

## Interview with James Thompson

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, June 12, 2014. This is Mark DePue, director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. And today I'm sitting across the table again from Gov. Jim Thompson. Good morning, Governor.

Thompson: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: Probably should explain what happened yesterday. There was an equipment malfunction, that I probably helped precipitate, but we were at a pretty logical place to break for the day.

Thompson: I think so.

DePue: But what I wanted to start with today is the relationship that you and Jayne had those last few years in the U.S. attorney's office.

Thompson: What do you mean?

DePue: I know that as you got towards the point where you were going to be running for governor, at least the impression I have is, the relationship got a little bit more serious.

Thompson: It should have been, it was almost nine years! (laughs) And I wouldn't be surprised if Jayne was thinking, What the hell? How long is this Act One

going to go on? Let me put it this way, once I decided to run for governor, I couldn't imagine doing it without her. I mean, it requires—as I learned, but I also suspected—every strength you have, and the ability to go out across the state, much of which was new to me. I knew Chicago, but that's about it. So I was a rookie with regard to knowledge of the state of Illinois, beyond Chicago. And I think part of the strength that you have to have to do that comes from having strength at home, and having a reliance at home, and having somebody to turn to on a regular basis in your personal life to sustain you, to get up in the morning and go out the next day. And we had been going together long enough, that I thought, It's time. I needed to get off the dime. (laughs) So I did.

We were having a party at my house for a group of friends, and I was feeling poorly; my back was out. We were sitting there in the living room before the guests were to come, and I said something like, "This is crazy. We ought to get married, don't you think?" And she said, "Yes!" I said, "Well, good. So we're going to do it." When all the guests arrived, I said something, like, "Well, I've got an announcement to make. We believe that two can live as cheaply as one, so we're going to try." I think Jayne said something like, "Living with you is never going to be cheap!" (laughter) And then, of course, everybody at the party went, "Oh, oh, God, they're going to get married! Oh!"

DePue: She was right about her comment.

Thompson: She was right about that! (laughs)

DePue: This happened in April, was it?

Thompson: May.

DePue: May?

Thompson: Yeah, my birthday, May 8th.

DePue: Of 1976?

Thompson: Seventy-six, right. So then, the next day, the press had it. I mean, as soon as my press secretary knew, then the world knew, of course. The *Tribune*, I think, came over to

take a picture of us sitting on the back steps of my house. She was young and beautiful, and I was skinny and had hair. (laughter) Maybe the best picture ever taken.



DePue: Well, Governor, can you blame the political cynics out there who accused you, probably, that this was all part of a political calculation?

Thompson: Look, I have discovered, in fifty-five years of public life, that there are a lot of people out there. Some of them are cynics, and a small subset of them are simply looking for whatever political advantage they think they can get when it's got to do with another public figure, or whatever partisan advantage they think they can get in dealing with another public figure. There's no way I can control that. I mean, they've said that not only about my getting married, but about my dog on the campaign trail, and about the birth of Samantha.<sup>1</sup>

You know, I've had that said about every good thing that's happened to me in my life since then. Somebody will be able to turn it to a political advantage, or they'll say, as they used to say when I was governor, "Well, he's just lucky." I couldn't take that anymore—a reporter would say it, a political opponent would say it—to which I finally decided, I'm going to take that one head on, and I'd just say, "Well, would you like to have a lucky governor or an unlucky governor?" I once said that, I think, to Charlie Wheeler, or somebody like that, when I had a press conference on the budget. And he was sort of exasperated by my answers, and he said, "Well, you're just lucky!" That's when I said that. And I thought, Okay, you know, if that's going to be the claim sometimes, that's going to be the answer.

If you've been in this business for fifty-five years, which I have—even before politics, as an assistant state's attorney, which is a public figure whose name and exploits get in the newspaper—over the years, I've seen it all, I've got to say. Not only in my campaigns, but in the campaigns of others. People who don't have good answers or good motives will always find something to say. I don't pay attention to it.

DePue: I don't want to get too much into the details right now, but do you think getting married in the midst of the campaign helped?

Thompson: I don't know, I suppose you could say that, because people sometimes look for an idealized sort of candidate: married, two and a half children, one dog, one house, sunny disposition—you know, you can go on forever with this. I don't think it played that big a part. Frankly, I think the birth of Samantha was a bigger event, simply because people adore children. And because Jayne was publicly pregnant and would be with me at events, she became, in the eyes of some, the "state's baby." Whenever Jayne heard that, she would just get inwardly furious, the "state's baby."

She was with me one time at a reception. I think it was in Lincoln. She and I were standing in the receiving line, shaking hands at this event. And a

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Michael Bakalis, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2014, and David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 27, 2014.

woman came over with a chair, and said to Jayne, “You really need to sit down.” And Jayne said, “Why?” And she said, “Well, you’re carrying the state’s baby!” Well now, imagine how that went over, how it would go over with any potential mother, right? The state’s baby, indeed.

In ’78, when Jayne was pregnant, and eventually when Samantha was born, people in the state, a lot of them, attached their own notions to the pregnancy. And they weren’t political, they were possessive. It’s like one time, before she was pregnant, she was standing in a receiving line, and this woman came up to her and said, in all seriousness, “I hope you get hit by a truck.” Jayne said, “*What?* Why would you say that?” And the woman said, “Because I’d marry your husband.” So, you know, there are some kooks out there, okay; we don’t know how many, but they seem to be in the public spotlight every once in a while.<sup>2</sup>

But as far as the baby is concerned, people just had a romantic attachment to the idea of the pregnancy and the idea of a baby born to a governor and his wife. You’ve got to remember, the last time it happened in Illinois was 1909, Bina Deneen; who, incidentally, was still alive when Samantha was born, and sent Samantha a double silver picture frame with Bina Deneen’s baby picture on one side and blank on the other, for Samantha’s picture to go in. And we put Samantha’s picture in and had that on display in the mansion. So it was a signal event. I mean, it was almost seventy years between gubernatorial babies. Most governors, who were much older than I was, had adult children or had no children. So this was a big deal to some people. And they didn’t take a cynical note of it, they took a sharing note of it. They wanted to be part of what was happening. People like babies, and here was a chance to like a baby that was going to be different from any baby in the state, right? When Samantha was born, people just flooded us with homemade gifts. They knitted sweaters, they drew paintings; they did all sorts of things. Toys piled up in the mansion. For a lot of people in Illinois, it was kind of a joyous thing, as it was for us. And so that was an event that was shared.

I discovered early what I think are the important values in politics; one, people want the traditional candidate to be smart, honest, open, forthright, and to have good ideas, most of which a voter shares. That’s the bottom line. But voters are smart enough to know that they’re not going to agree with a candidate on everything. And the fact that they don’t agree with a candidate on everything is not going to pull away their vote, because they know, as a matter of common sense, that they don’t agree with their spouses on everything, they don’t agree with their relatives on everything, they don’t agree with the people in their office on everything. So that’s not the issue, that

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<sup>2</sup> Thompson’s daughter also mentioned this moment. Samantha Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014. For another example of how politics “can come back on the family,” including a threat against his son, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 15, 2009, Volume II: 371-372.

you agree with a candidate on every issue. And they're also smart enough to know, and I always tell them, that there are going to be issues after I'm elected that we don't even know about now, and what they want is a candidate who they think will do the right thing, whatever the right thing is. That's what they're looking for.

Now, how do you move from that, I'll call it political calculation, to voter identification? I think just as important as being married, or having a baby, or all these other things, I'll give you what I thought were my advantages. First, I was tall, okay? Tall people command more attention than short people. That's just a fact of life. Think about your own personal life, the people you know; the tall person always attracts more attention. And even unspoken qualities are ascribed to tall people. So what was my political nickname from the beginning? Big Jim. They're not going to elect a candidate called Little Jim, or Short Jim, but Big Jim.

DePue: Which is probably why Governor Edgar didn't appreciate being called Little Jim, because he wasn't, necessarily.

zThompson: Right, he wasn't. But the press fastened that nickname on me, it's not something we came up with. But the minute they did, I saw the political advantages of that, and so we had a lot of buttons out there with "Big Jim" on it. And the more the press used it, the more we used it—bumper stickers, buttons, t-shirts. That's number one, tall. Number two, I had put crooks in jail. People are all for that! That's not why I did it, it was my job at the time. But the aura of that carried with me into the campaign, because that's when people downstate, who didn't know me, started hearing about me. That's what they thought of first. They didn't think, Oh, this guy's from Chicago, they thought, Oh, he's that guy from Chicago who put crooks in jail.



I think I speak plainly, and they like that. When I went downstate with some depth, and repeatedly—I have this natural inclination to sort of adopt what I'm hearing. So the further south I got in Illinois, the more my voice took on the lilt and the cadence of how people in southern Illinois spoke. And it wasn't something that was forced, it wasn't something that was planned, or sometimes it wasn't even something I was aware of, I just picked it up naturally, by being immersed in people who were speaking like that. In fact, one night, I remember coming home after two days in southern Illinois and coming into the house and starting to talk to my wife about the trip, and she said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, would you stop speaking Southern? I can't understand you!" I said, "Sorry, I'll..." But that's what happened to me. So what that says to people, unspoken, down in those regions, where I was picking up their way of speaking was, that I was an empathetic person.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> At least once, Thompson caused some controversy with this trait. See Edgar, June 15, 2009, Volume II: 379, and Vernon Jarrett, "Thompson Ain't Got No Rhythm," *Chicago Tribune*, October 22, 1982.

When we were campaigning one day in southern Illinois—well, not really southern Illinois, almost southern Illinois, around the suburbs of St. Louis—we were on this street in this small town, and there was this eighteen-year-old kid sitting there in his convertible, and he had seven Irish Setter puppies in the back seat. He was selling them, and my eyes bugged out. I had always wanted an Irish Setter. But I had no business buying a dog. I mean, I was campaigning all over the state of Illinois. Jayne was working back in Chicago, supporting us, since I didn't have a job after a while in that campaign. She had no way to take care of a dog. But I just... So I bought the puppy.

There was a grocery store across the street, and we went over and we bought a leash and a bowl and some dog food. And from that day on, not all of the time, but part of the time, the dog was with me on the campaign trail. Because there was no other place to put him, frankly. He couldn't be at home in Chicago, Jayne worked. You're not going to put a puppy all day by himself in a Chicago apartment. He came with me. And at least I had staff and people with me that we could share the duties. But then I noticed that he attracted people. People were more interesting in seeing him than they were seeing me!<sup>4</sup>



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<sup>4</sup> Thompson on the campaign trail with Guv. Unknown date, but Wolk Camera developed the film for Thompson's press secretary, Dave Gilbert, on August 30, 1976. Thompson Office Files.

So we go along, and one day, Mike Howlett says, “And Thompson, he’s dragging that poor dog around the state with him.” And I thought to myself, Oh, Mike, you shouldn’t have said that, you really shouldn’t have said that. So we were at some kind of campaign event or meeting that night, in southern Illinois, and when I got through with my speech, I said, “Now, my opponent says that I’m ‘dragging’ my poor southern Illinois bird dog around the state.” I said, “Well, he’s here tonight, and he’s going to be right over there. So now you got a choice. You can come up and shake hands with me, or you can go over and see the dog. It’s up to you.” And of course, they all went over to see the dog, this southern Illinois bird dog—although an Irish Setter is not really a southern Illinois bird dog, but close. And poor Howlett, what was he going to say after that? So he stopped saying that.

DePue: What did you name the dog?

Thompson: Guv!

DePue: Why?

Thompson: I don’t know, it just seemed natural. It seemed natural.

DePue: And did you anticipate then, too, that you’d get the challenges from the opposite camp about why you got the dog?

Thompson: Oh, no. The only time I heard that was from Howlett criticizing me, see, and what I said after that just shut him up, so it wasn’t a factor after that.

DePue: How about being young?

Thompson: I thought that was good. We can get to it later, the relationship between me and Mike Howlett, but he was a dear friend, and very helpful to me. But he was an older, heavier, old-style politician. I was a young, tall prosecutor. The contrast in looks and style couldn’t have been greater.<sup>5</sup> And I think that played an important part of it too. What you’re looking for in politics is a means of identifying with voters. You want to make them feel comfortable with you. If they’re comfortable with you, there’s a basis for at least beginning trust of you. And if there’s a trust of you, there’s a willingness to listen to you. And it goes on from there.

I got attacked by Howlett for wearing Levis and boots to county fairs. Well, the answer to that’s very simple: that’s what people wear to county fairs. They don’t wear three-piece suits with wingtips, which is what Howlett was wearing to county fairs and watching where he walked. I mean, I’d wear that to county fairs if I wasn’t running for public office. But it sure didn’t hurt

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<sup>5</sup> Thompson’s press secretary recalled the campaign had prepared a door hanger with a profile photo of Howlett and Daley, which emphasized “his jowls hanging down.” David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 14, 2014.

me when he started the comparison on that basis. People would say, “What’s he talking about? I was at the county fair this morning, that’s what I wore!” So the more you can identify with the voter, in every aspect, without forcing it, without doing it as a game... Because you’re going to start with some basis, like being tall. I can’t help that, I’m tall. So when I walk into a room, I look more commanding than the shorter, heavier, old-time guy, right? When we appear together at debates, people can see the difference between us.

DePue: How would you respond, though, to the aura that Richard J. Daley had? Because he didn’t have the things that you’re talking about.

Thompson: Yeah, but he didn’t have any opponents, either. What’s the basic rule of politics? Compared to who? The only time Daley came close in a mayoralty race was against Robert Merriam, an alderman in Chicago.<sup>6</sup> But as Chicago became more Democratic and what Republicans there were in Chicago moved to the suburbs, Daley had no serious opposition, so the contrast didn’t hurt him. And the contrast between me and Howlett was huge. Nevertheless, the press for most of the campaign thought that Howlett was going to win, simply because they thought he was the most popular politician in the state of Illinois. He had been secretary of state for a long time; everybody in the state had his name in their wallet, right? It’s sort of like the secretary of state today: God, he’ll be elected even after he’s dead!

DePue: Because even kids know who the secretary of state is: he’s the guy who gives them their license.

Thompson: Yeah. So everybody thought I was going to lose. And when the first polls came out in August, they were shocked. Shocked! But I didn’t think I was going to lose.

DePue: Governor, if you don’t mind, I’m going to pull you back to 1975.

Thompson: Okay. (laughs) Sorry!

DePue: But this has been illuminating to get your philosophy of running for office.

Thompson: Look, it’s simple. It applies to other parts of life too, you know? Go apply for a job somewhere? You want to have these attributes.

DePue: Let’s get back to Jayne and a very quick question on that respect. She was a successful lawyer in her own right, very successful.

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<sup>6</sup> Merriam (1918-1988) was a reform Democrat during his tenure as 5th Ward alderman from 1947 to 1955, when he won the Republican mayoral primary and ran an unsuccessful “Fusion” campaign against Daley in the general election. He received 45 percent of the vote. Following the election, he served in the presidential administrations of Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon. A combat reporter during World War II, Merriam was also known for his account of the Battle of the Bulge, *Dark December*. “Guide to the Robert E. Merriam Papers, 1918-1984,” Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Chicago, IL.

Thompson: That is correct.

DePue: Was there a discussion about what her expectations and what your expectation for her, in reference to her career, were going to be once you actually were running for governor?

Thompson: Not at first. She was employed. I was employed at Winston, although I was employed at Winston with the understanding that they didn't want to see me in the office, they wanted to see me on the campaign trail. (laughs) But she had a real job, a regular job. She worked for Bill Scott, the attorney general's office. It wasn't until after the election that the issue first arose. She decided she couldn't work for Scott anymore because that would be a conflict—husband a constitutional officer and Scott a constitutional officer—so she sought out a job in Springfield where there would be no conflict.

She went to this law firm in Springfield and did civil work that had nothing to do with the State of Illinois. She did that for a while. And from then on, she looked for employment that had no conflict. She, A, is a very ethical person, and B, being a lawyer was very important to her. Her mother told her she ought to be a schoolteacher or a secretary, and she was bound and determined from the time she was a teenager to be a lawyer. She worked very hard for it. She went to school part time to put herself through law school; her family had no money to do that. She's worked since she was thirteen years old, and work is important to her. She's very proud of being a lawyer, and she's a good one. And she wasn't going to sully that by taking a job that was inappropriate. She's still working today, which shows you what her commitment to work is. She doesn't have to work today, but she does. She may go on working, even if I retire. It wasn't so much a discussion between the two of us, it was her decision to work and to work in a manner that nobody could criticize. That's how that evolved.

DePue: Again, putting you in the 1974, '75 timeframe, when did you seriously think about running for governor? Was there a moment in time?

Thompson: There was one time when I was U.S. attorney, when one of the black Democratic congressmen from Chicago sneaked up the back stairs of my office in the federal building, from his office in the federal building, to implore me to run for mayor. And I listened to him.<sup>7</sup>

DePue: That election was going to be 1977?

Thompson: Oh, gosh, no. I don't know when it was. It was going to be the next election, whenever this occurred. And I thought about that. Of course, somebody comes

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<sup>7</sup> Two male black Democratic congressmen served during Thompson's tenure as U.S. attorney: Ralph Metcalfe (1971-1978, 1st District) and George Collins (1970-1972, 6th District). After Collins died in a 1972 plane crash at Midway Airport, his wife Cardiss Collins won the special election to finish his term; she went on to serve eleven more terms, retiring in 1997.

to you and says, “You ought to run for mayor, you’d be great!” For at least thirty seconds, you say to yourself, “I ought to run for mayor, I’d be great!” (laughs) Then reality sinks in, and I didn’t see that as happening, so I said, “Thank you very much for your thoughts, but I don’t think that’s for me.”

But I had thought about politics. I mean, I’d been a prosecutor in three offices. At least one of them was political, the attorney general’s office; Bill Scott was a famous statewide politician. In the U.S. attorney’s office, I didn’t see any politics. In the assistant state’s attorney’s office, I didn’t see any politics. I was just a pure prosecutor in both of those. But in the attorney general’s office with Scott, Scott was a political creature and I was one of his top aides, so I got to see it. And he would bring me in on discussions on what he should do in his own political career and how he should respond to other politicians.

He had this tenuous, at best, relationship with Ogilvie.<sup>8</sup> He always thought that Ogilvie and his ace aides were out to do him in by getting him to run for some other office, like U.S. Senate, which would create a vacancy that would allow Ogilvie to appoint his own attorney general. That’s how Scott’s mind ran, you know? And when you’re in discussions with him about that, brainstorming about how best to counter the governor, naturally, you start thinking politically. Not with regard to your cases, that never happened. Scott never let politics dictate a case or its result, but in terms of the political preservation of himself versus others, and what he should do and when he should do it, that’s how his mind ran. And people like me and Joel Flaum were at the heart of that.

So that gets you thinking about holding political office yourself. And the usual run of a U.S. attorney is four years. I know Pat Fitzgerald later did it for a long time, but that’s because presidents were afraid to replace him; that’s not the normal course. It’s a four-year term, and if you’ve been good enough in the U.S. attorney’s office, you move on to something that’s more rewarding, financially.

So here I am, I’ve had this bath of politics in Scott’s office, I’ve been interested in politics since I was nine years old. What did I say when I was nine years old? I want to be president of the United States. I said that in high school, right? It’s in the yearbook. I’d always been fascinated by politics. I watched the conventions: one year I was a Taft guy, then Eisenhower got it; then he was running against Stevenson, and I admired Adlai Stevenson. I didn’t like Eisenhower, because he didn’t repudiate McCarthy. When McCarthy and his ace aide, Senator Jenner from Indiana, attacked General Marshall, Eisenhower didn’t come to his defense. And I said, “That’s it, I’m voting for Stevenson.” I carried Adlai Stevenson’s picture in my wallet, because I’d met him. Now, that’s when I was young and foolish. It’s natural I

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<sup>8</sup> Governor Richard B. Ogilvie.

was going to be interested in politics. So when you're interested in politics like that, and your term is coming to an end as U.S. attorney and you expect that you're going to be moving on to something else, well, what would that be? What was open? What was a great office? Governor. So I started thinking about that.

DePue: Was it more appealing to be on the executive side than the legislative side?

Thompson: Yes, absolutely.

DePue: Why?

Thompson: Because on the legislative side, you're one of many. When you're the governor, when you're the head of the executive branch, you can get stuff done, by yourself. And when I say by yourself, I mean you and your staff and your appointments. You are the executive branch, basically, except for the other constitutional officers, but they have narrowly-defined functions; they aren't responsible for the state as a whole, or for executing laws, or all the other things the governor does by himself. The notion of running for the United States Senate and going to Washington to live, and being the hundredth senator and spending thirty years getting to a place where you could influence something, was not appealing at all. No, I was an executive branch guy. And despite all the times I was entreated to run for the Senate, I'd say, "Absolutely not."

DePue: What would you say to the people who are very suspicious of those who are very ambitious?

Thompson: That's a breathtaking notion, now, isn't it? Then I guess we should elect sluggards to public office, right? (DePue laughs) I mean, that's just a crazy notion. So I'd say to them, "You're crazy!"

DePue: It sounds like you didn't encounter that very much.

Thompson: No, I did not. In all the years I have been in public life, people have come up to me and said plenty, but nobody has ever come up to me and said, "You know what? You're too ambitious!" That's just like saying, "You're lucky!" I suppose I'd have to say, "Well, do you want an ambitious governor, or an unambitious governor?" Give me a break!

DePue: You mentioned Bill Scott, the attorney general. There was a time leading up to this when there was a lot of speculation that he'd be running for governor as well.

Thompson: That is correct. And Bill and I talked about that. I had worked for him, and we were friends. He had relied on me a great deal when I was in the attorney general's office. I admired him for hiring me. I admired him for what he did as attorney general. He was really the first activist attorney general in Illinois

history. Started all these other subsequent attorneys general down the road to be activist attorneys general. I think even he would not recognize the office that it is today, where attorneys general go around suing every big company in America, in conjunction with a posse of other attorneys general, forcing huge nationwide settlements against banks and cigarette companies, and on and on and on.<sup>9</sup>

Basically, the definition of an attorney general is a governor in waiting. That's pretty clear. And Bill had those notions. So we talked about it. He said, "You can't announce you're running"—this is what he said to me—"You can't announce you're running until I've decided whether I'm going to run." And I said, "Bill, with all respect, I can't do that. I'm running."

DePue: What timeframe are we talking about? This is the '75 timeframe, now?

Thompson: Yeah. Now, the truth is, that if he had run, he'd have killed me. I couldn't beat Bill Scott. He was a very popular politician, successful attorney general, known to every Republican county chairman in the state! I would have lost that race, I suspect. But I also knew one other thing about Scott; he did not like tough elections. Do you remember when he was thinking about running against Percy?

DePue: For the U.S. Senate seat?

Thompson: Yeah. In one day, in that potential race, he changed his mind three times. In one day! And the *Daily News* had a big banner headline that afternoon, that said, "Great Scott! He's In, He's Out, He's In." Or, "He's Out, He's In, He's Out." Whatever it was. And I knew that about Scott. I knew he didn't like tough races, he didn't like opposition. He had never run a tough race. And I don't know whether I would have given him a tough race or not. But he didn't relish the idea down deep, I think, of running against me in a primary, even though I'm sure he would have beat me. So he backed off. Decided he was going to run for re-election. And I was going to be the guy.

DePue: And I understand he declared that he would not be running for governor on May 30, 1975.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: When did you announce?

Thompson: I announced, what was it, July first?

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<sup>9</sup> In 2003, a Madison County judge issued a \$10.1 billion judgment against Philip Morris, which would have forced the company to post a bond for the full amount in order to appeal the decision. The firm hired Thompson to lobby for a bill to reduce the bond requirement.

- DePue: July first is the date I've seen.
- Thompson: July first, yeah.
- DePue: What were your ambitions at that time? Strictly focused on governorship?
- Thompson: Absolutely.
- DePue: Or did you have a bigger picture in mind?
- Thompson: There was no bigger picture. Governorship was a pretty big picture, (laughs) if you ask me.
- DePue: So all those comments that you wrote in the yearbook many years ago?
- Thompson: Yeah, I know. Yeah, sure; in the back of my mind, sure. Look, I was raised in a generation where it was an admirable thing for a young man to want to be president of the United States. That was the culture, okay, and I was part of that. But on July 1, 1975, that was not my thought.
- DePue: Was there a Republican Party central committee meeting where you were slated officially? Did it work that way for the Republicans?
- Thompson: No, it did not work that way. And I didn't know what I was doing as a political candidate. I mean, we—(laughs) I don't even remember who was in the organization then. At the beginning it was all volunteers, I think, until I made my first hire, which was Dave Gilbert to be press secretary. But we went and rented a room at the Intercontinental Hotel to make the announcement, and we saw the pictures on television that night. We had rented a room that had zebra stripe wallpaper! (DePue laughs) And it was the worst possible background for an announcement picture that you could ever imagine! That's how naïve we were, you know? I mean, that's all I thought of for days, That goddamned wallpaper! (DePue laughs) How could we possibly be in the room with that wallpaper? I need help!
- DePue: Well, Governor, this was the seventies, and—
- Thompson: Yeah, I know. But, gee, you looked at that picture, you were looking at the wallpaper, not at the candidate.
- DePue: Why did you think you were going to be a good governor? We've talked about that a little bit, but what qualities and attributes were you going to be able to bring to the job?
- Thompson: First, because I was a good U.S. attorney. There were a lot of swing-over qualities between a job like U.S. attorney and governor. I had a very, very deep feeling about clean and honest government; naturally, that's how I felt, but that was also a swing-over from the prosecutorial jobs I had held. So

strong law enforcement for the state of Illinois was a big thing with me, even during the time I was teaching at the law school, and it was one of the things I ran on; obviously, it was a strength.

I also thought that the political process in Springfield had just become ensnared in hostility between the governor and the General Assembly. Walker was getting opposition in his own party, and I thought, I'm not like that. I can reason with people. I can talk to people. I can come to agreement with people. I'm a consensus guy. I thought I could bring good, strong people to government, because I had done that in every job I had held previously.

DePue: Would it be fair to say at this point in time, we're talking mid-1975, that you anticipated you'd be running against Dan Walker?

Thompson: That was the early thought, yeah, absolutely. I thought I'd be running against Walker, because Howlett came later. Have I told you the story about the lunches with Howlett, Bauer, and Marshall Korshak?

DePue: No.

Thompson: Oh, okay. I'm U.S. attorney. Bill Bauer, who was my boss, and later, judge, was an old friend of Mike Howlett's, because Mike Howlett had friends in both parties. And Howlett's closest friend was Marshall Korshak, who was a South Side Chicago Democrat that had been in the legislature and had been city treasurer; he was a smart guy, had a good law practice. His brother, Sidney, was out in Los Angeles representing the mob, but that's different. So these guys would have lunch once a month at the Standard Club, where Marshall was a member. One day, Bauer brought me along, and I was the young kid at the table. These guys were veteran politicians—Bauer in DuPage County, Korshak in the city, Howlett statewide—and the lunches consisted of their telling old political stories to one another and to me.

For me, this was fascinating! I must have sat there open-mouthed the entire lunch; I probably didn't eat. These guys were good, they were like political raconteurs. And they sort of adopted me, so I was told to come back to lunch, each time, and that's where Korshak and Howlett got to know me. Hadn't known me before that, and I didn't know them. So when it became clear, I forget when this was, that I was thinking of running for governor, Marshall said he would support me. Now here, Chicago city Democrat, Mike Howlett's best friend, says he's going to support me for governor? I was really taken by that, as you might suspect.

DePue: But at the time, that's because you'd be running against Dan Walker.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: Who was the, would it be fair to say—

Thompson: Who neither of those guys liked, yeah.

DePue: ...the mortal enemy of—

Thompson: Both of them.

DePue: ...Richard J. Daley?

Thompson: Yeah, and Howlett and Korshak. So I announce. I have little or no money. So I've got mostly volunteers. I do have Gilbert, I do have Fletcher, I guess, by then.

DePue: Jim Fletcher.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Who became your campaign manager?

Thompson: Yes. Although he had never managed a campaign. But of course, that never did bother Fletcher, so it didn't bother me, because I was going to be my own campaign manager anyway. The candidate always is. The candidate knows better than anybody else. (laughs) So I get this headquarters in the old First National Bank building in Chicago, up on the second floor, looking out over Dearborn and Monroe. But I have no money for anything. Lou Kasper, who at that time was the Chicago Republican city chairman—came out of the Polish community, back when ethnic politics were still important—had a bunch of volunteers come and print signs and put them up in the windows. We had no furniture, no equipment.

Somehow, that word got back to Howlett. He called me up, and he said, "Jim, you want some furniture for your campaign headquarters?" I said, "Yeah!" "All right, a truck will come over." Mike knew a guy who dealt in second-hand furniture, and he told the guy, "Fill up a truck with second-hand furniture, and send it over to Thompson's headquarters." And then his son, Mike Howlett Jr.—who just died—had a typewriter business, so he sent over a bunch of typewriters, and we were in business. So my ultimate opponent and his son furnished my first campaign headquarters.

DePue: Small-world, politics.

Thompson: Yeah, but it was good, you know? And I don't think in the campaign that followed, I ever said a bad word about Mike Howlett. If I said any bad words, they were about Rich Daley, and Chicago Democrats controlling the State of Illinois. Yes, I'm sure I said many of those, especially when I was in downstate Illinois. I'd flog the Chicago Democratic machine for all it was worth, but not my opponent, because in the end, Mike destroyed himself, I didn't have to. And I wouldn't have.

DePue: To a certain extent, you didn't have the experience of being in state-level government, so you didn't have that direct knowledge of the legislative process.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Was that a concern for you?

Thompson: Not for me, no. (laughs) It was a concern of other people, I'll tell you that.

DePue: Within your camp, or the opposition camp?

Thompson: Not the opposition. They never really campaigned on, Thompson doesn't know anything about government. It would be hard to do that, because their party was screwing up government in Springfield at the time; that wouldn't have carried very far. (DePue laughs) But I remember talking to the editor of the *Decatur Herald & Review* once, in retrospect, after I went in there for an editorial board meeting. He said, "You know, Jim, you were as green as goose shit." (laughter) Meaning, I didn't know a goddamned thing about the state of Illinois beyond Chicago, or state government, or how it worked, or nothing. All I knew was, I could do it. So, I learned.

I got a \$9,000 contribution from Gaylord Donnelley, who ran the Donnelley Printing Company here in Chicago, to hire somebody to write position papers for me on various aspects of state government and state issues. I got Gary Starkman, who had been an assistant U.S. attorney under me and head of my appellate division, who was a hell of a writer, very smart, to do that. He started familiarizing me with the issues in Springfield, who was for what and what was it about, and what were the issues in the state of Illinois at large? I gradually started to learn, but the only way you *really* learned was to go out and around the state of Illinois, and both present yourself and make clear the qualities that you thought you would bring to government, whether consciously or unconsciously, just by people seeing you and listening to you.

But at the same time, you were listening to them. And they weren't shy about telling you what Rockford needed, what Bloomington needed, and what Springfield needed; what the issues of the day were, why they were important. You talked to the road builders, by God, you ended up believing you were going to be a road-building governor, because if you look at the history of the state of Illinois, that's how the state became the colossus that it is: we've got railroads, we've got waterways, we eventually had airports, but from the beginning, and still today, roads. Farm-to-market roads, when times were tough and they couldn't afford a fully paved road; it was only paved into town, when you went in with your loaded wagon of grain, and unpaved out of town, when your wagon was empty. I mean, you learned all those stories. And going downstate, you had to go down there by road most of the time. Once in a while, later in the campaign, I'd have volunteer pilots fly me. But even then,

when you got out of the airplane and went around that area, you had to be on the roads. People would tell you what they needed, and every place needed road improvements.

DePue: Was one of those people Bill Cellini?

Thompson: Not really. No.

DePue: I mention him because of the Asphalt Association.

Thompson: I don't think I ever encountered Bill Cellini until I visited the Sangamon County Republican organization the first time, and obviously, he'd be part of that. But during the campaign? No, I don't think so. It wasn't until afterwards.

DePue: I did want to ask you about financial challenges, because it sounds like you have to start on a shoestring, almost everybody would.

Thompson: Correct. There were certainly challenges. Everybody assumed that I was going to be running against an incumbent governor, so I don't think the road builders were rushing out to meet me until they knew where the land lay, right?

DePue: Right. And an incumbent governor, would you agree, that had the reputation of being a very good campaigner?

Thompson: Yeah. And if it was not going to be an incumbent governor, it was going to be the most popular politician in the state of Illinois, so either one would have been a big challenge. Yeah, the traditional big party supporters—the interest groups, the road builders, et cetera—hung back, as they should have, in that three-way potential. So I had to rely on small donations from what I'll call real people, you know, average people. I suspect that a lot of those gave because they thought I had been a good U.S. attorney and put the crooks in jail. They liked that, and so they liked me.

DePue: When did you resign from your U.S. attorney's position?

Thompson: July first.

DePue: Same day.

Thompson: Yeah. We scrimped along on that kind of money. And then some money from people who want to be on both sides in a political campaign would come in. I think my earliest meeting with an interest group was the nursing home people. They had always been on both sides in political campaigns. I met with them, and we agreed on what public policy should be with regard to nursing homes and nursing home reimbursement. I learned that lesson real quick, so I got some money from them. And then there was a group of Chicago business guys who admired me, and that I had met during the course of being U.S. attorney.

Remember, after I resigned as U.S. attorney, I went to work part time for Winston & Strawn. The chairman of Winston & Strawn, Tommy Reynolds, was a very big, popular, powerful guy in the Chicago business community. And he had all these CEO friends. He held fundraisers for me in his backyard. Then one of his other CEO friends would hold a fundraiser for me in his backyard. So I got introduced to that community and raised some money there.

DePue: Was Percy the most prominent Republican in the state at the time?

Thompson: Yeah, Percy and Scott.

DePue: Did either one of them weigh in, in helping you?

Thompson: No. No, it was Reynolds and his CEO friends.

DePue: Why did Winston & Strawn want to bring you on board, even though they knew that you really weren't going to be there? What's the advantage to them?

Thompson: I think they were befriending a future governor. And if I didn't win, I could join the law firm. So they had a two-fer; they couldn't lose. I was either going to be their partner, or I was going to be the governor whom they had helped. So that's pretty simple. I remember the guy who gave me my first \$1,000, which at that time, was a lot of money! I was shocked, okay? But then I got contributions from two rather famous people who I went to see. First was Clement Stone. I had met him, I think, through CEO's meetings. So I went to him, and I don't remember what he gave me, but it was maybe \$50,000.<sup>10</sup> An enormous sum. Didn't ask me for anything. Then I went to see Ray Kroc, who started McDonald's; I had met him somewhere. So I went to him and asked for a contribution. And this was hard for me, asking people for money. It was just hard for me; it was just the antithesis of anything I had ever done up to that time, you know? Guys who put people in jail don't go around asking for money. But I had to do it. I didn't have a staff that could do it, I had to do it. And I was the new kid on the block, so people had to know me personally. People want to be asked, right? It's a natural thing. They just don't get up in the morning and decide they're going to mail in money, not these guys.

I went to see Ray Kroc, and he liked me, I guess. And he said, "Well, I'm willing to do it, but you know, Joan"—his wife—"has told me I can't make any more political contributions," because he got in trouble with his contributions to Nixon. His wife at that time said, "That's it! No more political contributions. You don't need them. You've got your own business,

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<sup>10</sup> A \$1,000 contribution in 1975 is equivalent to \$4,400 in 2014; \$50,000 is equivalent to \$220,000 in 2014. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>. Illinois did not have limits on individual contributions to candidates until 2011. Stone had founded the Combined Insurance Company of America, which later merged with Ryan Insurance Group to form Aon.

it's got nothing to do with politics." So I had to come to his house for dinner and meet Joan, and only if she approved could he contribute to me. They lived on Lake Shore Drive, here in Chicago. I came to dinner, and apparently I was on my best behavior, because she approved. He contributed to me, and I think he gave me \$50,000.

So then money begets money. The staff, which had grown by this time, had a ritual. They would give me a list of people I needed to call to ask for money, and they wanted me to sit down at the telephone and make the calls; those were my instructions. And they had twenty people on the list. That's what they still do today, they go take the candidate, put him in a room, give him a phone and say, "Make your calls." Well, I didn't like this at all. The notion of my asking people for money, it just still bothered me. It was awkward. In that regard, I was still shy. I tried a couple, and I just couldn't do it. So I developed this ruse. I'd wait until noon, then I'd start to call. Of course, everybody's out to lunch. (DePue laughs) I'd do this, and then I'd report back to my handlers at 1:00, "Ah, everybody was out to lunch, but I left a message." Well, about two days of that, they caught on to me. So they put somebody in a room with me, as the enforcer, and we started the calls at 10:00. (laughs)

DePue: Who was the "they" you're talking about?

Thompson: Oh, I don't know. Somebody on my staff, I don't know who it was. Eventually I got more and more comfortable, because you needed to raise a lot of money to run statewide in Illinois, and as people got to know me around the state, it got a little easier. People would tell people, or people who had contributed to me would go ask other people for money of their acquaintance, and we started holding fundraisers around the state. And then Kim Fox came aboard. No, I take that back, she came later.<sup>11</sup> I forget who the treasurer of Citizens for Thompson was. Reynolds was the chairman of Citizens for Thompson; Jim Bere of Borg-Warner was the finance chairman; and we had somebody, the treasurer, who was the guy raising the money, who'd make the calls too, and who'd put the fundraising events together. So we scraped along.

But there was one point during the summer of '76, that we were literally a week away from having no money. This was right in the midst of the campaign, and by this time I was running against Howlett. So it was tough to raise money against Howlett, because nobody hated him like they did Walker. Everybody thought he was going to be the next governor. So apart from my friends and from small donations, we were a week away from running out of money. And that morning, I had breakfast with a guy who had been a special assistant attorney general under Scott. He was in charge of

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<sup>11</sup> She joined Thompson's team as advance staff in May 1977, before taking over management of Citizens for Thompson in 1983. For insight into advance work and fundraising, see Kim Blackwell Fox, interview by Mike Czaplicki, July 14, 2014.

enforcing the inheritance tax. I don't know how they did this, but he was not a regular assistant attorney general. He had a company that he used to collect the inheritance tax, and Scott gave him the title of special assistant, just to give him some government formality. I had known him when I was in the AG's office. And he said, "What's the matter, Jim? You look down." I said, "I'm about a week away from having to close down my headquarters and lay people off." He said, "Well, I'll take care of that."

He pulled out his checkbook, and he wrote a check that tided me over till August, when the first polls came out. And there were three: There was my poll, which showed me winning by twenty points. Everybody said, "Oh, that's bullshit, that's Thompson's poll." Then there was the *Tribune's* poll, which showed me winning by twenty points. Well, some believers perked up at that one. And then Jimmy Carter's poll, in which they included the governor's question along with the Carter question, showed me winning by twenty points. Then I had more friends than I knew what to do with; (DePue laughs) then the money *poured* in! The road builders suddenly discovered me. And what do you know? I was going to be a great roads governor, I assured them of that. And the nursing home folks came back in full force. And all the other crazy interest groups in the state that I would later have to deal with as governor. So at the end, three months before the election, we had enough money to compete. And by that time, Howlett had destroyed himself as a candidate.

DePue: I don't want to get too far ahead. We'll certainly get to the later part of the campaign, if you don't mind.

Thompson: Okay.

DePue: I don't think you told me the name of the contributor that tided you over in that critical moment.

Thompson: And I'm trying to remember his name. I'll think of it.

DePue: That's something we can get into the transcript later on.

Thompson: All I remember now is that after I became governor, there was a bill to abolish the inheritance tax, which I signed, which put him out of business.

DePue: Go back to the beginning days of the campaign. You've mentioned quite a few of these names already, but putting together a staff is going to be one of the crucial things you've got to do.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: You've mentioned that David Gilbert was the first, as the press secretary.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And I've heard his side of the story, let's hear yours.

Thompson: I don't know how he got to me, so whatever he said is the story.

DePue: It's the gospel truth, then.

Thompson: It's the gospel truth. Fletcher came from my wife. Fletcher was Jayne's law school classmate.

DePue: As you get to each one of these, can you give me a little bit of a thumbnail sketch of their personality, and why they were important to you?

Thompson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: So we'll start with Gilbert.

Thompson: Gilbert knew was the press. He was the transportation editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. So working even in that sort of smaller section of the *Tribune*, he's a gregarious guy, and he knows all these reporters, not only from the *Tribune*, but from the *Sun-Times* and the *Daily News*, radio and television. They know each other; it's a fraternity. And he looked to me to be a smart, capable guy; he understood the press. As U.S. attorney, I had never needed to understand the press. They loved me, because I provided great copy. But now they were going to look at me in a different way, as a candidate for governor. So you need a press secretary who understands them and can tell the candidate why they're looking at him in a different way, how they're looking at him in a different way, and what he has to do in response to take advantage of what they offer. Free publicity, and you get your message out. So that was important; that's why he was the first hire. But I truly don't remember how he got to me, who recommended him.

DePue: How would you describe Jim Fletcher?

Thompson: Fletch? I didn't know Fletch. Jim Fletcher was Jayne's law school classmate. And one day, she and I were sitting here and ruminating about, I've got to get a campaign manager. And frankly, I didn't know anybody. I didn't know anybody in the state Republican Party. Imagine the nerve of beginning your political career as governor, rather than as precinct committeeman. I mean, that's pretty bold. That's one adjective that could be applied to it; there could be others, but it was pretty bold, start your political career at the top. But I didn't know any Republican operatives, other than my own ward committeemen in the city of Chicago and my own alderman. So it was Jayne who suggested that I ought to talk to Fletcher. She regarded him as a smart guy interested in politics. That was her recollection. We found him, I interviewed him, and he decided he'd take the job. So that was solved, right?

Even though he had never run a political campaign, but I said that was all right, neither had I. We were starting out together.<sup>12</sup>

DePue: Did he know at the time that that's the kind of job that tends to burn people out?

Thompson: I don't think he did. I don't think he knew a lot about the job at all. But he was a smart guy.

DePue: It's not a nine-to-five job.

Thompson: No, I know.

DePue: And he was up to the task?

Thompson: He was up to the task. He was a very good campaign manager. He did very well. Of course, a campaign manager for me in that election, at the end, wasn't as hard as it was looking to be at the beginning, based on how things went through the summer of '76.

DePue: Did the two of you generally agree on strategy?

Thompson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Did you have your moments?

Thompson: Not really, no. I left the nuts and bolts to him and the people he hired. Other people came aboard. Jim Skilbeck came on. Skilbeck came on first as an assistant press secretary, but soon morphed into advance man, stagecraft, witchcraft, everything! (laughs) If you wanted an event staged, you got Skilbeck, no matter what his title was. There wasn't a better advance man in the world. And I had good advance people, I had a lot of volunteer advance people. Clem Stone lent me his political guy who knew advance work, and he took all my volunteer advance people, like Baise—as he recounted in his first interview, which I just listened to—and put them together in a cohesive group, statewide, and ran sort of an advance=man school for them. In fact, he even wrote a book for them.<sup>13</sup>

The book later leaked to the press, and that was embarrassing for a day, because it had all the stagecraft in there, the tricks of the trade for an advance man: How to build a crowd, how to get a good venue, how to make sure the microphones are working, who's going to introduce him—all that

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<sup>12</sup> For Fletcher's account of his hiring, see Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 2, 2015. He also recounts the critical role played by political consultant Doug Bailey in developing campaign strategy and teaching Fletcher how to manage a campaign.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 6, 2013.

stuff. Who's going to sit where? What are you going to do if it rains? I mean, there's a lot to the art of political advance-man.

DePue: That the public never even thinks about.

Thompson: No. Uh-uh. The only people who interact with the advance man are the political pros, or the people in charge of the local event. The advance man appears, they get together, and they plot it out. So Skilby went from assistant press secretary to sort of the jack of all trades of the campaign, but his chief function, and it remained so till I left office, was my chief advance man.

DePue: Who was doing the scheduling?<sup>14</sup>

Thompson: Oh, gosh, I don't know. There were a bunch of people in there that were the heart and soul of the campaign, but forty years later it's hard for me to put a name to a particular function, except some of them.

DePue: I also wanted to ask you about the public relations firm, or maybe the advertising agency, Bailey Deardourff?

Thompson: They weren't an advertising agency, they were a team, a partnership, that ran the advertising part of the political campaign. And I don't remember how I got them, because they were expensive. (laughter) That's probably why I was going broke in August. But they were the best in the country, absolutely the best in the country. That was their reputation. And they'd run a number of campaigns at the same time, so they weren't always in Chicago or Springfield, they'd be in and out. But they were smart, they were good; not only in doing the commercials, which was their first function—

DePue: Radio and TV commercials?

