minimum wage is setting a floor or increasing a floor...is that the worker is worthy of his hire and ought to be paid a salary that is commensurate with his work and her work and commensurate with the need to keep a roof over the head and put food on the table.

DePue: The bill that just past then... Oh, you would not have voted...

Currie: No.

DePue: ...on that one.

Currie: No. No, I wasn't there (DePue laughs).

DePue: Would you have supported that bill, because there was no provision about regional aspects.

Currie: I expect so, and I never really got into the details, the weeds, about the regional differences. I know that was a very big issue, and I'm not quite sure why there was not an effort to try to lessen the blow.

DePue: Do you not buy the argument that the conservatives were putting up, that small business owners were putting up? "Okay, if you want to raise our minimum wage to \$15, we'll hire less people and find more efficiencies elsewhere."

Currie: As I understand it... First of all, I think there may be some dispute about what the impact of a \$15 minimum wage is. I think that there are some economists who would say that that's kind of at a tipping point, such that it will mean some job loss. But generally what the economists find is that there's not much

connection between an increase in the minimum wage and what jobs are available. And while that can happen theoretically—and I'm sure that it happens on a case by case basis with an individual employer who may choose to pack up and go across the state line—many employers are pretty well stuck. So as we talked yesterday, if you're 7-Eleven, you've got to be where your customers are.⁸⁶ You don't have the opportunity to pack up and go.

Now, in these days when there are more and more ways to use computers to do some of the work that workers have been doing, yeah, there may be more times when people are ordering their McDonald's burgers with the little kiosk at the back of the store rather than ordering them from the front counter. But that's going to happen with or without an increase in the minimum wage.

As I say, most economists would say that the impact of an increase in the minimum wage, at most, unless you get to a really high disparity, is probably not, across the economy, significant, although you can always point to particular places where it is.

DePue: Another argument that's often put forward against the minimum wage increase is that the people who are often hired at minimum wage are very young people, high school kids, college kids.

Currie: And I think that this latest bill, and I'm sure the one that I sponsored, did provide for a lower training wage for just those people.

DePue: Next on the list is predatory lending.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: That was a problem for you.

Currie: Well, that was, of course, what led to the fiscal collapse in 2008. Are we talking about housing, about predatory lending in the...?

DePue: Yeah. I don't know too many of the particulars, but yes, I'm sure that's a part of it.

Currie: Yeah, so what was happening was that people were being sold properties that they couldn't afford by people who were then able to resell the mortgages that they had set up on the general market. Slicing and dicing we called it. Nobody at the end of the day was ultimately responsible for that mortgage. When you're selling people mortgages that they can't afford...

⁸⁶ **7-Eleven**, Inc. is an American international chain of convenience stores, headquartered in Dallas, Texas. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/7-Eleven>)

And I would say this was not just like, oh, Republicans were rapaciously destroying the lower middle class or the elderly. Democrats were complicit too, in the sense that Democrats have always wanted people to be able to buy houses. It's your basic property, your basic wealth in this country has long been determined by home ownership.

So it wasn't that the Democrats were out there crying in the wilderness. What we're letting happen in this economy is total rape and pillage. The Democrats, as I say, like it when people get easy credit. They like it when people get to buy houses. So it wasn't until the market collapsed of its own weight that we were able to see the folly of those years of bad actors.

DePue: Are you saying though that, prior to 2008, you were sponsoring legislation about predatory lending?

Currie: No. We were seeing the results of it on the ground. In some neighborhoods, every other house was boarded up. People who had been trying to pay off their mortgages were not able to and were not able to get any help from the place where they had taken out the loan because that loan had long since gone up the food chain, sliced and diced in fifteen different ways.

We were trying to establish what kinds of rules and regulations should apply when someone is offering a mortgage. That was a very difficult fight because there are some brokers and some realtors who are quite ethical and do not sell people things that they can't possibly afford, but not everybody fits that mold. How you craft something that will stop the bad guys without destroying the good ones is always difficult.

DePue: If I'm hearing you correctly, you're saying that, prior to 2008, you and others were studying the problem.

Currie: Yes, well, I think there was legislation, I think. I know this was an issue that galvanized the speaker and his daughter, the attorney general, in part because there were these examples of neighborhoods that were being just completely destroyed by virtue of foreclosures, before we got to 2008.

DePue: Were you finding some allies on the Republican side?

Currie: Not as easily as one might have expected, and we had some people who were opposed on the Democratic side. I remember there were some people who were close to Democratic legislators who apparently were doing a very good job. They felt that we were going too far in shutting down practices that were not... They were not abusers, but they feared that controlling the bad guys was going to make their lives more difficult. People don't like to be told what to do, you know. Nobody likes it.

DePue: How about the African American legislators? Were they generally more interested in this or opposing it?

Currie: Yes. Oh no, they were more interested because it really was their communities, the black and brown communities, that were suffering the brunt of the problem. We talked yesterday about Michael Madigan's district, which is now, and has been for some years, increasingly Latino. There were a lot of Latinos who got caught up in the bad loans for housing.

DePue: Groundwater protection.

Currie: Yeah. That was one of the... I don't remember much about the bill (laughs), but it was a long time ago (DePue laughs).

DePue: This one you might have more to say about, the Equal Pay Act. I understand that was 2003. This is an issue that obviously had a constituency in the federal level as well, but not much was happening at that time. There had been a 1963 bill that had passed at the federal level that required equal pay for equal work. So the question is, why did you need something beyond that?

Currie: In part because it didn't cover all of the workers in Illinois. There are some classes of worker that are exempt, I think farm workers, for example. I can't remember what others, but there were certain discreet numbers of people, 180,000, whatever it was, that were not already covered by the federal act. And there was a concern about how effectively it was enforced.

There's another issue that I had worked on, and that was bigger, a tougher sell than pay equity is the issue of comparable worth. It's the issue that says that jobs that are traditionally held by women tend to pay less than jobs traditionally held by men.

DePue: Can you give any examples of that?

Currie: Sure. Secretaries, they tend to be women. That wasn't true in the late nineteenth century. No, in the 1890s, most secretaries were men, and they were paid pretty well. By the time you get to the 1990s, they're mostly women, and they're not paid so well. The truck drivers are paid more than the nurses. The people who patrol the highways are paid more than the people who are taking care of the mentally ill in state institutions.

It's pretty well documented. The question, of course, is why? I had always been of the view that the reasons had partly to do with an underlying sexism in the way we operate economically.

DePue: A couple areas—and you mention one of them—home healthcare, always a fairly low, pretty low pay scale.

Currie: Very low, yup.

DePue: Childcare.

Currie: Um-hmm.

DePue: How would you reconcile the differences then? How does the federal government or the state government step in to reconcile the differences?

Currie: They don't. No, neither does. Neither does.

DePue: Are you advocating that they should?

Currie: Yes, yeah, I would. I would say, for example...

DePue: But how?

Currie: Well, at one point, we were working on legislation—I think this was the early '90s maybe—that would try to set up an ability on the part of the state to take into... This is just for state employees. That was the first place we thought we would start.

The idea was to try to figure out what kinds of experiences, what kinds of background, the qualifications, how does... If you can rank these occupations, and it turns out that these are requiring the same degree of skill, same degrees, of time on task, of challenge, that if you can make that comparison and you can look and see where people fall on the chart, you can begin to make a difference in terms of the pay packet. But that didn't go very far.

DePue: Because...?

Currie: Well, because it's very disruptive to the whole system. And, of course, there are people who say, "The only reason it happens is because women are out of the workforce for a time." We see the argument all the time, right? It's like, okay, women are not on corporate boards. They're not this, that, and whatever. And people say, "Oh, it's because they take time off to have children" or whatever. I'm not saying that that's not at all a factor, but it is not the most important factor.

DePue: Were you in the legislature at the time that the Illinois Legislature was looking at membership for minorities on corporate boards, or is that something that happened under...

Currie: No, that's just happened.

DePue: Pritzker's been a busy fellow then, and the legislature has as well.

Currie: I don't know if he's going to... You know, that was...

DePue: You're rolling your eyes on this one.

Currie: Well, yeah, I'm a liberal, but I'm not sure that it's even constitutional to say that these publicly traded, publicly held corporations must have a person of a particular race or gender on the board. And, of course, in the House, they left out the Hispanics. So there was a big rift after the bill passed the House...

DePue: So you're predicting a court case.

Currie: A change. Well, I'm predicting, first of all, a change in the Senate.

You'd have to have a black and an Hispanic. I don't know what the Asians are thinking; I just don't know, and women. I would expect there could be a court case. I think it was California that adopted that initially.

DePue: The next one, in fact the last on my list here, is expanded drug treatment support.

Currie: Yeah. Well, we had done a pretty poor job in the mental health arena all the time I've been in Springfield. Community services for people who have faced mental challenges, drug as well as other kinds of mental illness, have just been in very short supply. A lot of our institutions went down, went out. But we did not follow the people who were deinstitutionalized into the community with a heavy array of services. So we've been consistently held up as a poster child for the state that doesn't take care of drug treatment, doesn't take care of mental illness generally. And that's a budgetary battle.

DePue: You had served during the time when there was a revolution in how we take care of the mentally ill anyway.

Currie: Exactly, exactly.

DePue: And it's not just state level. That's federally as well.

Currie: No, right.

DePue: How about the issue of medical marijuana, which occurred towards the end of your time?

Currie: Yeah, and I supported it. It is unfortunate, I think, that we don't actually have [a] very good, evidence-based understanding of the value of medical marijuana. All we have are anecdotes, in part because it is not worth the time of the big drug companies to do a double-blind study to find out if it does any good because they're not going to make any money out of it. And, of course, the fact that the feds have a ban on it makes it doubly difficult for anybody to do the kind of research that would tell you whether or not this has value. But the anecdotal evidence was great.

And, of course, what happened was that the opioid crisis began to develop, just about the time we passed the medical marijuana bill. The

argument there was that surely marijuana is healthier than the opioids. So that became a kind of a selling point.

And individual stories, you know. People come with their tales of woe, and we respond to those. Though, as I say, it's unfortunate we didn't have any evidence-based science behind the decision. Of course, what's happened since is we had a limited number—not limited, thirty-five, forty—of underlying causes for which you can get medical marijuana, and that list keeps expanding. But again, nobody knows if it is valuable for the pain treatment here, there, or somewhere else.

DePue: As I understand it, Illinois's version of the Medical Marijuana Act is pretty restrictive.

Currie: It is. Now, it's changed since we've first passed it. It was a pilot program. I think it's now a permanent program, or at least there's legislation in Springfield to that effect. It used to be that all kinds of people, patients, had to pass criminal backgrounds checks. We got rid of that requirement. So it was very, very restrictive, so restrictive that it was very difficult for many people to access the program. And you know, there's a placebo effect and so, you know, who knows whether this is helpful or not. But if people think it is, well, there you are.

DePue: And since you've left the arena, the talk now is about—

Currie: Recreational.

DePue: Yeah, recreational. And what's your feeling about that?

Currie: Well, I think there's a lot to be said for it. There's a big black market in marijuana, as far as we know. Again, the ban on marijuana at the federal level means we don't have really good studies about the long-term effects of marijuana use. But it certainly seems as if it is less harmful than tobacco, than alcohol, other regulated but permitted substances. One concern that law enforcement has, and I think this arises out of the states that have already gone for recreational marijuana, is carnage on the highways. Apparently, there have been increases in car crashes in the states that have gone with legalized recreational marijuana. And apparently there is no good breathalyzer, at this point, to figure out how you would charge somebody with being under the influence of pot. And because pot can stay in your bloodstream for several days, it makes it a challenge. I would hope that we could figure that one out.

There also are questions about how you set the tax rate. Set it too high, and you still have a black market. Set it too low, and you're not getting the money that you need to do good things with your revenue. And, of course, there will continue to be issues about youth, who will not be allowed under whatever legislation comes out of Springfield to participate, but will continue to be finding ways, as they do with alcohol and cigarettes, to cheat.

DePue: And the state just raised the legal age for purchase of cigarettes to twenty-one, I believe.

Currie: Right. That was already the law in Chicago, and a whole bunch of communities across the state already had done that.

DePue: Would it be the same then, in terms of marijuana?

Currie: No, I think marijuana will be at the state level, twenty-one.

DePue: It sounds like you're generally supportive of recreational marijuana.

Currie: Yeah, I am. But I have qualms and quibbles about carnage on the highway... I wish we knew better what the long-term consequences might be.

DePue: You are starting to hear, just recently, some studies coming out about increase of schizophrenia, if you use it for long periods of time and things like that.

Currie: But we don't know enough to know. And again, we know that some of the things that are legal are really bad for you, like tobacco and booze. So is this as bad? I don't know.

DePue: I'm going to characterize one of the main reasons that Governor Pritzker—whose only been in office for a couple months—is supportive of this is for the fiscal reasons, is for raising more money for the state.

Currie: Yeah, I'm sure that's part of it. But I also think... First of all, other states have been doing it. Increasing numbers of other states are looking at it quite seriously. There also is a strong argument in minority communities that they have been disproportionately hurt by the current ban on marijuana. It's the black and brown kids that get caught. It's the black and brown people who end up with records. It's the black and brown people who get caught and that there has been a deleterious effect in those communities. Making it a legal substance would... And expunging some of the records of the ones who have been caught up in the criminal justice system would help rectify that imbalance.

There also is strong support from members of the minority community to make sure that the goodies that come from legalization, distribution, cultivation, so forth would accrue to the benefit of minority businesses. Now, I don't know how you do that legislatively and it may be... In New Jersey, the whole pot thing fell flat on its face over just those issues.

DePue: The next step then is an argument about whether or not you should legalize harder drugs, especially the opioids.

Currie: Yeah, I think that there will be no enthusiasm for doing that any time soon, given the opioid death rate that we're seeing at the moment in this country and certainly seeing it in Illinois.

DePue: So, no enthusiasm from you in particular?

Currie: No, no.

DePue: Well, now we have come to the place that I've been promising or threatening to go to for a long time. That's the Rob Blagojevich years.

Currie: All right.

DePue: Let's start with the 2002 gubernatorial election.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: And let's start with the primary for that, maybe even before that. How well did you know Rob Blagojevich before this?

Currie: I knew him because I served with him. He was not what you'd call one of the most...the hardest working member (laughs) of the delegation when he was in the House of Representatives.



Currie met with Governor Blagojevich in 2006 or 2007, location unknown.

DePue: I'm shocked to hear that (laughs).

Currie: Yeah. But he was a charm. He told wonderful stories. You know, he was kind of a fun person to be with, but you could never find him when you needed him for a vote. He loved reading historical biographies. He was very keen on Richard Nixon. I can't remember why, but he was. He just had really good stories to tell. This may or may not be significant, but in the primary for the congressional seat, before he ran for governor, there was a...

DePue: He was in the house from '93 to '97, so this would have been the '96 election.

Currie: No, no, no, in the federal. Remember, he was in the Congress.

DePue: Yeah, that would have been the '90s. He was in the U.S. House from '97 to 2000.

Currie: Okay. For the '96 primary, there were a lot of people running, including Nancy Kazak who was also a colleague in the Illinois House. What was interesting to me—I did not make an endorsement in that race—but what was interesting to me was that almost all of the people who signed up in that

campaign signed up for Rod. I think that just says he's a charming, nice, easy going guy. He was likable.

DePue: Did it hurt that his father-in-law was Dick Mell?

Currie: I think I'm thinking of people [for whom] that would not have been the reason why they chose to support him.

DePue: It's an interesting seat.

Currie: They just liked him.

DePue: It was Dan Rostenkowski's seat, was it not?

Currie: Yeah, and then it was what's his name? What was his name?

DePue: The Republican for two years.

Currie: The Republican, yeah, for two years.

DePue: So, you did not weigh in on either side for that one?

Currie: No, not in the congressional race, no. But many of my colleagues did, most of my friends. Most of the people that I was closest to, most collegial with, ended up with Rod.

DePue: Now we get back to the 2002 gubernatorial election. Who did you support in the Democratic primary?

Currie: I did not make an endorsement in the Democratic primary. We had Roland Burris; we had Paul Vallas; we had Rod Blagojevich. And I just stayed out.

DePue: I bet you voted in the primary though.

Currie: I did. I voted for Paul Vallas.

DePue: That would have been my guess. And why did you vote for Vallas?

Currie: Because I thought at that time, he had a lot of good ideas about governance, and he certainly was the most knowledgeable when it came to state finance and revenue. He'd been the head of the Illinois Economic and Fiscal Commission. Then he'd worked in the Daley administration, running the department of, I think, of revenue and other kinds of things. He was a bright and engaging guy, and he clearly had serious policy chops.

DePue: A lot of people say that one of the reasons he failed in that election is he was reluctant to fly. Had you heard that?

Currie: It's absolutely true, absolutely true. He didn't fly. So he never got downstate. Now, he may not have had the best people working for him—I wonder how my shirt is doing.

DePue: Yeah, I'm making you do what you don't want to do, to pin your microphone on your shirt.

Currie: Can I try it on my sleeve?

DePue: I don't think that will work, I'm afraid.

Currie: Oh, okay. How about this?

DePue: We're going to pause for just a second. (pause in recording)

We are just back from a short break. We got the microphone problem solved, and we were talking about the primary, which ended up being a pretty close race between Rod Blagojevich and Paul Vallas.

Currie: Yeah, but it was downstate that pulled it out for Blagojevich. I worked with Paul on some school issue. I don't remember if it was during or before or after that but, when he was the head of the Chicago public schools. There was a dispute about how principals get selected. I think that Mayor Richard M. Daley, at that time, had heard some complaints about a wonderful principal who got dumped by the local school council. So Paul's task was to try to find a way to make the system work better, a very daunting challenge.

He spent a lot of quality time in my office in Springfield, as we duked it out with the advocates for the local school councils, with the principals, with everybody trying to find a way that would... Anyway, it was a tough challenge. So he was back and forth to Springfield during that spring session, whichever one it was, always by car, never flew. That was a mistake.

DePue: I was actually living in the Chicago area, in Orland Park, during those early years when he was the new chief executive officer, and I was amazed by the positive press that Paul Vallas got.

Currie: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: And he was, as you've alluded to, he was very well known in Chicago area.

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: And I think that probably is part of his demise with Richard M. Daley, down the road.

Currie: Yeah. Yeah, I think that's right.

- DePue: So Vallas loses. Blagojevich wins by about two percentage points.
- Currie: Yeah, it was close.
- DePue: Yeah, in a primary that's very close. Did you have any reservations about Blagojevich at that time?
- Currie: I did not. I did not, except that I didn't think he was a particularly disciplined person or a very hard worker. But again, his heart was certainly in the right place. He certainly stood for the values I care about.
- DePue: On the Republican side in the primary, it was Patrick O'Malley, Corinne Wood, and then Attorney General Jim Ryan, who had the great disadvantage of having the same last name as the disgraced governor [George Ryan] on his way out.
- Currie: Right, right.
- DePue: Any thoughts about that group?
- Currie: Well, O'Malley was a very conservative, very rigid, very rigidly conservative candidate. I like Corky Wood. She's a great person, but she didn't win the primary. And Jim Ryan, there were certainly many of his stances that I did not agree with, reproductive rights being one of them. So it was easy for me to be in the Blagojevich camp from day one.
- DePue: And Blagojevich ends up winning that election rather handily, 52.2 percent versus Ryan's 45.1. Then some of the trailing parties won the rest of it, obviously. That gets us into the Blagojevich administration. Your impression of Governor Blagojevich in those early days, in the first couple of weeks.
- Currie: I thought he was taking the reins of government quite seriously and quite nicely. He had with him Bradley Tusk, who was a gold mine of bright ideas, interesting public policies.⁸⁷

I'm really bad at remembering what happened when, but I think that the difficulty with Blagojevich is that the longer we saw him in action, the more and more clear it became that he and his advisors thought that it was important for him to take bold steps, with or without the legislature. He was happy to take many steps that he had no authority to take, and he was obviously trying to carve himself a niche as a person of the people.

For example, importing drugs because drug prices are too high. That was an example of what Blagojevich was prepared to try. I think it was meant

⁸⁷**Bradley Tusk** (born October 3, 1973) is an American businessman, venture capitalist, philanthropist, political strategist, and writer, who in 2003, Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich appointed to be Deputy Governor of Illinois. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bradley_Tusk)

to be a populous message, but I think that was not the right way to govern. I think you can come to the legislature and see if we can find a way to hold down prices, other than do stunts that are probably going to (DePue laughs) get you in trouble with the feds.

DePue: I'm going to go through quite a few of these that came up. I don't know if I'll do too much better in terms of the specific timeline of this, but I am going to prod your memory as we go through some of this stuff. One of the first things that he got himself in trouble with wasn't necessarily with Republicans or Democrats in the upstate area, but it was with the people of Springfield because it was clear he didn't want to live or spend much time in the Governor's Mansion.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Did you have any particular opinion about that?

Currie: I think that it's overrated as an issue. I don't think people care that much about where the governor is actually putting down stakes. The argument that he made was that the older daughter was in school, and he didn't want to disrupt her education. Now, she was still pretty young, and you could go either way on that score. But it certainly didn't sit well with the denizens of Springfield. But as an issue, why should we care where somebody chooses to spend most of his nights, whether it's in Chicago or in Springfield? But because he made such a point of it, because he was not moving into the mansion, it became an issue.

DePue: It became an issue in Springfield at least.

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: I suspect it wasn't getting nearly as much press up in the Chicago area.

Currie: Not at all.

DePue: I'm going to mention some of these names, and these are names of people he had associated himself with that eventually are going to get him into some serious trouble. You mentioned Bradley Tusk. That's not one of the names I had down. What was Tusk's position?

Currie: I can't remember if he was deputy governor, maybe chief of staff, but he worked for Bloomberg. He's a bright—or maybe he worked later for Bloomberg—very bright ideas, very smart. He's now working for some awful corporation, but I can't remember which. He's clearly a person apart, clearly someone who's... I just read about him recently.

DePue: Did you say an awful corporation?

- Currie: Yeah, I can't remember which one (DePue laughs).
- DePue: How do you define an awful corporation?
- Currie: No, no. No, but I think he's working maybe with one of the startups to try to make sure that no one regulates them, that kind of thing. It's not an awful corporation. It's just that his role is to try to defend against reasonable restrictions and regulations. Anyway, very smart, and I think many of the ideas, for example, the drug idea, I think would have come directly from the brain of Bradley. He didn't stay with Blagojevich all that long. I don't remember when he left, but he was pretty important in the beginning days.
- DePue: The turnover, I suspect a lot of that turnover was because of the kind of things that we're going to end up talking about, in terms of his personality and his work habits. Chris Kelly.⁸⁸
- Currie: I never knew him, but I know what happened to him. And I know that he was involved in... Wasn't he involved in the Rezko stuff?
- DePue: Yeah, the fundraising side of things.
- Currie: Yeah, and then he ultimately took his own life.
- DePue: Part of the tragedy. Anton, otherwise known as Tony Rezko, you just mentioned.⁸⁹ How much did you know about him?
- Currie: Nothing.
- DePue: Isn't he a denizen of this area of Chicago?
- Currie: I don't think so. I thought he was north side. I do know him as the person who sold the property to Barack and Michelle [Obama] when they moved to the mansion in Kenwood.
- DePue: That's probably why I'm thinking he was from this part of the city.

⁸⁸ Christopher Kelly, a Champaign businessman, was one of Gov. Blagojevich's best friends, a member of the governor's inner circle and a powerful business figure in his own right. Kelly served as finance chairman in Blagojevich's 2002 campaign for governor. When Blagojevich won, Kelly became chairman of the inaugural and a member of the transition team. ([://www.news-gazette.com/news/good-friends-in-high-places/article_e71b1bf7-c359-5350-9a4f-fb59d1e49895.html](http://www.news-gazette.com/news/good-friends-in-high-places/article_e71b1bf7-c359-5350-9a4f-fb59d1e49895.html))

⁸⁹ Antoin Rezko (born 1955), an American businessman, was a fundraiser for Illinois Democratic and Republican politicians. After becoming a major contributor to Rod Blagojevich's successful election for governor, Rezko assisted Blagojevich in setting up the state's first Democratic administration in twenty years. As a result he was able to have business associates appointed onto several state boards. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Rezko)

Currie: Yeah. No, he's not. But there was a question about treating the side yard as a separate property and whether they got a good break on the price because he was willing to do that.

DePue: Another name I've got here is Stuart Levine.⁹⁰

Currie: I never knew him. He was on the Health Facilities Planning Board, and he was obviously a womanizer, a druggie, a cheat, a liar, a thief, all the above. I don't know whether he and Blagojevich had a particularly close relationship or not.

DePue: These people that I've just mentioned are not the people, I'm assuming, who are working closely with the legislature or the other state agencies?

Currie: Right, right, not at all.

DePue: Do you remember any of the names of the people he had on his staff who did work closely with you?

Currie: John Wyman, but I never knew him well. Wait a minute. Who was the...? I can't remember who was the head of OMB [Office of Management and Budget], John Filan [Chief Operating Officer]. I think that was a Blagojevich person. And he's very smart. I don't know whether his policies were always the right policies, but he was certainly able. I think it was OMB that he was in charge of.

DePue: How about his relationship with Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn?

Currie: Well (laughs), I don't know that they had a particularly close one. I remember once walking into the mansion, from the first floor, and there was Pat in some kind of kitcheny place, you know, crummy quarters. And there he's sitting with his briefcase, his papers out. And Madigan says to him, "So, is this your office?" (both laugh)

DePue: Well, as I mentioned to you, I'm looking forward to having a chance to interview Governor Quinn. I'm sure he'll have plenty to say about the lack of relationship.

Currie: I'm sure he will.

DePue: Let's get to the real nub of the question though, the relationship over time between Governor Blagojevich and your boss.

⁹⁰ Stuart Levine had appeared to the public to be a successful businessman, who lived in a mansion on Chicago's north shore and served on the boards of charities and key state agencies. As a government witness at Rod Blagojevich's criminal trial, he became one of the most significant government informants in Chicago's sordid history of public corruption, in part because he was also one of the most corrupt political insiders the city has known. (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2012-07-20-ct-met-stuart-levine-sentencing-0720-20120720-story.html>)

Currie: Deteriorated, and I don't know what precipitated it. I know that Madigan was very much of the view that this is not somebody that is a force for ethics and good government.

There was a time when they used to have these little meetings with the governor and the four tops, the four legislative leaders, and Madigan decided he wasn't going to go. So I had to go and sit in for him because he thought these were meetings that were going nowhere and because he didn't trust the governor. I can't remember when that happened, certainly long before the... long before the indictment. I think maybe the previous spring. But there was no love lost between them, and I don't know on what basis Madigan concluded that he was not a straight arrow.

DePue: That was the word in the press and what I was reading, that trust was a very important thing to Mike Madigan.

Currie: Right, um-hmm.

DePue: And he did not trust Blagojevich.

Currie: I don't know exactly at what point the lack of trust happened or what precipitated it. But there's no question that the longer Blagojevich was around, the less and less comfortable Madigan was with him and didn't trust him.

DePue: I guess I'm a bit surprised at how you say that, because I would have thought that you were one of his closest confidants, that he would be talking to you, complaining to you about the relationship.

Currie: Well yeah, he said that these meetings are terrible. "There's no point to them. I'm not going."

DePue: And there wasn't much of a deeper conversation beyond that?

Currie: No. No, just "This is a waste of my time, so go ahead, waste yours." (both laugh)

DePue: Is that a reflection of his personality? He just wasn't open about those kinds of things?

Currie: I think he was right. These meetings were going nowhere. They were opportunities for the governor to preen and to carry on and whatever and always, "Let's start with sports talk and yah da-da da-da." And they were going nowhere. As I say, I'm not sure that Madigan would have been comfortable with whatever direction he might have chosen to lead. I think it was, at this point, almost a visceral response. He didn't really want to be around him. He just, you know...

DePue: A hatred for the man?

Currie: No, just shutting him down, shutting him out and clearly not trusting him.

DePue: So you're going in his stead to some of these meetings with the four tops. And the four tops are obviously the caucus leaders in both the House and the Senate.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Who's the man you got to know in those meetings? Describe the Rob Blagojevich in those meetings.

Currie: Yeah, he was kind of a jokester, a warm kind of guy but not very serious. again and **never** getting to a point where there was any agreement among the four tops about what should happen with any particular public policy issue. So it was all show, I would say.

DePue: Did he have a handle on the policy issues that were discussed in these meetings?

Currie: I wouldn't say deeply, no.

DePue: Did he have anybody with him who was helping him in that regard?

Currie: He did, but I can't remember who they were, who his hench people were.

DePue: Hench people.

Currie: Hench people. It's a good word. I just don't remember who was around. Maybe that was when John Harris was the chief of staff. I'm not sure.

DePue: Well, that term suggests that you had no faith or trust in the man.

Currie: No, I mean, I figured this was all for show, that Madigan was right, that we were going to go nowhere with these meetings. They were not going to bring us to a consensus or a conclusion.

DePue: Any particular incidents that stand out in those meetings that you can recall?

Currie: I don't think so, a lot of boy talk, you know. Sports, "Let's talk about sports. Let's talk..." locker room.

DePue: Did the other members join in on those conversations?

Currie: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: At that time it's Emil Jones [President of the Illinois Senate].

Currie: Yeah, and Tom Cross in the House. And the Republican in the Senate—

DePue: Was it Radogno?

Currie: I'm not sure that Chris was there then.

DePue: I think—I was trying to get this chart to print out—but I think when Pate Phillip saw the handwriting on the wall, with the redistricting that we talked about yesterday, he decided he had no interest in being in the Senate.

Currie: Okay, so it would have been Chris, yeah, okay.

DePue: Christine Radogno. Then there were two women in there who weren't interested in the sports talk?

Currie: Right. But no one seemed to notice or care (DePue laughs).

DePue: You mean they ignored the two of you during that part of it?

Currie: Yeah, pretty much, pretty much.

DePue: How about of the relationship—you hear a lot about this—the relationship that Blagojevich had with Emil Jones?

Currie: I really wasn't close to that at all. You know, there's a big disjunction between the Senate and the House. We only see each other when we're passing bills from one chamber to the other. So I never really... I don't remember seeing much of that relationship. I mean, Emil was, you know, kind of a gruff guy from the 'hood [neighborhood]. And I think they got along okay.

DePue: How about your colleague on the Republican side of the house, Tom Cross?

Currie: He seemed to be perfectly content to go along with the governor.

DePue: What did you think of Tom Cross otherwise, as the leader of the Republicans?

Currie: I liked him. I think he did a good job.

DePue: Did you have a good working relationship with him?

Currie: Yeah, I would say so. His father is a Methodist minister who, from time to time, led the House in prayer. His prayers were totally inclusive, warm, open, welcoming. It was just amazing that he could be the father of the Republican leader. It didn't make a lot of sense to me. What it said to me also is that Tom grew up in a family where the values of inclusion and generosity and warmth are really important.

DePue: Did you see anything that would contradict those values that he was supporting?

Currie: Well, I think because Republicans in Springfield have always been a little less than inclusive, less than warm and welcoming, less than generous.

DePue: Here's one that you read a lot about, and I'm sure that you experienced directly. Rod Blagojevich, Governor Blagojevich seemed to have a tendency to be late often.

