

Interview with Governor Jim Edgar Volume V (Sessions 23-26)

Interview with Jim Edgar
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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Monday, November 8, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This is my twenty-third session with Gov. Jim Edgar. Good afternoon, Governor.

Edgar: Good afternoon.

DePue: We've been at it for a little while, but it's been a fascinating series of discussions. We are now getting close to the time when we can wrap up your administration. So without further ado in terms of the introduction, what we finished off last time was the MSI discussion. That puts us in the 1997 timeframe, into 1998. I wanted to start, though, with talking about some things in Historic Preservation. Obviously, with myself and our institution—

Edgar: Let me ask you a question real quick. Did we do higher education reorganization?

DePue: Oh yes.

Edgar: We did? Okay.

DePue: We did.

Edgar: I can remember what I did twenty years ago; I can't remember what I did two weeks ago.

DePue: Yes, we talked about that at great length.

Edgar: So in '97 is where you think we are?

DePue: Right. But this is kind of an aside here in terms of Historic Preservation. I wanted to ask you to begin with your initial involvement with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

Edgar: I think the '98 State of the State address is when I said we were going to do it. Then in the budget message a few weeks later, we had the money in for the first time; there was money to... For several years Lee Daniels had always stuck money in the budget which never got used—I think I didn't veto it, but we never spent it—but this was the first time we finally were in financial shape to do something, and we said we're going full force. So it seemed to me that it was at the Lincoln Day Dinner when I first formally announced publicly that the administration was going to push on the presidential library.

DePue: I know there was some discussion even in the Thompson administration. Do you remember how involved that was?

Edgar: No, I don't remember anything in the Thompson administration. I don't remember anything before—there was never any money and there was never any talk. Julie Cellini might have talked about it before.¹ I don't think I ever saw anything about it, never heard about it. I can't remember if Dick Durbin had said something at one time, because he was the congressman from Springfield. So I don't remember anything. I just remember right after I came in, Lee Daniels came down, because his wife Pam was on the Historical Preser—whatever that thing, (laughs) that structure in state government that shouldn't have been there, but...

DePue: The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency?

Edgar: The board that runs it, the governing thing.

DePue: The trustees.

Edgar: Yes. See, that's the only agency run by trustees. That was for Julie. (laughs) I used to tell Julie—I think she's great, but I said, "Governmentally, you shouldn't run an agency by a board. That was the old way they did government, and they changed that." Pam was on that, so I think that is where Lee got interested in it, and it probably came from Julie through Pam. I remember him talking to me, then Julie came in, too. This is '91; I just said, "We don't have any money to do anything." But I don't remember if anything had happened before. That's the first I remember it.

DePue: Do you remember how much money?

Edgar: It was like—don't hold me to this—a hundred thousand or something in there he passed. But when it comes to that kind of money, it doesn't mean anything because you've got to release it. I never did veto it, I just never released it and told him I wasn't going to release it because we couldn't afford it. So that was always there, but nothing ever happened with it. I'm pretty sure it was '98 versus '97, because I remember going to the Lincoln Day Dinner that night; they always have the

¹ Gov. Jim Thompson named Julie Cellini chairman of the board of the Illinois State Historic Preservation Agency in 1985. She is the wife of William Cellini, who was a former secretary of transportation under Gov. Richard Ogilvie, real estate developer, and major Republican powerbroker.

governor say a few words.² I just announced that the administration was now going to push this, and that was the first time. I think it was the State of the State, but after I talked about it in one of those speeches, I remember I went to someplace over in the Quad Cities area. Kids met me, and they were already collecting pennies. They had signs up. And it was interesting because you talk about a lot of things in a speech, but that resonated with the kids in the other part of the state, so you knew there was a lot of interest. It was obvious to me that that hit a chord with folks; they could understand it.

DePue: The next subject here is a little more personal for you, and that's your official portrait. Is there a story behind that portrait?

Edgar: No, not really.

DePue: And there's a Lincoln-Douglas connection to that, from what I understand, because isn't their picture in the background?

Edgar: There's two stories, actually. I think we got the wrong painter. They had brought in things to show me. I think I picked one guy, and they brought the other guy. The guy turned out to be fine, but that was always...

DePue: Do you remember the name?

Edgar: What, the name of the artist?

DePue: Yes.

Edgar: I can't remember. I remember what he looks like. (laughs)

DePue: We'll figure that out later.³

Edgar: He was good; I was glad I picked him. But I actually think, from the preliminary stuff they showed me, they brought the wrong guy in. (laughs) The thing about the portrait, which was done in '98, was that he said, "Is there anything you want in the background?" I said, "The Lincoln-Douglas painting." I'm pointing to one here in the office, a replica that one of the staff members had given me, of the Lincoln-Douglas debate in Charleston, which hung in my office both as secretary of state and then I moved it over as governor. It was supposed to be hanging on the second floor in the lobby. Back when they were renovating that part of the building when I was secretary of state, they were going to put it in storage, and I said, "No, put it in my office," because I had this huge wall, and it's a huge portrait of that debate. That stayed there. Then when I moved over to the governor's office, I realized that while it was going to be a lot smaller wall, it would fit right behind my desk, so we moved it over there. The last thing I did as governor, my last day as governor,

² Not to be confused with the annual circuit of fundraising dinners celebrating Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party, this is the annual banquet held in Springfield, Illinois, by the Abraham Lincoln Association.

³ William Chambers was the artist.

I moved it back out where it's supposed to be. There's a frame, actually, in the hall; if you ever walk down that hall, you'll see a frame. I put it there. I said, "This is where it belonged, and now that I'm leaving I'm going to put it back, because there's nobody from Charleston now." And George Ryan moved it back in, a few days after he became governor, so it's still in there. It (laughs) watched over Governor Ryan. It watched over Governor Blagojevich. So it's seen a lot of things.

DePue: (laughs) It didn't do much good, then.

Edgar: Yes. That portrait is of the Lincoln-Douglas debate in Charleston, my hometown, but it also was the cover of a book on Illinois history I had when I was a student in sixth or seventh grade, something like that. Maybe it was sixth grade. So I was always conscious of that painting. When I came to Springfield and saw it in the hallway, it always was my favorite painting in the capitol complex.

So I said, "Well, if you're going to have something in the background, it ought to be that, because that's always been with me as secretary of state and as governor, and it's Charleston, it's Lincoln." He said fine. He said, "It's not going to be as big." The painting is in what's called the library in the governor's mansion; there's a fireplace there and a mantle, and he had me standing by that. I said, "I've got a picture of Brenda. I want to put it in there so Brenda will be in this picture." So Brenda was in that, and it's the only time a First Lady has ever been in a portrait of the governor. It's something that to this day, if you take a tour of the capitol, the tour guides, when they get down to that part of the second floor in what is the south end of the building, down near the secretary of state's office, will always point out, "And Governor Edgar's wife Brenda is in, and it's the only First Lady." It got me more points with Brenda, (laughter) probably more points than anything I did as governor.

So I was on a roll. I thought, well, I got Brenda in here; this is good. There are some children that are faced back. They were in the crowd at the debate, and you see their faces.

DePue: Is this the same picture?

Edgar: That's the same picture. Now, that's not the way it is in the capitol, because I had him put that portrait, that one behind me, in the painting; in two of the faces of children, I had him put the faces of my grandchildren, Dakota and Cali Edgar, my son's two oldest. At that point, they were the only grandchildren we had. Now, Cali had just been born; he had to kind of improvise a little bit there. But Dakota was at that point four years old, so there are faces in there to look like those two grandchildren. So I had two grandchildren and my wife in this portrait.

DePue: What happened to Brad and Elizabeth?

Edgar: We have grandchildren. (DePue laughs) They've been replaced. Well, you know, they're adults by then, and so the thought was do the grandchildren. Elizabeth didn't have any children at the time, so she kind of got left out.

DePue: For some of the newer grandchildren, is this a bone of contention?

Edgar: I don't know if they really realize it. When I had Dakota over to the capitol, that hall is so dark, and you almost have to get a stepladder and get up there for him to see it. I just had to tell him he's up there someplace; he has to believe me. But no, it probably will be later on. I'm sure a couple of the grandkids will say, "Why aren't we in there?" I'll just tell them, "You weren't born yet. We didn't know you existed." But Brenda is very prominent; you can see Brenda without any trouble. As I said, it's one of the pluses I got with her from my time as governor.

DePue: How about the dogs? Did they make the picture?

Edgar: No, they didn't. There weren't any dogs in there, which was a hard thing. (laughs) If I could have put the dogs in, the dogs would have been in. It would have been appropriate for both those dogs to be in, since they spent a lot of time with me in my time as governor. Any time I had free time, I could take them for a walk or whatever. There is a picture of Emy when she was a pup that's one of my favorites, of me at the desk—it's in our book—laying down by me. She would come over to the governor's mansion some; Daisy came over occasionally. But no, they didn't make that, unfortunately.

DePue: On the next subject, I think that you'll have quite a bit to say. That was your decision in mid-1997 on whether or not you were going to run for governor, or what your options were at that time.

Edgar: In '97, you have to announce what you're going to do for '98, because we have such an early primary in Illinois—far too early. You file in December. Traditionally, if you're running for reelection you can kind of wait a little longer. But sometime late summer, early fall, you need to indicate if you're going to run again, you're going to not run, or if you're going to run for another office, so other people can run. Going into that period, I had three options. I could run for reelection; because Illinois does not limit how many times a governor can run, as Jim Thompson proved, I could run for a third term as governor. Or there was a Senate seat up, held by Carol Moseley Braun, which most people felt was a very winnable seat; in fact, I think it was probably the most winnable Senate seat we ever had the opportunity to run for in Illinois. Or not run for anything. Nobody really seriously thought I would not run; they just figured once you start running (laughs) you keep on running.