Thompson: Radio and TV commercials. But in plotting the strategy of the campaign; they were part of that as well. And polling. I mean, they were the complete package, and they were pros. They were good, and I listened to them.

DePue: A lot of campaigns always can point to somebody who is the numbers guy, who understands all the precincts and how they break, Republican or Democrat, et cetera. Did you have anybody like that?

Thompson: We didn't have that. No.

DePue: So that was Bailey Deardourff?

Thompson: No. We didn't have that down to the precinct level in our first campaign. We had a lot of volunteers around the state of Illinois, and volunteers beget volunteers. But Bailey Deardourff were in charge of advertising, writing the

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<sup>14</sup> Tom Norton was the scheduler.

commercials, filming the commercials, doing the polling through—they had a pollster by the name of Bob Teeter, so it was a trio: Bailey, Deardourff, Teeter. Teeter did the polls. Bailey and Deardourff were the puppet masters of the campaign, making sure all parts functioned, working with Fletcher.

DePue: You mentioned that they brought a lot to the table as far as developing strategy.

Thompson: Yeah, sure.

DePue: What was the strategy?

Thompson: The overall strategy was to get me as familiar as possible, as fast as possible, with the issues of the campaign and the challenges I would face as governor of Illinois and campaigning, on the one hand. And on the other hand, keep me the person I was, as opposed to the person Howlett was, so that the voters would draw the contrast. But that was all in line with my thinking and Fletcher's thinking. So after a while it became seamless. It wasn't a question of Bailey Deardourff saying, "You do this," it was arrived at, I think, consensually, once we got into a working rhythm with them. And they did all of my campaigns.

In fact, Bailey wrote my inaugural address. And Bailey wrote my first State of the State, with some additions and deletions by me; basically, the two documents were his. And I'll never forget the first line of the State of the State, which was, "The long war between the governor and the General Assembly is over." A thunderous standing ovation, right? (DePue laughs) This was the anti-Walker [mood]. These guys were clever guys, they were really good at what they did, they had achieved success in other elections around the country, they were the best you had in the country, and I was lucky to have them four times. Now, by the second campaign, I was writing my own commercials; or as it started, they'd give me a script to be filmed, and I'd start rewriting it. And as we went on, I would originate the commercial script, because I was getting good at commercials. It was a seamless effort, it really was.

DePue: Going back to strategy, the conventional wisdom is that you can divide up the state geographically into three parts: Chicago, the suburbs, and downstate.

Thompson: Yeah, generically that's true, but you wouldn't want to rely on that division as the basis of your campaign because you'd fall into the trap of saying one thing in Chicago, saying another thing in the suburbs, and another thing in downstate, and you'd soon be unmasked. Secondly, while you can make that generalization about the state of Illinois—Chicago-suburbs-downstate—it's really more than that. For example, western Illinois, culturally and politically, is not like the rest of downstate; it's not like eastern Illinois, it's not like southern Illinois, it's western Illinois. And within western Illinois, there are

subsets of municipalities and rural areas that have different issues than their neighbors in western Illinois. It's a big, big state.

A lot of people don't even understand where southern Illinois begins. Chicagoans think southern Illinois is right outside the city. Southern Illinois people will say maybe southern Illinois begins at Carbondale, where the airport sign says, "Welcome to southern Illinois," or something like that. But they'll dispute where the real southern Illinois really begins, and it's certainly south of Carbondale. As I learned in my AG days, going down with the White Hats, attitudes and beliefs and cultural ideas in Cairo, in the adjoining counties, are a hell of a lot different than anyplace else in downstate Illinois.

DePue: But if there's something that's more scarce than even money when you're putting together a campaign like this in a very big state, it's got to be your time.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So part of the strategy is, where are you going to spend your time?

Thompson: Absolutely. And for me, it was going to be downstate. Had to be. That's where I was least known, and that's where people really wanted to get to know you personally; they wanted to see you, they wanted to touch you, they wanted to understand you. Now, we're not as crazy as the Iowa caucus, where you've got to go sleep in people's basements five times before they'll consider voting for you.

DePue: Retail politics.

Thompson: That's beyond retail politics. That's insane. Or New Hampshire, which is not far behind in that regard. "Oh, I've only heard him six times, don't know whether I'd be for him or not." But there is some of that, and certainly more of that downstate than there is in Chicago. And certainly more of that in rural areas than there is in suburbs. Of course, when you layer on top of that the needs of people, the needs are sometimes common: roads—that's a statewide need—roads and city streets. But even within that subset, people in western Illinois believe that the rest of the state gets all the roads, they don't get any.

I used to joke it's in the water in western Illinois, that's how they believe: All their gas tax money is sent up to Chicago. And as much as I would try to say, "Actually it's the reverse," they didn't buy that. Or the attitude, "Well, I don't have any kids in school, I don't care about education." "My kids have graduated." "My kids are in private school." "I don't have any kids." So I'd have to say, "Do you want to live next door to an uneducated person? You know, a lot of these things which sound good in the abstract, when you get them out there to apply in the real world, you find so many different responses. There are some things that everybody will agree on: roads

and public safety; senior citizens will generally agree on what senior citizens need and want. But God, there's so much diversity in this state, there just is. And you've got to be attuned to that, which means you've got to spend 90 percent of your time as governor listening.

DePue: Most everybody I've talked to about you said that you did well on that, and that you were a very quick student. If somebody had to brief you up before you had to make comments or a presentation someplace, you were a quick study.

Thompson: Well, that's part of the mystique, and I thought I'd keep that going. (laughter) I guess I am. I can take a briefing paper, scan it, and act like I wrote it, but... And the longer you serve, the sharper your instincts. Usually your instincts are what at least lead you into the problem and its eventual solution, and you get better at that. I find myself today in the law firm talking to a young associate, who's perhaps in his fifth year, sixth year. He will bring me a problem, and we'll start talking about it. And after fifty-five years, I've got an instinct for some of these things, and we get right quickly to both the issue and its contours, and to an eventual solution. I can get there faster than he can.

DePue: One of the things we haven't talked about yet, Governor, is political philosophy. How would you describe yourself in 1975 and 1976, in terms of a political philosophy?

Thompson: Probably didn't have one.

DePue: Let me break it down in a way that sometimes people break it down today, (Thompson laughs) and let's start with fiscal issues.

Thompson: Oh, that's all acquired. I didn't have any idea of fiscal issues in '75, '76. I was introducing myself to the state! They were introducing themselves to me. I was listening to their problems and issues and questions. Nobody was asking me about my philosophy back in '75, '76. That came later.

DePue: Wasn't part of introducing yourself going and talking to editorial boards across the state?

Thompson: Sure!

DePue: Didn't they ask those kinds of questions?

Thompson: No.

DePue: They didn't?

Thompson: No. You'd go to Rockford and they'd say, "When are you going to get Route 51 done?"

DePue: Didn't they ask you your position on a variety of issues?

Thompson: Sure, they did.

DePue: Well, let's take that approach, then.

Thompson: They didn't ask whether I was conservative or liberal, or fiscally prudent, or—no, no, no. That came later, and it didn't come from voters and it didn't come from editorial boards, it came from academics—not academics, that's not the right word, but from panel discussions, from interviews. The interviewer would say, "Now, how would you describe yourself? Are you conservative or a liberal? Some people have called you a liberal." I'd say, "First of all, those labels don't really mean anything, unless you tell me what the issue is." And by that time, I had my routine.

DePue: This was later on in your governorship?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Is this a way of saying that, boy, have things changed in American politics since you were first running for governor?

Thompson: Oh, yeah, absolutely. No question about that. I mean, you see Eric Cantor defeated because he wasn't conservative enough? Well, probably because he wasn't crazy enough, not whether he was conservative enough. He sure was conservative.<sup>15</sup> So my response would always be, "Tell me what the issue is, and I'll tell you whether I'm conservative or liberal, if that has any meaning." If the issue is law enforcement, I'm conservative. If it's fiscal matters, I'm conservative. If the issue is people's rights, I'm liberal. That's what I am. Social issues, I'm liberal. Fiscal issues, I'm conservative. Law enforcement issues, I'm conservative. That's me. So you can't say I'm a liberal or a conservative.

DePue: What were the issues of the campaign?

Thompson: Here's the issues of the campaign, as I recall them: People were tired of the fight in Springfield, and the issue was, do you want Jim Thompson or Mike Howlett? That was the issue, statewide. A lot of local issues. I remember being dragged into a group of people who were opposed to the Crosstown Expressway in Chicago, and they wanted to know what my position was, and by God, they were going to get the answer out of me. Meeting on the West Side of the city, I think. I listened to their arguments against it, and I knew what the arguments were for it from the press and the city. There was a blackboard up in front, and I said, "Well, here's my answer to the Crosstown Expressway." And I wrote, "No." Big cheers went up. So that kind of issue,

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<sup>15</sup> Reference to political newcomer Dave Brat's shocking defeat of Eric Cantor, the incumbent House minority leader, in the 2014 Republican primary election for Virginia's 7th Congressional District.

you would mark yourself.

Or you go downstate, Danville, where the big issue was the Vermilion River. Could it be dammed, or should it be free-flowing? This was an environmental versus commercial. So I get put down there, and Skilbeck, the master of stagecraft, has got me in a canoe! And he's got the press on a flatbed truck up on the bluff. I'm to paddle down the Vermilion to answer the question, Would the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River be wild and free-flowing forever, or could you dam it up for the commercial interests? I was there to give my decision, and I couldn't give my decision without experiencing it firsthand, the free-flowing Vermilion River, in a canoe.<sup>16</sup>

Two things: After we got about twenty feet down the river, the young kid who was with me in the canoe—since nobody was foolish enough to put me in a canoe by myself—said, “You're holding the paddle wrong!” (laughter) And there's the press up there! I quickly switched to what he showed me. Then we were going down the river, and I'm observing the river



<sup>16</sup> Thompson's schedule has him taking this “Splash and Paddle Trip” on May 24, 1976. First he met with proponents of the dam, including the Vermilion County Conservation District board of trustees and Danville mayor Dave Palmer. An hour later, he paddled with dam opponents to Saddle Barn on the Hill, where they presented their case. The trip was important for another reason: one of the dam opponents Thompson met was Mike Witte, a graduate student at the University of Illinois, who Thompson later tapped to be his first director of conservation. In Witte's telling of this event, he organized it and was the person in Thompson's canoe. He also ended up favorably impressed by the soon-to-be governor. Going into the event, he saw Thompson as “this Republican who doesn't know anything about downstate Illinois, and who's never been in a canoe, and who's worn a suit his whole life up in Chicago.” Michael Witte, *CEO Series*, Adnewsonline, <http://adnewsonline.com/ceo-series-michael-witte-ceo-of-alphagraphics/>. Photo from Thompson Office Files.

is about four inches deep, and I'm thinking to myself, I'm going to kill Skilbeck! The wild, free-flowing Vermilion River! (laughs) It's a goddamned puddle, is what it is! I mean, who are we kidding here? Probably couldn't get enough water if you dammed it up, right? There's three forks to the Vermilion, and this was the Middle Fork. So I got to the end of my canoe ride. I announced that the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River should remain free-flowing and wild forever, and that's where I stood. No dams.

DePue: How did that play in...

Thompson: To the few environmentalists who wanted that, that was fine. Most of the townspeople thought that was ridiculous, because they had lived with and used the Vermilion River; they knew better. I once did the same thing on the Fox River when I was governor. The environmentalists wanted bicycle paths along the Fox River out there in Kane County. And it was a big cause célèbre. Only problem was, their proposed bicycle paths ran right across people's backyards, so I was in a canoe going down the Fox River to observe where bicycle paths would go. There's a young kid doing the paddling—I wasn't trusted to paddle anymore—and it later turned out to be Richard Roeper, now a famous columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*; he has taken over Roger Ebert's spot as movie critic. He also has his own column. And there, in opposition to what the environmentalists wanted, I said, "Absolutely not. We're not having bicycle paths running across people's backyards. Think of all the trouble that could bring." That was another Skilbeck-staged event. But really, really, the dominant issue in the first campaign was Thompson versus Howlett, and what that represented, and an end to the Walker days.

Now, funny enough, when Walker was defeated in the primary, he sent all his people over to my campaign. That was his revenge on Daley. (DePue laughs) So Victor deGrazia, the evil genius of the Walker campaign, came over to see me and said, "Okay, our guys are coming with you, and they can be very helpful." And they were. They were.

DePue: Actually physically rolling up their sleeves and helping you in the campaign?

Thompson: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Helping the campaign, working precincts, raising money. You bet. They were going to have their revenge on Richard Daley.

DePue: You're going to have to tolerate a few issue questions from me, and we can go through these fairly quickly probably, unless you want to dwell on them a little bit more. The economy at the time was not doing the best.

Thompson: No.

DePue: National unemployment was 7.7 percent, state rate was about 6 percent, so we were doing a little bit better. That's different today. Inflation was in the high sixes. So jobs and economic development are part of the issues, I would think.

Thompson: They were.

DePue: What were you saying about that?

Thompson: I said Illinois had to get stronger and healthier, and the way to do that was to have tight fiscal management of the state.

DePue: A balanced budget?

Thompson: A balanced budget. Well, the state constitution requires it, doesn't it?

DePue: Right.

Thompson: And we had to play to the economic strengths of the state: our roads, our waterways, our airports, our utilities—electrical, telephone; we didn't have the Internet then.

DePue: Was that during a time when nuclear power plants were being built?

Thompson: Yeah, that became an issue. There was a determined minority in Illinois that didn't want anything to do with nuclear power, and I struggled with that. If I recall correctly, in the end I said, "Hey, it's the cheapest, cleanest form of power we can get. Power is important because it supports all the other economic strengths of the state." So there were subsets of issues dealing with the economy, but they were pretty common in every area of the state.

DePue: Part of the fiscal picture is always going to be revenue and taxes.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Were you making any definitive statements in reference to taxes?

Thompson: No.

DePue: I'm sure people were asking about that.

Thompson: I announced at the very beginning that I was running a no-promise campaign, and I stuck to that. And in the end, it didn't matter. The election boiled down to a personality contest between me and Mike Howlett, and how the press descriptions of Howlett changed during the course of the campaign. While he was widely regarded at the beginning—because the press had grown up with Mike Howlett as secretary of state, and he was a good fellow, hail-fellow-well-met—by the end of the campaign, he had so alienated the press that he

sort of destroyed himself. The depiction of him in the press just changed radically. He wrote the press off, so they wrote him off. All to my benefit.

DePue: On crime and punishment, I'm sure because of your prosecutorial background that you were running strong.

Thompson: Yeah, and you didn't have to really say it; people assumed it.

DePue: Were you coming out in favor of the death penalty? Was that an issue?

Thompson: I don't think that was an issue. And if it was, I would have said at the time I was in favor of it.

DePue: How about gun control?

Thompson: That was never an issue. I took hold of that one early. We were out one day in some area west of Chicago, some small town somewhere, and I saw a firing range. We stopped, borrowed a gun, and fired off a few shots just for the hell of it.

DePue: Handgun or a rifle?

Thompson: Handgun. Look, I grew up in the era when every boy had a cowboy set, two cap guns in a holster, and you wore them. That's what I grew up with. And my parents weren't the kind who were saying, "My son's never going to have guns. We're not getting him any guns." So I said, "Skilbeck, I've got an idea." And I forget what photographer was traveling with us that day. It might have been Ferguson.

DePue: A campaign photographer?

Thompson: Yeah. I said, "Skilby, I'm going to get up to this gun range and sight, like this. You tell him to get about ten feet in front of me, take that picture." And they did. The picture was from the other end of the barrel; you saw me with the gun, like this. Well, that picture went statewide. And there were no gun control advocates then, but that picture went statewide. I'll tell you why I did it. I did it because I wanted to make sure that the people of downstate Illinois didn't think I was some crazy guy from Chicago who was going to take away their guns. And when that picture hit downstate, you could just see the reaction, people talking about it. "Oh, I saw your picture in the paper with the gun, that's pretty cool." It was a very, very powerful thing, and I didn't have to say a word. And I never did say a word. I just let the picture do the talking. I remember that, and I remember because it was my idea! (laughter)

DePue: You've been critical of some of Skilbeck's ideas, but this one you liked!

Thompson: Oh, I wasn't critical of Skilbeck's ideas, I was just, Why can't I just go down and look at the river and come back up and make my—no, no, no, I've got to get in the canoe.

DePue: I wanted to ask you about a couple of social issues that were playing at the time. Equal Rights Amendment.

Thompson: Oh, God!

DePue: It had passed Congress in 1972, so it immediately went out to the states. You've got to get thirty-eight states to ratify it. Illinois defeated it in the legislature, and I've heard some interesting stories why. It was defeated every year after 1972, partly because the Illinois state constitution said they had to have 60 percent for any kind of an amendment. At the time, that meant state amendments, but they applied that to the federal amendments as well.<sup>17</sup>

Thompson: Yeah, I know. (sighs) ERA was the bane of my existence for a while. And it was all so unnecessary, and it was all so fake. Look, people knew from the beginning that I was in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment. I mean, how could you not be in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment? All it said was that men and women had equal rights. Now, I always thought, A, as a person, that was self-evident, and as a lawyer, the Fourteenth Amendment said equal protection, right? That's all you needed. Why did you need an ERA?

DePue: It is also a part of the Illinois state constitution of 1970.

Thompson: Yeah. So who needed an ERA? You had the Fourteenth Amendment and you had the duplicate provision in the state constitution. Nevertheless, the women's groups had to have the ERA, okay? And political opinion in Illinois was split very deeply. But in my first campaign, it was irrelevant. Never became an issue. I'll give you a symbol of that. I attended a fundraiser in Alton, held at the home of Phyllis Schlafly. Certainly no friend of ERA; in fact, one of the most vigorous campaigners against it. She was giving me this fundraiser in her home, in Alton. One of her neighbors ran the ERA campaign in Illinois. She attended the fundraiser. She parked her car, with the ERA license plate, in Phyllis Schlafly's driveway, and both women were there, both women contributed, and both women supported me throughout the campaign. Now, what better could you ask for than that? But in later years, oh my God!

DePue: How about the other hot-button social issue of the last two or three decades, abortion, which had just become an issue because of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision.

Thompson: Yeah.

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<sup>17</sup> On her regret for writing the three-fifths provision into the Illinois House rules, see Ann Lousin, interview by Mark DePue, October 8, 2013.

DePue: Was that an issue in this campaign?

Thompson: In the first campaign?

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: No. Later. But my position was clear from the outset. I was pro-choice. Had always been. But what I said to the pro-life people was, if you can pass through the legislature bills that are not unconstitutional by my reading of *Roe v. Wade*, I'll sign them. And that was my position from the beginning. This wasn't an issue in the first campaign, but subsequently as governor, the legislature at that time was *way* pro-life in both parties. So they passed these blatantly unconstitutional statutes.

A pattern developed: They'd pass these statutes by an overwhelming margin. They'd come to me, I'd veto them, and I'd write a veto message saying why they were unconstitutional. They'd go back to the House and Senate, and my veto would be overridden by the same overwhelming margin. Then the pro-choice people would go, usually the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], to the federal district court, and sue that they were unconstitutional. And after a hearing, the federal district judge would decide they were unconstitutional, citing my opinion. Result? Issue settled until the next time, everybody happy. Why was everybody happy? Because the pro-life people got their statutes passed; it was only the governor and the evil federal judge that stood in their way, but by God, they passed them. The pro-choice people were happy because they won in the end.

DePue: Do you remember some of the constitutional issues that caused these to go down? Anything in particular?

Thompson: No, the real issue was whether in light of *Roe v. Wade* and its reasoning, you could do these things.

DePue: This is getting ahead of the story on my side as well, but having just talked to Michael Bakalis, who you ran against in '78, he boiled it down to an issue of whether or not the state or the federal government could pay for abortions. He stated that he was opposed to that, and that you were for that.<sup>18</sup>

Thompson: Well, I was for it for people who were too poor to pay, yeah.

DePue: Okay. But that was not an issue in '76?

Thompson: No. There were no real issues in '76.

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<sup>18</sup> Bakalis, June 10, 2014.

DePue: You mentioned a few minutes ago that you were making the contrast between yourself and Howlett. But earlier in our conversation today, you were making the connection with Daley, that you were really running against Daley running the state.

Thompson: Correct. That was a big issue downstate. It's still a big issue today. But back then, it certainly was; it was a very livewire issue downstate, and it was particularly acute because everybody downstate knew that Daley had forced Mike Howlett to run when he didn't want to run, and Daley had beaten Walker with his candidate for governor to get total control of the state of Illinois.<sup>19</sup> Now, I think that's a very potent issue, and I played that to the hilt because I wasn't going to campaign against Howlett. He was my friend, and I never said a cross word about him. And the same from him.



DePue: He did not?

Thompson: No. But Daley was a good target. And the more Daley came after me, the more I went after him. He didn't understand that his attacks on me were going to backfire, even in the city of Chicago. Hell, I carried half the city of Chicago in the election, I carried twenty-five wards! Who are they kidding?

DePue: I'm going to bounce around here, but I wanted to finish this part of the conversation on issues. Would you agree that the campaign was really more about the image you were trying to portray, than the specific issues that were being discussed?

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: Going back into the 1975 timeframe, was there a point in time you thought you needed to lose some weight?

Thompson: Sure. Everybody wants to look their best.

DePue: I read someplace you had to lose something like forty pounds.

<sup>19</sup> Cartoon in Thompson Office Files.

Thompson: I didn't have to, but I did. The first bag boy, Baise's predecessor, Dan Patterson, was a young banker just out of college who worked for Amalgamated Bank in Chicago. That was my bank.

DePue: We might need to define "bag boy" here, very quickly.

Thompson: Travel aide. The guy who carries the bags. And none of them minded being called "bag boy," except the current bag boy, who doesn't like the title.<sup>20</sup> He fancies himself an "assistant to the governor," that's what his card says. (laughs) He's a travel aide, scheduler, driver—not a bag boy. That's just John's notion. They were called bag boys back then, for that reason. Patterson was the first.

Back when I didn't have a lot of staff, I first started out driving myself. I got a campaign car from a friend of mine by the name of Frank Morrow, who had a big dealership up in the north suburbs. I'd drive to various locations. I think I got in one accident, and I had a near miss on nine or ten others because I was preoccupied, as you might imagine. And I was driving solo. Bad idea! I was talking to Gene Heytow, who ran Amalgamated Bank, a friend of mine. And I said, "I've got to get some more staff." He said, "You're driving your own car? That's crazy!" I said, "I know!" So he said, "I got a young guy I just hired out of college. I'm going to give him to you for the balance of the campaign." That turned out to be Patterson. So Patterson became the first travel aide, bag boy. And he was the driver. We're going along one day, up the Kennedy, and he says to me, "That sign up there, what does that say?" And I said, "You can't see that?" He said, "No. I don't have my contacts in, and I didn't bring any glasses." I said, "Oh, this is great. You drive and I'll read the signs." (DePue laughs) From that day forward, he wore his contacts. He and I went all over the state.

He was also a physical fitness nut. I wanted to lose some weight, and he lived at McClurg, which is a housing facility over in Streeterville, in Chicago. And he was a member of the health club downstairs. He took me over there. And I got this great idea: I should take tennis lessons, be good for me. So I went upstairs, and a guy named Max Davidson was the tennis pro up there. We had one lesson, after which he said to me, "Look, you're never going to be a tennis player. I want you to go downstairs to the racquetball courts. And if you don't tell anybody I tried to teach you tennis, I won't tell anybody you tried and failed to learn." I said, "Okay."

So I went down to the racquetball courts. Patterson was a good racquetball player. He taught me how to play racquetball, and then he put me on a regimen, working out: running, working on the weight machines, working on the free weights, doing all kinds of exercises, and playing a lot of racquetball. And when we went to events where they were serving alcohol,

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<sup>20</sup> John Frier.

somebody would come up to me, “Do you want a drink?” “Sure, I’ll have a Jack Daniels.” I’d take a sip, and I’d be standing there talking to someone. Patterson would come up to me and say, “Excuse me, sir, may I refill that for you?” He’d take the glass, and I’d never see him again until the end of the event.

So under that regime, lots of racquetball; even when we were on the road, we brought the racquetball equipment with us. And I learned how to be a B player. I had never been an athlete, not in grade school, not in high school, not in college, never. I wasn’t any good at it. But I became good at racquetball, partly because I’m tall, so I’ve got a great reach, and because I played it so much. It became like riding a bicycle; once you learn, you learn. We’d play almost every day. And that was true, no matter where we were in the state. I was probably 230, 235—I wasn’t fat—but under that regime, I went down to 190. And people started to say, “Are you sick? Is he sick?” Because I was so thin! I thought, This is crazy, I don’t want people thinking I’m sick. So I went back up to 220, and that was an ideal weight. If you look at my pictures from the first campaign, I look pretty good, you know? And I stayed that way, partly through my own willpower, but partly because of Dan. He just kept me that way.

DePue: Remind me again, your height?

Thompson: I was six-six then. After being governor for fourteen years and being beaten down by people, and being old, probably about six-four now.

DePue: In terms of the early part of the campaign again, August 1975, there was some criticism in the *Chicago Daily News* of you at the state fair versus Dan Walker at the state fair: “Walker seldom walks from one point to another at the fair without shaking most of the hands in between. With 98 percent name recognition, he can simply say, ‘Hi, I’m Dan!’ But Thompson was seen committing a political boo-boo, walking from the fair’s coliseum to the Republican tent without glad-handing anyone, and with 55 percent name recognition, most of it in the Chicago area, he cannot expect downstate fair goers to stop and stare the way they did when Walker goes by.” And I think I’ve got a picture of you in a tie at the state fair. Now, you just told me a few minutes ago that that wasn’t how you went to the fair, so do you think there was a learning curve in terms of how to present yourself and how to campaign early on?

Thompson: Sure, absolutely.

DePue: Remember anything in terms of that evolution, that kind of stands out?

Thompson: It goes in fits and starts. I had a primary opponent, Richard Cooper, who invented Weight Watchers. He was a very successful business guy, and he was a multimillionaire.

DePue: Would he have been characterized as a conservative?

Thompson: Yes. He would have been characterized as more conservative than I was. And one day, we met at the same event; it was a picnic in a town near Decatur. It was a famous picnic, because the theme was the pies that the local Republican housewives made and brought to the picnic. That was the big deal, that's what it was known for. I was there, and I had a coat and tie on because I was wearing a suit. And up rolls this big, long limousine, Richard Cooper coming to the same event. He gets out, and he's bedecked; he's got a coat and tie and vest on, as I recall. And I took one look at him, and I thought, Oh, no, no, no, no.

I took my coat off—handed that off to Patterson, I guess—took my tie down, rolled up my shirt sleeves, and that's how we appeared up on the platform: me dressed like that, Cooper dressed as he was when he rolled in with the limousine. We both made our speeches. I thought his first strike was rolling up in this limousine to this basically farm crowd, but in his speech, in an attempt to appear humorous, he wagged his finger at the audience and talked about the fact that they shouldn't be eating all of these pies, because he was from Weight Watchers, and you know you've got to watch your weight, going at those pies. And I'm thinking, Oh, my God, that's just like standing up there and declaring that you're a communist! (DePue laughs) The whole theme of this picnic is the pies, and now you've insulted the ladies who made the pies, and you've insulted the people who are out there eating the pies as you spoke, implying that they're fat! That was the end of that. He got in his limousine and drove away, and I stayed behind for a while. And as I saw his car pull out, I saw the bumper sticker on the back of his car. It said, "Weight Watchers are losers too," and I thought, Got that right! (DePue laughs) That was the end of Richard Cooper.

The only other story about Richard Cooper, who afterwards became a good friend of mine and is a nice guy: there were some county chairman who I hadn't yet visited early in the campaign. They'd call up and say, "Well, Richard Cooper was just here, and he sounds pretty good. I don't know, I haven't heard from your guy, Thompson." So they were wedging me with Cooper, who they never in their wildest dreams would have endorsed. (laughs)

DePue: Did you focus on Walker in the primary, and not Cooper?

Thompson: No, I really didn't focus on Walker. I didn't attack anybody. I just went out and introduced myself to the state of Illinois. Because if you remember, at one point when I was the candidate, I went down to Springfield to try and help Walker on his education bill. He vetoed some funding out of education to hold the line fiscally, and the Democrats thought, Oh, we'll just stick another finger in his eye and override him, throw his budget out of balance. And I went down there as a citizen to say, "The governor's right!" So there was never any

real contention between me and Walker, that's not what my campaign was about.

DePue: I want to finish off today with the primary campaign at that point, and then we'll pick up later, because we're already past two hours.

Thompson: I've got a hell of a political bladder, don't I?

DePue: Do you need to take a break, Governor?

Thompson: No, not yet.

DePue: I wanted to ask what you did early to really introduce yourself. Specifically, the things I would think of doing are the editorial board circuit, Lincoln Day dinners, state fair, county fairs, those kinds of things. Were all of those part of the strategy early on?

Thompson: Sure. And it literally all focused on downstate Illinois. I was known in Chicago, I was known in the suburbs, and I was favorably regarded there. I didn't need to spend a lot of time there. I'd come back to Chicago and the suburbs at the end of the campaign. I could afford to spend the bulk of the campaign downstate, and in fact, I had to spend the bulk of the campaign downstate. So it evolved... Did I tell you the story, or have you heard the story about my going down to one of those towns on the Illinois River? Down in the Alton area, but it wasn't Alton.

DePue: That would put you close to Calhoun County.

Thompson: It wasn't Calhoun, there was another one. It was a Republican county. I had never been there, and this was real, real early in the campaign, '75. I went down there, and I had arranged, or Gilbert had arranged, for me to meet this reporter from either the *Alton Telegraph* or the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*. He hops in the car, and we're going to spend a good part of the day campaigning. He's there to observe me. So I go first, as you might suspect, to the courthouse, since it was all controlled by Republican office holders—sheriff, state's attorney, county clerk. I went in there and shook hands all around in the courthouse. Then I said, "Let's go downtown and meet some voters." He said, "Fine."

We drove downtown, and I picked out a street corner and put myself out there on the street corner. People would walk by, I'd nod and say, "Good morning," and they'd say, "Good morning," and then keep walking. So after about ten minutes of this, he came over to me and said, "When are you going to start campaigning?" I said, "I am campaigning." He said, "Well, to campaign, you've got to meet people and talk to them." I said, "Stop them on the street?" I'm thinking, That's like an arrest, right? (DePue laughs) I'm thinking like law enforcement, you stop somebody on the street, it's an arrest. He said, "Yeah! Go back out there!" I said, "Okay."

The first guy came along, and I said, "Hi, I'm Jim Thompson." The guy said, "Yes?" "Well, I, ah, I'm running for governor." "Okay." That was it. I eventually learned to stop them and say, "Hi, my name's Jim Thompson, I'm running for governor; I hope you'll support me," or, "I hope you'll help me." And people would say, "Yes, sure, I'm for you," or they'd say, "Well, I'll see." Along came this guy, and I said, "Hi, my name's Jim Thompson, I'm running for governor." By now, I'm really practiced at the hand out, the delivery, I'm into it, right?

He said, "What party are you?" I said, "What?" He said, "What party are you?" I said, "I'm sorry, I didn't quite understand what you were saying." He said, "What party are you?" I said, "I'm a Republican." He said, "Wouldn't vote for a Republican," and went on. And I thought, That's a piss-poor attitude, give me a chance! Well, that was my discovery of the yellow dog Democrat, right? Vote for a yellow dog before he'd vote for a Republican. (laughs) That was the only guy like that, that day. All the rest were cheerful and encouraging, and so we did fine.

DePue: Is that how you found out what was on their mind oftentimes?

Thompson: Absolutely. They'd tell you, especially if they had the time. If they were in a hurry, they didn't; they'd just be polite and move on. But yeah, I mean, you could tell. Or you could go into a McDonald's, sit down, and there'd be five farmers in there talking about the welfare queens in Chicago. They, of course, were the welfare queens of their area, because they were getting money from the government for not planting their crops, but that, you know, was different than the welfare queens of Chicago, so... (laughs)

DePue: Later in the primary season, you got to the Lincoln Day circuit.

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: How was that different? What was that experience like?

Thompson: That experience was good because you were spending time with people who were of your party and interested in supporting you, and who just wanted to get to know you as a person. And of course, I was a big Lincoln guy, so Lincoln Day dinners were easy for me. I'd talk about Lincoln first, then I'd switch into what I was about, what I thought the issues of the campaign were, and you'd end up by asking for their help. So that was sort of a natural forum for me. And at the same time, it helped me learn about that particular part of the state, who was who in the Republican organization, and who could be helpful and who was just talk.

DePue: Eye-opening to meet all the county chairmen?

Thompson: Oh, absolutely!

DePue: Any characters that stick with you?

Thompson: Oh, there were. Guys who had been in office a long time, you know, thought they knew everything, and they probably did. And they were out to tell the candidate what he should do and shouldn't do. Patronage was going strong then, and that was the county chairman's life blood; that was what made the local Republican Party cohesive, the jobs, as well as the issues. It was a combination of jobs and issues that drove party cohesion. Now, of course, that's all gone, except among older people.

DePue: How about doing the newspaper editorial boards? Did they reach out to you, or did you reach out to them?

Thompson: We reached out to them. I think that was a combination of Gilbert and Skilbeck. And it made sense. While in fact, at least in Chicago, the surveys had attempted to show that only 3 percent of the people who read newspapers read the editorials, I suspect downstate it was larger than that. Editorial boards downstate were more important. I've always chided editorial writers in Chicago, "If you think that's so important, why don't you put it on your front page? You used to have front page editorials, back in the day, when you felt strongly. Put it on the front page, then people will read it."

DePue: When newspapers were more out front about what their political leanings were in the first place?

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: Was the *Tribune* still very much in the Republican fold at the time?

Thompson: Oh, absolutely. *Sun-Times* more to the other side, but not always.

DePue: Do you think cultivating the press like that worked to your behalf?

Thompson: Yeah, since a lot of times, reporters sat in on the editorial board sessions. It wasn't just the editorial writers. A favorable impression at an editorial board, and the reporter getting to know you personally by meeting you there, could color later stories that he wrote, sure. Be human nature, I think. It was nothing overt on either side, it was just human nature.<sup>21</sup>

DePue: A couple more quick questions that deal with your early stages in preparation. You've got to find a running mate. Can you walk me through that real quick?

Thompson: There were several. Dave O'Neal, the Republican sheriff of St. Clair County; kind of a cowboy kind of guy, but likeable. There was this woman from

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<sup>21</sup> For Bailey's use of the cascade of endorsements to create a "crawl" in Thompson's political ads, see Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 16, 2015.

Chicago who lived on the West Side. She was Italian. She was, if not then, later a state legislator.<sup>22</sup>

DePue: I know that the state constitution changed how the lieutenant governor position was run. Was this before that went into effect?

Thompson: It was before that.

DePue: So they were running on their own.

Thompson: They were on their own. I kind of favored O'Neal, because I thought this woman was going to be her own person in the lieutenant governor's office instead of being part of the team. So I was for O'Neal. And I remember one of the guys at the *Tribune*, I think it was on the editorial board, called me up and said, "Who do you want?" I said, "O'Neal." They said, "Okay," and they endorsed O'Neal. He had the papers downstate because he was local, and he had the *Chicago Tribune* because that was my ask. So he was elected.

DePue: In terms of learning more about the way state government worked, and learning more about the fiscal status of the state, were you briefed by the comptroller's office?

Thompson: No.

DePue: I had understood that Bob Mandeville sat down with you at one point in time.<sup>23</sup>

Thompson: Oh, he did, yeah. He became helpful—I forgot he was in the comptroller's office. But he didn't sit down as a representative of the comptroller. Who was the comptroller then, was that Lindberg?

DePue: George Lindberg.

Thompson: Okay, so then he would have sent him over to be helpful to me, yeah. That's correct.

DePue: Anything you remember about that first meeting?

Thompson: Not really.

DePue: And one other name I wanted to ask you about, Paula Wolff. I don't know if she was involved with the campaign early on, or came on board after you were elected.

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<sup>22</sup> O'Neal ran against Joan G. Anderson in the Republican primary.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 12, 2013, 84-85, and February 10, 2014, 88-89.

Thompson: My recollection is that she was not part of the campaign, but I could be wrong about that. She certainly came onto the administration and she was very influential.

DePue: This is a presidential election year as well.

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: I'm sure people were asking you in the primary season whether you were Ford or Reagan.

Thompson: Ford.

DePue: Did you elaborate on that?

Thompson: I mean, he was the president of the United States.

DePue: You're going to hate this characterization, but in terms of your particular political philosophy, or where you're at in the spectrum, you were very much a moderate Republican, it sounds like.

Thompson: Yeah. So I was for Ford, and he was the president. And he asked for my help. In fact, I was endorsed by every newspaper in the state, except one. I was not endorsed by the paper in St. Clair County. Ford was running in a very tough campaign. Illinois was a bellwether state; Illinois had voted right in the presidential campaign for sixty years. So goes Illinois, so goes the nation. And he wanted my help.

He was having a big rally up at one of the shopping centers in the northern suburbs of Chicago, and he wanted me there to introduce him. And it conflicted with my appointment with the editorial board of this St. Clair County newspaper, and I had to choose. I chose going up there and helping the president. They were so mad at me, so mad at me, and the fact that I was going to be with the president of the United States didn't matter to them. They were the most important thing in the world, right? What did they do? They endorsed Howlett for governor, and their own sheriff, Dave O'Neal for lieutenant governor. But you couldn't do that, because once O'Neal was elected, he was on my team. That's how nuts they were, just to spite me! (DePue laughs) It didn't make any difference, because it was foolishness of the highest order; they were just acting out of anger. But it spoiled my record of me being endorsed by every newspaper in the state. That's never happened to anybody, and I got them all but one.

DePue: Did you spend any of your marketing money and TV time or radio time for the primary?

Thompson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: To get yourself introduced to the public?

Thompson: Yeah. In fact, those were the days when TV was a lot cheaper. And the first commercial we did was sort of introductory, this is who Jim Thompson is. It was five or six minutes long. Imagine that today. And this was not cable, this was regular TV.

DePue: When there were only three networks out there.

Thompson: Yeah. It didn't cost a lot to do a five-minute commercial. You couldn't do that today. And it was introductory. It started with me as a young boy: Here's Jim Thompson, born and raised West Side of Chicago, a young boy, went to Sunday school, later became a Sunday school teacher, and just took me on through my career as the guy who put people in jail. And that went only downstate, where the rates were a lot cheaper. And that was important, I think, because it was the first that a lot of those people ever heard of me.

Later on, we had more sophisticated commercials, but the best one ever, best one ever, was a Bailey Deardourff commercial. They stationed me out in front of a bank in Oak Park, Illinois, at a busy intersection. People were coming back and forth into the bank, out of the bank, so I was stationed right there in front of the bank. And I would, as passersby came, stick out my hand and say, "Hey, I'm Jim Thompson, I'm running for governor; I hope I have your support." People would stop and talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. And they were filming all the while, looking for something. And that's what we call a "man on the street commercial."

So this older lady comes up. I stick out my hand, and say, "Hi, I'm Jim Thompson, I'm running for governor." She says, "I've heard of you." Now, here I am, six feet six inches tall, she's about up to here on me. And I'm bending over, you know, great picture. We talked a little more, and she said, "I'm going to vote for you." And I said, "Why is that?" And she said, "Because I think you're honest." Well, she became the *star* of the commercial. She was the last one shown, and the commercial ended with a freeze frame on her and me, after she said, "Because I think you're honest." Looking up at me, like this. You know? (DePue laughs) Powerful stuff. The only problem was, they forgot to get her to sign the waiver of using her in the commercial. And they realized the next day at the headquarters, "We didn't get her release!" So what did we do? We stationed a crew in front of that bank for the next three weeks, looking for her! Never found her, and finally decided, It's too good, we've got to use it. We'll deal with any objections later, but we've got to use

it. And we used it. Very powerful commercial, very powerful. And she was never seen or heard from again. But it was just an incredible piece of campaign photography and commercial message.<sup>24</sup>

DePue: Dave Gilbert did give me some videos of your early commercials, and I think that's one of them. We're going to post these commercials up on the website, so hopefully we can get some of the opposition advertisements as well.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

<u>THOMPSON FILM SHOOT</u>		
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 1975		
8:45 a.m.	Depart	Film Crew departs Sheraton Chicago-Hotel
9:25 a.m.	Arrive	Oak Park Mall EMERGENCY PHONE: 383-1750 ALTERNATE LOCATION: Yorktown Mall (interior) CONTACT: Ray Stannis 629-7330
9:45 a.m.	Arrive	Thompson Van arrives. It Parks as near as possible to rear side of Oak Park Bank (North side of Mall) next to chain fence. DRESS: Sports Coat
**9:50 a.m.	Arrive	Jim Thompson Arrives Oak Park Mall at American Flag Poll in center of Mall near Cozy Corner Restaurant EMERGENCY PHONE: 383-1750
9:50 - 10:00 a.m.	Briefing	Final Briefing by D. Bailey
10:00 a.m.	Film	Filming begins for street campaigning activity. D.Kennelly and Van driver should funnel passer-bys to the Candidate.
11:15 a.m.	Depart	Thompson departs film location. NOTE: Allow additional time if Yorktown Mall is used as alternate location.
11:15 - 11:30 a.m.	Wrap	Film Crew wraps
11:30 - 12:30 p.m.	Lunch	Lunch at Cozy Corner Restaurant Phone: 383-1750
12:30 - 12:45 p.m.	Film	Exterior shot of Thompson's boyhood home 1129 Elmwood in Oak Park
12:45 p.m.	Depart	Boyhood home
**NOTE: Pertains to Candidate Thompson		

<sup>24</sup> Gilbert and Fletcher also recalled this as a key moment in the campaign. Gilbert called it, "money in the bank," while Fletcher said the commercial "was the greatest thing that I was ever a part of in terms of creativity." David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 26, 2014, and Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 9, 2015. Bailey laid out a detailed schedule for filming December 3-4, 1975 Photo is from Thompson's schedule for December 3, Thompson Office Files.

DePue: But I think we've got that one. The election results, on primary election day, 77.1 percent Thompson, 9 percent Cooper.<sup>25</sup>

Thompson: Pretty good.

DePue: It's an overwhelming victory.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: I assume you weren't worried at all about the primary day.

Thompson: No.

DePue: What was your reaction when you found out the results on the other side of the ledger? Michael Howlett, 48.1 percent, Dan Walker 41.7 percent.

Thompson: I thought, This is going to be tough. It's one thing to run against Walker, who was a very polarizing politician and had his enemies in his own party. And I didn't know what the reaction of the Daley people would be if Walker won. I don't think they'd help me, they'd just—I don't know what they would do. But Howlett won. And the Walker people were so unhappy, as I said, they got together and said, "We'll fix them in Chicago. We're going to support Thompson." And they did. DeGrazia rounded them up, and they were very good in influencing votes in certain parts of downstate Illinois. That was Walker territory.

DePue: That's probably a pretty good place to end for today, and we've got the rest of the general election—although you and I have been talking about that a lot. The next time we get together, we'll close up the '76 election and get you into office.

Thompson: Okay!

DePue: Thank you very much, Governor.

Thompson: My pleasure.

(end of interview #6)

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<sup>25</sup> DePue is citing Thompson's share of the total Republican ballots cast. Thompson's share of the Republican gubernatorial primary votes cast was 86.4 percent, while Cooper picked up 13.5 percent. State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast at the Primary Election, March 16, 1976*.

## Interview with James Thompson

# IST-A-L-2013-054.07

Interview # 7: July 30, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, July 30, 2014. My name is Mark DePue, director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. And today we're about ready to start the seventh session with Gov. Jim Thompson. Good afternoon, Governor.

Thompson: I hope I live long enough to complete this odyssey.

DePue: Me too! (Thompson laughs) But there are so many interesting things for us to talk about. Last time, we got through most of the '76 gubernatorial election. We got you through the primary and talked a lot about the general election as it was going along, but I've got some more questions for you. And I guess I'm going to start with the hope that you're going to tell some colorful stories from the campaign trail in 1976.

Thompson: Baise has told them all.

DePue: He has told some great stories.

Thompson: Only half are true.

DePue: (laughs) How about some parades? Any parades that you remember in particular?

Thompson: There are two I remember in particular. The German American parade in Chicago, in October '75. That was probably longest day of the campaign. I

was up early for a 6:00 breakfast and photo shoot with *People Magazine* in our house on Fullerton Avenue in Chicago. And then I had to argue a case in the appellate court; then I had to make three or four appearances; and then I had to march in the Oktoberfest parade! And it was cold as hell. We're marching down State Street, and I thought, Boy, governing can't be as hard as this! Tough day.