Currie: Yes, he was always late. So that was another reason Madigan didn't like going to meetings with him because you knew they were not going to start on time. Madigan is well disciplined (laughs), and he doesn't like just sitting around twiddling his thumbs.

DePue: And you probably didn't like it much more.

Currie: No. But, you know, it was my job.

DePue: What was the explanation when he showed up late?

Currie: I don't remember that he had one. Just, you know, like, "Oh, traffic," whatever people say when they're late.

DePue: You've already talked about this a little bit, about the relationship with Emil Jones, but it also extends to his relationship with the African American community.

Currie: I think he had a good relationship with the African American community. Many of his proposals, expanding KidCare, expanding the opportunity for people to get cheap drugs. You know, there were a lot of good policies that were particularly responsive to the needs of the African American community. I don't remember them all at the moment, but I know they were subjects of some discussion during impeachment.

DePue: You represented one of the more liberal districts in the state and certainly in the city. How did he do in your district? How was he thought of?

Currie: I think he did well. I think he was thought highly of. I think his policies and programs, preschool for all. That was one of the ones I worked on, having been the mother of the initial state preschool program. He wanted to extend it to everybody. I was the sponsor of the bill. So he gets a lot of good support for progressive, populist policies like that.

DePue: I don't know if we talked about this long ago. We probably did, but by this time... Tell me about the demographics of your district.

Currie: Well, it changed over the years. What year is this?

DePue: He was elected in 2002, so we're talking 2003 to 2008.

Currie: Yeah, there were times when my district was almost 80 percent African American. In more recent census periods, that percentage has gone down, just because there have not been enough African Americans to spread about. I think 58 percent was what it was when I left office.

DePue: Were these middle class or affluent African Americans?

Currie: Both. I have a district that starts at Kenwood and Hyde Park. I would say that there are lots of professionals, lots of upper middle-income blacks and whites. There also are poor people who live in this part of the district. In South Shore there is an enclave of pretty well-to-do blacks but not a huge number. And then, as you spread out further south, you run into areas where there are more people on welfare, people who don't have much in the way of a close connection to job.

One of the schools at the far end of my district had a—not the total end but in South Shore—had a transiency rate such that, of the kids that were in the fourth grade class, 80 percent of them were not there by the time we get to the end of the school year, so very transient, very... It's a district that varies a lot.

DePue: Was Barack Obama's home in your district?

Currie: Um-hmm, yeah. Now, when he moved into the mansion in Kenwood, it wasn't. It was just outside my district. But when he lived in east Hyde Park, he was in my district.

DePue: Here's another name, and maybe it wouldn't have been Radogno. It would have been Frank Watson who was... [Senate Minority Leader **during the Blagojevich administration.**]

Currie: Oh, of course, of course.

DePue: I'm more at fault than you are on that.

Currie: Yeah, no, thank you. Thank you; thank you, but you're right. It really was three guys and me.

DePue: I would imagine Frank Watson was more than happy to join in on the sports talk.

Currie: Absolutely.

DePue: Because he's a very congenial kind of guy. At least that's how I found him.

Currie: He is, yeah.

DePue: Let's turn to legislative accomplishments then during this time frame. We've already talked about this one, the earned income tax credit. Was that something that was accomplished during his tenure?

Currie: Not the original one, but the expansion, I believe, was during his tenure. I think that, yeah, I think that was definitely after Emil came in, and Pate Phillip was gone, we were able to get the votes in both the House and the Senate to make it refundable.

DePue: A comprehensive smoking ban.

Currie: I don't remember that one.

DePue: I think that dealt with state offices.

Currie: Okay, hmm.

DePue: This is reflecting a national trend at the same time that the smokers all hated that kind of legislation forcing them out into the cold to smoke.

Currie: Yep, yup.

DePue: Had you ever been a smoker yourself?

Currie: Oh yeah, oh yeah, until 2005... Well, in fact, in fact, I just did the calculation. Fourteen years ago I stopped, as of April 1.

DePue: April fool's day.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Two thousand and five.

Currie: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: During the Blagojevich administration.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: When you were dealing with all the frustrations of working with him. Well, you're to be commended (laughs) for overcoming that.

Currie: Thank you. Thank you.

DePue: Now, you've talked about this one already and a couple more, on which I think you were very much in line with his thinking, expansion of KidCare...

Currie: Yep.

DePue: And FamilyCare.

Currie: Yep.

DePue: Talk about what that actually means.

Currie: My recollection is that it meant we expanded it to include a larger share of the low-income population. We started out with the idea that people who are just above the Medicaid limit would be advantaged by this and that when you expanded it further, you helped more people. I'm not sure I want to put words in Blagojevich's mouth, but I think one of the issues... Is that bug inside my window?

DePue: It looks like he might be. You want me to take care of that for you?

Currie: Let me get you a swatter.

DePue: We'll pause for a second (laughs). (pause in recording) We are back from our short break to take care of critters.

Currie: A bug.

DePue: You'll get my bill later for that (both laugh). We're talking about KidCare and FamilyCare.

Currie: Yeah. Another piece of that puzzle, I think... Now, I don't remember what the demographics were at the time, but there were people who were undocumented who were not eligible for Medicaid because that's a federal program. One of the restrictions is that you have to be either a U. S. citizen or documented. KidCare and FamilyCare enabled us to reach out to people in the undocumented community. And that...

I'll tell you, that continued under Rauner. In fact, there had been a sunset date on one of those programs, and the Rauner administration worked very hard to make sure we continued the program and that the value was that it was helping people that otherwise we couldn't help, through the Medicaid program.

DePue: And it continues to be one of the hot button topics that divides that two parties to this day.

Currie: Yeah, although as I say, for Rauner, he was a staunch champion, defending the program, expanding it, making sure that it didn't fall apart. It was interesting to me that his Republican leadership in the House just spoke to how important this program was, how really critical, didn't mention anything about the undocumented. Then one of the members on the Republican side did kind of lash out and let everybody have it. But it passed.

- DePue: Was that the same one who ran against him in the primary election, that he had a serious challenge in this last primary election?
- Currie: No, no, it was another. It was a downstater. It was Bill—how quickly we forget—from downstate. Bill...
- DePue: Wouldn't have been Brady, would it?
- Currie: No, no. It was a House member, Bill Mitchell.
- DePue: The next one I've got on the list... This is kind of a natural, given that he had gotten elected, in part, because the public's disgust with what had gone on in the George Ryan administration, and that's ethics reform.
- Currie: Um-hmm.
- DePue: Especially pork barrel spending and pay-for-play.
- Currie: Yeah. There was generally a sense that there was a lot of it going on within the administration. I don't know that anybody had any chapter and verse, but there was a sense that that was going on.
- DePue: In **his** administration.
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: So even though he ran on ethics reform and got some passed...
- Currie: There was a sense that it was still happening. A sense, I don't know that I can say it any more strongly than that.
- DePue: One of the things that he was proud of was a yearly increase in educational funding.
- Currie: Yes, yeah. I would have to say though, he really socked it to the higher education community. He was the first governor in my recollection who undercut higher ed. There had been a kind of a two-thirds/one-third approach to funding for higher education and elementary and secondary. Blagojevich broke that mold and really did start under-funding higher education in a significant way.
- DePue: Which part was getting the two-thirds?
- Currie: Elementary, much bigger. But he reduced the share that was going to higher ed. I think there's another one [bug], or maybe it's the same one. Is it...?
- DePue: (laughs) I don't see it.
- Currie: It's way over there.

DePue: On the window?

Currie: I can't tell if it's on the window or on the other side of the window.

DePue: I think there's something that's extending down that might look like a bug on the...

Currie: No, because it's moving.

DePue: Oh. Well, do you want to take another break?

Currie: Let's have another break. (pause in recording)

DePue: Another very quick break that time.

Preschool for all.

Currie: Yeah, that's the one I talked about earlier. I had been the sponsor of the initial preschool program for at-risk children, and this was an effort to expand it to all preschoolers, all three to five-year-olds. Actually the funding never did follow. And the way we crafted the legislation—this was not his proposal—but the way we ended up crafting it and passing it said that there still will be priority given to the kids at risk of school failure without an early learning boost.

So we kept the principle that the children most at risk are the ones who have first claim on whatever dollars end up being put into the pot to fund the program, which was not what he'd suggested. He just wanted to make it available to everybody.

We had—what's his name?—Barry Bazeilon. He was a very important childhood researcher from Harvard, who was there at the signing ceremony. So Rod got great credit nationwide for being the first state in the nation to say, "Yes, preschool should be available to everybody."

Now, we continued to fight over how much money was going into the preschool pot. So, to say we were going to have universal preschool didn't mean that we had it, but it was certainly an effort in the right direction.

DePue: So when you've previously said the funding didn't follow, that's what you were talking about, the funding mechanism wasn't there?

Currie: It was not an automatic funding mechanism, and we continued to fight to have more dollars go into preschool. He did do more dollars for preschools. In fact, actually his predecessors and his successors have done the same. So preschool has been an important... But he does get credit nationally for doing the first universal pre-K program in the country. Nobody noticed that the funding wasn't there.

- DePue: Wouldn't this be part of the general revenue fund?
- Currie: Yeah, totally, totally. There was not a dedicated source, and there was no way in which the legislature passed legislation that said that we will always fund this program at 100 percent. It's still part of the ordinary appropriations process.
- DePue: The reason I mention that—I'm going to get to it quickly—is the fiscal issues. But I don't want to get there quite yet because it sounds like a lot of these things you're talking about take money to implement.
- Currie: Yeah, yeah.
- DePue: Getting into the fiscal issues, then you have some negotiations that often times get towards the end of the session. One of the things that I suspect your boss and probably you didn't appreciate was the frequent calls for emergency sessions that Governor Blagojevich did.
- Currie: Yes, yes. That had a lot to do with the lack of trust, I think, between Madigan and Blagojevich. That whole year was just awful. What year was it? It was 2004? Two thousand and four, yeah.
- DePue: Over his administration—this is not just 2004—thirty-six times. What people like me were reading in the newspaper was, he would call these special sessions requiring everybody to come down to Springfield, paying the legislators for doing that...
- Currie: Costing, right?
- DePue: ...and then wouldn't even show up.
- Currie: Right, nothing happened, and there was no agenda. So there was no reason for us to be there. It stopped that year, just in time for people, delegates, to go to the Democratic National Convention. And that, of course, was the year in which Blagojevich's hopes and prayers for the presidency were dashed.
- DePue: That would have been 2004.
- Currie: That was 2004, when Barack Obama was the keynote speaker and became the darling boy from that wonderful state Illinois, and Blagojevich saw all of his hopes go right down the tubes.
- DePue: You're saying that he had aspirations to be president of the United States?
- Currie: Absolutely, absolutely.
- DePue: And what are you basing that on?

Currie: Just because of knowing the kind of person that he was. He was happy to run for higher and higher office. I think that he felt that he could, that all the programs he was putting out, all the populous programs he was putting out would stand him in good stead in a Democratic field and maybe even in a national field.

The fact that his name was Blagojevich had not hampered his run for governor of the State of Illinois. The fact that his father-in-law was Dick Mell didn't seem to matter to the voters. I think he really thought he could be a real player. And I think that when Barack Obama got the kudos he got for the keynote speech, I think that must have left the taste of ashes very firmly in the Blagojevich mouth.

DePue: Did he not understand the great animus that he had built up among the Democrats in the Illinois House?

Currie: I think he did, but I don't know that he thought that we were as important as the way he could pitch himself to the people, that when he can talk about how he's importing cheaper drugs; he's expanding universal preschool, that he's expanding healthcare; he's doing all the kinds of things Democrats like. So the fact that the people in the legislature were not very happy with him, I don't think would have said that he didn't have a chance. But after Barack Obama, he didn't have a chance. It just had to be awful.

DePue: You've already referred to a couple of these things. The purchase of flu vaccines was also an issue about that same time, in 2004. It's an annual event. I don't remember the background for this, but Blagojevich was interested in spending \$7 million to purchase 260,000 doses of flu vaccine from overseas sources.

Currie: Yeah, and maybe there was a shortage in the country. I don't remember.

DePue: But that was \$7 million that apparently your legislature had never authorized?

Currie: Right. When we get to the impeachment, there were some real bones of contention between Blagojevich and the legislature. They were not the reasons that he was impeached. The reasons that he was impeached, in my view, are all the things that the feds said when they indicted him.

But from the perspective of legislators, there was a very strong sense that he had way overstepped his authority and was stepping cheerfully on the legislative prerogative, right, left, and center. For some legislators that was at least as important a ground for impeachment, although that would never have sold to the folks back home.

DePue: So what we're saying is that he's spending money that the legislature had never authorized.

Currie: Yeah, and he did many things that the legislature never authorized. The Joint Committee on Administrative Rules had a field day with him when he was overstepping his bounds. Someone like Lou Lang [who] was very much a committed supporter of the institution of the legislature. He was livid about the kinds of things that Blagojevich did, that he felt undercut our authority and were totally inappropriate for the governor.

DePue: I was going to wait until we got to the impeachment proceedings, but since we're here, you didn't have the same strength of feelings that Lou Lang had about that issue?

Currie: Oh, I did. Yeah, I did. I think he was more into the weeds on it than I because he was a member of the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, so I think he saw more examples where the administration was putting forth proposals, regulations, that were not supported by legislation, were not backed up by legislation.

DePue: We probably should take just a moment to explain what exactly JCAR is and does.

Currie: Okay. The Joint Committee on Administrative Rules is bipartisan, bicameral. I think there are four...wait, three members from each party in the House and three from each party in the Senate. They have the opportunity and the responsibility to look at rules promulgated by state agencies to make sure that the rules do reflect the authority granted them by the legislature.

It takes, I believe, eight votes to knock out a regulation. Is that right? Let's see... Yeah, so there should be... Yeah, I think that's right. And the members who are... I served briefly on the committee, after Lou Lang was bounced, after somebody made allegations of sexual harassment against him. People take the job very seriously, work very hard to hear both sides of an issue. Does the agency have this authority or not? They take testimony from various and sundry sources about whether or not this is a legitimate exercise of the gubernatorial authority.

Lou Lang had been on that committee for many years, and during the course of impeachment, he had many examples wherein the Joint Committee felt that Blagojevich had overstepped his authority.

DePue: Here's my question about that. He's operating outside the bounds of his executive powers.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: He's seizing power that rightfully belongs to the legislature.

Currie: Belongs to the legislature. And we've always been very jealous of our authority. It's one of the reasons, in all the nominating speeches that I gave for

Michael Madigan, one of the points I always made, no matter who was governor, was that Mr. Madigan respects the point that the legislature is coequal with the executive and with the judiciary. We are not second-class citizens. We are coequal, and we have authority that we should be able to exercise, without other people trampling on our turf.

DePue: I'm going to talk about some other specific examples of this as well. But my question then is, why didn't Madigan or the legislative leadership challenge him and talk more directly about impeachable offenses prior to the time he was arrested?

Currie: I think it was Gerald Ford who said that impeachment is a political act. I think the reality is, you don't...To overturn the outcome of a fair, open, free, democratic election is a very big pill to swallow, very hard to do. And people do it very reluctantly. I don't think you can do that unless you've got strong support from the people.

I don't think that the kinds of things that we were concerned about were the sorts of things that Harry and Maude sat over their dining room table saying, "Gee, this guy really is too big for his britches." So I don't think there was any support in the broader public to say that the fact that he's done universal preschool or that he's done this, that, he's bought these flu vaccines. I don't think people would see that as anything but a good thing to do.

So there was no appetite on the part of the general citizenry, and I think that fact was reflected in the legislature. The question would be also whether if he oversteps his bounds, is that always an impeachable offense, sometimes an impeachable offense? How far does he have to overstep? How many times does he have to do it? Those are complicated questions as well. But I would argue that impeachment is inherently a political act, and it's a very, very major, very large step to take. And people do it very reluctantly.

DePue: And the courts are going to get involved in whatever occurs?

Currie: With impeachment? No.

DePue: I'm just wondering, at what point does it get to the point of political tyranny because somebody has seized more power than they're entitled?

Currie: And I think there is a point at which that could happen. But I don't think that it can happen unless the citizenry sees that, unless they understand and feel that somehow the rights of their legitimate representatives have not been responded to.

DePue: That makes it sound like our system is rather tenuous in that respect.

Currie: I think it is. I think it is.

DePue: And it relies a lot on the trust of the office holders in the first place.

Currie: Yes, it does.

DePue: That's a very interesting philosophical discussion. Let's get back to the specifics.

The FDA [Food and Drug Administration] finally blocked their use in the loss of something like \$2.6 million of state money...

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: ...that he was never authorized to spend. The I-SavRX plan was a very similar kind of a thing.⁹¹

Currie: That was the one that was importing drugs from foreign manufacturers, right.

DePue: From Canada.

Currie: Again, he did that without any kind of legislative authority.

DePue: Another one that was close to this, the All Kids program.⁹² Now, we've talked about KidCare and FamilyCare. What was the All Kids program?

Currie: I thought that was also a program about Medicaid, but maybe I'm wrong. I don't remember what... You know, everybody changes acronyms every time you turn around.

DePue: This is November of 2005. That was a proposal guaranteeing universal, affordable, and comprehensive healthcare for all children.

Currie: Yeah, at this moment I can't tell you the differences between All Kids, FamilyCare, and this one. It was just, presumably, an expansion, so a higher income eligibility threshold.

DePue: Right. And this was going to be an expensive one. At one point in time, he thought about financing this with a gross receipts tax.

Currie: Oh yes. Oh my god. Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with a gross receipts tax. Other jurisdictions do have them. But this created a total firestorm, and the business community came down like a ton of bricks. Pat

⁹¹ Led by the State of Illinois, the I-SaveRx program provided residents of Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, Kansas, and Vermont with low-cost foreign prescription drugs. The program was discontinued at the end of 2008. (<https://www.prweb.com/releases/2009/01/prweb1917784.htm>)

⁹² All Kids is Illinois' program for children who need comprehensive, affordable, health insurance, regardless of immigration status or health condition. (<https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/MedicalPrograms/AllKids/Pages/about.aspx>)

Quinn was very involved in this, as an opponent (laughs) of the governor's proposed gross receipts or, as someone called it, grocery tax.

We had committees of the whole, and we met and met and met. There were very few people who came forward and said, "This is really a good idea. You should do it." We mostly heard from people who opposed it. And as I say, one of the leading opponents was Pat Quinn, Blagojevich's own lieutenant governor.

DePue: What was the gross receipts tax?

Currie: What it does is, at every point at which there is a sale, there is an added tax. It's like a value added tax. I'm not sure that it operates quite the same way, but the principle is the same, that every time you move from the manufacturer to the distributor to the retail consumer, you add a tax. Then, presumably, the end user is the person who ultimately pays the cost of that tax.

The argument against it would be that, first of all it's complicated and confusing for the business community that's going to have to implement it. And then it's going to be expensive for the ordinary people who buy the product at the end of the day.

DePue: The number that was put on at the time was 7.6 billion. This would raise 7.6 billion that would support...

Currie: That's a lot of money.

DePue: ...All Kids; it would support pension payments; it would support all these other programs because the bill has been adding up for all of these things.

Currie: Yes, it has.

DePue: Do you remember what happened in the legislature?

Currie: I don't remember if there even was a vote in the legislature. I do remember that, as I say, we had committees of the whole, day after day, week after week and only heard bad things.

DePue: I'm going to recall your memory on this one. Speaker Madigan actually called for a vote (laughs).

Currie: Oh, that's right. That's right.

DePue: And what was the result of the vote?

Currie: I don't think anybody supported it. I think it was zero.

DePue: One hundred and seven to zero.

- Currie: Yeah. Even Blagojevich's own comrades in the legislature, in the House... People like Jay Hoffman didn't vote for it.
- DePue: So (laughs) that's a sign of the amount of support he was getting from his own party in the House.
- Currie: Right, I'd forgotten about that, yeah.
- DePue: That gets us to the fiscal issues. At this time were you on the Finance Committee?
- Currie: No.
- DePue: You had been though in the...
- Currie: Oh yeah, I was on the revenue... It was not revenue and finance, so I was not directly involved in spending. That was the Appropriations Committee.
- DePue: The only reason I mention that is because you had a tradition of having an interest on both of those sides...
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: ...both the finance and the revenue side.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: How would you characterize Rod Blagojevich when it came to fiscal issues?
- Currie: I think he was irresponsible. I think he was perfectly happy to spend until there's no tomorrow. He was not—except for the gross receipts tax which fell of its own weight—he didn't have very much in the way of either measures to cut or to replace revenues or expand revenues that were at all palatable to the members of the assembly and the public.
- DePue: By this time in his administration, I would think this is putting incredible pressure on the budget.
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: That you're running deficits year after year?
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: What was the mood among you and other liberals in the House on that issue?
- Currie: We would have been concerned to find more revenues. We would have liked the programs, but we would have liked to have found a way legitimately to pay for them, I believe.

- DePue: A gross receipts tax was not a legitimate way.
- Currie: That did not turn out to... It fell of its own weight.
- DePue: Were there any other tax increase measures that were discussed at the time?
- Currie: I don't remember. There have been efforts to do a progressive income tax. There've been efforts to close corporate loopholes. Those happen pretty much every session, pretty much every year. Most of them don't get very far.
- DePue: Yesterday we talked a little bit about sales taxes going to services.
- Currie: Yeah, and I don't think there was much serious discussion about that at that point.
- DePue: Yet, year after year you've got a deficit that you're arguing about. That's one of the reasons for all these late sessions and extended sessions and going past the time frame, et cetera. There's got to be a growing frustration among all the legislators because of that.
- Currie: Yes, yes.
- DePue: Let's take a specific look at 2005. Yesterday we talked about Edgar's pension ramp. We're now ten years into that pension ramp.
- Currie: And now we have John Filan from the Office of Management & Budget suggesting that we do some little scam that is going to reduce the need to put the payments in this time.
- DePue: In 2005, talking about fiscal year 2006, Rod Blagojevich or the legislature or a combination of both support a pension holiday plan.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: I've got an article here; I'm going to read about that.
- Currie: Good.
- DePue: Do you want to weigh in before or after?
- Currie: No, I'd like to hear the article because I don't remember the specifics of that particular proposal.
- DePue: This is Dave McKinney and Ben Fisher, *Sun Times*.
- Currie: Okay.
- DePue: And this is sometime in spring of 2005, about the 2006 budget. "A Democratic bid to withhold nearly \$2 billion in required payments to

employee pension systems (and this is public employee) to balance the 2006 state budget swept through the legislature on Sunday, despite Republican comparisons of the deal to a payday loan. On party line vote, the pension proposal passed the House at sixty-one to fifty-three and the Senate, thirty-two to twenty-six, putting in place the controversial cornerstone of the budget deal.” In other words, I believe there were no Republican votes for this.

Currie: I’m sure that’s right.

DePue: “The plan is built upon a series of pension rule changes the governor and other leaders say will save the state at least \$30 billion over the next forty years. They want to use some of the savings up front during the next two years, in part to cover the \$1.2 billion budget deficit that year. The capping of end-of-career pay hikes for educators, at 6 percent annually, was one of the measures. Late career pay increases, as much as 60 percent, had exorbitantly boosted educators’ tax-funded pensions.”

Currie: Right.

DePue: So that was one of the things that was addressed.

Currie: Actually, Madigan was very strong on that one. He was the one who really proposed it and pushed it. The problem is that what had happened would be the local school boards would be granting these end-of-career boosts, but it was the state that was picking up the cost of the teachers’ retirement, not the local school district. It was a no-brainer for the school districts. “We can send Sally Sue off to wherever, with a much bigger pension than she otherwise would have had, and it’s no skin off our nose.”

DePue: Here’s an example of how this was abused: A finance director from the Adlai Stevenson Township High School District managed to increase his pension payments, his annual pension payments, to \$200,000 a year for the rest of his life.

Currie: Wow, pretty good.

DePue: That’s the kind of thing that would make the general public furious, I would think.

Currie: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Continuing to read along here, “Republicans railed how it will add to the \$34 billion under funding of the state’s three budget pension plans and that future generations will be left holding the bag.

“Also, Blagojevich can balance the State’s books today and avoid an overtime session, beginning Wednesday, that would empower the

Republicans.” This would have been in May, because in June the Republican... You go into that super majority time frame.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Thirty-four billion dollar under funding. That’s...

Currie: And the Republicans were right. It was not a good plan. Now, there was a whole lot of sleight of hand. I remember being part of discussions about how it could actually save money in the long run. Whether those assumptions were just plain misguided or whether it really was sleight of hand, I can’t tell you.

DePue: Now, he said “the three biggest pension plans.” There are five state pension plans.

Currie: Yeah, but the big ones are the state employees, the downstate teachers, and the state universities.

DePue: And the smallest would be...?

Currie: The General Assembly Retirement System (DePue laughs).

DePue: Which you now are receiving.

Currie: I am.

DePue: And probably grateful to do so.

Currie: I am.

DePue: You certainly would have earned that. This is toward the end of the article: “Madigan spent two days trying to line up sixty of his sixty-five Democrats to vote for the plan. On Saturday, as many as a dozen House Democrats were prepared to vote against it, but intense arm twisting by party leaders left only Republican Kevin Joyce...

Currie: Yeah, he’s a Democrat, yeah.

DePue: ...and Julie Hamos...

Currie: Ah, okay.

DePue: ...as Democratic no votes Sunday.” I suspect you’re one of the people who’s out there twisting arms.

Currie: Out there twisting arms, but I wasn’t able to twist Julie’s, darn it.

DePue: Do you remember any of that?

Currie: I remember working on it; I remember trying to get the votes, and I remember making the arguments that John Filan had made to us, that sounded on their face not so bad. I don't, again, know whether there were assumptions that turned out not to be accurate, whether later decisions by the assembly made it more likely to create problems than not. I just don't remember.

DePue: So you're not paying into the pension system. The cost savings are because you're capping these end-of-career pay hikes.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: It obviously hasn't worked too well in the long run.

Currie: Right, but there were other mechanisms that were supposed to be savings in that plan. I don't remember today what they were.

DePue: How would you vote on something like that, in retrospect?

Currie: Well, in retrospect I would have said, "No" (laughs). On the other hand, as I said yesterday, I think that the way the pension ramp worked was detrimental to other important activities in state government. Level funding for the full forty years would have made a whole lot more sense than putting in a little bit today and then counting on legislatures and governors in the future to put the whole treasury into pension funding, instead of attending to other responsibilities.

I'm not even sure that we need, as a state, to fund pensions at 90 percent, which is what the current ramp does. Given that we are a state government, I do not believe that we're going to go bankrupt. I don't know that we need to make a commitment at 90 percent, as private corporations may well want to do, given that there is a chance that they will disappear. But I don't think the state's likely to.

DePue: But I believe at this time, certainly later on, Illinois had perhaps the biggest imbalance in its pension payment in the entire country.

Currie: Right.

DePue: And we'll pick up there. I'm not going to let you off the hook entirely.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: When we get to Pat Quinn and what he was doing with trying to solve the pension problem, we'll take this issue up one more time.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: I know that the governor also had challenges and difficulties with some of the other constitutional officers. I think, at the top of the list, was Attorney General Lisa Madigan but also with both the comptroller and the treasurer, Comptroller Dan Hynes and Treasurer Alexi Giannoulas. I don't know if you can talk to any of the specifics on that.

Currie: I don't remember. Ordinarily the governor is hands off when it comes to the other constitutional officers, and we generally have been willing to fund the constitutional offices, all of them, at the level that's basically requested by the constitutional officer.

We don't generally look over their shoulder and say, "Couldn't you save a few more erasers here? Couldn't you cut mileage there?" They are, after all, elected public officials, and we figure it's in their interest to try to save money and to present a budget that is not out of whack and that it is not overly large, because they're going to pay for it the next time they're standing for reelection.

So there's just been a general courtesy that says, if this is what you think you need to run your office, this is what we're going to fund. My recollection is that Blagojevich tried to undercut that as well, in the budgets that he proposed. There may have been other issues between him and these other officers as well.

DePue: I could be wrong in this, but as I recall, for Attorney General Madigan—and this is Mike Madigan's daughter—the issue was the kind of things that you had talked about previously in JCAR violations.

Currie: Yeah, yeah, doing things that he was not allowed to do under the Constitution of the State of Illinois. I don't believe she sued him, however. I don't remember any example in which she actually took him to court.

DePue: By 2006, 2007, he's been in office for a few years already. There are lots of people who are willing to drop a dime big time on Governor Blagojevich and people within his own party. Democrat Joe Lyons. Do you remember him?

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Here's one of the things he was quoted as saying, "We have a mad man. The man is insane."

Currie: Well, that's the way he came across, busy brushing his hair and busy wandering around and coming up with scatterbrained schemes, like apparently the pension holiday was.

DePue: Would you agree with Lyons' assessment?

Currie: I don't know that I would say that he was mad, but I certainly would say that he was a scattershot governor and was not tending to his knitting in the kinds of ways that someone like Jim Edgar always had done. He was not focused on fiscal issues. He was not focused on running the state in an ordinary, responsible, drama-free way.

Again, I think that's partly because he had ambitions to move up the food chain. I think that he thought that the kinds of proposals he was making, with or without legislative approval, would be popular with the people. And they were; they were popular.

DePue: Were you hearing by this time—we're talking two or three years into his administration—rumors about corruption within this...?

Currie: I'm sure I heard some of them but not from anybody that was giving me chapter and verse. So I don't know. I don't have a sense that I knew something. I didn't.

DePue: Were any people within his administration coming to complain or whisper in your ear or talk about things?

Currie: No, not to me. They may have come to other people, but not to me.

DePue: Apparently, they were going up to the US attorney in Chicago. I always get this confused. Is it Peter Fitzgerald?

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Patrick Fitzgerald.

Currie: Patrick Fitzgerald was the U.S. attorney.

DePue: Peter was the senator.

Currie: The senator.

DePue: Okay. Because, almost from day one, they had been looking into some improprieties in the administration.

Currie: I don't know who blew the whistle.

DePue: That wasn't a topic of discussion between you and Speaker Madigan either?

Currie: No.

DePue: Well, that gets us to the 2006...

Currie: Election, yeah.

DePue: ...gubernatorial election. By this time, it sounds like he had soured with most of the leadership in the legislature, with you as well as obviously Madigan.

Currie: Yeah. But nobody challenged him in the... Oh wait. Did somebody challenge him in the...

DePue: Somebody did challenge him.

Currie: Eddie Eisendrath?

DePue: That's right. But he [Blagojevich] had been a great fundraiser. In fact, that's what led to his demise eventually. What was your opinion? What was Madigan's opinion at that time? Were you looking to find a challenger?

Currie: I wasn't actively doing that. I'm not much of a party person. I don't know whether Madigan was. I doubt it, but I don't know that. I think Eddie Eisendrath, although he certainly had good credentials, was not seen as sufficiently able to run a strong race against Rod. And at the end of the day, he didn't.

DePue: I knew he worked for the *Chicago Sun Times*, a senior position there. Had he had any other elective experiences?

Currie: I don't think so. His family was quite wealthy though. His mother... Wait a minute; I'm losing their names. His stepfather was a very big fundraiser for national Democrats, Susan and Lou Manilow... I think his mother was Susan Manilow. He did have some sources of wealth, and he was understood to be a good progressive. But I don't think he had the mechanisms in place or was able to put in place mechanisms that would cause him to win.