Probably years before, I had thought maybe I'd run for the Senate, because as a young person I'd always thought, gee, it'd be neat to be in the U.S. Senate. But probably in the early part of '97, I thought, you know, two terms as governor? That might be enough. Maybe go to Washington, but I'm not sure I can afford it. It's a

very costly thing for a person to go to the U.S. Senate. As governor, they provided me with a house and all kinds of perks: a car, a cook, planes to fly you places. As senator, you don't get any of those. Not only that, you've got to maintain two residences—you have to have a place in Illinois and a place in Washington, DC, which is extremely expensive. Plus, the U.S. Senate in 1997 wasn't the U.S. Senate of Ev Dirksen and Mike Mansfield and those people back when I was growing up, when it was the club; I mean, it was kind of a neat place. The U.S. Senate [in 1997] was not much better than the U.S. House. It was very partisan, and a lot of talking.

So I looked at it, and I thought, I'm not sure I'd like... After being governor of Illinois, to me, to be a senator, to be one of a hundred, would be kind of a step down. I didn't like sitting around listening to a lot of debate. In the legislature I didn't enjoy that, and in the governors' meetings I'd go to, you'd have to listen to all the governors want to get up, particularly when TV cameras were there, and talk. I didn't like that. I enjoyed the executive branch, where you could make a decision and something happened. So as the year progressed, if I was going to do something, I'd probably lean more to running for governor. There's a lot more [to do]. The party folks were very insistent I run for governor again, because they figured George Ryan would run, and they weren't sure he could win. You know, they don't really care about a U.S. senator in Illinois politics. The governor is the office that really matters, and they didn't want to lose that office. So I had a lot of people in the party trying to convince me to run for governor.

I had a lot of people outside of politics who just wanted to see a change. They didn't want Carol Moseley Braun; they wanted me to run for the Senate. They just figured, Two terms, Governor; run for something else, run for the U.S. Senate. I personally just thought, I don't know if I want to run for either one of these. Because again, the Senate, I couldn't afford. If I had been a multimillionaire, I might have run for the Senate and been able to have a nice home in Washington, DC. I remember the press asked me about it several times. I said, "The trouble with the U.S. Senate is it's expensive to live in Washington. I've got two dogs; to have a yard for these two dogs, that house would cost me a fortune." They just kind of laughed, and I said, "No, no, you guys don't understand. I want my dogs with me. I'm not going to leave them back in Illinois. I'm not going to be like Dick Durbin does, live with three other senators in an apartment." I just didn't want to do that. If I was going to be in the U.S. Senate, we were going to move out to Washington; we weren't going to keep a small apartment and run back and forth, and I needed a place for the dogs. That would have cost a million dollars, and I didn't have any money. So the press thought that was a joke, and I was very serious.

In the governor's office, I felt like you could really do worthwhile things. I thought things were working well. So as I kind of got closer and closer to knowing I had to make a decision, I probably gave a lot more thought to the governor's race. Also, I have to say that the Senate Republican campaign committee wasn't very well organized. They just took for granted that I'd run for the Senate.

DePue: Who was in charge of the—

Edgar: Mitch McConnell.

DePue: Who was in charge of the Illinois Republican Party?

Edgar: Oh, that's irrelevant. (DePue laughs) Harold Byron Smith, who was a good guy, who was one of the best state party chairmen we had, wanted me to run for governor because that's what everybody cared about. But who was really... Trent Lott wanted me to come out and see him, and I went out and saw him.⁴ They just all took it for granted that I'd run for the Senate. I remember him saying, "You've been governor, but this is what really counts, here in Washington." And in the 1990s, that wasn't where the center of action was. The center of action was really at the state level. More things were happening at the state. Washington was kind of in gridlock. But it was obvious that they had a Washington approach, and I didn't have a Potomac approach. And they couldn't answer just a lot of personal questions about all these restrictions on how you raised money and what you could do and things like that. I kept worrying about how I can't afford it. Again, I don't want to live in an apartment house with three other U.S. senators; that just was not what I wanted to do in life at that point. I knew I wasn't going to have a mansion as I'd had the last eight years, but I wanted Brenda to feel comfortable, because Washington would be quite a change for her, too.

The other factor was—our grandkids were out in Colorado. Well, Elizabeth wasn't in Colorado yet, but Brad was in Colorado. He had one, and had another one on the way, so I knew that's probably where the grandkids were going to be. We also thought, gee, we want to watch our grandkids grow up, and Washington, DC, is the other direction. You're going to be tied in Washington; you're not going to control your schedule. You're at the mercy of whoever's running the Senate when you're there. So if I hadn't been governor, I wouldn't have hesitated to run for the U.S. Senate; but after being governor, U.S. Senate to me just was more of a step down.

Also, the third option was, I'd had the heart surgery; I knew I had limits in life. I mean, I was mortal. Someday I'm going to die, and there are a lot of things I want to do. I want to travel, I want to see the grandkids grow up, I want to go walking with my dogs. I'd been governor for two terms; things were in good shape. Is there a lot more I could have gotten from that?

DePue: Well, that's the question. At that point in time, what did you think you still needed to accomplish as governor?

Edgar: We still hadn't gotten the school thing done. That still was hanging. But the budget, we had it in good shape. We had done a lot of things—reorganized the higher education governance structure, welfare reform, departments were running very well. I think everybody thought state government was in pretty good shape. In the polls I had good job approval. Nobody that they did head-to-heads with really was

⁴ In the 105th Congress, Mitch McConnell (R-KY) was the Republican Campaign Committee Chair, and Trent Lott (R-MS) was the Senate majority leader.

giving me any trouble out there. So politically, I felt if I had run again, chances were I was going to get reelected. I mean, I'd probably have to really mess up. And I could run for the U.S. Senate and probably even win easier, though the U.S. Senate was a whole new world. I had to learn new terms and other things. But the governor's thing was attractive from the point of view that I knew the job, I liked the job, and I thought I did the job pretty well. But I also thought, I've done the job; I've kind of done it, and now there's other things in life to do while you can still do it.

I don't remember whether Brenda or somebody said, "You ought to put down the pluses and minuses." So I started doing all the pluses about being governor, what I liked about being governor. Well, it was all the perks. I liked having a house, I liked having a cook, and I liked having people (DePue laughs) at my disposal. I even had somebody to polish my shoes. All my life, every night I'd taken shoe polish and my finger and polished my shoes. I didn't have to do that anymore. Then I started looking and I said, "These are all the perks. This is dangerous. I'm going to be fifty-two, and if we stay here four more years, we may never be able to give up these perks." Now, there are other things, but the perks—that's a good job, from that regard. It kind of offsets some of the negatives of the job. I realized, Hey, if I'm going to get out of here and go back to normal life, I better do it before I become so accustomed to this, people waiting on me, that I'll never be able to adjust.

Another thing that happened—I always wanted a place in the mountains. I always wanted a place, whether to live full-time or whatever, but I wanted my place. I'm big on real estate. We have three houses right now. We used to have four. I drive Brenda nuts because (DePue laughs) I always want to buy these places. Around Easter time in '97—I think it was back in late March—I convinced her I wanted to go out to Arizona and look at some land. I wanted to go to Prescott, Arizona. That's up a little bit—it's about a mile high; it's similar to the altitude of Denver. It was considered one of the ideal places to retire. I'd read about it, and I said, "You know, let's go out there. I want to look around and just see, maybe buy a lot or something out there." She said, "We can't buy anything." I said, "Well, I just want to go look." She was always scared when I'd want to go out and look. So we went out there for three, four days, and of course I ended up buying a lot. The lot wasn't that expensive; I think we paid sixty thousand dollars for it.

DePue: How big a lot was it?

Edgar: It wasn't a huge lot. It was in a great view. There's a butte in Prescott that's kind of the symbol, and you had a great view of that; it was in a new subdivision, and you were right next to the National Forest.

DePue: Less than an acre, though, you think?

Edgar: Oh, yes, yes. Less than an acre. We couldn't have had horses or anything on it, but we could have built a home there. She was just glad I only bought a lot for sixty

thousand; I didn't buy a house or something like that. She agreed only because that was the lesser of all the things we looked at. So I thought, someday we'll build something out here, whether we live here full-time or come out and spend some of the time. I remember on the plane back Brenda said, "You know we'll never be able to afford to build a house on there." I said, "What do you mean? That's not a very expensive lot; we don't have to build a very expensive house. Maybe two, three hundred thousand dollars." She said, "We can't afford a three hundred thousand dollar house on your retirement. I don't want to be house poor." My retirement might have been around a hundred thousand dollars at that time. If I served another four years, maybe that would bump it up four thousand dollars. It wasn't going to go up much more because I had my maximum time in.

For the first time, I remember on that plane, I started figuring out, and I said, she's right. If we just build a normal—nothing spectacular—just a normal house out there, I won't have much left in retirement. That's the first time I think it ever hit me that while I enjoyed government and everything, it sure wasn't a great retirement. It was okay, but after, you're kind of spoiled from living in a mansion and running around with all these people with money, and you want to travel and do all these things. I really didn't have much equity in a house at that point. We had the log cabin out north of town, but the question was whether we'd get what we paid for it. I actually realized now that there were things I wanted to do which that pension wasn't going to allow me to do. So for the first time, I seriously started thinking, maybe I need to get out of government and go do something else while I still can make some money, so I can have a comfortable retirement. All that stuff was going through my mind during that period.