The other one I remember is July 4, 1976. I did four parades that day, starting in the suburbs and into Chicago, then down in Vrdolyak's ward in the



steel mill area, and then to the adjoining suburb.<sup>26</sup> And that's where the people down in South Chicago and the adjoining suburb developed the habit of handing me beers when I marched in their parade. They did two things, actually; they took pictures of their kids standing next to me year after year in the same spot, in effect using me as a giant measuring stick to show how their kids had grown, and they put these pictures up on the mantle in their houses.

The other thing that the crowd did, mostly younger people, would be to hand me beers. I'd march down the street, I'd take a swig of beer, and I'd pass it off to Skilbeck or one of the crew, and then people would give me another and another and another and another. So by the time I got through with that parade, I was pretty well (laughs) paraded out! But the affection that you get

<sup>26</sup> Edward Vrdolyak, 10th Ward alderman, who became president of the Chicago City Council in 1977 and later led half of the alderman in opposing Mayor Harold Washington during the Council Wars (1983-87). Slides from the July 4 parades are in Thompson Office Files.

from people like that, it was extraordinary. And it gave you some of the energy to go on, you know? It's a very emotional thing, drawing that affection out of the crowd. And it really buoys the spirit, especially as the campaign days get long in the summer and the fall.

But one of the most beautiful was down in southern Illinois, where I hit town and was welcomed at the airport by the high school band. Then we went downtown, and the leaves were turning; they were beautiful. It was a great Saturday, I think, and we gathered in the



square. The image is still in my mind, thinking, This is a perfect day in politics. The flag was flying, the sun was shining, the high school band was playing, everybody in town turned out to the town square, and I gave a speech. It was the closing days in the campaign, the last part of the fall, and I thought, This is magical! If you could have a movie or a picture of this, this is what American politics should really be like.

The other one that sticks in my mind was a Chicago parade. Daley was the mayor, and by God, he was going to lock up Chicago against me. And as you know, he took Tony Kerner before the county central committee in the closing days of the campaign to rev up the precinct captains. I'm not sure that worked, but it got him some publicity. And in the end, it turned out I got twenty-five wards out of the fifty. So I split the wards in the vote, which was unheard of for a Republican.<sup>27</sup>

I got approached by, or somebody in my campaign staff knew Chicago firemen. And they said that if I would parade on the near west side of Chicago in the city during the day, they would have a Chicago Fire Department fire truck lead the parade. Now, I'm thinking, We'll all get thrown in jail, starting with the firemen, for doing this while the mayor is in charge. But by God, it happened! I didn't ride on the fire truck, I was smart enough for that. But there we were, careening through the West Side just west of the Loop, in

<sup>27</sup> In the best general election performance of his four campaigns in Chicago, Thompson won twenty of the city's fifty wards, picking up 43.3 percent of the vote. He rolled up huge margins in the adjacent suburbs to defeat Michael Howlett by 330,342 votes (57.7 percent) in Cook County. State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast at the General Election, November 2, 1976*.

ethnic neighborhoods, being led by a City of Chicago fire truck with all the firemen hanging on there, people hanging out of their windows, and crowds on the street. And I thought, At any minute, the squad cars are going to show up, and we'll all be hauled off. But they didn't, and I thought that was an extraordinary demonstration of political courage by those firefighters. (laughs)

DePue: Got a sense that there was an endorsement by the Chicago Fire Department for Jim Thompson?

Thompson: Yeah, I guess so! Those were a few of the parades from the first campaign.

DePue: One of the things you had a reputation for is dressing down to the occasion. In fact, we'll talk about this in the future with some of your other opponents as well, since both Bakalis and Stevenson kind of hesitated to be as willing to change their dress. I wonder if you could talk about that.

Thompson: Well, it's not so much of dressing down, as dressing appropriately. I still remember pictures of Mike Howlett going to county fairs in a three-piece suit and wingtips, and I thought, God, how out of place you look, Mike! And fairgoers, none of whom are dressed like that, are going to look at you and think, Does he really understand us? Does he really know what we're doing here? Does he understand agriculture? Does he understand agricultural exhibitions? What is this? So I went in jeans and a shirt and boots, which is what you should be wearing at a county fair, or a state fair in Springfield. You're going into animal barns, looking at the livestock. You're marching up and down a dusty fairway. It doesn't make any sense to dress other than the way I was dressing. Political candidates who make foolish examples of themselves by not adopting the dress that people are using that day, I think, suffer for it. They raise questions about their empathy for, or their sympathy with, or their awareness of what's going on around them.<sup>28</sup>

So it wasn't a matter of dressing down. Same thing with a football game. You dress for a football game, like everybody else did. I think I rarely, if ever, wore a suit to a football game. Why would I do that? Same thing with



<sup>28</sup> Undated photo from Boxed Photos, Thompson Office Files. "Bill" inscribed the back of the photo, "As Doug Bailey reminded me, you always did have a way with the farmyard vote."

parades. That famous parade where Adlai showed up in a raincoat, carrying an umbrella and a briefcase and hat, and during the course of walking along with the reporter, managed to call himself a wimp—which was the headline the next day—was just terrible for him. But you look at a picture of that, and you think, My goodness; I mean, get into the spirit of it! Be appropriate.

DePue: Did you have to expand your wardrobe a little bit in the process of running?

Thompson: No, not at all. If you're going to wear casual clothes to a casual event, I had plenty of casual clothes, and I had suits. I was a practicing lawyer, U.S. attorney, and the suits were my costume when I was U.S. attorney, so that wasn't a problem.

DePue: How about the penchant for t-shirts? You've mentioned that you've got quite a collection of these t-shirts.

Thompson: It's not so much that I would wear a t-shirt—I guess I did occasionally—but that people would give you t-shirts: if you visited school, get a t-shirt; if you visited a county fair or a state fair, people were handing you t-shirts; a groundbreaking, you might get a t-shirt; you could get a t-shirt almost anywhere. I mean, go in and do a radio interview in a downstate radio station, and they'd give you the radio's t-shirt. So it was a matter of accumulating this crazy collection of t-shirts, not so much wearing them.

DePue: These weren't, then, t-shirts that your own campaign was putting out?

Thompson: Oh, yeah, we had t-shirts in the campaign that we handed out to Thompson supporters, or to people marching with me in the parade. But I didn't wear those.

DePue: How about this one, then, Governor? You just talked about dressing to the occasion. Was there also a factor of drinking to the occasion?

Thompson: Drinking to the occasion?

DePue: We just heard the story about drinking beer with the parade goers.

Thompson: Yeah. But that wasn't a deliberate thing on my part; that was on their part. They wanted to do that. And I thought it would be rude to refuse the beer when it was being offered, (laughs) because it was being offered in a very friendly, jubilant, happy fashion; they're parade watchers, they got their six-pack in their ice chest. In my first campaign, I think, I went to one keg party at the University of Illinois, back when the drinking age was eighteen. And we raised a fair amount of money from kids, which always shocked me, that college kids would give you money. They certainly would give you beer, but not money. But they did! So I had a couple of beers with the guys on that occasion. And there might be other occasions where alcohol would be served, in an appropriate fashion.

DePue: If I can mention one story that Dave Gilbert passed along, and you can confirm or deny, then.<sup>29</sup>

Thompson: Gilbert!

DePue: And I think this was Peoria. It was outside a factory, early in the morning—

Thompson: Oh, yeah. This was East Peoria.

DePue: Factory workers were coming out, and you noticed that a healthy percentage of them were going into a bar across the street. You went into the bar, and they asked, “What do you want?” You said, “I’ll have what they’re drinking,” and that was a shot and a beer.

Thompson: A shot and a beer. Absolutely. That’s one of the great, classic stories of not only that campaign, but every time I was in that city. I was in East Peoria. I was shaking hands at the Caterpillar gates, at the 6:00 a.m. shift change. So I was there early, shaking hands with the workers as they came out. Now, most of these guys were Democrats. They were UAW members. They might have been conservative, or maybe a little more conservative than their union leaders. They’re all blue-collar guys. People shaking hands at the shift change at Caterpillar gates is an old political custom down there; I wasn’t the first to do that. And I did notice them all after they passed by me, heading to the saloon.

So when we finished shaking hands, when the shift change was essentially over, I followed them in there. I sat up in the bar, and the guy said, “What do you want?” And I said, “Well, give me what they’re having. What are they having?” He said, “A shot and a beer.” I said, “Okay.” Now, this is 6:30 in the morning, and forgetting that I had a long day, beginning with a speech to the Rotary after this morning interlude. The whole day just went on, and it was not easy.

I saw this sign up behind the bar, and it said, “Ask me about the Jimmy Carter sandwich.” I said, “What’s the Jimmy Carter sandwich?” And he said, “Peanut butter and baloney.” I said, “Why?” “Because he’s a peanut farmer and he’s full of baloney!” Carter had been shaking hands at the shift-change gates, and the secret service closed the saloon, thereby pissing off the saloon owner, Jugs Anthony—who became a dear friend—and pissing off the Caterpillar workers who couldn’t go into their favorite saloon to drink after the shift change.<sup>30</sup> I said, “I’d never do that,” So, he [Anthony] took a liking to me. And every time I visited Peoria for the next fifteen years, I wouldn’t leave Peoria until I went to East Peoria, to that saloon. He made a rule that

<sup>29</sup> David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 27, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Charles “Jugs” Anthony owned Anthony’s.

whenever I was in the saloon, all drinks were on the house, as long as I was there.

DePue: He was picking up the tab?

Thompson: He was picking up the tab. Obviously, it gave me a lot of friends, right? (laughter) He'd say, "Governor's in the house, drinks are on the house!" I'd grab a drink, and I'd go down and sit at a table of Cat workers. He was Lebanese, and he kept a bottle of Arak under the bar; that was a Lebanese liqueur, only this wasn't from a distillery, this was homemade. It was pretty powerful. We soon developed a ritual where every new bag boy got his initiation at Jugs Anthony's; he'd have to sit at the bar and drink a glass of Arak. We were fast friends.

I fell asleep on his lawn one time. We were visiting down there on Sunday, Jayne and I. He had a dinner for me and some friends. I had some Arak, and it was summer, and I said, "I've got to go out for some air." I sat down on his front lawn, and I think I dozed off. I woke up, and there's the state police standing over me, and a bunch of neighborhood kids standing over me, looking down at the governor! (laughter) Like Rip Van Winkle, right? But stuff like that was part of the joy, or the happiness of campaigning.

DePue: How much did you enjoy being on the campaign trail?

Thompson: I loved it. I really did. A lot of politicians don't like to campaign. But a politician, or a political candidate, is a salesman. And the only way you can sell, apart from television advertising or radio advertising or interviews, is to campaign. A lot of candidates these days do less and less physical campaigning, a lot less of door-to-door campaigning or the meet and greets. And they rely on television, and they rely on negative commercials; define your opponent before he defines you. When I first started out, I did a lot of campaigning, so I was brand new at it. I learned how to do it. And it became a joy.

I mean, I would get dropped off at Six Corners, and I'd head into the Sears store and stand in the isles and shake hands, until they shuffled you out. (laughs) Or I'd go into a K-Mart, and the manager would say, "We have a Blue Light special! Jim Thompson is here campaigning!" (laughter) So I was the Blue Light special for half an hour.<sup>31</sup> But I'd go walking down a street in a neighborhood in Chicago, or in a town downstate, and I'd go in and out of every store, shaking hands. Eventually, you'd draw a crowd. I'd go into the beauty parlors, and the ladies were sitting there under the machines, getting their hair curled, and they were startled to see me shake hands with everyone.

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<sup>31</sup> Six Corners is a large shopping area on the Northwest Side of Chicago at the intersection of Cicero and Milwaukee Avenues and Irving Park Road.

I once took a whole press corps into a steam bath in Chicago. It was a steam bath on Division Street. It was an old-time Russian steam bath; it went back to the twenties.<sup>32</sup> We were street campaigning in Wicker Park, and we went charging in there. (laughs) These guys are sitting around, smoking cigars, playing cards. We ran into the steam room, and all the photographers' lenses fogged up, so that didn't work very well. But it was theater: the press enjoyed it, I enjoyed it, the people enjoyed it. I was always a very physical campaigner, like Billy Clinton; you know, arm around the shoulder, handshake, squeeze.

DePue: Is that your natural style anyway, or did you have to develop that?

Thompson: I had to learn that. Yeah, I had to learn that, because before I got into this business, I was kind of a reserved person.

DePue: What, a typical Midwestern kid?

Thompson: Yeah. But once you learned it, it was great fun. It just was. Plunge into a crowd, shake hands. And you know, it does something very important. It gives people a sense of you, a sense of who you are and a sense of how you feel about them, which is really important. It's part of the job of building trust between the candidate and the voter. And you can build trust in a lot of ways. You can build affection in a lot of ways. You can build good feelings in a lot of ways, and it's all part of that.

That's important, I think, because they know and you know that standing there on the sidewalk today, you couldn't tell them what the challenges that might lie ahead for the state of Illinois and for its citizens would be in a year, or two years or three years. So they really had to trust you to find the right answer. That's a very elemental part of politics. If they don't trust you or they don't like you, they're probably not going to vote for you, even though you may be, in terms of issues, more closely aligned than otherwise. If you don't have the trust, you don't have the bond, you don't have the vote, it seems to me.

DePue: What you've been explaining here, and correct me if I get this characterization wrong, is that your focus is on the image you're trying to portray more so than it is on policy issues.

Thompson: Well, no, it's part and parcel. You have to have the policy issues, for no other reason than to satisfy the press, which will peck you to death until you tell them what you're going to do with X, Y or Z. It's one of the problems Rauner is having with his campaign now.<sup>33</sup> He's being baited by the press. "Give us your plan to overcome a six billion dollar budget deficit!" Well, how the hell

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<sup>32</sup> Most likely Division Street Russian and Turkish Baths at 1914 W. Division, which was in business from 1906 until 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Republican Bruce Rauner, who went on to win the 2014 gubernatorial election in Illinois.

does he know? He's not the governor, he's a candidate. He doesn't have the Bureau of the Budget at his side. He doesn't know what the legislature, which is Democratic, is going to do. How can he possibly tell them how he's going to do that, right?

But the press nibbles at him, or bites at him, or chews on him until they force him to do it. Then you come up with a grab-bag list of things, and it's not satisfactory to them, it's probably not satisfactory to you, and it doesn't tell the voters much at all. And it contains some traps. I mean, when Rauner was pushed into doing a tax program of sorts, he said of the service tax, "Okay, that's a fair, legitimate thing." Quinn was for that at one time, but now, of course, he beats Rauner over the head with it. But he says, "And I would be willing to consider taxing social security." (pounding noise) Give me a break! You see the ads that are running now? "Rauner went through loopholes to avoid paying social security tax on his income, but he wants to tax yours." There's a sucker punch if I ever saw one, you know?

So, yeah, you got to do policy. I did it in my first campaign. I was asked at a meeting whether I was for or against the Crosstown Expressway, and I listened to people, and finally came out against the Crosstown Expressway. So I did that. And I took other positions. But it's just as important to give people a sense of who you are, not just what you believe in.

DePue: When you're in Jugs Anthony's, would policy issues come up?

Thompson: Never. (DePue laughs) Never! They wanted to know you're a good guy, you understood them; you talked about baseball, or whatever, farming. They didn't talk about policy in a saloon, never.

DePue: Now, I have heard a couple of stories that you didn't back away from being a Cubs fan.

Thompson: No, I didn't. Got myself booed in St. Louis, if that's what you're talking about. Went down there to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Jack Buck, the St. Louis Cardinals' announcer. I was governor then, and they brought me out onto the field. I shook hands with Jack Buck, and gave him some award from me and the people of Illinois, because a lot of downstaters are Cardinals fans. And I don't know why I was feeling devilish, which happens every once in a while. I had the microphone, and the place was jammed, of course; not a seat to be had. So between games of a doubleheader—

DePue: Cards and Cubs?

Thompson: Yeah. I said, "I'm a Cubs fan!"—this *roar* of boos came out, and my staff is looking at me like I'm demented—"And I'll always be a Cubs fan. I'm living as a Cubs fan, and I'll die as a Cubs fan!" And the place just went nuts. Just went nuts. I did it again at a signing ceremony raising the drinking age from eighteen to twenty-one. I shouldn't have done this, but I signed it on the

sidelines of a University of Illinois football game. That was daring, right? (DePue laughs) And when they announced what I was doing, this huge wave of boos came out. I just lifted a glass and said, "And here's to you." (laughs) The staff was yelling at me for... I didn't do too many of those.

DePue: You're new to the press at this time. How did they treat you in that '76 election?

Thompson: Wonderfully! Treated me better in the 1976 election than they have since. I was a new candidate, there were a lot of young reporters on a campaign trail, and it's back when the press covered governor's races much more closely than they do now. I mean, I lugged around the press corps almost every day in the closing months of the campaign. I had to rent an RV to haul them around in. I'd be in the RV with them all day long, and we're drinking beer, and we're singing songs.<sup>34</sup>

In the meantime, Howlett is fighting with the press and not letting them on his campaign bus. They had to rent cars and chase him. Well, you know what kind of stories they wrote about that, and you know what kind of stories they wrote about me. It was really a wonderful relationship. They were clearly my fans, as I say, because a lot of them were young, and they hadn't seen a candidate like me. I remember one Halloween in that first campaign when I showed up at the campaign bus, and the press corps, about twenty of them, all had Jim Thompson masks that they were wearing!<sup>35</sup>

DePue: Somebody had actually manufactured Jim Thompson masks?



Thompson: Yeah. They had taken a photo of mine, blown up the face, cut out masks, and put elastic bands on it. When I showed up at my trailer, they all jumped out with their masks on. They thought that was wonderful, and I thought that was wonderful! Now, that was a very affectionate thing to do, and there are pictures of me standing in front of the group of reporters with the masks.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson's Democratic predecessor, Dan Walker, was critical of Thompson's camaraderie with the press corps. See Dan Walker, interview by Mark DePue, August 22, 2007, 81.

<sup>35</sup> Undated photo of Thompson in a later campaign shows the joke persisted. Boxed Photos, Thompson Office Files.

One time, in southern Illinois, we were headed down to the gospel sing. I believe it was at Metropolis. This Republican county chairman down there, Bob Winchester, put on this gospel sing, and I was going to speak at it. I was riding with my press corps down there, we had a few beers, and they said, "We're going to write your speech, but only if you agree to give it exactly as we write it." I said, "Sure, I'll do that," so they wrote the speech in the back of the bus. I gave it, and it was a hell of a speech! And I was doing cadence and the rhythm of the southern preacher, but I delivered it word for word. When would that happen in politics today, that a young press corps would write your speech, and you'd deliver it at a gospel sing? That wouldn't happen today.

DePue: Why did they make you promise? Because you had the reputation for adlibbing?

Thompson: No, if they were going to go through the trouble of writing, they wanted to make sure I delivered it. I said, "Sure, that's a deal."

DePue: How did it go over?

Thompson: It went over fine. Days like that—whether it's with the press corps, or with voters, crowds at campaign events, parades—are the stuff of politics, and they are very important to a candidate. At least they were important to me. And they just affirmed my faith in the people of Illinois, and I hope they affirmed their faith in me. If you looked at the election results, you would think that it did; to win by a million six, unheard of!

DePue: Your opponent, Michael Howlett, I understand made allegations that all of this, what we've just been talking about for the last half an hour, was just for show, that you were a phony.

Thompson: I don't think he ever said I was a phony. Remember, he was a friend of mine, and had supported me running for governor before Daley made him run for governor, and had furnished my campaign office; so he wasn't going to call names. But every once in a while, he'd say goofy things like, "Oh, Thompson is all for show, look at him in his Levis," and arrgh, arrgh, arrgh. "He's got this dog he's dragging around the state of Illinois." But that's as far as it went. He was frustrated. He didn't want to be running for governor. He did not want to run. He did not want to be governor. He didn't want to do the campaign. He was a perfectly popular secretary of state; he could have run and won that office without leaving his office.

DePue: Did your campaign in the later days have to resort to what we'd call negative campaigning today?

Thompson: Never. I've never run a negative campaign, even against Stevenson, who would offend me greatly from time to time. The most negative commercial we ever ran about Adlai Stevenson was to say that as a United States senator, in all the time he served, he introduced only two bills, one of which was to aid

him and his family in selling their newspaper enterprise, getting tax treatment for it. And then he got bored, which was what he said, and he quit. Now, that's pretty mild criticism. And it was all true—no phony headlines, no taking things out of context, no nothing. That was the only negative commercial that we ever ran on Stevenson.

DePue: Everything we've been talking so far, all these campaign stories you've been talking about, it sounds like Jayne is not with you, but I understand Jayne was on the campaign trail quite often.

Thompson: She was on the campaign trail. She did a lot of separate events, and not just women's events. She did a lot of door to door, walking the precincts of Chicago. She's a very good campaigner, and a very good speaker. People like her. And we'd do some events together, like the state fair. And obviously, some other stuff we did together, when it was important to do that. But Illinois is such a big, big, big state. And remember, she was working full time. I wasn't! (DePue laughs) She was supporting the family. We had to eat. You couldn't just eat at campaign events. You had to go home and eat and sleep. So she did a lot of campaigning, which perhaps wasn't fair, given that she had a full-time job. But she wanted to do it, and she was good at it.

DePue: Were there different kinds of audiences that she would be campaigning to?

Thompson: Not necessarily. And I think in the first campaign, she even did a video campaign commercial in Spanish, which we ran on Spanish stations in Chicago, because she's a fluent Spanish speaker. My Spanish was limited to *cerveza fría*, so...

DePue: Which means?

Thompson: Cold beer.

DePue: (laughs) See, beer has come up quite a bit in this conversation!

Thompson: Beer has come up, yeah!

DePue: What was your beer of choice?

Thompson: You know, I wasn't that big a beer drinker, I really wasn't. If we were at a state fair or a county fair, it was a real hot day, and they had an ice cold beer, that was fine. One. But I was not a beer drinker. I never was. Not like you see young guys today, and it's their alcohol of choice. You go out and you see these young guys in restaurants or at sporting events, and it's all beer. They don't drink hard liquor. If I went to a reception, I'd have Jack Daniels on the rocks. But I was not a beer drinker.

DePue: Let's change gears here on you. You talked before about the relationship you had with the press.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: An issue that the press just wouldn't leave you alone on was your presidential aspirations, even in the midst of this '76 campaign.

Thompson: (laughs) That's sort of silly, isn't it? I hadn't been elected governor yet, and they're talking about the presidency, which is probably a reflection of their looking for a young, dynamic candidate, as opposed to the—

DePue: This is the doldrums of the Republican Party, because Nixon had just been impeached.

Thompson: Yeah. And who was on the horizon? Ford, Reagan, Dole. The press would naturally be interested in a new, youthful candidate who was tall, and a former prosecutor who put crooks in jail, and on and on and on. I mean, that's the— look at Washington press corps today, honest to God, it's... So it was true back then.

DePue: But you weren't denying that you were possibly—

Thompson: Why would you deny it? Wouldn't that add to your luster? I mean, people in Illinois weren't offended by the notion that the guy they were voting for governor might someday run for president, they rather liked it. They weren't unhappy with that notion.

DePue: How seriously in 1976, then, were you considering a run sometime in the future for the presidency?

Thompson: I don't think I was. Others might have been. You've got to be on guard against taking press stuff too seriously and letting it go to your head. It was a big enough job to get elected governor, because I was brand new to politics. Had to introduce myself to two-thirds of the state, and then I had to govern. And I was taking over from Dan Walker, and that was a horrible mess; he was fighting with the legislature for all four years. So it was not an easy time in Illinois politics, and I think people would not have been pleased with the notion that once elected, I was to have one foot out the door to Washington. And I was careful not to do that. You can't help what other people write or say, you just can't do it. But it's natural to look at a new, younger guy who's coming on the scene with my kind of background, and when the Washington press corps, or even the Illinois press corps, has nothing else to write about, they're going to write about that.

DePue: Next subject is fundraising. How was that going in the deep summer of the campaign?

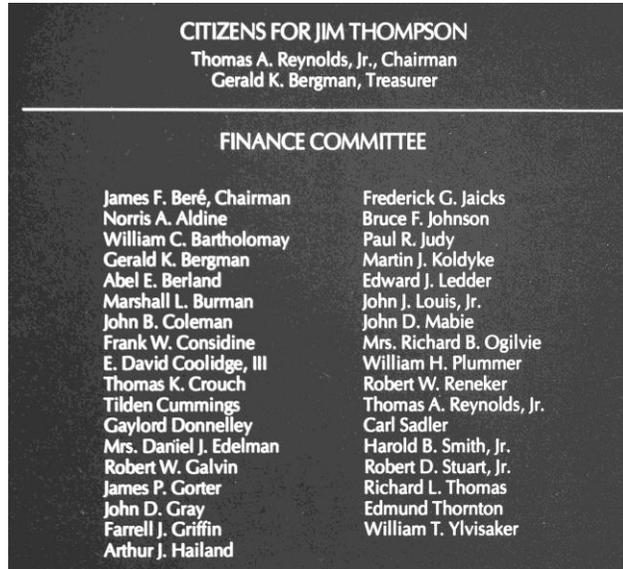
Thompson: That was really tough. First of all, it was very, very hard for me, personally, to ask people for money. And I had a good finance committee, the leading CEOs in the city of Chicago and downstate, who raised money for me.<sup>36</sup> But the candidate, and especially the first-time candidate who's not in office... Once you're in office, it becomes much easier and you have to do it personally less; others can do it for you. But my staff would give me a list of fifteen to twenty people every day and get me on the phone, and I hated that. I just hated it, I couldn't do it.

DePue: We have talked about that a little bit. Was it especially tough in the summer? I understand that you almost ran out of money.<sup>37</sup>

Thompson: We did almost run out of money. We were a week away from being unable to pay salaries or pay the rent on the campaign headquarters. I ran into a friend of mine who heard this tale of woe at breakfast—I think this was late July—and he said, "I'll help you out." He gave me a loan, which we later repaid. And I later had to sign legislation which put him out of business. How's that for the necessities of politics?

DePue: Are you willing to mention his name here? Do you remember that?

Thompson: Oh, gosh, it'll come to me. He was a special assistant attorney general who collected the inheritance tax, and he got a piece of it. It was a business of his. And the legislature, I guess in my first time as governor, passed a bill abolishing it. I signed it. Now, he had made plenty of money by then. Harry—his last name will come to me. But he loaned me the money, and we were able to keep the headquarters open and pay people salaries until the polls started showing me twenty points ahead; then I didn't have to ask for money anymore, it just came over the transom, through the door, through the window! (laughs) The road builders discovered me, the nursing home operators discovered me—they all discovered me.



<sup>36</sup> Photo is from a 1976 fundraising dinner invitation. See appendix for the even larger dinner committee. Both committees were a who's who of Chicago business.

<sup>37</sup> David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 14, 2014.

- DePue: How about some of the deep pocket contributors early on in your political career?
- Thompson: There were some, but by today's standard, no, we didn't have Ken Griffin of Citadel giving me two and a half million dollars; no, that didn't happen. But Clement Stone gave me fifty thousand, and Ray Kroc gave me fifty. And Clem never asked for anything. Ray Kroc only asked me to have lunch with him on his birthday one day, at a McDonald's. (laughs) There are some guys who will give you \$10 and want the world. But Gaylord Donnelley of the Donnelley Printing Company gave me \$12,000 to hire an issues guy to write policy papers, research papers.
- DePue: That they would publish?
- Thompson: No, just for my use, getting me acquainted with Illinois issues. And boy, that was it, until the August gusher. It was ten bucks, twenty bucks, a hundred bucks, two hundred dollars.
- DePue: This family is much more prominent today than I believe they were in the seventies, but how about the Pritzkers?
- Thompson: No, not really.
- DePue: I also read Ann Landers' name. I don't know to what extent.
- Thompson: She gave me money and appeared at a campaign event for me, and was just furious when the announcer introduced her as Eppie Lederer, which was her real name, instead of Ann Landers. I mean, the audience didn't know who the hell Eppie Lederer was. They sure knew who Ann Landers was, and they would have been very excited. I got bawled out for that. But she was a dear friend.
- Thompson: She bawled you out? Or somebody else did?
- Thompson: Yeah! "Jim, what are they doing, introducing me as Eppie?" She was right.
- DePue: Let's turn to one of the more controversial subjects that came up in—
- Thompson: Oh, there can't possibly be any controversial subjects.
- DePue: Well, I think I might have discovered one here (Thompson laughs) that you'll recall. You already mentioned his name, and that's Tony Kerner, who is the adopted son of Otto Kerner.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> For other perspectives on Thompson's prosecution of former Illinois governor Otto Kerner, see Gilbert, March 14, 2014; Tyrone Fahner, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 16, 2015; and the panel discussion, which included Anton Kerner, "Kerner: The Trial and Conviction," Governor's Conference on Otto Kerner, November 2, 2013, ALPL, Springfield, IL, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXMNahvgSGM>.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And I guess he was going out of his way to try to undermine your reputation as being this very honest and upright and empathetic candidate.

Thompson: I understood that. I mean, that was his son. I understood his feelings. Daley was taking advantage of him at the end of the campaign, I thought.

DePue: Daley more than Howlett?

Thompson: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, this was not Howlett's doing, this was Daley's doing. Brought him to the last big rally of the Chicago Democratic precinct captains before the election. Daley made his red-meat speech, and Tony got up there and made a red-meat speech, and I'm thinking, What the hell do these precinct captains care about that? These are guys who are in public jobs, and they're walking the precincts and delivering for Democratic candidates. What do they care about hearing about the Kerner case all over again? What affinity was there ever between Otto Kerner and these blue-collar guys down at the precincts?

So it didn't bother me. It gave me a chance to whack Daley, to answer him. And it fortified my campaign downstate of, "You going to let Daley and the city of Chicago run this state?" I wasn't shy about campaigning like that downstate. And he played right into my hands on that. But I never saw the virtue of Daley and Kerner doing that, because I didn't think they were connecting with their audience. And even if the audience was a wider one through the press, Otto Kerner was convicted and he went to jail. And I was one of the ones who had asked to let him out when he got sick.

DePue: That had already occurred before the election started?

Thompson: Yeah. I was still U.S. attorney when I asked that he be released. And as much as I understand why Tony Kerner felt the way he did, he was at the trial. He heard the evidence. What did he think about Kerner's obvious lies and the racing stock secretly held? That's hard to explain, and he certainly didn't explain it very well to the jury.

DePue: I would assume you knew at that time that Tony Kerner really devoted his life for the next few years after that—you could make a case all the way up to the present—of trying to exonerate his father.

Thompson: Well, sure.

DePue: I want to get specific in this one, a WBBM interview that you had with Bill Kurtis on October 19th.

Thompson: That he had, or I had?

DePue: That you had with Bill Kurtis, and the focus of the interview was about all these allegations that Tony was bringing forward.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And there was a series of issues I just want to go down the line and ask you about, from the context of the 1976 election.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: Nixon's administration had targeted Otto Kerner in order to weaken the Daley organization in Illinois, and that was according to Charles Colson.<sup>39</sup>

Thompson: Absolutely not. First of all, the final decision on indicting Kerner was mine. I refused to let Bauer return the indictment, because he was going to the district court where he would be in the same federal judicial system as Kerner, who was then sitting on the Seventh Circuit. And I thought that would have been very awkward for Bill, so I signed the indictment and returned it. The decision was mine, not Colson's, not Nixon's, not anybody else. And the investigation started not as one that was targeting Kerner, but that was looking at corruption in the State of Illinois. It was started and carried on in Washington, until we in the U.S. attorney's office joined in the investigation later on, when they revealed it to us. We didn't know it was underway. But the investigation was conducted by veteran prosecutors in the Department of Justice that were not part of the Nixon administration. They predated the Nixon administration; they were career prosecutors. So the notion that the White House targeted Otto from the beginning, and that this was some masterminded thing in Washington, was crazy.

DePue: Here was the next statement that he had for you to respond to: Indicting Kerner was a condition that had to be met before you got the job as U.S. attorney.

Thompson: I got the job as U.S. attorney long before the Kerner case came out. I didn't even know there was a Kerner case at that time. I didn't know there was a Kerner case until the Department of Justice's career prosecutors brought it to us several years later. So that obviously couldn't have happened.

DePue: But I thought you said you didn't want to—

Thompson: Bauer was the U.S. attorney during the time of the investigation. I was a first assistant.

DePue: But you didn't want him to deliver it, because of his—

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<sup>39</sup> Colson was White House counsel under President Nixon.

- Thompson: He was going to the bench, and I was going to be the next U.S. attorney.
- DePue: So you knew about it, certainly, by the time you were appointed U.S. attorney.
- Thompson: No. No, no, no. It was several years later. I was appointed in '71. The Kerner case was, what, '73?
- DePue: Right, but the investigation was ongoing before that.
- Thompson: Yeah, but we didn't know about the investigation. The investigation was being conducted in Washington in the Department of Justice by career prosecutors. We didn't know a thing about it in Chicago, until it was near time to decide whether to indict or not. So at that point, we joined the investigation, and we ultimately decided to return the indictment. I went to Washington, I laid out the case before the assistant attorney general in charge of the tax division and the assistant attorney general in charge of the criminal division, and said, "I think the evidence is there." And that's when I was told by the assistant attorney general in charge of the criminal division, "The attorney general says this case is not going to happen unless *you*, Thompson, try it. Unless you're sitting at the prosecution table. You want to bring this case? You try it."
- DePue: And Bauer was already on the bench?
- Thompson: Yeah. So we were in charge of the grand jury; we had these prosecutors from Washington, and postal inspectors, and IRS agents who had done most of the investigation; we're getting ready to return the indictment, and Bauer is only days away from taking the bench. He had already been nominated and confirmed by the Senate, and I said, "Bill, it doesn't make any sense for you to return this indictment. You're going to be on that bench. Kerner's going to be sitting one floor above you in the federal courts. That's very awkward. I'll return the indictment." But we didn't know a thing about the Kerner case in 1971, when I became U.S. attorney. And I was Percy's choice, not the Department of Justice's choice.<sup>40</sup>
- DePue: The next question or comment: the key witness, William Miller, was threatened and cajoled by you, by your people, until he turned government witness.
- Thompson: I don't think anybody could cajole William Miller. I really don't. After we returned the indictment, we were preparing for a trial, and that was a year-long thing between the indictment and the trial, at least a year. We divided up the witnesses, and Skinner took Marge Everett. He got to go to Arizona to interview her, and I got William Miller, so I had to go to Dalton to interview

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<sup>40</sup> Sen. Charles Percy, who would have controlled the appointment as the senior senator of the president's party.

him. And he was a cantankerous old guy. I mean, he set the conditions for his interviews.

You had to sit and listen to his theories, to his pontificating, and you had to have a drink with him, and on and on and on and on, in order to pry documents out of the guy. I remember the day when the IRS agent and I were down there interviewing him, and he suddenly made reference to a cache of documents. We said, "What are those? We've never seen those." He had a filing cabinet over there, and so he finally opened the filing cabinet, and gave them to us. You couldn't cajole him.

DePue: Yeah, we've talked about this before, and I guess it's my fault to bring it up again, but it's in the context, this time, of being in the political campaign.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: The next one—and this is Bill Kurtis' comments to you—"Washington was pulling the strings at the Kerner trial, evidence being Thompson's trip to California to testify for Marge Everett at the licensing hearing."

Thompson: Yeah?

DePue: And your comment in that interview, "I told the California racing board that Marge Everett was guilty of bribery, and she didn't like that testimony one bit."

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And one of the things that Tony is consistent in saying then and now, is that that wasn't what was said. That you were supporting her ability to get a license.

Thompson: Yeah. I did support her. That's why I went out there, to support her.

DePue: But how could somebody get a—

Thompson: She was my witness.

DePue: She was guilty of bribery, yet she should get a license?

Thompson: Hey, that was up to them, not up to me.

DePue: I'm going to read one of the comments you made either at the beginning or at the end in the interview: "If any person in the state of Illinois thinks that I used the U.S. attorney's office to railroad Otto Kerner, I hope they won't vote for me, because if I did that, I would be a person who would be unfit to be the governor of Illinois."

Thompson: There you go. Right. I endorse that today. And I had no hesitancy about saying it then.

DePue: You've already said the news media was—this is my word—enamored with you; that if they were to come down on sides, they were certainly more supportive of your campaign than Howlett's campaign.

Thompson: True.

DePue: Did any of this controversy hurt you, do you think?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Was there any other controversy that was raised during the election campaign that really caused any damage?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Allegations that you were granting immunity to the wrong people during the time you were U.S. attorney? Again, that's something we've talked about before.

Thompson: You know, that's so inside baseball, the average person doesn't care about that. The crooks go to jail, they don't care how they got to jail. Sad to say, but that's their attitude.

DePue: Did you have any debates with Howlett?

Thompson: Yeah, sure.

DePue: What was the strategy for the campaign in terms of planning for the debates? Did you think that was going to be to your advantage?

Thompson: To let Howlett talk? (DePue laughs) Hey, if the guy's heart is not in the campaign, let him talk. I'll never forget that debate in Oak Brook before the League of Women Voters, and they asked him about coastal zone management. And neither Howlett nor I had ever heard of coastal zone management.<sup>41</sup> Fortunately, he had to answer first. And his answer was, "Coastal zone management? What the hell do I know about coastal zone management?" They said, "Mr. Thompson?" I said, "Same answer!" I was leaving on a downstate trip after that debate. The press corps was traveling with me, and of course, evil as they were, they got little kids in the audience everywhere we went downstate to ask about coastal zone management. So between the second and third appearance, I learned what it was so I could bore everybody with the answer.

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<sup>41</sup> Gregory Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 6, 2013.

DePue: Just a couple more questions about being on the campaign trail. I don't know that this factored in much in terms of your strategy for winning the election, but hey, you're out in a lot of different places, and there's antique stores out there—

Thompson: Yeah!

DePue: —and opportunities to buy antiques.

Thompson: Yeah!

DePue: Did you do any of that?

Thompson: Of course, I didn't have any money, but I sure looked at a lot of them. (laughs)

DePue: At this point, what was the attraction for you and antiques?

Thompson: Oh, I don't know. When I was U.S. attorney, every once in a while, I'd have dinner in the homes of some of my assistants. They'd invite me to dinner. This one assistant U.S. attorney, John Simon, had worked in an antique store while he was going to law school, and he and his wife had filled their house with antiques, since he was a collector and she was a collector. And I had never been exposed to antiques, my parents didn't have them. And I just thought they were interesting, so I started thinking about them, I started looking at them, and that's where it came from. Now, it's sort of out of control.

DePue: Did it really start on that campaign trail for you? Or were you already into it?

Thompson: It gave me a chance to be around the state of Illinois, so there's opportunities while you're campaigning, especially downstate, to take ten minutes and go look at stuff. There's no difference between that and playing racquetball on the campaign trail. In fact, I probably played more racquetball than I looked at antique shops, because you needed the exercise, I enjoyed racquetball, I was physically able to play it then, and I was a pretty good player.

DePue: Was there anything in particular you were looking for at the time?

Thompson: No, your tastes change. When I first started collecting, I collected postal scales and antique picture frames. (laughs) Pretty safe.

DePue: Relatively cheap?

Thompson: Yeah, cheap, because I didn't have any money. I wasn't working. And my wife was not about to untie the purse strings for antiques, being a frugal person.

DePue: She obviously has in the interim here, between then and—

- Thompson: No, she hasn't! Not her money, uh-uh. Oh no, she's still a frugal person.
- DePue: Let's get to election night, unless there's any other campaign stories in '76 you want to talk about.
- Thompson: No, I don't think so.
- DePue: I understand it was in the Palmer Hotel in Chicago, does that sound right?
- Thompson: No, it was up on Michigan Avenue, I believe. I don't remember which one.<sup>42</sup> I got to our hotel suite early. Polls closed at 6:00 back then. Now they close at seven or eight. I was the first one there; it was me and the state police detail, I had a small detail then, and the dog, Guv. The state police were off in the next room, and Guv and I were sitting in front of the television set. We turned on the 6:00 news, and one minute into the news, they declared I had won.
- DePue: At 6:01?
- Thompson: At 6:01, because they had exit polls. And it showed an overwhelming victory. They were safe in saying, at 6:01, that I had won the election. This was before any returns were in. I'm sitting there staring at the screen, and I turned my head and said, "Dog, we won!" He didn't say anything. Then people started coming in.
- DePue: Was Jayne there with you?
- Thompson: No, she came later. Just me and the dog.
- DePue: I was going to ask you what the mood was that night, but I guess I know what the mood—
- Thompson: Jubilant!
- DePue: Yeah!
- Thompson: (laughs) Far better than '82.
- DePue: Well, the official results that I've got, and I don't have a detailed breakdown this time: Thompson, 65 percent; Howlett, 35 percent.
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: That's a trouncing in anybody's book.
- Thompson: It's a record for Illinois. Never before or since.

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<sup>42</sup> The press reported Thompson gave his victory speech at the Palmer House Hilton.

- DePue: What was your personal mood that night, then?
- Thompson: Good! Pretty good. I was happy.
- DePue: Were you already thinking about all the things you had to do in terms of being governor?
- Thompson: No, I was just enjoying the election. Plenty of time for that to come later.
- DePue: Was there champagne drunk that night?
- Thompson: Oh, yeah. Champagne, beer, a lot of stuff. Jack Daniels.
- DePue: Do you remember what Howlett said after the election? His famous quote?
- Thompson: No, I really don't.
- DePue: "I should have bought a dog."
- Thompson: "I should have bought a dog!" (laughs) Well, shows he had a sense of humor, after all. God, that was one of his big mistakes, complaining about my dog.
- DePue: Oh, he did?
- Thompson: Oh, yeah. I told you that story, didn't I?
- DePue: I don't think so.
- Thompson: Oh, I thought I did. I bought the dog down in the Metro East area. There was nobody at home to take care of the dog, because Jayne was working. So the dog came on the campaign trail with us. It wasn't a stunt, it was a necessity. At least we could take care of it, Jayne couldn't. And since she didn't buy the dog, she was not about to stay home with the dog. We were in that area again. It was a little further south, maybe. And Howlett had just attacked me for, quote, "dragging that dog around the campaign trail," being mean to the dog. Of course the dog was having the time of his life.
- DePue: Was he still a puppy at the time?
- Thompson: Yeah. Being petted and handled by everybody, and fed, and walked, and marching in parades. So after I read what Howlett said, when I ended my speech, I said, "Now, my opponent has attacked me for dragging my dog around the state on the campaign trail. Well, that fine southern Illinois bird dog"—because I was in hunting territory—"is with me tonight. And after this speech, I'm going to stand on this stage over there, and the dog's going to be on the stage over here, and you can decide who you want to come up and meet." Of course, they all got in line to see the dog! So, Howlett's attack sort of fell on deaf ears. (laughs)

DePue: There is a tradition in American politics of dogs. I'm thinking of that picture—

Thompson: Oh, sure!

DePue: —of Johnson holding his dog—

Thompson: By the ears?

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: Oh, God. Well, I took my dog down the giant slide once, at the state fair. That was a dumb thing to do, but that's as close as I ever got to—

DePue: It made for a great photo.

Thompson: Yeah, I know, but it was stupid, because if the dog had gotten out of my hands, he could have gotten hurt. I had Guv, the Irish Setter, and Jayne had the Collie, which was more of a puppy. And we're sliding down the giant slide. And for once, her common sense got overwhelmed by me to do this stupid thing. And down we went! That was a great picture. But people liked the dog. A lot of people had dogs. How are you going to attack somebody for having a dog or for showing them off? That's what people do!

DePue: So, you had taken care of the UAW workers; you'd taken care of the dog lovers out there.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: You're covering all the bases, then, Governor.

Thompson: Covering all the bases.

DePue: Let's get to a more serious subject, then, because now that you're elected governor, you actually have to start thinking about being the governor.

Thompson: Oh, God.

DePue: Talk about putting together your transition team. Who did you select to begin with to head it?

Thompson: I don't even remember. Did we have a transition team?

DePue: Maybe I'm just assuming you did.

Thompson: Boy, if we did, I don't remember anything about it.

DePue: Really?

Thompson: Yeah. I mean, this is, like, thirty-some years ago, right? I remember picking cabinet members and staff, but I don't remember a transition team.

DePue: Before we get to going through the people that you're going to find for your administration, which is what you obviously have to be doing in that transition period, did you have a chance after the election, before the inauguration, to meet with the Walkers?

Thompson: No, just on the morning of the inauguration.

DePue: Not until then? Did you intentionally not want to reach out to them?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Or they just weren't—

Thompson: Frankly, I didn't see any need, and they apparently didn't see any need. I mean, my people were talking to Walker's people. His gray eminence, Victor deGrazia, rounded up the Walker people in support of my campaign after Walker lost the primary. So we were in conversations with the Walker administration all during the general election campaign, and certainly after the election for the inauguration, but I didn't meet with Walker until that morning.<sup>43</sup>

DePue: Was he gracious that morning?