DePue: Do you recall who you voted for in the Democratic primary?

Currie: I don't remember. I just don't remember. I think that it was pretty clear that Blagojevich was going to be the nominee, but I don't remember how I actually voted.

DePue: Biting your tongue, or I assume you...

Currie: No, I really don't remember. I voted in the general for Rod. That I do remember.

DePue: In the Republican primary, you've got Bill Brady, Ron Gidwitz...

Currie: Oh god, okay (DePue laughs). Helene Curtis is his claim to fame.

DePue: Oh...Andy Martin...

Currie: Don't know.

DePue: ...Jim Oberweis...

Currie: Oh lord.

DePue: And Barbara Flynn Currie.

Currie: And what?

DePue: Excuse me (Currie laughs). I got the name wrong because my computer's been acting up, Judy Baar Topinka.

Currie: Right, and Judy wins.

DePue: And Judy wins. Of that group, who were you generally more for?

Currie: Judy.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about your experiences with Judy because she's a fascinating personality.

Currie: She started out in the House. She came in not long after I, and she was very much a free spirit, very much her own...not a party line kind of person. At that time, it seems to me, she changed her mind on a couple of issues that were kind of important to me. I can't remember now whether it was the Equal Rights Amendment or reproductive rights. But she became much more flexible, once she was in the assembly.

She'd been a journalist before she came to Springfield and comes from a very ethnic, white ethnic suburban turf. She didn't stay in the House long. She moved quickly to the Senate. She was very glad hand, upbeat. And as I say, her policy positions were not, by and large, bad. They were pretty good.

DePue: You say you voted for Blagojevich though in the general election.

Currie: Yes, in the general. Yes, I did.

DePue: Would you have been disappointed if Topinka had been successful?

Currie: I think I would have been disappointed, but I would not have been disheartened.

DePue: It was actually a three-way race, because you have Rich Whitney, the Green Party member, who also polled respectable numbers in the race.

Currie: Right.

DePue: But Blagojevich had the money. He polls 49.8 percent, against Topinka's 39.3 percent.

Currie: Right, so pretty crushing.

DePue: I have talked to a couple Democrats who are proud that they did not vote for Rod Blagojevich (laughs). Gene Callahan, in particular, comes to mind.

Currie: Really?

DePue: Yeah.

Currie: Oh, interesting, interesting.

DePue: He was proud that he could say he didn't vote for Blagojevich the second time around.

Currie: I love it.

DePue: What were your views, going into a second term for Blagojevich, knowing all the struggles you'd had for those first four years?

Currie: I was still hopeful that he would shape up and do well. I think, by this time—this is after the 2004 keynote speech, when I think his aspirations were crushed—I think that he seemed to be less and less engaged, even less around, even less spending time on task. That was of some concern, but I don't think I really saw that until after the election.

DePue: Let's go ahead and take some time to talk a lot more about Barack Obama and your relationship with the man who was going to become president of the United States. He was elected in 1996 to the Illinois Senate from the thirteenth district, your district.

Currie: Um-hmm.

DePue: How well did you know him before that time?

Currie: Not real well. I met him in the summer of '96. He's elected in '96 did you say?

DePue: Yeah.

Currie: Yeah, I met him in the summer. Alice Palmer, then the sitting state senator, had decided to throw her hat in the ring for a congressional seat that had just opened up and gave Barack her blessing to run for her seat. He was out raising money and meeting with people, including people like me. So I saw him on the campaign trail during those summer months, and I thought highly of him. He seemed to be a very well put together person. Then Alice got about 2 percent of the vote in the primary to replace whichever congressman it was. Jesse Jackson Junior beat her handily.

By the early fall, some of Alice's supporters were anxious for her not to lose her Senate seat after all. So there was a bit of a struggle, a bit of a tangle, and some of her supporters then went out and gathered nominating petitions to put her back on the ballot, which seemed to be undercutting what she'd said to Barack.

At the end of the day, Barack arranged a challenge to her nominating signatures. That challenge succeeded. She was not on the ballot, but there were some bitter feelings with people in the community that had supported Alice, including Lu Palmer, who was a well-known African American journalist; Lou Jones, who was an African American House member. I can't remember who the other movers and shakers were, but the reality is they did not do a good job collecting signatures for Alice.

Barack was, I think, totally within his rights to challenge, since, I think, the minimum numbers of petition signatures required are not an onerous burden for anybody to have to meet. It always seems to me that there is some value in having some requirements for ballot access, so that you don't have 192 people with no chance of winning appearing on a ballot, just to confuse the voters.

DePue: You've talked briefly about this, but I want you to spend just a little bit more time talking about your early impressions of him.

Currie: Well, we had lunch. I thought he was a great guy. I didn't see a president sitting opposite me at the...whatever restaurant it was. But I did think that he was a smart, able, progressive person who would do well in Springfield. So I was happy to toss my hat in his ring.

DePue: You answered my other question when you said you didn't see a president sitting across from you.

Currie: No, I didn't. I didn't.

DePue: Since you're from the same Senate district, did you ever partner with him in legislation?

Currie: I did on things like the earned income tax credit. There were a couple of other measures that we traded from one chamber to the other. But the biggest one, the most important one, was the earned income tax credit.

DePue: I think I've got a couple pictures here. Let me prod your memory. Do you remember, in April 2001, a town hall meeting for both of you?

Currie: We did several town hall meetings.

DePue: Yeah, here it is, a flyer for that event, I think.

Currie: Yep, yep.

DePue: And here's something from July 12, 2000. I love this picture.

Currie: (laughs) I do too. Yeah, that's the way we did our...

DePue: Well, explain what we're seeing in this picture.

Currie: That is the Fourth [of July] on Fifty Third [Street]. It is the Hyde Park July 4th parade. Everybody marches; nobody watches. That has always been the signature tune of that parade. The organizers of the parade made us political people dress up in costumes. Somebody made that Uncle Sam suit for me, just for me, out of polyester. On a hot summer's day, it is not a very comfortable thing to wear, but it certainly looked great. And there's Toni as Lady Liberty. There is Leslie Hairston as Betsy Ross.

DePue: Toni, what's Toni's last name?

Currie: Toni Preckwinkle. And there's Barack who's got, I believe Sasha in the stroller. He chose not to dress up at all.

DePue: Yeah, he got off the hook.

Currie: There are some times when I've seen him in colonial garb in that parade. In fact, I know I have a picture of him someplace wearing a colonial, heavy wool suit.

DePue: Well, it looks like a fun time was had by all.

Currie: Oh, absolutely. It's a short parade, thank god (DePue laughs). But it is a marching parade. And it's great. They provide streamer's for the children's bicycles and tricycles, so it's really very much about kids.

DePue: Do you know what happened to that polyester Uncle Sam suit?

Currie: I don't know. It may still be at the dry cleaners from last year (both laugh).

DePue: Oh, you wear it over and over?

Currie: Oh, I wear it every year, yeah.

DePue: Are you going to be in this parade next year?

Currie: I expect I will be.



Barbara Flynn Currie and Barack Obama marched together in the 2001 Independence Day 53rd Street Parade in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood.

DePue: That might be worth seeing. Are there any others that come to mind, where you were collaborating with him?

Currie: Well, we did a bunch of town halls. The biggest legislative issue that I remember is the earned income tax credit. I'm sure there were other bills, but they would not have been quite as important as that one.

DePue: You're obviously in a different House. He's in the Illinois Senate. Were you hearing things about what he was doing in the Illinois Senate?

Currie: No.

DePue: Is that because you just weren't paying attention or...?

Currie: You know, we don't pay a lot of attention to what goes on in the other chamber because we're riveted by what's going on in our own. So, only at the point where we change bills, where things go from that chamber to the other, do we have a lot of interaction with our Senate colleagues.

DePue: I'm sure you've heard the comments, especially during the presidential election run that he had, that he had a pretty low profile in the Illinois Senate, that he was... Some would characterize that he was a back bencher. He was not in a leadership role.

Currie: No, he was not, but he wasn't there very long. He would have been in a leadership role, I believe, had he stayed longer. And I do think that Emil Jones did consider him somebody he should take under his wing. So I think he got a lot of support from Emil, both in terms of passing his legislation and in terms of how he stood with his caucus.

Remember what I'd said earlier. When he came in, there was this dispute among many of the activists in the African American progressive community who were mad at him because he had not respected Alice's wishes to return to the state Senate. Since she'd already committed to him, it seemed a little unfair, but there was that.

He also, I think, had some trouble with some of the other African Americans because he came from a very... He was not a street guy. He was not of the people. He didn't start out in the projects. He started out with a degree from a really fine institution. And I think that a lot of people resented it and didn't think that he was, as they would say, black enough.

DePue: You were hearing that, even in those early days?

Currie: Oh yeah.

DePue: To kind of pick up on that, in 2000, I believe, he ran for Congress against Democrat Bobby Rush.⁹³

Currie: Right, and so did... Don Trotter ran at the same time. Barack did much better than Don, but he did not carry the day. He only got a little less than a third of the vote. Now, everybody thought it was terrific that he had done so well, but that those numbers don't signal very well.

DePue: Yeah, I think today, when I'm reading about it, it's that he pretty much got trounced by Rush.

Currie: He got totally trounced, yeah.

DePue: Do you think it was unwise for him to...?

Currie: I'm not sure. As it turned out, he didn't win for Congress, but he became president. It was a very tough race, I would say. The argument that Barack was making was a tough sell. He was essentially saying, "Yeah, Bobby votes right, but he's not really a leader. He's not someone who develops the policy. He just votes the way you want him to." That's a hard sell. People say, "Ah, he's voting my way. I'm for him."

Also, Bobby had a lot of money from all the people in Washington whose causes he had helped over the years. So he was not without resources, and he didn't make any mistakes. My favorite billboard was one across the L tracks. Its tagline was "We're sticking with Bobby." And it is every race, every gender, every occupation, just a whole array of people. He didn't make any mistakes, and I think there just was no way for Barack to break in.

DePue: By that time he had been in the Congress for quite a few sessions already.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: And Rush is still there today.

Currie: Right, exactly.

DePue: And doesn't appear to be going anywhere soon (laughs).

Currie: No, no.

DePue: The man that you knew at that time, did you understand how ambitious politically he was?

⁹³ Bobby Lee Rush is an American politician, activist, pastor, and the U.S. Representative for Illinois's 1st congressional district, serving in Congress for more than two decades. A civil rights activist during the 1960s, Rush co-founded the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bobby_Rush)

Currie: I didn't, no.

DePue: One of the things that you did with him, I understand—I believe this is August of 2003—a bill for open meetings.

Currie: I don't remember the specifics, but yes, we would have presumably expanded the protections for the public, that meetings should be open. I don't remember what the bill did. We already had an open meetings act, so this would have been some kind of an expansion.

DePue: I wonder if you can just talk briefly about what it means to have an open bills act.

Currie: Open meetings?

DePue: Open meetings. I'm sorry, yeah.

Currie: So the idea is that when public officials are making decisions that matter to the taxpayer, that matter to the people back home, that they ought to be transparent and accountable. And an open meeting gives the public the opportunity to figure out why they're voting the way they are and what the stakes are.

There are times when it's legitimate to close a meeting. For example, if you're trying to negotiate a contract with the lawyer who's going to represent the city, you don't want to do that in public. Some personnel matters also, I think, legitimately can be left from public view because they're sensitive, and they involve the reputation of the worker. But by and large, decisions that are made that have to do with the way we spend money or the zoning decisions we make. Those should be subject to public view and subject to the opportunity for the people to know what is happening.

DePue: So city, county...?

Currie: Yep.

DePue: ...state level meetings?

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: So meetings between the...

Currie: The park district, all of the...

DePue: Meetings between the governor and the four tops?

Currie: No, those have never been subject to the open meet... And the General Assembly is not subject to the open meetings act.

DePue: Why not?

Currie: Because we just never have been (DePue laughs). And I don't think that I try...

DePue: Because it's fine for some people but not for the General Assembly?

Currie: Yeah. Yeah, well but then, no. The General Assembly sessions are open, but our caucuses are not. And there's nothing, I think, that says that our caucuses should be open. But the difficulty...

DePue: Isn't it a different set of rules then?

Currie: Slightly different because what I think that it is is that, under the open meetings act, a majority of the quorum constitutes a body for purposes of the imposition of the open meetings act and that, therefore, you can have a smaller number of people who are subject to it, even if they're not able to take action. So yeah, it's a little unfair.

DePue: By this time in Illinois legislative history, one of the criticisms that you heard from a lot of people is how much business was actually conducted just among the four tops.

Currie: Well, remember, anything that they proposed, has to be voted on publicly, openly, as a matter of public record by the legislature. So the fact that the proposal may come from the governor, whether it's a budget or whether it's a particular policy idea or whether it's coming from the governor and the four tops, it seems to me that it's not a mistake, and that it's not something that needs to be open because any discussion about those proposals will be public.

DePue: Kind of a parallel to that whole criticism about the power of the four tops is part of their power is the sizable war chest that people like Madigan have. Somebody's in trouble in their legislative district. He supports them with enough money to win the election, and they are therefore beholden to him in any kind of votes that are going to occur in the legislature later on.

Currie: People make that argument. You know, all of the legislative leaders do exactly the same thing. The leaders stand behind their caucus members. I don't know that Madigan outspends, compared to Bill Brady or compared to John Cullerton or compared to Jim Durkin. I think that's not unusual in political circles. I also don't think that the fact that somebody is helping a candidate financially means that they are forever beholden to that individual. As we talked about Madigan the other day, I think that Madigan has been very helpful to his caucus in terms of legislation, in terms of committee assignments, in terms that are way beyond just electoral politics.

- DePue: Everything you said was certainly everything I've always understood about the nature of the way business is conducted. Would you agree with this statement, that nobody is better at that process than Mike Madigan?
- Currie: I think he's very good at that process. And I think the fact that, in spite of the public contumely with which he's forever being hit, he nevertheless gets reelected handily by his caucus in the House of Representatives.
- DePue: We're going to go to that thing now that you've referred to a couple times here. That's that 2004 US Senate race. Obviously, Barack Obama had turned his sights on that and saw an opportunity there. And that was in part because...
- Currie: Right, is it 2004? No, it's 2006; isn't it?
- DePue: Two thousand four because that's the year that he appears before the Democratic Convention and makes that rousing speech.
- Currie: Yeah, but that would have had to have been in the primary, and he wasn't... Maybe I got the years... No, 2004...
- DePue: The Democratic Convention would have been in August. He had already won the primary race by then.
- Currie: Oh, okay, okay. I'm sorry, yes, you're right.
- DePue: In the Democratic primary, you've got Dan Hynes, Blair Hull, and Barack Obama. Who did you support in that?
- Currie: Barack Obama.
- DePue: By that time you'd had a good solid working relationship with the man.
- Currie: Yes, and he was my state senator, come on.
- DePue: Vocally in support of him?
- Currie: Yeah.
- DePue: Helped him campaign?
- Currie: I believe I did.
- DePue: He wins that primary, and here's one I know you remember because you've mentioned a couple times. Were you at the 2004 Democratic Convention?
- Currie: No, because my husband was ill, and we had spent so much time in Springfield on the special sessions that Blagojevich called, that I decided not to go to Boston. So I missed it.

- DePue: Had you been in Democratic Conventions previously?
- Currie: In 2000. I was a delegate. I was expected to be a delegate in 2004, but it was just too difficult because my husband was ill, and I'd been away so much. It seemed it would not really do for me to take off just as soon as I got back from Springfield special sessions.
- DePue: Did you watch that speech, the keynote speech?
- Currie: I did. It was a great speech. If I didn't see it at the time, I certainly saw it after.
- DePue: Give me a few more insights into that speech.
- Currie: Well, I thought the rhetoric was soaring. The ideas were exactly the ideas that I espouse, exactly the values that I care about. I think that he just plain knocked everybody's socks off.
- DePue: Did you see the potential then that so many saw?
- Currie: Oh yes, yes, yes. That Blagojevich saw and that so many other people saw (laughs).
- DePue: That this is a potential Democratic candidate for president?
- Currie: Yep. I became totally convinced by that speech.
- DePue: Before that time, had you ever thought of him in that respect?
- Currie: No, I really hadn't. As I say, I thought well of him. I thought he was a great guy. I thought he was smart. I thought he was able. But, you know, being president is hard, right? It's hard to pluck people out and say, "Oh yeah."
- DePue: The Republican primary, Jack Ryan wins...
- Currie: Oh god.
- DePue: ...against a crowded field, Ryan, Oberweis, Rauschenberger, Andrew McKenna, John Borling and others.
- Currie: Yeah, and then, of course, his [Ryan's] campaign is trashed because he took his wife, then wife, to sex clubs in Paris.
- DePue: That happened before all of this.
- Currie: I think much of the material that caused him to disappear, go down in flames, was part of a custody battle, following his divorce from whatever, Jeri, whatever her name was.
- DePue: Yeah, Jeri Ryan, who was famous in her own rights as...

- Currie: Yeah, as a television actress.
- DePue: Yeah, who was known as kind of the sex object in one of the *Star Wars*...
- Currie: Oh really? Okay, I didn't...
- DePue: *Star Trek*. I should say, *Star Trek*.⁹⁴ If you'll allow me, I'll kind of lay out some of the background there, Jack Ryan, George Ryan, Jim Ryan.
- Currie: Right (both laugh), too many Ryans.
- DePue: Are there any relationships there, other than the last name being the same?
- Currie: No, just the same last name.
- DePue: I think Jack Ryan was a successful businessman at the time. As you mentioned, early in the campaign—I'm not sure when this occurred—there was discussion about those sealed court records about the child custody, which were in California.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: A nasty divorce between Jack and Jeri Ryan. And, as I understand this, the *Chicago Tribune* sued for release of those court records...
- Currie: I believe that's right, yep.
- DePue: ...to the great benefit of Barack Obama.
- Currie: Right, totally, totally. I felt sorry for Jack Ryan. Whenever things come out of a custody dispute, I'm always less than impressed because of what happens in custody battles.
- DePue: He feels he has no choice after some very ugly incidents occur, after those court records are released. And now the Republican Party...
- Currie: He resigns from the ballot, and they find Alan Keyes.⁹⁵ Good luck.
- DePue: Where do they find Alan Keyes?
- Currie: Well, isn't he in Virginia? He was a talk show host, and I think that the...
- DePue: Maryland.

⁹⁴ *Star Trek: Voyager* is an American science fiction television series, the fifth in the *Star Trek* franchise. It originally aired on UPN from January 16, 1995, to May 23, 2001, lasting for 172 episodes over seven seasons.

⁹⁵ Alan Lee Keyes is an American conservative political activist, pundit, author, perennial candidate, and former ambassador. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Keyes)

Currie: Maryland. I remember talking to some Republican members at that time. I can't remember who. But I think they thought, "Well, one black's like another black. So if we've got a black on our side of the ticket, that will neutralize the fact that Obama is running on the Democratic side." Well, nothing could be further from the truth.

Alan Keyes was a madman. Alan Keyes was insane. And he was certainly not somebody who would appeal to the mainstream of either the Republican or the Democratic Party. So they, I think, just plain misread who he was and what his impact would be on a contested general election in Illinois.

DePue: Do you remember who was the chairman of the Republican Party at that time?

Currie: No.

DePue: Judy Baar Topinka.

Currie: Oy, yoy.

DePue: Which is the reason I always wanted to interview her...

Currie: Sure.

DePue: ...to find out the back story of that, if for no other reason.

Currie: But I think it was others who were pressing for him. I don't think she would have been the mover behind that proposal. Maybe she didn't have anything better to recommend, so that's how Alan Keyes got to be it. But I know there were people in that party who were involved in that decision who really thought that this would neutralize the fact that Barack Obama was black. How they could think that I can't imagine.

DePue: It clearly was a disastrous decision, and coming off this incredible speech that Obama gave at the Democratic Convention, Barack Obama polled 70 percent against Keyes' 27 percent.

Currie: Just a complete rout.

DePue: So the question is, what had happened to the Republican Party in Illinois, that had held the governorship for thirty years?

Currie: Yeah, right. And I don't know. I don't know.

DePue: Had George Ryan done that much damage to it?

Currie: No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

DePue: Was it a demographic shift?

Currie: I think it was the demographic shift. I think also it was the Republican Party becoming more Republican. When I first went to Springfield, you couldn't tell the party by virtue of whether people were for or were against items like the Equal Rights Amendment. And you couldn't tell which party when it came to reproductive rights.

Well, today the polarization is not complete but pretty complete... You can tell. If it's someone who's pro-choice, likely to be a Democrat. Anti, very likely to be a Republican. In fact, there were no Republican votes for the last reproductive rights legislation that we had in Springfield while I was still there. So I think probably the state party is moving in the same direction that we see happening in Washington and that we see happening across the country.

DePue: Were you seeing a similar shift for the Democrats moving farther to the left?

Currie: Yes, I think that's right.

DePue: So both parties are moving away from the center.

Currie: Yes. And Barack's speech was a reminder that we need to come back together.

DePue: That gets us into 2007 and especially 2008. The relationship between Governor Blagojevich and the party and the legislature as a whole was increasingly rocky. I think you could make that case.

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: It hadn't improved certainly. Were you ever interested or willing to support a notion of impeachment proceedings prior to the election?

Currie: No.

DePue: Do you remember when Senator Larry Bomke actually proposed that we should be looking at impeachment?

Currie: I don't remember. He was in the other chamber.

DePue: Yeah, and that was in 2008.

Currie: Ah.

DePue: There was no talk about that in the Illinois House.

Currie: I don't remember that there was. And as I say, to the extent that there might have been, I don't think that there was the public support for doing anything.

DePue: It's 11:19 now. The impeachment will probably take at least a half an hour or more. We probably call it a day then, or...?

Currie: Okay, maybe we should, and then we'll get back to it.

DePue: I'm tempted to ask you about election day or the day of the arrest. Let's talk about that day...

Currie: Oh, god.

DePue: ...your memories of December 9, 2008.

Currie: Well, terrible, just terrible. It was at least a week, maybe longer than... No, it was maybe two weeks after that before we decided to put together a committee to look at the possibility of impeaching Blagojevich.

DePue: I want to save that for next time.

Currie: Okay, all right.

DePue: And just specifically where you were at, what your initial reaction was to hearing that.

Currie: My reaction was, I was appalled. Now I must also say that I don't think that the federal prosecutors are supposed to try the people that they want to indict in the public press and that the language that the federal people, agents, used was certainly inflammatory. They took out the worst possible things that they could have said about Blagojevich. They made them very public. And, in fact, as we know, Blagojevich never did sell the Senate seat. But even to talk about it...for that information to become public was totally incendiary.

I began immediately getting calls in my office, and I'm sure my colleagues did as well, calls that said, "Impeach the bastard. Blagojevich has to go." That pressure continued to build. And people would call and say, "Why haven't you done anything? It's been three days. It's been four days. It's been a week." And it was a great deal of constituent pressure, of feeling on the part of the populous, that this guy just has to be out of there.

DePue: What a great teaser for our next session.

Currie: Yeah, okay.

DePue: Thank you very much.

Currie: Good to see you.

(end of transcript #8)

Interview with Barbara Flynn Currie

ISL-A-L-2014-049.09

Interview #9: June 17, 2019

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Monday, June 17, 2019. This is Mark DePue, and today I have what I believe is my ninth session with Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie.

Currie: Wow, I didn't remember it was that many.

DePue: Good afternoon.

Currie: Good afternoon.

DePue: We had four or five sessions a long time ago, and then there was quite a break.

Currie: A really long time ago, right.

DePue: Then we had a couple other sessions that were very interesting. We got you up through the Blagojevich administration, and today will be about one of the most memorable events in the Illinois legislature ever.

But Leader Currie, I think what I'd like to start with... I think I might have neglected asking you, the last time we met, if you were involved at all with any of the inauguration events for President Barack Obama.

Currie: Yeah, I went. I was invited to a couple of parties, and I was invited to the inauguration itself, with pretty good seats. So that was good.

DePue: When you say parties, out in D C?

- Currie: Out in D C. In fact, there was one party that was kind of a small group of Illinoisans who'd been with him for a really long time, maybe thirty people. He did stop by to say, "Hello," which was pretty good.
- DePue: What do you remember about the inauguration?
- Currie: I thought his speech was stirring, and I thought the whole event, cold as it was, was really quite, quite meaningful.
- DePue: Was your husband able to go to that as well?
- Currie: No, my son was though. I took my son.
- DePue: That brings us back to Governor Rod Blagojevich who, as we talked about last time, was arrested, I believe, on the ninth of December.
- Currie: Is that right? I thought it was earlier. Okay. Yeah, you're right.
- DePue: Apparently he had been under investigation by the FBI since 2003.
- Currie: Amazing.
- DePue: How much did you and the other members of the legislature know about, that he was under investigation for all that?
- Currie: I had no idea. Other members may have known. I would not be surprised if the Speaker [Madigan] had suspicions because he had become very dismissive of Governor Blagojevich and clearly thought that he was, at some level, playing fast and loose with the rules and all the rest of it. So he may have had better information than I. But I did not have a clue.
- DePue: If I recall though, a couple years out from that, maybe 2006 or 2007, there were already plenty of rumors in the media about him being under investigation.
- Currie: Yeah, but I never followed through. I never knew what they were about.
- DePue: Would it have surprised you, considering the man that you knew at that time?
- Currie: Yeah, to a degree. I thought he was a straightforward, honest chap, and it was very disconcerting to discover that he wasn't.
- DePue: Speaking of being disconcerting, what was your reaction when you started to hear some of the evidence, the tapes especially?
- Currie: Shocked, shocked. But let me say this also. I thought the FBI was itself over the top when it played recordings that were so inflammatory that it seemed to me it wasn't quite fair to Mr. Blagojevich. I'm not denying that the recordings

were real or that they existed. But ordinarily when you indict, I didn't think that you made it a point of doing character assassination on the way.

DePue: Is that a criticism of Patrick Fitzgerald, the way he...

Currie: Uh-huh, yes.

DePue: ...very publicly came out on that?

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Were you surprised about Patty's language as well, both of the languages that they used?

Currie: Less so, less so.

DePue: This is going to happen quite a bit later, but I think it's appropriate now. One of the reasons that Fitzgerald said he pulled the trigger when he did was because Governor Blagojevich was busy trying to sell the Senate seat.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Eventually he appoints Roland Burris into that position.

Currie: Right.

DePue: What did you think about that?

Currie: By the time he did that, by the time he appointed Burris, had we already had all of this flap or not?

DePue: Oh yes, yeah.

Currie: Okay. I thought he was taking the path of least resistance, and I was a little surprised that Roland Burris decided that he wanted to play along, given that Blagojevich was now under such a serious cloud. But as we know, Roland Burris was busy on his monument in Oak Woods Cemetery, one more success to etch in stone.⁹⁶

DePue: What did you think personally of Roland Burris?

Currie: I thought highly of him. I think he has a bit of a chip on his shoulder. When he was traveling on the state plane, he was always very concerned about being in the front, not the back of the bus, a quality about him that was a little...as I

⁹⁶ Illinois politician, Roland Burris, charted his esteemed career path on the walls of his future grave in Chicago's Oak Woods Cemetery. Beneath a seal of the state of Illinois, the Burris monument lists his accomplishments to date, with room above the bench to add his career in the Senate. (<https://www.politico.com/blogs/politico-now/2008/12/roland-burriss-monument-to-me-015049>)

say, a little chip on the shoulder. But in terms of what he did as attorney general, he did a good job, very smart, very able. And he certainly made his way up the political ranks. As an African American from Cairo or East St. Louis, wherever he came from, he really did very well for himself. [Burriss was born and grew up in Centralia, Illinois.]

DePue: I believe Pat Quinn recommended that he resign and not accept the position.

Currie: I don't remember that, but it would not surprise me. That would be a very Pat Quinn thing to do.

DePue: Why do you say that?

Currie: Because he's a populist, and it's a very un-populist thing for somebody to accept, from these tainted hands, a plum appointment like this one.

DePue: Do you know anything or do you have any opinion about part of the collateral damage (this would have been far after the impeachment), but Bill Cellini?⁹⁷

Currie: Um-hmm.

DePue: Any opinions about that?

Currie: No, that I didn't really follow. I know that he'd been very engaged in government and patronage activities within governments in Illinois for many, many years, but I never really knew exactly what that meant.

DePue: Did you not know Bill Cellini very well?

Currie: No, I didn't know him at all well. I'm met him a time or two, but I certainly did not know him well.

DePue: He had the reputation of being very influential, as you know, in Republican party circles.

Currie: Yes, dating way back to the Ogilvie days.

DePue: Yeah. I think he was Department of Transportation director with...

Currie: I think that's right.

⁹⁷ William F. Cellini is co-founder of the New Frontier Companies, a group of Illinois-based real estate companies with headquarters in Chicago. He was previously the chairman of the NYSE-listed Argosy Gaming Company, was the treasurer of the Sangamon County Republican Party and has held several public offices within the state of Illinois. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_F._Cellini)

DePue: ...the first one. Let's get to the Blagojevich impeachment then. Were you interviewed by Bernie Sieracki, who wrote the book? [*A Just Cause: The Impeachment and Removal of Governor Rod Blagojevich*]

Currie: I think so.

DePue: That would have been a long time ago as well.

Currie: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Because I believe the book probably would have come out around 2010, maybe 2011.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: One of the first things that happened though, apparently, is your boss, Speaker Madigan, asked you to chair the investigative committee.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Why you?

Currie: Well, first of, first of all, let me just say this was a terrible day because we had just come from the Electoral College, selecting Barack Obama to be...our Barack Obama to be the first African American president of the United States. Because, as you know, the Electoral College meets within the separate states. We don't meet in Washington. I was a member of the Electoral College, and I cannot tell you how exciting it was that we were casting our ballots for Barack. So that's what I did in the morning.

Then at noon (laughs), I was part of this announcement by the Speaker that we were establishing an investigative committee to consider the impeachment of Governor Rod Blagojevich. So it was the highs and the lows of politics, all in a single two-hour period.

DePue: Was that just a couple weeks after the arrest in the first one?

Currie: Yes, it was. I cannot remember if it was... Well, we would have met in the Electoral College around the twentieth, something like that, nineteen, twenty-first, something in that neighborhood. So it would have been maybe not quite as much as two weeks.

And I must tell you that constituent concerns about Blagojevich were through the roof. Everybody's phones were ringing off the hook. "Why have you not thrown him out of office yet?" Not even "Why don't you impeach him?" "Why isn't he gone?" There was a very fierce response from the public. And again, I think that's partly because of the way the FBI handled the arrest.

- DePue: You mean kind of stirring up the animus of the public in the process?
- Currie: Yes, yes. And it's not illegitimate. It's just that you don't have to do that if you want just to make your case.
- DePue: You had already been the majority leader for quite some time, but why did Madigan select you in particular?
- Currie: Well remember, I had also chaired the impeachment inquiry into Justice Heiple, so I was already the impeachment queen.⁹⁸
- DePue: That was in the '90s?
- Currie: I believe so.
- DePue: And did you need to have a lawyer in that position as well?
- Currie: What do you mean?
- DePue: In running this investigative committee?
- Currie: We did have legal support, yes.
- DePue: But being a lawyer yourself was...
- Currie: I'm not. I'm not a lawyer, no, never have been.
- DePue: Well, I take it all back. I'm sorry about that.
- Currie: No, it's okay. But I was married to someone who taught the law. And as he used to say, "I teach the law. She makes it," so (DePue laughs).
- DePue: I feel terrible about that.
- Currie: It's okay. I've been around it long enough that... You know, Frank Savicks, who was a state senator from the southwest side, he used to introduce legislation that said, "If you've served in the General Assembly for ten years, you're a lawyer."
- DePue: You certainly would know all the ins and outs of the law by that time.
- Currie: His bill never got anywhere. The lawyers didn't like it, as you can imagine.
- DePue: What then exactly was your role in that position?