I think most people just took it for granted, either I'm going to run for governor or I'm going to run for the U.S. Senate. I had a lot of people trying to get me to do those things, but they were split. There was no uniform pressure on "run for governor" or "run for the U.S. Senate"; it was kind of split out there. As a result, since it was kind of split, I couldn't make up my mind for sure. I probably leaned more toward governor than U.S. Senate, but as I said, I had people kind of pressing me on both.

DePue: Were you hearing from the Ryan camp?

Edgar: They were just waiting to see what I did. George told me later that if I had run for reelection, he was going to quit. He was going to go out and lobby, go make some money, he thought. He figured he was getting to the point where he couldn't keep waiting around. They were interested in what I did. Even some county chairmen who were close to them were trying to get me to run again for governor, because the conventional wisdom was I could win, and they weren't sure he could win. So I remember I went out to Washington and listened, and I wasn't too impressed with the pitch they made out there. They really couldn't answer a lot of questions I had. I came back, and this was at the state fair time. I pretty well kind of thought, I'm going to make a decision sometime in August. And people kept saying, "Well, you got to decide soon." I said, "No, I don't have to decide soon. There's plenty of time.

I'm not going to rush this decision. Now, if you want to go ahead and announce and run against me potentially, go ahead and do it, but I'm not going to make an announcement."

At the state fair, the county chairmen asked if they could meet with me, and I said fine. So I went over to the state fairgrounds—it was probably a Republican day; they were all in town—and I met with the county chairmen. They really put an all-out pitch on "I need to run for governor again." And they about had me talked into it. I have to say, I walked in, and I wasn't going to do it; I walked out thinking, well, maybe I ought to do it again. The first MSI trial had ended about two weeks before, in which one of the people from MSI had been convicted.

DePue: Martin, I believe.

Edgar: No, it was the other one, I think, wasn't it? Maybe it was Martin, yes. Yes, whoever was convicted that first time.⁵ So people thought that might have... It didn't have any impact. In fact, I had people conflicting, saying, "Well, you got to run now; you can't look like this forced you out." I said, "I'm not going to let MSI have any impact on my future. I'm going to decide based on me, not what a jury decided on these people. That's not going to enter into it." And it didn't enter into it. It was kind of an irritant; it wasn't a decisive factor.

Brenda didn't put any pressure on. She really just—

DePue: Well, you know, that's not the conventional wisdom.

Edgar: Oh, I know, but Brenda really did not know what I was going to do. I didn't know for sure what I was going to do. Brenda told me later she thought I was going to run for U.S. Senate. We talked about it, but she never said, "You ought to do this or that." She just kind of listened to me and made comments, but never, "You got to do this or that." I knew she would be happy if I got out. She didn't have to tell me, I knew that, but it wasn't like any pressure from her that I ought to do that.

I really worried about going to Washington. I would still be in the limelight and everything. There's pluses and minuses about being First Lady, but she had worked it out and she was doing a very good job; I think she was probably the most popular First Lady. She was very visible out there, and she enjoyed the projects she could work on. Then to go to Washington, we'd worry about money, and we've never been good at worrying about money. She always worries about money. So I wasn't real sure that she would like the Washington scene. When I went out to see Trent Lott and talk to some people, we thought, that may not be too bad, but still, I worried about the finances and just would she like Washington that much. She

⁵ The first convictions in the MSI trial came on August 16, 1997, when a jury found former Public Aid worker Ron Lowder and former MSI co-owner Michael Martin guilty of bribery and fraud. *Chicago Tribune*, August 16, 1997. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, September 9, 2010, 47-63. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

was at the point where I could get out tomorrow and she would be very happy, but she also felt good about what she was able to do as First Lady and had adjusted well, and I thought that would be okay for her, too. The Washington thing: I wasn't sure how both of us would adjust, but I thought at least I still have my ego thing. You know, they'll call me "Senator." She's going to have to just worry about getting around Washington, DC, and paying bills and things like that, which probably wasn't going to be a lot of fun. And then running back and forth, but I already said I'm not going to run back and forth.

DePue: How about the issue of Washington, DC, as a big city versus Springfield, which is a pretty small, provincial town?

Edgar: That was part of it, though she had gotten used to Chicago—but of course (laughs) she had somebody to take her places and things. No, I thought it would be difficult for both of us, but I thought Brenda may like it less than I did because I'd be busy in the U.S. Senate and she'd be not knowing anybody. I guess she could go to the wives' gatherings, but that may not have been the most fulfilling thing to do. So I wasn't sure how she'd...

But in the end, it was my decision; it was kind of what I thought, too. At this point a lot of people had started to say, "What's he going to do?" Nobody knew because I didn't know. I knew I did not have to decide until I announced. I could let it go back and forth in my mind: not run for anything, run for governor, run for the U.S. Senate.

I remember pulling all my staff together about a week before, and I said, "All right, what do you guys think?"

DePue: Now, this is important. Before you get too much farther into this, do you remember who specifically was in this meeting? Because they do, and they all have memories about this meeting.

Edgar: Yes. You probably have talked to most of them. Mark Boozell, Grosboll, Gene Reineke, Mike Lawrence—I don't know if I can remember everybody. It was a trailer out at the fairgrounds where we all sat.⁶

DePue: Brenda?

Edgar: I don't think Brenda came out that day. I mean, that wasn't the final thing. I think I just got everybody together. I don't think she sat in on that.

DePue: Was Joan there?

⁶ For other perspectives on this meeting and Edgar's thinking about his course of action after his second term, see Mark Boozell, September 9, 2009, 21-24; Al Grosboll, November 6, 2009, 44-46; Mike Lawrence, July 3, 2009, 2-12; Mike McCormick, July 22, 2010, 82-89; Gene Reineke, June 4, 2010, 68-71; and Joan Walters, August 13, 2009, 31-32. All interviews by Mark DePue.

Edgar: Joan was there, yes. (laughs) I remember what Joan said. Let's see, who else was there? There might have been some others there; I can't remember. What I remember is, Joan was adamant: "Don't run for governor." It was more the governor thing. I said, "Well, we got the Senate," and Grosboll said, "I always wanted you to run for the Senate, but it's awful late now. I mean, you got to get organized. You can't just announce next week you're going to run for the U.S. Senate. If you haven't decided you're going to run for the Senate today and you're going to announce in a week, I don't think you're going to run for the Senate. But I always wanted you to run for the Senate." Mark Boozell very much wanted me to run for governor again. I'd say most of the staff did. Gene Reineke went back and forth. He was kind of, "Oh, don't run. You don't want to put up with all this stuff." But after MSI, he said "Well, you got to run again. You can't look like MSI forced you out." He's the one I said, "MSI is not going to impact my decision. I'm not going to let that have an impact on what I decide to do." Joan thought, "Get out. Things are good now. Things won't always be this good. Medicaid will come back, and why put up with all this stuff?" Now, she was director at that point of Public Aid; she had moved out of the Bureau of the Budget. Schnorf might have been in there too. He probably said run again for governor.

Lawrence wasn't in that meeting, excuse me. Lawrence had gone. I don't think Lawrence was in that meeting. Lawrence thought two terms, everything was good—it'd be a good time to leave. I can't remember. I know later on, in future years when everything would come up, he always said, "Ah, don't get back in." Though one time he told me, "Don't hurry up, though; I'm getting my calls returned a lot quicker now that (DePue laughs) you possibly would be a Senate candidate." So I think the consensus, except for Joan, was, "You ought to run again."

DePue: Most people who remember that meeting have it divided pretty evenly between the three options.

Edgar: I don't remember who else was as adamant as Joan about not running. Who thinks they were?

DePue: I had the impression that Brenda was in the meeting as well.

Edgar: She might have been. Because Brenda and I were talking all the time, I don't remember if she was in that meeting at all. She was in other meetings, but I don't remember. I knew Brenda; if it was left up to her, she'd just as soon not run. But she also figured that was my decision, and she never put any pressure on me. She was pretty well into whatever I wanted to do. Joan I just remember was very adamant on it. Lawrence I think was adamant, but I don't think he was in that meeting. He might have been in that meeting. He might have come back for that.

DePue: He would have been somebody you would have sounded out anyway if he wasn't at the meeting.

Edgar: Oh, yes. So my sense was he thought I probably ought to not run.

DePue: So it sounds like the meeting didn't move the ball forward very much; you were still split between three options—maybe two by this time.

Edgar: Well, no. In the end, I had to make those decisions. I just wanted to listen, see what they had to say. (DePue laughs) And it was right after I'd met with the county chairmen, I think. I remember walking in there maybe being a little more pro-running again than I had been. But again, I knew I could be pro- because I didn't make the decision that day. I could let whatever was in my mind play with it until I announced. I had the luxury, probably; I could pick where I wanted to run. [Peter] Fitzgerald was out there making noise about running for the U.S. Senate, but I think he would have dropped out if I'd have gone in. I really don't think he would [have run]. He said he wouldn't, but that's what you always say. But I really wasn't too worried about him. In the general election for governor, I think Poshard was out making noise, but I didn't worry about him.

DePue: That'd be Glenn Poshard.

Edgar: Um-hm. So it wasn't like, gee, you're going to run, you're going to lose. I've lost, so I know that's a possibility, but that didn't really enter into it; it's just where I thought I would feel the happiest. I didn't want to end up doing something and six months later regret it. I finally set a date. I still didn't know what I was going to do, but I set a date. And I don't know if you've got the specific date; I can't remember...

DePue: August twentieth. So that's just a week or two after the end of the state fair.