Thompson: Yeah, I thought he was. I went over to the mansion and picked him up, and we rode together to the inauguration. Now, in his book, he's got a completely different story that I picked him up, and that I wouldn't talk to him in the car. First of all, that's not me. That is simply not me, and that simply didn't happen. And I have no notion of why he would tell a story like that. Maybe he was bitter about losing the governorship. But I certainly didn't give him any cause to do that. I gratefully accepted his administration's help during the campaign. They were going to get back at Daley and Howlett, so they helped me, and I was grateful for that. And as I say, we were in constant communication with his people. Why he would tell that story of the ride from the mansion to the inaugural, I do not know.

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<sup>43</sup> Governor Walker claimed, "We got no cooperation at all from Ogilvie in the transition, and the same pattern occurred with respect to Thompson when I left office"; Daniel Walker, interview by Mark DePue, August 22, 2007, 80. Similarly, Thompson's first chief counsel thought "we had almost no contact with the Walker administration in terms of just the functioning of the governor's office"; Julian D'Esposito, interview by Mike Czaplicki, September 2, 2014. Thompson's budget director recalled that "Dan Walker turned over the budget process to us a day or two after the election"; Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 10, 2014. D'Esposito and Gilbert remember a transition team, but most project participants discuss the transition in terms of building up the administration's cabinet and staff, rather than reviewing government operations with their counterparts in the Walker administration. See Gilbert, March 26, 2014, and Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 16 and 24, 2015.

DePue: Did you consider it your advantage that you were taking over from a governor who wasn't all that popular, especially with the legislature?

Thompson: I'm not sure I thought it necessarily to my advantage, because the legislature didn't know me, and I didn't know them. I had to learn to deal with the legislature. But I certainly referred to it in the first State of the State, when I said, "The long war between the governor and the General Assembly is over." I felt that way, and I think the legislature appreciated that. The press appreciated it.

DePue: Did you get a round of applause?

Thompson: Oh, yeah, standing.

DePue: When was the first time you got to see your new residence? The executive mansion? Was it that day?

Thompson: Yeah, I don't think I had been in the mansion before then.

DePue: What did you think of the place when you first saw it?

Thompson: It was certainly grand. I mean, it was huge. It's the largest governor's mansion in the nation. Ogilvie had doubled its size. But the architecture on the outside was seamless, so that you couldn't tell where the new part began and the old part ended. And it was well-furnished. It's the third oldest, so it had been going for a long time. And over the years, I did some improvements. I brought in a groundskeeper from Peoria to get the grounds in shape, because it was just green; it was grass and green shrubs. No flowers. And apart from the public rooms, I liked the apartment upstairs, and later refurnished that. Then I refurnished it again for Edgar.

DePue: That was in the new portion of the building?

Thompson: It's in the new portion of the building, yeah.

DePue: I've already had the chance to interview David Bourland.<sup>44</sup>

Thompson: Oh, God!

DePue: Talk about your relationship with David, and how does it connect to the mansion?

Thompson: First met David when he owned a small picture framing company. I wandered in there one day to get something framed.

DePue: While you were on the campaign trail?

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<sup>44</sup> David Bourland, interview by Mark DePue, May 29, 2014.

Thompson: No, I think it was after I was elected.

DePue: This was in Springfield, obviously.

Thompson: Yeah. I think he took over that business from an older guy.

DePue: Right.

Thompson: But he was, like, eighteen when he did it. So we struck up a conversation, then we struck up a friendship. Eventually, he became the curator of the mansion. The mansion staff that was there stayed when I was elected. Butlers wore tuxedos, as opposed to today, when they run around in Levis. And as I say, I hired a groundskeeper, and we had a competition over at the school of landscaping at the University of Illinois, to do designs for the grounds. We got local garden clubs to help us put them into action. Eventually, the staff changed; people would leave and then we'd hire new people. I forget what year Bourland came to the mansion.

DePue: I know he's mentioned it to me, and I can't recall it right now. It's early to mid-'80s.

Thompson: That's probably right. He went on all of my foreign trips.

DePue: For the purpose of looking for things to purchase for the mansion?

Thompson: Oh, sure!

DePue: Or for your personal collection?

Thompson: No, he's just a good guy. I mean, we looked at stuff for the mansion, but we bought very little for the mansion abroad. It's not that kind of furnishings. The mansion was full of Victorian stuff. And then when I left office, he was banished by Edgar, so he was picked up by George Ryan who, as secretary of state, ran the Capitol. He worked for George over in the Capitol. George came back as governor, and then he came back to the mansion.

DePue: As Dave mentioned to me, you had asked governor-elect Edgar to—there was a handful of people that you wanted to make that transition. Was his one of the names? Do you recall that?

Thompson: No, I don't remember that, I really don't. I asked Blagojevich. And since I was co-chair of Blagojevich's transition committee, as we were marching into the press conference to announce my appointment—along with the head of the AFL-CIO as my co-chair—I said, "Governor, there's one guy you got to keep on." He said, "Who's that?" And I said, "Dave Bourland, who runs the mansion." "Okay," he said. Bourland stayed under Blago, and then under Quinn. And he's still there today.

- DePue: Let's go to the people who are going to help you run your administration, and I've got a list here, if you don't mind me kind of starting from the top.
- Thompson: Yeah, sure.
- DePue: I'd like to have you do the same thing in terms of why you selected the person, and tell me a little bit about their abilities and their personality. Chief of staff—I don't know if that's the right term to use—to begin with.
- Thompson: Deputy governor. Fletcher.
- DePue: Jim Fletcher.
- Thompson: Yeah. Fletcher was my campaign manager, and I thought he ran a great campaign. We developed a great personal relationship. And I was very impressed with Jimmy's abilities, his political abilities and his organizational abilities. He was just a natural choice for deputy governor.
- DePue: And did you see the deputy governor having the lead of the staff members?
- Thompson: Yeah, sure.
- DePue: What kind of skills were you looking for in that respect?
- Thompson: The same skills he had exhibited during the campaign, where I had a staff which he led. So it was an easy transition. Not an easy transition, easy in one sense: Jim Fletcher ran the staff during the campaign, and a number of the staff from the campaign came to government, so it was sort of seamless in that regard. And Jim understood the legislature. So he was, I thought, a perfect choice for deputy governor.
- DePue: Describe his personality.
- Thompson: Sometimes reserved, sometimes hail-fellow-well-met. A schemer, thinking up stuff to do and how to get it done. He had good political instincts.
- DePue: So he was one of your close political advisors as well?
- Thompson: He was.
- DePue: Was he the kind who could take charge of the staff and keep discipline within the various staff members?
- Thompson: Oh, I don't think we had to have so much discipline. They were all adults. They gave 120 percent during the campaign, so you assumed they were going to do the same thing in the administration. I don't think he had to crack the whip or do a top-down thing. He was more a strategist, and worked with me, and worked with the General Assembly, and the interest groups. In a large

way, it was like a continuation of his job as campaign manager, because an administration is simply a perpetual campaign.

DePue: What kind of an atmosphere did you want among your staff? A collegial kind of environment?

Thompson: Yeah, collegial. I'm a collegial guy. I think the campaign demonstrated that. And I had a collegial bunch of folks. So that wasn't hard.

DePue: Now that you're governor, and lots of people are going to be pressing issues and want you to do various things, who is controlling access to you?

Thompson: Well, Baise has said he did! I've listened to all of those recordings. Lying there thinking, "No, that's wrong. Wait till I call Baise." Baise did when he became assistant to Fletcher, I guess, at one point? But he was also travel aid and certainly controlled access on the trail. And sat outside my office with the secretary, controlled access there. When he ran scheduling, he certainly controlled access, as any scheduler would.

DePue: Did you want to make it easy, though, for people to get access to you?

Thompson: Well, I had too many people getting access to me.<sup>45</sup> In fact, for a while during the latter part of my administration, I would work part of the day with my office doors open to the hallway. The big doors to the hallway were open, and there was just a rope line in front. People would stick their heads in and wave and talk, and I'd go over to the doors. Some of that's pretty easy access, right? That was at least a couple of hours a day. During the state fair, we had a governor's tent. I'd go out there every day and sit for a couple of hours in the governor's tent, so they had access to me there. And they had access to me walking around the state fair, or riding around the state fair. I did a lot of parades and I did a lot of events. So access to me was not bad, even when I was in my office. And I was a sucker for letting people in, so the staff had to control my notions of access, rather than other people's notions of access.

DePue: In other words, they had to be protective of you and your schedule.

Thompson: Yeah, because otherwise, you'd be running until midnight every night.

DePue: That strikes me as quite different than the Governor Walker experience.

Thompson: Oh, yeah.

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<sup>45</sup> On access to Thompson and the development of scheduling protocols, see Gregory Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 7, 2013; D'Esposito, September 2, 2014, 61-70; Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, March 9, 2015; Kim Blackwell Fox, interview by Mike Czaplicki, July 14, 2014; Gilbert, March 26, 2014; Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2009, Volume II: 277-279.

DePue: One of the issues that any executive is going to have to deal with is the budget. What kind of budget scenario did you inherit?

Thompson: I'm trying to think.

DePue: This was not a rosy economic time in the United States.

Thompson: No, but there were worse times later.

DePue: There were going to be worse years, by far, for you.

Thompson: Yeah, for sure. Try '82 and '83. Yeah, they were tough times. But I had one of the wisest people in state government working for me on that, Mandeville. He was my budget director, and he was my budget director for fourteen years, which is an Illinois record.

DePue: Robert Mandeville.

Thompson: Robert Mandeville. And he recruited a really good staff. So I had great advice. And he taught me the state budget. I didn't know anything about the state budget. He taught me.<sup>46</sup>

DePue: Can you tell me about his character and his personality?

Thompson: He was a quiet guy, kindly guy. Great deal of experience. He had nothing but my best fortune as his charge. And once he taught me the budget, in the later years we just worked hand in glove. In the beginning years, I relied on him a lot. In the first year of my administration, I think I sent him to Wall Street to talk to the rating agencies, but for the next thirteen years I went with him, once I learned the budget so I could go out there and not make a fool of myself. Very few governors showed up with their budget directors to the rating agencies. And I think it helped us keep the ratings we had for a very long time.

DePue: I'm a little bit foggy on some of the details here. I know that the 1970 Illinois Constitution changed some of these things. But the time you were governor, who was taking the lead in developing the budget? Was it the governor's office?

Thompson: The Bureau of the Budget. It's always the governor's office.

DePue: And then presenting that to the legislature?

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<sup>46</sup> Thompson's education actually started during the campaign. Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 12, 2013 and February 10, 2014. He also shaped Fletcher's understanding of state finance; see Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 2, 2015, for claim that Mandeville "tutored me endlessly from the minute Thompson won."

Thompson: Yeah. Now, in later years, the legislature has simply thrown the governor's budget out the window and done their own.

DePue: Which certainly was the case with the Blagojevich budgets, and I think—

Thompson: Quinn's.

DePue: —afterwards, as well.

Thompson: Yeah. That's true. But when I was governor, they worked off my budgets.

DePue: Was Mandeville the type who would work with the legislature up front so he knew what their concerns and interests were?

Thompson: Yeah, he would. Yeah, sure, because he had guys who worked with him who were assigned to deal with the legislature. He didn't so much, but his guys did. And of course, my legislative liaisons did. They dealt with the legislature on everything, but to a great extent, the budget. The budget is government. That's what it is.

DePue: That's where priorities are set.

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: And what were your priorities going in?

Thompson: To get us towards balance; to invest in things that I thought were important, like roads and educational structures. I think we transformed the campus of the University of Illinois, basically. And the community colleges, which I thought were really important.

DePue: And many of them were in their early youth.

Thompson: They were. But I was so convinced that community colleges and job training to lure investments went hand in hand, that I put a lot of money into the community colleges and into job programs. Safety—transportation safety and law enforcement safety, state police. I gave them the tools they needed. Department of Conservation, gave them what they needed. Blago decimated it later.<sup>47</sup> The mental health facilities, although later as community-based treatment became more popular and cheaper, I had to close institutions. On the other hand, we built prisons all over the state.

DePue: So the expenditure for mental health is going to be on the decline during your administration, and Department of Corrections on the incline?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Nickname for Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

<sup>48</sup> See the budget tables for Thompson's administration in the appendix.

Thompson: Absolutely, simply because in terms of mental health, the assessment of the professionals was that warehousing mental health patients was bad, although we had done it for centuries.

DePue: Drug regimens became much more prominent.

Thompson: Well, yeah. I mean, the way you treated people pushed you towards community based. And not only the way you treated people in terms of drug therapy, but giving people a chance at a life outside rather than, as they say, “warehousing.” So those twin goals called for the closure of most of the mental health facilities.

DePue: Did you see that as a positive trend?

Thompson: I did, although it was achieved with great difficulty, because obviously, communities and a group of state employees and their unions had a big investment in the facilities. You threaten to close a mental health facility or a veteran’s facility, and the community would go on the warpath. You’d be picketed and denounced, and the legislators from that area would join the fray, and the press from that area would join the fray.

DePue: Republican Party chairmen would make calls?

Thompson: Oh, certainly. Absolutely. I mean, if you had a mental health facility in your district or your county, and it employed four or five hundred people, it was probably the largest employer there. Back in the patronage days, people could get jobs there through their county chairman, and people had been in those jobs for a long time. That was not easy, but it had to be done. I remember going over to Manteno, which was in George Ryan’s neck of the woods when he was lieutenant governor, and he was mostly unhappy about my closing Manteno.<sup>49</sup>

So not only did the budget demand it, not only did the new course of treatment and a more humane way of dealing with these people demand it, but those dollars went into other priorities. And it wasn’t just prisons, it was buildings on the U of I campus, buildings on the community college campus, other physical structure around the state, Department of Transportation, roads, bridges. It was a constant balancing act to try and do that.

DePue: Did you have a person on the administration who was especially focused on policy issues, and making advice on that—

Thompson: Yeah, Paula Wolff was the chief of policy, and she, like Mandeville, was there for the whole fourteen years. Hired *very* bright people.

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<sup>49</sup> On the changes in the state’s provision of mental health services, see Jess McDonald, interview by Mark DePue, September 3, 2010. On budgetary decisions, see Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 11, 2014, 156-159.

- DePue: Where did she come from before she joined the administration?
- Thompson: Somewhere in a public policy organization in Chicago. I can't remember any more specifically than that.
- DePue: Do you remember how she came to your attention?
- Thompson: No. You go out looking for good people, and their reputations precede them.
- DePue: How would you describe Paula Wolff?
- Thompson: Paula Wolff is very, very smart and very, very dedicated. Wanted the best for me and my administration and for the people of Illinois. She has been in the public policy arena of this state for almost forty years now. Chairman of the toll road under Governor Quinn. Metropolitan 50-50 in Chicago for a long time; that job just ended, I guess. Just a very smart, very devoted, very compassionate person.
- DePue: You mentioned earlier that the budget is governing.
- Thompson: Government, yeah.
- DePue: And policies have dollar figures attached to them.
- Thompson: They do, indeed.
- DePue: What was the relationship that Paula had with Bob Mandeville?
- Thompson: It was good. Yeah, it was good.
- DePue: Were there things that the two of them were taking to you? Because sometimes these things can be conflicting.
- Thompson: Rarely. They worked it out themselves, mostly. Sometimes the decision would have to come to me, because the dollars were so big. And depending on the budgetary problems of the moment, whether it was a good year or a bad year in terms of state revenues, I'd have to decide. I can remember the winter of '82, after the election, sitting with Mandeville and Paula night after night at the mansion, going over budget items that today you would think were small dollar, but back then were critical because they added up. It was a great budget, difficult time. It was the time when the legislature gave me the power to cut the budget without review by them. They passed a law. They didn't want the responsibility for cutting the budget.
- DePue: For that particular year?
- Thompson: Yeah. Yeah, no thank you. (laughs) They empowered the governor to do it, and not to be reviewed.

- DePue: You didn't appreciate that power?
- Thompson: No. It had to be done, and they weren't willing to do it. So I had to do it.
- DePue: They were letting you choose who you want to have as enemies.
- Thompson: Yeah, exactly. And it was not easy, because Paula would argue for a program, and then Mandeville would say, "Yes, but we don't have the money." And I'd say sometimes, "Do it," sometimes, "No, he's right, we don't have the money." Really, it was a very, very difficult time.
- DePue: Can you think of any specific examples? Now, this is a long time ago.
- Thompson: One night I was faced with the choice of funding a certain Medicaid program to heal the sick, or funding a program to bury paupers. Now, how would you like to make that choice?
- DePue: Which side did you come down on?
- Thompson: Healing the sick.
- DePue: Did that mean the counties and the cities had to deal with the other part?
- Thompson: Correct.
- DePue: Here's a name we've talked about already, but you obviously kept Dave Gilbert on board as your press secretary.
- Thompson: Right.
- DePue: Tell me about Dave.
- Thompson: Dave was the first person I hired in my campaign. He was the transportation writer for the *Chicago Tribune*. I don't know how I got to him, but I did. And I persuaded him to join the campaign. He was just an outstanding press secretary, and smart beyond his job. I mean, he, like Fletcher and others, were close confidants and advisors during the course of the campaign and during the administration. I think he served as press secretary when I was governor for four or five years, maybe.
- DePue: I think '85 is when he stepped down.
- Thompson: All right, so eight years. By that time, he had trained successors. But he was a wise head, you know? And when we had difficult issues, he would sit in there in my office with Fletcher and Paula, and sometimes Mandeville, depending on what the issue was; if it didn't have any budget consequences, no. But the big guns were Fletcher, Gilbert, and Paula—the three. And other staffers, you know, came and went.

- DePue: But that was the inner circle?
- Thompson: That was probably the inner circle, yeah. And then in later years, Baise would join that circle and others would join that circle. Skilbeck was always there, although he was mostly responsible for advance.
- DePue: Did Wolff get into political discussions as well?
- Thompson: Oh, sure. Hey, every decision in government has a political consequence, so yeah, absolutely.
- DePue: How about the legislative liaison position?
- Thompson: I had a variety of legislative liaison people, the most famous of whom was Mr. Edgar.
- DePue: I've got Zale Glauberman as the first.
- Thompson: Zale Glauberman was the first one, yes, and he was excellent. Zale is still a lobbyist today.
- DePue: Was he in the legislature when you selected him?
- Thompson: No, he wasn't in the legislature, he was a staffer. And his son is a partner at Winston & Strawn today. Both very smart. But Zale was really good. And Zale would be in those meetings, those inner circle meetings a lot. I should include him in that because, you know, almost everything he did had a legislative as well as a budget or political dimension. So budget, legislative, political, interest group—those four drivers of public policy. Zale would sit in on those meetings, I shouldn't leave him out. And he was very good.<sup>50</sup>
- DePue: It wasn't too far in the administration that brought Jim Edgar on board as a legislative liaison, and I think that was in '78, perhaps.
- Thompson: He ran with me in '76, but he...
- DePue: He ran for the legislature in '76. He lost in '74 and thought his career was over, and won in '76 because—
- Thompson: Landslide Jim carried everybody in!
- DePue: —I can't remember the guy's name who had run for the House, but he was running for the Senate. There was an opportunity for him.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> On Glauberman's ability, see D'Esposito, August 4, 2014, 45-46, and Fletcher, February 24, 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Max Coffey. For Edgar's legislative races and joining Thompson's administration, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 29, 2009, and June 9, 2019, both in Volume I; June 10, 2009, in Volume II.

Thompson: Okay, so he ran, was elected in '76, then he ran again in '78 and was elected, and then I stole him.

DePue: What brought him to your attention? Because he's otherwise kind of still new to the legislative process.

Thompson: Oh, I don't know, just a hunch, an instinct. I looked at Jim and I said to myself, He could go places. So I hired him. And I think it was at that meeting where I sat him down on my couch and told him he was going to be governor one day.

DePue: After just getting acquainted with him?

Thompson: He was shocked. He went home and told Brenda, and she was shocked. She remained shocked for years! (laughter) And breathed a sigh of relief every time I announced for re-election. I remember being on one campaign platform where I announced for re-election, and she was sitting there, and she said, "Oh, thank you, thank you!"

DePue: Who else did you say that to?

Thompson: Nobody else.

DePue: Well, Governor, permit me to make an observation here—

Thompson: Yeah?

DePue: —you and Jim Edgar are not the same personality at all.

Thompson: Not at all. Absolutely not at all. That's correct.

DePue: So the question again, what was it about Jim Edgar that you saw?

Thompson: It's just a political sense, and picking out people who you think will be successful in politics. A lot of it is, you know it when you see it, really. I've met a lot of famous people in the world, famous political figures, and they just have a presence. Whether it's Reagan or Gorbachev or Margaret Thatcher, all of whom I knew within minutes of meeting them why they were what they were. And I just saw Edgar: young, clean-cut, moderate like myself, basically, in terms of policy. Certainly not in terms of style, but that's irrelevant. Hard worker. I was just making a prediction.

DePue: Well, you got it right.

Thompson: I got it right.

DePue: As a governor who had his career in law and was the U.S. attorney, what kind of person do you pick as your legal advisor?

Thompson: Smart young lawyer.

DePue: I've got Gary Starkman down.

Thompson: Yeah, Starkman.

DePue: Did he come from the U.S. attorney's office?

Thompson: He was an assistant U.S. attorney. He was the guy I got the \$12,000 for to write the policy research papers during the campaign. Then he came along as the first counsel. And then I think the second one was O'Connor.

DePue: First name?

Thompson: Bill. It was Len O'Connor's son. Len O'Connor was a famous television news man in Chicago.

DePue: Was Ghesquiere in that mix as well, or have I got the wrong position for him?

Thompson: No, he started there. Very able. And who else? My memory is failing there. Ilana was deputy counsel in Chicago.

DePue: Ilana Rovner?

Thompson: Yeah. She was deputy governor for Chicago and she was deputy legal counsel.

DePue: What does that mean, deputy governor for Chicago?

Thompson: She ran the Chicago office.

DePue: When you got to the office, did you sense that there really are two states of Illinois? There is Chicago and then there is the rest of the state?

Thompson: Well, it's a little more nuanced than that. Yeah, in a broad sense, there's Chicago and then the rest of the state. But it's also true to say there's Chicago, then there's the suburbs; then there's the Collar Counties; then there's downstate, which is divided into western Illinois, southern Illinois, eastern Illinois, and central Illinois. Western Illinois doesn't cotton much to the rest of the state, certainly not to Chicago. And same thing for southern Illinois. I mean, you can parse this as much as you want. There are many Illinois.

DePue: Would it be possible to run the state of Illinois without having a Chicago office, without having that Chicago presence?

Thompson: Sure. You could, but you wouldn't be as effective.

DePue: Now, this has been tried a couple of times. Is it possible to run the State of Illinois strictly from the Chicago office?

- Thompson: No. How would you do that? The legislature meets in Springfield. The Supreme Court meets in Springfield, although they have a Chicago courtroom; they rarely sit there.
- DePue: That's certainly where the allegations that were made against Blagojevich—
- Thompson: Well, you see what happened to him. At one time, I had an office in Rockford as well. And somewhere else—Peoria, maybe?
- DePue: Rockford was probably the second largest city at the time.
- Thompson: Yeah. This was a part of my way of demonstrating that I cared about people in the northern part of Illinois, outside of Chicago, outside of Springfield. So I had a Rockford office. And I held office days there.
- DePue: A position we haven't mentioned yet, theoretically the second person in the administration, the person who takes over as governor if you're taken out of the picture, is lieutenant governor. Dave O'Neal?
- Thompson: Yeah, Dave O'Neal, back when the lieutenant governor candidate ran independently from the governor at the primary.
- DePue: The '76 election is going to be different from the '78 election.
- Thompson: Yeah. But in the primary, they ran apart. There were two candidates for lieutenant governor who announced themselves, because I didn't have one. Dave O'Neal, the sheriff of St. Clair County, and Joan Anderson, a Republican legislator from the west side of Chicago.<sup>52</sup> I didn't know O'Neal. I grew up with cowboys, so I said the sheriff. And the *Tribune* called me and said, "Who do you want for lieutenant governor?" I said, "Sheriff O'Neal." So they endorsed Dave O'Neal, and he won. And he was a nice enough guy. But after a while, he got, as he said, bored with the lieutenant governor's office because he didn't have much to do. This is a feature of the lieutenant governor's office under the constitution and under some of the statutes, unless the governor gives him ex officio responsibility.
- DePue: Did you give him anything to work on?
- Thompson: Not a lot. I was new; I was not even going to farm out my new responsibilities to the lieutenant governor, who had no more experience with the state government than I did, and who didn't have the same background that I did. I could see why he'd get bored. Now, he ran for re-election in '78, I believe, and then later decided that he wanted to resign.

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<sup>52</sup> Anderson was from the western suburb of Western Springs and serves as a commissioner on the Metropolitan Sanitary District of Greater Chicago.

- DePue: There were a couple of years you didn't have a lieutenant governor.
- Thompson: Yeah, I didn't have a lieutenant governor again until '82 or '83, actually. In the interim period, I issued an executive order, which took up all the lieutenant governor's duties under the statutes and transferred them to me.
- DePue: What were the duties officially? Ceremonial things?
- Thompson: Yeah, ceremonial things and obscure seats on boards and commissions.
- DePue: Here's a more important one—and in your case, you burned through a few of these people before you found the right folks—and that's the patronage chief. It probably officially was known as the personnel director?
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: Who did you start with?
- Thompson: Dan Kennelly. Dan ran the Chicago office of the campaign. Former policeman from the city of Chicago. His father worked with me in the U.S. attorney's office. His father was suffering from cancer, so I brought the youngster to my U.S. attorney's office so he could work with his dad for a year. When I left the U.S. attorney's office to run, he left with me. He was one of the first staffers. He is just a really great guy, salt of the earth, honest, dedicated, exceedingly hard worker, gets along with everybody.
- So I named him. He served for a week or so. (laughter) The famous story of the first inaugural ball: He's out dancing on the floor with his wife, when a guy comes up and cuts in, not to dance with his wife, but to talk to Dan about a job, right there on the dance floor, twelve hours after I had been sworn in. He came to me that week and said, "I can't do this!" So I sent him up to run the toll road, which he was really good at. It's the shortest tenure in the Thompson administration. He fled as quickly as he could!
- DePue: I want to get for the record, then, your definition of what the patronage chief is expected to do in the administration.
- Thompson: He's expected to make sure that where we had jobs to fill, we filled them with Thompson people. Pretty clear. We didn't fire anybody. We never did political firings, except for policy positions, as you might expect. But hires for vacancies? I was going to fill those jobs with the people who brought me, right? Dance with the people who brung you. And I believe that today. I think the notion that you cannot hire politically is one of the worst things that's happened to government.
- DePue: This is going to be a discussion I definitely want to take up with you later, in part because I'm not ready to have it, and it's going to be a much hotter issue towards the end of your administration, when you're sued for it. But to start

with, you're making a very clear statement that you don't have an issue with the whole patronage system.

Thompson: Not at all. I'm for it. It helps breed responsibility in government. Look, if the governor doesn't fill these positions with his supporters, the people who got him elected and are expected to support him in office, they're going to get filled; they're going to get filled by unions, they're going to get filled by bureaucrats, and they're going to hire *their* cousins, *their* buddies, *their* pals. Positions are not going to go unfilled. The question is, do you want them filled by people who are not elected and responsible to the people of Illinois? Or do you want them filled by the governor who is elected and responsible to the people of Illinois, and if he doesn't do the job right, and if his administration doesn't do the job right, he'll get tossed out on his ear?

Now, what's the better system? What about discipline in government? How can you hold a governor, or anybody else—a mayor—responsible for the success of his administration, if he can't hire people who will help carry out his program and carry out his platform? And sure, you can hire the cabinet director, but they aren't down there on the street or out there on the highway; they're not doing the day-to-day job. You've got to have people who believe in you, who support you. So the notion that patronage is wrong is just crazy. And of course, the opinion which said it was unconstitutional, 5–4 opinion in the Supreme Court, written by Justice Brennan from New Jersey, how do you think he got *his* job on the Supreme Court of New Jersey?<sup>53</sup> Boy, there's one of the biggest patronage jobs in the state! The governor appoints the state supreme court justices in New Jersey. He didn't take an exam, you know? I mean, it's just nonsense. I believed that then, I believe it now.

DePue: What were the instructions you gave your patronage chiefs?

Thompson: Hire Thompson supporters. And make sure they perform. We hired people with A's on the test; we didn't hire anybody who didn't get an A on the test. We didn't hire people who were crooks, or lazy, or had their allegiances to somebody else, whether it was a Republican county chairman, or... Because ultimately, I'm responsible for them.

DePue: When you say "Thompson people," does that mean that they had to be voting in the Republican primaries?

Thompson: Sure. Oh, absolutely. Now, I hired Democrats; I would sometimes hire Democrats based on the recommendations of Democratic legislators or other Democratic officeholders. I wasn't a rigid ideologue in that sense. I had

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<sup>53</sup> Reference to *Rutan v. Republican Party of Illinois*, 497 U.S. 62 (1990), which extended the rule of *Elrod v. Burns*, 427 U.S. 347 (1976) and *Branti v. Finkel*, 445 U.S. 507 (1980), determining "that promotions, transfers, and recalls after layoffs based on political affiliation or support are an impermissible infringement on the First Amendment rights of public employees." Justice Brennan wrote the majority opinion. Prior to his appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court, he served on the Supreme Court of New Jersey.

Democrats who were cabinet directors of mine. But the day-to-day soldiers? They needed to be Republican Thompson people, because, as I say, I was responsible for them. I was responsible for the government of the state of Illinois. And if something went wrong, I wore the jacket. Yeah, I was very clear about that.

DePue: The name I had down as the first was Michael Dunn. Did he take over from Kennelly?

Thompson: He took over from Kennelly.

DePue: And how long was he in the position?

Thompson: Oh, he was in there maybe a year and a half, and then he had an unfortunate instance. He flew on the state plane to a political event and didn't list it on the manifest. And somebody turned him in. So I had to send him back to Rockford, where he was from. He was a young volunteer in my first campaign. When I went out to Winnebago County to the lobster broil, which was their big political summer event out there, I went out looking for a Winnebago county coordinator. I was told, "Well, Jim, all the good guys are taken, but there's this youngster over here..." And he pointed at Mike Dunn. So (laughs) I said, "Okay." Now, as it turned out, Mike had a father who ran a furniture factory in Rockford, and was pretty well-to-do; he had his own plane, which Mike thereafter stole for the election campaign. (laughs) Flew me around the state. I mean, we had a lot of volunteer pilots, and a lot of contributors' planes, as you might suspect. But Michael worked hard at this.

I brought him to the administration, he was the patronage chief, and he was good. Got along with people, understood politics, hard worker. But he did that stupid thing, and so I had to let him go, and he went back to Rockford. He's still a friend of mine today. He's done quite well in Rockford as a real estate agent. He ran the Rockford Airport for a while, I think. He ran the Convention and Tourism Bureau for a couple of years. He's got a saloon in Rockford now, had a stroke recently. And I share my White Sox tickets with him. I buy the tickets, then he takes half of them.

DePue: That's a great way to keep in contact with each other.

Thompson: It certainly is.

DePue: And after Dunn stepped down, is that when Greg Baise came onboard?

Thompson: Yeah. He started out as a travel agent, then he went to scheduler. That's how they did it back then, travel agent to scheduler to patronage, or they went back to law school or someplace else after scheduler.

DePue: Can you think of any other positions within the governor's office itself? Who were your secretaries, to begin with?

Thompson: I had Walker's secretary. I kept her.

DePue: What was her name?

Thompson: It starts with an A—I'm getting terrible with names, especially names from thirty years ago.

DePue: That's probably understandable.

Thompson: I'll get it. Jayne will remember it. Jayne is my memory these days. But she was competent, she knew state government, she knew the governor's office, and I thought, Why should I get rid of her? She served until she decided to leave, which was a year and a half later. Then I stole Jayne's secretary out of the mansion, brought her over. And in the Chicago office, I stole my secretary from the U.S. attorney's office and brought her over. Of course, she had served in the U.S. attorney's office for about forty years by then. She typed Al Capone's indictment. (DePue laughs) She did!

DePue: Well, that's something to put on your resume!

Thompson: You know, I once went back to look at her employment file, and it was this thick.

DePue: Three inches thick?

Thompson: Yeah, it was all carbon paper. Leta Mokstead(?), she started in the office under George E. Q. Johnson.

DePue: Holy cow!

Thompson: Back in the thirties. And she literally did type Al Capone's indictment, and she typed Otto Kerner's indictment.

DePue: Plenty of cocktail conversation there too.

Thompson: I guess so. What a dear, sweet woman; she came over to the governor's office. When I was still U.S. attorney and she was my secretary in the U.S. attorney's office, Jayne and I were going out then. I guess one day we were out in the country, up near Rockford somewhere, and I saw a wooden box that took my fancy. I still have it somewhere. I didn't have any money for it. And Mrs. Thompson lent me the money. This was on Sunday. And on Monday morning, my secretary comes in to me and says, "Miss Carr called. She said that you owe her \$40, and she would like a check." (laughter) She pronounced it like it was something illicit, you know? As I said, my wife is a frugal person.

DePue: When the two of you got married, did you keep separate accounts then? You certainly have to know the answer to that.

- Thompson: Yeah, I think so. I think we've always had separate accounts.
- DePue: That was my impression.
- Thompson: She wouldn't trust me with her checkbook, are you kidding me? Oh, no, no, no! (laughs)
- DePue: How about some of the department heads that you did have opportunities to appoint, any of those come to mind?
- Thompson: Yeah, Art Quern.
- DePue: For Public Aid?
- Thompson: Public Aid, who I got from Nelson Rockefeller's office in New York. He came in with a splendid resume and a splendid reputation, and an endorsement from Rocky, who was a friend of mine.
- DePue: I have to mention to you, of all the people that were in your administration, that's the one that we regret that we're never going to have an opportunity to interview.<sup>54</sup>
- Thompson: Yeah, he was an amazing person. He was an amazing man. Very smart, very dedicated. Ran a great department, later became deputy governor. Yeah, he was one in a million. Jack Block for the Department of Agriculture. I interviewed thirty farmers before settling on Jack Block.
- DePue: He didn't stay with you all that long, though.
- Thompson: That's because I got him promoted.
- DePue: To secretary of agriculture for the United States.
- Thompson: Yeah. Oh, absolutely! The minute there was a vacancy, I was on the phone to the White House, and I said, "Hey, this is the best guy in the nation." I said, "I went through thirty people before I got to Jack Block. I was fussy about my director of agriculture." And by God, Reagan appointed him, and he was outstanding!
- DePue: There was a lot going on in agriculture in those years.
- Thompson: There certainly was. Jack was smart, he was a modern farmer. First met him, I think, at a Farm Bureau meeting in Bloomington, in '76.

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<sup>54</sup> Quern died October 30, 1996, when the corporate jet he was traveling on crashed while taking off from Palwaukee Municipal Airport. *New York Times*, November 1, 1996.

- DePue: Well, here's another area of patronage as well, and that's IDOT. Who did you find for that one?
- Thompson: The incumbent Democrat, Langhorne Bond, Walker's director of transportation. And boy, did that cause me a lot of grief. Republicans were just beside themselves, that I would keep Walker's secretary of transportation.
- DePue: What a great name, though!
- Thompson: Langhorne Bond. There was a Democratic state senator by the name of Jack Knuppel, who was just a cantankerous old downstate Democratic senator, just a whacky guy. Every once in a while he would go out into the rotunda and yell down from the third floor, "Lang-horne Bond!" (DePue laughs) You could hear him all over the capitol.
- DePue: Just because it had a ring to it?
- Thompson: It had a ring to it, and probably Langhorne Bond didn't hire somebody he wanted hired. The reason I kept Langhorne Bond was that Illinois, under Langhorne, was getting more federal transportation dollars than any other state. Why in the world would I tamper with that?
- DePue: Construction of a lot of new interstates through the state?
- Thompson: Yeah. Plus, he knew how to lobby the Congress and the administration. And when he left, he resigned, he just left; I didn't make him go. He had his young deputy, and when I named him secretary of transportation, there was even more of a furor. They might understand why I kept Langhorne four years, before he left, but why I would name the deputy—
- DePue: Another Democrat, I assume?
- Thompson: Another Democrat, absolutely.
- DePue: That John Kramer?
- Thompson: Yeah. But John was the evil genius who got all that money out of Washington. (DePue laughs) And I'd go to Washington with him and watch him work. He had a membership at the Metropolitan Club, he met congressmen there, and he worked it. And we got more than any other state. Now, we should have, because we were the transportation center of the nation, but you've still got to work for it. So I made John the secretary of transportation. Took a lot of crap from Pate Philip and Republican senators, Republican county chairmen.
- DePue: Who all had the name that they wanted you to promote, I'm sure.

Thompson: Actually, they didn't. They just didn't want the Democrat, because they wanted somebody who would look kindly on Republican highway maintainers and Republican bridge measurers. (laughs)

DePue: We're kind of getting towards the end of today's session.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Any other names you want to mention?

Thompson: I'm surprised my bladder has lasted this long. Who else? Dave Kenney was from SIU [Southern Illinois University], a long time downstate conservationist. He just died a month or so ago. He ran the Department of Conservation for a number of years, and then we moved him over to run the new—

DePue: IHPA [Illinois Historic Preservation Agency] for a very short period of time.

Thompson: Yeah. Who else?

DePue: How about the Department of Corrections, or state police?

Thompson: As I said, I had a small detail when I was running for governor; after I won the primary, they gave me a three-man detail headed by a corporal. I didn't know anybody on the state police, and I certainly wasn't going to take any names for head of the state police; I didn't regard that as political position, I regarded that as a law enforcement decision.

But there was one man who had more sway over state police affairs in the legislature and among the state police than anybody else, and that was a guy who wrote for the lesser newspaper over in Champaign County. I got it in my mind that I was going to appoint as the director of the state police my corporal, the head of my unit. And I knew that would go over like a lead balloon, unless I could persuade this newspaper reporter who had been mixing in and around the state police for thirty years. I knew him during the campaign, but I went over to see him, and we had dinner and drinks. I guess I talked him into it; it was probably half the governor asking and half him being flattered by being asked. So he supported it, and I got my guy as director of the state police. A lowly corporal was now running the joint.

DePue: You remember his name?

Thompson: No, it's one of those on the tip of my tongue.<sup>55</sup>

DePue: I remember a name, but I think this would have come later. Jerry Margolis?

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<sup>55</sup> Lynn Baird.

Thompson: No, that's later.

DePue: How about Department of Corrections? That's certainly going to be an important growing concern for you. Do you remember that one?

Thompson: I think whoever was the head of the department stayed for a while. I had met a young law enforcement guy when I was U.S. attorney and making a speech to the Sheriff's Association in Champaign County one night. This deputy sheriff came up to me after the speech and said, "I want you to meet my son. He's just graduated from," I guess it was the University of Illinois, in their law enforcement training division. So I met him, Gayle Franzen.

I guess I was an assistant attorney general then, not U.S. attorney. And I hired him later in the attorney general's office as an investigator. When I came in there, the attorney general's office had a bunch of old time, not very good, politically wired investigators. I said to Bill Scott, "We've got to get rid of these guys, or their stories will go right back to the wrong people." So he said, "Okay." And I hired Gayle as one of them. We worked together in the attorney general's office, became friends. Played golf together.

When I left the attorney general's office to go to the U.S. attorney's office, he went out to the West Coast, to Seattle-Tacoma, and was in the probation office out there. And when I was elected governor, I brought him back and put him on Paula's staff as the assistant policy person for law enforcement. And like any good young staffer, his immediate task was to try and overthrow his director and get the job himself. (laughs) That's what I always accused these kids of doing. In some cases it was true. So when there was vacancy in the department, I appointed Gayle as the director.<sup>56</sup> And he was a very good director.

DePue: I wanted to finish off with an important event that happens before you take over as governor. And that's December 20, 1976, Richard J. Daley dies.

Thompson: Yeah, he died a month before I took over, and then I always had the question of how we would have gotten along as governor and mayor, had he lived. I suspect we would have gotten along okay.

DePue: First of all, you're not Dan Walker.

Thompson: Right! And secondly, I got along with every mayor of Chicago that I served with. And when I was U.S. attorney, I got along with him. Investigated him a couple of times based on allegations that we received, and he was clean. I suspect we would have done okay. But he died, and of course there was this mad scramble in Chicago to have the old-guard aldermen protect themselves

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<sup>56</sup> Thompson initially kept Governor Walker's IDOC director, Charles Rowe, but replaced him with Franzen in December of 1978. Franzen resigned in January 1981 and was replaced by Michael Lane.

by picking the new mayor, and they went all through that with Eugene Sawyer and et al.<sup>57</sup> But it was certainly the end of an era, no question about that.

DePue: Tomorrow, then, we'll go through that first important year that you're serving as governor. And I look forward to that. Thank you, Governor!

Thompson: So do I.

(end of interview #7)

## Interview with James Thompson

# IST-A-L-2013-054.08

Interview # 8: July 31, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, July 31, 2014. Today I'm in Chicago again; this will be my eighth session with Gov. Jim Thompson. Good morning, Governor!

Thompson: Good morning!

DePue: Got a beautiful day here in Chicago, and it's a Lollapalooza day, huh?<sup>58</sup>

Thompson: It is another beautiful day, and it is Lollapalooza day, and Grant Park will be awash with people. The tourists have really packed into Chicago these days.

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<sup>57</sup> Michael Bilandic succeeded Daley as mayor. Thompson is referencing the scramble that again occurred when Mayor Harold Washington died in 1987. On the events that led to Sawyer succeeding Washington, see Arnold Kanter, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 17, 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Lollapalooza was a major multi-day music festival featuring prominent performers, which first came to Chicago on an annual basis in 2005. In 2012, the festival's promoters struck a deal with the city to stay in Grant Park until 2021.

You can see them on Michigan Avenue; you can see them in Millennium Park; you can see them all over the place.

DePue: And they're certainly on Michigan Avenue, driving there. It was a bear getting out of town last night.

Thompson: And they're spending money, which is wonderful.

DePue: Well, that's why they have Lollapalooza, I suspect. (Thompson laughs)

DePue: Let's talk about 1977, your first year in office. But do you have any housecleaning to do from yesterday? Anything you want to mention?

Thompson: Yeah, I finally remembered the name of my first secretary, who was Governor Walker's secretary, whom I kept until she decided to leave a year later or so. Alberta Lavin, L-a-v-i-n. Great lady. Knew how the governor's office operated.

DePue: And this is your secretary who worked in your Capitol Building office?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: Can you just explain the terrain for the governor's office, just very quickly, in the Capitol Building?

Thompson: The governor's office is on the second floor. The legislature is on the third floor, ruling from on high. And it consists of a large formal office, a small hideaway office, and a reception area behind the glass wall that some prior governor installed. Governor Walker used the small hideaway office, and used the large formal office only for press conferences. He had Klieg lights installed. I reversed it. I used the large office for the formal office, because as it happened to turn out, we had a lot of meetings in that office—the legislative leaders, interest groups, individual legislators—many more meetings, I think, than Governor Walker had undertaken. And I would do press conferences in there, or press conferences out in the reception area, or out in the hall, actually, or up in the blue room, where the press offices are. I took away the Klieg lights. And it was getting kind of shabby, so at some point we did a historical restoration of the office, which people seemed to like very much.

DePue: Who else was in the office complex with you? Who on your staff?

Thompson: You'd find the travel aide at a desk between where my secretary was, in that area, which was behind doors from the big reception area where people would wait to see me. And then in back of my office, you'd find people like Jim Skilbeck, the advance man; whoever the scheduler was at that time; Dave Gilbert. And then others were housed upstairs; the legislative guys were upstairs, and some others.

DePue: How about Jim Fletcher? Was he with you?

Thompson: Fletcher was with me, yes.<sup>59</sup> And I believe Paula was with me too.

DePue: Was there enough room in the Capitol Building for all of the governor's staff?

Thompson: Yeah, I think there was.

DePue: Did you have a larger or about the same size staff as Walker did?

Thompson: I don't remember what he had, but my guess is it was about the same size, because it's built by function.

DePue: I know that when Kerner came on board, he had a much smaller staff than was available by the late 1970s.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Here's a peculiarity: the 1970 constitution dictated that the gubernatorial elections from here on out were going to be offset from the presidential years. You were running the same year that Jimmy Carter was elected president of the United States, but the constitution's going to kick in, and 1978 was going to be the next election for governor. Does that mean that you didn't have a chance to relax on the political side, (Thompson laughs) you had to start running right away again?