⁹⁸ On April 14, 1997, Judge James D. Heiple was the subject of the first judicial impeachment proceedings in Illinois in 145 years, conducted by an investigative panel of ten representatives of the Illinois House of Representatives. The panel voted not to impeach Heiple; he remained on the bench through the end of his term in 2000. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_D._Heiple)

- Currie: As the chair of the impeachment? Exactly that. I was the person who was running the game.
- DePue: Does that mean that your committee had to collect the evidence and run the actual impeachment proceedings probe?
- Currie: Yes, and if we had not voted to impeach, I don't know that there would have been an impeachment. But following our vote, then the full House took a vote. And then, of course, once impeached, then it went to trial in the state Senate.
- DePue: You just kind of started this, but define the impeachment process.
- Currie: That's exactly what it is. So somebody files a resolution in the House because it starts always in the House of Representatives (that's true at the federal level as well). Then a committee was created, bipartisan. I'm not sure what the actual breakdown was. There may have been a few more Democrats than Republicans, but it was a fairly large committee. And then we proceeded to gather evidence, to hear the charges. We did not hear from the FBI, but we heard from others who had reasons to suggest that he was guilty of impeachable offenses. And while we didn't get direct testimony from the FBI, we did have access to the tapes they had already made public.
- DePue: Why didn't you have access to the FBI?
- Currie: They chose not to because they were busy preparing their case to go to trial, and they didn't want to get short circuited or put off their road by virtue of talking with us.
- DePue: Leader Currie, I wonder if you can explain the confusion the American public always has with the term impeachment because it's a two-part process.
- Currie: Yes, yeah, and so... Well, the impeachment is not... The impeachment happens entirely within the House of Representatives. We had a committee. The committee voted that the articles of impeachment should go forward. The full House voted upon those articles, came to the same conclusion. Then we send the whole issue over to the state Senate. And then the state Senate, they don't impeach. The person who's been impeached stands trial. So that's what happened in the state Senate.
- DePue: But you understand that many in the American public thinks impeach means that you're kicked out of office.
- Currie: Right, exactly. But they're wrong.
- DePue: So what is the technical term for the Senate's making the decision?
- Currie: A trial, a trial finding the person guilty or not guilty of an impeachable offense.

- DePue: So, a conviction?
- Currie: A conviction.
- DePue: But it's not a conviction of a crime, is it?
- Currie: No, no, does not need to be. It could be, but it isn't required.
- DePue: Who else was on that committee with you?
- Currie: Jim Durkin was the minority spokesman... Oh golly, it was a big committee. I don't remember all the people, but there were a lot.
- DePue: Was it one of those situations where people wanted to be on that committee?
- Currie: Some did and many did not. I think most of those who were on it were reluctant participants. It's a very heavy responsibility to undo the results of a fair, open, free election. It is not anybody's favorite in a democratic society. So I think there was a reticence. People did not want to have to be in a position where they were judging one of our fellows who had been freely, fully, fairly elected. To overturn that was not a comfortable place to be.
- DePue: Was it even tougher that he was a former colleague among many of the members?
- Currie: I don't think it made as much difference as you might expect. By this time we were far enough removed from our collegiality with him. And enough people had had enough experiences with him as governor that there was a fair bit of testiness.
- DePue: How did you come to the decision about selecting somebody to actually put the case together?
- Currie: Well, we had legal staff who was working on exactly that part of it, David Ellis, Heather Wier Vaught, Mike Kasper. And I know the minority party had staff as well, Andrew Freiheit, who I think is now the chief of staff to Jim Durkin. And they were working cooperatively.
- DePue: Were these people who were already in the caucus staffs?
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: Dave Ellis is the name that normally comes up. Was he the lead in this process?
- Currie: Yes, he was. He was at that time. I think he was the parliamentarian, and he might have been chief counsel. But working with him was Heather Wier Vaught, who was part of our technical review team. I think Mike Kasper, but

I'm not sure Mike Kasper was involved in the House proceedings. He may only have been involved in the Senate proceedings. He had been parliamentarian and chief counsel, but I think he was involved in this as well.

DePue: Once this happens, once you're in the process, is anything else happening legislatively?

Currie: Oh yeah, things go right on. We were meeting fairly frequently, but we were not meeting from 9:00 in the morning until 5:00 at night.

DePue: So your time wasn't 100 percent taken up by this.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: How about David Ellis and his other legal staff who were working on it?

Currie: They were doing a lot of work on this, but they still had their other responsibilities. My recollection is they were meeting those as well.

DePue: There's a lot of midnight oil being burned during this time.

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: How much of a challenge was it for Dave Ellis and his team to put the evidence together?

Currie: I don't remember specifically, but I think a lot of it just sort of laid out itself. I think there were a lot of complaints and charges that took... There they are. What you see is what you've got. For example, in addition to the things that we heard about from the feds, in terms of selling Senate seats and in terms of offering goodies in terms of the Governor's signature on legislation that would help the Chicago Children's Hospital and all other pediatric hospitals.

The issue was that there were not enough specialty pediatricians willing, at Medicaid reimbursement rates, to take Medicaid children. And there was legislation sitting on the governor's desk that would have raised those rates, obviously critically important to all the children's hospitals throughout the state. Blagojevich clearly had offered that he would sign the bill if they would make him a major campaign contribution. So the evidence pretty well laid out itself.

DePue: So what he thought was a private conversation was taped evidence?

Currie: I don't remember if that was... That was Pat Magoon who was the head of... I'm not sure if it was then Lurie or if it was still Children's.⁹⁹ But whether it

⁹⁹ On June 9, 2012, the hospital moved from their old campus to its current location in Streeterville, in a coordinated move of 200 children that took over 10 hours. The hospital also changed its name to Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. Pat Magoon was president of the hospital for 22 years, retiring in

was stuff that he'd heard from Blagojevich directly or whether he'd actually taped it, that I don't remember.

DePue: I remember that particular piece of evidence was one of the more damning ones, maybe because it was connected to a children's hospital, of all things.

Currie: But it really was, "I'm going to sell you this. I'm going to do you a favor if you cross my palm with silver, if you make a campaign contribution." What could be more blatant than that? What could be more wrong? What could be more impeachable than using your public office to line your own nest? And, yes, you're right. It was only made the worse because it was a children's hospital. But the reality is he's giving away a favor because he wants something for his campaign in response.

DePue: And the ultimate piece that he had, obviously, was the Obama Senate seat.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: This thing is...

Currie: "...fucking golden," right.¹⁰⁰

DePue: (laughs) You roll your eyes, as anybody would, when you hear that phrase. Oh my gosh. Do you remember minority leader Jim Durkin complaining that the Democrats had subpoena powers (you did), but that the Republicans weren't granted that?

Currie: I don't remember that that was an issue. I don't know who they wanted to hear from. We were very responsive, and we worked very collegially. I don't remember that there was an issue in which they wanted to hear from somebody that we didn't want to hear from.

DePue: And subpoena power, to have the authority to bring them in and testify before the House.

Currie: Right. I don't think we used that power, but we did have it.

DePue: Does that mean people voluntarily came forward?

2019. (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-lurie-childrens-hospital-magoon-ceo-20190725-j6fzf6be7nhonl23mjhw6ozac4-story.html>)

¹⁰⁰ In his June 1, 2011 court testimony, Rod Blagojevich tripped over his words a bit when asked to clarify the now infamous "I have this thing and it's fucking golden" statement, referring to the Senate seat vacated when Barack Obama was elected president. Blagojevich admitted under oath that the comment referred to the seat, that he was "stupid" for saying it, but that he was also thinking about the people of Illinois the entire time and admitted he didn't want to be left behind while other politicians, like Obama, were moving on to bigger things. (https://chicagoist.com/2011/06/02/blagojevich_on_f-ing_golden_comment.php)

Currie: Yeah, pretty much.

DePue: Was there any particular strategy that you remember, when putting the case together?

Currie: Well, one issue was whether we're going to have separate articles of impeachment or whether we're going to do one article. The ultimate decision was to do one article. There were things that Blagojevich had done that, in my mind and in the minds of many legislators, really crossed the line between the executive and the legislative authority. But for most people that doesn't sound like very much. For most people that doesn't seem impeachable. But I think for many members of the assembly, the way he ran roughshod over the legislative prerogative, whether it was importing drugs from Canada, expanding healthcare services... These are good things. I'm not saying they're bad things, but he did it without respect for the balance of powers between the legislative and the executive branches.

So we put all those things together. And we did put those, the items, in where we felt he had transgressed his authority. I think if they had been standalone items, they might not have been successful. But I think that there were people in the assembly who felt very strongly that he way overstepped his boundaries.

DePue: We talked a little bit about that last time. I'm going to bring some of these up on a case by case basis again. But certainly it's consistent with what you said last time about the subject of what is an impeachable offense in the first place. I have that the proceedings actually started on December 17. Does that sound right, before Christmas?

Currie: You're probably right. So it must have been that the Electoral College met earlier than I said, sixteenth, fifteenth. I don't remember.

DePue: The Electoral College vote would have happened; you put the team together, and then you collect the evidence?

Currie: Yeah, the same day of the Electoral College meeting was the day that we announced the committee. And then we would have put the committee together quite quickly. But I didn't realize it was that quickly.

DePue: Yeah, well, but you said yourself, the public was hounding you.

Currie: They were absolutely, absolutely.

DePue: What did you think of Blagojevich's initial defense team?

Currie: That's what's his name?

DePue: Ed Ginson, Genson?¹⁰¹

Currie: Genson. He was a very dramatic kind of over-the-top, hyperbolic, old time Chicago defense lawyer. So he was given to... I wouldn't say antics, but he was given to less serious an approach than might have been more appropriate than what he offered. But he was clearly a defense guy who had lots of people that he'd got off from serious criminal charges.

Now remember, this is not a criminal charge. But it does smack of the possibility of criminality, and I can certainly understand why the Blagojevich people might have thought somebody who's experienced in this line of work would be a plus for him.

DePue: Now, the reason that Blagojevich got himself in trouble in the first place is he was worried about what was going to happen to him and his family, once he's out of office.

Currie: Right.

DePue: He was worried about money.

Currie: Right.

DePue: So how is he going to pay somebody as prominent as Genson?

Currie: Well, I don't know what the financial arrangements were, but he still had money in his campaign account. And I'll tell you, I think what happened to Mr. Blagojevich is very sad. At the Democratic convention in... Was it 2000? No, it was 2004, 2004, when Barack was the keynote speaker. I think he saw his hopes just absolutely dashed.

He thought himself a politician from Illinois who might be able to take center stage. And there is Barack Obama, from his home state, totally upstaging him. It had to be very much ashes in his mouth that suddenly he saw that he was never going to go to that level because there was just no way he could. I think that's what got him... He was still a youngish man, and I think it got him thinking, "Well, what am I going to do next? How am I going to provide?"

It was a very limited notion of how you do that. The man is a lawyer. He's got certain credentials. He has some experience. It isn't as if he has to go out into the world with a begging cup. So the idea that he had to set up all of these things, in the long run, to protect himself was a misunderstanding of his

¹⁰¹ Edward Marvin Genson (June 30, 1941 – April 14, 2020) was an American attorney who represented high-profile defendants such as former Republic Windows CEO musician R. Kelly, newspaper owner Conrad Black, and Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed_Genson)

own ability and the requirements of somebody who has served in the kind of office that he served.

DePue: He had presidential ambitions, as you just said, long, long before all of this.

Currie: Yes, totally right.

DePue: Could you ever envision him being in that role?

Currie: No, but I thought he would have trouble becoming governor. I thought the name Blagojevich, it's a hard name... I thought pictures of Dick Mell, his father-in-law, on his desk in the city council, after Harold Washington died, I thought, Duh. So I was wrong.

DePue: I think we talked last time about being surprised that Barack Obama, this young state senator from Illinois...

Currie: Yeah, yeah. By then he was United States senator.

DePue: Well, 2004 was the election for U.S. Senate, right. Later on, the Blagojevich defense team... I guess he fired Genson, or Genson maybe resigned.

Currie: I don't remember what the...

DePue: I think that was the second.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: And then he hired Sam Adams and Sam Adams Jr.¹⁰²

Currie: Yes, and they're another colorful defense team that does a lot of work at 26th [Street] and California. So they too are kind of steeped in the Chicago traditions, and they have defended a lot of people who have been charged with serious crime. So they didn't change strategy. They may have changed the actors, but I don't think the strategy significantly changed.

DePue: Twenty-sixth and California.

¹⁰² Samuel Adam was a player in Chicago's courthouses for decades, making a name for himself standing up for some of the city's higher-profile defendants, from politicians to alleged mobsters to R&B superstar R. Kelly. The younger Adam began to emerge from his father's shadow, finding himself in the spotlight with his own "heater" case, representing one of the seven suspects accused in the fatal beating of two men whose van crashed into three women on a South Side stoop. (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2002-09-15-0209150534-story.html>)

- Currie: That's the criminal courts, Cook County Criminal Court or now the George Leighton Criminal Court.
- DePue: By the time the impeachment was working in the House, were the Adams representing him at that time?
- Currie: I think so. I believe so. There should be transcripts of the impeachment committee hearings that might give better answers.
- DePue: I suspect there's even videotape of all this, as well.
- Currie: I think there is. But there was a court reporter, so I know that there is a good record.
- DePue: I want to move to some specifics for the trial, and you've already talked about some of this. One charge, you said?
- Currie: Yes, there was one charge that included many offenses. So it included the sale of the signature on the bill with the pediatricians. It included the possibility he was interested in selling the Senate seat. There were other allegations of misuse of the office, as well as these areas in which he seemed to transcend his executive authority.
- DePue: This is just the kind of terminology that the Illinois public would roll their eyes and say, "What in the world is that in the first place?" You had already addressed this, but I think the specific terminology is maladministration, violations of JCAR. So what's JCAR?
- Currie: The Joint Committee on Administrative Rules. Their job is to make sure that whatever agency of state government is offering rules and regulations to implement a particular policy, their job is to make sure that that agency is working within its legislative authority.
- DePue: So, is this the inside baseball [expert knowledge] stuff that legislators would do?
- Currie: It's totally inside, totally inside baseball. And as I say, from the perspective of the public, not what you call overwhelming. I do remember—I think it was in the Senate vote—there was somebody who basically said... He actually voted to convict, but on the way, he said, "You know, I'm troubled because a lot of the things that Blagojevich did were good for my community, expanding healthcare, expanding preschool, helping people with their pharmaceutical bills." That was somebody who was torn because he liked the outcome, even if he agreed that how Blagojevich got there was not quite kosher. But that's a hard argument to make, right?

DePue: Jumping down, “Save RX and the purchase of flu vaccines.”¹⁰³ That fits into that category?

Currie: Yes, exactly. He just went ahead and did it.

DePue: “Getting drugs from Canada.”

Currie: Canada, I believe, and the flu vaccine. I don’t know where he found the money, but the idea was to go out and buy it, bypassing every agency that would have been relevant, bypassing the legislature that should have appropriated the money.

DePue: I think we addressed this last time, but I’ll ask you again in this context. Is that sufficient, that he violated the constitution, essentially?

Currie: I would say it is, but sufficiency is in the eye of the beholder. That means the public. I don’t think that those issues, standing on their own, would have led to the calls for impeachment that we heard. The sale of the Senate seat, because of the threats that, “I won’t sign that bill unless you make a major campaign contribution,” threats that, “Unless you hire me, I’m not going to be your friend,” those were the things that made the public sit up and take notice. The inside baseball stuff, I think, would never have risen, in terms of the public notice, to something that would count as impeachable.

DePue: It does have a feel though of being on a slippery slope. Does it not?

Currie: It does, and I felt very comfortable that we included those because they were legitimate. Now again, I don’t think they could have stood alone. If that’s all we had, I think we would have gone nowhere. There would not have been an impeachment. But we had more than that.

DePue: Then we get to the “pay-to-play” activities.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: There’s a phrase that rings Illinois history, doesn’t it?

Currie: Yes, it sure does.

DePue: It’s been going on for how long?

Currie: Probably forever.

¹⁰³ To compensate for a flu vaccine shortage in the 2009 season, Governor Rod Blagojevich sought FDA approval to purchase up to 87,000 doses of flu vaccine from European wholesalers. (<https://khn.org/morning-breakout/dr00026425/>)

- DePue: You've mentioned a couple of these, and certainly the most prominent one is the US Senate seat. How about the attempt to extort the Tribune Company, the *Chicago Tribune*?
- Currie: That was incredible to me. I didn't get that at all. I mean, I thought that was not only inappropriate but completely boneheaded. What in the world was he thinking?
- DePue: Well, he was thinking that the *Chicago Tribune* kept writing bad articles on him.
- Currie: Yeah, they were, but that's... Yeah. You're not going to... Never mind.
- DePue: So he was attempting to get a couple members of the editorial board fired, basically.
- Currie: Yeah, that's not going to work. I don't think there's anything wrong with trying. But why he thought that would be effective, I can't imagine.
- DePue: Well, wasn't he trying to extort the Tribune Company?¹⁰⁴
- Currie: Yeah, but I can't remember what the issue was.
- DePue: It was... Let me see if I have it. Financial assistance from the Illinois Finance Authority.
- Currie: Oh, maybe they had some project that they were getting some help with, and he was going to try to stop it.
- DePue: Was that in connection with the children's hospital, as well?
- Currie: No. This would have been a different issue. You know, as we say in my trade, "You never pick fights with people who buy ink by the barrel."
- DePue: I'm biting my tongue right now (laughs), not to bring it up to modern day.
- Currie: Oh right, I know, yeah.
- DePue: Did you use, in the House, the tape recordings?¹⁰⁵ Were they available, and were they used?

¹⁰⁴ Impeachment charges against Governor Rod Blagojevich included a pattern of conduct constituting abuse of power. One of those was "Plotting to extort the Tribune Company by withholding state funds unless it fired certain members of the editorial board who had been critical of the governor."
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rod_Blagojevich_corruption_charges)

¹⁰⁵ Rod Blagojevich was brought down largely on the strength of his own words. Audiotapes secretly recorded by the FBI as part of its 2008 corruption investigation were used in his trials.

Currie: I believe we did, but don't hold me to that. They were certainly very much in the public sphere. So whether we used them or not, everybody knew what they said, the ones that the FBI had released publicly. And those are the only ones we had access to.

DePue: What was the committee's opinion about whether or not you would allow Governor Blagojevich to be part of the proceedings as well?

Currie: My recollection is that he was welcome to come and testify.

DePue: Were you surprised when he declined to take that opportunity?

Currie: A little. I thought that it might have been smart for him to try to... Now I believe that he did testify in the Senate during the trial. I think that's right.

DePue: Yes, he did.

Currie: Yeah. So I don't know why he chose not to talk to us, but maybe he figured the handwriting was on the wall and that he should save his ammunition for a point at which it really did make a bigger difference.

DePue: So you've got the first step. Your committee recommends impeachment proceedings. The vote for that, was it unanimous?

Currie: I think it was. I think it was. Now, in the House, the full House, his sister-in-law, Deb Mell, became a member, and she did not vote for the impeachment.

Here's what happened. The committee voted to impeach. The House voted to impeach. Because the legislature changed—It went from one General Assembly to the next, between December and January—there was a concern that we ought to redo it, just to make sure that the new assembly was on record as being also for impeachment, just in case anybody raised the question, "Well, that was an old assembly. What are you doing with their information, their votes?"

So we did do a second round. Both Durkin and I spoke for the articles of impeachment, and the only person who did not support that motion was Deb Mell, the governor's sister-in-law.

DePue: Was that the second time around?

Currie: Yeah, that was in the new assembly.

DePue: The name I had down was Milt Patterson. Was he the same seat in the previous assembly?

- Currie: No, no. Maybe I'm misremembering.¹⁰⁶
- DePue: I do remember (laughs) his sister-in-law.
- Currie: Yeah, she was the standout, and I think she was the only one. Now maybe he wasn't there when the new assembly convened, but she did not take his place.
- DePue: I'm going to quote you now. This is in your House statement. I guess this is in the General Assembly, not the committee; I believe that's the case. "The evidence we gathered makes it clear that this governor tramples on the legislative prerogatives."
- Currie: Yes, that's back to the JCAR issues and buying the vaccines...yeah.
- DePue: "He breaks state and federal laws. In his own words, he expresses a willingness to barter state official acts and state taxpayer money for personal and political gain. The governor has failed to uphold his oath of office." And in another article, you were quoted as saying, "He has forfeited his right to hold office. He should be impeached."
- Currie: Yeah, I stand by those statements. As I say, painful statements, and I would say everybody on our committee—and I'm sure this is true of all the members of the House—everybody on our committee took very seriously the responsibility. Nobody gave it the back of his or her hand. Nobody said, "Oh well, you know, throw the bastard out." My sense was that the enormity of the decision was palpable. People understood that we were overturning the results of a fair, free, and open election, and that's very heady, very serious stuff.
- DePue: Do you think maybe some of the Republicans were giddy with delight over the process?
- Currie: Yeah, possibly, and I suspect that they would have all been for it, even if the evidence hadn't been quite so heavy. I think there tends to be a willingness on the part of the minority party to topple the people in charge.
- DePue: Maybe you just answered this next question, but what...
- Currie: I mean, Bill Clinton. Think of Bill Clinton and the Republican Congress, where they were more than happy to impeach him, never mind the Senate didn't convict.

¹⁰⁶ On January 9, the House voted 114–1 to impeach Blagojevich. The only member to vote against was Milton Patterson, a Democrat from Chicago's South Side. A second vote for impeachment, taken on January 14 at the beginning of the next General Assembly, resulted in a vote of 117 for impeachment, 1 opposed. That one opposition vote came from new House member Deb Mell, Blagojevich's sister-in-law. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rod_Blagojevich_controversies)

- DePue: What was your emotion? What were the emotions in your caucus after that vote was taken?
- Currie: Well, as I say, I think people were very chastened. The idea that here was a guy that was our governor, that we all kind of were for, has so misused his office that we don't have any other choice is shocking. But it's also very uncomfortable, that here we are, overturning the results of a fair, free, and open election. That's **very** difficult. People were chastened, but I think they all felt they did the right thing.
- DePue: By this time, things were moving pretty quickly. The 114 to one, pretty overwhelming vote in that respect, goes to the Senate. They move pretty quickly. How closely were you watching what was going on in the Senate?
- Currie: Very closely. I was not one of the House prosecutors. We left that to the legal team, but I was certainly paying very close attention.
- DePue: So the House prosecutors are presenting the case to the Senate?
- Currie: Yes, and I think that was David and Heather and Mike Kasper. And that was fine; there was no reason for them not to do it. They were the ones who helped put the case together, and they're all lawyers. I'm not.
- DePue: Were you in the Senate chamber watching all this?
- Currie: Some of it, not all of it. Some of it I was, yeah, listening to.
- DePue: Now, you said you kind of remember Blagojevich making a statement in the Senate. Do you have any specific memories about that, because it was typical Blagojevich, over the top?
- Currie: Braggadocio, braggadocio. It's kind of like, "You know me. I'm me" And how he could think that would be a way to play at that point, I don't know. I don't get it. But it did not move many hearts and minds. As I say, it was interesting to me that there was at least one member who did say, "Wait a minute. Some of the stuff that he's done is kind of good stuff for my community" but ultimately voted to impeach because everything was wrapped up together.
- DePue: I'm not a psychiatrist. You're not a psychiatrist, but you heard some of the statements being made, assumptions. "He must be a sociopath." "There must be something..."
- Currie: Or a narcissist or a whatever, yeah. I have no idea. I think he got into a very difficult situation. I think he had real ambitions and thought he was on track. And he **is** a very personable chap.

Here's just an interesting little sideline. There were two people running for Congress when Rostenkowski was no longer there, two members of the House. There may have been many others, Nancy Kazak and Rod Blagojevich. They came in the same class. And I think virtually every member of the class signed up with Rod because he's a really personable, really nice, really nice guy, you know. So his style, his persona was very open, very easy, very gregarious. It just said something to me that they all quickly lined up in his corner for the congressional race.

DePue: So it was Kazak who lost the race to Blagojevich?

Currie: Yes, yeah. There may have been others who lost as well, but I was only interested in the fact that the... I mean, she had many credentials. She was certainly a solid person, a good reformer, all the rest of it, but it was just interesting that friends and neighbors politics came to the top. And it was on that basis, I think, that most of his classmates, the people who came in the same year he did, chose his side.

DePue: Did you watch the vote in the Senate?

Currie: Yes.

DePue: With every single senator having something to say.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Does any of that really stand out to you?

Currie: The one thing that did is the individual or individuals who said, "But wait a minute, some of what he did was a good thing." That didn't mean that they didn't think it impeachable, but it did mean that they said, "Wait a minute, let's not forget that some of the things he did were good for the people, particularly people in my district."

DePue: Frank Watson was the minority leader at that time. He had recently suffered a stroke.

Currie: Right, I forgot that.

DePue: And often times one of the byproducts of that is you tend to be emotional. I understand he was emotional. Do you remember that?

Currie: I don't remember that, but I'm not surprised.

DePue: And his conviction. Once the Senate convicted him, did you have the same feelings as you did once the House impeached?

Currie: Yep.

DePue: Was there any sense of relief? This is behind us now?

Currie: Yes, oh, absolutely, but still feeling chastened, feeling as if we had really had a very difficult challenge and that we had met it, difficult though it was. And I think there was definitely a feeling of relief that it is over.

DePue: Now, maybe this is a little tougher one. What is it about Illinois politics that we get this? This is the fourth governor in modern history...

Currie: I tell you, my sense is that each of them had a different kind of problem that led to the conviction. I think they're not all peas in a pod. I don't think they're all focused on the same, inappropriate things. As I say, I think Blagojevich felt cornered. I think that what he did as a result, lashing out, doing things that were completely inappropriate, was because he felt cornered.

That is not an excuse. I don't mean that to be an excuse at all. But he didn't start out to say, "Oh, how can I line my own pockets?" No, that was not what he was about. But then, when he got to a point when he felt that his ambitions were thwarted, then I think he saw ways to enhance his opportunities that were stupid. But what can I tell you?

George Ryan, I think, just fell into the trap of good old boy politics. I don't think the things that he did were intentional, in the sense of, "Oh my heavens, I'm going to do something illegal here." I think they were the old ways of doing business.

Danny Rostenkowski is somebody else who, when he started out, you could sell the chairs or whatever it was that he did.¹⁰⁷ Then the rules changed, and either he didn't notice or somebody never told him. So he was offering things to his constituents that were not a big deal, but that he did so became actionable. So he's somebody who never caught up with the new reality.

DePue: Dan Walker would say, "I was sent to jail. It had nothing to do with what I'd done."¹⁰⁸

Currie: That's right. That's exactly right. He would be right when he said that, completely separate kind of issue.

¹⁰⁷ Long among the most powerful figures in Washington as the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, former Representative Dan Rostenkowski, pleaded guilty in federal court two counts of mail fraud stemming from the use of public funds to pay employees who did little or no work, and to buy personal gifts. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1996/04/10/rostenkowski-fraud-plea-brings-17-month-sentence/81dd9bf4-cb0f-40fb-897f-5f7a1b3952a1/>)

¹⁰⁸ Former Illinois Governor Dan Walker pleaded guilty to federal charges that he improperly received nearly \$1.4 million in loans, some of them from a savings and loan association he owned. (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1987-08-06-8702270503-story.html>)

- DePue: And Otto Kerner, of course. When I started my interview series with Governor Jim Thompson, Governor Jim Thompson made his name by sending Otto Kerner to jail.
- Currie: Yeah, yeah. And that was the horse racing scandal?
- DePue: Right.
- Currie: I never was real familiar with it. And what was the problem, kickbacks again? Was that it?
- DePue: There was some insider trading. I think that would be the simplest way to say it.
- Currie: Okay.
- DePue: And there are plenty of people who think that there wasn't much of a case in that respect.
- Currie: Yeah, okay. But again, I think, stemming from a very different personality, a very different set of facts. So I guess I don't see these as being peas in a pod, comparable in the actual carrying out of the misdeeds.
- DePue: But Leader Currie, you've been in Chicago politics your whole life. You certainly have heard the reputation that Chicago in particular and Illinois in general has across the country about corruption.
- Currie: Yeah, I know, but I'm not sure it's fair. I'm not sure that we deserve it. (DePue laughs)
- DePue: Would you agree with—we mentioned his name earlier—Bernie Sieracki, who wrote the book, *A Just Cause*, on the impeachment, that this event was perhaps the most significant event in Illinois legislative history?
- Currie: I think that's quite possible, yeah, the first and last impeachment. And again, that's a very heavy, very heavy challenge and responsibility, not just impeachment but conviction.
- DePue: We're going to move beyond the impeachment itself, but he's still not out of the limelight.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: In fact, I think because of what the Adams were convincing them to do with Blagojevich... What do you call him now? Is it former governor Blagojevich or just...?
- Currie: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: He decided to hit the public circuit. So he went on [talk shows]: [*The Late Show with*] *David Letterman*, went on *Larry King Live*, was on *The View* with the ladies on *The View*, was on [television networks] CNN and MSNBC and Fox News. You're shaking your head.

Currie: Yeah, for what? For what? Did he gain anything from that? I don't think so. I don't see how it helped with the criminal trial.

DePue: My understanding, and this is what Mr. Sieracki told me, is that the public gets enamored with the public personality of these individuals, and then it becomes much more difficult to prosecute and convict.

Currie: Well, I would agree with that, except that the jury that's actually charged with that responsibility isn't necessarily a jury that watches *David Letterman*, *The View*, and all the rest of it, and it becomes attenuated [watered down]. So they saw him in this context, but by the time he's actually on trial, and the twelve jurors are making their determination, we're a long way from *The View* and *David Letterman*.

The general principle, I think, is accurate, but I think how it plays out in an individual case forgets that you've only got twelve jurors. It's not as if this is just the court of public opinion.

DePue: I believe one of the examples, though, that was presented... We're just at the twenty-fifth anniversary of OJ Simpson's trial...¹⁰⁹

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Or his arrest, and that was one of things now. "See? They didn't convict him."

Currie: Yeah, but that was very different.

DePue: Here are some of the other things he did. He wanted to get on reality TV, which would have required him to leave the country.

Currie: Patty did it.

DePue: And Judge Zagel...

Currie: Said no.