Edgar: It was between the state fair and Du Quoin. I decided I was going to do it at the mansion. That kind of tipped people off to some extent—it doesn't sound like he's going to run for something. I have to say that I kept thinking, probably in the end, I'm not going to run. But I also knew that I hadn't made that decision. I could think that. I could think I'm going to run for the Senate. I had that luxury. I kept thinking the pluses and minuses and all that. So the night before the decision, I had three speeches written for me.

DePue: Had written for you?

Edgar: Yes. Run for governor again, run for U.S. Senate, or not run for anything.

DePue: Who wrote the speeches?

Edgar: I can't remember who worked on them. Mike was gone, though I think Mike might have come back for that. I think we had Mike come in and work with... I very seldom ever did written speeches. I did at the State of the State and the budget, which were very technical, but other than that, I didn't do written speeches. But I decided, I think I'll do a written speech, use the teleprompter.

The suspense around the state—Chicago, usually they don't care [about] Springfield, but there wasn't anything else going on, so they were really into this. Everybody was

into this, and nobody knew, because anytime anything like this happened, somebody always leaked it. Well, nobody could leak it because I didn't know yet. People were going nuts—the press in Chicago particularly—because they couldn't get anybody to tell them, because nobody knew. So it came time, and we actually had two TV stations from Chicago that broadcast this live. I mean, (laughs) they don't broadcast anything live in Chicago from Springfield. They just kind of ignore it. It was in the afternoon; I forget what day of the week. It was probably a Wednesday or Thursday, something like that.⁷ But they came down, and they were going to broadcast it live. I had invited people who had been involved with me over the years. I invited the two Republican leaders to come in. I didn't invite the Democrats because that would have been a tip-off that I wasn't running. You're not going to invite them if you're going to announce you're going to run as a Republican for governor or for the U.S. Senate.

The night before, I had very few staffers involved. We only had about four or five staff people over there, because I just said, "I don't want anybody else, because I don't want this out." So I practiced all three of the speeches. I got to the speech saying I wasn't going to run again, and I broke down. I could not get the words out, because you realize that if you don't run, you're just voluntarily giving up all this power and something you worked for all your life. I'd never experienced that. It dawned on me why it's so hard to get people to retire, why people stay too long: they don't want to let go. They worked all their life to get to this point, and to me, the governorship was the point. As I said, I viewed the U.S. Senate as kind of a step down. I remember talking to my heart doctor, and he said, "I don't know if any of them are very good for your heart, but I think the Senate would be a lot easier than being governor. Governor's got to be a lot more stressful, so maybe the Senate would be all right." I remember Brad, who didn't want me to run, said "I think the Senate would be more like a halfway house. You know, it'd be better."

As I said, I can't get it out that night. Everybody said, "You don't have to; you can run again. You don't have to give up, quit. You don't have to make that..." So I said, "I'm going to think about"—

DePue: Was Brenda one of those people telling you that?

Edgar: Yes. She said, "You don't have to. You can run again, if you want to. If that's what you want to do, you can run again." I said, "Well, I'm going to think about it more overnight." They just kind of groaned. (laughter) I said, "Guys, it doesn't matter. We got three speeches; we got the thing set. I'll make up my mind, but I don't have to make up my mind till one o'clock tomorrow afternoon." So we went. Brenda didn't know for sure what I was going to do. She had thought all along, until the last few days, I'd probably run for the U.S. Senate, but I was pretty well sure at that point I wasn't going to run. It was a question of do I run for governor again or do I not run? That last few days, it was pretty much down to those two.

⁷ Edgar announced his decision Wednesday, August 20, 1997.

Elizabeth was in Champaign cleaning apartment houses, and she had to take a day off. She said, "Taking a day off is going to cost me money. I don't want to come over there if you're just going to run again." I said, "No, come on over, Elizabeth." "Okay." We found out later, she went to whoever she was cleaning apartments for—she never told them she was the daughter of the governor—and she didn't say, "My dad's going to make an announcement." She just said, "I have a family matter." They didn't know until they saw the picture in the paper the next day that Elizabeth was... They said she just never traded on the fact she was the governor's daughter. She was just cleaning out apartments over here; that was her summer job.

Brad and his family came back from Colorado. They came in that morning, and we were talking. I said, "I got three speeches. I don't know yet. Your mom and I are going to have lunch, and I'll decide at lunch." He said, "Give me the speech that says you're going to run for governor, and if you ask for that, I'm running out of the room with it, because I don't think you ought to run." He was just adamant I don't run for governor.

DePue: Because?

Edgar: He just thought it was too much stress; it's not worth all the headaches. He'd worked in the Bush administration. He was just adamant I should not run for... He didn't care about the Senate; he called it kind of a halfway house. But not governor—he just thought that was too much stress, too much stuff. He was adamant. Elizabeth didn't have a strong feeling about it. Again, Brenda said, "Whatever you want to do. I don't want you to do something you think I want you to do; then you're not happy."

DePue: Then she'd be stuck living with you that way.

Edgar: That's right, exactly. (laughs) So Brenda and I went off to lunch. I kind of went through, and I said, "You know, I don't think I want to run. It's hard to give it up, but two terms—I'm tired. I've got staff that wants to move on; some have moved on, and others want to move on to make money. I don't want to have to keep worrying about keeping..." Because I needed a good staff. I felt that was extremely important. I said, "The polls are great. My job approval's at an all-time high. This is probably a good time to get out. I don't worry about my heart, but I do"—and the doctors all said, "You could do whatever you wanted to do." But just for a variety of reasons, I thought this was probably a good time to not run again.

Now, in the back of my mind I also thought, I'm still young enough that this doesn't mean never again, but probably not. Once you get off the merry-go-round, it's hard to get back on. But I rationalized that maybe something down the road someday.

DePue: When you were making this decision, you were about fifty-two?

Edgar: I was actually, I think, fifty-one at the time. I think I turned fifty-two the next year.

DePue: Still very young, still got a lot of working years ahead of you. At that point in time were you envisioning, okay, if I do step down, this is what I'm going to be doing?

Edgar: No, I didn't know for sure what I was going to be doing. I thought it would be fun to be an ambassador, but we didn't have a president. We might someday. I didn't necessarily think I wanted to be in the cabinet—not that anybody ever offered me one—but I don't think I would have. I'd rather be governor than have some wise kid at the White House telling you what to do. But I didn't know at that point. I wanted to see the grandkids, I wanted to go for hikes, I wanted to travel. I traveled a lot as governor, but I always had to have a coat and tie on and try to pronounce names I couldn't pronounce. I just kind of wanted to go on my own. If I look back now, fifty-one's pretty young, but I was set. I'd been doing that for thirty years, and I thought it was maybe a time to do something else.

So finally at lunch, I just said, "Brenda, I think I'm not going to run." She said, "Are you sure?" and I said, "Yes." So we called the kids in and told them. Then I had about fifteen minutes before the speech. I called Trent Lott; I wanted him to know. He just took it for granted I was running for governor when I said I wasn't going to run for Senate. I think he never thought I wouldn't run for anything. I didn't tell him, I just said, "I'm not going to run for the U.S. Senate." He said, "Well, you got to find us..." I said, "We'll find you a good candidate." Then Bob Kustra, the lieutenant governor, I told him, and I said, "Now, do you want to run for...?" He'd already told me he didn't think he'd want to run for governor; he was beaten in the [Senate] primary two years before, so he was kind of down on running. I didn't talk to Jim Ryan, but I had talked to him maybe earlier, and Jim Ryan had had a bout with cancer, so he was not interested in the governor's race per se.

DePue: Jim Ryan, the Illinois attorney general.

Edgar: Yes. I called Jim Thompson. I told him. He said, "Oh, I wish I'd have known. I could have made a lot of money on the bets out there on this." (DePue laughs) Then I called George Ryan, and because George is kind of a guy that always leaks stuff, I said, "Now, George, don't tell anybody..." And I wanted till like five minutes before. I remember walking out on stage. Channel 7, ABC—Andy Shaw was their guy, and he said right as I walked out, "And we just heard from the Ryan people the governor's not running again." So within five minutes they had leaked it. (laughs) I almost changed my mind, I was so mad.

So I went out. Carter Hendren came over with Pate, and he said when he saw the people there, he said, "He isn't running. This is the old group from Charleston that was originally with him. This is a farewell. I just knew it walking in; this was going to be a farewell thing." Because they wanted me to run. Lee and Pate wanted me to run for the U.S. Senate because they wanted George as governor; they knew they could get a lot more off George, but they wanted me to head up the ticket to help the whole party. That's what they wanted me to do, and I knew what they wanted me to do, and I wasn't going to do it just to help them. They thought

George would say yes a lot easier than I'd... But they wanted me at the top of the ticket to help the ticket.

Bob Collins, who was my good friend—who was the guy at WGN radio, the most listened-to guy in the Midwest—was down. He let out a gasp. He just thought for sure I was going to run again. I just remember when I announced it. And I got through that speech. Brenda was scared to death I was going to break down, but I didn't. I got through it.

DePue: Why was it different than a couple days before?

Edgar: The night before? I think I just practiced it, and I just kept going and didn't stop. A few years later when I did the governor's thing, I kind of broke down in that. But I think maybe I had myself prepared for that. It was a written speech, too, so you just kept reading. She said, "Now, don't slow down when you get to that part; just keep going." Again, it's just very difficult to let go. I now understand why you need mandatory retirement age for a lot of folks, because people don't want to let go. There are times when you've got to let go.