Thompson: The real truth is, you never relax from the political side, and you shouldn't relax from the political side. Even though the election is over and you've taken the oath of office and gone to work as governor, you're still campaigning in a number of ways: Your relationship with the legislature is a campaign to win their hearts and minds. Your relationship with interest groups is a campaign. Your relationship with the press is a campaign. Your relationship with donors is a continuing campaign. And you can go on. But the constitution did shift the gubernatorial elections to the off-presidential year. I guess the theory was that they didn't want the governorship to be determined by the votes for president, since we still had straight party voting there; you could hit the Republican at the top of the ballot and vote for everybody on the Republican ticket.

DePue: The bullet vote, I think it was called?

Thompson: Yeah. That was one theory. I guess the other theory was that it would be easier for the governor candidates to raise money if they weren't competing with the presidential race. The practical result for me, since I was in the switchover period as the governor, was that eleven months after I took the oath of office in January, I had to file my petitions for re-election. I was

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<sup>59</sup> Fletcher's description of the office layout is in Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, March 9, 2015.

inaugurated and had to file the petitions for re-election in the same year. So the political apparatus didn't stop. I only made one mistake. Doug Bailey, who was one of my campaign consultants—Bailey and Deardourff out of Washington, very able man, and I used him in all of my campaigns—persuaded me to do something different: offer to give back 10 percent of the contributions that people had given me, as a thank you for giving them to me, on the theory that nobody would take me up on it. Well, that was wrong! (laughter)

DePue: Well, they had to ask to get—

Thompson: They had to ask, yeah. And for the thrill of that ten-minute announcement, I had to give some money back at a time when I was raising money for the next race. In retrospect, that was sort of dumb. I mean, it wasn't fatal, but it was just dumb.

DePue: This one I'm sure didn't surprise you at the time, but the *Akron Beacon* and other national press are already speculating what Republicans might run again for the 1980 presidential election. You were among the mix—

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: —and consistently so for a while. And certainly some of the Illinois newspapers, especially Chicago, were deep in speculation as well. How much were you thinking about it at that time?

Thompson: I really wasn't. The assumption of the governor's office can be somewhat overwhelming, at least at the beginning. I think I commented at the time that yeah, when I was nine years old, I decided to be president of the United States, and I thought it was a wonderful office and more people should aspire to the presidency. And I didn't know whether I'd ever make it or not, but if I didn't do a good job as governor, I certainly would not make it. And I had just started the job as governor. That was my public comment, and that was my private attitude. Newspapers like to write stories, writing stories today about whether Jay Cutler will be an MVP candidate for professional football, who will be the Bears' backup quarterback, and the race that three candidates have for that job. Well, the season hadn't started yet. The press will write to fill space if there's nothing else going on. They like to speculate, and it's fun to read and all of that business, but it was not serious.

DePue: The inauguration was January tenth, as I understand. Do you remember any of the planning? Who did you put in charge of planning?

Thompson: (laughs) Oh, I think that stew had a lot of cooks! Mike Dunn was one of the planners. Bobby Radmacher was one of the planners. Mike was my Winnebago County aid, and Bobby Radmacher was a Springfield guy who

was one of my advance men. Skilbeck had a big part in it. Gilbert had a big part in it. A ton of people, I am sure.<sup>60</sup>

DePue: What was your guidance? What was your vision of what your inauguration was going to look like?

Thompson: You know, you have your pet ideas, right? But I was not going to be in charge of the apparatus. That was a job for people who understood what they were doing: sending out the invitations, booking the hotel rooms, and planning the galas, meals, private parties, seating in the Armory, and all of that business. I didn't have time for that, and I wasn't expert at it. I just attended to personal things, like inviting people that I really wanted to be with me; friends from Chicago, people I had associated with for a long time who might not otherwise get an invitation because they had nothing to do with politics. And I had a habit during that last year, the '76 year, of inviting people to the inaugural as I went. (laughs) Something like Governor Blagojevich used to do; he'd be out and around the state of Illinois, and whoever he met, he'd invite to the governor's mansion for an overnight visit—of course without telling his staff in the mansion—and these people would show up! Some of them were remarkable characters that startled the mansion staff a little bit.

DePue: Remarkable as in nefarious characters?

Thompson: Not nefarious, but just—

DePue: Colorful?

Thompson: Colorful, let's put it that way. (laughs) The guys at the mansion told me this car pulled up one Friday afternoon, and the state police said, "Yes?" They said, "The governor invited us to stay for the weekend." And out of the car rolled this three hundred-pound guy in bib overalls and no shirt, who said to the trooper at the door, "You want to wrestle?" Out of the car rolled his mother in a wheelchair. The governor had met them somewhere—Decatur, I think—and invited them to the mansion. Well, I did the same thing with high school bands and municipal bands wherever I went that year. The campaign was running so nicely, and the reception was so great, I developed a lot of affection for people who were helping me.

DePue: Are these invitations to the inaugural, not to the mansion?

Thompson: To march in the inaugural; we were having an inaugural parade. All year long in '76, I would invite high school bands to come march in the inaugural parade. Well, they hadn't had an inaugural parade for thirty years or more, and it's easy to see why: the weather. It's not like the state fair parade in August,

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<sup>60</sup> Lynn Rainey was another planner, and he supervised the work of a young volunteer who worked for the Illinois National Guard, Kim Blackwell. She soon joined Thompson's advance staff, and went on to run Citizens for Thompson. Kim Blackwell Fox, interview by Mike Czaplicki, July 14, 2014.

this is January. But I invited people, and 8,500 showed up to a four-inch snowfall and eight degrees above zero. But we had the parade anyway. So things like that, personal things to me. The first family dinner at the mansion, George Jewell, a caterer from Chicago, catered it, because we didn't yet have the staff in the mansion to be able to do it. And I did the menu, all my favorite things. That's what I did about the inaugural.

DePue: I'm assuming that first family dinner didn't just include you and Jayne.

Thompson: No, that was everybody. Cousins, uncles, nephews, nieces—

DePue: Were both your parents still alive?

Thompson: Yeah, my parents were alive, and Jayne's mother was still alive, so it was pretty crowded.

DePue: What did your parents think about this rocketing to success? (Thompson laughs) That might not be how you looked at it, but...

Thompson: They were proud, obviously. But they were pretty quiet, reserved people. And my mother took it in stride; it was like my being elected to the governorship was like my visiting her on a Sunday. It was no big deal. (laughs)

DePue: Does that mean that you were more of an extrovert than either of your parents were?

Thompson: Yeah, I would say that was true. My dad, who was a physician, obviously liked it. Made sure I immediately adopted the doctors of the state of Illinois as one of my primary interests. (laughs) And my Aunt Genevieve, who was a schoolteacher, made sure I adopted the schoolteachers of Illinois as a primary interest.

DePue: Wasn't it your Aunt Genevieve who was collecting all of these newspaper clippings?

Thompson: Yeah, this was unknown to me until she died, actually. But she was a schoolteacher in Chicago Heights for fifty years, in grade school. Unbeknownst to me, she started clipping newspaper stories about me, beginning with my service, first job out of law school, as an assistant state's attorney of Cook County. And the state's attorney of Cook County then, Ben Adamowski, was no shrinking violet. He immediately got into confrontation with Mayor Daley. In fact, he ran against him once. He hired me, and he gave me assignments, even as a youngster, that brought public attention. He got into a fight with the chief justice of the criminal court, defied him, and sent me up to the courtroom to do it! (laughs) Judge said he'd throw me in jail, and when the state's attorney heard that, he was eager to be thrown in jail. So he raced up to the courtroom and said, "Throw me in jail!" You know? They finally settled it. So criminal court reporters started writing about

me.

Unbeknownst to me, she started clipping the newspapers—the Chicago newspapers, the local newspapers. And as the years went on, this is from 1959 up until she died sometime in the '80s, former students of hers who had graduated and become adults would send her clippings from out-of-town newspapers. When she died, I found twelve volumes of clippings that chronicled my career from assistant state's attorney at the age of twenty-three to the governorship, a remarkable collection, one which I treasured. Reading back on some of those reminds me of all the tough times we had in that era.

DePue: As you know, our colleague on this project, Mike Czaplicki, has photographed all of those articles, and we're including them in the collection. They will never make it onto the webpage; that would be a mammoth task because there's thousands of articles we're talking about!

Thompson: Well, it's my entire career.

DePue: All of those will be available at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, if somebody is interested to tracking them down. The next thing here, I'm going to go through the rough schedule for the inaugural and ask you to reflect on the events of the day. You already mentioned the snowstorm, so I assume some of the things that might have been planned for outside moved inside the Armory?

Thompson: The parade sure did. The kids assembled outside the Armory doors, they marched through the Armory, and Jayne and I were there along with other officials who would drop in from time to time to view their kids. Jayne and I were there the entire parade, then they'd be fed, and they would march out the other door to disburse. So it was an indoor parade.

DePue: Nine-thirty might have been the first official event: worship service at the First Presbyterian Church.

Thompson: Yeah, that's a Springfield inaugural tradition to have a worship service for the governor and his family and friends, to the extent that they could all fit into the church, because that was the church where Abraham Lincoln worshipped. There is a Lincoln pew in that church that is original to the time when Lincoln was there. It's sort of a hallowed place in Springfield, and it's been the tradition for the governor to begin his inaugural there.

DePue: Anybody sitting in the Lincoln pew?

Thompson: I don't think you were encouraged to sit in the Lincoln pew.

DePue: Even you, with all of your—

Thompson: No, I—you know. In fact, I think it was roped. And it would not have been encouraged.

DePue: Then comes the inaugural ceremony, and that's where the parade would have been, all over the Armory Building?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Who had written your inaugural speech?

Thompson: Doug Bailey wrote the inaugural speech. When I later did the State of the State, it was probably a joint effort between Bailey and me because I didn't have, at that time, a speech writer. I had done all off-the-cuff speeches during the campaign, obviously. He wrote the inaugural address, and it was pretty short.

DePue: Let me make a couple of quotes here, and then ask you if that was the tenor that you wanted to establish in the inaugural speech. This is right from the speech itself: "Trust the people, and they will return the trust. Impropriety will be treated firmly by the law."

Thompson: Yeah, I mean, the first half of that quote is Abraham Lincoln. And I wanted to set the tone of trust right at the beginning, because it was a key part of my campaign. I think we talked yesterday about what campaigning is meant to engender: a liking of you as a person, a liking of you as a candidate, but also a trust in you to make the right decisions on issues that neither the candidate nor the people contemplate at the time of the election. You know, the election is a snapshot in time. The campaign is a snapshot in time, basically a year. And then you're going to govern for, in my case, in the first term, two years before an election; but in the ordinary case, four years before an election. Illinois is a big, big state, with all kinds of challenges and issues—urban, suburban, Collar Counties, downstate, agricultural, manufacturing, services, the crossroads of the nation. You could go on, as I used to do during the campaign.

DePue: And lots of people make the point that Illinois is kind of a microcosm of what the United States is.

Thompson: It is. That's exactly right. Teddy Roosevelt said long ago when he was president—and I don't have the exact quote, but I read it once—that Illinois was the most American of all the states.<sup>61</sup> Now, he didn't mean that we were more patriotic than the other states, what he meant was we reflected America in the diversity of our people, in the diversity of our economic base, sitting there in the heart of the country. Even though we're not in the middle geographically—that honor belongs to one of the farm states—we are in many ways, and were at that time in many ways, the center of the nation; we were emblematic of the nation. And that was certainly true.

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<sup>61</sup> Thompson is probably thinking of "The Strenuous Life," Roosevelt's famous 1899 speech delivered before the Hamilton Club in Chicago. The speech opens, "In speaking to you, men of the greatest city of the West, men of the state which gave to the country Lincoln and Grant, men who preeminently and distinctly embody all that is most American in the American character..."

So how in the world could you know in 1976 what issues would arise between '77 and '78, the next election? Or in the next four years? You couldn't. You could guess at some of them, because some of them were going to last for a while—recession or economic challenges, or dividing up the state budget, that was always going to be there. But there were things that nobody suspected were going to happen, where people would have differing views. They didn't expect to agree with you all the time, but they expected you to try and make the right decision, the honest decision, according to your ability. And that desire on the part of the people rests on a foundation of trust in you as a person and trust in you as an elected official. So that was the tone I wanted to set right at the beginning of the administration.

It went along, in some ways, with a mantra I adopted during the campaign, that I was going to run a no-promises campaign because I couldn't promise stuff that I didn't know was going to happen. I wanted to say that right at the outset, and I thought it was important, because my election had been preceded by a lot of political bickering between the mayor and the governor and the legislature. And we were facing tough economic times, and I wanted to overlay what I was about to do with that issue.

DePue: You've talked a lot about establishing trust. Another line that comes right out of your inauguration speech, "No jobs will be bought. No favors will be sold." And to put that in context, and put you on the spot a bit, you talked quite a bit about your views on patronage yesterday.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: You certainly didn't invent patronage in Illinois—

Thompson: No.

DePue: —it was a deep-seated Chicago tradition, and secretaries of state, governors, and other state officers in the past had certainly used it to their advantage. So, "No jobs will be bought, no favors will be sold." How do you fit in that context of the patronage system?

Thompson: Because patronage jobs, as we practiced it, were not bought. When I said, "No jobs will be bought," what I meant was, you couldn't get into government under the Thompson administration by paying for a job. And that had not been true in the past. Not necessarily true today. That's what I meant. It didn't have anything to do with my desire to place into positions in government people who had supported me, and people who would continue to support me and enable me to carry out the job that the people have elected me to do. When the people elected me, they didn't elect the bureaucrats, they didn't elect the unions, they didn't elect a lot of the other people who, if left unattended, would be the real bosses of patronage, the real bosses of filling government

jobs without any responsibility. So one doesn't have anything to do with the other.

DePue: Next thing on the schedule that day, about 1:30, the Republican State Central Committee luncheon.

Thompson: Oh, yes.

DePue: Where would that be?

Thompson: That was probably at a hotel in Springfield. And I'm sure we discussed patronage. (laughter) I'm sure they discussed patronage. They *always* discuss patronage, they and the county chairman.

DePue: Let's throw this out here, were there hotels that Republicans favored with events, and ones that the Democrats favored with events?

Thompson: No, because at that time, the Republican Party statewide was not a big booming apparatus like the Democratic Party was, that controlled the legislature in both houses, and had controlled the governor's mansion for four years. I never noticed that there were Republican hotels or Democratic hotels. What there were, were old-time Springfield downtown hotels that were fading away; hotels that I used to patronize when I was a young assistant state's attorney going down to argue before the Supreme Court weren't in existence later on, The St. Nicholas, the—

DePue: The infamous St. Nicholas, because of Paul Powell's association there.

Thompson: Yeah. The Leland, the Abraham Lincoln—those were all hotels that I ate at or stayed at when I was a young prosecutor in the early '60s, that weren't around when I was governor. And in the meantime, there were newer hotels out on 55.<sup>62</sup> They were springing up, and those certainly had no political affiliations.

DePue: Was the Hilton Hotel already built by that time?

Thompson: I don't think so. It might have been, I don't know. But to my knowledge, nobody was focusing on the political labels on hotels. I certainly wasn't.

DePue: Six o'clock was dinner at the Old State Capitol for contributors and campaign workers.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: All those people you had possibly invited to Springfield that day.

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<sup>62</sup> Interstate 55.

Thompson: Well, not all of them, because we invited twenty-two thousand. (laughter) The ones that needed to be there. Dinner in the Old State Capitol is a wonderful thing; it's candle-lit, and—

DePue: Where in the Old State Capitol did you do that?

Thompson: I think it was in the House of Representatives chamber.

DePue: Really?

Thompson: Whatever the largest facility was.

DePue: Yeah, that would be it.

Thompson: And probably other rooms as well, not just one room. It would be out in the halls, you know, you'd just take the place over. But to me, it was always a very emotional thing, because you were walking around in places where Abraham Lincoln and others had worked. Lincoln sat in the governor's office in the Old State Capitol to get election returns on election night in 1860. It was, to me, an emotional place. I always loved history; that was my major in college. I regarded those dinners as just wonderful things.

DePue: You have a remarkable collection of Lincolniana today. Would this be the origin of your affection for Lincoln?

Thompson: Not so much. I think just living and working in Springfield started it. Plus, Lincoln was the greatest Republican president, and one of the two greatest presidents ever. He was a folk hero in my party, and I also had a great affection for Teddy Roosevelt, who was a different kind of president, in different times. So I would start a modest political collection. I didn't have any money back then, so I couldn't buy anything extraordinary. You could buy buttons and photos and things like that. And in my office, I borrowed the desk that Lincoln wrote at in his—I'm trying to remember whether the desk was part of his grocery store business?

DePue: That would have been in New Salem.

Thompson: Yeah, I think it was from New Salem, if I'm not mistaken.

DePue: Not a very elaborate desk at all.

Thompson: No, it was a pigeonhole desk. And it stood in one corner of my office. I also borrowed Stephen A. Douglas' chairs, with monkey heads on the end of the arms, from the state museum. They were uncomfortable and very low, so they did not encourage long meetings. (laughs)

DePue: He was a little bit shorter than six foot six!

Thompson: Yes, he was.

DePue: Would you agree that if you're going to run for governor in Illinois, or even for president of the United States, you need to get yourself right with Abraham Lincoln's legacy?

Thompson: Well, sure. Where did Barack Obama announce? He announced in the Old State Capitol in Springfield, quoting Abraham Lincoln. So Lincoln has been hijacked by people of other political persuasions than my own. Yeah, he's an iconic figure in America. He saved the nation; Washington helped create the nation, Lincoln saved it. And in addition to that, he did some other remarkable things during the war, like expanding the railroads to the West during the war, and establishing land grant colleges, like the University of Illinois. He was a remarkable president, quite apart from the war effort, and quite apart from the issue of slavery.

DePue: The next event that evening, 8:00 PM to midnight, probably various inaugural balls.

Thompson: Yeah, oh, there were.

DePue: One was at Forum 30, and another at Holiday Inn East.

Thompson: They were all over the place. I think there were at least four. And we were obliged to drop in on them and do a dance, then say hello, and go on to the next one. So it was a long night.

DePue: It may be a peculiar question, but what kind of music would you favor at these kind of events?

Thompson: I don't think I paid any attention to the music. I think the only thing I ever asked for was Bobby Short, who was a New York piano player who played at the Carlyle hotel, and was a native of Illinois from Danville. Jayne and I had heard him a number of times when we were in New York; we heard him on our honeymoon and we heard him on subsequent visits. Our favorite song that he played was, "I Love You Samantha," and that's where her name came from. Everybody else thought it was from the *I Dream of Jeannie* show, but it was not. It was from Bobby Short singing at the Carlyle hotel. And I think I had Bobby Short at that first inaugural. I know he played in the mansion. And at a subsequent inaugural—there were two, at least, he played—I danced with Samantha in my arms.

DePue: She was born in the '78 election.

Thompson: So he played in the '79 inaugural as well.

DePue: Just for those paying attention to TV trivia, I think the name Samantha would have been connected with *Bewitched*.

Thompson: Yeah, *Bewitched*, I'm sorry.

DePue: Now, this probably wasn't a surprise to you, but there were newspaper articles during that time, and shortly after, that called this, "A little extravaganza," with something like a \$65,000 bill attached to this.

Thompson: Well, I suspect that inaugurals today would triple, quadruple, or even quintuple that cost. How do you hold an event for 22,000 people, plus all these other special events, for less than \$65,000? I don't know. And it certainly wasn't a huge extravagant affair, I mean, it's what it took.

DePue: When we get to some of the other election years, this will be a persistent theme that the media is going to drum on you—

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: —especially mansion budgets. But we'll hold that for later. We talked about this a little bit yesterday. Any bumps in the road in terms of the transition with the Walker people?

Thompson: I don't think we had any real problems there.

DePue: Any surprises moving into the mansion?

Thompson: It wasn't a surprise, since I assumed it, but the mansion staff was wonderful. I mean, they were great people.<sup>63</sup> And one of them had been there a long time, the butlers especially, and served other governors. It was in part a fantasy. From your home in Chicago, you walk into this huge mansion, the biggest in America, with all these public rooms filled with antique furniture, a kitchen big enough for a hotel, and an upstairs apartment and guest rooms. Neither Jayne nor I were raised with that kind of surroundings. We both came from middle-class families, who started out not middle class. My dad was an intern at Cook County Hospital making something like \$28 a month. You know? An internship at that time, and today, still, is part of the education of a doctor, and it was certainly not financially rewarding. Jayne's father died when she was thirteen, and she went to work, and her mother went to work. So they scraped along, both families, until later times when my dad became a doctor.

DePue: You mentioned Jayne started working at a very young age. You now had a full time job, the kind of job that would absolutely consume you, I would think, most days.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: What was her intention about working?

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<sup>63</sup> On the mansion staff, see Samantha Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014.

Thompson: Oh, she wanted to continue working. She has very fixed notions about women having a financial independence and being able to guide their own destiny. And she has very fixed notions about the necessity to work; sixty-eight years old, she's still working today. So she fully intended to keep working. She was an assistant attorney general, working for Bill Scott. She had started in that office as my law clerk, then advanced on her own. She worked at that for a while, and I think she finally determined that given Scott was the attorney general and another fellow constitutional officer, there just would have been conflicts down the road, unavoidable conflicts. And she gave that up and went to work for a private law firm, which was also difficult, because she needed to go to a law firm that didn't have any substantial business with state government. She found one in Springfield. So she's always worked.

DePue: All the way through the administration, then?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: Any special projects or causes that she took on?

Thompson: She would do a lot of things that people asked her to do. One of the surprising things we learned early on was that there was a favorite Springfield phrase that people would use with the governor and his wife, which was, "It is traditional that..." or, "Governors have always done..." then fill in the blanks, whether it's an organization holding a party at your mansion and expecting you to show up, right?

DePue: Or starting your inauguration at the First Presbyterian church?

Thompson: Yeah, there's a lot of that in Springfield. Hey, it's a company town. That's exactly what it is, it's a company town. The business is state government, and you're a part of the company town when you're the governor and his spouse. We got used to that, I guess. I mean, there was a tradition in Springfield that the Sangamon County Medical Society, or the Springfield Medical Society, every year would have a sort of debutante ball, which the governor was obliged to show up at and crown these young ladies (DePue laughs) because it is traditional.

DePue: Well, that doesn't sound like the kind of thing you'd shy away from.

Thompson: Yeah, but year after year? I mean, these were young kids. That's different from crowning county fair queens at the state fair. But we got through all of that. So, yes, she had things that were important to her, women's causes. The role of women in state government. She was a nudge on that, but I didn't really need any nudging. And I think I had more women in state positions than any previous governor, it was a point of pride with me. And I'd talk about it often.

DePue: We're going to certainly weave this into the narrative as we get closer to the 1982 timeframe, but the pre-eminent cause for women during those years when you got there was the Equal Rights Amendment.

Thompson: Yeah. Right.

DePue: And I assume that Jayne was strongly for the Equal Rights Amendment.

Thompson: Yes, she was. But she understood, as I did, that it was not really a governor's function, unlike the passage of a law which comes to a governor's desk for signing or veto. The Equal Rights Amendment was an amendment to the United States Constitution, which came before the state legislature, and if the state legislature passed it, it went right back to Washington. It was never on the governor's desk. So there were limits to what a governor could do, or should have been expected to do, with regard to the Equal Rights Amendment.

I was a supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment, and I made speech after speech after speech about it. I know this is a 1982 topic, but I didn't have any control over it, I didn't have any leverage. The state of Illinois, at that time, was a very conservative state; look at all the abortion laws restricting abortion that they passed during that time. And state legislators were a conservative bunch, whether they were Republicans or Democrats. And the legislature was firmly in the control of the Democratic Party. So here is a Republican governor who can't act on it, having little influence on it. Yeah, we both supported it, but apart from supporting it and making speeches for it and giving interviews about it, it was not something I could act on.

DePue: And how about Jayne? Was she vocal in her support?

Thompson: Well, she was for it. I mean, she wasn't nagging me every day, she didn't have to. I was for it.

DePue: But was she out actively looking for opportunities to make speeches about it?

Thompson: No. I don't think so.

DePue: One other piece before we get back to governing and politics, if you will. As I understand it, this was about the time you got yourself the Collie.

Thompson: I grew up reading Lassie and Laddie. Obviously a Collie was every American boy's dream. I guess I talked about it, and she surprised me with it on my birthday. Maybe it was May of '77. It was the weekend, we were home in Chicago, and I was lying on the bed at night, I think the day before my birthday. And she came into the bedroom and dumped this dog on the bed!

DePue: A puppy?

Thompson: A Collie puppy. Of course, I was eternally grateful and went a little crazy. So I had two dogs now. Guv and Sam; named the dog Sam, after a friend of mine, Sam Skinner.<sup>64</sup> Then later when Samantha was born, both my mother-in-law and my mother didn't want the child named Samantha, because they were afraid everybody would call her "Sam," and that's the dog's name. Well, I prevailed and named her Samantha, because nobody else was around; my wife was still recovering from anesthesia. I went to a press conference, named the child, and included my wife's name as the middle name. I thought that



would get me out of trouble; it didn't. (DePue laughs) I ignored my mother and mother-in-law. And the child called herself "Sam," so what was I to do? And it had nothing to do with the dog!

DePue: Did the dogs have free run of the mansion?

Thompson: Oh, sure. The staff loved them, and they took care of them. And they had a whole block-long yard in which to run.

DePue: Plenty of big yard for two dogs like that to have fun.

Thompson: Yeah, and they're both buried there.

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<sup>64</sup> Thompson's first assistant in the U.S. attorney's office, who succeeded Thompson as U.S. attorney. He later served in the White House as George H.W. Bush's secretary of transportation and chief of staff. Undated photo of Thompson with Guv and Sam on the mansion lawn is from Boxed Photos, Thompson Office Files.

DePue: Legislature kicks in, not too long after you're inaugurated. Let's start by the selection of the Illinois State Senate president.

Thompson: Oh, boy, there was a moment in history. After the governor is inaugurated and has taken office, in the next couple of days when the legislature is to be sworn in and elect their officers, the secretary of state presides over the election of the Speaker in the Illinois House, and the governor presides over the election of the Senate president in the Illinois Senate. Ordinarily, it's a fifteen-minute affair. The leaders are predetermined by their party caucuses, and you get up there and bang the gavel and call the Senate into session. Each caucus makes its nomination, and there are these long seconding speeches, then there's a roll-call vote. The leaders vote for each other, like grade school, and it's over. And you're escorted in, you're escorted out, like the State of the State. So I get up there, and I have my script; it tells me what to say to call these proceedings to order, and how to call on senators, and—

DePue: And you're expecting no problems in this?

Thompson: There were a lot of candidates that I remember. But I had expected, as was almost always the case, that the party caucuses had decided on the winner; you know, others might be nominated, then they'd bow out. So there were a bunch of candidates, but I don't think anybody expected to go a long time. But it did, something like two hundred and seventy ballots?

DePue: A hundred and eighty-six ballots.

Thompson: A hundred and eighty-six ballots. So I was up there for a couple of months. I wrote my budget speech up in the little office behind the Senate podium, and I worked on State of the State up there too. And I conducted other business, because while the legislature was in session, I was their prisoner in the Senate! (laughs) Greatest thing that ever happened to me. Yes, it was inconvenient, in terms of organizing my own office and doing my own business one floor down, but I didn't know any of these guys. And I spent a couple of months with them. I presided. I was fair, and I didn't favor one over the other. When they were in recess, I'd go down on the floor of the Senate and walk around and talk to senators, make their acquaintance. So by the time it was all over, the senators were my friends; where when it began, we were strangers. And that had, I think, a lasting impact.<sup>65</sup> In fact, in Michigan, on the political wall of the house there, I've got a framed picture of the Senate from that time, signed by all the senators, which they gave me as a sort of memento. And that went on and on and on, it was downstate versus Chicago.

DePue: Who was the downstate candidate?

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<sup>65</sup> An assessment shared by Thompson's first deputy governor, who offers a longer account of this "big moment" and its effect on Thompson's political capital. Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 24, 2015.

- Thompson: Terry Bruce from what were called the Crazy Eight, eight downstate Democratic senators who wanted Bruce. What they were really after was leverage on the Senate president to appoint members of their ranks as deputy leaders and committee chairs. They knew that with eight votes, they couldn't elect the Senate president; they needed thirty.
- DePue: You mentioned that the Crazy Eight were downstate Democrats, but I know it included Dawn Clark Netsch.
- Thompson: Except for Netsch, yes.
- DePue: They stylized themselves, I think, as Independent Democrats?
- Thompson: Independent Democrats, yeah.
- DePue: Independent from the Chicago machine.
- Thompson: That's correct. Tom Hynes was the Chicago organization candidate, and he could not persuade the eight to give in, until the hundred and seventy-eighth ballot. After a hundred and seventy-eight ballots, they got what they wanted, which was leverage and positions and things of that sort. But I went storming into the Democratic caucus before that vote, and I said, "Listen, this has gone on long enough. People of the state of Illinois expect me to be on that floor downstairs, the second floor, to do my job, and not sitting up here as a prisoner of the Senate. And they expect you to do your job and get organized and start passing legislation, and we're not going to have any more of this! So if you don't get going, we're going to have a lot of recesses here and you can just sit around, because I'm going to be downstairs working." And that, plus Hynes' promise to the Crazy Eight, got the job done, and he was elected. But as it turned out, it was a wonderful thing for me.
- DePue: Did you also have an opportunity during that timeframe to get to know the House members as well?
- Thompson: Oh, sure, you got to know the House members; in particular, you got to know the House leadership, or as they were affectionately known, "The Four Tops," (laughs) The Governor and the Four Tops.
- DePue: The Four Tops. That's what I wanted to ask you about, is some of the legislative personalities, and again, this is early in your administration. A lot of these guys are going to be around for a long time, but let's start with your impressions of these men. I think they all are men. Let's start with Tom Hynes.
- Thompson: Tom Hynes was a Daley Democrat from Chicago, smart guy. Very smart guy. We got along fine. I mean, he obviously had a different agenda than mine, for the most part. But I respected him, and I think he respected me, and we did okay.

- DePue: I think he was probably already moving up pretty quickly in terms of influence in his party, but Phil Rock.
- Thompson: Phil Rock, a dear man. Just a really dear man, and as my governorship went on and Phil eventually attained the Senate presidency, he was one of my best friends and one of my most trusted leaders, even though he was a Democrat. When Phil gave his word, it got done. And a lot of times, Phil would side with me, to the dismay of his caucus. But I trusted him and he trusted me, and we had a lot of the same issues and resolutions in mind.<sup>66</sup>
- DePue: On the Republican side of the ledger in the Senate, David Shapiro.
- Thompson: Doc Shapiro, from—
- DePue: Not to be confused with the other Shapiro out there.
- Thompson: No, not to be confused with the lieutenant governor, acting governor.<sup>67</sup> Dave Shapiro, a doctor from DeKalb County, was also a great man. He was just a lovely, wonderful, kind person. And I got along with him fine, except for the one incident where the Republicans tried to seize control of the Senate with less than thirty votes.
- DePue: Let's see your reaction to the next one—and I think he also is going to be moving up pretty quickly in the ranks of Senate Republicans—James “Pate” Philip.
- Thompson: James Pate Philip. (laughs) I first met Pate during the campaign. I had never met him, didn't know him. So I went out to have lunch with him in DuPage County, and it lasted for, I don't know, two, three hours. And he was one of a kind, I swear. He was, in private life, a bread salesman. He didn't go door to door or store to store, but he ran a group of bread salesmen, and he had been at this company for years and years and years.
- DePue: I'm thinking it was Sara Lee, but I could be wrong.<sup>68</sup>
- Thompson: No, it was not Sara Lee. He was very conservative, very opinionated, not politically correct, even back then! (laughs) Given to profanity—we were as different as night and day. But you know, you grew to love Pate. We had our difficulties from time to time when he ran the Senate, but in the end, like George Ryan when he was Speaker or Republican leader, if it came down to what the governor wanted, they had respect enough for the governor to help him get it done.

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<sup>66</sup> For some reflections on Thompson, particularly in comparison with Jim Edgar, see Phil Rock, interview by Mark DePue, November 29, 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Shapiro was Otto Kerner's lieutenant governor, succeeding him when Kerner moved to the federal bench.

<sup>68</sup> Philip worked for Pepperidge Farm.

- DePue: In Phil Rock's case, you mentioned that he was a man of his word. Could you trust Pate Philip to come through as well?
- Thompson: Yes. Yeah, if Pate told you he'd do it, he did it. It might be a contentious getting-there, but he kept his word. All four leaders did; even as the leadership changed, all four kept their word, because, hey, you don't keep your word in politics, (laughs) you're going to come to a sorry end. And with their fellow legislators, before me.
- DePue: Let's move to the House, then. The Illinois House when you first got there, like the Senate, was controlled by the Democrats.
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: And Bill Redmond was the House Speaker.
- Thompson: He was, indeed. Bill was a rarity. He was a Democrat from DuPage County. I don't think Bill Redmond ever alleged that votes were stolen in DuPage County, and he would have known, wouldn't he?<sup>69</sup>
- DePue: I did want to mention that it was the 1974 election when Walker was attempting to refashion the Democratic House so that he could have a better chance of getting some things pushed through. So in early 1975 there was a knock-down, drag-out about the selection of the House Speaker, when Lee Daniels was the deciding vote to switch from Republican to Democrat, and came out in support of Bill Redmond to finally solve their problems of selecting a Speaker.
- Thompson: His fellow DuPage guy.
- DePue: Exactly. As is Pate Philip.
- Thompson: As is Pate Philip. DuPage was the most vote-rich Republican county in the state, so it's natural they would have outsize influence. And—this is important in terms of legislative leadership—DuPage was a wealthy county. They didn't need much from state government. It is a truism that you want a legislative leader who doesn't need much for his legislative district, so that he can focus on helping his members get what they need. Pate Philip didn't need much, Doc Shapiro didn't need much. DeKalb County was a wealthy county. Tom Hynes and Phil Rock came out of the city of Chicago, and while the city of Chicago had a lot of needs in the state, in the legislature, Phil Rock's district didn't and Tom Hynes's district didn't. So leaders are expected to be rather selfless in their requests. Now, there's some who have strayed from that principle, and they shall not be named. But at that time, those four leaders,

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<sup>69</sup> Reference to the closely contested 1982 gubernatorial election, and Adlai Stevenson's claim that fraudulent votes in DuPage County helped put Thompson over the top. See Jim Thompson, interview #14, by Mark DePue; Adlai Stevenson III, interview by Mark DePue, August 5, 2014.

they were free to spend their time and their influence on behalf of their members.

DePue: You mentioned that the people from DeKalb, and especially DuPage County didn't need much. I would think one of the things that they did want was some help on skyrocketing property tax rates, and that's going to become a factor later on in the administration.

Thompson: Yeah, but under the law then, there wasn't much they could do about that.

DePue: It wasn't a state issue?

Thompson: It was not a state issue. There were no state caps, or anything like that.

DePue: Some have suggested that Bill Redmond was pretty much a figurehead, that there was somebody else who was really acting as the Democratic leader in the House, even at that time.<sup>70</sup>

Thompson: Mike Madigan. And I think that was probably true. Bill was nearing the end of his political career. He only had, what, two terms as Speaker?

DePue: Three terms.

Thompson: Three terms. And he was not of the same mold as Madigan in terms of using the levers of power of the Speaker's office to fashion a political machine, both for himself and for his party. For example, Madigan has been the Speaker for thirty-something years, as both the Speaker of the House and the leader of the Democratic Party in the state. That's an *awesome* combination of power! And I can't think of another legislative leader, in my memory, maybe before my time, who had that kind of power and influence.

DePue: The only one that would compare is the legendary Richard J. Daley, but coming from Chicago instead of from the state.

Thompson: Yeah, but Daley wasn't a legislative leader. He was a member for a little while. Elected as a Republican, actually. (laughs)

DePue: Didn't last for very long, as I understand!

Thompson: No, that didn't last for very long. So yeah, Madigan basically ran the House, but Redmond was a crusty old sort, and I don't think he was exactly on the same wavelength as the new Republican governor, the kid. And we had our battle over Class X. I wanted Class X, it was a signature initiative of my first administration, and he killed it. I got it in the next session.

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<sup>70</sup> Former governor Jim Edgar claimed Redmond was "never the real power; the real power was always the majority leader, particularly when Madigan emerged in 1977." Jerry Shea was the majority leader during Redmond's first term as Speaker. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 9, 2009, Volume I: 236.

DePue: We're going to get to Class X here in a little bit. But I did want to ask you a couple of other things for the early stages of your administration. Since we've been talking about personalities and working with all of these various people, let's hit the constitutional officers quickly. And tell me how much dealings you even had with these people. At the top of the heap in terms of influence in Illinois—maybe you would disagree with this—typically, it's said that the secretary of state position is the plum position in the other constitutional offices.

Thompson: I think that's right. The Illinois secretary of state controlled a huge number of patronage jobs. He had offices in every county of the state. His name was on the driver's license in your wallet. And he didn't have to do anything controversial!

DePue: Even kids knew who the secretary of state was.

Thompson: He didn't have to raise taxes, he didn't have to fight with the legislature over a budget—he didn't have to do any of those things! He just gave out driver's licenses and ran the state library, for whatever that was worth. Once elected secretary of state, you could go on forever, as Howlett did, and as Jesse has done since that time.<sup>71</sup>

DePue: It was Alan Dixon when you got there.

Thompson: Yeah, and he and I were pals.

DePue: Interesting term, because he was known as "Al the Pal."

Thompson: Yeah, and it was true. He and I staged that coup on Walker on the inaugural stage, appointing Alan's deputy treasurer as the acting treasurer, which was the office Alan was coming from, until the next election. And we did that right on the inaugural stage, to the governor's great chagrin. That's a fascinating story. Alan tells this story in his book, and it's a true story.<sup>72</sup>

DePue: We should also mention that he just passed away less than a month ago.

Thompson: He did just pass away, and I did one of the eulogies, down in Belleville. I mean, he was a dear friend from the time I became governor. Dixon had been elected secretary of state, and he was desirous of having his assistant treasurer appointed to be acting treasurer when he left office, even though the guy was a Republican. He was sort of a career, nonpartisan guy, but he was a Republican. And I think he was from DuPage County, if I'm not mistaken. So Alan called up the governor, and said, "Can I see you?" The governor said, "Yeah, come over to the mansion." Alan went over and said, "Listen,

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<sup>71</sup> Jesse White, who at the time of this interview had been serving since 1999.

<sup>72</sup> Alan J. Dixon, *The Gentleman from Illinois: Stories from Forty Years of Elective Public Service* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013).

Governor, I've got an idea. I'm going to be leaving the treasurer's office, and I've got this guy, my assistant, and he's a good, career nonpartisan guy, and he'd be an excellent acting treasurer. I'd really count it a favor if you would appoint him." And Walker, in his cold manner, said, "I'll make my own appointments, thank you very much!" Alan said, "Thank you, Governor," and out he went.

He dialed me up, said, "Jim?" I said, "Yes?" He said, "Now, listen," and then he told me the story. He said, "That's just not right. This fellow would be an excellent caretaker of the office. If the ordinary course of inaugural program is followed, Governor Walker can make the appointment from the stage the minute I resign to take the secretary of state's office, because the governor is sworn in last. Now, if we reverse that, Jim, you could appoint the acting treasurer. And Jim, he's a Republican from DuPage County, so you wouldn't get any rejections from your fellow Republicans." I said, "Well, Alan, yes I would, because he wouldn't be their cup of tea; they'd want one of their own to be appointed treasurer of the state of Illinois for two years. Are you kidding me? But if you give me the opportunity to make the appointment, rather than have Walker make the appointment with a Democrat, I'll do it. I trust your word about this guy, and he'll administer the office in a nonpartisan fashion for two years, and everybody can start equally in the next election."

We hatched that plot, and since the governor-elect was in charge of the inaugural, he certainly could determine the order in which people were sworn in. So we just flipped it. I was sworn in first, and the minute I was sworn in, Alan Dixon, who was to be sworn in as secretary of state but hadn't yet resigned, got up from his chair on the stage and walked over to me at the podium—(laughs) very dramatic—handed me his written resignation. I had on the podium in my book with my speech, appointing this guy as the acting treasurer, and life went on. And so we were friends, lifelong friends after that.

DePue: Did you happen to catch the expression on Walker's face?

Thompson: Yeah. It was not kind.

DePue: That's all you want to say about it?

Thompson: That's all I want to say about it.

DePue: The treasurer was Donald Smith.

Thompson: Donald Smith, that's right.

DePue: And that's the gentleman we've just been talking about?

Thompson: Yeah, that's the guy.<sup>73</sup>

DePue: The next one, attorney general, William Scott?

Thompson: Scott was a friend of mine. Jayne was one of his assistants. She had always been one of his favorites. She was in the office as a law clerk, and then as an assistant attorney general and a litigator. In fact, one time in there, she left the office to go to a law firm, McDermott Will & Emery, where she was the only woman litigator. She could have made quite a career for herself there, but she missed the action of the attorney general's office. She ran into Scott on the street one day, and he enticed her to come back.

Now, Scott hired me as an assistant attorney general shortly after his first election. Made me the chief of the Criminal Division, the Pollution Control Division, and the Antitrust Division; I had four or five departments under me. We were friends. He relied on me, and I was part of the inner circle. It was interesting; every day, Scott would gather five of us in his office, and he'd bring up an issue. His press secretary always sat in those meetings, and Scott was ever vigilant to do a press release on what was decided in the meeting. We'd talk about what was to be decided, and then when Scott made a decision, he would turn to her and say, "Martha, here is the press release. 'Attorney general William J. Scott announced today that'"— then he'd turn and look at me, and I was supposed to fill in the rest of the press release! (DePue laughs)

In an eerie subsequent event to that, I did the same for Blagojevich at a meeting where Illinois, along with Ohio and Indiana, were competing for the new Honda plant. It eventually went to Indiana because they could pass the federal air pollution standards quicker than Illinois. Since they were what was called a "designated state," they could make their own decision at the state-level; Illinois was not a designated state and would have to go through the federal EPA to get clearance to build this plant. Even though Illinois made an extremely competitive offer, I think probably the best offer, the Honda people were all about getting this thing built quickly. And the ability to avoid the federal entanglement on over-air pollution controls, tipped the decision to Indiana.

When Blagojevich was meeting in his office with officials from Honda, he had included me along with the director of DCCA, his director of economic development in charge of this effort; Honda had hired me as a lobbyist. In the meeting, Honda would ask the governor a question, he'd get out three or four words, and then he'd turn to look at me, and I was supposed to fill it in, right? (laughs) That was a famous meeting where he was late

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<sup>73</sup> Dixon initially recommended that Walker appoint Joseph McMahon, a Chicago Democrat. John Elmer, "Dixon Recommends Aide Be Appointed Treasurer," *Chicago Tribune*, November 19, 1976.

coming to the meeting. And the reason he was late was because he was having a debate with Judy Baar Topinka in the midst of the campaign.<sup>74</sup>

DePue: Wasn't he always late to everything?

Thompson: Yeah, but this was the reason, this time. He walks into the meeting— everybody's sitting at the table, all these Honda people from out of state— slams the door, and says, "Jim! That woman, she wants me to be indicted!" And the Honda people went, "What? What?" I guess Judy Baar had suggested in a debate that he ought to be indicted, and he was still pissed off. And that's how he opened the meeting. (laughs) From then on in the meeting, I had to answer all the questions that were posed to the governor, which I'm sure the Honda people walked out of there thinking, What the hell? Our lobbyist is answering the questions that we're asking of the governor of the state of Illinois? Anyway, Scott would do that in terms of a press release.

We were very close, when Ogilvie, who was then the governor, was importuning Scott to fill a vacancy for the U.S. Senate, or to run for election to the Senate. Joel Flaum, an assistant attorney general with me, was also very much trusted by Scott. Scott always thought of this as a plot by Ogilvie to get rid of him, to get him out of the state, by getting him to the Senate. Scott would scrutinize press releases that came from the governor's office, to see if he could match the typing to some other suspect typewriter that he was convinced was being wielded by the real power. It was all very paranoid. So I had a long history with Scott. And even though we had sort of a contretemps on my running for governor before he announced his decision, we got past that. He was the attorney general at a time when I was there serving my first term as governor.

DePue: How important was it for you to have a good working relationship with the rest of the constitutional officers?

Thompson: Oh, I thought it was important, because they could, if they were of a mind to, weigh in on issues and criticize you or oppose your programs, or things of that sort. And because they didn't have your responsibilities, it was easy to do.

DePue: There's one of the constitutional officers I haven't mentioned yet. In Illinois, you've got both a treasurer and a comptroller. That was Michael Bakalis, and let's kind of hold off a discussion with him, because he's your opponent in about a year.