¹⁰⁹ In 1995, O.J. Simpson was found not guilty of the murders of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ronald Goldman. After the verdict, polls of public opinion continued to break down along racial lines. Close observers say the O.J. Simpson trial was a watershed in Americans' perception of the law. (<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/oj/themes/impact.html>)

- DePue: ...said, "No." Patty did get on *I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!*¹¹⁰
(laughs) Is that the name of a show? I guess.
- Currie: I think it's the name of a show. I didn't watch any of it.
- DePue: Where she famously ate a bug, I think.
- Currie: I believe she did. But to me it didn't help them in any way, shape, or form. It just held them up to what I would describe... Well, maybe I come from a very different kind of place, but I would think that makes you a subject of public ridicule.
- DePue: He even had his own show on WLS radio for a while.
- Currie: Yeah.
- DePue: I assume you weren't listening to that either.
- Currie: No, and he didn't invite me as a guest.
- DePue: What was he talking about; do you know?
- Currie: I have no idea.
- DePue: He even was on Donald Trump's *Celebrity Apprentice*.¹¹¹
- Currie: Oh my god. I didn't remember that.
- DePue: Sorry to bring back all these memories. He [Blagojevich] was fired in episode four.
- Currie: Okay.
- DePue: I'm leading up to what happened in his criminal trial. So August 17, 2010... This is a year, over a year, almost a year and a half since he was actually impeached and convicted.
- Currie: Yeah.
- DePue: A hung jury, on twenty-three of twenty-four counts. Doesn't that play into the argument that his defense attorneys were giving him?

¹¹⁰ *I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!* is a British reality TV series in which a number of celebrities live together in a jungle environment for a number of weeks, competing to be crowned "King" or "Queen of the Jungle." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I%27m_a_Celebrity...Get_Me_Out_of_Here!)

¹¹¹ *The Celebrity Apprentice* is an American television reality competition series. It was a variation of *The Apprentice* series, hosted by then real estate developer (later 45th president of the United States), Donald Trump, from 2008 to 2015. Trump "fired" Blagojevich from the show for having poor quality leadership and not delegating the team correctly. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Apprentice_\(American_season_9\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Apprentice_(American_season_9)))

- Currie: Well, maybe. It may be that the fed's case wasn't as strong as it looked from the outside, as it looked from the tapes they decided to share with the public on the day they arrested him.
- DePue: My understanding is—Who knows how accurate this is?—there was only one juror who refused to go along with them.
- Currie: To convict, yeah.
- DePue: To convict. Then it was June 27, 2011, he is convicted of seventeen of twenty charges. So they dropped four of the charges, and he's convicted on seventeen, not guilty in one, and no verdict for two counts. That leads us then to the sentencing, and that's December 7, fourteen years.
- Currie: I don't know enough about federal criminal sentencing to know, but there are those who say that was a pretty long sentence.
- DePue: Do you have any sympathy for him having that long a sentence?
- Currie: I do, if it really is kind of out of the box. I take it it was. Judge Zagel, whom I know, although I didn't know him then. I think we were in college together. I think that he had a reputation as something of... I wouldn't want to say a hanging judge but somebody who played by very strict rules and was certainly not particularly sympathetic to defendants. As I say, Mark, I don't know whether they're right or not, but there were certainly plenty of people who were not in Blagojevich's corner, not Rod Blagojevich fans, who did think that the sentence was longer than it needed to be or that it should have been.
- DePue: I know that the family has made several appeals. They've gone nowhere. And my understanding is today his only opportunity to be released early would be a presidential pardon.¹¹²
- Currie: And my understanding is that they're working hard on that, that Patty is writing the president and that they're doing whatever else they need to do in order to bring attention to what's happened to him.
- DePue: Had you heard that Illinois Republicans had basically told President Trump, "Don't pardon him"?
- Currie: Yes, I had heard that. Whether he'd listen to them, I have no idea.
- DePue: He is his own man.

¹¹² President Donald Trump announced February 17, 2020 that he had commuted the prison sentence of former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who was impeached and removed from office in 2009 on corruption charges. (<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-expected-grant-clemency-former-ill-gov-rod-bлагоjevich-ex-n881051>)

Currie: He is his own man.

DePue: Well, you'll be relieved to know that I have no more questions on Rod Blagojevich (laughs).

Currie: Phew.

DePue: That leads us to the next governor, and that's [Democrat] Pat Quinn, a very different kind of person.

Currie: A very different kind of person.

DePue: What are your thoughts of Pat Quinn as a person?

Currie: Well, first of all, I love him. He's a wonderful populist. He's a progressive, and I just think the world of him. Several counts against him, I will certainly admit. That is, he was the force behind the Cutback Amendment.

At some level, not only did I disagree with him on that, but I would not say I never forgave him for that. I think that he used lots of rhetorical devices to sell it, even though he sold it on the wrong grounds. "It's going to save money." "It's going to da, da, da." That really wasn't true. What it really was, was the opportunity for the voters to throw out fifty-nine lawmakers, with a single flick of the voting switch.

DePue: We talked about this already a few sessions ago, but I'm sitting here thinking today, Are there any legislators still in the House who were affected by that? And I can think of only one.

Currie: Michael Madigan and me. I think we're the only ones.

DePue: So most of them are saying, "Cut back of what?" probably.

Currie: Yeah, right. But anyhow, I wasn't happy about that because I thought our system worked well, and I thought it was an imaginative, interesting arrangement. And I know how it happened.

It happened because of the tensions after the Civil War, and [*Chicago Tribune* Editor], Joseph Medill made this proposal. There's a lot to be said for saying that the minority party, whichever it is, wherever it is, deserves some direct representation. Now, there are many things you can say against the system, but to me it had real democratic value. If there are Republicans in my area, if there are a bunch of them, why shouldn't they have direct representation?

DePue: One of the other things he [Quinn] was known for in the '80s, especially, was the Public Utility Board.

Currie: Yes, right.

DePue: Your view on that?

Currie: Not a huge fan. I understand where that comes from too. He also very much wanted to elect the Illinois Commerce Commission. I never was for that either. I come out of a League of Woman Voters tradition, in which you want fewer elected officials rather than more. The idea is that you hold accountable the people at the top.

The idea that we're electing all these smaller agencies... There may be a whole lot of public focus the first time you do it, but over time there will not be the same focus, the same interest. And if there is, it's possible it's because the special interests that those agencies regulate are busy with the campaign checks, with the campaign activity to see to it that their own are the ones who are selected.

DePue: So it ends up being like those judges on the ballot where, "I don't really know who this person is in the first place?"

Currie: Exactly, exactly. That could be okay, except that, to the extent that they always say, "Oh yeah, we really care." Maybe people do care the first time around. "I want someone who's really going to sock it to the utilities." But then ten years later, it's the utilities that are busy buying and selling the seats.

DePue: I'm going to ask you about your definitions here because you defined Quinn as both a populist and a progressive.

Currie: Yeah, I would say that's right.

DePue: So populist, what does that...

Currie: A populist, I think, is the Cutback Amendment. It certainly is the Citizens Utility Board, electing the ICC. Those are very populist things. They're popular. They speak to me—my small self—in this larger world that I can't control.

A progressive, I think, I would define as somebody whose basic focus is on policies that are helpful to people who need a hand up and are... For example, the progressive income tax. That would be an example. So, what Pritzker just did would be a progressive policy, more opportunities for people to register and vote. That was something that Quinn was very good on.

Now, I think I may have told you my favorite Quinn story. That is after he became governor. He had these business cards, "Pat Quinn, Lieutenant Governor." Well, he didn't want to stick it to the taxpayers, so he just scratched out the word "Lieutenant" (DePue laughs), and he used those forever. That's a very Pat Quinn thing, you know, "I'm going to save the

taxpayer's dollars," a little wacky, a little irrelevant, but why not? (DePue laughs)

DePue: You're making a couple points in the process; aren't you?

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: How close was he to Blagojevich?

Currie: I don't think very. I think they were pretty far apart. I remember once walking, with other people, walking into the mansion. This has been fairly early in the first term, I think.

DePue: Of Blagojevich?

Currie: Blagojevich.

DePue: And Pat Quinn is in the basement, sitting at a desk with his briefcase, you know (whatever her name is, Betty whatever), with papers strewn all over everywhere. And someone says, "Oh, is this your office?" So not only was, I think, the reality that he was not close to Blagojevich, but the perception was that Rod was on his own. And Pat was just left out there doing whatever lieutenant governors do.

DePue: Did you have an admiration for Quinn in doing something, trying to make something out of that position, when there wasn't much of a relationship?

Currie: I really don't remember what he did, but probably. Was he doing mine subsidence? A lot of lieutenant governors do that. Maybe he did rivers and quarries. I really don't remember.

DePue: One of the things he did that impressed the veterans was go to the veterans' funerals.

Currie: Oh, yes, yes. That's a very populist thing to do. I don't mean to sound like I'm knocking populism. I'm not. I think it's a wonderful strand in American political life, American political discourse. But Pat certainly had it more than most, more populism in his pinky finger than most of the rest of us have in our whole bodies.

DePue: Now, I suspect you have just answered this next question. I asked you about your views of him personally. The second part of that is how you viewed him as a politician.

Currie: Tougher. I think he did not have great leadership skills, and he had a tendency to move from issue to issue to issue without kind of squaring the circle, without saying, "Okay, this is where we're going." I think he had a tendency

to get deflected from his cause, a tendency to not always understand the distinction between what's important and what's not quite so important.

I think that's why he lost the next election. I think there was a perception, not that he was a bad guy, not that he didn't do anything, but that he did not have the kind of maturity, the kind of leadership that meant you could trust him to move the state in the right direction.

DePue: You said he lost the next election. He did win one election as governor, and we'll certainly get to that. How would you describe the relationship between Quinn, whose roots were in the Dan Walker administration in the mid-1970s, and Speaker Madigan, whose roots were in the Illinois legislature, in fact, going back to the constitution?

Currie: I don't think they got along badly, but I don't think that they were very close, either politically or governmentally. That is to say, I think that Madigan was certainly happy to work with Quinn, and I think a lot of his populist ideas Madigan liked. So it's not as if they're coming from very different places.

But I think the issue of leadership and staying on course was probably... I can't speak for him [Madigan], but I wouldn't be surprised if that was an issue for him as it was for many others.

DePue: One of my favorite quotes in Illinois politics is attributed to Mike Madigan about Pat Quinn. I believe it has something to do with the Cutback Amendment fight. The quote is "Pat Quinn should be ashamed to call himself an Irishman."

Currie: Ha! (both laugh) I love it. I never heard that. I love that.

DePue: So what's that quote all about?

Currie: I don't know, but it sounds great. It sounds great. Maybe what it means is that we stick together when we're Irish, and we don't begin cutting people out, cutting people away. I think probably that's what it's about. It's about clan loyalty.

DePue: Well, it's unfair of me to even ask you what Madigan's thoughts were when he made that quote.

Currie: Yeah, but I wouldn't be surprised if that was the genesis.

DePue: And he might not even admit to ever saying that. Who knows? His [Quinn's] performance as governor. How would you describe your relationship with him as governor and you as majority leader?

Currie: I don't know that we had a close personal relationship. I dealt mostly with his agencies, the people who were running his agencies and were coming forward

with ideas. I had more of a relationship with them than I did with him, and his senior staff. I don't mean to say that we didn't get along well, but we were not sitting about talking about how we get from here to there. He was not that kind of strategist when it came to members of the assembly.

DePue: When you were talking about Rod Blagojevich, he had a terrible relationship with the legislature that had disregard, would not come down and work with the legislators.

Currie: Right, and the people that he was close to were... My impression was, all kind of locker room talk, mostly the good old boys who were hanging around, a lot of sports talk, just was very...not professional.

DePue: How about Governor Quinn? Did he reach out to the legislature?

Currie: I think he did, but I'm not quite sure what the impact was. Again, I think he had a scattershot approach to governing, and I think that did not stand him in good stead. He also ran into other problems down the line. Not funding the AFSCME [American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees] contract was certainly one. Denying salary increases and things like that made him unpopular in many circles. And I think there was a general sense on the part of the public that he was not a strong leader.

DePue: If the reports in the news media are correct, he did not have a good relationship with your boss either.

Currie: I think that's right. He probably didn't.

DePue: Did Madigan express that to you sometime?

Currie: I don't remember hearing that directly. But it would be, again, the same kinds of issues, the lack of focus, the lack of forward whatever. Although there were areas in which they were very, very close. I mean, they appreciated one another's ideas.

DePue: Do you know of another legislator who would be closer than you were to Mike Madigan?

Currie: I'm sure there are many who, on a different kind of level, might be closer than I. We have a good working relationship, and we do at some level see one another outside the confines of the legislature. But we've never been bosom buddies.

DePue: So you don't ever recall Madigan expressing his disdain or disappointment?

Currie: Yeah, a little. But I don't feel comfortable going into that, and not a lot, not a lot. Just, you know, there's a kind of a PQ. "Oh, it's PQ again." "Oh, it's Pat Quinn." You know, that kind of language.

DePue: Okay.

Currie: Not specific.

DePue: Was he more successful or relatively successful getting his agenda through the legislature?

Currie: I think he was. I think he did a pretty good job.

DePue: Do you know anything about his relationship on the other side, the Senate with John Cullerton?

Currie: No, I don't. But he had some really good people. Jerry Stermer was his chief of staff for a time, and he had been Voices for Illinois Children, earlier had worked in the legislature in the Commission on Poverty or something like that. Mike Gelder who did a lot of his healthcare policy... Both of those were people who were familiar to many members of the progressive part of the House Democratic Caucus.

DePue: I assume all of that would be things that you were sympathetic to.

Currie: Yes, yeah. He appointed Julie Hamos, who was a former colleague, to head the Department of Healthcare and Family Services. His appointments looked pretty good from the perspective of those of us who approve a progressive agenda.

DePue: Two thousand and ten is another gubernatorial election year. Which one of these Republican candidates would you have preferred yourself to be running against? And here was a crowded field: Bill Brady, Kirk Dillard (a senator for a long time), Andy McKenna, Jim Ryan, Adam Adamowski, and Dan Proft.

Currie: I would say that, of that group, the one that's most close to being a statesman is Kirk Dillard. I would have worried about him winning.

DePue: That he would have had a chance to beat Quinn?

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Then what did you think about Bill Brady's campaign?

Currie: Didn't look great to me, but I didn't follow it real closely. It was not mostly focused in the Chicago Metropolitan area.

DePue: His statewide election obviously.

Currie: Yeah, yeah, but his focus was on his base, which was not the City of Chicago.

DePue: Well again, what you heard in the press a lot—and I think the press tried to make more of this than maybe Brady wanted to—was the social issues. Would you agree with my statement?

Currie: I think you're exactly right. I agree that his stands would not have been particularly popular. Certainly they should not have been in the front and center, but they were.

DePue: So he loses the election. Quinn wins the election. It's a fairly close election.

Currie: It is, yeah, closer than I expected it to be.

DePue: But the other thing that happens in 2010 is a redistricting. I wondered if there was any impact on your district in the redistricting that year?

Currie: No.

DePue: Again, the Democrats have the majority in both the House and the Senate.

Currie: We do.

DePue: You've got the governorship.

Currie: I was queen of the map too.

DePue: Again. Do you remember anything in particular about that redistricting?

Currie: Well, I remember a lot. My heavens, we had hearings up and down the state, back and forth, across here, across there. We heard from many organizations, many affinity groups. Chinatown was particularly...

It's interesting to me—this is an aside—but we have Greektown, where a lot of restaurants are, but Greeks don't live there. Chinatown, Chinese, Asian Americans, generally do live there. There is a significant Asian population, Asian American population, in the area that we define as Chinatown.

DePue: And that's over there, close to McCormick Place?

Currie: Yeah, west of McCormick Place, Cermak and 23rd Street, Cermak and Wentworth, that whole area. But in that area, there are large numbers of Asian Americans. They spent a lot of time talking about the importance of trying to keep them all together in a single state rep district, giving them influence in the state senate district. It was really quite interesting. And there were other groups that were making the same kind of pitch.

What else was interesting? Well, one of the things I did as chair of the committee was that I asked my Republican colleagues if they had a particular

thing they wanted to see in the map. Was there some special something? You know, "My mother-in-law lives two blocks away. Don't take her away," whatever. So we were trying to be helpful to the members of both parties, not just those who were Democrats.

DePue: Over the decades, Mike Madigan's district has become increasingly Hispanic.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Has he ever expressed a concern about that?

Currie: Not to me. What choice does he have? He's done very well working with Hispanics. And as you know, he keeps winning by large numbers. The last time he had a contested general against someone with an Hispanic name, Mike crushed him.

But I think his alderman works very closely with the Hispanic community. I think Mike and all of his staff do. I think they provide various kinds of constituent services that are valued by the immigrant community.

DePue: I'm going to show you the maps after the 2000 census and after the 2010 census. Should I pause for a couple minutes while you look at that?

Currie: Yeah, yeah. (pause in recording) I'm ready.

DePue: Do you have any general comments about what happened in your particular district?

Currie: Well, in my area, I moved further south. That was in part because we had lost population, so there was a lot of movement in the map, many people going further north, some going further south.

There was also a very big concern about making sure that we tried to respect minority populations. And even though the numbers of minorities and the concentration was not as heavy as it had been in 2000, we were trying to make sure that we gave the opportunity for members of minority groups to elect their own. But instead of being an 82 percent African American district, we were more often dealing with those that were 62 percent or 65 percent.

DePue: For your particular district or the...

Currie: For the African American districts in the City of Chicago.

DePue: One of the things I noted was that it looks to me like the districts you guys drew after the 2010 census were more elongated.

Currie: Yes, and that's partly a function of the population happening to capture more. I don't remember why we did the elongated... Ten years before this they went the other way.

DePue: Well, the Republicans are saying that you guys were deliberately trying to carve out as many Democratic controlled districts as possible.

Currie: They would have said that in 2000 as well. We would have said the same thing about them in 1990. There is a tendency for whichever party is drawing the map to try to maximize its opportunities.

DePue: So you're agreeing that that is the case when you're drawing this map?

Currie: And this case went to federal court, and the federal court said that the map was legitimate, that it was substantially equal in population, respectful of geography, respectful of community, respectful of members of minority groups and that it met all the requirements for a legitimate map.

I certainly wouldn't agree that the only thing that mattered was to elect more Democrats. In the context in which you're trying to maximize community representation and geography and equal population, yeah, there may be some tendency to look at that as well.

DePue: You'd had a chance to do this exercise twice or three times?

Currie: Twice, I believe.

DePue: Why did Madigan select you to do that?

Currie: I guess I was the queen of maps, as well as the queen of impeachment (DePue laughs). Wait, when did I do it? I did it in 2010. Yeah, I did it in 2000 and 2010.

DePue: And most people would say there's as much power, political clout, in drawing legislative maps and congressional maps as there is in any other exercise you would do.

Currie: That's probably right. But I would just point out that the members all had a lot to say about what the maps looked like, and we did have experts working with us, people who were familiar with the mapping process, who understand how maps work. So we were not just drawing blindly. And we were not asking those people to try to figure out a way to make us the kings of the hill, kings and queens of the hill.

They were giving us good solid data, good solid information about how communities react together and which parts of communities are important to keep together. And again, members and the Congress... Congress

tends to do its own map, and then they bring it to us and they say, “Would you like to ratify?”

Remember when Barack Obama was there, in the state senate, in 2000. One of the things that happened—You’ll remember that he’d run against Bobby Rush, without success—and one of the things that happened in the map that the congressional delegation, Republican and Democratic, sent us was that Barack’s house was drawn out of Bobby Rush’s district. So I remember Barack making a very impassioned speech for fair play on the floor of the Illinois Senate. I don’t think he mentioned that his house was drawn out of the district (DePue laughs).

DePue: I remember the 2000 congressional map for Illinois. It looked like it was the poster child for gerrymandering.

Currie: Yep. But again, that was challenged in court and succeeded.

DePue: But I believe it was gerrymandered in a way to protect all the...

Currie: Incumbents.

DePue: ...incumbents.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: I probably have asked you this before, but this is my last chance to ask you. Would you agree with Mike Lawrence [former director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University] that there is no more political act in politics than redistricting?

Currie: I think that’s right. I think that’s a fair statement.

DePue: Did you shy away or gladly take on the role as queen of redistricting?

Currie: Well, you know, what are my options, right?

DePue: Well, I would think that’s quite an honor, that he’s given you the chance twice.

Currie: Sure, absolutely. And I was able to work well with my colleagues and with these members of the community. I mean, we certainly paid attention to what people said at the hearings that we had here, there and everywhere. And I think that we incorporated many of their proposals and many of their specific issues into the maps that we drew.

DePue: More going back to Pat Quinn now.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: March of 2011, he signs legislation abolishing the death penalty.

Currie: Yes. Oh my god, what a day was that. What a day was that!

DePue: You remember that day?

Currie: Yes. I'm very strongly an opponent of the death penalty, and I have been since before I went to Springfield. So this was like, "Oh my god. We actually did this?" And then Pat Quinn signed the bill. It was just absolutely wonderful.

And he also signed gay marriage. So when I say that he's a progressive, I mean that in a really good way, and those are two really great examples.

DePue: I suspect I know the answer to this. Are there any crimes that you would consider applying the death penalty?

Currie: No, no. I think it's been well demonstrated that it's discriminatory. It is random, and there is absolutely no reason to think that... (alarm sounds) That's a...

DePue: Car alarm.

Currie: Yeah. No reason to think that it serves the purpose for which it was created. It's totally random... Two people committed the same crime. One of them goes to the death chamber, and the other doesn't? What does that mean? And, of course, the racial and class discrimination involved in the imposition of the death penalty is another major issue.

DePue: I'm going to pause until...(alarm stops) Oh, there we go.

Currie: Yeah, there it stopped.

DePue: All I have to do is just mention that I'm threatening to pause.

Here's a hot topic in Illinois politics for decades as well. What do you think of Governor Quinn on the issue of the pension crisis?

Currie: I think he did the right thing. I think that's a very tough issue. I was back and forth on the issue myself. And the question, of course, was whether the constitution protected the benefits already promised to people who were already in the workforce. I thought it was a good faith effort on the part of the legislature and on the part of the governor to try to say, "Let us see if we can find a way out." So what we proposed was, I thought, not draconian, but it certainly did impinge upon the value of their benefits. And the court, as you know, unanimously threw it out. So we were wrong.

DePue: Do you remember the specifics of the initiative that you and the governor...

Currie: What we did was we changed... Let me see, oh... There were a lot of specifics, but I don't... I think we changed the COLA [Cost of Living Adjustments]. That would be the biggie.

DePue: Yeah, I should know the answer to that myself, so I apologize.

Currie: That would be the biggie.

DePue: How about the two-tier pension reform? It was December 2013 when that was signed.

Currie: Yeah, I thought it was '11, but it's okay. So, okay, here we are. We're absolutely strangling under pension debt. So okay, we may not be able to touch the people whose pensions we've already promised, but what about the workforce going forward? It seemed to me a totally reasonable and totally legitimate legislative/executive enterprise to try to recreate the system that guarantees benefits at the end of the work period. Now, did we do it right? I don't know.

There are those who would say that it was stingy enough that some might argue that we really ought to be on Social Security instead. The one that started in 2013 are going to be very hard pressed to have retirement security. So I'm not sure that's right. All I know is that there is an argument that says that we were pretty draconian. But the idea of trying to do something so that we don't keep on adding to the burden, totally legit.

DePue: There are five pension systems in the State, as you know. I think only the teacher's pension system is excluded from Social Security. But it's the largest as well.

Currie: It is the largest, but I think a lot of state employees, depending on when they got hired, depending on where, they also don't have Social Security.

DePue: That might go way in the annals of history. I joined in 2006. I believe that it's been around longer than that.

Currie: Yeah, okay.

DePue: I'm certainly paying into both Social Security and into the pension system.

So does that mean that you would agree with this statement, that State employees generally get a very generous pension plan?

Currie: I think that's right. It's not overly generous, in my view, but it is generous. And at a time when the private sector is seeing fewer and fewer pension opportunities at all, there are people who feel that it isn't fair that the State workers are well protected. That was the genesis for the changes for 2013.

DePue: You had alluded to this already, but Governor Quinn's relationship with the public sector unions was damaged pretty severely when he blocked the pay increase.

Currie: Right, and the pension thing. That also really annoyed organized labor. And that's, I think, partly how he lost the next election.

DePue: The pension thing, do you mean that there's a two-tier system?

Currie: Well, the two-tier system but more important, the effort to redo the pension plan for those who already had been promised. So it was the effort to undo what we'd already done, as well as the next effort to say, "Well, wait a minute," going forward.

And I... You know, I was at some meeting with a judge, a Cook County circuit judge, who said, "I'm covered because I'm grandfathered. I'm in the pension system as it has been and was and will be. After the Supreme Court threw out the new bill, I'm fine." But going forward, the judges who have since gone on the bench, he said, "They're never going to retire because they're not going to be able to afford to."

I said, "Yeah, and that's true of the teachers. It's true of the State workers. It's true across the board." What we've done with the tier-two, I think is probably not adequate, probably ought to have been more generous than we were.

DePue: There's more of an onus to have Social Security plus, and for the case of the teachers, to be putting some of their own money aside, in addition to what...

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: The pension gets you to the issue of the budget, which gets you to the issue that, where the bills that the state is racking up generally are more than the state is taking in in income, you're making delinquent payments by borrowing.

Currie: Yes, and then we also raised the income tax.

DePue: Right. Well, I'm going to get to that in a second. Are you comfortable at all with the notion that we keep going back and borrowing more?

Currie: I would be happier if we didn't, but it does take a great deal of the collective will to decide that we're going to find the revenues we need to step up to the plate. And that's always a very hard sell.

DePue: And the problem increasingly—and I don't need to mention this to you—is the credit rating for the state has gone into the toilet.

Currie: Yeah, although it's looking a little better with Pritzker. They're anxious about the uncertainty of the revenues from gambling, from recreational pot, but I think the score card I saw seemed to be saying, "Yeah, we're on a better track," even though no guarantees.

DePue: And for those who are listening to this fifty years from now, we've got a brand new governor and a new day in Illinois. So we'll finish off with that tomorrow probably.

Let's talk about the income tax increase. This is 2011, from 3 percent to 5 percent for personal rates, 4.8 to 7 percent for corporate rates, again in 2011, and a temporary income tax increase. You're rolling your eyes again.

Currie: I'm rolling my eyes. Well, everybody always says, "Oh, why don't we make it temporary?" And my argument has always been, it's only going to get you in trouble if you do, that if we say, "Oh, this is only temporary," and we come back in a year or two years or whatever it is, it turns out that the needs are still there. We haven't solved the structural problems of the state's finances, so now we're in deep trouble, and getting the votes to do it again is extremely difficult. So I never was a fan of making any of these taxes temporary.

DePue: Leader Currie, you just said, "Everybody says, 'Let's make it temporary.'" Who's everybody?

Currie: Many of the members. "Oh, I can't vote for it if it's permanent, but I could sell it if it's only temporary. And then I can tell people I will not vote for it again," duh.

DePue: Oh both sides of the aisle?

Currie: Oh yeah, for sure.

DePue: What was Speaker Madigan's view on the subject?

Currie: I don't think he started out being a fan of making it temporary, but that's what we did. So enough pressure, that's what will happen.

DePue: Was that Quinn's position as well?

Currie: I think so. I think he also started out not saying, "Let's do it temporary." But I think he became a voice for temporary. Again, it's a very populist approach, right? "Yes, you're taking money out of my pocket now, but you promise you won't take it out tomorrow." I was the queen of the income tax too.

DePue: Well, you have used the phrase yourself, "tax and spend liberal." (laughs)

Currie: But I think I sponsored the bill.

- DePue: You ended up sponsoring it, even as a temporary bill.
- Currie: Yeah, I think.
- DePue: And the timing of it expiration is interesting; isn't it?
- Currie: Right, it's right after the next gubernatorial election.
- DePue: So in other words, the next gubernatorial election is all about the income tax.
- Currie: Taxes, yup.
- DePue: And that's by design as well?
- Currie: Well, I didn't remember that it was, but it certainly sounds like it, doesn't it?
- DePue: That's certainly how it played itself out. Yeah, it expires, January 2015.
- Currie: Right, and then the new governor came in and said, "Oh, don't renew the income tax." Right?
- DePue: So, at that time of the election, and now we've got this fiscal train wreck. Then there's who to blame for the fiscal train wreck. And it's Madigan and Quinn that most people are blaming for the fiscal train wreck.
- Currie: Right.
- DePue: Is that fair?
- Currie: No, but there is no fair in politics. It is what it is.
- DePue: And what was the consequence for the state in that respect?
- Currie: Well, the backlog of bills kept growing, and our ability to make a budget became diminished.
- DePue: I'm going to pick up on a couple of others here, for today. Let's talk about concealed carry, which happened during the Quinn...
- Currie: Yes, thank you, Nino Scalia.
- DePue: Nino Scalia.
- Currie: Yeah, his was the deciding vote, or at least he was certainly involved in the vote in the... What was it called? I can't remember the name of the case. The one that said that yes, people should be able to have handguns in their homes.
- DePue: Okay, so you're talking about [U.S. Supreme Court Judge] Antonin Scalia.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Nino?

Currie: I knew him when he was... He taught on the faculty here, with my husband. In fact, in fact, the only time I've ever done a background check for the feds was when Nino was appointed to, not the Supreme Court, but one of the other courts. Because I knew him, whatever, they came to me and said, "Was he a..." whatever, whatever? I gave him a high mark for character and all like that. I didn't like his politics, but I didn't say that to the FBI.

DePue: I have never heard that nickname for him before.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: It was, obviously, something that you were strongly opposed to, I would guess.

Currie: Yes, indeed.

DePue: Walk me through how we got to that. You've alluded to it.

Currie: We got to it because the courts basically said, "You cannot stand in the way of people who want to protect themselves and their homes with their guns." I think we were the only state without concealed carry in the country. So I think the legislative leaders, recognizing that this was going to happen, tried to put some brakes on it, tried to make some compromises that seemed reasonable. For example, let's not have guns in government buildings. Let's not have guns in daycare centers, in schools and so forth and so on.

But the people who were for more guns, here, there, and everywhere, really did get their say. So it was not as if this was what you'd call really balanced legislation, in my view. It had too many opportunities for too many people who shouldn't have guns out there on the street to have them.

DePue: The people who shouldn't have guns would include?

Currie: Well, people who are likely to engage in road rage, likely to misuse, likely to become intemperate for one reason or another.

DePue: How about the discussions you hear sometimes about mental health issues. That's connected with, at what point is the courts or the system allowed to take somebody's weapon away without due process? Talk me through that.

Currie: The question really becomes, what is due process? So the Illinois legislature... Well, we passed a bill. The governor vetoed it, I believe. But then it passed again, and I'm sure Pritzker will sign it if he hasn't already.

What it says is, if you think... If you, law enforcement, or you, the husband or the father, think that there is a risk to the public that Johnny Joe has guns (and we know he does), you can go to the court and petition the court to take them away. There is an opportunity for a due process hearing, but the court would then be allowed to take the guns away. And that would not be a bad thing.

Wasn't the Aurora...not the Aurora shooting. There was another shooting, not in Illinois. But the person had come from Illinois, and he was obviously mentally distressed. He had these guns, and so he shot them.

DePue: Was that the case that dealt with the shooting at the Republican baseball game?

Currie: Yes.

DePue: And then it's the issue that going through that procedure you just talked about is a lengthy process.

Currie: Well, I think the idea here was to streamline it so that, yeah, it is not a year's worth of due process. It is a short period, during which the individual whose guns are going to be taken has an opportunity for a lawyer. A defense lawyer has the opportunity to explain to the court why that's wrong.