DePue: Governor, if I may, the first couple sessions we talked, I was amazed by how focused you were in your political career when you were in junior high and high school, even figuring out who your successor was going to be in high school. It's not the kind of thing most kids think about.⁸

Edgar: No, no—my mother always worried about dropping me on my head when I was a baby. But I had come to that point where I had done it. I didn't have the desire, like some of my fellow governors, where all they do is sit around and talk political strategy. I'd go to the governors' meeting, and I kind of wanted to go watch a movie. I'd got there, I'd done it, and there were other things I wanted to do in life for the first time. And going through that open-heart surgery, you begin to realize you are mortal. I mean, you don't have forever, and you've got to make some choices.

I think if I had gotten beat, I wouldn't have been happy; I would have wanted to come back. I know why people want to come back. Or if things weren't going very well. But things were going great. Even with MSI, our numbers were still up there, and I wasn't worried about MSI affecting anybody around me; it was just an irritant with the press. We hadn't gotten the school finance thing resolved, but I thought we had a shot at that. The Senate Republicans wanted a compromise, and I figured out we could get that done. So that was maybe the only thing out there hanging, but I thought we were going to get most of what we wanted. We were going to get the foundation level; we were going to get more money. So I felt like: go do something else. I really wanted to travel, and I wanted to spend time with the grandkids and things like that, which I guess I hadn't thought much about

⁸ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 21, 2009, 89-90.

when I was in high school or college. But again, I had kind of gotten to do what I wanted to do.

Also, I think the other thing that kind of surprised me—it wasn't just right then but a few years before when I realized that I really did not want to go to the U.S. Senate. When I was younger I always thought I wanted to be in the U.S. Senate, but I really thought after being governor that would be anticlimactic in a lot of ways. Now, if you were the Senate leader... But that would be a long way down the road before you'd have a shot at that. And as far as president or vice president, what you've got to go through to be president—you've got to about give up three, four years of your life, and you may never be anything more than a blip on the public opinion polls. I'm a moderate Republican; there hasn't been a moderate Republican since Gerald Ford, and he got there by accident.

DePue: You wouldn't consider George Bush a moderate?

Edgar: The father?

DePue: The son.

Edgar: No, not the son. No, no. The father was somewhat of a moderate, but he got there because he was vice president and he'd kind of moved a little more. I think he'd have had a hard time getting there if he hadn't been vice president.

DePue: After you made the announcement, did the press suddenly pay a lot less attention to what you were doing, and were you surprised by that?

Edgar: A little bit. I mean, they didn't say, "Well, he's a lame duck." In fact, I was a lame duck, but we got just as much done. It didn't affect our ability to get things done. In some ways I thought it made it easier because Democrats weren't as worried about giving me things—I did have a Democratic House—because I wasn't going to be there to beat them up in the next election, run at the top of the ticket and affect them. Republicans still needed my help in the election. While I wasn't going to be a candidate, they still wanted me to do commercials and campaign for their people. As long as my approval rating stayed up, that was the key. That's always kind of the key. If your approval rating is high, then the legislature can't ignore you. So, if anything, I thought it might go up. It's kind of the tendency. You leave—people are like, oh, gee, we're going to miss him.

DePue: You remember what your numbers were?

Edgar: Oh, I don't. They did polling before I made my decision. High fifties, and probably disapproval was low twenties. They got a little higher right before I left, I think. Some polls had it higher. It's just according to how you looked at it. Some had me in the low sixties. But it was very solid, very... Again, that made me feel good, because I thought if you go out on top, that's what people are going to remember. That day, after I did it, I was the most relaxed I think I had been in, I don't know, maybe ever. I had the family there. I felt good about my decision. I remember

there's a picture—I don't have it here, I have it at home; it's my favorite picture—of Dakota sitting on my knee with his fireman hat on, Emy and Daisy are in front, and Brad, Stacey, and Elizabeth are behind me. I'm sure it's in the book. I've got a smile, and that is a genuine smile. (laughter) I just was very relieved.

The next day I went up to Chicago and made a tour of all the TV stations. I remember they introduced me at Fox and they said, "The Edgar era has ended" or something like that, and I said, "Well, not quite. I've still got about a year and a half to go." As far as the lame duck feeling, it never happened till after the election; once the election was over and there was about two months left, then you definitely were a lame duck.

DePue: Did you in those last few months start to think about who was going to be left on the bench when you left, and who was going to be in position to move up in the Republican Party?

Edgar: Not too much. We had a full slate of constitutional officers. I'd have liked to have seen Bob Kustra—no, that's not it. It must not be... I'm surprised it's not in there.

DePue: I'm thumbing through the book here.

Edgar: Jim Ryan. If it hadn't been for health, I thought he probably would have been more likely than George. George, I knew, had a lot of support. The two leaders, Pate and Lee, wanted him, because as I said, he was a little more agreeable to their requests. Some of the county chairmen wanted him. Some weren't sure. If I didn't run, I figured he'd get most of the party support; so I indicated if he was going to be the candidate, I would support him, knowing that Bob and Jim weren't going to run. There was some talk that Loleta Didrickson might run, but I didn't think she would have a chance in a primary against George at that point.⁹

DePue: Judy Baar Topinka's the other constitutional officer.

Edgar: She and George weren't real close, but they were allied. I mean, she wasn't going to run against him. I knew that most of those party folks wanted George, so I didn't have anybody to fight that with at that point. I had hopes that George could rise to the occasion; I had my doubts. George, I always thought, was a legislator, not necessarily executive branch. I didn't think the way the secretary of state's office—not knowing that there was anything illegal—but just his style of management, I wasn't sure he was going to be able to run the governor's office. But people surprise you. Nobody thought Harry Truman was going to do a good job as president, and he surprised people. And nobody really thought Gerald Ford could, and I thought he was a good president. So I had hopes. But I was at that point where, look, if the party folks want George, that's fine. I've done my thing. The Republicans have done well under my eight years; we've won a lot of offices and things, so I'm going to go on and let them worry about it. I'm not going to worry about it.

⁹ Didrickson won election as comptroller in 1994. She ran in the 1998 Senate primary.

DePue: The next question, you anticipated, and that's: Now you're in a position where you know you're going to be resigning, and—

Edgar: Not resigning—not running again.

DePue: Not running again, I'm sorry. Important distinction there.

Edgar: It is, (laughs) right.

DePue: So you start thinking about what's after life in the governor's mansion.

Edgar: I had no idea. I didn't know at that point what I might do, but I also knew I had a year and a half, and I thought something would come along. But I didn't at that point know what I was going to do for sure. I wanted something, though, that would give me flexibility. I did not want to go work for a corporation and get caught in all that, because again, why do I want to be maybe a number-two or number-three guy when I used to be the number-one guy in a multibillion-dollar business called the state of Illinois? So I thought, whatever I did I wanted to make sure I had some free time so I could travel, I could go for hikes, I could see my grandkids, and things like that. But I did not at that point have any idea what I might do.

DePue: Let's talk a little bit about travel, because I know right at the turn of 1998, you took a trip to India, which is kind of ironic, because as we speak today—

Edgar: The president's there, yes.

DePue: —President Obama's over in India.

Edgar: Actually, what happened: right after I announced I wasn't going to run, we took a trip to Europe. We did Ireland, France, Italy.

DePue: Was this as governor?

Edgar: Yes, as governor. This was a trade mission. Princess Di was killed about that time, too. It was about two or three weeks after that, because I remember going to Paris; we went by the hotel because that was a big deal. The India trip was actually about six months away. It was the first part of January. That was my second trip to India. I'm glad the president's going to India. I think we don't pay enough attention to India. We pay so much attention to China, and we forget India is about as big, and it's probably in a lot of ways a greater potential for us. So I'm glad he's in India.

DePue: It's the largest world democracy.

Edgar: It is, and it's the largest English-speaking country, too. It's the largest everything. Even when the Soviet Union was still around, they had the third-largest number of engineers in the world, behind the United States and the Soviet Union. Now that the Soviet Union no longer exists, they're probably the second-largest number of engineers. It is very diverse. I always tell people, "You have not seen the world

until you've been to India." China's kind of dull compared to India. There's so much variety in India. I had always had good relations with the Indian community in Illinois. In fact, when I ran for governor—I can't remember if we talked about it—*The Daily Times* or *The Indian Times*, the major English-speaking paper in India, sent a correspondent along with me because they were doing a story on Indians in the United States getting involved in politics, and they knew that the Indian community was close to me. I always got a kick out of that because it's not often you run for governor and have the Washington correspondent for *The Indian Times* cover that event.¹⁰

DePue: What do you say to those in the media or private citizens maybe saying, "Why are we spending so much money sending a governor over to these places?"

Edgar: A governor? Trade. It's important. Governors do it all the time. What does the *Tribune* keep haranguing Quinn on? It's not just the budget; they want him to create jobs. Well, we're in an international marketplace; especially in a state like Illinois, an awful lot of our jobs depend on being able to export, and India—huge country. We have Illinois corporations over there. It's very important that we have good relations. A lot of our agricultural products are exported. I'd say the trade missions that I went with, usually half the people with me were agricultural people because that was one of the great opportunities we had, be it Mexico, China, or even Europe. But especially in Asia and Latin America, agricultural goods are a huge trade issue.

And the other thing: in most countries—particularly Asia, Latin America maybe more so than Europe—personal relationships are very important in how you deal with those. While in the United States, a governor or a president doesn't have a lot of discretion on who buys what, in a lot of those foreign countries, they do have a lot of discretion. I remember early on when I was secretary of state, I went to Taiwan. The Taiwanese were great at playing that trade thing and going to the state level, because they got shut out at the federal level once Carter recognized mainland China. They went to state governments and got to deal with governors and state legislators, because state legislators became congressmen later on, and they would always announce a grain deal. They'd buy so much grain off the state of Illinois or the state of Iowa. And the same way with these other countries; you wanted those relationships.