Thompson: I actually didn't have much to do with Bakalis as a constitutional officer.

DePue: Is he essentially at that time the check signer?

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<sup>74</sup> Blagojevich ran for reelection against Republican state treasurer Topinka and the Green Party's Rich Whitney in 2006.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Paying the bills?

Thompson: Yeah. You would not expect a governor's office to come into too much conflict with either the treasurer or the comptroller, although there were some instances where one or both had to sign off on the state's ability to borrow. But that's the only, I think, real intersection of the powers of those offices and mine.<sup>75</sup>

DePue: Was the secretary of state's office responsible for managing elections, like it is in many states?

Thompson: No. Illinois had a state electoral board.

DePue: Was that created in the early stages of your administration?

Thompson: It was recreated, let's say.

DePue: A function of the constitution?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: I had forgotten that.

Thompson: I think it's true that in one of the early days in my administration, there was a need to reconstitute or redo that law, and it wasn't getting done. I summoned the leaders up to this hideaway office in the Bismarck Hotel that I would use for secret meetings so people wouldn't be seen trooping in and out of the governor's office from Chicago or Springfield. And I'd hold them prisoner until we got agreement, which we did.

DePue: I should have remembered all of this because I've had a most interesting conversation with Ron Michaelson, who served as the executive director of the Board of Elections for a long time.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: He had stories to tell.

Thompson: I'm sure.

DePue: Some of them dealt with you, Governor.

Thompson: I'm sure.

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<sup>75</sup> The comptroller's office under Republican George Lindberg had a "contentious" relationship with Democratic Governor Walker. See Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 12, 2013.

- DePue: What would you consider your biggest challenge, then, stepping into office? The thing that you had to wrestle with first?
- Thompson: The budget.
- DePue: And tell me about that.
- Thompson: That was a tough economic year, '77. And I think I announced early on, even before I was governor, what I would put as a cap on state spending. I said we would allow \$300 million of new spending, and that was it. That was significantly below increases of prior years, as much as 50 percent below some of the prior increases in state spending.
- DePue: This is what I have: a 5 percent increase, and that was belt-tightening; there would be a threat that the public sector unions would possibly strike if they didn't get that much. Let me put something else in context here for the period of time we're talking about, because 5 percent today would sound like an awful lot. But this is a timeframe when you take off a 6 percent inflation rate.
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: I don't know whether anybody could, in today's perspective, imagine a 6 percent inflation rate.
- Thompson: Right.
- DePue: Six-point-two percent unemployment rate, and at the early stages of what we would call the "Carter malaise."
- Thompson: Yeah. We'd be thrilled with a six-point-something unemployment rate today, but state revenues were tight. I mean, Mandeville persuaded me of that even before I took office. And I think I said three hundred million, that's it.
- DePue: Also putting pressure on the budget would be increasing welfare costs, inflation, and Medicaid costs eating up more and more of the budget every year.
- Thompson: Yeah. And even nominal increases in educational spending were big dollars. That's the annual battle of the budget, if you were going to cut the budget or hold increases in spending to a minimum. You'd have to go, as they say about bank robbers, to where the money is, and the money in a state budget is education—elementary, secondary, and college and university—Medicaid, and welfare.<sup>76</sup> The rest of the budget, the operations of state government, are small potatoes. Now, if you're going to have a sacrificial budget, where the pain is shared by everybody, obviously you're going to take dollars from

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<sup>76</sup> See Mandeville, December 12, 2013, for "the three Ps that will kill you: prisons, public aid, and pensions." Also see Jeffrey Miller, interview by Mike Czaplicki, July 7, 2015.

those small agencies, too, or limit their increases. But that's not where the money is.

DePue: Here is another traditional big-ticket item, and that's infrastructure improvements. And I believe your budget called for only \$512 million for roads that year.

Thompson: Yeah, although you could borrow for capital projects. You could borrow for roads, and the federal government would help you on roads and part of the interstate highway system. There were sort of safety valves there.

DePue: There was certainly a federal tax on gas and a state tax on gas. Did all of that money, the state tax on gas, go right back into the DOT?

Thompson: It did in those days before the legislature got its greedy hands on it.

DePue: (laughs) Maybe this is your budget message for that year, 1977 was the "year of austerity."

Thompson: Yeah, that's true. And that's how it ended up in the last days of the session when the budget was passed.

DePue: Is it tougher to do that your first year, or easier to do that your first year?

Thompson: I don't think it has anything to do so much with the first year. It's tougher to say no in good times, because everybody expects you're going to say yes to everything. And it's easier to say no in tough times, because then everybody understands that there are limits. That's the more applicable rule, I think, in first year or fifth year or tenth year.<sup>77</sup> Those may operate at the margin, but...

DePue: And I understand that you hit the road to try to sell your budget idea.

Thompson: Oh, absolutely. I was a great believer. And my staff, of course, since they didn't have to make the speeches, was an even greater believer in hitting the road (laughs) to try and persuade the people of Illinois to pressure their legislative representatives to do what the governor wanted. That's a myth!

DePue: Why would that be a better approach than sitting down next to the legislators yourself?

Thompson: You did both, obviously. And as you know, the governor has the privilege of the floor in the House and Senate, and I took advantage of it for all fourteen years, repeatedly, often, importantly. But there's this myth out there that to sell a program, the governor has to fly around the state, make speeches to the Rotary and the Chamber of Commerce, and on and on and on, in the hopes

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<sup>77</sup> By contrast, Thompson's budget director did think the "the first budget of a new administration has to be an austere one" because the prior administration can serve as a useful foil to provide political cover for resisting demands to expand programs. Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 10, 2014.

that they will arise and call their legislators and say, “Hey, do what the governor says!” It’s a myth, but it’s part of the political culture. You initially start out believing it; (laughs) you soon come to understand it’s not true. But the staff is absolutely persuaded it’s true. It’s easier to go make the speech than to argue with them.

DePue: Let’s talk about something you just mentioned, and that’s sitting down and going out on the floor and working with the legislators.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Because would it be a true statement that Dan Walker didn’t do that?

Thompson: He did not do that.

DePue: And I think it’s a true statement that Jim Edgar didn’t do that.

Thompson: Jim Edgar did not do that.

DePue: And certainly Blagojevich, he probably would have been thrown out if he had tried to do that.

Thompson: Yes, he did not do that. And Quinn does not do that.

DePue: So why did you take such a different—

Thompson: Ryan did not do that.

DePue: So, we’ve just about mentioned every governor from the last forty-some years.

Thompson: Yeah, and the governors before me did not do that. I did that. Because to me, as I said before, the running of state government is a continuing campaign, and that was a campaign. Plus, the legislators were flattered that the governor came to their house or the governor came to their office and asked them to do something. That was flattery. It was important. It got stuff done. It’s tough to say no to a governor when he strolls onto the floor, pulls up an empty chair next to a legislator, and says, “Now, listen, Bill...” It’s tough to say no! We proved it during the debate on the White Sox stadium bill, proved it on other bills. Very, very tough to say no to a governor when he puts in the effort to persuade you not from a distance, but from up close and personal.

DePue: Could it be overdone?

Thompson: Oh, sure. You could make a nuisance of yourself. But I didn’t do that. And the leadership certainly welcomed me. If I strolled on the floor of the Senate or the House, immediately, the presiding officer, no matter who he was, would say, “Ladies and gentlemen, we are honored by a visit from the governor of

the State of Illinois, James R. Thompson.” There would be applause, and then you’d go do what you came to do.

DePue: And they’d go about their business?

Thompson: Yeah. You start with your Republican leader, because obviously, he would be pissed off if you didn’t go to him first. (DePue laughs) Especially Pate.



And then you talk to a few guys on that side, because if you sat down next to Pate, the other Republicans would come running over to huddle; they didn’t want to miss anything.<sup>78</sup> And then, when the game got to be really fun, you’d cross over to the Democratic side, and you’d sit down next to Emil, or Hynes, or Rock.

DePue: That’s Emil Jones?

Thompson: Yeah. If I sat next to Rock, you could hear mutters in the Democratic caucus, “Uh-oh! Now what’s he going to give him?” (laughs) And you’d pick out the troublemakers and go sit next to them so they couldn’t say boo.

DePue: Since you mentioned the name, Governor, give me your impressions of Emil Jones.

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<sup>78</sup> Undated photo of Thompson with Pate Philip on the Senate floor is from Boxed Photos, Thompson Office Files.

Thompson: (laughs) Oh, Emil's one of a kind in a different way than Pate was, but he's one of a kind. I always had good relations with him in the legislature. He looked out for his caucus, and he looked out for his personal interests, his personal projects; by God, Chicago State University was going to get more money than it deserved. And you know, if the gambling bill was on the floor, Emil would say, "The ship ain't moving until the cargo's on board!" (laughs) He was not shy. But he could control his caucus, like the other leaders could.

DePue: He had the reputation for being an atrocious speaker. Would you agree with that?

Thompson: He didn't speak that often. I mean, he'd get emotional in his wind-up. He wasn't the greatest public speaker, but he got the job done.

DePue: An effective leader, then, in his own right?

Thompson: Yeah, he was an effective leader. They were all effective leaders.

DePue: We're talking about your taking the opportunity to go down on the floor and actually directly deal with these legislators, and that is kind of against the grain of tradition in Illinois. Do you understand why other governors had been reluctant or unwilling to do that?

Thompson: I have no idea. And I certainly encouraged Blagojevich to do that in my capacity as director of his transition, and later as his lawyer. For the life of me, it's one of the most effective tools a governor has; that and the use of the mansion. And Blagojevich did neither. (laughs) He went home every night to Chicago! He was not a mansion guy. Quinn started out by saying, "I love the governor's mansion; I want to live here! He goes home."

DePue: Because Blagojevich's use of the mansion did not go over well with Springfield at all.

Thompson: Well, he didn't use it. That was the point. He neglected it. It was almost in hock every night. He wouldn't pay the telephone bill, for God's sake! He wouldn't pay the grocery bill. People cut off credit to the mansion. That's how he used the mansion.

But the use of the mansion is very effective. That's what it's for! It's not there for a governor to live; you can rent an apartment or a house for the governor if that's all it's about. It's for use by the governor in his effort to persuade people to do something. That's why you invite people to the mansion; you invite the legislative leaders to breakfast at the mansion to hash out an issue. That's why you allow legislators to have parties or dinners at the mansion, where they could invite their home constituents. That's what it's for. It's a public house. It's not a museum, and it's not the governor's residence; those are secondary purposes. Its primary purpose is its use as an instrument of persuasion, just as going to the floor was an instrument of persuasion, or

going to legislator's offices was an instrument of persuasion.

And the two were different, because if you went to the floor, everybody saw you. If you walked over and started whispering in a legislator's ear, everybody else wanted to know, "What the hell is he saying, and why is he talking to him instead of me?" Or, "That's nice of him to come." If you went to their office, it was a bigger individual deal, because the minute I left, he'd be on the phone calling up all of his buddies, saying, "The governor was just in my office," and he'd let them think about what it was that transpired. He wouldn't tell them, unless he said, "Well, I told the governor that..." which wasn't true, of course. Or he'd let on that by God, I'd given him three or four jobs, which wasn't true, of course, but the word spread quickly by the representative or senator. The secretary was flattered... It's all about dealing with people in a kindly, persuasive manner. That's the essence of politics. First you persuade the people of Illinois to elect you, and then you persuade various bodies you deal with after you're elected to come together on a shared platform.

DePue: You're removed by quite a few years from all of this now. Do you still hear stories at parties, or at dinner with some of these former legislators, "Do you remember, Governor, when you came over and did such-and-such?"

Thompson: Sure. I mean, half the time what they say is made up, but that's common. You get stopped on the street, "Governor, you remember me?" And then you have to sort of persuade them to help you remember them, and God forbid they should be with somebody else, and they start telling a story of something I said to them twenty years ago, which of course is not true; never happened. But it makes the guy look important to his buddies standing there on the sidewalk. (laughs)

DePue: Well, either not true, or you just didn't remember the story yourself.

Thompson: Not true.

DePue: Not true?

Thompson: I remember the not-trues, yes. It's like having your picture taken with people. If you stop to worry about, Who is this guy? Is he a convicted felon? Is he a criminal? So you adopt the rule: anybody who wants to have their picture taken with you, you have your picture taken with them. If that's the rule, nobody can blame you for having your picture taken with them.

DePue: You've been talking about what it takes to get your legislative initiatives through, and working the legislature. Would you do the same—

Thompson: This is in addition, of course, to the work of your legislative liaisons, who are there every day and also had the privileges of the floor; except when the

leaders got mad at him and threw him off the floor, but that was mostly a show.

DePue: How about your approach to the press? Same approach with them?

Thompson: Yeah, same approach. I was very accessible to the press. I was during the campaign. God, we lived together, essentially, during the campaign, back when they covered campaigns. They don't do it anymore. That's because they'd rather have the paid media than go out and do interviews. But since that's how I was raised during the campaign—and that was my rule when I was U.S. attorney, I was very accessible to the press. That's how I became widely enough known to be able to run for governor. So I was very open with the press.

DePue: Truth to the stories I've heard that you'd go into the press offices in the Capitol Building, put your feet up on the desk and just start talking?<sup>79</sup>

Thompson: Absolutely. I did with the press and the press offices what I did with the legislature.

DePue: Was that also somewhat unique in terms of the approach other governors would take?

Thompson: Absolutely. Some of the other governors wouldn't be caught dead doing that.

DePue: Why did you do it, then? Why did you think it was an important and effective thing to do?

Thompson: Because it *was* important, and it was effective. First impressions on an issue are likely to be the lasting impression. And if you can persuade a member of the press about what you're doing and why you're doing it, then maybe when somebody else comes along and takes a contrary view, he'll weigh both sides. If you let opponents get there first—that's one of the issues with the press that's very difficult to deal with sometimes, who gets to the press first? A lasting issue. I've seen it happen where somebody sells a story to a reporter, he writes a story in the paper, and no matter what you've got to say in counter to that, it's a waste of time; they're going to go with their first impressions. It's just a habit of the press. I mean, it's a habit of a lot of people, it's a habit of politicians. First impressions are enormously, enormously important. That's true in private life as well; your first impressions of people are likely the ones that are going to stick with you, unless over the course of a long time your views change about people, which can happen. And I enjoyed the press. That was the point. A lot of my fellow governors did not enjoy the press. I enjoyed them! It was fun, jousting with the press. It was a sport. Not in the sense that it wasn't serious, it was serious. But in the sense of, I can get my point across

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<sup>79</sup> David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 27, 2014.

here; I can persuade this guy to my point of view in the same way that I persuade a legislator or a voter. And I enjoyed doing it.

DePue: Or a prosecutor would persuade the jury?

Thompson: A jury, sure. And back then, a lot of the reporters were my age or younger. I enjoyed being with them.

DePue: Name some of the more important or influential journalists that you dealt with.

Thompson: Here's where I'm going to forget all the names. Bob—who was the *Sun-Times* reporter who often times would drive me crazy? I'll have to come back on the names. But *Sun-Times* reporter, Bob, who was from a hog farm in central Illinois, and his ace pal, a younger reporter from the *Chicago Daily News* Bob Selter, Larry Green, or James Kloss(?). A number of the reporters from the campaign went on to become Springfield reporters. The guy who wrote the column about state government for the *Journal Register*, Al Manning, was an odd duck. Not an odd duck, he just had his fixed views, you know? He had seen administrations come and go, his job was to sort of puncture them. So, he'd write stuff that... For the Chicago newspapers, and for other newspapers around the state, what their Springfield Bureau chief wrote was important. And television wasn't as big an influence then, so it was the written word that ended up in the newspapers and tracked over to local TV broadcasts. But I had worked well with the press corps during the campaign; I liked them, and they liked me. And I liked the members of the press, even though they were not uniformly in love with me or my ideas. They liked me, but they weren't going to do everything I said. I just enjoyed it.

DePue: Was it your sense at the time that they would generally lean towards the Democrat Party versus the Republican Party?

Thompson: The press? No, I think they were pretty neutral.

DePue: So, different from today's might be.

Thompson: Well, different from today's columnists might be. Today we have all these controversies about the liberal press, the conservative press; we've got Fox News and MSNBC on opposite sides of the political spectrum, and the talking heads. We didn't have that many talking heads back then. They were workman-like journalists.

DePue: I'm going to go down a list of issues or incidents, and I'll start with this one. January 21, 1977, you declare a hiring freeze.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Hiring freeze in what respect?

Thompson: Budgetary was the first respect.

DePue: Does this apply to the other constitutional offices?

Thompson: No, just offices under the control of the governor. There's no way I could have imposed it on other constitutional officers. But their budgets imposed a sort of freeze on them. When the legislature passed their budgets, the legislature was always generous to constitutional officers for the operations of their office, because the legislative leaders and legislators would want favors from those guys. If you're going to call up the secretary of state and ask to have Joe Jones go to work in a driver's license facility, you were not about to ding the secretary of state's budget. But this was imposed for the governor's office hires, or agencies under control of the governor, and it was the first of a number of freezes that we instituted in the fourteen years.

DePue: I understand Art Quern went after welfare fraud early in the administration.

Thompson: Yeah, he did. Quern was a very, very able man. He came out of the Rockefeller administration with glowing references. We conducted a nationwide search for the public aid director, as we did for some other posts.

DePue: Was that his initiative or yours?

Thompson: It was both. It was a shared initiative.

DePue: Here's one that we're going to take up later on, but just put a mark on it right now. Your position as far as state salaries, to include the executive branch and the legislators, (Thompson laughs) at a time when there's high inflation year after year. Like I say, I want to save most of that story for later.

Thompson: Oh, I'm sure you do. That was an issue I could never win. Never, ever win. It was a favorite sport of the press to try and bait the governor into taking a stand on his own salary or the salary of legislators. And you couldn't win. You either said no to all pay raises year after year after year, in which event the legislature would be mightily pissed off and you'd go without sustenance, (laughs) or you said what you thought was appropriate, and then you got beaten up all over again. You couldn't win it! It's just an issue you couldn't win. Because the press like to stir up controversy with that, and then of course, that would stir up the letter writers. Then some legislators would jump out and make speeches about, "Hey, no more pay raises for you guys either," looking at his fellow members.

DePue: Looking at some of the articles, I did have the impression, at least in '77, you, in a kind of general sense, said that you would be willing to consider pay raises for legislators and the executive.

Thompson: Yeah. Right. Why would you rope off the governor and the General Assembly from decent, ordinary pay raises to keep up with the demands of inflation and

the importance of the task, and watch all the other state employees get their annual raises and people in the private sector get their raises? When I started as governor of the state of Illinois, responsible for a \$10 billion budget and hundreds of thousands of employees, I was paid \$50,000 a year.<sup>80</sup> The counter argument is, “You sought the office; you knew what the salary was.” Or, “That’s all politicians are worth,” rah, rah, rah. (DePue laughs) You can’t win. And I’ve seen all sorts of solutions; legislation to raise the salaries of the legislature and the governor and the other constitutional officers; or commissions, which of course are staffed by all the cronies of the legislative leaders, so that’s just a front. You can’t win on this issue. You just cannot win.

DePue: This is something you’d addressed before, but I want you to go into some detail and explain what it really means, and that’s the Chicago Crosstown Project.

Thompson: The Daley administration conceived of this Chicago Crosstown Expressway, which was to link two sections of the city. I’m not exactly sure where now, but I think it would have gone diagonally from southwest to northeast across the city, probably linking with what is now the Kennedy and the Eisenhower. And of course, the people in the way of that project, the homeowners and the business owners, were not thrilled with the notion that these bulldozers were coming; it carved a wide swath across the city.<sup>81</sup>

DePue: Would this be an interstate or a state highway?

Thompson: I don’t think it was an interstate, but it was a highway project that was being paid for by the federal government, basically. This was within the city of Chicago, and it was going to cost a lot of money, like, several billion dollars. So it became a hot issue in Chicago during the campaign. I got invited down to a group of anti-Crosstown Expressway people, and I had to make a decision on whether I was going to support it or be against it. And I finally persuaded myself that it was not a worthwhile thing to do. It was way too costly, to the deleterious effect on people whose homes and businesses were going to be taken. So I went there to that meeting, I listened to all the speeches, and I walked up to a drawing board on an easel and I think I wrote the words “Crosstown Expressway,” then I put a big X through it. That was my decision. That was the position I took during the campaign.

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<sup>80</sup> A salary equivalent to \$195,327 in 2014. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>.

<sup>81</sup> The Crosstown would have consisted of two legs: the northern connecting the Kennedy-Edens interchange with the Eisenhower, and the southern running from the Eisenhower down to Midway Airport, then over to the Dan Ryan-Skyway interchange. For an extended discussion of the Crosstown’s importance to Thompson’s agenda, see Fletcher, February 24, 2015. Also see David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 14 and 26, 2014. On the Crosstown during the Walker administration, see Victor deGrazia, interview by Marilyn Huff Immel, 1981, Illinois Statecraft Oral History Program, Norris L. Brookens Library, University of Illinois Springfield, Springfield, IL, <http://www.idaillinois.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/uis/id/1820>.

DePue: Did the Democratic legislature present some legislation to you on that issue in '77?

Thompson: I don't think so. It sat for a while. The money sat in Washington until Jane Byrne was elected, and then a deadline arose that we either used the money or they were going to take it back. This was at least \$2 billion. I called up Byrne, and I said, "We need to make a decision on this, Mayor." So we met in that secret hideaway in the Bismarck Hotel, courtesy of Arthur Wirtz; the mayor on one side of the table, me on the other, and our advisors next to us. And we reached a deal. She got half the money for the city of Chicago, I got half the money for the suburbs and the Collar Counties, and I got a judgeship. A friend of mine wanted to be a circuit court judge; he and I were assistant states attorneys together. I don't know why he needed my influence, since his uncle was the chancellor of DePaul University and a very powerful Roman Catholic priest in Chicago. But nevertheless, he wanted to be a judge, so—

DePue: Do you remember his name?

Thompson: Yeah, Paul O'Malley. His uncle was Comerford O'Malley. Jane and I agreed on this deal, and as she was getting up from the table, I said, "Ah, Mayor, there's one more thing: I need a judgeship for a friend of mine." She said, "What? You want to throw a judgeship into the Crosstown Expressway deal?" I said, "Yeah." "Okay," she said, "fine." He was made a judge. So I got, like, \$1.5 billion and a judgeship.

DePue: As I understand it, that's the pinnacle of the patronage system in Chicago, appointing those judges.

Thompson: Absolutely. The City of Chicago people and the Democrats in the legislature were absolutely convinced that I had snookered Jane Byrne, that I had taken her to the cleaners, that I had gotten the better of the deal, because all that money was supposed to be spent in Chicago. My response was, "Well, none of it was going to be spent in Chicago or anyplace else, because the federal government was going to take it back unless the state and the governor agreed on a deal." And that was the deal. Everybody benefitted from that money—Chicago, suburbs, Collar Counties.

DePue: That was obviously not 1977, because Byrne didn't take office until later.

Thompson: Yeah, it was later.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> There were actually two Crosstown deals. In the first, Thompson and Bilandic agreed to kill the northern leg of the plan, but fund the southern leg and the Franklin Street Connector subway project. After Byrne defeated Bilandic, she cut a deal with Thompson to end the remaining portion of the project. Thompson's staff later memorialized the achievement with a ditty during one of their periodic "Follies" (set to the tune of "Pick a Bale of Cotton"): "Crosstown, turn around, sell a city freeway; Crosstown, turn around, buy it back again." See Fletcher, February 24, 2015.

- DePue: Michael Bilandic was sworn in on June 7th as mayor of Chicago?
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: Your relationship with him?
- Thompson: Good. I got along with every mayor I served with.
- DePue: You mentioned that yesterday too.
- Thompson: Harold [Washington] and I had a few disagreements, but they were finally worked out.
- DePue: We'll get to some of that later on, I suspect. Did you have any thoughts about significant reorganization of state government, at least for this first year?
- Thompson: Yeah, we talked about that, and I don't know, maybe we did something on the edges.
- DePue: I know the state police and the Illinois Bureau of Investigation were combined in that first year.<sup>83</sup>
- Thompson: Yeah, into the Department of Law Enforcement, which was one of my areas of interest, obviously, given where I came from. But that was about it.
- DePue: How about ERA? This was the perennial fight in Illinois all the way through the seventies, up to 1982. Did it eat up a lot of energy and oxygen in '77?
- Thompson: Yeah, that's rather a long story, so let's take a break.
- (pause in recording)
- Thompson: Oh, it's wonderful to relive triumph and failure!
- DePue: After a quick break, we're back at it, and the subject was ERA, and only the 1977 version of ERA.
- Thompson: I'm not sure I remember the 1977 version. This is an issue like pay raises: you can't win; you just cannot win. The staunch supporters of ERA would always believe you hadn't done enough, no matter what you did; it's not enough, unless you got it passed. And the opponents of ERA believed that it was conceived by the devil, and by God, they would lie down in front of a railroad train to stop it. Now, how do you win that argument, when you have no power over the issue itself? So we'll save the really hot stuff from '82. But I supported the ERA during my campaign, and thereafter for five years. During the campaign, Phyllis Schlafly, a diehard opponent of the ERA, held a fundraiser for me at her house in Alton. And the head of the ERA campaign in

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<sup>83</sup> On this reorganization, see Tyrone Fahner, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 16, 2015.

Illinois was a neighbor of hers, who came to the fundraiser, parked her car in Phyllis' driveway with the license plate "ERA." I'm sure that caused a lot of stir in the neighborhood!

DePue: And we did mention that one before.

Thompson: Yeah, I got along famously with both of them. And they knew what my position was.

DePue: Did Mrs. Schlafly spend any time in your office trying to convince you—

Thompson: No.

DePue: Her focus was on the legislature?

Thompson: Absolutely. I had nothing to do with it. Why would she waste her time on me? She knew what my position was. She supported me anyway.

DePue: One of the other key figures in the Stop ERA movement in Illinois was Kathleen Sullivan. Does that name ring a bell to you?

Thompson: Sure. She was a close confidant and fellow traveler with Phyllis.

DePue: Your impressions of Kathleen?

Thompson: It was almost a religious issue with her. It's like abortion. Same fervor, same ideology, same arguments.

DePue: Both women were staunch Catholics and staunchly anti-abortion.

Thompson: Yeah. And staunchly anti-ERA. They were strong, powerful, persuasive women. They didn't need ERA. (laughs) They had surpassed ERA.

DePue: You mean, they had proven that you could be a successful woman without ERA?

Thompson: Right. And the truth was, you didn't need the ERA; you had the Fourteenth Amendment, the Equal Protection Clause. Why do you need more than that? It was a political fight.

DePue: Does that mean that your support for ERA was strictly a political decision?

Thompson: No. No, sir. Because as I said, it was an argument that you couldn't win, so it was bad politics to take any kind of position on ERA. I was for it, because I was strongly in favor of making the point that women had been undervalued and underutilized in the life of this nation, that they had rights equal to that of men, and you shouldn't have to go resorting to the Fourteenth Amendment in a broad constitutional claim. We should have it as part of our Constitution. I was for it. But you couldn't win the argument.

DePue: Do you remember any issues that dealt with ethics in government during that first year? We already talked about the State Board of Elections; there was legislation brought in for that.

Thompson: I don't know, there may have been ethics legislation, but I don't recall it.

DePue: One of the things that was starting to be bandied around in the press at that time was your disclosure of gifts. And you went to great extent to disclose all kinds of gifts. But people were starting to take a closer look and asking questions like, Hey, how about this trip to the Kentucky Derby?

Thompson: Yeah. They didn't do that until five years later. I mean, my gift book was open for public inspection 365 days a year, not like the rest of the folks in government who filed it on the day it was supposed to be filed, and then you couldn't see it again until next year. I put them all in a book, and it was an open book. I thought that was sufficient, and people could make of that what they wanted. And it went for five years, until the campaign of '82, when the Democrats decided to make it a political issue.

DePue: There's a lot to talk about in '82, then.

Thompson: It didn't do them any good.

DePue: The death penalty. Did that come up for a vote in 1977?

Thompson: I don't remember if it came up for a vote. I was for the death penalty, and said so during the campaign.

DePue: Well, a recent Supreme Court decision had changed that.

Thompson: Yeah, it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, and there it sat for a while. Finally, the legislature reinstated it, and I signed it.

DePue: If the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional, was there a certain aspect of—

Thompson: I don't remember what the nuance in the decision was, but they got around it, met the objections of the Supreme Court's opinion, and reinstated it. I signed it. It was interesting, though. In fourteen years as governor, I never had a capital case come to my desk. I didn't have to make any life or death decisions.

DePue: Edgar did, and certainly famously, George Ryan did.

Thompson: Yeah.

- DePue: That leaves us the last topic I wanted to get to today, and that's Class X legislation. Why don't you start by explaining what the objective of Class X was, maybe even where the name came from in the first place?
- Thompson: I made up the name. I thought it had a ring to it. I thought it would signify something to people instantly. You know, movies can be X-rated, the "X" symbol was a powerful symbol in the American culture. You X'd something out. Yeah, a number of uses of X as a symbol, so I named this X. And it basically was an attempt to say, three strikes and you're out. You commit a felony, by the second offense you were a serial offender; society was not going to tolerate more than three offenses, and then you got life.
- DePue: Were there other states talking about the same kind of legislation?
- Thompson: Yeah, there were similar laws in some of the other states. They had different names. They might have had different offenses, degrees of offenses, stuff like that. We wrote the Class X statute and introduced it into the General Assembly. It was part of the priorities I had announced for my administration, law enforcement. And I would have thought it would have been an easy sell.
- DePue: Was this concept driven more by your personal philosophy or by politics, or a little bit of both?
- Thompson: I suppose a little bit of both. It was driven, certainly, by my philosophy that society and the people of the state of Illinois should not have to tolerate repeated felony offenders. And it takes an awful lot under Illinois law to go to the penitentiary, the first time or the second time.
- DePue: A possession-of-marijuana conviction wasn't going to do it?
- Thompson: No. But because of prison overcrowding, and because a lot of judges are persuaded by second chances and third chances and on and on, probation, it's hard to get any—get much deterrent value in the law. Criminals always believe they're smarter than anybody else. That goes for political criminals, especially. And you see it today in Chicago's gun violence. You get somebody out there shooting and killing, that's not their first offense. They're in and out all the time. And yet, the politicians are constantly saying, "Oh, we need stricter gun laws. We need to cut down the rights of law-abiding people whose Second Amendment right it is..." Second Amendment's not a tail-end amendment, is it? It's the *Second* Amendment! The press got there first, of course; free speech, First Amendment.
- DePue: And freedom of religion.
- Thompson: Freedom of religion. And what's the Second Amendment? Freedom of guns! It's not until the Fourteenth Amendment that you get to equal rights, or the Fourth Amendment that you get to unlawful searches and seizures, privacy. The constitutional fathers thought very highly of the Second Amendment,

that's why it was second. But today, it's, like, Oh, take away those guns, they're not entitled to that. I'm getting off the track, getting emotional. But I thought a lot of people in Illinois were just tired of this constant parade of felons, and I thought it was a politically smart thing to do.

DePue: That this would also be a deterrent?

Thompson: Well, yeah, to the extent that there is any deterrence in criminal law. And I don't think anybody's really measured that or can measure that. It's always an assumption.

DePue: I guess the question is if a potential felon is out there and decides, I don't think I want to do this, because Thompson's going to lock me away forever.

Thompson: I don't want to do this because it would be my third offense; I think there's some deterrence in that. But as I say, most criminals are not too swift; they know better than anybody, they're smarter than anybody, and they're not going to get caught. That's the general attitude.

DePue: When you were pushing for this Class X legislation, how thoroughly had you and the people in your administration thought through the implications in terms of prisons and prison population?

Thompson: Oh, we knew it would be impactful on prisons if it was enacted and applied, if prosecutors didn't duck it by charging alternate offenses. But it was a price we were willing to pay.

DePue: You had two months burned up by trying to select the Senate leader, and then you had to deal with the budget, so maybe there wasn't much time left for Class X, or major legislation. But I know the initial piece of legislation went down to defeat, in the May-June timeframe.

Thompson: In the House.

DePue: In the House?

Thompson: Yeah, with the opposition of Speaker Redmond. I don't know why he decided that this was going to be his cause célèbre, but he didn't like it, and he killed it.

DePue: Was the Democratic caucus strongly, vocally against it?

Thompson: I don't think so. I think they took the attitude, if this is what the Speaker wants, okay.

DePue: How about the black caucus?

- Thompson: Oh, I'm sure they were against it. Although they shouldn't have been. They should have been the foremost proponents of it, since their constituents were the victims of all these crimes.
- DePue: You might have mentioned this before, but what was the attorney general's position on it?
- Thompson: I don't remember.
- DePue: So what's the strategy, now that it's gone down to defeat?
- Thompson: Do it again.
- DePue: And you didn't wait very long, did you?
- Thompson: No, next session.
- DePue: The next session, or the veto session?
- Thompson: No, the next session.
- DePue: I understand that a special session was convened, because it was passed December 28th.
- Thompson: Hmm, I thought we did it after January of the following year, but I could be wrong. I called a special session?
- DePue: That's my understanding.<sup>84</sup>
- Thompson: I want to go back and look at that because that's not my recollection, but I can be wrong. However it was done, whether it was in the veto session or whether it was in the subsequent session, it obviously was a high priority. Especially after it was defeated, it was an even higher priority.
- DePue: Governor, I think we've had an excellent conversation today.
- Thompson: Oh, it was fun! Fun! And we've got so many more years to go.

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<sup>84</sup> Thompson called a special session for October 24, 1977, but Class X did not pass until November, during the fall veto session. "Class X Passes as Part of Sentence Reform Law," *Illinois Issues* (January 1978), <http://www.lib.niu.edu/1978/ii780127.html>. For an overview of the differences between Thompson's proposal and House Bill 1500, see "Will It Be the Governor's Class X or the Legislature's H.B. 1500?" *Illinois Issues* (October 1977), <http://www.lib.niu.edu/1977/ii771004.html>. On the importance of Class X, both politically and as policy, see Jim Fletcher, February 24, 2015; Tyrone Fahner, interview by Mike Czaplicki, May 4, 2015; David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 26, 2014; Gregory Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 6, 2013; and Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, July 9, 2009, Volume I: 244-247. Fletcher gave Gary Starkman credit for coining the term.

DePue: There's a little bit more housecleaning for '77, but next time, the main focus will be that '78 legislative and electoral year for you.

Thompson: Okay.

DePue: Thank you very much.

Thompson: Me versus the Greek kid, yes.

DePue: Michael Bakalis.

Thompson: Michael Bakalis.

(end of interview #8)

## Interview with James Thompson

# IST-A-L-2013-054.09

Interview # 9: August 28, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, August 28, 2014. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm in Buchanan, Michigan, for my ninth session with Gov. Jim Thompson. Good afternoon, Governor.

Thompson: Howdy, Mark. Welcome to Buchanan.

DePue: Beautiful Buchanan.

Thompson: Beautiful Buchanan. Republican state with a Republican governor in a Republican county. Imagine that.

DePue: I figured that it might be Republican territory over here. (Thompson laughs) Maybe as you head east and you get to college towns and then get to Detroit, the politics might change a bit?

Thompson: Yeah. But we don't even have any Democratic candidates in this county; it's like DuPage in the early days.

DePue: How long have you been coming here?

Thompson: I had a home in Wisconsin for twenty years, and my parents had a house up there too. It took longer and longer to get there, four hours from Chicago. Then my dad died and my mother did not want to keep her house, which was about three hundred feet from mine, so I ended up with two houses that I wasn't going to. I sold them and didn't have a summer place for a while. And a number of my partners were out here in Michigan, so I came out and was impressed with the area. I bought a house on Lake Michigan in Sawyer, Michigan. It was beautiful, right on the dunes above the beach; it had a guest house, it had a funicular that ran down to the beach, and it had a little beach house. And once I got over having it, every morning when I woke up, I opened my eyes, looked at the lake and thought about my mortgage, and I thought, This is crazy!

So I sold that to a wealthy Chicago lawyer, and we were gone for a while. And then I missed it, so I said, "Let's go get a little cottage in the woods." Well, there are no little cottages in the woods; Hansel and Gretel got the last one. But we got a little ranch house in the woods in Harbert, the next town down from Sawyer. We had that, and one day—after we'd had this about six, seven, eight years—I was reading the local paper for this area, and there was a little box ad that said, "Own your own lake!" Well, my eyes flew wide open, I jumped in my car, and I drove right over. The real estate agent who owned the property took me out here; I looked at the lake, I looked at the property. I brought Jayne back, and she looked at it. I thought, I'm going to buy this.

DePue: Was there a house on the lake?

Thompson: There was nothing, just land. Absolutely nothing. I offered him 10 percent less than he was asking, like you would do. "Nope." I said, "Well, what's the price?" "The price I quoted," he said. And I'm thinking, Your own lake, dummy! How many of those are there? Write the check! Which I did. Then we had it for a couple of years and thought, Why do we have this land if we're not going to build on it? So we built. And we've really been happy here. We have friends out, and Samantha comes out. She can fly from New York to South Bend, whose airport is maybe fifteen minutes away. And my nephews

come out from Pennsylvania in July to fish. They've been doing that now for six or seven years; I've watched them grow up out here.

DePue: So the pond is stocked?

Thompson: It's a lake. Lake, not a pond.

DePue: Oh, I'm sorry! Lake.

Thompson: Fifteen-acre lake is not a pond. And it's on the map. If you look at the map or the plat book, you'll see Moon Lake. Yeah, it was stocked to the gills. I stocked it over the last ten years, and it had largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, walleye, perch, bluegill, crappie, catfish. And then last winter was so severe, and the ice and snow were on the lake for so long, all the oxygen in the lake died, and the fish died too. So I had winter kill, as did a lot of people around here. I've started restocking it; hopefully, the fish will grow up before I'm too old to go out there and catch them! I put in bluegill this fall, and I'll put in bass and perch next spring. You can't put the bass in before the perch, because they'll eat the perch next spring; they'll get too big by spring. So I'll begin the process of restocking it. It's just fun. We don't cook the fish, we just throw them back.

DePue: Oh.

Thompson: Yeah, it's easy.

DePue: Even the nephews, huh?

Thompson: Even the nephews, yeah. Well, when they catch 178, like they've been known to do, I don't think you're going to keep them. I mean, they're out there from seven in the morning until midnight, then they come back and tell me how many they caught. "I caught 178," "I caught 220." They'll have five lines going.

DePue: Are they on the shore, or do they get out on a boat?

Thompson: They're both. They're both. I taught the oldest one how to drive the boat so I didn't have to do it. And my brother, who comes with them, he and I sit and talk and watch television, and the boys fish.

DePue: I would assume you'd need a satellite out here, if you're going to have TV.

Thompson: Yeah, you get satellite service. DirecTV.

DePue: Tell me about Buchanan.

Thompson: Buchanan is a neat town. It started back in the 1830s, 1840s. There was mining around here, there were farms, and a lot of lakes. Businesses

associated with all of that grew up. It was a pretty decent town. The cemetery was named for President Buchanan, who dedicated it; so Buchanan's seen a president. Its largest manufacture in the twentieth century was Clark Equipment, which made forklifts. Clark Manufacturing was the biggest manufacturer of those in America, and it was a big factory, or factories. So this was a robust economy out here. But then Clark got sold to somebody, and eventually they closed the factory here, moved production elsewhere; then the economy was down for a while. But now that tourism from Chicago to Michigan has been on the upswing the last twenty or thirty years, and given its proximity to Niles and to South Bend, Buchanan is really back. It's just a pleasant little town that's got everything you could want: quiet, no parking meters—

DePue: Not too many stop signs, stop lights.

Thompson: One stop light on this end of town and one stop light on the other end of town.

DePue: They've got as many golf courses as they have stop lights.

Thompson: They do. And the scarecrows are going up now. Buchanan does really nicely in decorating the downtown. Flowers all summer, and then in the fall, they put up shocks of dried corn and scarecrows; every business sponsors a scarecrow. And they're really cool to look at.

DePue: Where did this scarecrow come from?

Thompson: Oh, this scarecrow came from a stand over on the Red Arrow, about twenty miles south of here, and a little north of here.<sup>85</sup> But that's the kind of thing they'll put up in downtown Buchanan. Strap them to the light pole.

DePue: Well, here's one of the important things. If you're going to be a Thompson living in Buchanan, does it have any antique shops?

Thompson: Yeah. Five. (DePue laughs) And there's antique shops out and around, so I make the rounds. Go from here to Shawnee to the Red Arrow, then to Three Oaks, and back to Buchanan again.

DePue: I imagine anywhere you go in Chicago, especially, but in Illinois in general, people will recognize you.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Do they recognize you here in Buchanan?

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<sup>85</sup> The Red Arrow Highway follows the original route of US-12 along the lakeshore from the Indiana line to Benton Harbor. Interstate 94 runs parallel to it.

- Thompson: Yeah, some of them do. We've been here long enough, and word spreads. People from Chicago spot me and then they tell people in Buchanan. So yeah, they know. But nobody makes any big deal of it.
- DePue: Is that one of the attractions of coming here?
- Thompson: No, not really. The public recognition never really bothered me when I was governor or in the twenty-three years since. In a way, it's nice, because in the twenty-three years since I left office, nobody has ever said an unkind word to me on the street, or anywhere else. And you get a lot of, "Thanks for being a good governor," "Thanks for saving the White Sox," "Thanks for saving the Dana Thomas House in Springfield." To hear that on the streets of Chicago is kind of shocking, but it's nice.
- DePue: How about, "Nice to meet you, Governor. You're my favorite Illinois governor"?
- Thompson: Well, that's true.
- DePue: You've heard that?
- Thompson: Oh, yeah. Or, "I wish you were running again." You get a lot of that.
- DePue: Those years are behind you, though, I think.
- Thompson: That's exactly right.
- DePue: Let's get back into 1977 and '78. We're going to spend quite a bit of today in 1978, and getting into that particular election as well. I wanted to start with something you and I have talked about before, and that's presidential aspirations, but in connection with your travels around the United States the first couple of years you were governor. Now, most people would think you were traveling to places like California, New York, Washington DC, these kinds of places, because you're trying to burnish your reputation and get ready for a presidential run. How would you explain the many travels that you took the first year or two?
- Thompson: They were either on behalf of the State of Illinois, the Washington trips, visiting the president or visiting his cabinet members, or visiting the federal agencies which were responsible both for regulation and dollars. California or New York, or other places where I might have gone, might have been fundraisers for Citizens for Thompson. Or they were fundraisers for other people, and they asked me to come and speak. I was a new governor, I had had some notoriety in the press, and so it's natural that Republicans in other parts of the country would ask you to come and attend a dinner or attend a fundraiser, and speak and raise money. So I guess a combination of those.

DePue: But you would go to places like New York and California to raise money for your gubernatorial campaign?

Thompson: Sure, why not?

DePue: I guess, is that typical of a lot of governors in a lot of states?

Thompson: Well, Rauner's been doing it, Quinn's been doing it, and Blagojevich used to do it. Illinois is a big, modern, wealthy state, and it has sent a lot of people to places like California, or Nebraska, or to New York. Former Illinoisans who have made it abound in those places, and a lot of them are happy to come and pay money to see their hometown governor.<sup>86</sup>

DePue: It was obvious that the Illinois press was very curious about your presidential aspirations. Did you find the national press to be the same?

Thompson: Yeah, back in those days, political columnists—say, David Broder for *Washington Post*, and others like that around the country—whenever they did a “Who’s a Presidential Prospect” column, which might contain five or six names, would throw mine in. Sometimes they’d write solely about me; I think Broder did one of those.<sup>87</sup> *Time* magazine. I mean, you’d find the same things said today. Take Governor Walker of Wisconsin; national columnists write about him as a potential presidential candidate, if he can win his re-election this fall in Wisconsin. There are others like that. They did it about Christie before he had his slip and fall.<sup>88</sup> So it’s natural. And it doesn’t have to be sparked by anything the governor does, except win election as governor in his state, in a big state.

DePue: Did you try to squelch those rumors?

Thompson: No, how are you going to squelch them? They wouldn’t believe you, anyway. They didn’t want to believe you, they wanted to write the story.

DePue: Let me ask you something in terms of timing and strategy.

Thompson: I think if you see my comments in stories of that time, I downplayed presidential opportunity. I’m not going to say I downplayed presidential aspiration, in fact, I talked about it. I used to say I’ve been wanting to be president of the United States since I was nine years old, that’s hardly hiding

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<sup>86</sup> Thompson also traveled to visit bond rating agencies and promote Illinois bond issues to investment firms. See Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 20, 2014.