DePue: As a person who's been opposed to, or anti-gun, described as anti-gun for most of your career, all of your career, did you have any proposals or amendments to the legislation?

Currie: Well, I think I tried to make it less strong from the perspective of who gets to carry. But as I say, there were those who felt it was pretty balanced. At the end of the day, we did keep them out of daycare centers, out of schools, out of government buildings. That's certainly a good thing. We made it easy for retail establishments to post notice that you can't have one here.

DePue: Would that include churches, as well?

Currie: Yes.

DePue: It passes on July...

Currie: But I think the churches had the opportunity to opt in or opt out, rather than...

DePue: July 9, 2013, it's overridden by Quinn, who vetoed it. Then there's an override on his veto—that's how we should say it—which would suggest that it took some Democratic votes to override the...

Currie: Oh, gun issues tend to be regional, not partisan. So the downstaters tend to be in favor of guns, whether they're Democrats or Republicans. The upstaters,

whether Republicans or Democrats, seem to be a little leier of guns. Now, many Republicans in the more moderate parts of town are anxious about the issue because, if they don't go whole hog with the NRA, they are fearful of primary opponents.

So while I'm right that the tendency is for the suburban, particularly the inner suburbs and the city people, whether they're Republicans or Democrats, to be very concerned about guns, it doesn't always get reflected in the roll call because a Republican might be fearful that, if they vote other than with the NRA, they get primaried.

DePue: I have just a couple more questions about the Quinn administration. You've already mentioned this, in fact, passage of the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act.

Currie: Yes, that was another wonderful moment. Before the [U.S.] Supreme Court said we had to, Illinois said, "Yes" to gay marriage.

DePue: Is there anything else that you want to mention about the Quinn years?

Currie: Well, as I say, I was a fan of his progressive politics, particularly when it comes to things like the death penalty and gay marriage, terrific. And he was certainly progressive when it came to how do you put a government together, and what are your priorities? What are your values? The populist part of him has never been my favorite. And his leadership skills, I think, were not quite as strong as I had wished they would be.

But he ran into problems like, okay, we have a tax increase, and we had to do a tax increase because we were drowning in debt. But that's never popular. And his relationship with the State workers, both with respect to the pension changes and with respect to the salary issue, the wage issue, made him, you know, *persona non grata*.

Now, I don't think that's a good argument for electing Bruce Rauner, but I think that's where people started when it came to the 2014 election.

DePue: If you don't mind, I'm going to end with that today.

Currie: Okay.

DePue: We've got Governor Rauner to talk about next time.

Currie: Okay, great. That is tomorrow.

Currie: We are moving right along.

DePue: We are, quicker than I thought, but that's fine. So we can finish off tomorrow.

Currie: That's great.

(end of transcript #9)

Interview with Barbara Flynn Currie

#ISL-A-L-2014-049.10

Interview #10: June 18, 2019

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, June 18, 2019. Again, this is Mark DePue, and I'm with Leader Barbara Flynn Currie.

Currie: Former, former leader.

DePue: Former leader. So what title should you be going by now, former leader?

Currie: I don't know. Whatever you like. I don't care. You know, making a fuss and then saying, "I don't care." That's so like me (DePue laughs).

DePue: I think this is our tenth session. You and I think it's our last session.

Currie: Yeah, and if it isn't, it isn't. We'll do it again.

DePue: I think we can get through. One of the subjects that maybe is not necessarily your favorite. I would suspect Governor Rauner is not your favorite governor.

Currie: Least. I would say, "least favorite governor."

DePue: And you've served with quite a few.

Currie: I have.

DePue: Thompson...

Currie: Thompson, Edgar, Ryan, Blagojevich, Quinn, and Rauner. So, you know, a fair number from each party too. It was not just that he was a Republican, and I don't like Republicans. I got along pretty well with the agendas of Thompson, Ryan, Edgar, particularly Edgar, but the other two as well.

DePue: I know Thompson and Edgar would consider themselves moderate Republicans.

Currie: No question that you're right.

DePue: And I'm not sure how Ryan would classify himself.

Currie: I think he ended up being... Now, he came out very strenuously against ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. So he cast himself as more conservative than I think his background suggested that he should be. A pharmacist from Kankakee, not an ideologue. And yet, in some ways he acted that part.

Then, of course, with the death penalty. He was there when the death penalty was restored. And then when he became governor, the whole issue of the death penalty took on a very different meaning, a very different cast.

DePue: It's interesting that we're talking about those two. You can say the same thing for Quinn, as well, and even Blagojevich. They all had governmental experience.

Currie: Right.

DePue: And most of them had a significant amount of legislative experience.

Currie: Well, Thompson did not.

DePue: Thompson did not, no.

Currie: No. He was a prosecutor, but he never served in any of the other branches of government. But Edgar, yes, and Ryan as well. But Ryan's career was focused on the state legislature, so he didn't have executive branch experience.

DePue: But they had that experience of how to work with the legislature and get things done.

Currie: Yes, exactly. And their agendas, as you pointed out, were moderate, reasonable agendas. So here's just a little interesting aside. In I can't

remember what year it was. It was before I got to Springfield, '74, '76, after Roe versus Wade. The anger on the part of lawmakers about Roe v. Wade led to the introduction of large numbers of bills, clearly unconstitutional, throwing everything into them but the kitchen sink. So one of the bills—and I just saw Governor Thompson's veto message last year or the year before—one of the bills would have restored funding for people on Medicaid for abortion services. And it did 15,000 other things.

But his veto message is all about how unfair it would be if wealthy women can have abortions and poor women, just because they are poor, cannot. And it was a really interesting. I mean, that debate has not really been at the forefront. He could have found fifteen other things in the bill that he didn't like and explained why he vetoed it. But this was the thing that he picked up on, and I thought that was fascinating.

DePue: That's an interesting place to start for today's discussion because towards the end I think we'll kind of finish with that same topic.

Currie: Let me just also say that, of course, his veto was overridden by large, large numbers of votes, not surprisingly.

DePue: Let's get then to the 2014 gubernatorial race between Pat Quinn, who you and I discussed at length yesterday, and Bruce Rauner. Just a couple questions about the primary. You've got [State Representative] Bill Brady, [DuPage County Republican Party chairman] Kirk Dillard, [State Treasurer] Dan Rutherford, and [businessman] Bruce Rauner. That's quite a team for that particular election, all of them fairly prominent.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Did you have any preferences among the Republican candidates?

Currie: Actually, I thought well of Dan Rutherford also. He had been a colleague of mine, but he ended up in that scandal, and that pretty much put the kibosh on his campaign.¹¹³ And I'd always thought highly of Kirk Dillard. Now, I did want Pat Quinn to win. So, in a way I was happy that it wasn't Kirk Dillard who was running against him.

DePue: Did you think that Quinn was vulnerable, that Dillard could have taken him out then?

¹¹³ A sexual harassment lawsuit that tanked the political career of former state Treasurer Dan Rutherford was dismissed on November 21, 2017 in federal court in Chicago. (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/politics/ct-rutherford-sexual-harassment-lawsuit-20171122-story.html>)

Currie: Could have, yes, because Dillard himself was fairly moderate, and Brady, as we pointed out, was kind of suffering with the social issues that were defining him. And upstate, that was not a particularly helpful place for him to be.

DePue: But that's not the way it worked out. Bruce Rauner ended up winning.

Currie: Yep.

DePue: What did you know about Bruce Rauner at that...

Currie: I knew very little about him at that time. I knew that he was a change agent. "We're going to shake it up. We're going to turn this state around." I did know all of that, but I didn't know much about his background.

Now, after he'd been elected, I did talk to people who'd known him in previous incarnations. And to a person, they did say that he was one of the most arrogant people they'd ever met and that if you were in a small group, he was clearly the person who thought himself the smartest. So there was a quality about him, I think, from the very beginning that put a premium on his own perceptions and understanding of the world. He didn't much listen to other people, or as we might say, suffer fools gladly.

DePue: What was his background before he ran for governor?

Currie: I never really knew. Actually, he was a venture capitalist. I thought, first of all, that he had been a negotiator, [that] he'd been buying and selling and negotiating this deal and that deal. But I think that's wrong. He mostly did the actual turnaround. So his company would buy a company, and then he would be in charge of going in, off with their heads, do the reorganization, and turn the company around or not.

His role was never one of negotiation, compromise, "Let's figure it out. Let's work together." It was more like the Queen of Hearts. He comes in and redoes the chart, and people are gone and whatever. He never had that kind of collegial relationship with the people that he worked with.

DePue: But a very wealthy man. Was he a self-made man, in that respect?

Currie: Yes, to a degree. He came from a fairly well-to-do family. They lived in Wilmette or Winnetka. His father was a fairly high-level businessman; I don't remember what company he worked for. And Bruce himself went to good schools, Dartmouth. I can't remember where he got his MBA, but he certainly had a good deal of help from a fairly affluent, well put together, certainly upper middle class family. But he was a self-made man, in the sense that the amounts of money we're talking about here are well beyond what he might have expected, coming up as a high schooler.

DePue: In the hundreds of millions of dollars?

Currie: I don't know. You know, once you get beyond a million, (DePue laughs) I lose all touch with reality.

DePue: I think he was a Harvard MBA.

Currie: I think you're right. But I know he was Dartmouth undergraduate.

DePue: Did you help with the Quinn campaign that time around?

Currie: Yeah, but not a lot. I can't remember what I did, but I would have been willing to make little speeches for Pat. But I didn't do any organizing in the precincts, anything like that.

DePue: What do you think made Quinn vulnerable against somebody like Rauner?

Currie: Well, I think first of all, the change story is appealing. "I can shake things up. I can turn things around." I think people like that, no-nonsense, roll up your sleeves, get to work. Also, Pat was still suffering from the income tax. He was suffering from his inability to deal with the wage claims by the State workforce. He was still reeling from having tried to change the pension program for sitting state employees. So he was not in the best of posture with some of the groups that traditionally would have stood with him. I don't mean to say that I think they deserted him, but their enthusiasm may have been a little low, compared to what it would have been expected to be, for just those three reasons. Then again, I think the leadership thing is important too.

DePue: And you've expressed in the past that you didn't think that Quinn had high leadership skills. Would that be fair to say?

Currie: I mean, he's a great guy, and he had good ideas. But I don't think he was really good at implementing or focusing on the agenda items that might have made him stand out from the crowd.

DePue: In terms of the leadership you would expect for a governor, does that boil down to the ability to work across the aisle, the ability to work with legislators, to sit down with them?

Currie: Absolutely and with stakeholders. Not just with lawmakers but also with organized labor, the business community, all of those groups. Now, Thompson was very good at all of those things. I remember when there was some question about whether Illinois was going... Maybe George Ryan introduced a bill, "Let's be a right-to-work state."

Well, Jim Thompson broke out the beer barrels on the mansion lawn in his, you know, worker jacket, with the union label at the back. There he was just having a great time with all the union people, promising this would never happen in Illinois. He was really a past master at working with the

stakeholders, whether they were the kind that might start out being with him or the kind that might start out not being particularly in his camp.

DePue: It's one of Thompson's favorite stories too (laughs).

Currie: It's a great story. It was stunning, totally stunning.

DePue: The day he invited all the union members over to the mansion for a beer.

Currie: Yeah. And there he was in his, you know, little worker jacket. You know, the wool jacket with the emblem on the back, perfect, perfect.

DePue: Let's get back to Rauner and Quinn. Rauner wins that election with 50.27 percent.

Currie: Yes, it was very close.

DePue: Quinn polled 46.35 percent, and the libertarian [Chad Grimm] got 3.4 percent, roughly. Do you think it was the income tax issue that sank Quinn's...?

Currie: I think it was all four of those things. It was income tax. It was his inability to work it out with AFSCME, in terms of the raises they thought they were due. It was the pension program; they hadn't forgiven him for that. And there was a question whether he was a strong leader, whether he was moving us in the right direction.

DePue: Rauner carries every county, except Cook County. Here's the ultimate question, though: How did the Democrats fare in the legislature in that election?

Currie: We did all right. I think we lost a couple of seats but not many. We still had Democratic majorities in both the House and the Senate. Not as robust as we have today but certainly pretty good.

DePue: Was there a super majority in either house?

Currie: I think there was in the Senate. I'm not sure there was in the House. In the House we may have had seventy, just one short. Or maybe we had exactly seventy-one. And then, of course, the question is whether all seventy-one are really Democrats. You know, as people say, "I belong to no organized political party. I'm a Democrat." (DePue laughs) We had a big problem, you may remember, with Ken Dunkin, leading to his loss in the next election.¹¹⁴

DePue: He was the one who was willing to...

¹¹⁴ In the 2014 Democratic primary for Illinois governor, House Speaker Michael Madigan and his allies worked to oust Dunkin for breaking with the party and supporting some of Governor Bruce Rauner's initiatives. (<https://abc7chicago.com/juliana-stratton-ken-dunkin-illinois-house-5th-district/1248111/>)

Currie: He was clearly playing footsy with the governor's office. And when it came to efforts to override a veto of childcare funding that was only fair and good, we thought he was going to be in Springfield with us. He wasn't. And when he finally turned up, he didn't vote with us.

That happened several times, in which he showed that he was not being a team player, and he was not standing up for the needs of his community. And he got whomped in the next election by Juliana Stratton.

DePue: What was his community?

Currie: Mixed. South side, west of here, a little further north. [It] covered a little bit of, I believe, not the Gold Coast but part of the downtown loop area but also the neighborhood, so a little bit of Englewood, I think. I'm not sure exactly all the neighborhoods. It did not have a center. It was not a district in which there's one single community that takes over.

I think he felt a little freer to do what he wanted to do because, who would notice? But people did notice when it turned out that he turned his back on low-income people in his district, and he sure paid the price.

DePue: Let's move then to the administration, the Governor Rauner administration. What was your hope for this outsider, the guy with no governmental experience, going into it?

Currie: Well, my hope was that he would play the same role that previous governors of both political parties had done. That is to say, he would work with the stakeholders, work with lawmakers, try to help, try to do the things he wanted to do without so stepping on people's toes that the chances are good he's not going to get anything done.

DePue: Without getting into specifics because we're going to get there pretty quickly, what kind of relationship did he form with the legislature?

Currie: I would say not a good one. He was, as I said, very... I would say, arrogant. I don't know that that so much came through. But in conversations with him, he never listened. It was his way or the highway. It was his path, and he was just oblivious to other...

He invited lawmakers to supper from time to time, and there was a group that included some northwest... This was all Democrats, maybe there were eight of us; I'm not sure, northwest side. I think there was someone from the south suburbs, Sara Feigenholtz, Greg Harris, me, kind of progressive lakefront types.

And one of our guys, one of the members, who is himself a plumber, was talking about the importance of protecting people against people who

don't know how to build houses and don't know how to deal with plumbing. And Rauner... That meant nothing to him whatsoever.

So, here is somebody who is explaining about how, in places where they don't have adequate protections, adequate regulation, you actually end up with some disasters. But Rauner could not hear that; he could not hear that. He did not like unions, particularly public sector unions. But he didn't like private sector unions either. So he was just... That meant nothing to him.

We had a conversation about the constitution, the relationship between the judiciary and the legislature, and he was completely off base. He was not a student of government. I mean, I don't remember what the issues were, but he was clear that he was just, you know, he was going to be the legislative power. And he was going to do what he wanted to do.

DePue: Is that what you meant by saying he was completely off base?

Currie: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: In what respect?

Currie: Well, he didn't understand the separation of powers. He didn't understand that he's not been made king. He seemed to think that he had this plenipotentiary [full power] authority, and he didn't. But he didn't know enough about the workings of government to understand the relationship between the legislature, the executive, and the courts. And he was very hostile to the courts. "They're not going to tell us what to do."

DePue: You mentioned his thinking that he had his own power over the legislature. That was the same complaint that people had about Rod Blagojevich but perhaps with none of the charm that Blagojevich had.

Currie: Right, absolutely none of the charm, absolutely none. And Blagojevich did work a little better with the legislature than Rauner did.

DePue: Considering that there's a solid majority in both houses of the legislature for the Democrats, how much leverage did he really have?

Currie: Very little, very little. He had his turnaround agenda. Sometimes there were forty-four items on it. Sometimes it was down to ten. But it was a wacko agenda.

Issues like worker's compensation... Now, we had made some major changes in the workers' comp system in 2011, but what he basically wanted was a workers' comp system that said, "If you've been hurt on the job, you get to go to the emergency room, and that's it. That's the ball game." He didn't like project labor agreements. He didn't like... What were the other? There were a couple of other.

DePue: I'm going to go through each one of the items on the turnaround agenda. So I'll give you a change to talk about them. Here's my challenge. Should I talk about the turnaround agenda before the budget fight or after the budget fight or during?

Currie: Either way, either way.

DePue: So I'm going to talk about the turnaround agenda beforehand, knowing full well that much of this is also very much part of that budget fight.

Currie: No question.

DePue: Did you have any personal dealings with him?

Currie: Hardly. Yeah, a couple of times. This dinner party and, you know, a couple of conversations. In the transition, I did have a meeting with him in the transition offices. And again, there was this blindered approach, that it seemed as if we weren't talking in the same ballpark. And then all of a sudden, he was off someplace over there.

DePue: Now, this is maybe a hard one for you to judge. Do you think he literally truly wasn't bothering to listen to people, or he listened and then he did what he thought was the right thing?

Currie: I think a bit of both, but I think really, he didn't listen. I think his style was not one and his whole business experience had not been one in which you compromise, negotiate, listen to the other side.

DePue: Which had worked well for him when he was in the business community.

Currie: Yes. But again, his role in the business community wasn't negotiation and compromise. It was takeover; "Off with their heads."

DePue: Let's get into the turnaround agenda.

Currie: Okay, the forty-four list or the ten whatever.

DePue: I've got a few on here. You might want to add a couple.

Currie: I hope not.

DePue: Minimum wage.

Currie: Okay, well, of course, he was death on the idea of the minimum wage. And there are some economists who say, "You don't need a minimum wage. The market will sort it all out." But I think that, for most people in this country at his time, there is a sense we should have a minimum wage, and it ought to be fair. The worker should be worthy of his hire. And if you're out there

working, you deserve a decent day's pay at the end of the workday. So I think his approach, which is to say he'd rather abolish all minimum wages, didn't fall on very open ears among the larger populous. And you see that now, with the push to fifteen.

DePue: Of course, he didn't have the power to abolish because that's federal law, but he didn't want to reduce it to the federal level, I believe.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: Unions.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: You've already touched on that a couple times. Can you elaborate on his notion about the relationship with public sector unions to protect?

Currie: Okay, as I understand it, his view was that public sector unions are running the state. That because they give contributions, they give help to Democrats. Democrats cave at the bargaining table. We give away the world, and all that's in it to any public sector union. I think that's not a fair reading of what actually happens, but that was his view. So any opportunity he had to undercut the public sector unions, he was more than happy to embrace.

Now, he didn't much like private sector unions either. So it's not just one/or; it's both. But his particular focus was on the public sector, and that was why the Janus case.¹¹⁵

DePue: I didn't want to get to that. But going back to the notion of this allegation that he was making, that there's too cozy a relationship between the public sector unions and politicians, who turn around and negotiate favorably for the union members themselves, you yourself said that Illinois is generous with its public sector employees.

Currie: I have said that I think we've made reasonable contracts, but I don't think that they've been give-away-the-store contracts. I think anybody who is managing state government has to be respectful of the taxpayer dollar, has to be respectful of the resources that are available. And yes, we have been a state that I think has been good to unions, both public sector and private sector, but I don't think that we've gone overboard in the sense that it's been give-away-the-store.

¹¹⁵ Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31, No. 16-1466, abbreviated Janus v. AFSCME, was a landmark decision of the US Supreme Court on US labor law, concerning the power of labor unions to collect fees from non-union members. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janus_v._AFSCME)

DePue: One of the things he initially did was try to block fair share payments. I don't know if that's a term that we have used in the past. Can you describe what a fair share?

Currie: Yeah, I don't remember what that stands for.

DePue: Fair share, meaning people who have the option not to be in the union that have to pay their fair share.

Currie: And that's the Janus case. That's exactly the Janus case. And his view was that, even if you're segregating the funds and the requirement for the person who chooses not to join the union but is required to pay fair share, his view is that, oh, the line is blurred and that that individual is helping to pay for all the political stuff. It's not true, but that was certainly his perception.

DePue: Since we're there, how did the Janus case resolve? Because it did resolve in the Supreme Court.

Currie: Mr. Janus won his case. The Supreme [Court] said, "You don't have to pay fair share." Now there's a fight over whether you can get back the money that you did pay in fair share, and I think mostly the courts are saying, "No, you can't," that you do what the law said at the time, and the law at that time said, "Yeah, you pay fair share."

I don't know what the impact has been on unions. There was, of course, a concern on the part of the unions that it will be difficult to recruit people if they don't have to pay fair share. Why wouldn't you want to be a freeloader?

I don't know to what extent it's really undercut their efforts to organize and to maintain a collectively organized workplace. It's hard to get information from them because they certainly don't want to say that it's undercut them. They don't want to say, "People don't want to join."

DePue: That decision came down just about a year ago because the important Supreme Court decisions always come out in June.

Currie: At the end of June, yeah.

DePue: So, June of 2018. I will say that I've had a chance to interview Mark Janus about the case and also a representative, Mitch Roth, who was the general counsel for the Illinois Education Association.

Currie: Ah, okay.

DePue: And I hope to do the same for AFSCME somewhere down the road.

Currie: Good, good.

DePue: So I get, again, the balance on both sides. But it's certainly an important case for the unions.

Currie: No question about it. And the idea of fair share was long standing. Wasn't it the Abood case that started it out fifty years ago, that said, "Yeah, fair share. You're benefiting. You're reaping the rewards of the collective bargaining contract. You have a responsibility to help pay for it. Freeloading is not the American way."

DePue: Very much part of that same discussion is the right-to-work option. That was something that Governor Rauner was pushing. I'm sure he would have liked to do it for the entire state. He probably recognized that wasn't going to happen. But he wanted to give local communities right-to-work. Define what that actually meant.

Currie: Well, what that meant was that you couldn't require the local community to hire people who are a part of a union. And first of all, let me just say, the idea that you're going to pick apart these few things, and that's going to turn the state around is nonsense on its face. But secondly, the idea of undercutting the opportunity for people collectively to bargain, to work together against the people who have the resources, just strikes me as anti-American.

DePue: Property tax freeze. That's a subject that comes up repeatedly in Illinois.

Currie: Oh, and I was on one of those task forces that he created, oy!

DePue: (laughs) You're rolling your eyes again.

Currie: I'm rolling my eyes again. The problem is this: The reason Illinois property taxes are high is because the state has never stepped up to the plate to fund public education. So in the average state, forty cents of every property tax dollar goes to fund public schools. In Illinois it's more like sixty, sixty-two cents. That imbalance explains why property taxes are high. And until and unless the state steps up to the plate, there's no way of controlling the growth in property taxes, without undercutting the ability of the school systems to educate the kids.

We've made some progress on that in the last few years. The new money that went into the Evidence-Based Funding model, I think, will be helpful, but that's going to be a long time coming.¹¹⁶

DePue: Was that something that occurred in the Rauner administration?

¹¹⁶ Governor Bruce Rauner signed into law Public Act 100-0465 or the Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) for Student Success Act in August 2017. The law comprehensively changes the way that school districts receive the bulk of state funds. EBF sends more resources to Illinois' most under-resourced students. EBF is intended to be the first step toward ensuring all schools have the resources they need to provide a safe, rigorous, and well-rounded learning environment for all students. (<https://www.isbe.net/Pages/EvidenceBasedFunding.aspx>)

Currie: I guess it was the last year I was there, and there was a huge fight. He [Rauner] was of the view that it was a giveaway to Chicago, so we went back to the negotiating table. And he got his scholarship opportunity program. Then, all of a sudden, it wasn't a giveaway to Chicago. Chicago, in fact, did well.

DePue: It was one of his campaign themes, that he wanted to improve funding for secondary education.

Currie: Yes, not higher education but secondary.

DePue: We're going to get to that too. Term limits, he pushed hard for term limits.

Currie: Well, my view has always been, we have term limits. It's called the voting booth. Most people are running for two-year or four-year terms. And if you don't like them, vote them out. The idea of artificial limits on who you can support for public office doesn't strike me as the democratic way to go.

I don't even think that it does anything. If you look at the states that have done term limits, what you find is, first of all, that the institutional memory, instead of being with lawmakers, is with the bureaucrats and with the lobbyists because they're not term limited, and that many people going into a legislature are quickly looking forward to seeing what their next gig might be, since they know that they're time limited in the job they hold.

DePue: Their next gig, as in becoming a lobbyist?

Currie: Becoming a lobbyist, working for a corporation, whatever it might be. But I'm concerned about the lack of institutional memory and the fact that term limits for lawmakers sounds great, but if you remember that the bureaucrats and the lobbyists don't have them, it seems to me they have a leg up in the legislative process because they know the ropes.

DePue: No one can accuse Illinois legislature having a lack of institutional memory, so here's my next question. I'm wondering, in your view, how much of his push for term limits had to do with Mike Madigan being there since the 197...

Currie: Oh, no question, no question about it.

DePue: And I think, to a much lesser extent, probably he was focused on you as another very long-term...

Currie: Sure, and Cullerton would have been the third, yeah. But let me just say also that when it comes to the literature, what happens in states with term limits, they're not economically more successful, economically more viable. He wanted to attach the term limit agenda to a better Illinois infrastructure, better economy. And there's just no correlation between the states that have and the states that don't have and what happens to them when it comes to economic

success. The premise was phony. He may not have known that, but the premise was phony.

DePue: But it's popular among the populist side of the...

Currie: Oh totally, totally. "Get rid of the bastards," right? The Cutback Amendment, back to that, right? The opportunity to throw out fifty-nine people with the single flick of the voting switch. That's very appealing. We like to throw the bastards out.

DePue: The next one you've talked a little bit about already, worker's compensation reform.

Currie: Right, right. [It was] never clear to me exactly what he had in mind. As I say, in 2011, we did make some major changes in the workers' comp program. Could we have made more? I suspect we could have. But what I think he was looking for was a workers' comp system similar to, I think, what they have in Indiana, which is not a very full-throated approach to people who are hurt on the job and that there are then long-term consequences in their ability to care for themselves and to go back to work.

We did hear testimony during our committees of the whole from people from other states. And there are many states that just plain turn their backs on people who've been hurt on the job. That to me is wrong.

DePue: The next one on his list was redistricting reform, to reform the process.

Currie: And that's fine. But again, I don't know that it has anything to do with economic success or turning the state around, from the perspective that we are now better able to deal with the economic challenges of the global economy.

DePue: There have been a couple efforts—I think this is even independent of Bruce Rauner—to reform the redistricting process, to get something on the ballot as an amendment or referendum.

Currie: Yes, that's right, a constitutional amendment.

DePue: And it's always failed. Why has it always failed?

Currie: I think the courts have basically thrown it out. And the reason that they have is because... I don't remember what their actual rationale was the last time they tossed it. My sense of the amendments that were proposed—I wish I could remember what their analysis was—my sense of the proposal was that, because it was done by a committee, it was so filled with specifics, you've got to have 3,942 hearings.

Here is a panel that's going to be able to do A, B, and C. And here is the way it is constructed. It was filled with the minutia that ought to be

legislatively organized, not in a constitution. And there are limits in Illinois to the opportunity for citizens to initiate constitutional changes.

DePue: That is my understanding, that there were legislative prerogatives that had been crossed in the...

Currie: Right.

DePue: So that was different in the way that the Cutback Amendment was phrased?

Currie: Well, the Cutback Amendment was pretty straightforward. It just said, "We're going to cut the number of lawmakers in the House, and we're going to change the way we elect them."

There was quite a big flap at the time on the question whether the Illinois Supreme Court should have found that that should have been on the ballot, because there is that two-part test. It has to change the structure, and it has to change—Wait, how does it go?—the structure and the procedures. Any amendment that deals with the General Assembly has to deal both with structure and with procedures.

There was a great flap over whether the Cutback Amendment actually met that test. And the vote on the Supreme Court was five-four, with actually one Democrat voting with the Republicans. I don't know that that's meaningful.

DePue: Let's set aside what the specifics about that, over the last couple referendum. Do you think the State needs to have reform in redistricting?

Currie: I do, and there were several proposals that we made in the legislature, to try to make some changes in the redistricting process. For example, there was a proposal that I didn't... I think we passed it in the House. I don't think it happened in the Senate, so it never went on the ballot. But the idea would be to share some of the redistricting responsibilities with the Supreme Court, with some reference to both the minority and the majority party on the Supreme Court. So there really were efforts to try to deal with some of those things.

I guess, as a final thought—I don't know why the Senate didn't pass our bill. I thought it was pretty good. I can't remember all the specifics. Kwame Raoul, I think, was the sponsor—is that it's interesting to me that the enthusiasm for redistricting reform tends to focus on the blue states, not the red states.

DePue: But the reforms would make it less political.

Currie: Yes, that was the idea, to some extent, take politics out. Now, I don't know that you can ever take politics out entirely. I remember a story from Iowa,

where they had that approach wherein this independent group presents a map, up or down vote. And one year they managed, with no political data, to put the—I don't know if it was the assembly speaker or the president of the senate—in a district that he or she couldn't win. Well, that map was gone. Back to the drawing boards. The idea that you can do this without any reference to politics may be a little naive.

DePue: Pension reform, the perennial issue in Illinois.

Currie: Well, so we had done it. We've been there, done that, and the courts slapped us down and said, "You can't do it with people who are... They've been made promises."

Besides the pension benefit clause in the constitution which, interestingly, in the constitutional convention, came from Republicans, who were fearful that some of these local governments would give short shrift to their obligations. This was not like a Democratic/Republican thing. It was Republicans who were protective of the workers.

DePue: You're saying back in 1970?

Currie: Back in 1970, yeah, just a small footnote, a footnote.

DePue: Wasn't Rauner's proposal though to get that on the ballot as an amendment to the constitution?

Currie: Between the pension language and contract law, I would say what the court told us is, "You cannot change the rules in the middle of the game. Yes, you can change it for people going forward, new hires, but you can't change it for those who are already there."

DePue: Are you suggesting that, if it did pass... If a referendum got on the ballot to amend the Illinois State Constitution...

Currie: Too late.

DePue: ...that that amendment would be overruled by the courts?

Currie: I would believe so. [It would be] too late for the people who already [have] been promised those benefits; it's *ex post facto*. You can't take away what you already gave.

DePue: So the courts rule that an amendment to the constitution, duly passed by the citizens of Illinois, is unconstitutional.

Currie: Yes, I think the court would do that.

DePue: Wouldn't that give the courts an amazing amount of power?

Currie: I don't think so. It seems to me that the argument, the legitimacy of the argument, is essentially, "I made a promise to you, and I can't take the promise back. I can't renege on it ten years later." I think that's settled contract law, as well as reflective of the pension language in the Illinois Constitution.

DePue: And the people who were supportive of the amendment in the first place would say, "So that doesn't leave Illinois too many options to get rid of the ever-growing imbalance."

Currie: Right, what it means is pay, pay for it. Now, John Cullerton had an interesting approach, which did not become part of the conversation. But when doing the initial major pension reform bill, his idea was consideration. He was hopeful that you could work with the unions and that they might give up this, and they might give up that. But then you got this in return or they got something in return. He was working hard on it.