I went to China in '96, and I remember meeting with the vice premier. I had a trade group with me; I think among others, John Deere was with me. I remember they had told me, "You probably have about fifteen minutes to meet with this guy." We ended up going for about three hours. But when I first went in, he said, "Oh, Governor Edgar, we're so glad you're here. We know you would be a good friend." I'm thinking, a good friend to mainland China? (DePue laughs) They said, "We very much appreciate your sponsorship of the most-favored-nation resolution in the governors' conference." I was chairman of the economic development committee, and we'd put a resolution saying we supported most-favored trade recognition for

¹⁰ Edgar is probably referring to the *Times of India*.

China. Governors are big on trade and we thought that would help trade. Those resolutions go to all the congressmen and they go right into a wastebasket; I mean, nobody (DePue laughs) pays any attention to them. Well, they knew in China that I'd done that. I had made a speech one time at the Council of State Governments about when the Three Gorges Reservoir was being built in China. The United States decided they didn't like that and they said we couldn't trade with them. Well, Caterpillar had a huge contract with China on that project, and they were going to lose that. I remember I was somewhat irate; as governor, it's one of my big employers, and nobody talked to us about it—just someone from the State Department had arbitrarily... In this speech I made reference that we can't do that. The federal government needs to work with states, particularly when it's going to impact their—

DePue: What was the opposition to the Three Gorges project?

Edgar: Environmental. This was the Clinton administration; that was the excuse. This speech was given in San Juan, Puerto Rico, at a Council of State Governments meeting. There might have been a hundred people there. The guy said, "We very much appreciated your remarks about Three Gorges." They had a copy of that speech. They had somebody there. Again, I don't know if the hundred people I gave that speech to that day remembered what I said, but they knew I'd said it. They said, "We just very much appreciate your friendliness toward us. Is there anything we can do?" I said, "By the way," (laughter) "John Deere's been trying to get an answer on some trade thing for like two years." He said, "Let's look into it." Two days later, John Deere got their thing worked out. As I said, we spent three hours talking to this guy.

I was told by somebody when I first went over to China—this was a guy that ran the Motorola plant in mainland China—"You got to remember: in Asia, it's relationship first, then it's quality of goods, then it's the law. In the United States, it's the law, it's quality of goods, and it's relationship. But in China, in Asia, it's first relationship, and number two is so far away it doesn't really matter. It's all relationship." So one of the things as governor, not only these trips, but also, I think I mentioned earlier, I spent a lot of time with the consuls-general in Illinois. Next to New York and Washington, we have more foreign diplomats stationed in Chicago than anyplace else in the country. I used to spend time with them. Whenever they'd have important people coming through, they'd want to show that they could get that person in front of the local power, the governor, and I'd try to meet with them because I enjoyed it. It was a chance to get to know a little more what was going on around the world, but also it created relationships, so they felt positive about Illinois. If we had Illinois companies and they had a problem, we could maybe make a call and try to help them get into the front door.

I was pretty well on a first-name basis with three presidents of Mexico because I went down there all the time. We did a lot, particularly agricultural products. I remember one time the president of Mexico was in Chicago, and I had to leave the state. I had to go someplace, but I went by and just saw him briefly. I said

something about, “You know, the state fair’s coming up, and we’re trying to get the secretary of agriculture for Mexico to come”—who I knew, and who later became the presidential candidate. But I said, “We haven’t heard anything.” And he said, “When’s the state fair?” I said, “It’s in about two weeks.” He said, “He’ll be there.” And he was there. But it was because I was for NAFTA; I was known to be very supportive of good relations with Mexico. We’d had Pat Buchanan talking about we got to cut off all these imports and these people, and I took the other side of that. So there was a personal relationship there, and they felt good about me, and I think then they felt good about the state. So those trade missions I think... Now, can you always prove that you got so much? You always take credit for it, but you need those types of exchanges, you need those visits. Long-term I think it pays dividends, particularly for a state like Illinois where exporting is a big part of our economy.

DePue: Do you think these world leaders that you were dealing with had an appreciation for the federal system of government, where the states have a specific, unique voice in the process?

Edgar: I think they do. Their consuls-general and their ambassadors understand the American political system, and they explain that. I think sometimes the consuls-general from Chicago probably embellished my importance (DePue laughs) just so they looked better. I think I told you the story of when I was in Egypt; it would have been in '95 after I was reelected. I traveled the Middle East; I took a group of Jewish businessmen and Arab businessmen. But I kept getting all this VIP treatment and seeing Rabin. They sent apologies when I was in Jordan that King Hussein was in the United States. Then Mubarak changed his schedule to meet with me. They all thought—because it had been reported by their consuls-general—that I was the leading candidate for vice president of the United States.¹¹ Again, I think these guys embellished so they looked good, but that helped. But we had good relations.

About five years after I left the governorship, the person who handled that for me said that the consuls—there aren’t many, because they rotate those—there were a couple left, and they said they had never had that type of relationship with the governor of Illinois before or since, where they felt that the governor’s office would respond to their request. If they had somebody they needed to get in to see—the governor or whoever—if that was possible, they could write back in their dispatches that they’d met with the governor of a key state. That was important to them, and I think it was good for Illinois. So those trade missions were part of that. And truthfully, it was fun, too.

DePue: We certainly spent a lot of time on educational reform, which culminated in 1998, so I don’t know that we need to go back to that again. Were there any other initiatives in the Edgar administration that were significant?

¹¹ During this trip in April 1995, Edgar met Yitzhak Rabin, prime minister of Israel, and Hosni Mubarak, president of Egypt. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, August 30, 2010, 58-62.

Edgar: There's a lot. There are things like adoption; it's probably the one I always say. "What are you proudest of?" I say, "It's not the budget." I mean, we got the budget—that was very important—but we can see it didn't take them too many years to screw that back up. But in adoptions—

DePue: And we talked about that quite a bit already.

Edgar: Did we?

DePue: Yes.

Edgar: Oh, I didn't remember us talking about that. Because I just remember that when we left, I felt that was probably the most significant. We talked about the presidential library, getting that started. The environmental, the parks and recreation. We set aside a lot of land and I think did a lot there, and got the hunters and the environmentalists and everybody kind of together to see if they could reach some...

DePue: Maybe this is the point then to talk about, how do you in a more systematic way capture the legacy of your two-term administration? And that's where you get to *Meeting the Challenge*, which I've been referring to all the way through—both of us have.

Edgar: There's an old saying that someone asked Winston Churchill, "How's history going to remember you?" and he said, "They're going to remember me well; I'm going to write it." (DePue laughs) I think Zell Miller, who was the governor of Georgia at the time, told me that. I don't have the ability to write like Winston Churchill, nor would anybody buy my books like Winston Churchill's books were bought, but we decided that we needed to put something together.

DePue: Isn't there a requirement to do that anyway?

Edgar: Not like this, no. You got to send all your papers over to someplace to get stuffed into some corner of a building that probably nobody ever looks at, but no. It was my decision that we needed to write a book or do something, because what I always worried about is the written word is what people go to for looking at history. They don't really listen to radio programs or watch old television programs; they look at what was in the newspaper. For the most part, state government gets kind of ignored by the Chicago papers, and that's where most people go look. And usually the reporting is a little shallow; there's not too many reflective pieces. My last day in office, the papers all wrote stories and it was all about the latest fight with the legislature, so there wasn't a whole lot. Or there were one or two they thought were big issues. There were a lot of big issues the media never got into because they weren't necessarily partisan fights. An awful lot of things we did in health care, we did in human services, that never were a headline, and they were complicated. Did we talk about KidCare?

DePue: Yes.

Edgar: That was a good example where we had to leak that to the media just to get them to cover it, because they don't cover things like that. But a very significant program, because it was the first time—we didn't have too many things we could spend a lot of new money on. But that's a major departure for us, to start providing health care for children of the working poor—not just of the poor, the unemployed, just people on public aid, but other people. A lot of those things occurred day in and day out and didn't get any coverage. So we knew we had to put together something to make sure that didn't get lost.

The other thing—and I don't think we captured it in here as well as I would have liked to—it wasn't just the program things, it was just the way state government was run in those eight years. The most continuity they've ever had in state government. I mean, my cabinet pretty much stayed intact for the entire eight years, and that's never happened before. Many of them were asked to stay on for most of George Ryan's time; I would say in those departments, he didn't get in trouble because they knew what they were doing. But that continuity and well-functioning agencies were part of the reason that I thought we had job approval, because people felt like state government worked. Northern Illinois University does a poll every year on people's attitude about state government. They ask about the legislature and the governor. During those eight years was by far the most positive attitude the public has ever had about the governor's office in Illinois. It built up while I was governor, and the last two years, it was at a peak; then it started back down when I left and has continued to go down. It came back a little bit Blagojevich's first year—not anything like we'd left it—but then it just took a nosedive. So again, I wanted to make sure we at least had our say on that, and that's why that book came about.

DePue: Who did you put in charge of writing this, of collecting this?

Edgar: Tom Schaefer was the person who wrote it, who had been a journalist when I first was a legislator then became secretary of state. He was a journalist. In fact, they used to have something called the Gridiron, and the media would do a spoof on the politicians. The first year I was secretary of state, he played me as preppy. Then he went off to Florida, came back, and was in Public Health in the Thompson administration. I almost hired him over, but I didn't; he stayed in Public Health. But I always thought he was a—and I know Mike Lawrence, they all thought he was a very good writer, a good press person there. We also thought he was enough removed, too. It would be kind of hard to have somebody in-house, the governor's office; they might have their own biases. So we thought he'd be a good person to do it, and I thought he did a good job. We had all the agencies and everybody put together materials for him to look at and to talk about.