<sup>87</sup> David Broder, “Big Jim Thompson: A Passion for the Presidency,” *Washington Post*, October 15, 1978. Related to Thompson’s point about Illinois migrants, Broder was born in Chicago Heights and went to the University of Chicago for college and grad school.

<sup>88</sup> New Jersey governor Chris Christie was viewed as a leading contender for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination, until his administration came under an escalating series of investigations for ordering politically motivated lane closures on the George Washington Bridge in September 2013. The closures created a massive traffic jam in Fort Lee, a community whose mayor had refused to endorse Christie’s reelection bid.

your light under a bushel. But I think all of those were accompanied by the plain truth that I had just been elected governor of the state of Illinois. I was a brand new governor, I had a lot to learn, I had a lot to do. And I couldn't be about the job of campaigning for president.

DePue: Aren't those the kind of statements that don't quite make it into the column?

Thompson: Well, certainly. It would spoil the column! (laughter)

DePue: I want to quote one thing that you said, and I don't know the specifics of the location or who you said this to, but a message about Republicans: "The Republican Party is perceived wrong these days, and we're often on the wrong side of issues. We too often identify with corporate boardroom interest, rather than corporate interest as a whole. A corporation is more than a board of directors; it's the employees, it's the consumers, it's the customers; it's the shareholders who may be senior citizens, working people."

Thompson: I wouldn't have a clue about where or when I said that.

DePue: But this is in the '78, '77 timeframe.

Thompson: Well, look, I was a moderate Republican. There were a few back then in Illinois and elsewhere. But there were a lot of Democrats who would try to define the Republican Party in ways that were advantageous to their cause. So every once in a while, you'd do a push-back against that.

DePue: And a statement like that would be for that.

Thompson: Sure. Yeah.

DePue: Let me get back to the timing question, then. You're a relatively new governor in '78.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: And you're looking at the next presidential election in 1980. Would it be correct to say you have a good feel for who the main presidential candidates for the Republican Party are going to be, and it's going to be Reagan and Bush?

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And were you thinking at the time, Okay, if Jimmy Carter runs again in 1980 and he wins, then my chance to run for president might more likely be 1984?

Thompson: No, I didn't think like that, (laughs) because politics are too uncertain. Candidates pop up that you never expected to pop up, and names come back. I mean, take Reagan. Who would have given Reagan any chance a couple of

years before the 1980 election? He came out of the past. He had been governor of California. But he was the kind of guy the country was hungering for, I think, after Carter. And you never know when a candidate like Bush is going to be in the running. Bush was Reagan's vice president for two years. So even if you had an idea that you might want to run after Reagan's two terms expired, here was a sitting vice president, who was your friend, who you had supported, and who wanted you to support him. I mean, that's just a natural.

DePue: Really, what you're saying, it's a matter of timing.

Thompson: Yeah, but the plain fact is that if you're going to run, you'd want to run with a base of support. If you look at the candidates for president today, or the purported candidates for president today, they're all in public office and have a base of support. The last guy that came out of the woods was Carter. He was a retired governor of Georgia. By the time Bush lost his race for re-election, Clinton was elected. You had to figure that there was eight years down, gone. And now I'm out of office, you know? With no base. So it is a matter of timing. It's a matter of luck. There's a lot of luck in politics. My wife always insists that I operate under a lucky star, which I suppose is a gentler version of, "It's better to be lucky than smart," which she's never said. I've been accused by the press of being "lucky," so I—

DePue: This is a bad thing to be accused of?

Thompson: I was doing a press conference on the budget, and I think Charlie Wheeler—who always had the details of the budget down pat—said, "Where's that \$25 million you're talking about? I don't see it in the budget." I said—this is a throw-away line—"Well, it's not in the budget, it's in the press release." And he said, "You know, you're just lucky!" (laughs) "Do you want a lucky governor, or an unlucky governor?"

DePue: Tell me about the trips to governor conferences and the purpose for those.

Thompson: The first governor's conference trip I ever took was to New Governor's School. The National Governor's Association, to which all the governors belong, ran a school for new governors right after the elections, say, in late November, while the governors were putting together their cabinet and their staff, and their legislative program, and their budget for the following January. And they were still finding out where the men's room was in the state Capitol, you know. The school would teach maybe eight, ten, twelve governors, those who came. And I was one of them in November of '76. I forget where it was, whether it was Williamsburg, or someplace like that. The faculty was current and former governors, and they'd do primers on the things that new governors who hadn't been in office needed to know. How do you put together a budget? What kind of priorities are you thinking about? What's the relationship with the federal government? What are current tax

strategies? All these things.

So I went to New Governor's school. And after the first day, the guy in charge came to me and said, "Listen, we'd like you to give a lecture tomorrow." I said, "Me? I'm a student! You've got all these veteran governors here." He said, "No, no, no, you're the only one here who can do it." I said, "What subject?" And he said, "How not to get indicted." (laughter) And I said, "What?" He said, "How not to get indicted. These guys need to know what to avoid doing so they don't get in trouble. And we're going to hold it at 7:00 in the morning, away from the regular program, with just the governors, nobody else." I said, "Okay." The next morning at 7:00, I gave a lecture entitled "How Not to Get Indicted." Joe Teasdale was the newly-elected governor of Missouri, and he sounded off at the conference about some prosecutor in Missouri who had been chasing him on something, and he was all upset. We talked about it, and he calmed down. It was an interesting lecture, I thought. Everybody said, "Thank you very much," and nobody from that class ever got indicted.

DePue: I would think part of the essence of it was, don't break any law!

Thompson: Yeah, don't break any laws, and don't do goofy things: don't write letters, or I don't know whether we had emails back then or not, I don't think we did. But don't write letters that you don't want to see on the front page of the newspaper, and don't do obvious things.

DePue: Well, one of the stories you told me when we first got started was that you didn't have any personal records, because—

Thompson: I don't.

DePue: —Kerner had personal records that you used to indict him.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: Was that part of the lecture?

Thompson: No. (laughs) I learned that later!

DePue: Okay. And this was before the age of emails where politicians can embarrass themselves (unintelligible).

Thompson: Emails and YouTube. And guys following your campaign with a recorder and camera. Yeah, the dangers are much greater now! (laughs)

DePue: Exactly. Who would normally go along on those trips with you?

Thompson: The press secretary, Gilbert, and whoever was the bag boy. And when I went to the National Governor's Association, you'd take key staff, because

governor's staff would have their own meetings at the National Governor's Association, whether it was the budget people or the policy people. The NGA meetings were designed to give the governors the latest, give them a look at programs in other states. I remember after I did Build Illinois, at the next governor's conference there were Build Michigans and Build Ohios and everything else popping up all over the place, Build New York.

Governors love to copy what other governors are doing. I mean, if you can come away from a national governor's meeting with good ideas, you'll go back to your state and use them. It's very useful. And the midwinter governor's meeting is always in Washington, and you met with the president, both a meeting with the president in the White House and then a dinner that night in the White House. That was a pretty good way of meeting the federal officials that were important to governors: cabinet members, boards and commission members, things of that sort. You'd take along the staff that you thought were necessary as resources for you, or who would have the opportunity to meet with other governor staffs who were doing the same thing, so that they could get educated about the latest things as well.

DePue: During this timeframe, when did you actually physically declare that you were running for governor again in 1978? Do you recall?

Thompson: No, I really don't. It was so taken for granted, because I had a two-year term. And since you had to file nominating petitions in the same year you were sworn in—which was bizarre, sworn-in in January, nominating petitions in November or December—that people just took it for granted.<sup>89</sup> I assume we made some kind of formal announcement, but it couldn't have been a big deal, because people would have been shocked if I didn't run. The third time, when I decided to run in '82, my wife claims that I announced it on the radio before I told her. (DePue laughs) Maybe I did, I don't know. I always answered questions people asked me, so I might have done that!

DePue: You ended the first year on a couple of interesting notes, here. Channel 2, in late 1977, did this expose—and I might have talked to you about this before—but this sequence, here, where they played *HMS Pinafore*, and they had all these pictures of you and film of you, and it made you look rather good. And I was struck when I saw this, and I said, "Oh, my gosh, would we do anything like that today?"

Thompson: Anything to make a politician look good, you would not do today. I can give you that as a general rule.

DePue: It was Channel 2 especially, and what would be the call letters there?

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<sup>89</sup> On the importance of the filing date, see Jim Fletcher, interviews by Mike Czaplicki, February 16 and February 24, 2015.

Thompson: WBBM TV was Channel 2, CBS in Chicago. I appeared on their station on the 10:00 news the night I was elected. And I knew a lot of people at Channel 2, so they were always pretty good to me. I have to say the press, as a whole, was pretty good to me the whole fourteen years. There were some bumps in the road, and there was some criticism; I mean, no governor goes through his administration without criticism. And it was a far cry from the press treatment of me when I was U.S. attorney; there was *never* an unkind word. But I'd have to say that even though I'd get upset sometimes or critical of the press sometimes, on the whole, the press treated me pretty well for fourteen years. I think the reason was, a lot of reporters liked me, especially the younger ones; some of the ones who had campaigned with me in my first race were still writing political stuff. I think they admired a lot of the people that I appointed to public office in my cabinet, on my staff. Everybody admired Mandeville, and everybody admired other members of my staff— Paula Wolff. And because I was pretty open with the press; I didn't hide from the press, I didn't duck the press, I answered their questions. And I was good copy,

DePue: Did you go out of your way to deliberately cultivate those relationships?

Thompson: Oh, absolutely.

DePue: And how important was Gilbert?

Thompson: He was very important, because the only time I had ever dealt with the press before this in any sustained way was as U.S. attorney. And that's a whole different bag, you know? You're the prosecutor, you're putting crooks in jail; obviously, you're going to get good press. Now you're the governor and make a lot of decisions, and you make people happy or unhappy. And the press is a little more cynical about politicians than they are about prosecutors. Gilbert knew a lot of the reporters that I didn't, although over the fourteen years, I guess I got to know all of them. So he was important. And he was a good press secretary, because he dealt honestly and fairly with the press. He came from the press, so there was good chemistry there.

DePue: Since our last session, I decided to go to the blue book and make a photocopy of some of the pages of the press members. I'll ask you to just go through there and name a couple that really stand out.

Thompson: Egler was, I think, bureau chief for *The Tribune*; smart guy, good reporter, fair. Mitch Locin, good reporter, fair. Hillman, very smart; came from central Illinois, where his folks had a farm. He was a lot more cynical, let's say, and he always had the trap questions and the trick questions, and he was always looking for something. He'd stir things up.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Dan Egler was the *Chicago Tribune*'s statehouse bureau chief from 1977 to 1991, when he became Gov. Jim Edgar's deputy press secretary. Mitchell Locin was a reporter and editor at the *Tribune* from 1974 to 2008. G. Robert Hillman was Springfield bureau chief for the *Chicago Sun-Times* from 1975 to 1983.

I'll give you an example. After we moved back to Chicago part way through my term, he visited one day. And this house we bought was up in Uptown, kind of a sketchy neighborhood, and there was an iron fence around the front yard. I didn't put it up. He asked me, "Did you put that fence up?" And I know the question was designed to find out whether I was (mocking) walling myself off from the common people of the neighborhood. That kind of stuff, Hillman would do. Smart reporter, though.

Charlie Wheeler, expert on state government, nice guy, hard worker. Simeon Osby, *Defender*. The *Defender* was the black newspaper in Chicago, and it didn't have a lot of circulation, maybe, on a good day, five, ten thousand. But Simeon was a nice guy and a good reporter.<sup>91</sup> He didn't get to cover a lot of the stuff that the others did, because he had a small readership. Charlie Bennett, AP; AP always did get good reporters, and Charlie was one of them. Lee Hughes, who was bureau chief for the AP, very smart. Deb Singer and Bob Springer, same way.

DePue: Like I said, there are several more pages there, Governor. There was a lot of people who worked for the press at the time.<sup>92</sup>

Thompson: Ray Serati, Copley, yeah, nice guy...Jim George, Gannett.

DePue: I don't need to have you necessarily read all of them, but the ones that would really stand out in your memory.

Thompson: Let's see who stands out here. Al Manning.

DePue: Springfield paper.

Thompson: Springfield paper, *Journal-Register*. And Al Manning's job was to puncture bureaucrats and politicians, write gossip about state government. So, I would appear in his columns with regularity. Kenny Watson, *State Journal-Register*, nicest guy in the world! Been there a long time, very smart, not a mean bone in his body. Bernie Schoenburg from the *Pantagraph*, younger, good guy, smart, good reporter. Mike Briggs, pal of Hillman, sort of a sidekick to Hillman, from Lee Enterprises. Mike Lawrence, one of the best in Springfield, went on to teach after he no longer was a reporter, but just a stand-out.

DePue: We should mention, in Mike Lawrence's case, he was Edgar's press secretary.

Thompson: Yeah. Jim Bray, good guy, eventually came to work for me. Billy O'Connell of the *Peoria Journal-Star*, God, there's a name out of the past. A good

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<sup>91</sup> A Springfield native, Osby (1909-1993) began his career in journalism as editor and publisher of the *Capital City News* weekly from 1947 to 1951. Simeon Osby, interview by Rev. Negil McPherson, April 1974, Norris L. Brookens Library, University of Illinois Springfield, <http://www.idaillinois.org/cdm/fullbrowser/collection/uis/id/4936/rv/compoundobject/cpd/3488>.

<sup>92</sup> Readers can see the list Thompson is looking at in *Illinois Blue Book, 1979-1980*, 243-248, <http://www.idaillinois.org/cdm/ref/collection/bb/id/38685>.

reporter, longtime veteran. Bill Lambrecht, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, oh, yeah. He was sort of a downstate Hillman. Always looking for something to stir. He wrote a column that still makes my wife mad to this day!<sup>93</sup> He wrote a column about liquor and great stuff in the mansion, and this is all being paid for by taxpayers, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. He neglected to say in the column that this was mainly Walker's stuff that he had ordered before he left, so the pantry was stocked, and that Jayne, in fact, had cut the food budget of the mansion within a few weeks after we got down there. So, you know, there are guys like that. Ben Kiningham, nice guy, the CIB, understood state government.<sup>94</sup>

DePue: Let's go back a step, here. "Governor Lives High—on Taxpayers," *Alton Telegraph*.

Thompson: There you go!

DePue: Bill Lambrecht, just as you said.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: "The Mansion food bill: shrimp, lobster, crabmeat—\$1,550."

Thompson: Yeah.

**ALTON TELEGRAPH**  
Serving Madison, Jersey, Macoupin, Greene and Calhoun Counties  
Est. Jan. 15, 1856 Sat., April 8, 1978 Alton, Ill. 6 Sections 86 Pages

## Governor lives high — on taxpayers

By BILL LAMBRECHT  
Telegraph Capital Bureau

SPRINGFIELD — Taxpayers spend four times the amount spent eight years ago to house and feed the Illinois governor, with steady purchases of liquor, seafood and luxury items, state records show.

This fiscal year, the mansion occupied by Gov. James R. Thompson is running on a budget of \$312,600, not counting over \$100,000 in salaries for security and support services paid by other agencies.

Costs include a 16-member staff, utilities, food and drink, and typical household expenditures on a much larger scale.

The current mansion budget is up \$113,500, or 37 percent, from last year. The budget contrasts with eight years ago during the administration of Richard B. Ogilvie, when the mansion budget was only \$77,800, less than one-fourth of today.

Budgeting for three of six permanent mansion staff members who had been on other payrolls amounted for around \$40,800 of the increases, according to Dan Long, a fiscal officer in the governor's office.

The remaining increases, Long said, are due to "salary adjustments and general inflationary-type things."

The governor was unavailable Friday to discuss mansion spending. He was taking the day off in San Francisco, an aide said, after a national GOP fundraising dinner there Thursday night.

**THREE OTHER** "ghost payrollers," including two \$21,000 a-year engineers from the Department of Administrative Services and a \$10,500 a-year grounds-

"Taj Mahal," lives in an apartment across from the capitol.

The Thompson Mansion is also quite unlike the Jimmy Carter White House, where consumption is limited to beer and wine.

A liquor inventory March 14 showed 46 quarts of whiskey, 48 quarts of liqueurs, 7½ quarts of vodka, 23 quarts of gin, ten quarts of scotch, 14 quarts of rum, 26 quarts of sherry, 19 quarts of vermouth, 17 bottles of fine cognac plus a stock of beer and wine.

When the liquor supply gets low, a run is made to the liquor store. A March 21 mansion liquor bill at a shop up the street from the Capitol was \$1,100, which covered six cases of scotch, four cases of whisky, a case of liqueur and six cases of beer.

**RECORDS ALSO SHOW** the regular costs for maintaining the 40-room mansion, much of which functions as a museum and includes \$250,000 worth of antiques from the Oldmansion in Alton.

The electric bill at the mansion is averaging around \$2,000 a month so far this year, along with \$1,270 for gas. Cost for Xerox rental is \$165 monthly, and the flower bills are averaging around \$100.

Under a contract with an elevator company, the state pays \$188 a month for maintenance and service of the mansion elevator, whether it needs it or not. Vouchers also show in December, the elevator was carpeted at a cost to taxpayers of \$377.

The state also pays \$18 every month to seek out bugs at the mansion — not wiretap bugs but real bugs — in a contract with a pest control service.

ing whose salary increased 37 percent from \$15,500 when she took over some mansion manager duties from House manager under Dan Walker. The Ippoliti is the mansion fiscal person \$11,500, and is in charge of well kept mansion spending.

A major difference in operation of mansion is the role of the new first, Roberta Walker, in the words of one rent staffer, "was always in background, acting like the perfect lady, with Tony House bent everything."

Jayne Carr Thompson, in contrast virtual whirlwind of activity through the mansion, signing vouchers, giving orders and chatting with staff, generally acting like the boss.

Mansion expenditures also reflect of the Thompson's personal purchases number of checks are written for dog for the three mansion dogs, and above around \$200 in personal items went for fencing and lumber to build house.

**SEVERAL MANSION** staff men commented that cat food was bought during the Walker years at state expense. Only on rare occasions were Thompson's personal checks written for items were billed to Citizens for Thompson governor's fundraising arm.

Bills show that apparently on only occasions did the political committee for political entertaining at the mansion including a barbecue last June.

The committee, on several occasions paid for flowers which could have been paid for by the state, including flowers sent to funeral of Supreme Court Justice

**Mansion Food Bill**

Shrimp, lobster, crab meat  
\$1,550

One trip to liquor store  
\$1,100

Monthly meat bill  
\$1,100

**Total monthly grocery bill  
\$2,500**

<sup>93</sup> See Samantha Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014, 6.

<sup>94</sup> Capitol Information Bureau was a statewide radio network started by Bill Miller to carry political news out of Springfield. Ben Kiningham, interview by Chris Reynolds, May 30, 2008, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. His interview, along with Lawrence, Schoenburg, and other statehouse reporters, is available as part of the *Journalists' View* series of *Illinois Statecraft*.  
<https://www.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/oralhistory/illinoisstatecraft/journalists/Pages/default.aspx>.

- DePue: “One trip to liquor store—\$1,100; monthly meat bill—\$1,100.”<sup>95</sup>
- Thompson: Uh-huh.
- DePue: Now, when I interviewed Dave Bourland, he said you paid for the liquor yourself, it didn’t come out of the state budget. Does that sound right?<sup>96</sup>
- Thompson: I think we paid for it from Citizens for Thompson.
- DePue: Okay, it came out of your campaign budget?
- Thompson: Yes. Previous administrations had disguised liquor as groceries.
- DePue: As in Dan Walker?
- Thompson: I don’t know who started it, but it was a longtime custom at the mansion.
- DePue: But did you, in fact, spend a decent amount of money on shrimp and lobster and crabmeat?
- Thompson: I doubt it.
- DePue: Back in the seventies, I would think the Illinois public would look and say, “Oh, my God, he’s buying that kind of fancy stuff?”
- Thompson: We were three people in the mansion. I mean, we weren’t going to eat all that.
- DePue: But you’ve talked a little bit before about what you saw the mansion’s use was.
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: There were certainly some entertainment purposes in that.
- Thompson: Certainly, absolutely, it was vital. That’s why there is a mansion. I mean, a governor could rent an apartment in downtown Springfield as a home, or the state could provide a house out on the lake. I mean, the mansion, which goes back to the middle of the nineteenth century, has always been the meeting place in the state for the governor to get together with people to solve problems. Yeah, there’s entertainment too—the legislature, the interest groups—and a lot of people hold their functions at the mansion and pay for

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<sup>95</sup> According to a note in a scrapbook kept by Thompson’s aunt, this story and several others were reprinted and “distributed by the Democrat booth at the Sandwich Fair. However, we noticed that most people picked up the free Illinois road maps instead of the enclosed sheet.” This image is from the Sandwich Fair pamphlet. In 2014 dollars, the monthly grocery bill would total \$9,100.

<sup>96</sup> Dave Bourland, interview by Mark DePue, May 29, 2014.

the privilege. But when you get a call from the governor to come to the mansion, you've got to show up. If you show up and there's an issue presented, you're expected to meet and help to solve problems or challenges, or to get legislation passed, or to do the things that need to be done to keep government functioning properly. So whether it's a legislative meeting or an interest group meeting, or a meeting with union leaders or business guys, or a social service group, the mansion commands respect among the people of Illinois, and that's why we have one. And that's what other governors do, nothing different in the state of Illinois.

DePue: There are a couple of functions each year that I want you just to talk briefly about. One was the annual Christmas parties.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Who was that for?

Thompson: That was for people who supported me—people who supported Citizens for Thompson—or for interest groups. A governor would end up, or at least I did, having seven or eight Christmas parties, either at the mansion or at a hotel in Chicago. Christmas got stretched out a long time! (laughs) When you got to about your eighth party, you were thinking, Oh, is it New Year's yet? But they were important. They were thank-yous to people. They were designed to renew friendships, to show hospitality, to celebrate a holiday, and to thank people for being there for you.

DePue: Does that mean some of these were coming out of campaign budget money?

Thompson: They all came from campaign budget money.

DePue: Another one I was told that I should ask you about was after-session parties.

Thompson: Oh, yeah. We started a tradition, I guess, because this did not exist before I was governor. It started at the end of the first legislative session that I was governor, so this would have been July 1 or June 30, or whatever it was back then, when the legislature finally adjourned after the spring session. And if I'm recalling correctly, the legislature went until late at night. I don't know how this started, I think it was in consultation with Jayne, who worried about people driving home from the Capitol, drinking without eating.

I said, "Let's have everybody over to the mansion," so announcements were made on the floor of the House and the floor of the Senate that when the session ended, you were welcomed to the governor's mansion. And they all came. And since Jayne was worried about food, and we were not prepared for a cast of hundreds—because it wasn't just legislators, it was their staff, their secretary, their assistants; it was the lobbyists, it was the press, it was everybody.

DePue: Did you anticipate that everybody would show up?

Thompson: Oh, yeah. I mean, this is about two or three in the morning, they're still there, and Jayne starts to worry. So she sends out to all-night grocery stores and gets eggs, and she and the wait staff, or cook staff, are down in the mansion cooking them to feed this whole, crazy crew. And I can remember sitting on the mansion balcony with the sun coming up, when we finally got rid of the last stragglers. It was such a great thing, and I got a lot of compliments on it from people who were there—people would say, "Well, no governor's ever done this before"—that we made it a tradition.

And then I added to it. We'd have the mansion party, it would go until the sun was almost up, then I'd go get in the helicopter and fly to the campus of—oh, what's this college? Blackburn? Black something.

If you were on the edge of its campus, you could see the confluence of the Ohio and the Illinois Rivers come together. And so, I just made it a—

DePue: You mean the Ohio and the Mississippi?

Thompson: Ohio and Mississippi, I'm sorry, yeah, come together. I made it a tradition that when the mansion party ended, I got in the helicopter, I flew there, and I just sat by myself. I mean, the session goes for months, right? And the last closing days or weeks of it are emotionally wearing and draining. So I took this as a contemplative moment, until one day I got a letter from the president of the college saying, "Why are you flying your helicopter on our property without talking to us?" (laughs) I just sent my apologies and asked permission from then on.

DePue: I'm surprised you were even awake at that time!

Thompson: Oh, yeah, the adrenaline was still flowing, as you might expect at the end of session, where there was either terrible times or great times, depending on the budget.

DePue: I wanted to show you something else, and I think this might have been a result of something that your campaign or your office put together; it's showing your report card at the end of the first year.

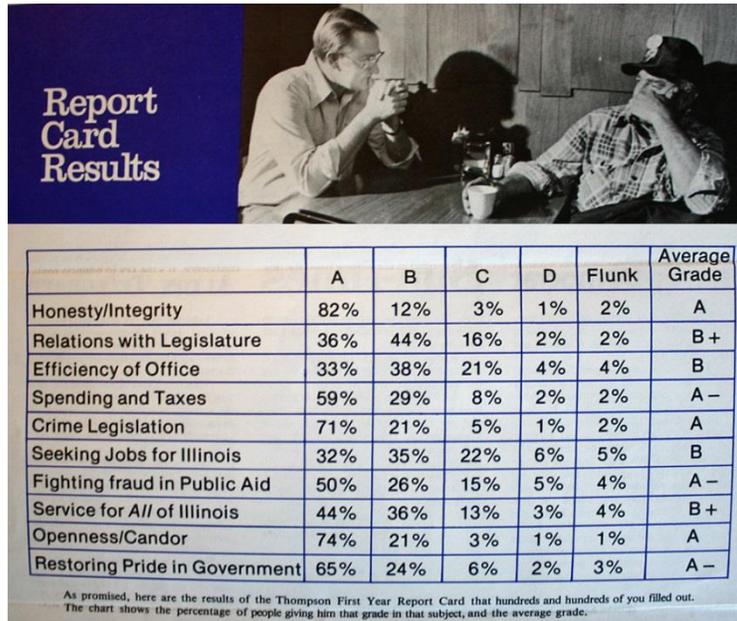
Thompson: I'm not sure I ever saw this. I'm sure I did, but I don't remember it. How did this come about? It says, "Here are the results of the Thompson First Year Report Card that hundreds and hundreds of you filled out."

DePue: Again, this is something your campaign put out.

Thompson: Yeah, but where did they get the hundreds and hundreds—

DePue: I was going to ask you those kind of questions.

Thompson: I have no clue. Gilbert might know.<sup>97</sup> Well, honesty and integrity, 82 percent, A, that's pretty good! Relations with the legislature, B+. No grade lower than a B? Better than my college record. (DePue laughs) Look at that!



DePue: And it's just the kind of thing that you'd want to run on for your second time.

Thompson: Oh, no kidding! Openness and candor, A. Yeah. Oh, I like that.

DePue: So it doesn't ring any bells here, showing it to you after all these years?

Thompson: Not really, no. I like it.

DePue: I'm not sure when this falls into the timeline, but I think this is as good a time as any, because we're basically talking about your image and how you fared after that first year. I wanted to ask if you remember a young man by the name of Michael Curry—

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: —who I think is from Lincoln. Tell me about that story.

Thompson: I got a letter one day from Michael. It said he had cancer. But he was going to hold out until he was eighteen years old, so he could vote for me. Now, something like that really grabs you, right? I went up to Lincoln to visit him. He, indeed, did have cancer. If he wasn't in the hospital then, he was in the hospital soon after. But he did keep himself alive until he was eighteen, and he did vote for me, his first vote. And he died in my arms. His parents called me one day to come to Lincoln because he was close to dying. I went to the hospital and sat on his bedside with his parents, and he asked me to hold him,

<sup>97</sup> David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 26, 2014.

and I did. And then he passed away. First time that ever happened to me. I was so touched by that, I named our summer internships after him. They have been known ever since that time as the Curry Fellows.

Every year, I would meet with the Curry Fellows near the end of their time, before they went back to school, and always had Mr. and Mrs. Curry there. And I'd tell the story of young Michael Curry, who cared enough about politics and cared enough about supporting people that he admired in his politics to will himself to stay alive to cast his first vote. I always tried to make that an object lesson for the youngsters that were in the program. The students got to meet Mr. and Mrs. Curry, and they had a chance to talk together. So that's Michael Curry.

DePue: I heard that story from somebody who was a student with him. Her fear when she first heard about it was that this would be just another attempt for you to get some publicity out of it. And she said she was so pleasantly surprised that there was no publicity about it.

Thompson: Right, there was none.

DePue: Was that a very conscious thing on your part?

Thompson: Yes. There was no point to publicity. It was between him and his family and me, and he asked me to visit him so he could tell me he was going to vote for me. And I was so admiring of him and his spirit, I thought we've got to honor him in some way, and that's what I did.

DePue: That gets us into the 1978 election year in a very serious way. The year typically starts with a State of the State meeting, and includes a budget discussion shortly thereafter. March 1, you come out with a budget of \$11.2 billion. This is a pretty minimal increase in the budget that year. I know that these budget years can really kind of run together for you, but does that ring any memories for you at all?

Thompson: Yeah, we had ended the 1977 legislative session with a pretty tight budget; in fact, so tight that the amount of school aid for Chicago angered the black caucus, and they tried to storm the podium to get at Madigan, who was with me on the budget. And Madigan had a big guy, big black guy from Chicago, by the name of Taylor Pouncey up there on the podium to protect him from the legislators down below, who were yelling and hollering at him as he gaveled the session to a close.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Pouncey was a state representative from 1975 to 1983. The Illinois General Fund had a cash balance of \$52 million when the 1977 fiscal year ended June 30 during Thompson's first year in office. This balance increased to \$85.6 million at the end of FY1978, and after the lean budget DePue is discussing here, the balance increased to \$390 million on June 30, 1979. All three figures are nominal dollars.

DePue: He would have been just the majority leader at the time, I believe. Wouldn't Redmond still be there?

Thompson: Right, but Madigan was on the podium, and it was Madigan with whom we dealt. It's not surprising that '78 would be a lean year, as well. I was pretty conservative about the budget. I've always been pegged as a fiscal conservative and a social liberal. And that's true. I mean, that's how you would describe me, it's not—

DePue: Well, Governor, if you'll permit me—

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: —in later years, there were people who would say that you did like to spend on major projects. We're going to have opportunities to talk about that.

Thompson: Yeah, (laughs) A, if you have the money, and B, if you needed the project, that's true.

DePue: Let me talk a little bit more about the economic year that you had in '78. And this is going to be kind of a broken record as we go through the next few years, especially up to '83 and '84. But 7.6 percent inflation at the beginning of '78; compared to what we've got today, that's a big number.

Thompson: It is.

DePue: Six percent unemployment, and the unemployment rate might have been trending up. The thirty-year loan rate, 9.64 percent. That's also hard for us to comprehend today.<sup>99</sup>

Thompson: Wow. It is.

DePue: Rising gas prices, and the misery index, which was certainly something that the Carter administration was tagged with, was 13.6 percent. The index is the inflation and unemployment rates added together.

Thompson: Yeah, that's political. But it was on the front page.

DePue: When I went through your scrapbooks, I was struck that one of the pictures was of a thermostat set on sixty-eight.

Thompson: Well, Jimmy Carter made us. What are you going to do? If the president of the United States is sitting before a television camera in his sweater because he's got the thermostat turned down low, and tells the nation they've got to do the same thing, you know the next day the press is going to run in and look at the governor's thermostat, right? I mean, it's just—might as well have opened the

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<sup>99</sup> At the time of this interview, the average thirty-year mortgage loan was 4.1 percent.

doors early. Get the mob in there. So, if the president had his at sixty-eight, we had ours at sixty-eight.

DePue: It sounds like you didn't think much of that statement.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: A gimmick?

Thompson: Yeah, of course. Sometimes gimmicks are useful, I understand that. He was trying to make a point about energy conservation. And I suppose that was one way to do it. But of course, it relied on a lot of volunteers following to get that accomplished, because nobody's going to sit in your house and check your thermostat, unless you're the governor.

DePue: A big part of Illinois' economy has always been farming, and this is the early stages of the farm crisis, although it's before the grain embargo. But the American Agriculture Movement was pushing for parity in grain prices. The American Farm Bureau was trying to seek increased exports. Do you remember that being an issue at all?

Thompson: Yeah. Parity in farm prices was a governmental solution of price support. Exports were, obviously, a long-term program to stimulate demand, or respond to demand, and relied on free markets, with a push by government to get farmers pointed that way and to try and open up markets abroad.

DePue: Which side would you tend to be on?

Thompson: On the market side.

DePue: I know that later on, especially, you're going to be making a lot of overseas trips.

Thompson: Yeah, that was part of it.

DePue: The United Mine Workers were also threatening to strike that year, especially coal miners. And at that point in time, southern Illinois, central Illinois still had a lot of coal mines.

Thompson: I brought the president of the United States down to a coal mine. We both put on the uniforms and went down and sat at the bottom of this coal mine with a bunch of coal miners, and Reagan and I (laughs) talked to them about their issues. Reagan was pretty much in favor of the coal miners' issues, and so was I, because ours was a coal state. I was constantly reminded that the energy value of the coal under the borders of Illinois was greater than the energy value of the oil under the borders of Saudi Arabia, and I started using that in my speeches.

- DePue: Was that before you heard all about the high sulfur content in Illinois coal?
- Thompson: Oh, I think we always knew about the high sulfur content. It was probably before the western mines' low sulfur coal got really started, and before long, snaky trains were going out there and loading up in coal and coming back.
- DePue: The primary was March 21. Apparently you didn't have a primary opponent.
- Thompson: In one of those elections—whether it was '78 or '80, I can't remember—I was running against a muleskinner.
- DePue: The record I have is that you didn't have an opponent that year.
- Thompson: He might have been an unofficial candidate. (laughs) I remember he showed up one day at the Capitol with his mules.
- DePue: There's another colorful (unintelligible).
- Thompson: Hey, I drew all kinds, let me tell you.
- DePue: What was the point of that campaign?
- Thompson: I don't remember. (laughs) He obviously thought he'd be a better governor than me. But I guess he didn't make the ballot.
- DePue: Michael Bakalis did have an opponent, but he won rather handily in the Democratic primary.
- Thompson: Yeah, I don't remember who Bakalis' opponent was.
- (pause in recording)
- DePue: Okay, after a very quick break here, I got my 1978 primary results. You ran unopposed; you polled 83 percent of the vote, of the Republican ballots cast. Michael Bakalis' primary opponent was Dakin Williams.
- Thompson: Oh, yeah, Dakin Williams.
- DePue: Fourteen percent, and Bakalis got 66 percent.
- Thompson: Dakin Williams was the brother-in-law of Tennessee Williams?<sup>100</sup>
- DePue: That sounds right.
- Thompson: Yeah. I think he was from southern Illinois.

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<sup>100</sup> Walter Dakin Williams was the younger brother of Tennessee Williams.

DePue: There's a name from our literary past. Your running mate, again, was David O'Neal. Did it take much to convince him to be on the ticket again?

Thompson: No.

DePue: It's going to be later on, then, that he starts to sour on the idea about being lieutenant governor?

Thompson: He got bored.

DePue: Did you give him much to do in those first couple of years?

Thompson: I probably didn't give him as much to do as I later gave George Ryan. But then, George Ryan was an experienced county board member, then legislator, then Speaker, then lieutenant governor. And George Ryan, obviously, had a lot more experience than Dave, knew more about state government than Dave, and had a lot more political relationships than Dave. So it's probably true that I gave him more responsibility than I gave Dave. And besides, when Dave was the lieutenant governor, I was the new governor. And new governors, you know, don't willingly cast off responsibilities very quickly. (laughs) Probably by the time that George got there, I was more relaxed about that. But I certainly gave him more than Blagojevich gave Quinn, which was zero.

DePue: Yeah. Or Walker gave his lieutenant governor, Hartigan.

Thompson: Right. Or Quinn has given Sheila Simon.

DePue: When did you find out that Jayne was pregnant?

Thompson: Christmas of '77. She put a note on the Christmas tree. (laughter) I probably opened a bottle of champagne and sat around all day drinking it, until my relatives arrived! And it explained why she had disappeared during a trip to New York for an hour or so without telling me where she went. She went and saw a doctor.

DePue: Thinking that maybe the chances of a doctor in New York being quiet about this were better than in Illinois?

Thompson: Yeah, I think so.

DePue: That's interesting.

Thompson: Obviously I was one happy guy.

DePue: When did you announce that she was pregnant?

Thompson: Oh, I have no idea. Whenever she let me, I think. She was the boss on that.

DePue: Let's change gears completely, and ask you what you thought of your political opponent. Michael Bakalis is the guy that the party wanted to run against you.<sup>101</sup>

Thompson: Mike had been comptroller. He was an okay guy.

DePue: He also had an education background; he had been superintendent of Illinois schools at a pretty young age.

Thompson: Right, so he was a well-qualified candidate, in my opinion. And the campaign never got tough or nasty or negative in any real way. My thought always was that it was unlikely that the voters were going to turn me out after I had been in an office a year; they'd certainly give me more chance than that, considering the margin by which I had won. And that turned out to be true.

DePue: So you saw it as an advantage that you'd had just a very short term in office?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And the next one here, just kind of going in chronological order, March 24th, an ice storm hits central Illinois. And those kinds of events—floods, ice storms, tornadoes—give a special challenge to executives. Or is that an opportunity?

Thompson: It's both in some sense. It's not so much of a challenge, because a state like Illinois, both at the state level and the local level—the county level, the city level—have long years of experience in dealing with natural disasters of one kind or another. And there's a pretty good bureaucracy at all three levels of the government to deal with a natural disaster and its aftermath. The main job of the governor is twofold: show up and let people know that you care about them and share in their grief. And secondly, get on the horn and get federal aid as quickly as you can. Those are the two jobs of the governor in responding to a natural disaster.

The toughest are the tornadoes, tough because you really can't prepare. Floods, you got some warning; you can retreat to higher ground, you can go elsewhere. Tornadoes just swoop in with maybe minutes of notice, or no notice; maybe just enough to run to the basement, or the bathroom and throw yourself in the tub. And tornadoes are quixotic. A tornado can strike and obliterate one side of a street and leave the other side of a street untouched. It hits mobile homes the hardest, as you might suspect. Those people's homes are just literally tossed in the air. The quixotic nature of a tornado, so that people can come out of the wreckage of their houses and look across the street and see their neighbor's houses undisturbed, is a really, really tragic thing. You don't know what that does to the human spirit, to see your life lost, literally; not death, necessarily, but your home destroyed and all your

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<sup>101</sup> For his version of the 1978 race, see Michael Bakalis, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2014.

possessions strewn around the front yard—your letters, your photos, your memories—and your neighbor’s house is untouched. That’s just the worst. And that’s where it’s especially important to go and to stay, as long as you need to, to comfort those people.

It’s an interesting thing about human nature. What’s the common reaction in a tornado-hit area, the people whose homes were destroyed? They want to walk you through the wreckage. They want you to go down to their basement and see everything smashed, and everything strewn around. They want you to physically participate in understanding the damage and what it’s done to them. They take a comfort from that, from the governor showing up and walking with them through their damaged home, or standing on their lawn, and just—it is a comfort factor.

Whereas floods, because you’ve got warning, and because you can escape from it, and because there are some places like where you came from today—I remember George and I went and visited the Kankakee area when there was a big flood, and we were literally coming down the swollen Kankakee River in this boat.

DePue: And of course, Ryan’s from Kankakee.

Thompson: Yeah. And there was a picture of us that I had always referred to the “ship of fools” picture, because (laughs) there we were on the prow of this boat, and what did we find along the way? River rats, which I always used as an affectionate term, people who had lived along the river all their lives; they’d probably been through four or five floods, they kept coming back, you couldn’t keep them away from the river, and what were they doing? They were sitting on their roofs, drinking beer and waving as the governor went past!

DePue: And expecting somebody to bail them out, because they decided to live there?

Thompson: Yeah. Now, that’s obviously a different scene than the tornado. Other floods are more treacherous, the floods of the Mississippi, where you go down there, and you’ve got the Guard and local volunteers sandbagging. So you have to do the obligatory filling-the-bag-with-sand picture.

DePue: Of the governor doing that?

Thompson: Of the governor doing that, oh, yeah. But tornadoes are the worst.

DePue: Was there a sense that you had to kind of play not getting in the way, with being visible, being seen?

Thompson: Oh, yeah, absolutely. You couldn’t get in the way of the relief efforts, you could only make sure that your people, whether it was state agencies, whether it was the Guard, or whether it was the Office of Emergency Management—

that was the state version of FEMA—were working right, that they were coordinating with local law enforcement and local natural disaster folks. That's your function: Make sure state government is doing all it can at the scene. Make sure that you're asking the feds for a disaster declaration from the president. And make sure that you're there in sympathy with the local people, and that you understand their issues and care about them. Those are the three jobs.

DePue: Here's an event that happened in California, but I'm sure you're going to remember this because it's a big factor in your election. June 6, 1978, Proposition 13 passes in California, and I know that you ended up having your own proposition.

Thompson: Was that in '78? The Thompson Proposition?

DePue: The Thompson Proposition in '78.

Thompson: I thought the Thompson Proposition was '82.

DePue: No, it was in the Bakalis campaign.

Thompson: I thought it was in '82, because I thought that was part of my defense against a close election. I didn't remember it as part of the '78 campaign, which was not a close election, and I didn't anticipate it would be. Okay, so the Thompson Proposition.

DePue: Proposition 13 in California was very much an anti-property tax proposal. The public in California was just fed up with having large property tax increases year after year, and they wanted to put a ceiling on that.

Thompson: I think I and a lot of other politicians were piggybacking off that, since that seemed to represent the popular sentiment across the country, not just California. (laughs) The idea came to me while I was staring in the mirror, shaving! So help me God, that's—

DePue: That you needed to have your own proposition?

Thompson: Yeah. It was an election year, so you were looking for anything you could to reflect what you thought was the will of the people. I put down the razor, I picked up the phone, I probably called Gilbert, and I said, "Listen, Dave, here's what we're going to do." I think by 2:00 that afternoon, we had petitions printed and I was on Michigan Avenue signing up people on the petitions. And it became a big deal in that campaign.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> On the Thompson Proposition, see Julian D'Esposito, interview by Mike Czaplicki, September 2, 2014, 74-76 and 77-78; Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, March 9, 2015; Tyrone Fahner, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 29, 2015; David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 27, 2014; Gregory Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 6, 2013.

- DePue: Here's the petition: "Shall legislation be enacted and the Illinois Constitution be amended to impose ceilings on taxes and spending by the State of Illinois, units of local government, and school districts."
- Thompson: Pretty comprehensive, huh?
- DePue: And in your mind at that time, what does that mean would happen if this proposition passed?
- Thompson: Well, it was an advisory referendum, right?
- DePue: Yes.
- Thompson: So nothing would happen, unless the legislature followed it up.
- DePue: Were you committed at that point in time to really push hard for this thing to happen?
- Thompson: Sure, but didn't I have a Democratic legislature?
- DePue: Yeah.
- Thompson: Yeah, so there'd be a fight.
- DePue: From '80 to '82, I think that's the years George Ryan was Speaker, so the Senate was still in the Democrats' hands.
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: And from what I understand, it was quite a struggle to get enough signatures for the referendum. Do you recall any of that?
- Thompson: Yeah, it was a struggle, it was like a full-fledged political campaign. My starting out on Michigan Avenue with the petition was the opening salvo, but then you relied on a lot of volunteers all over the state, just as you would rely on people all over the state to get your nominating petition signed—although that was a much smaller number, twenty-five thousand.
- DePue: You ended up getting 607,000 signatures for this petition. And you needed a certain percentage of the previous election.
- Thompson: It was less than six hundred thousand, because I gave a number of those petitions away when trouble developed.
- DePue: Do you remember actually offering \$100 to people who could get 750 interviews?
- Thompson: I don't remember that, but I'm sure the campaign did.

DePue: That became very much of an issue. And then—

Thompson: Why would that be an issue?

DePue: Paying people to collect signatures leads to fraudulent signatures, in a lot of people's minds. And in fact, David Robinson challenged a lot of the signatures that you had.

Thompson: But paid petition gatherers are the norm in Illinois politics. There are companies that you go to today to put canvassers out on the streets to gather signatures for political campaigns. I mean, Rauner's term limits, I'm sure, employed those kinds of solicitors. The Democrats have, too. It's done in local elections as well. I didn't think that was a big deal.

DePue: Do you remember the name Vicki Sands?

Thompson: Yeah, but I'm not quite sure what role she played.

DePue: She was apparently O'Neal's executive secretary.

Thompson: Oh, okay.

DePue: And one of the people who was out there helping to get the signatures. According to the things I read in some newspaper articles, she pled the Fifth in questions about some roughly seven thousand signatures she was involved with.

Thompson: Yeah, we had problems with the signatures, obviously. We were trying to get more than half a million signatures in a big hurry. And some of the people who were involved in that didn't do it the right way. They, in fact, did it the wrong way. There were some instances of round-tabling.

DePue: Which means?