I don't know whether it ever would have come to pass. Unfortunately, once the "supremes" ruled against the bill that we did pass, there's no reason for the unions to go back to the table at all. But that was an interesting approach. Whether it would have materialized into anything and whether had it, it would still have been open to court challenges, I don't know. But it was an interesting model.

DePue: The way the issue was framed in the Illinois State Constitution, 1970 constitution, is very straightforward.

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: And very hard for, obviously, the politicians to work around.

Currie: Right. Again, interesting to me, that it was Republicans who put that protective language in. But many other states have used ordinary contract principles to come to the same conclusion.

DePue: I have interviewed others about that issue, and I don't mean to challenge you. That's not how it was framed when I've talked to others about it. But I'd have to go back and look at the language on that.

Currie: All right.

DePue: A couple of these, three of these in particular... His position on unions, trying to (I think you agree with this), trying to undermine the strength of unions.

Currie: Yes, yes.

DePue: Term limits, redistricting reforms, and to a lesser extent, worker compensation reforms. All of these things were interpreted by some talking heads, some

political pundits as, “Oh, he’s going after Madigan’s power base. He’s going after the Democrat’s power base.” Is that how it was perceived?

Currie: I don’t know that it was Madigan’s power base. But yes, his perception was that public sector unions were in cahoots with the Democrats. Therefore, let us tamp down their ability to do what they do. Again, tie his turnaround agenda to what that means for the state of the Illinois economy, term limits, redistricting, duh, and minimal changes in either workers’ comp or the rights of workers collectively to bargain. They’re not going to make all the difference in the world. He set up a premise that, I think, his own agenda didn’t turn out to be a good fit for.

DePue: My comments were geared toward, what would the Democrats, Mike Madigan in particular, be willing to compromise on to get to the point where you could pass a budget?

Currie: Well, first of all, we did... As I say, in 2011, before Rauner was governor, we did make some significant changes in the workers’ comp system. There’s been a willingness on the part of the Democratic leadership to work on compromise, work on changes. It’s never been a party that’s my-way-or-the-highway. Looking for opportunities for compromise has been the name of the game. To go this far, yeah. But to go that far, probably not.

I think that Rauner’s mistake was that he overreached, in terms of what he thought he could accomplish. And he did a very poor job of explaining how his changes were going to turn around the economy, increase the competitiveness of the state.

DePue: How much of that failure to get any of this accomplished was what we started with today, his personality, those traits?

Currie: I think that had a lot to do with it.

DePue: That he just wasn’t willing to sit down and negotiate.

Currie: Right.

DePue: Now, what he was seeking to achieve, what he said, was to make Illinois a much more business friendly environment.

Currie: Right, and what I’m suggesting is that a lot of the things that were on his turnaround agenda bear no relationship to making the state a more business friendly economy. Workers’ comp, yes. But I think most of the rest of it was nibbling around the edges and was not going to make any significant difference. Redistricting? Term limits? No connection whatsoever.

DePue: Do you think it was more about undermining the Democrat’s...

Currie: I think so.

DePue: ...stronghold in the state?

Currie: Yes, I think so.

DePue: That gets us to the big issue, the budget struggles. When he initially came in, as I recall, you still had half of the budget year for 2015.

Currie: We did, right.

DePue: And there was an agreement on that.

Currie: There was. We were overspending. We did not extend the income tax in January of 2015. So here we are, coming up to the end of the current fiscal year, but we're spending more money than we've taken in.

There were very difficult, heavy negotiations, trying to trim the spending remaining—This was, I think, in May, maybe late April—trying to trim some of the spending responsibilities.

These were haircuts; these were not smash and grab; these were not going wholesale, taking meat axes. [They included] some reductions in Medicaid rates, a bunch of other things. And we did adopt that budget for the remainder of that fiscal year.

The odd thing to me, the governor agreed to this. The legislative leaders agreed to this. I was presenting the agreement in a House committee and one of the governor's whippersnappers comes along to sit beside me at the table. His job is to say, "Best thing since sliced bread". "The Rauner administration is totally for this compromise." "Difficult choices, but we're making the sound, fiscally responsible decision."

Instead he's taking potshots, like, "Excuse me? Excuse me?" So I raked him a little bit over the coals afterwards and said, "No, that was not your job. Your job was to say, 'Yeah, this is good.'" Unfortunately, that did not set the stage for easier budget negotiations for the coming fiscal year.

In a way, unfortunately, much of the decisions about spending then ended up in the courts. After the courts stepped in, we were right back to spending money we didn't have. The unfortunate fallout from the failure of adopting a budget for fiscal, then would have been fiscal '16, is that we ended up spending more than we would have—money that we didn't have—had we just said, "Let's sit down and do a budget." It was counterproductive.

DePue: Some were looking at that compromise, where you had the half a year budget agreement, as a positive sign that, "Maybe Rauner will be able to work with..."

Currie: That's exactly what I thought. I thought that was great. It was like pulling teeth. It was not easy to do, but I was very encouraged that we did it. And then, as I say, it somehow fell apart. And for his people to say, "Oh no, this is really bad stuff. The Democrats are..." You know, it didn't make any sense. I don't think he had a good handle on his legislative team. I think he was just slow to get organized.

DePue: Slow or reluctant because of his personality?

Currie: Probably a bit of both.

DePue: That gets us into the... Let's see, this is 2015, so we're now talking about the 2016 budget.

Currie: Budget, right, of which there is none.

DePue: Talk about the negotiations for that budget, leading into May and then to June.

Currie: Well, they continued. We had done a budget change for the last half of fiscal '15. But now let's get organized. And then talks just fell apart, and I do not know what the answer is. I do not know why, but there was just plain no budget.

And then, of course, what happened was the courts, federal and state, ended up making the spending decisions, instead of the legislature and the governor. He didn't do himself any favors, if his concern was to be fiscally responsible.

DePue: Did the budget that the Democrats proposed for that 2016 year, did it include reinstating the budget cuts, the income tax increase?

Currie: I think we never saw a bill. I don't think that we ever proposed a specific bill. I think the negotiations were happening among the leaders and the governor. So I don't know the answer to that question.

DePue: You don't recall that the House ever actually proposed a spending bill or a budget that year?

Currie: I don't remember. We probably did. But we would have included the changes that we made in the part-year budget that we adopted in April or May of 2015.

DePue: My guess is that any kind of sense of actually reinstating those tax cuts would have been a non-starter.

Currie: I don't think so, no. You mean tax cuts or you mean the haircuts?

DePue: No, the reinstating the tax cuts that ended at the end of the Quinn administration.

- Currie: Oh, okay, yeah. I don't think we did that.
- DePue: Which would require some...
- Currie: But I think we would have said, "Okay, we're still going to go with a slight reduction in rates for services for whatever."
- DePue: Which you said before didn't happen, because the negotiations broke down?
- Currie: Right. Negotiations broke down, and then many of the decisions about spending ended up in the courts.
- DePue: Traditionally, by the time you get to mid to late May, it's the time that the four tops and the governor's office sit down, roll up their sleeves, and that's the hardball negotiations.
- Currie: Yep. Didn't happen, and I don't know why. As I say, that first window, that first six months, it looked as if we were on track. And then it all fell apart.
- DePue: So there was no meeting about the budget?
- Currie: There may have been, but it clearly didn't go anywhere. And I don't know why.
- DePue: Now, you've alluded to this a couple times. What's your view about the way the courts stepped in?
- Currie: I think that's the risk that you take if you can't put a budget together. But I think it's unfortunate that the courts are making determinations about how we're spending and at what level.

For example, when we had set Medicaid rates a little lower because of fiscal constraints, those were not the rates that the court looked at. I don't think they had a clue that we had done that. They went back to the original rates. They were requiring us to spend money, hand over fist.

And, of course, the AFSCME workers went to a favorable court someplace downstate, and they were able to win their case that yes, they deserved to be paid, even without a legislative appropriation. So the kind of pain that usually accompanies a budget impasse didn't quite cut to the bone.

I don't mean to say there were not serious casualties. Of course there were. But when it came to funding for workers, funding for Medicaid (one of the state's very biggest programs), there wasn't a lot of pain. So, small social service agencies, people who deal with epilepsy or autism, domestic violence; higher education is another whole proposition... But when it came to some of the more basic healthcare workers, there was not the hue and cry that there otherwise would have been, had they lost those cases in court.

- DePue: Are you saying that you think that the courts overreached?
- Currie: You know, I don't know enough about the legalities of the opinions, so I'm not prepared to say that. But I am disappointed that we were not encouraged to sort out our own problems.
- DePue: That things would have ended up quite differently if the courts had not stepped in?
- Currie: I think so. Yeah, I think we'd have been more responsible. We would not have dug ourselves a deeper hole.
- DePue: The way that would translate is, you get to July first, there is no budget. Nobody gets paid.
- Currie: Yeah, but then you go to court, and the court says, "Oh, you've got to get paid." And that's exactly what happened.
- DePue: And if the courts hadn't stepped in?
- Currie: Then I think it would have been a crisis, and we would have said, "Okay, let's put a budget together."
- DePue: And would the state have been better off in the long run?
- Currie: I think so. I think we would have had more control over how much we were spending and what we were spending it for. Again, I think the casualties of the lack of budget are not insignificant.
- DePue: Let's talk about the casualties. What's the impact on the state when you've got no budget for, not just one year but two years?
- Currie: Yeah, almost two, a little more than two. Well, the impact is... It's in pockets where it's very serious indeed. And as I say, those social service agencies that are not part of the Medicaid program, domestic violence, criminal sexual assault, epilepsy, all of those programs basically fall by the wayside. In addition, higher education didn't have a clear-cut case with which to go to court, and they were really struggling.

Bruce Rauner had not been very sensitive to the needs of higher education to begin with. And the cuts they were looking at were draconian. One of the things I think is important to say about higher education is that Rome is not built in a day, and if you tear it down in a day, you're going to have a very hard time rebuilding it.

So that was really a terrible, terrible... And it wasn't just the higher ed institutions, but it also was the student Monetary Award Program, tuition help for low income college students. That also did not get funded.

- DePue: And the state's unpaid bills start to stack up.
- Currie: Of course, particularly when we're spending money that we don't have in other places because the court said we had to.
- DePue: And during this time, there was no bill to borrow the money?
- Currie: I think there was. I don't remember the specifics. At some points along the way I know we did some short term borrowing but whether it was then or later, that I don't remember.
- DePue: A lot of the social services the State provides are through not-for-profits.
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: How did the not-for-profits fare during this time?
- Currie: Well, as I say, they're the ones that I think took it in the neck, depending on what they were doing. For example, if you're a not-for-profit with a contract with the Department of Children and Family Services, I think, under court orders, you might have been okay. If you're a not-for-profit, providing services to victims of domestic violence, which is not a Medicaid program, or sexual assault victims or people with epilepsy or autism, a whole range of things, then I think you're out of luck.
- We saw many, many small agencies in particular close their doors. Even the big ones, Lutheran Social Services, Catholic charities, they were able to give us chapter and verse about the loss of funding that many of their ancillary programs faced, and the numbers of layoffs and lacks in service delivery, they were unfortunately unable to avoid.
- DePue: Another analogy, "Rome wasn't built in a day?"
- Currie: Yeah, right, exactly.
- DePue: How did the budget fight differ, or did it, when you got to April, May, June of 2016 for the 2017 budget?
- Currie: Now let me just think; I'm really bad at dates. Seventeen, is that when we got the Republicans on board?
- DePue: No, that would have been the next year.
- Currie: Oh, okay. Yeah, well, it just went right on, went right on, cantankerous, contentious, and no compromise in sight.
- DePue: By this time, nationally, the state of Illinois is a laughingstock. It's a joke.

Currie: Yes. No budget, on its way to two years' worth of no budget. Yeah, we look like... And our pension debt continues to increase, and our unpaid bill backlog continues to grow. That's not a healthy picture.

DePue: And by the time you get towards the end of that year, we have the unenviable distinction of having the longest period of time without a state budget in the nation's history.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: What was your gut feeling about all this, at the time?

Currie: That it was unfortunate that we had a leader who chose not to lead and didn't seem to understand what his options were and chose to make his turnaround agenda more important than running the state.

You know who was really interesting on this topic, was Jim Edgar. He was out there railing in the press about how it was unconscionable that Bruce Rauner wasn't tending to the everyday nuts and bolts of state government. His [Rauner's] job was to run state government, and he wasn't doing it. This was not just a partisan jab. Jim Edgar was a Republican and believed in responsible governance.

DePue: There were conservative Republicans though, who were pointing the finger at Mike Madigan.

Currie: Oh sure. They always do.

DePue: Well, was there anything that Madigan was willing to compromise on, to give Rauner some kind of a victory on his turnaround agenda?

Currie: If we're just talking about the budget, I don't think that that was the issue. I don't think there was an unwillingness on the part of Madigan and his budget team to make for compromises. When it comes to the turnaround agenda, I think we did make some offers, not good enough apparently. Of course, when you're dealing with somebody who wants all of these ancillary issues, term limits, redistricting reform, come on; this is not going to happen. You're setting up a straw man. And the idea that we're going to compromise on those is just not realistic.

DePue: Was there anything that got accomplished legislatively in those two years?

Currie: Oh dear...hard to remember. I expect there were, but nothing leaps to the mind.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that, in your many, many years in the Illinois legislature, these are your least favorite years?

Currie: Yes, I would say that they were certainly my least favorite years. I think lawmakers like being lawmakers because we like to get things done. We like to solve problems for people. We like to make sure that people are getting the services that they deserve from their state government. I think we felt very much stymied, and that's a hard thing for lawmakers.

You'd think the governor would feel that way too, but he came from someplace else and didn't see himself in the same role that a Jim Edgar or a Jim Thompson would have done.

DePue: What's the impact then? Obviously, we've been talking about it a lot, but what's the rest of the impact on the state? Let's take a look at the credit rating.

Currie: Yeah, the credit rating is tanking. If you want to say, "This is a state that is a viable state; come do business here," the fact that we are without a budget, our pension debt is mushrooming, and our bill backlog is growing by leaps and bound makes it a tough sell. That's not a good message.

You're looking at a state that is fiscally unstable. It seems to me, if I'm in business thinking about where I want to go, the last place I want to go is someplace that is not in charge of its own agenda.

DePue: From Rauner's perspective, he would say, "Well, it's hostile for businesses because of the workers' comp, because of the high property taxes, et cetera, et cetera." He would be making the same kind of arguments.

Currie: Right. Well, and as I say, there's room for compromise on some of those issues. Property taxes, I think, is a tough one, since so much of our property tax goes to public education.

Again, workers' comp, we made changes in 2011. Could we have made other changes? Sure, but I think that the ball kept moving. So instead of saying, "Okay, here's a real proposal. Let's discuss it. Let's negotiate around this particular proposal." I think the goalposts kept shifting down the road, so that you don't have a basis for beginning the discussion, when you don't have a proposal on the table that is serious.

DePue: One of the things that I think most everybody would agree on that's painful about all this process we've been talking about, is the out migration of population...

Currie: Right.

DePue: ...especially the young people.

Currie: Right.

DePue: And if you look at enrollment in some of our universities, in state universities, that has plummeted in so many cases.

Currie: Right. Now part of that is because some of our neighboring states were offering in-state tuition and free tuition to Illinois residents, particularly those on the border with Missouri. There was a real effort on the part of other public universities, not far away, to poach our students.

Well, we should have been more nimble ourselves and figured out how to offer goodies. But at the same time, we're looking at a budget that isn't there. We didn't have the flexibility that some of these other institutions did. But I think a large part of the movement of college students to other states had to do with what the states were offering them.

DePue: Let's get to the next budget fight then. That's the 2017 negotiations about the 2018 budget. How was that year different?

Currie: Is this when the Republicans flipped? A couple of things. First of all, I think we had very good working groups among Democrats and Republicans. I think Greg Harris, who was our chief budgeteer, now the majority leader, I think he did a great job at trying to bring people together, trying to figure out who could buy what, who could live with what.

I think that, as I said, all of us were stymied. All of us felt that what we did this job for, why we ran, what we were doing in Springfield was just plain come to a screeching halt. That's not a partisan thing. I think the Republicans felt just as stymied, just as much in a crunch, just as lacking the opportunity to do what they do.

I think that it fell upon fairly open ears when there were efforts to try to do some backroom, small group negotiations with the people who turned out either to have important institutions in their districts—They were very concerned, whether it was an educational or correctional facility—and among those who might be described as more moderate Republicans.

DePue: So it took two years before the Republicans and Democrats within the legislature decided to...

Currie: Yep, and it took very careful, difficult negotiations to come to a meeting of the minds.

DePue: Was there anybody in the House that you can think of, who was especially the advocate for Governor Rauner's positions?

Currie: Yeah, the people like David McSweeney, Keith Wheeler, Grant Wherle. But then you had that whole raft of lawmakers, as I say, either had institutions in their districts that were taking it on the chin, or they were people who just

took a very responsible approach to what it is we're supposed to do when we are government, David Harris, Steve Anderson, Bob Prichard.

DePue: A couple of them in the Springfield area itself, which is a traditionally Republican area.

Currie: Yes, yeah.

DePue: How did you manage then to actually raise taxes from 3.75 to 4.95 for individuals and for corporations, 5.25 to 7.00 percent? I would think that would be at the core of what you were trying to achieve.

Currie: Yeah, and I think that there was recognition on the part of the moderate Republicans and on the part of those whose institutions were screaming for help, that we have to do something.

DePue: And you mentioned places that had the...

Currie: And I think there was the idea of going to 5 percent would have been, like, "Oh my god, no. That would be back to Quinn." So 4.95. "No, no, no, can't go above it."

DePue: That's one of those peculiar legislative compromises.

Currie: It is. It is just like, "Oh, let's make it temporary, right? We'll go to 4.95. We can't do 5.00, right?"

DePue: But this wasn't temporary, was it?

Currie: No.

DePue: And how many Republicans joined with the Democrats?

Currie: I think there were fifteen. You can check the record. And then, when it came to the override, we may only have had ten or eleven, ten, twelve. Not all of them stuck with us on the override, but we did have that number on the first vote.

DePue: So, to a certain extent the public is thinking, Well, Rauner got a budget.

Currie: Yeah. Yeah, but over his dead body (DePue laughs).

DePue: Which is just now time for another election.

Currie: Yeah. And I think actually, if I'm right, I think some of these Republicans chose not to run for reelection, David Harris, Steve Anderson, Bob Prichard, a couple of others. But I think only one who chose to stand for reelection on the Republicans lost. That was David Rice, I believe, in the primary.

- DePue: What district was he from?
- Currie: Downstate. I can't remember what the number is. But he's a fairly conservative person from downstate, and he lost.
- DePue: Somebody who had stuck with Rauner in that respect.
- Currie: Yeah, but he didn't stick with him this time. All the others who came from districts that were pro Rauner... But then, when they bucked him, they didn't suffer at the ballot box.
- DePue: There were a couple things that Rauner did, towards the end of his administration.
- Currie: Yeah, Norine, Norine Hammond was another who stuck with us, and she also...
- DePue: Norine?
- Currie: Norine, yeah. She had, I think, Eastern Illinois University in her district.
- DePue: What was her last name again?
- Currie: Hammond, H-a-m-m-o-n-d. And she faced a very tough primary challenge, but she survived.
- DePue: Rauner, towards the end of his time in office... He had a reputation of being pro-choice, going in. In the past, he had supported Planned Parenthood, and then he made some compromises, reached out to the more socially conservative wing of the Republicans. But then he was perceived as breaking that promise.
- Currie: Right, when he signed House Bill 40.
- DePue: Which was?
- Currie: That was the bill that re-established Medicaid funding for abortion for low income women on the Medicaid program and also said that State workers, women who are State workers, also have access to reproductive services. It did other things. It tried to codify Roe v. Wade. It got rid of some of the old language that was still sitting on the books. So, should the courts at some point say, "Roe v. Wade is no longer the law of the land," the idea behind this bill was to say that it still is in Illinois.
- DePue: And that goes back to how we...
- Currie: So it's three prongs. It was the Medicaid funding. It was State workers' funding, and it also was codification.

DePue: That gets back to where we started today, with the conversation about what Thompson was attempting to do back in the late 1970s.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: The other thing, where Rauner got himself crosswise with some of the conservative wing of Republicans, dealt with immigration.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Can you address the specifics on that?

Currie: Well, I would say that he's someone who comes from the business community. Many have a real appreciation for the value of the immigrant workforce and recognize that we're not going to manage if we do not rely upon some of these newcomers, just as was true in the early part of the twentieth century, the late part of the nineteenth century. I think that his business perspective was one—and many business groups are like this—are not unresponsive, not antagonistic to immigration. But from a social perspective, there were certainly many in his party who were violently opposed to all these people coming in and taking their jobs.

He had what I would describe as a more global understanding of the role of the immigrant workforce in the success of the American economy. And that was not unusual. Many higher-level business groups and individuals also got that.

DePue: I probably am going to do a poor job of this. My understanding is that the legislation prohibited law enforcement agencies from making arrests, strictly on the basis of their immigration...

Currie: Immigration status. I think that's right.

DePue: ...which others interpreted as being, making Illinois a sanctuary state.

Currie: Right, right. I think they overreacted. But nevertheless, that was what he got in trouble for.

DePue: So those two issues in particular... You've got abortion and immigration.

Currie: On House Bill 40, he was back and forth and back and forth. He had met with the right-wing groups and apparently made, they thought, a commitment that he was not going to sign the bill. And then waver, waver, waver, and suddenly he signs the bill. I don't know whether he just did a bad job of the PR or whether he shouldn't have met with them in the...whatever.

DePue: That was the abortion bill?

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Let's change subjects a little bit, before we get to the 2018 race, because in the midst of all of this, there's a presidential election in 2016, and... Oh, I see you're rolling your eyes (laughs).

Currie: I'm rolling my eyes again.

DePue: Did you know Hillary Clinton?

Currie: No. I'd met her but not really to know her. I was a Hillary Clinton delegate to the 2016 National Nominating Committee.

DePue: She has Illinois connections but had left the state long before.

Currie: Yeah, but she's still very close to the people she went to high school with. It's kind of nice. Betsy Ebeling and a bunch of them, whenever she's in town, they all get together. It's sweet.

DePue: Was she a south sider?

Currie: No, she was from Park Ridge, a suburb to the north of the city. At least that's where she went to high school.

DePue: Do you have any comments about the legal challenges she faced in the midst of that campaign?

Currie: Well, I think they were pretty much phony. The whole private email server and Benghazi.^{117, 118} It was shocking to me that they had traction because it



Currie attended the July 2016 Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia where Hillary Clinton was nominated as the Democratic candidate for president.

¹¹⁷ During her tenure as United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton drew controversy by using a private email server for official public communications rather than using official State Department email accounts maintained on federal servers. Clinton's server was found to hold over 100 emails containing classified information, including 65 emails deemed "Secret" and 22 deemed "Top Secret". (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillary_Clinton_email_controversy)

¹¹⁸ The 2012 Benghazi attack was a coordinated attack against two United States government facilities in Benghazi, Libya, by members of the Islamic militant group Ansar al-Sharia. Four Americans died in the attack.

looked to me as if it was just “Say it over and over and over again, and suddenly somebody will buy it.” It just didn’t seem to me that either one of them actually led to anything important. Yet they became very much fodder for the Republican Party and for Donald Trump. “Lock her up.”

DePue: What did you think about the Republican primary?

Currie: It was a zoo, a complete zoo. I was disappointed that Donald Trump was the victor. I guess I wasn’t surprised that he was, that his showmanship, his ability to hold the debate stage made him a very likely winner. His Peck’s bad boy approach to everything.¹¹⁹ “Shake it up. Mess it up. Don’t go with the old.” That obviously is appealing.

DePue: You were, as you stated, a strong supporter of what Barack Obama, President Obama, was doing in his administration.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: What does it say about where the country was that they would elect a clear outsider, a non-politician, somebody like Donald Trump, who had a very different approach to politics, that we would elect him as president?

Currie: Right. Well first of all, let me say that 3 million more people voted for her than for Trump. So it’s not a simple equation. It isn’t that, yes, more of us voted for Donald Trump. We didn’t. But because of the vagaries of the Electoral College, Trump ends up the winner at the end of the day because of those several states wherein he, winner take all, got the Electoral College vote. It isn’t fair to say that she lost at the polls. She didn’t. She lost in the Electoral College.

I think it’s disconcerting, and I think that what’s happened since Trump has taken office is very disconcerting, especially for those of us who thought that the environmental things that the Obama administration stood for, worker protections that they stood for, healthcare, all of those things, seems to be just out the window.

It isn’t just that I don’t like Mr. Trump’s style, his overbearing personality, it’s the policies that he’s implementing are, I think, harmful to the public health and the environment, the latest, just one more thing. [It’s] hard

In the aftermath, Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton sought to take responsibility for the security lapses at Benghazi and expressed personal regret. In her January 2013 testimony before Congress, Secretary Clinton claimed security decisions at the Benghazi compound had been made by others. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012_Benghazi_attack)

¹¹⁹ Peck's Bad Boy, is a fictional character created by author George Wilbur Peck (1840–1916). The phrase has since entered the language to refer to anyone whose mischievous or bad behavior leads to annoyance or embarrassment. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peck%27s_Bad_Boy)

to know whether you should be outraged twelve times a day or only once. But dismissing the science of climate change?

We had this group that's supposed to do a report on climate change and what its effects will be. The Trump administration has now limited them to talking about climate change effects up until 2040 or whatever. The problem with that is that it's down the road that the real effects become apparent. So they're not allowed to look at what's going to happen down the road. They're only allowed to look from here to there, where there will not be very significant change, duh.

DePue: Most people are willing to give him a nod in terms of the economy. Are you one who would agree that he's made decisions that have bettered the economy?

Currie: I don't know. I know that we were in a really good spot when he took office, and I know that things have improved to a degree. I don't know whether his tax plan actually helped. I do know that it added significantly to the deficit. I've always been of the view that presidential administrations probably don't have as much to do with the health of the economy as they would like us to think.

DePue: When we started this conversation about Donald Trump, you talked about the Electoral College, that if it had not been for the Electoral College, Hillary Clinton would have been the president. So are you agreeing with many of the progressives now who are saying, "It's time to get rid of the Electoral College"?

Currie: Well, I don't think it's realistic to think that we will. I think the small states are not going to give up their advantage. I don't think there's anything nefarious about the fact that we have an Electoral College. I don't think that the framers meant is as a sop to the slave states.

DePue: They put it there as a way to appeal to minorities, to small states obviously.

Currie: Yeah, and over time, when the states became very unbalanced in terms of population, it has a greater effect than it did some time ago. I think that in the history of the country there have been five times—which is not a large number—when the Electoral College result did not reflect the popular vote.

There is an effort in this... Illinois is part of it. What is it called? The National something Vote Compact, National Popular Vote Compact. A number of states, including Illinois, have signed on. The idea is that we are committing ourselves to the proposition that, even if our state goes for Hillary, if the country goes for Donald Trump, we're going to instruct our members of the Electoral College to go with the winner of the popular vote.

Now, a number of states have signed on to that. Still quite short of the number you would need for it to have impact on the Electoral College, since it's only effective if the states that are part of it are a majority of the Electoral College. I'm a bit of a skeptic. I supported the proposal, but I think it's hard for people at the end of the day to say, "I'm going to ignore the wishes of my voters and vote for somebody else."

I know that it's carefully crafted so that the language that you put into the statute would seem to preclude the opportunity to give it the back of your hand. But I think that it is fraught... It's also fair to say that, once that becomes the standard, if it were to become the standard, you've have a whole different politics of running for election. And everybody says, "Oh, they don't come to California." Well, okay, they don't. And post-election battles would proliferate, duh.

DePue: It's an interesting comment to make for somebody who, as you mention...was it 2008? You were one of the electors for Barack Obama.

Currie: Right, right, and I was thrilled. I would have been for Hillary in 2016, but she didn't make it.

DePue: How about the persistent allegations that are now leading to talk about impeachment, that Trump had colluded with the Russians, that the Russians had colluded with him?

Currie: Right, well, of course the Mueller report says they didn't collude. They may have obstructed justice, but they did not collude. Whether he's on strong ground when he says there was no collusion, I do not know. I do know that Mueller's left open the question of obstruction of justice. I don't know whether that's because there is the Justice Department rule that says you can't indict a sitting president. And my understanding was that Mueller didn't want to accuse him of obstruction of justice, leaving him no venue in which to defend himself.

So off to Congress to decide whether or not there was obstruction of justice. And, of course, they're trying in their various committees to get more information about all of those issues.

DePue: When we were talking about Hillary Clinton and her legal challenges, you said, "There's much noise about nothing."

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Is the same thing true for Trump?

Currie: I don't think so. I think this is a very different kettle of fish. I think that the connections between the Trump people and the Russians, the connections between Trump and his ability to try to shut things down before they even

start, keeping people from testifying before the Mueller Committee, keeping people from testifying before Congress. I think that's a very different kettle of fish.

DePue: That's all that I'm going to be asking about the presidential level. Back to you in particular, because somewhere—I believe in 2018, maybe before that—you decided to retire.

Currie: Yes, I did.

DePue: Tell me what led to that decision.

Currie: Well, I'd been there... I will have been there... I mean, this is a year and a half before I leave, but I will have been there for forty years. To run a tough election campaign, which certainly it could have been, was just not something that I had the energy and the enthusiasm to do. So in a way, it was been there, done that. It also was that a lot good people coming along were standing up for the things I cared about, picking up the cudgels for the causes I believed in. So, I didn't feel as if I were leaving my issues or the things I cared about in anything like a lurch.

I think I felt that forty years was long enough. I didn't have the energy to throw myself into a hot and heavy campaign. I was a little tired with the back and forth to Springfield, and it seemed time to turn over the reins to people who were younger and ready to just take the bit and go. I felt good about the fact that the issues that I cared about had really moved to the fore.

DePue: You mentioned a couple of times in that answer that you didn't feel you had the energy for a tough political campaign, but I thought you were in a kind of a slam dunk district?

Currie: You know, never. The primary is always a question. So yeah, you can't assume that there will be no primary challenge. And it's possible I could have skated. But again, the other considerations were important too.

DePue: The drive back and forth between Chicago and Springfield would have been enough for me.

Currie: Yeah, well, that was weighing upon me too.

DePue: What were your fellow members... What was Speaker Madigan saying?

Currie: About?

DePue: About your thoughts of retirement.

Currie: Well, he took it in good stead. I think he thought maybe I should stick on the ballot and see what happened, but I didn't feel like I wanted to do that.