DePue: Just the way you organize something like this is important in the first place. Did you have a strong voice in determining what the specific chapter titles were going to be, what the subjects were going to be?

Edgar: No, but I had ideas about what ought to be in there, what information and things, and they'd run things by me. I am a little known as a control freak, so something like this—he had all the time he needed to talk to me, and I kept making suggestions. Tom did a good job. Lawrence got a little bit involved, but again, he thought it was too close. He was already down at the Simon Institute at that point. Eric Robinson, who was my press secretary by then—Tom Hardy had left—they all worked [on it], but it was mainly Tom Schaefer.

DePue: Was this published with government money?

Edgar: No. No, I paid for it out of campaign money.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about the law as it applies to campaign money for the state of Illinois.

Edgar: The law at that time was that whatever you raised, you could take as personal income if you paid taxes on it. That was the only requirement. You had to pay income tax. In 1998, there was an ethics bill, as they like to call those things, passed, and it changed—in fact, Lawrence and the Simon Institute were kind of pushing that, working with a freshman senator named Barack Obama and some others, because I think we were the only state left where you could take campaign money and convert it into personal income. They changed it, but (laughs) to get it passed, they had to grandfather everybody in. So anything you had raised prior to July 1, 1998, you could still convert to personal income, but from then on, you couldn't; you had to give it to a charity, to a political campaign.

DePue: There's an obvious follow-on question here, then.

Edgar: All mine was under the grandfather clause, so I could do whatever I wanted with it.

DePue: Well, how much?

Edgar: Oh, about that point I probably had about three million dollars, maybe a little less. We did the book, which I thought was a legitimate campaign expense. I gave a million dollars to Brenda to give out to charities of her choice, mainly women's shelters and things like that.

DePue: During the administration? At the end of the administration?

Edgar: Right at the end, right at the end. She originally worked with Ronald McDonald charity on that. They kept it for a while, but she decided where they gave it, then they gave it back to her. She still controls I think six hundred thousand—no, maybe it was four hundred thousand left in that today—and she'll give it out to various charities.

Then the money I had left, I thought, I'll hold it; maybe I might run again. But I wasn't going to use it on personal things; I gave it out to what I considered was

related to my time as governor or to politics or to charity, so I've given a lot to charity for my part of it.

DePue: You talked before about that house down in Arizona, and, well, we can't afford that house. Was there a discussion between the two of you about how to use that campaign money?

Edgar: No, no. I mean, Brenda would be aghast, and I never even thought... I always said it's going to have to be something related to politics or to charities. The closest we might have ever come was when we got the house in Champaign. You can keep security for six months after you are governor. I didn't keep security. I didn't think I needed it. But when we moved to Champaign, I did take some of it to put a fence around the house and a gate for security reasons, because I was going to be gone a lot, and Brenda was somewhat... You've got people that are always going to come up (laughs) because you were the governor, they voted for you once, and stop by. We paid taxes on it. But that's the only time that—and there, I argued that was a lot better than me having the state provide me security for six months. That fence, you know, gave us some security and particularly gave Brenda a lot.

I had people say, "You're foolish. You ought to declare that and take it. You don't have any money; you can do that." I said, "No, no, I'm not going to. Yes, maybe I could do it legally, but I think it would be a terrible perception out there." That's just not... And I said that there will be enough things that will come along that I'll want to help out, particularly charities. We've given money to Eastern from that to set up an Edgar lecture series for both Brenda and I. We'll probably do something here at the University of Illinois. Every Christmas, every year, I give out so much to certain charities we're involved in that I think are worthwhile. Brenda doesn't give out quite the same amount annually as she did to shelters for women and things, but she still gives some out to those areas. She gave out a lot of that money initially to women's shelters and things around the state.

DePue: Did you have any thought about where you would want to put your personal papers as you were closing up?

Edgar: I don't know when that decision was made. We have to give the state—

DePue: Yes, the state archives gets the formal papers.

Edgar: They get the formal papers. I always thought putting something at Eastern... I remember Julie Cellini called me and said, "We'd like to have those at the historical..." I said, "You've got a guy with a beard who you care about the most. (DePue laughs) Eastern doesn't have a president; all they've got is a governor, so they might pay a little more attention. But if you want to pay for them, I'll be happy to give you copies of everything." I don't know if they ever asked for copies. A lot of my personal things are down at Eastern. In fact, in about three weeks they're going to open up the Edgar wing of the Booth Library, a room that they named after both of us. They have artifacts from our administration in there, and they have stuff

in the library. You can go to Eastern to get a lot of the original materials from the Edgar administration.

DePue: This is more back to the governance aspect, and it's another money question. Before, several sessions ago, we did talk briefly about the pension problem in the state of Illinois, which has only grown exponentially since you were in office dealing with it.¹² Was there also something in your last year or so of the administration where you offered early retirements to some state employees?

Edgar: We talked about it. There was a discussion about early retirement; the legislature didn't want to do it, and Ryan didn't want it done. This was right after the election; there was some talk about doing early retirement again. They put it off; they did it four years later.

DePue: I wonder, though, if in a thumbnail sketch you can talk about the problems you were concerned about with the pension system that the state had at the time.

Edgar: Unfortunately in the eighties, the decision was made by the Bureau of the Budget during the Thompson years not to fund the pension funds where they should have been funded, but just to be sure they covered enough for payout. That's when you began to see the big gap in what should have been there versus what was there. The legislature had a tendency to pass pension sweeteners, sometimes without really identifying legitimate revenue, so that problem had expanded. In the early part of our administration, we couldn't do anything about it; we hardly had enough money to keep the doors open. But by '94—

DePue: Were you making regular pension payments that you were supposed to be making?

Edgar: We weren't making as much as we should have been making, no. It was the same pattern that had happened during the Thompson years. We pretty much kept that. But then in '94—this was much to Dawn Clark Netsch's chagrin, because she wanted to beat me over the head on that—we made a proposal to begin to rectify that, and worked out a compromise with Madigan that passed in the legislature in '94 and went in effect in '95. We began to close that gap. Now, it was long-term, it was going to take several years, and there were steps you would increase as you went along. But we began to move the other direction. One of the things that was said when we did that was, in ten years, you need to relook at this, because we're looking, and we don't know for sure what things are going to be like in ten years. But this very well needs to be altered. Of course, ten years came and nobody looked at it; they haven't made any changes.

What hit Blagojevich was—we complain a lot about him not doing the pension stuff—he got one of the big bumps where it went from a lot more money than the year before. Of course the state already was spending beyond its means, so they weren't in a very good position to deal with that. He just kind of ignored it and made minimal payments. But the problem was, I think, more during the Ryan years.

¹² Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 18, 2010, 26-30.

At the end of the Ryan term, they should have taken a look at this and been ready for how to handle that down the road. It did get more and more difficult as you went along. The feeling was the state would be in better financial condition, a lot of things would happen—inflation, all this and that—and they'd be able to do those things. So the pension problem is still with us. It's worse now than ever before; they did early retirement between the Ryan year and the Blagojevich year, and that aggravated it. I think it did a lot more damage just to the quality of state workers than it did to the pension. A lot of those people who left, we never really replaced with equally competent people, and that's part of the real dilemma the state faces right now. It's not just a financial problem; I think it's also a personnel problem. We don't have a lot of the right jobs filled. We saw, unfortunately, a lot of jobs that probably weren't necessary created to give high salaries to people who were basically political hacks, as opposed to those middle management people who run state government.

I think we got good marks for recognizing the pension problem and beginning to try to do something about it, but it wasn't the final solution; it was something that had to continue to be reviewed and updated and dealt with. Unfortunately that didn't happen, and now I think we're in a dilemma where we're going to have to look at it. Again, it's not going to be solved overnight; it's going to take several years to solve it. For the people who look at state government and who are willing to loan money to state government or rate state government financially, they want to see a plan in place. What we gave them in '94 was a plan that I think the rating agencies and everybody felt good about. Unfortunately, we got away from that, and we're going to have to deal with it. They began to take steps this year, in 2010, when they made some changes on retirement and the pension plans, but I think they're probably going to have to do more, and they still haven't figured out a way to fund all that.

DePue: Let's move on to the 1998 gubernatorial election, then. You've already talked a lot about who the obvious candidate was; it ended up being George Ryan. I think he had a primary candidate or two.

Edgar: I don't think so. Did he? It didn't amount to anything.

DePue: Senator Oberweis—was that a later campaign?

Edgar: Oh, no, that was a lot later. The Democrats had quite a primary battle.¹³ In fact, that probably is why George won the election: the wrong guy won the primary. Glenn Poshard was probably the least likely of three of the—

DePue: A rare downstate Democrat on the ticket.

¹³ George Ryan easily defeated Chad Koppie, 608,940–98,466, to secure the Republican nomination for governor. On the Democratic side, Glenn Poshard (357,342) defeated Roland Burris (290,393), John Schmidt (236,309), Jim Burns (55,233), Larry Burgess (6,075), and Maurice Horton (4,955). State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast at the General Election, November 3, 1998*.

Edgar: The reason was, you split the votes between Chicagoans. It's kind of like what happened this year in the Republican primary. I'm sure Roland Burris was probably running again. I can't remember. (laughs) But you had a guy who was close to Daley. He went on and became assistant attorney general under Clinton. I'm blank. Was that Schmidt? He was a lawyer—

DePue: We'll figure that out later.