Thompson: Which means you put five or six people around a table like this and pass the petitions around; people would sign names off the voting lists, and then pass it to the guy next to him, so they could write the next signature in a different handwriting, different ink, as though it were coming from the street. We found instances of that. People were prosecuted for that.

DePue: One of the names I have is your aide, Larry Lucas? Does that ring a bell?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: What was his role in your office?

- Thompson: I'm not sure now. He was either on the policy staff, or he might have been on the economic development staff, or at DCCA, or someplace like that.<sup>103</sup>
- DePue: Here's the question that comes up, and I'm playing journalist in this respect.
- Thompson: Sure.
- DePue: You're the governor, you're in charge of your campaign, and these kinds of things are happening on your behalf.
- Thompson: Right.
- DePue: How are you implicated, then, when those things happen? That you had encouraged it? That you had not discouraged it enough?
- Thompson: No, neither. Obviously, at the time it was happening, I didn't know it was happening. So I didn't have any opportunity to discourage it. I certainly didn't encourage it. I thought we had enough people out on the streets of Illinois to get the signatures without any problems. You know, one of my closest friends was implicated in that, a guy who had worked for me. Mike Dunn, out of Rockford, the young advance man for me in my first campaign. He was a patronage chief, and he got let go because he used the state airplane to go to a political event and falsified the log. But he's still a friend today. I think I pardoned him. He was convicted.
- DePue: What was your feeling at the time, though, when you were finding out about these things?
- Thompson: It was sort of like betrayal. I wasn't elected for that kind of business. I didn't have a reputation for that kind of business. I was a former prosecutor. My connection afterwards was to forfeit something like a hundred and fifty thousand signatures. When this kind of stuff became known, I said, "Hey, throw them out!"
- DePue: Did that make you more careful in the future when you were doing these kinds of things?
- Thompson: I don't think we had any—
- DePue: There were no other initiatives that were quite like this.
- Thompson: No, there were not. And as I say, the gathering of signatures for nominating petitions was miniscule.
- DePue: The state Board of Elections had to approve this initiative, and they did that on September 8. So it was going to appear on the ballot. And since we're in

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<sup>103</sup> Department of Commerce and Community Affairs.

this territory, there were several attempts to have things added to *this* year's ballot.

Thompson: Yeah. (laughs)

DePue: I want you to reflect on that, because I don't think any of them were successful.

Thompson: Oh, the ones on this year's are real prize examples of trying to gin up political support.

DePue: What, the Thompson Proposition wasn't?

Thompson: Yes, certainly! Certainly. But the Thompson Proposition didn't go on the ballot in an effort to crowd others out, which is an old Chicago trick.

DePue: To crowd other propositions out?

Thompson: Yeah. Take Chicago, for example. In order to make sure that there were not any embarrassing petition questions on the ballot, the Chicago Democrats would always come up with these hokey questions, or initiatives, until the limit on how many could go on the ballot was reached. And therefore, real citizens with real issues couldn't get on there.

Now, this year in Illinois, they've got the ballot crowded with good stuff. Minimum wage increase, which, of course, is a live issue in Illinois, and there's nothing wrong with putting that out as an advisory referendum so the legislature knows what the people think on that before they address legislation regarding it. But you know, nobody's going to vote against that. Everybody's in favor of minimum wage. You'd have to be a scrooge to be against it. Yes, a lot of small business people are against it, because they think they can't afford it and would have to lay people off, but they're not going to storm the polls to vote. What else is on there this year?

DePue: The one that Bruce Rauner was pushing was for term limits.

Thompson: Term limits, yes, but he ran afoul of the Supreme Court's opinions on that.

DePue: And I'll be honest, I can't quite understand what their issue is with it, not allowing it to appear on the ballot.

Thompson: Because the constitution limits citizens' initiatives to the legislative process and questions of the—what's the phrase? The structure, and something else, of the legislature. And term limits are not structure or whatever the other phrase is that goes from that constitutional provision. The Supreme Court had ruled in earlier cases the term limits didn't fall under that.

DePue: But how does the Thompson Proposition fit into that definition?

- Thompson: But the Rauner petition would have changed the constitution; that was a constitutional amendment. This was simply an advisory referendum, and there are no rules about that.
- DePue: Well, Michael Bakalis did have a view on the Thompson Proposition.
- Thompson: I'm sure he did!
- DePue: He called it, "Proposition Zero" and "a meaningless absurdity." Those were a couple of phrases he used in describing it.
- Thompson: But that wasn't really the way to attack it, now, was it? Because neither of those descriptions made any sense. What was the result of the vote?
- DePue: But you know what the result of the vote was. (Thompson laughs) But since you brought it up, Governor, what did you do about the proposition after the vote?
- Thompson: We introduced legislation, as I recall.
- DePue: How hard did you push it?
- Thompson: I pushed it, but it got beat.
- DePue: Did it ever come up for a vote?
- Thompson: It either got beat, or I think it died.
- DePue: Died in committee?
- Thompson: Yeah. Legislators were not about to give up the power to tax and spend, now, were they?
- DePue: Did you shed any tears when you lost that one?
- Thompson: Probably not.
- DePue: I guess what I'm saying, it sounds to me like much more of a political stunt than it was an initiative.
- Thompson: No, that wasn't true. No, that wasn't true, because if there had been a decent contest in the legislature on the issue, we would have come out with something. A compromise, maybe, not my original position—legislation rarely comes out with your original position, it comes out as a compromise. And we could have enacted something that gave the tax payers a little more protection. I'm not sure what that would have been, but it would have been possible. But the legislature wasn't having any of it.

DePue: Was your thought more on putting some kind of caps or limits on property tax, or income and sales taxes as well?

Thompson: I think it was more on property tax. And my guess is, we wouldn't have ended up with a flat cap; we might have ended up with an adjustable cap, whatever that would be, and we might have ended up with an unless-the-voters-authorized-it kind of thing, which are common in government today. School issue is on the ballot. Voters will always tell you in the polls that they're in favor of more money for schools. But then when they go to the ballot box, "Oh, no!"

DePue: It all depends on if they've got kids in school themselves.

Thompson: That's absolutely true. And the majority of people in Illinois today do not have children in public schools.

DePue: Well, the next issue is the perennial issue of ERA, and—

Thompson: Oh, God!

DePue: You always say that when I bring up ERA.

Thompson: Well, yeah!

DePue: And 1978 was a big year, because it was supposed to have sunset in 1979, so this is theoretically one of the last years. Phyllis Schlafly has her rallies and anti-ERA forces in Illinois, you're pressing legislators to pass it, and then your lieutenant governor, you find out, is coming out and working with legislators to defeat ERA.

Thompson: Who, O'Neal?

DePue: Mm-hmm. That doesn't ring a bell to you?

Thompson: No. It would not have made any difference.

DePue: What's your memory about what George Ryan's position was, and what he was trying to—

Thompson: Oh, he was against it. Look, ERA was in some sense a phony issue. Phony because the Democrats had it set up so that all the focus was on the governor. But since a constitutional amendment doesn't go to the governor's desk for signature, the governor really, in the constitutional sense, has nothing to do with it. It's strictly a legislative proposition. So the control of ERA legislation was in the hands of the leaders of the General Assembly. Now, I don't remember whether ERA ever got to the floor of the House or not. I think it did.

DePue: That year it was defeated in the House, and the article I read stated that Jayne and your mother were both there in the gallery watching the ERA debate.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And when it came time to vote in the House, there were five blacks that elected not to vote.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And that caused a stir.

Thompson: Well, look, George was against it, as I recall. But at least he put it on the floor. Did it ever get to the floor of the Senate? No.

DePue: I'm pretty sure it did. That's one of the things I want to check the records on.

Thompson: See, Phil Rock, my friend, my dear, dear friend, the big liberal, made sure it didn't get out of the Senate.

DePue: The year you might be talking about is '82, when it never got out of committee, which was the last year.

Thompson: Yeah. Look, the plain political truth is that the Democratic leadership did not want to pass ERA, because in those days, they had enough conservative Democrats in the caucus that they didn't want any problems, not only from downstate—from Schlafly territory and other places—but from the city of Chicago, where the Italian legislators would not vote for ERA. So they did their best to avoid blame being put on them, and my dear friend, Phil, was part of this. But they were just happy as hell to have it all focus on the governor, who had nothing to do with it. And my staff, God bless them, all ERA supporters, loved nothing more to do than to fill up my days conferring with legislators who didn't have a chance in hell that they were *ever* going to vote for it, but they were happy to sit in the governor's office and talk to me.

DePue: It made them feel important?

Thompson: I don't know what it made them feel. But after about three hours of talking to somebody that you know isn't going to vote for it, you figure, what the hell? And you call up your staff and you say, "Absolutely no more! At least today, I can't take any more of this bullshit! These people are never going to vote for it, you know they're never going to vote for it. But they're sitting in my office, taking up my time, and it's all bullshit." But the ERA supporters, of course, I was their target. Why? Because I was a single person. I wasn't a party, I wasn't a caucus, I wasn't a legislator out in the boondocks; I was the governor of the whole state, and I was the visible person.

Wherever I went in the state of Illinois, especially in '82, the ERA people would greet me as I got off the plane, or I got out of the car to go to the event. They would chant, "Big Jim, remember, we vote in November!" I mean, that followed me all around the state, and you get a little sick of it, because they knew, or should have known, who the real enemies were, and it wasn't me. I worked harder on ERA than on almost anything I can remember, and I didn't have anything to do with it! I couldn't do anything about it. I couldn't sign it, I couldn't veto it, I couldn't do any—it was none of my business as a governor, except as a leader of opinion. And then, this is '82, when the most violent of the ERA demonstrators chained themselves to the door of my office and threw pig blood on the door, the tide turned. People were horrified by that. They got dragged away by the police. It's like the spell was broken.

DePue: That they'd gone too far in their tactics?

Thompson: Yeah. But I had picketers marching around the mansion, led by the wife of one of my cabinet members!

DePue: Who was that?

Thompson: Jeff Miller's wife. That was when, like, four-year-old Samantha was in the yard. She went up to the fence and said, "You get out of here! You're bothering my daddy!" Smart kid. I couldn't say it, but she could say it. And she wasn't coached, either. (laughs) Mother had to drag her away from the fence, out there arguing with demonstrators.

DePue: Let's take this back to 1978, then. What was your reaction when you found out that the U.S. Congress decided to extend the debate from 1979 to 1982?

Thompson: Probably a big sigh. You're go through this again. It's going to get worse. I can't win.

DePue: Again and again and again.

Thompson: Yeah, right. You would have thought that the equal protection amendment of the constitution had been stricken out somehow overnight, and we needed this ERA.

DePue: And that's a point that you've made a couple of times before.

Thompson: Yeah. I mean, why did you need ERA, if you had the Equal Protection Clause? Nothing could be clearer in both the federal and state constitutions. And you've got to get into these silly debates with opponents about, you know, bathrooms on airplanes. I'd say, "You've flown on an airplane recently?" "Yeah." "Were there men's and women's bathrooms on the airplane?" "Well, no, there's just one." "Men and women use it?" "Well, yeah." "At the same time?" "No." I said, "So, what's the big deal?" Because

that was one of the arguments against ERA, unisex bathrooms. Oh, my God, the nation would have collapsed.

DePue: Back on the campaign trail, and you said it was a clean campaign, not a lot of vitriol.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: But Bakalis's statement on your budget was, was that it was a budget of gimmickry, of broken promises and broken hearts.

Thompson: But they always say that. That's no big deal. That's sort of standard from budget opponents.

DePue: What were you stressing in that particular year? This is the first time you're running for re-election, and you've got not much of a record to be running on.

Thompson: I really don't remember what the themes of that campaign were, but I suspect it was: I've only been here a year, folks; I'm doing the best I can, I'm keeping the promises that I made, and please vote for me.

DePue: See if any of this rings a bell. Emphasis that taxes had not been raised for two years.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: That's certainly a true statement. Here's one, return of civility in Springfield.

Thompson: True.

DePue: You saved the state from financial disaster.

Thompson: True.

DePue: How did you save the state from financial disaster?

Thompson: By not spending all the money people wanted me to spend.

DePue: That if Walker had been elected governor, he would have been spending a lot more money?

Thompson: He, or the legislature in revenge, yeah.

DePue: But when it came to educational spending, I've got a comment here that you were trying to increase educational funding. How do you do that and still keep a balanced budget, since that's such a big part of the budget at the time?

Thompson: You keep education spending within the balanced budget, but you favor it, as opposed to, perhaps, other things, even though the numbers in education are

bigger. You can do it, unless it's a horrible year where you have to cut education spending. And there were a couple of those.

DePue: Yeah, I think those are a couple of years to come Off-track betting was an issue at the time. What was your position on that?

Thompson: Didn't I appoint a commission to study that?

DePue: I don't know.

Thompson: I think I did.

DePue: You were somewhat ambivalent about it?

Thompson: Yeah. I think it was off track betting, I don't think it was casino.

DePue: There is already a lottery at this time, is that correct?

Thompson: Yeah. The lottery came in under Walker. Either casino legislation or off-track betting, I appointed a commission, chaired by the chairman of Citizens for Thompson. Marshall Korshak was on there too, the Democrat who supported me. I think they came back with a favorable verdict, and I disagreed. Unless I am confusing it with a later casino effort.

DePue: Here's something that you'd think is not a big issue, but it is a big issue, potholes.

Thompson: (laughs) Potholes are always a big issue!

DePue: Bakalis came out and said, "I'm going to put \$30 million into filling in some potholes," and you came out and said, "I'm going to spend \$75.6 million filling in potholes."

Thompson: There you go. I guess I knew the DOT budget better than he did. Boy, the mayor had a tough time with potholes this past winter. They still haven't all been filled, especially the ones on my block.

DePue: It was a very tough winter for that.

Thompson: It was awful!

DePue: Here's one I want you to spend a little bit of time on. This is going to come up again in 1983, but I think this is the election where, it seems to me, you were really pushing hard to gain the union vote.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: I want to talk about your rationale for going after the union vote, and ask you for some anecdotes or memories you have about that whole experience.

Thompson: My pursuit of the union vote was never ceasing from '77 through '86. And I got it, more and more each year.<sup>104</sup>

DePue: Let's start from the beginning of that in terms of just the rationale. It's not typically something that's associated with Republicans.

Thompson: Well, they're foolish if they don't. I had a union leader tell me the other day, just recently, "You know, Jim, we're the new blacks." I said, "What do you mean, you're the new blacks?" "Labor movement," he said, "We're the new blacks, taken for granted by the Democratic Party." I said, "Yeah, probably right." In the '76 election, I think I was supported by two unions, the Teamsters—

DePue: I know you went after the UAW, AFL-CIO.

Thompson: Yeah, but that came later.

DePue: Tell me about the Teamsters.

Thompson: Teamsters were under the control of Louis Pike, who was the Teamster leader. I guess he liked me, and he was married to somebody who knew me, or knew my father, or something like that. I don't exactly recall. But he supported me. And one of the building trade locals, whether it was the operating engineers or something like that—they were local of a union, not the statewide outfit—supported me, and the IEA. The teachers supported me; not the IFT, but the IEA.

DePue: IFT would be?

Thompson: Illinois Federation of Teachers. That's AFL-CIO.

DePue: Okay, but that's different from Chicago's teachers?

Thompson: No, Chicago's teachers would have been part of the IFT. The IEA were the downstate teachers. Separate union. They supported me. Worked very hard for me. But that's all I had. And I had a little money from those unions. In '78, I picked up most of the statewide building trades—carpenters, plumbers, electricians—who were generally a lot more conservative than their public union counterparts like AFSCME and the SEIU. Although AFSCME may have supported me too, I'm not quite sure. But in '78, I picked up more.

DePue: Was that the year you had to go to Florida to court the Teamsters?

Thompson: No, you went to Florida to court the AFL-CIO and their constituent unions, which would have included the building trades—carpenters, plumbers,

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<sup>104</sup> On Thompson's support for public employee collective bargaining and his pursuit of the labor vote more generally, see Fletcher, February 24, 2015. Also see Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 7, 2013; Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, April 22, 2014.

electricians, the operating engineers, and the stationary engineers. Those guys, you could get—those constituent unions of the AFL-CIO—even if you couldn't get the AFL-CIO, the umbrella organization. And the advantage of getting the support of labor was several-fold: one, the votes, because these union members, to some degree at least, followed their leadership; and the money. Unions were a potent source of campaign funds. And most of it had always belonged to the Democrats. But if you got labor support, you got labor money. So through that fourteen-year period, I kept picking up labor votes, labor money; labor votes, labor money.

It also, and this is probably more for my satisfaction, demonstrated an even-handedness between business and labor. With Republicans always thought of as in the pockets of business, and Democrats and their labor unions. And I wanted to break that mold, A, because it was helpful in the legislature; they were important in the legislature, the unions. B, because I thought it was fair. I took unions as well as business guys on my trade missions. I got them together to pass legislation important to both of them, where under previous governors, they had sat apart and refused to deal. It was a matter of pride for me to able to accomplish something that previous Republican candidates for governor had not been able to accomplish.

DePue: Now, they're just not going to endorse you because you meet with them and you're a nice guy and they like your record. What were you telling them that you would do for them?

Thompson: Treat them fairly. That was a big deal with them, because that was the first time they ever felt that about a Republican candidate. That was very important at the outset. And I followed through. I mean, teachers got the right to strike under me. I opposed "right to work."

DePue: Why?

Thompson: Because I thought it was an attempt to gut the power of unions.

DePue: Essentially we're saying that if you're in a particular trade or business or profession, you will be forced to join the union for the right to work.

Thompson: Either join the union, or at least pay union dues. You couldn't be forced to join a union, but you could be forced to pay those dues which went to support the objects of collective bargaining. Not the political part of the unions, but you had to pay the dues to support collective bargaining. Especially public employees, where the collective bargaining is all about getting working conditions from the political masters. Now, my guess is, the current Supreme Court is headed towards saying you can't compel people to pay, even for the nonpolitical things that unions do. I wouldn't be surprised to see that become the law next year, and that'll severely—

DePue: A law, or a Supreme Court decision?

Thompson: A Supreme Court decision that will severely hurt unions.

DePue: Public sector unions.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Here's one of the statements that you did make during this campaign cycle, "I will not be satisfied until every public sector employee has the right to collective bargaining."

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: "If the legislature passes the collective bargaining bill, I will sign it."

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And as you just mentioned, you promised to veto any right-to-work legislation.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: That was one of George Ryan's big issues, and he was pushing it.

Thompson: It was. He had apparently made promises as Speaker to put it on the floor for a vote. I kept saying, "George, you're wasting your time, because it won't pass the Senate, and I won't sign it." He said, "Yeah, but I've promised to put it on the floor for a vote." And he did. It got twelve votes. But he kept his promise.

DePue: Did he just do that one time?

Thompson: Yeah. And he did it on a day when there were, like, twenty-five thousand union members in the Capitol. (DePue laughs) I went out to address them, which led to the great beer party on the lawn of the mansion.

DePue: Tell me about that.

Thompson: Haven't I told that story?

DePue: I've heard it from Dave Gilbert.

Thompson: Ryan's got this right-to-work bill, and the unions know it's coming up this day. Led by the electrical workers out of Chicago, they come down to Springfield, twenty-five thousand strong. They're filling the halls of the Capitol, they've got public address systems outside the Capitol, and various Democratic politicians are running out there to speak to them. So I went out there, and I said, "Thank you for coming. I'm glad you're here. I'm with you. If the legislature passes right-to-work, I will veto it." Big roar, right? And I

said, “And when you’re through demonstrating here, why don’t you come over to the mansion and have a beer?” Big roar!

I leave the demonstration, and I’m thinking, Ah, they’re going to finish shortly. They’ll start marching on the mansion, they know where it is, and I’ve invited them!” I’m still outside, and instead of going back to my office, I run across the street to the Supreme Court Building. I run into the clerk’s office, and I say, “Let me have your phone.” I get the phone. And I call the mansion, “Honey, ah, I invited some guys over to the mansion!” (DePue laughs) “Oh, good,” she said, “That’s fine. How many?” I said, “Twenty-five thousand!” Ah! “Oh, when are they coming?” I said, “Shortly!” (laughs) I said, “So, you know, maybe you could prepare?” She said, “Okay.” I said, “Have the troopers put my red Mitsubishi out in the driveway.” I ended up leading them over there about an hour later. And this smart, tough woman had beer trucks on the lawn of the governor’s mansion, porta potties, and my red Mitsubishi.

DePue: Where did she find beer trucks in that short a time?

Thompson: Springfield! She probably called the Associated Beer Distributors, and they rounded them up; called the porta potty people, and they delivered them. And those guys stayed all afternoon, I mean, it was great! I walked over there and I was standing by my car, the red Mitsubishi, and I had a couple of guys come up and say, “Uh, where did you get this foreign car?” I said, “It’s not a foreign car.” “Well, it’s a Mitsubishi.” I said, “Yeah, but you know where it’s made?” And they said, “No.” I said, “It’s made in Bloomington by UAW members. The only union Japanese auto plant in the country.”<sup>105</sup> “Oh, can I have my picture taken with it,” they said. I said, “Sure! Hop in!” (laughs) But a grand thing is, today, more than thirty years later, people will still come up to me on the streets of Chicago and say, “Hey, do you remember when we all came down and had beer on your lawn?” I say, “Yes.”

DePue: One other obvious question, who was paying for the beer?

Thompson: CFT.

DePue: CFT meaning?

Thompson: Citizens for Thompson. It might have been donated, for all I know. Let me tell you, that went a long, long way to counting with union members across the state of Illinois, because while only twenty-five thousand were there, every single union member of the state of Illinois knew that twenty-five thousand union members were drinking beer on the mansion lawn with the governor after he had helped defeat right-to-work. Better than that, you can’t do.

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<sup>105</sup> The Mitsubishi Diamond-Star Motors venture with Chrysler did not open in Normal, Illinois until 1985.

DePue: On another highlight of the campaign season that year, I'll show you a picture and let you tell this story.

Thompson: (laughs) Oh, the horse! That was a great story.

DePue: And I've heard this one from both Michael Bakalis and from Dave Gilbert.

Thompson: Gilbert's probably closer to the truth. Look at that, isn't that embarrassing? That is so embarrassing. I can't believe I did that; I can't believe I didn't fall off and crack my head on the marble floor. The governor's office is on the second floor, and the legislature is on the third floor. I walked out of my office, and I went over to the elevator. Maybe I was going up to the legislature, I don't know, and I was taking the elevator.



The door of the elevator opened, and out came this horse and his handlers, and the press. And my eyes go open wide. What the hell is this horse doing on the second floor of the State Capitol? Well, they explained, it was a trick horse, and he was on his way up to the Senate, where some idiot senator had sponsored this visit. I said, "A trick horse belongs in the Senate, so have at it." "Well, why don't you ride him?" I said, "Absolutely not! No! No, no, no." "Oh, come on, get on the horse, he's a trick horse." I said, "I don't want that horse doing tricks with me on it!" "No, no, he won't do anything, just get up and sit on the horse." And I forgot my number one political commandment: Don't wear no funny hats, don't ride no funny animals. Finally, after they *pestered* me long enough, I got up on the horse, briefly. Then I got down off the horse, and the horse got back in the elevator and went up to the Senate where he belonged, with all those other horses.

DePue: (laughs) But you were on the horse long enough to get that picture.

Thompson: Long enough to get that. What happened was, the press heard about it and came racing up there. And I did not know, I swear to God, I did not know, I don't care what Bakalis says, I did not know that he was holding a press conference on the back steps of the Capitol. He was in the middle of this press conference, when some reporter came flinging out the back door and yelled, "The governor's riding a horse on the second floor of the Capitol"; whereupon all the reporters surrounding Bakalis packed up and ran up to the second floor

of the Capitol, ending that press conference. Now, I'm sure he thinks, honestly, that this was a calculated stunt to take reporters away from his press conference. Why would I do that, number one; number two, I didn't know he was holding a press conference. So it got reported, and he had his comments to say.

DePue: Governor, do you mind (Thompson laughs) if I tell you what I've heard from both Dave Gilbert and Michael Bakalis?

Thompson: Yeah, sure. But you just got the truth.

DePue: Gilbert said that he knew that Bakalis was having this important press conference on the steps of the Capitol Building, and he knew that there was this character who was trying to get this trick horse to come to the Capitol building for a long time, and he kept saying, "Why would we want this trick horse to come?" And then he put two and two together, and said, "This might be the perfect time to have this guy bring his trick horse to the Capitol to steal all of Bakalis's thunder."

Thompson: Well, I'm sure Dave would like to take credit for this masterminding scheme, but there isn't a word of truth in that story! (DePue laughs) The horse was the guest of the Senate. Dave Gilbert's got nothing to do with the Senate floor, and who gets on it.

DePue: So his attempt to take credit for this is not true?

Thompson: Yeah! Shame on you, Dave Gilbert!

DePue: You'll have to read his account.

Thompson: I'm sure.

DePue: Well, you can imagine what Bakalis' response was. He called this a "piece of buffoonery," I think that was the term he used.

Thompson: It probably was. (laughs)

DePue: And that, "Jim Thompson would do anything to get press attention."

Thompson: Well, not anything, but... I think this was kind of ungubernatorial.

DePue: I think Bakalis might agree with you on that.

Thompson: (laughs) I mean, look at that, that's *embarrassing*, I don't want my child to see that, even though she's thirty-six.

- DePue: Let's get back to a more serious note. July 22, there is a bloody riot in the Pontiac Correction Center. Three prison guards are killed, and three more seriously wounded.
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: How does a sitting governor respond to something like that?
- Thompson: First of all, you're always on the alert for trouble in the prisons. It's not something that you can ever say you've guarded against and it won't happen, because it does happen. Prisons are, in a real sense, powder kegs. You've got the worst of the worst Illinois citizens in there, you have many more prisoners than you do guards, and you have a lot of prisoner guard interaction in a normal day. You can try lockdowns and you can try discipline, and you can try security practices. The guards are armed, and the prisoners are not, unless they have homemade weapons, which a lot of them do. You know, you can buy collections of prison inmate weapons on eBay. You'll get them framed. So you just hope and pray that it doesn't happen, but it occasionally happens, and it happened to me. I mean, you can take all the steps in the world to guard against it, but you can't.
- DePue: Perhaps it's even more relevant in your case, because you'd managed to push through Class X legislation and know that's going to result in a growing prison population over the years.
- Thompson: Right. Class X resulted in a growing prison population, and better law enforcement resulted in a growing prison population, and judges getting tougher without Class X resulted in a growing prison population. Economic adversity results in a growing prison population.
- DePue: Does the combination of Class X legislation, knowing the prison population's going to grow, and the Pontiac riots lead you to make some decisions about what to be doing in the future about your correction system?
- Thompson: You try to make it even tighter, but because of the fact that guards integrate with prisoners day to day, it can't be prevented. A lot of it is luck. And you build more prisons, so that prisons are not overpopulated. If they're overpopulated, it brings more problems—the crowding, inmate dissatisfaction, too disparate a ratio of inmates to guards. I built a lot of prisons while I was governor. I mean, you can't be for tougher law enforcement and then say, "But no, I'm not going to build any more facilities."
- DePue: But knowing that's going to put even more pressure on the budget as you go, year after year.
- Thompson: Absolutely. But what's the alternative? It's to leave these people on the street. And too many people with horrendous criminal records get put back on the street time after time after time; it's one of the failures of our criminal justice

system that people are allowed to get too many strikes before they're dealt with appropriately. What do you think about these guys in Chicago, these gangbangers with the guns? How many of them have had serious scrapes with the law, and are put back on the streets? Even gun offenses and put back on the streets. And then you wonder why they shoot each other.

DePue: As we're sitting today, there is an epidemic of gun deaths in Chicago right now.

Thompson: Right. Children are being shot. Innocent people are being shot. It's just not gangs shooting gangs. Drive-by shootings, when they spray a restaurant, as they did in Chicago the other day, or a stray bullet goes into an apartment building and kills a child. There's too many guns, and there's too many people who don't belong on the street, but they've been put back there by judges. In this whole controversy about guns, there are some people who think the only answer is to wipe out the Second Amendment and abolish all guns. Well, even if you did that, the gangbangers would still have them, I'm here to tell you. And there are others who say there should be no controlling guns, and they're crazy too. It's not the fault of the police. Police are spread too thin. Even if you had twice as many police, these things would be going on. It's not the issue of the laws. Illinois laws on guns are tough enough. You've got hundreds of thousands of guns that are in the neighborhoods now, and you'll never get rid of all of those. And you've got judges, because the courts are too crowded, I guess, or because the prosecutors don't scream and holler enough, who are putting gangbangers back on the street.

DePue: Give you a chance, then, to respond to what Governor Quinn has done in the last several years. He's closed prisons—he's certainly closed Tamms—and he's tried to decrease the prison population. I think that's a fair statement to make.

Thompson: Mm-hmm. So what affect has that had on the crime rate? Has it gone down? I don't think so. It certainly has had no effect on gun violence in Chicago.

DePue: Was Tamms one of the prisons built during your time frame?<sup>106</sup>

Thompson: You know, I don't remember. It might have been.

DePue: I'm mentioning Tamms in particular, because that's the one where the worst of the worst prisoners end up.

Thompson: Worst of the worst, yeah, they're probably in isolation most of the day. I came out of law enforcement, and my philosophy always was that if they were in prison, they were not on the street hurting and robbing people. Pretty simple. I'm not sure that the day-for-day good time we have is a good idea anymore.

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<sup>106</sup> Tamms Prison, in rural Alexander County, opened in 1995, and a 500 bed supermax facility was opened up in 1998, during the Gov. Jim Edgar administration.

You think somebody's gotten twenty years—well, he doesn't get twenty years, he's got ten years. They got ten years? No, five years. Because he gets a day-for-day good time credit; whereas in the federal system, you've got to serve 85 percent of your sentence, not 50 percent.

DePue: And are there certain crimes that you shouldn't even consider that?

Thompson: Yeah, I would think so.

DePue: What would those crimes be?

Thompson: Certainly murder, armed robbery.

DePue: One that's gotten a lot of attention in the last few years is sex offenders.

Thompson: That's different because sex offenders are dealt with both criminally and civilly. You can go to jail for a criminal sexual offense, but you can also be dealt with civilly, because you don't automatically return to the streets. The courts can hold you if part of your sentence was to be committed after the criminal sentence had expired, and there's no place to put you at the moment. I mean, that's a very, very difficult thing. A person has completed their criminal sentence, and yet, they're still in the penitentiary, because we don't have enough civil facilities to handle them. And some of these sexual offenses are horrendous: the abuse of young kids, infants, serial offenders.

DePue: Yeah, the recidivism rate is—

Thompson: High, sure. That's because it's not a matter of economic opportunity, it's just a matter of urges, human urges. I mean, nobody has an urge to commit robbery, but this is deep in the psyche.

DePue: Now it's time for a happier subject!

Thompson: (laughs) Well, these have all been happy!

DePue: What happened August 3, 1978?

Thompson: Oh, boy. A day that will live in infamy! I have to say that the people of Illinois were really excited about the impending birth. Somehow, this became the "state's baby," a phrase which irritated Jayne no end! (laughter) Sometimes she'd say, "Oh, why don't they carry it and deliver it?" There were crazy things on the campaign trail. When she was by herself at a campaign event or a civic event, the minute she walked in, they were dragging chairs over for her to sit down in. She'd say, "No, there's a receiving line, and I'm standing in line."

DePue: Was it her decision that she would continue to be on the campaign trail?

Thompson: Yeah, absolutely. And she didn't want to be cosseted. Or if some woman would come up to her and say, "You need to sit down," she'd say, "Well, why?" "Because you're carrying the state's baby!" That was almost as good as the woman who came up to her in a receiving line once downstate and said, "I hope you die!" (laughs) And she said, "What? Why would you say that?" "Because I want to marry your husband," the woman said. I heard about that one that night!

But I have to say that the state was really beyond supportive, they were sort of joyful about it. And gifts started flooding into the mansion, quilts and toys and all that kind of stuff, clothes that you would send to a baby. Jayne was under the care of a local doctor in Springfield, obstetrician. We had gone to Lamaze class together; you know, sitting on the floor and saying, "Breathe, breathe, breathe," hearing the lecture and all of that. But as it turned out, she had a difficult pregnancy. And after it went on for twelve hours, the labor, they decided to do a C-section. So I didn't get a chance to be present.

DePue: Were you in there before that decision was made?

Thompson: What do you mean?

DePue: Were you in there in the early part?

Thompson: Oh, yeah. I was at the bedside. But when they decided to do the C-section, I was tossed out, and they went to the operating room. Now, under legislation I later signed, fathers can go to the C-section. But you couldn't then. So I waited until the baby was born. And we hadn't finally decided on a name. We had talked about Samantha, for reasons having to do with Bobby Short, but there was opposition from my mother and her mother on the grounds that people would think we had named it after the dog, Sam.

DePue: Yeah, you mentioned this story last time we were here.

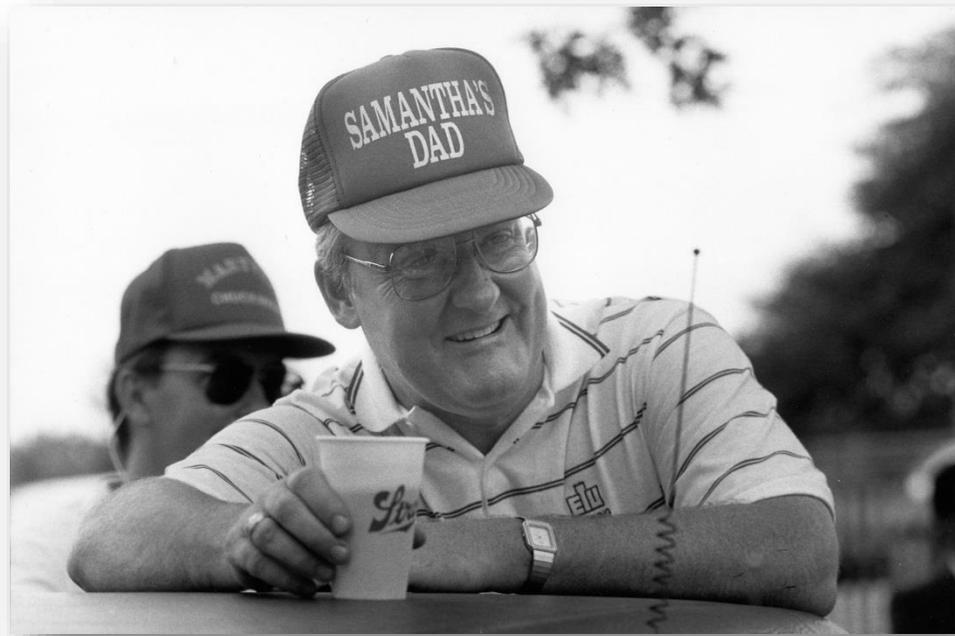
Thompson: But left to my own devices while she was still under the ether, (DePue laughs) I named the baby, added her name as the middle name to mollify her—that didn't mollify her—and went downstairs and announced to the press conference that Samantha Jayne Thompson had been born, and here she is! Then of course, the next day, I took off for Marshall Fields in Chicago to buy stuff, leaving Mrs. Thompson behind. And after bringing a breakfast from the mansion, including a Bloody Mary, to her hospital room, and eating it! I guess that was probably bad manners. Anyway, everybody was all excited about the baby, and there are pictures of the baby arriving home, the dogs greeting the baby, toys in the buggy, on and on and on and on.

DePue: You were quoted as saying that this was, "The world's most gorgeous baby!"

Thompson: That's true. And I was just a very proud, happy father. I mean, it's a big, big, big deal.

DePue: I think this is your statement, maybe not. But again, another quote, “The truth is, she’s got her father’s looks and her mother’s temper.”

Thompson: That’s mine. I say that today. (DePue laughs) My wife says that today! My wife attributes all of her bad genes to me, all of her bad habits to me, and it’s



all true, of course! World’s greatest shopper, who did she get that from? Not her mother, no, no, no! Gift of gab from her mother? No, father. Anyway, it was a really joyous time.<sup>107</sup> And the last baby born to a governor, Bina Deneen, still alive, sent a double picture frame with her baby picture in it, and a space for Samantha’s baby picture, which we had proudly on display in the mansion. Very nice. And people just kept sending all of this stuff. There’s a quilt, or some kind of thing, upstairs in Samantha’s room that was a gift to her when she was born. Wow.

DePue: Did you get a few teddy bears?

Thompson: Oh, I’m sure! We got everything.

DePue: How many percentage points is that worth in the election?

Thompson: Oh, I don’t think it’s worth any. I know that’s contrary to the prevailing wisdom, but the prevailing wisdom of politics is sometimes not very wise. And I don’t think people voted for me because we had a baby. It’s a greater context than that. Howlett once complained that I was dragging the dog

<sup>107</sup> The most important of the many hats Thompson wore as governor. Undated photo in Boxed Photos, Thompson Office Files.

around the campaign trail in an effort to win votes. That wasn't the point; I was like a kid when I saw that dog, you know? I just thought, That's really neat, this Irish Setter puppy.

It does go to make up what people think about you, but so do so many other things: He's a dog owner. Well, a lot of people are dog owners, and they think kindly of dog owners. Or he's tall; or he's young; or he speaks his mind; or he put crooks in jail; or he and his wife just had a baby, so they're like us, because we had babies. It's a matter of people trusting you and having confidence in you, not just for what you say and what you stand for, but for how they view you as a fellow human being. That's very important, *very*, very important. But you don't do things consciously to get to that point.

I didn't consciously decide to be tall, it's genetics. Yeah, I chose to be a prosecutor, but I didn't choose to be a prosecutor because I thought, Oh, gosh, ten or fifteen years from now, I'm going to run for governor. It was just part of my history. There's always naysayers who are looking for the cynical in everything you do or say. And we didn't have a baby so I could get more votes in an election. I mean, for God's sake, what did I get, 65 percent of the vote the first time? How many more votes was I going to get, no matter what I did? So you just put that out of your head.

DePue: It wasn't too much later after Samantha's birth that she had a bout with pneumonia.<sup>108</sup> Do you remember that?

Thompson: Yeah, that was very, very tough. Very, very tough. She was only a couple of weeks old, and she developed pneumonia. We rushed her to the hospital. And we had the most wonderful doctors, and in particular, a pediatrician down there, Dr. Ann—I can't remember her last name now, but she was Samantha's doctor the whole time we were in Springfield. And after we came to Chicago, we had another pediatrician, who Samantha insisted on staying with until she was twenty-one. The pediatrician finally said, (laughter) "Well, Samantha, you notice everybody else in this waiting room is an infant? It's time to go, Sam."

DePue: So you figured out pretty quickly she had a mind of her own?

Thompson: Yeah. But this was really tough. She was in the hospital for a week, ten days, or something like that, and she had intravenous antibiotics night and day. And eventually, they wore out all the veins in the arms and legs. Of course, they're just little tiny veins to begin with, at that age, a few weeks old, and they just wouldn't take the needle anymore. Finally, they had to put it in her head. Jayne would hold her, just sit and hold her for hours on end until I yelled and hollered at her to give the baby up so she could get some rest, and then I would hold her. And we had a friend down there, Dan Weil, who was a friend

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<sup>108</sup> See Samantha Thompson, April 4, 2014.

of mine for a long time. He was, at one point, a partner at Winston. He was, at one point, the warden of the county jail in Chicago. He loved law enforcement, he loved corrections. And he came down, and he was the only other person Jayne would let hold Samantha, besides her and me. The three of us took turns holding her until the pneumonia broke. They were able to take the intravenous needle out of her head, and she could go home to the mansion.

DePue: She had to be held so she wouldn't—

Thompson: Dislodge it, yeah. No, you couldn't put her down. So she had to be held day and night. You couldn't put her back in the crib. So that was a tough, tough, siege. But we got through it.

DePue: I wanted to ask you a couple of questions about debates. Do you remember anything about the particular debates you had with Bakalis?

Thompson: I remember one debate with Bakalis, and I don't remember what we were talking about.

DePue: Let me run through the dates that I've got, and then you can take it from there. In June, there was the first debate, and obviously, there's always the debate about the debates beforehand. June was focused on taxes.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: There was one September 6 in Carbondale, September 19 in Peoria—seems that things got a little bit nastier on both sides, charges of untruthfulness coming from both sides of the campaign—and then October 12 at Oak Brook, where Bakalis pledges to reduce property taxes by 20 percent over four years. Those are just some of the highlights.

Thompson: How was he going to do that?

DePue: And he was going to retire from politics, if he was defeated; by October 12, he probably knew where the polls were.

Thompson: I remember nothing about the issues in the debates, I just don't. The only debate I remember, I think it was at Carbondale; it was at a university. The studio was so hot, I was starting to sweat, and I thought, Is this what happened to Richard Nixon? (laughter) (phone ringing) And you couldn't mop your brow, you know? Let me just take a break, see if this is Jayne calling me.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Another positive note, or something on the fun side here, before I get too far beyond it, in August, you hosted a high school class reunion in the mansion.

- Thompson: Yeah, my thirty-fifth. I had missed my thirtieth, somehow. I felt badly about that, so I said, “Okay, the next one’s going to be in the mansion.” We held it in the mansion, and, God, they all came. (laughs) Everybody who was still alive came!
- DePue: Was this something about the pledge that you had made even back in high school?
- Thompson: No, I just said the mansion because I felt badly about missing the prior one. It was wonderful, it really was. And then I went to my fiftieth at a hotel in the north suburbs. I was so scared at that reunion, because everybody looked so old and lame and halting, that I’ve never been to another one. I just—they had our pictures up on the wall, our graduation pictures. We were eighteen years old. Then these people came in, and they had walkers, they had wheelchairs, they had oxygen, and I thought, Oh, I’ve got to get out of here, this is—oh, my God!
- DePue: It almost reminds a person of their mortality!
- Thompson: Yes, it does! Yes, it just focuses it very, very well! Very precisely. Wow!
- DePue: One other thing that came up in the campaign surprised me when I read about it. I thought, Why would that be a topic of debate? Apparently, Bakalis had an opportunity at one point to claim that you were a liar about the Holocaust. Do you remember that?
- Thompson: No. A liar about the Holocaust?
- DePue: Yeah, there were some statements, and I’d have to get the article.<sup>109</sup>
- Thompson: I have no clue. I don’t remember anything like that. We had Seders in the mansion, why would I lie about the Holocaust?
- DePue: I’d have to get the terminology, but the important thing is, it’s not something that you recall some many years later?
- Thompson: God, no.
- DePue: It wasn’t an issue then, anything like that?

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<sup>109</sup> Late in the campaign, Bakalis held a news conference in Chicago, where he proclaimed Thompson “an opportunist guilty of cynical and heartless duplicity for political gain” and “guilty of moral duplicity and moral cowardice.” Bakalis juxtaposed Thompson’s executive proclamations memorializing the Holocaust in the spring of 1978 with him allegedly telling Chicago-area German-American leaders several months later that “he did not believe the Nazi war crimes were any different from atrocities committed in other wars by other nations.” “Bakalis Calls Thompson Liar,” *DeKalb Daily Chronicle*, October 26, 1978.

- Thompson: No. I mean, I took trips to Israel. I bought Israel bonds. I was there, man, with the Jewish community of Illinois. No bigger champion, so I don't know *what* in the hell he would be talking about with the Holocaust.
- DePue: Did you get the Jewish vote?
- Thompson: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.
- DePue: Do you think you had the majority of the Jewish vote?
- Thompson: Absolutely.
- DePue: Why do you say that? Because typically, that's a reliably Democratic—
- Thompson: Because I know what wards and townships I carried. That's out of left field somewhere, I don't know.
- DePue: Any other stories that you want to pass on about the '78 campaign?
- Thompson: No. My margin went down. (laughs) Big surprise there! To something like, what, four or five hundred thousand?
- DePue: Here's the margin: 596,550 was the plurality.
- Thompson: Wow.
- DePue: You had over 59 percent; Bakalis got 40 percent.
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: And there was a smattering of other campaigners—libertarians, socialists, people like that.
- Thompson: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- DePue: It's still a significant victory. Your margin in Cook County was 54 percent, and downstate was 63.6 percent.
- Thompson: Now, a margin of five hundred plus is about three times as much as the normal margin in a governor's race.
- DePue: And you mentioned before about the Thompson Proposition, 83 percent.
- Thompson: Yeah! Bigger than me. Right?
- DePue: Bigger than yours.
- Thompson: So obviously, some people who voted for the Thompson Proposition didn't vote for me.

DePue: A lot of times, people decide to vote for the names on there and elect not to vote for the propositions, because they just don't know.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: But that's probably as good a place as any to end for today, and tomorrow we can pick up on the controversy that emerged immediately after this. Thank you, Governor.

(end of interview #9)

(end of volume II)