- DePue: Was there somebody that you were thinking would rightfully step into the position of being majority leader?
- Currie: There was not. I had not done a good job at grooming a successor. But there were some very good people who chose to run. I did not make an endorsement, but they were people of parts. There are people who... I think the one who succeeded me is doing a good job, and I think there were others on the ballot who would have done well too.
- DePue: And who is the majority leader now?
- Currie: The majority leader is Greg Harris. But in terms of my seat, the replacement is named Curtis Tarver.
- DePue: Did you have a role in grooming him?
- Currie: I did. In the primary I was happy to talk to any of the contenders, give them my advice, help them, whatever. And then after he had been nominated, I did work closely with him to try to prepare him for what was to come, doing joint town halls, that kind of thing.
- DePue: Does that mean that you weren't endorsing anybody in the Democratic primary?
- Currie: Not in the primary, no. But in the general I was certainly with the winner of the Democratic primary. There was no Republican opponent.
- DePue: No Republican opponent?
- Currie: No.
- DePue: Is that a healthy situation for districts like that?
- Currie: Well, it's hard to know. You've got to district people. Geography goes with political affiliation. And it isn't unusual to find that there are districts in our part of the world that are overwhelmingly Democratic, just as there are districts in some of suburban territory that are overwhelmingly Republican. And I don't know any way that you cut into that and re-slice, unless you want to make people move.
- DePue: Well, that gets us into a discussion about the 2018 gubernatorial race and Rauner... We'll get to his campaign in a little bit. But on the Democrat side you've got J.B. Pritzker, Chris Kennedy—He's got the Kennedy name — You've got Daniel Biss, a Downstater?
- Currie: No, no, he's Evanston.
- DePue: Suburban.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Bob Daiber, Tio Hardiman, Robert Marshall.

Currie: Yeah.

DePue: Of that field, who were you leaning toward?

Currie: I did not make an endorsement. I was leaning initially to both J.B. and to Daniel Biss. I did not make an endorsement by the end of the day. I didn't feel comfortable with Chris Kennedy. His approach didn't seem to me to be solid, unclear to me exactly why he was running. Tio Hardiman's a bit of a joke, and Mr. Marshall is as well. They were not even in contention. The only three would have been Kennedy, Pritzker, and Biss.

As I say, I didn't think that Kennedy gave a very good account of what it is he wanted to do, why it was he decided to run. I liked what Biss had done in the legislature. He was a champion for things like trying to reform the pension system. He took on a lot of heavy lifting. And J.B. obviously was in a good position, as a man who is personable and who stood for all the right things and had the resources to run a really strong campaign (DePue laughs). And that does make a difference.

Now, during the course of the campaign, Daniel Biss was, to me, somewhat disappointing because he basically turned his back on what had made him special when he was a state representative and a state senator.

DePue: Turned his back?

Currie: Well, it was basically, "It was a mistake for me to try to deal with the pension." He became a populist. That may have been the only path for him to succeed. I get that. But he turned his back on the things that had made him stand out, that he had been someone willing to take on some of the shibboleths in state government, take on the pension problem. And now he was saying, "That was a terrible mistake. I should never have done that." I was disappointed that he turned his back on himself.

DePue: What kind of governmental experience did J.B. Pritzker bring?

Currie: He did not bring much, but he certainly had been involved in political campaigns and issue advocacy. He was very, very major, all the time that Hillary Clinton was running and while she was in the United States Senate, on issues of early childhood education. He was a champion for that for very many years and was certainly working with the people who had the wherewithal to make it happen.

DePue: So no concerns about another very, very wealthy guy, who had no experience, running for governor?

Currie: Yeah, except that his demeanor was very personable, and what he said about the issues was exactly the right thing to say.

DePue: Now, you did have a reaction when I mentioned Tio Hardiman's name.

Currie: Yeah, well, he was the ceasefire guy, the Violence Interruption Program.¹²⁰ He ran it for a time, but then I think he got in trouble because he beat his wife or some such thing. He'd run for governor before. I don't mean to say that he's not a nice man. I'm sure he's a nice man, but he doesn't have any credentials that would make him appropriate for the office of governor of the State of Illinois.

DePue: I'm assuming then that you endorsed nobody in the primary?

Currie: I endorsed nobody. As I say, it would have been between J.B. and Daniel, and then I soured on Daniel. But by that time, J.B. didn't need me.

DePue: The results for the Democrat primary, Pritzker 45.2 percent, Biss 26.6 percent. So quite a substantial victory for Pritzker.

Currie: No question.

DePue: And then Kennedy came in with 24.3 percent.

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: So a pretty solid victory with that kind of...

Currie: Yeah, he blew them out of the water, yeah.

DePue: Were you surprised at all?

Currie: No.

DePue: You were comfortable with the results.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Did you know Pritzker before all this?

Currie: I'd met him a time or two, but I didn't know him.

DePue: Did you know any of the other Pritzkers...Penny?

¹²⁰ Violence interruption is a community-based approach to reducing communal and interpersonal violence that treats violence as a public health problem. It is a partnership between law enforcement and community partners. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence_interruption)

- Currie: I'd met her, but I didn't really know her. There was a Pritzker who lived down the street from me for a time. I can't remember what his... Nick Pritzker, but I'm not sure what his relationship to the family was.
- DePue: Part of the Pritzker cousins. I think something like eleven are billionaires now.
- Currie: Yeah, right. Not bad.
- DePue: That's a lot of money that they had to divide up a few years ago.
- Currie: I remember there was a lawsuit.¹²¹
- DePue: That's right.
- Currie: Brought by Gigi and some of the others that felt they were not getting their fair share.
- DePue: And that's what ended up resulting in the fortune being split the way it was.
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: Was it Gigi? Was she the child actor?
- Currie: She does movie production, maybe theater production too.
- DePue: I think she'd been in a couple movies.
- Currie: But she was not the only one. There were other cousins who were part of the lawsuit.
- DePue: Do you have any comments about the Republican primary race? That was primarily between, obviously, Rauner...
- Currie: Jeanie Ives and Rauner.
- DePue: ...and Jeanie Ives.
- Currie: Yeah, well, [it] tells you something that she came so close to toppling him. I was amazed. I had no idea that she would be able to come so close to winning that one. I think she's very much an outlier in Republican Party circles. She's very conservative, very old school conservative, not a Rauner "shake it up and turn it around" agenda person. And I was just surprised that the Republican

¹²¹ In the process of splitting up the assets of the Pritzker family's empire, estimated at more than, \$15 billion, senior members of the Chicago-based family prompted a dispute that resulted in a lawsuit and lifted the veil on the secretive clan. (<https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/pritzker-family-settles-dispute-with-900-million-agreement>)

primary voters were, I suspect, so fed up with Rauner that they were willing to try anything else.

DePue: Did Jeanie Ives have some experience in the legislature?

Currie: Yes, she was in the legislature for several years. And she was very much the voice of the very conservative, very right wing faction of the Republican Party.

DePue: Here's a tough question for you. Rauner versus Ives, which one would you have preferred to deal with?

Currie: I would have gone with Rauner. I would have rather gone with Rauner. I liked Jeanie, but her brand of conservatism was, in a way, as blindered as his brand of turnaround was. And I was not comfortable with her stand on the social issues, gay marriage, abortion, all of those things, very much against.

DePue: Yeah, it was the immigration issue. It was the gay marriage and especially was the abortion issue.

Currie: Yeah, and she did that ad with the gay couple on the wedding cake. It was, you know, come on. And a transgender person.¹²² I didn't see the ad, but I was shocked.

DePue: In the general election then, Pritzker wins by 54.5 percent. You would think it sounds close, Rauner, 38.8 percent.

Currie: Terrible.

DePue: So there was a lot of outliers, a lot of people who bailed on the Rauner campaign.

Currie: Yep. I don't think that Rauner ran much of a campaign. I think he was kind of MIA during that campaign.

DePue: I have one other question before we get to the Pritzker administration. We'll finish with that. What are your predictions, considering what we had talked about before? Without migration, Illinois is actually losing population. A lot of other states are obviously gaining population. Will we be losing one or two House seats?

Currie: We don't know. I do not know the answer to that. I'm fearful it will be two. I wish we knew more about the demographics of the leavers. My impression

¹²² A controversial ad for Jeannie Ives in the Republican Primary for Illinois's governor created a firestorm. In the ad, Ives attacks Governor Bruce Rauner over policy decisions on immigration, abortion and transgender rights. (<https://abc7chicago.com/jeanne-ives-ad-thank-you-controversial/3039035/>)

(just totally impressionistic) is that a lot of people coming up for retirement age are moving.

I know a fair number of people in the African American community, south side educators, police people, coming up to retirement. They want to go back to North Carolina. They want to go back to their family roots in Georgia. Is that typical? Then you have a lot of people who want to go to Florida because it's cheaper to... You don't have to pay as many taxes if you decide to go to Florida, and the sun shines, and the weather's warm. I would like to know more about exactly who is leaving and why.

DePue: Do you blame people for wanting to leave?

Currie: No, I don't. But one of the things that has always been attractive about Illinois has been the quality of our workforce, a very strong, very able workforce. And I'm hopeful that we're not losing a lot of the people that make it so.

DePue: It's interesting to think about the people who are out migrating. You've got people who are well off and retired and taking their tax base out.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: And then you've got the people on the other side, the millennials, people just graduating from college or going out of state for college, the future workforce.

Currie: On the other hand, with the new headquarters here, we're getting a lot of millennials moving into Chicago. I'm not sure what the actual relative balance is between the movers and the leavers or the movers and the comers.

DePue: Over the last few years, Chicago has had a horrific reputation, in terms of gun violence especially. You kind of just answered this. Is it still an attractive place for young millennials to be moving to?

Currie: It depends on where they're moving to. The gun violence tends to hit particular communities on the south and the west side. There is not a lot of gun violence on the north side. There's not a lot of gun violence in more affluent areas with fewer members of minority groups, although minority groups are able to move more freely than they were fifty years ago. But still... I think that if somebody is a young person looking to locate in Chicago, I don't think that the gun violence is likely to be a problem, unless their only option is to move into one of those gun-ravaged communities.

DePue: Which they wouldn't be coming here...

Currie: They would not be coming here for that.

DePue: Every time I'm in downtown Chicago, I am always struck by how vibrant a city it is.

Currie: Yes, and my understanding is the millennials are really very anxious to come here, and they are not interested in signing up with the company that's in Skokie [a village in Cook County]. They want to be downtown.

DePue: Yesterday, before we pushed the start button, I asked you if you had any regrets about not being around for the Pritzker years.

Currie: A bit bittersweet. With the successes of the Pritzker agenda and the issues that I care about, minimum wage, you know, all those good things, it's been just a wonder to see. I felt a little bittersweet that I wasn't there, helping to put that package together. But I was excited to see it from the outside, and I have no real regret that I'm not there in the midst of it.

DePue: I wanted to go through what was an amazingly successful legislative year in Illinois. A lot of that success goes to Governor Pritzker because many of these were his initiatives. Quickly, I'd like to get your responses to some of the successes that he had. Minimum wage increased to \$15 per hour.

Currie: Yeah, down the road, but yes. And that was amazing.

DePue: Do you think that's appropriate, or...

Currie: That was first off the bat.

DePue: Do you think it was too much too quickly?

Currie: No, I think it's okay. I think it's good. There were certainly complaints from downstate about how this is going to make life very difficult for their people. But most of the jobs we're talking about are landlocked. They're not moving across the border, so I don't think that their concerns are so legitimate that they should have been addressed.

DePue: So the concerns about that makes Illinois less attractive for businesses to come to is not relevant?

Currie: Yeah, I don't think so, but we'll find out. Economists tell us that...They do say that if it's a real outlier, then there can be economic dislocation. But generally speaking, ordinary increases in the minimum wage do not lead to disruption. There may be people who lose a job, but there are others who are moving in and filling the gap. So the question would be whether a \$15 minimum wage sets us so far above the bar that we do see some economic ill consequences. But I don't know that there's any likelihood that that will happen. Again, it's happening slowly. It's happening down the road.

DePue: There were a lot of things that Pritzker was running on, but I would think, right at the top of that list, was to have something on the ballot to pass a progressive income tax.

- Currie: Yes, that was clearly very high on his agenda. And it took a while to get it done but get it done, he did. Now whether it will pass when the electorate has the opportunity to choose yes or no, I have no idea.
- DePue: You don't think that that's an easy victory for...
- Currie: No, I do not think so. I think it's a tough one. I think he'll have the business community lined up against it. And he'll have all the money that's going into both his ads on the one hand and the dark money going the other way.
- DePue: Dark money.
- Currie: Well, there's a group that has organized a new political action committee that doesn't have to disclose its donors that is spending quite a lot of money on advertising on vote no.
- DePue: Now, part of the argument that Pritzker has is it's only going to be the wealthiest in the state.
- Currie: Yeah and so they offer legislation that says here's what the rates will be. But everybody knows that that's not the end of the story and that the rates can change. Legislation down the road can change the balance. And that's the argument that Republicans and the business community will make, "They tell you you're off the hook, but that's not true." And they'll look at other states and they'll say, "Look, people in your bracket are paying more than people who are earning a little less than you." It was a brilliant strategy, but whether it works, I don't know.¹²³
- DePue: And it sounds like you're...sympathetic would be the wrong term, but you can see the rationale for those who are opposed to it saying, "We've got like \$135, 140 billion deficit on our pension payments. We can't possibly get there by just going after the rich."
- Currie: Well, and that's probably not an unfair statement but I do think that this is a way to begin to dig ourselves out of our hole.
- DePue: So you would be supportive.
- Currie: I'm voting yes. I'm voting yes.
- DePue: I kind of figured that you would.
- Currie: You knew that, Mark. You knew that.

¹²³ The proposal on every ballot in Illinois to change the state's income tax from a flat rate to a graduated tax was rejected. The vote trailed by a 10-point margin and the committee pushing for its passage conceded defeat. (<https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-politics/illinois-graduated-income-tax-proposal-where-vote-on-amendment-stands/2363905/>)

- DePue: A lot of this happened just within a couple weeks here. How about recreational marijuana?
- Currie: Yeah, that was fascinating. You know, both in New York and New Jersey the legislation to do exactly the same thing as ours did fell completely apart. There were concerns on the part of African Americans that their people were not getting their fair share of the goodies. Somehow, we were able, in Illinois, with, I think, the leadership of Governor Pritzker to avoid those pitfalls.
- DePue: Was this primarily an effort to raise more tax dollars? Was that what this was about?
- Currie: Well no. I would say really two, three things. First, it was an effort to say, "In the real world, this ought to be legal." Second, it was an opportunity to expunge a lot of criminal convictions. I think that was really important to the African American community and the Latino community, in particular, because it was their people who had been subjected to most of those convictions in the first place.
- Third, people saw it as maybe an opportunity to expand the base, to have more entrepreneurs of color participate in this new largess. Whether that will work, I have no idea. My impression is that those who are coming in the beginning are going to be the big Wall Street money people.
- DePue: Are you comfortable that the legislation that Illinois passed is sufficient enough to protect minors, youth?
- Currie: Yeah, I hope so. We will find out. I guess I'm a little concerned law enforcement was upset because there is no easy test for impaired driving. If people are driving impaired because of marijuana, there is no easy way to tell, as there is with alcohol impairment. That's a legitimate issue. You can look at different statistics, but I have seen some things that suggested that when Colorado approved recreational pot, there was in fact, an increase in traffic problems on the highways.
- DePue: Also an increase among minors...
- Currie: Yes.
- DePue: ...going to the hospital for emergency situations.
- Currie: Yes. So those are all concerns, and I just hope that the language is carefully enough crafted that the public health regulators will be able to... My impression was that the public health people got 90 percent of what they thought they needed in order to make it work, which I think is encouraging.
- DePue: Concerns about what the health impact would be.

Currie: And their ability to regulate.

DePue: It's interesting that just now you're seeing more articles coming out about what the long-term health impact on these things are, as well.

Currie: Yes, yeah. Here's part of the problem. The big drug manufacturers never cared about marijuana because there was no money in it for them. And then, of course, the fact that there are bans at the federal level made it difficult to do any long-term epidemiological studies to find out what the real impact of marijuana use over time is. We don't really know the answer.

So everybody took everything on a kind of an anecdotal level. I was there when we passed medical marijuana. There was no evidence that medical marijuana was any more effective than Tylenol. But you had a lot of anecdotes. You had people who say "Oh." And we know that isn't particular good testimony, but that's what we had. But we had no good studies that said, "Oh yeah. This really does work."

DePue: And Illinois's medical marijuana program was very tightly controlled.

Currie: Very.

DePue: Would that be a fair statement?

Currie: Yeah, I think not so much so now. I think it's expanded fairly much to include a lot more illnesses. Again, we don't know if it's effective.

DePue: How about this statement? I'm sure you've heard this one. "Well, marijuana today is not our generation's marijuana."

Currie: Right, right.

DePue: It's much more potent.

Currie: They say it's much more potent, right, and I don't know what impact that will have on health. Again, we don't have any of that information because we've never done... We had nobody like the pharmaceutical companies that wanted to do the studies.

DePue: Here would be another one that I think you would have a strong feeling about, that's the abortion bill that passed just this month.

Currie: Yes, and I think it was a good thing. I think that the reaction that Illinois showed to all of those southern states, Alabama, Georgia, Ohio—not a southern state, but you know—was to say, "Wait a minute, no."¹²⁴ We are

¹²⁴ In the spring of 2019, a wave of abortion restrictions in Alabama, Georgia, and other states sparked nationwide controversy, and they could be the start of a prolonged legal battle over *Roe v. Wade* and the future

standing up for the rights of women and their ability to control access to reproductive health.”

DePue: It repeals the state’s 1975 bill on abortion...

Currie: That was probably the one the governor vetoed, Governor Thompson.

DePue: ...and repeals the ban on partial birth abortion.

Currie: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

DePue: Are you comfortable with that?

Currie: I am because that seemed to me always to be a very hokey, very PR driven issue that had nothing to do with the state of the fetus nor the health of the mother. It was a dramatic expose of what happens in the real world.

If you were to watch open heart surgery, I suspect it would make you kind of uncomfortable. I know it would make me uncomfortable, and watching any abortion, let alone a partial birth abortion... If you call it that, then already you’re setting it up to be a terrible, terrible thing. But without any regard to what the reasons are, at what point in the gestation of the fetus this is happening... I thought it was a way overreaction on the part of the federal government and on the part of many states.

DePue: Here is part of the language of the bill. I think this is what conservatives especially are reacting against, that [reading from the bill] “a fertilized egg, an embryo, or fetus does not have independent rights under law.”

Currie: And I agree with that.

DePue: At what point does...

Currie: Viability has usually been the standard. And my recollection is that Thomas Aquinas was of the view that viability was the point at which... And remember, we didn’t have all this anti-abortion legal program until the late 1890s.

DePue: So at what point does viability come into reality?

Currie: What do you mean?

DePue: Is it after the birth? Is it only then?

of abortion rights in America. (<https://www.vox.com/2019/5/17/18628265/alabama-abortion-law-missouri-georgia-roe-v-wade>)

Currie: No, once... My understanding is that once this fetus can actually live outside the womb, with a really good chance of life, then that's viability. After that, then you have to be very cautious about when you do an abortion.

There are examples when the fetus is so badly gorged that people say, "Yeah, you ought to be able to abort rather than to bring that child to term and then have the child die five days later or go through five surgeries and live for another six months and be in pain and in..." you know, whatever. Those are obviously issues that should be taken into account. I don't think that the fetus has any leg up over the mother, over the woman who is carrying that fetus in her womb.

DePue: The language though doesn't assert anything about viability. It just says the fetus has no independent rights under the law.

Currie: I have not looked at the legislation.

DePue: Here's another one that, on the surface, was done because we wanted to have more tax revenue. That's the significant expansion of gambling in the State of Illinois.¹²⁵

Currie: Very significant.

DePue: What's your view on that subject?

Currie: Well, we'll see. [It] may be the goose killing the golden egg. It may be that we are so over-saturated that there's not going to be much in the way of new revenue. It may be that what you'll see is that each of the new boats is feeding upon the people who are going to the other boats, and so you have not expanded the base. I don't know whether that's going to happen or not. But it brings a large number of additional boats to the State of Illinois.

DePue: Is there a downside to increasing gambling in the state?

Currie: I think you worry a little about people who are compulsive gamblers. But they've always been with us, and I suspect they're busy doing horse racing and lotteries anyway. So yeah, we should be concerned about that, but I don't think that it is such a major concern that we ought to jump through hoops to avoid it. I also think that it's important to establish these facilities, not in places where you're preying upon low income people who can't really afford an evening at the wagering table.

DePue: That does seem to be the collateral damage though.

¹²⁵ The June 2019 gambling expansion will make Illinois the gambling capital of the Midwest, far surpassing neighboring states in total gambling positions. (<https://www.illinoispolicy.org/pritzker-signs-illinois-budget-out-of-balance-by-up-to-1-3-billion/>)

- Currie: Yes. So I'm hopeful that whatever decisions are made about placement are respectful of the communities that are surrounding the place where the boat is sited. An issue in Chicago, for example. People are talking about economic development. Well, site it on the west side. But will anybody go to the west side? I don't know.
- DePue: You mean place a gambling casino on the west side?
- Currie: Or wherever, you know, vacant land somewhere. Then the question is whether the O'Hare travelers, the conventioners, the whatever, the downtown crowd will go there. And then there's the question whether the community will be somehow ravaged because it has this new opportunity to waste resources it doesn't have. But those are all tough questions.
- DePue: The next one is clearly to raise more money. That's an increase in the gas tax, I believe, by eighteen cents per gallon.
- Currie: It is, doubling, I think.
- DePue: Doubling of the gas tax.
- Currie: Yeah, as of July first, be sure to fill your tank.
- DePue: I'm going to do it on, I think, June 30 (laughs).
- Currie: Yeah, okay, good for you.
- DePue: What do you think about that? Because that's another one you could say, "It's taxing everybody, obviously, including the people who can't afford that increase."
- Currie: Well, there's always that issue. But I would say that because we spend so much of the revenues that we raise through gas taxes and license fees making sure our highways and our bridges are safe, that the people who are paying it are the people who are going to benefit from that expenditure.
- DePue: Do you think that the State will adhere to that, that all of that extra money will go to maintenance of the roads?
- Currie: Well, some of it's going to go to mass transit. I'm not sure exactly what the mix is. But there is that lock box amendment, which I opposed, the one that says, "All the revenue that comes in from anything having to do with highways has to go to highways," crazy, in my view. We should not have been busy handcuffing ourselves when it comes to difficult decisions about how to spend money. But it was overwhelmingly popular at the poles.
- DePue: That leads to the next one, a capital bill.

Currie: Yeah, well, that was what that gas tax is for; it's for capital. It's been many years... What was it? Two thousand nine was the last time we had it. It was a long time ago.

DePue: Was there one during the Blagojevich administration? I know Ryan pushed one through.

Currie: Yes, yeah, a big one, big one.

DePue: And he was out of office in 2002. I can't remember. Did Blagojevich get one?

Currie: I don't remember. I thought there was something under Quinn. It was not huge...

DePue: You're probably right.

Currie: ...but there was something under Quinn.

DePue: So the state was overdue.

Currie: Yes.

DePue: Forty-five billion, that sounds like a lot.

Currie: Well, I don't know how far it will go in terms of actually meeting needs in both the highway, bridge program but also water infrastructure and municipalities here, there, and everywhere. I mean, we've got a lot of unmet infrastructure needs, and I'm hopeful this will set us on track to begin finally to respond.

Again, I have to hand it to Pritzker. I didn't think he was going to be able to do all of that in the last three days of the session, so I think it's amazing he was able to.

DePue: You know better than anybody though, it's not just Pritzker. You've got to have the support in the legislature.

Currie: Right. And he made a deal with the house Republicans to try to bring them on board, and that was effective. They wanted tax credits for data centers. They wanted a return of the manufacturer's purchase credit, which is kind of phony because you get a credit for taxes you didn't pay. It's all right (DePue laughs). I'm just saying, just saying...and a couple of other goodies that they were anxious to have. He was willing to make a deal with them, and they were willing, given that deal, to come on board. They felt that had responded to the needs of their business community, and then they could be for the rest of it. And I think the business community is not opposed to the idea of fixing the crumbling infrastructure.

- DePue: How much of this new agenda, the ability to push so many things through, was a reaction against Governor Rauner personally in the Rauner years?
- Currie: I think a lot of it, a lot of it. As I said, lawmakers on both sides, both upstate/downstate, both chambers of the legislature felt stymied. People felt very frustrated. And suddenly the faucet is open, and they're having the opportunity to do what they do, which is to legislate. I think a lot of it is exactly as you say.
- DePue: I'm not totally confident saying this, but my understanding is there is a balanced budget that passed.
- Currie: Yes. And you know, people will quibble about exactly how balanced it is, but I think that the overwhelming view is that, yeah, it's pretty well balanced.
- DePue: On assumptions about how much revenue's going to be generated from marijuana sales and...
- Currie: Yeah, but that's down the road. So much of that will not be included in this year's spending plan.
- DePue: Especially what's down the road is the issue of the progressive income tax passing, because obviously that doesn't even appear on the ballot until 2020.
- Currie: Until 2020.
- DePue: So overall, what are your comments about the beginning of the Pritzker administration?
- Currie: I think he's done amazingly well, and my question is, "What's his encore?"
- DePue: (laughs) Now that it's all done.
- Currie: What you going to do next year, Governor?
- DePue: We finally come to the point where we can wrap this up, after ten sessions.
- Currie: Whoo!
- DePue: We had a great conversation today. I appreciate that.
- Currie: Well, they've all been great. You ask really good questions.
- DePue: Of your accomplishments, your many accomplishments, what really stands out as the thing you're most proud of?
- Currie: It really is fair to say that I did so much work across the waterfront that it's very difficult to say, "This, not that." I'm proud that I was the mother of the state's early education program. I started with that idea in 1979. It wasn't until

'85 that we adopted preschool for kids at risk of school failure without an early learning boost.

I'm proud of my last bill. That was the one that re-institutes the possibility of parole for people who were under the age of eighteen when they committed the crime that sent them to the slammer. So, that to me was a very exciting bill. We've not had parole in the State of Illinois in forty years.

I believe thirty-seven other states always kept parole. And the idea that somebody, a youthful offender who probably didn't have a sense as to what the consequences of his or her actions would be, who didn't have a lot of maturity guiding their behaviors, the idea that you're in the slammer for fifty years, it doesn't make any sense to me. To me, that was a good beginning in figuring out how to make the criminal justice system a little more fair, a little more responsive.

DePue: What would you consider, in your long career, to be your most exhilarating moment?

Currie: The abolition of the death penalty was certainly one of those. My vote for Barack Obama in the Electoral College was certainly... I think I did it twice, but it was the first one that really mattered.

DePue: Those were both things that we talked about yesterday, and obviously there was an emotional response with that.

Currie: Totally, totally. Gay marriage, I think that was certainly a highlight; reproductive rights. I think there have been a whole bunch of things that have stood out for me as being real pluses, real successes.

DePue: With forty years, there obviously are some disappointments.

Currie: Right.

DePue: What would those be?

Currie: Well, we didn't make as much progress in the area of criminal justice reform as I would like. We have not yet dealt effectively with income disparities and income opportunities among low income people compared to others and members of minority groups compared to others. We've not figured out how to undercut the consequences of poverty when it comes to economic independence over time. Those are tough nuts to crack, and people will continue work on them. But there's no simple solution. There's no easy fix, and my years in the legislature reminds me that there isn't.

Now, there also are difficult ideological differences among not just the parties but among people. What are the root causes? Is it people having pulled themselves up by their bootstraps? Or is it that the whole system is rigged so that there's not really an opportunity for you? I would fall rather in the latter category than the former, but there's always tension between what are we doing to give people a leg up that is fair and that is effective, and what is actually just pandering? Those are tough questions too.



Barbara and David Currie on a holiday in 1998.

DePue: We hadn't talked about this, but obviously your husband had passed away. Are you willing to talk about that just a little bit?

Currie: Okay. Yeah, he died in 2007.

DePue: And what were the causes of that?

Currie: He had cancer. He'd been sick for maybe three and a half years, so it was...

DePue: Obviously a very tough thing for you personally to be dealing with.

Currie: Sure.

DePue: Was being able to go back to the legislature something of a release?

Currie: Yeah, although there were times when it was very uncomfortable. Here's an example. In 2004, I was supposed to be a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, but we had spent so much time that summer in Springfield that I didn't have the heart to leave. I gave up my seat as a delegate so that I could stay at home and watch the convention on television, a little bit of ying and yang, a little bit of push and pull.

DePue: Can you look at any particular moment and say, "That was most painful political moment of my career?"

Currie: That's a tough one. Well, I would say the impeachment of Blagojevich was certainly painful, certainly painful.

DePue: And the other one we talked about today. It wasn't a specific moment, but it's certainly a term that you dealt with, in the Rauner administration. Have your views evolved over time in that long career in politics?

Currie: I'm sure they have, but I'm not quite sure exactly how. My sense is that the progressive values that I came to Springfield with are still the values that are my values. Do I see a better, more efficient or more responsive way to incorporate those values into public policy? I think we've learned some things that are helpful, but I don't think that I'm ready to say, "Let's start all over. Let us reinvent the wheel." I think being on track to me is pretty much where we should be.

DePue: What advice would you give new legislators, in terms of how to be effective?

Currie: I'd say the first thing you need to do is serve on an Appropriations Committee. The basic job of state government is to run state government. Unless you know where the money's coming from, how much money is coming in and what the sources of revenue are, serve on the Revenue Committee, serve on the Appropriations Committee, figure out the nuts and bolts of state government.

[It's] not sexy, not headline grabbing, but it is the basic building block of what we do. The one thing we should do, we have to do—we don't always, but we should do—is at the end of the session, craft a budget and approve it. That's the basics. I'm with Jim Edgar on that (DePue laughs).

DePue: Forty some years.

Currie: Yeah. Forty, forty.

DePue: What would you like to be remembered for?

Currie: Her charm and her wit (both laugh) No.

DePue: Maybe that too.

Currie: Her ability to work with people across both sides of the aisle and all parts of the state, to solve the problems that really do confront the people of the State of Illinois. I think I would like to be remembered as somebody who had a real ability to work with people to solve problems, without creating other problems along the way.

Another thing that I would like to be remembered for—remembered is probably the wrong word—I think I did develop a pretty good ability to explain what is going on in this or that piece of legislation. A lot of the stuff that I did over the last...certainly twenty, twenty-five years, was to be the person who just, "Here's a bill. Go ahead and run it." I spent a lot of time, with only five minutes to spare, figuring out what was in the bill and explaining it. That was a fun thing to do and a challenging thing to do, but I enjoyed that opportunity.

- DePue: The twenty-five years pretty much encompasses your time as the majority leader.
- Currie: Majority leader, right, right. But it was over time that I developed more and more of that “Okay, give it to Barbara. She’ll do it.” I enjoyed that role. I enjoyed being able to say, “This is what it does. I can answer your questions. This is a good thing to do.”
- DePue: To include two times being selected to head up an impeachment proceeding.
- Currie: Um-hmm, um-hmm.
- DePue: And two times being—your phrase—queen of redistricting.
- Currie: Right, right.
- DePue: Those were some heady assignments that you had.
- Currie: Absolutely. Never met a challenge I couldn’t meet.
- DePue: That you’d back away from.
- Currie: Would you mention that my eyes rolled (DePue laughs)?
- DePue: I guess I did do that a few times, didn’t I?
- Currie: Yeah.
- DePue: Well, it’s been a delight for me to have a chance to talk to you. Do you have any closing comments for this interview?
- Currie: I hope not. If I remember any, I’ll call you. But I don’t. I’m not good at closing comments.
- DePue: Thank you very much.
- Currie: Well, thank you very much. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed it. And if anything comes across your way that you say, “Oops, we didn’t quite get to that,” let me know, and we’ll do another session.
- DePue: Very good.

(end of transcript #10)