Edgar: —who I thought would be a terrible candidate. He had talked about running for a long time. It turned out as the campaign went along he got to be a pretty good candidate. But Madigan in the end supported Poshard. I asked him one time, "Why are you supporting him?" He said, "Because it's not Daley's guy." The thought about Schmidt was he was too close to Daley for Madigan, so Madigan supported Poshard. I was trying to think who else. As I said, Roland Burris seems to run for all these things. I thought he ran that year; I'm not sure. Jim Burns, who had been a U.S. attorney for a while, ran. He just fell apart. I mean, that was a surprise; we all thought he would be the one. It seemed like there was somebody else, too. Again, they split the votes up there. Glenn had Madigan's help, which helped, because you have a guy, a ward committeeman from Chicago that's very effective, on your side. Then he won that primary.

One of our concerns about George Ryan always was that he was too conservative to win statewide, because he was always the darling of the conservatives in the Republican Party. He was anti-abortion and all these things, against taxes. The fear was he couldn't win the general election, but then he gets a candidate who's more conservative than he is. George was against abortion, but he would allow it in the case of rape or incest. Glenn Poshard was against that, and gay rights he was adamantly against. George was kind of like me; he'd go along with most things on equal protection. But on those social issues, Poshard was so conservative for a Democrat, that's what the media concentrated on. George all of a sudden became the liberal, the moderate candidate, and picked up a lot of Democratic support, particularly from the Chicago area, because they thought Poshard was too conservative.

Early on it looked like it was going to be a runaway. The IEA even endorsed George Ryan, even though Poshard had been a member of the IEA; they wanted to be with a winner. I think they made their endorsement in July, and I think at that point George had probably a twenty- to fifteen-point lead. I think that endorsement probably cost Glenn Poshard the race, because it ended up George only won by 4 percent; it got very close at the end. I always said that the way John Schmidt ended up improving, if he'd have been the Democratic nominee, he'd have had the traditional Democrats. I think he would have shoved George to the right, because he was much more of a moderate than George was. I think he would have probably won that race.

DePue: You already talked about the popularity ratings, that you were very high in the poll ratings. You were leaving the state in very good shape, so why wouldn't the public take a chance on another Republican?

Edgar: I think it helped. Change was not the thesis of this campaign; in fact, if anything, we want to keep going. That was kind of the theme out there. I'm just saying that I think it helped. In the end, though, people do look at who their choices are. I think some of the problems we thought George might have, developed later on in the campaign. But again, Glenn Poshard never could get out of the doghouse with the traditional Democrats, and the media just kept talking about this. He also would not take money from PACs; you don't unilaterally disarm. (DePue laughs) So he was way behind. But in the end it got close, and I think it had more to do with the two individuals. Particularly I think a lot of people began to think George maybe wasn't the darling of the moderates.

DePue: Well, even in that campaign season, there was a whiff of scandal.

Edgar: There was. I don't think it had any impact, though. There was a whiff, but it never had legs. None of us really thought it was going to amount to anything. I don't think it did in that campaign.

DePue: Yes, it certainly didn't seem to have an impact, but why did people around you think that it wouldn't matter?

Edgar: It was something that happened because somebody got a license; I'm not sure you can blame the secretary of state because they screw up and somebody gets a license. Now, what came out of that was maybe widespread abuse on giving out licenses or trading for money.

DePue: Trading for campaign donations.

Edgar: That's where the money went. Supposedly that's where it went. But yes, that became a lot more widespread than what initially was heard. Again, you never know sometimes which ones of these stories catch and which ones don't.

DePue: Were you hearing those kinds of rumors coming from the secretary of state's office while you were governor?

Edgar: No. I didn't think it was managed very well. When we were going through—especially the first few years—tough, trying to cut budgets, George kept wanting to raise his budget. I had more trouble with him on budgets than anybody in the other constitutional offices. And I knew from people who worked for me that had been there, they were saying that it was a lot of politics and things. But there wasn't any sense in me that there was widespread corruption—mismanagement maybe, just poor management. But that was just part of the style of that administration.

DePue: He's a constitutional officer: secretary of state. You're the governor. If you had thought there were some serious allegations of corruption going on in the secretary of state's office, what actions could you have taken?

Edgar: You're limited. That's an independent agency. The only control in some ways you have over that is on the budget. You can veto the budget, but George would always go get his legis—and the Democrats, he took care of them, too. You realized you were limited on how much you'd probably be able to cut out of his budget, because guys all felt like... George had been a legislator. He knew the system well. He had support from both Republicans and Democrats. Democrats were probably as supportive of George as secretary of state and as governor as the Republicans were. Also, my theory was, he's the secretary of state; he's going to run that. Thompson didn't interfere with me; I ran that. That's an independent agency. Somebody said, "Well, the governor's the boss." He's not the boss. Those guys are all independent, and it's kind of what they can get for the legislature.

We would get things sent to us, or the state police would get things and they would investigate. In fact, there was a case we got, and it might have been that case that bloomed. I remember I got a call from George real upset because the state police was looking at it. I said, "George, they've got to look at it. We got MSI that way. If you get something, you got to look at it, because if you don't, it's obstruction of justice." Now, George is not a lawyer; he's like me, and I didn't really understand that either. That's just George, "Why would you be doing that to me?" "Well, you got to look at it. It doesn't mean anything's going to come of it." But I knew George long enough that I didn't worry about that, because that's just George. He did not like criticism. That's kind of what got him in trouble. In my experience with George Ryan, I never thought he was dishonest; I thought sometimes his managerial style maybe wasn't the best. I thought the legislature was a better place for him than the executive branch.

DePue: How about the allegations that there were patronage violations, that he was kind of turning a blind eye to the new *Rutan* decision?¹⁴

Edgar: Oh, nobody knew for sure what that meant. You'd have to fight that out in court about *Rutan*. To me it'd be foolish to do it, because you don't want to spend all your time in court. Knowing George, he was taking care of as many Democrats as he was Republicans. (laughs) I didn't ever hear too much about serious violations of *Rutan*. There were always questions about *Rutan*. We used to get allegations against us, and it got to the point where if you were a Republican, it was held against you. We had people that wouldn't hire Republicans because you could never explain the fact that they were the most qualified. People would figure you were playing favorites and end up in court, so they hired the Democrats. So *Rutan*, I always

¹⁴ *Rutan v. Republican Party of Illinois*, 497 U.S. 62 (1990). By a 5-4 vote, the decision 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.

thought, was unfortunate in a lot of ways. I think in some ways it penalized people for being involved in politics, more than it rewarded them.

I knew enough that I thought they were putting people in who probably weren't qualified and creating jobs, and they weren't filling some of the vacancies. That's the same kind of thing they did when they got to be in the governor's office, and the same thing that Blagojevich did, though on a much larger scale. But that's part of my thought about management. I think politically you're far better off not to hire that political person if the guy can't do the job, because it's going to cause you more problems in the long run.

DePue: This one is very much still on the same subject: At the end of your administration, like almost every executive officer that's heading on the way out, you want to appoint some people to boards and commissions. Can you explain your rationale for doing a lot of these appointments at the end?

Edgar: I didn't want to lose some of those people before I left, and they weren't going to go before I left. I left, and I wanted to put them places. They were all very competent people; they were appointments that I had to make, and I put them in.

DePue: So the timing of it was, you wanted to get good people into these positions but not lose them from the administration itself?

Edgar: Yes, there were people that I needed. One of the things you worry about once you are a lame duck, people start jumping ship. Gene Reineke left, Tom Hardy left, and that's fine, but I didn't want to lose everybody, because you need to keep them until—you don't want to be the only guy left to turn the lights out. A lot of these people had worked hard and had done a good job.

Joan Walters is a classic example. I didn't think Pate Philip was probably going to keep her, because she was a woman and he wasn't high on women. He'd never liked Joan because she was pretty forthright in her opinion. I wanted to make sure she got taken care of. She had been on a school board years before, and she would have been a good person dealing on labor relations with schools, so I put her there. The lady that I was going to replace, I had put there. Her husband had had a job with me; they had been taken care of very well, but Joan would have been a better person in many ways. Basically he was a former senator, and he went to the Senate and of course stirred up things. And I understood him doing that because it was his wife, but I thought Joan would have been good on it.

Those jobs aren't for life. I mean, she'd been on for a while. I had some other vacancies where I wanted to put people in that I thought had done a good job and would do a good job. I didn't try to put a round peg in a square hole anyplace; they were very good. I had an understanding, I thought, with the Senate leader, but the new governor after the election wanted those appointments himself and promised some of them to the Republicans in the legislature, so they decided to hold them up.

DePue: Mike McCormick—this probably won't surprise you—had a pretty colorful story about your decision that he should be the first to go before the Senate, in the hearings on all of these late-term appointments and commissions. Do you remember that at all?

Edgar: I don't remember why, except Mike could charm anybody and he comes out of a political family.

DePue: That was in essence his memory about it; that it was some stroke of political genius on your part to have him go first because of his connection with his dad, C.L. McCormick.¹⁵ But it went south pretty quickly after that.

Edgar: It was all because of the election, and Ryan basically got to Pate. Now, Joan Walters: I would have probably had a hard time no matter what, because Pate doesn't like Joan Walters. But the others shouldn't have been a problem because a lot of them were people that had paid their dues, too, politically. They wanted to work a compromise, and I said, "No, those are my appointments. I talked to you about them. I'm at the point where I really am tired of playing games with you guys; just turn them all down if that's what you want to do." I think Mike's got approved in July. I don't think we waited on him until afterwards.

DePue: That one was for Labor Relations Board.

Edgar: Yes, which took effect, I think, in January, but I think he got approved early. Some we couldn't; some we had to wait.

DePue: This is December 3, 1998. So this is about a month after the election. Here's the headline for a *Chicago Tribune* article: "Edgar Accuses Philip of Lying over Appointees." Was that true?

Edgar: I had talked to him, and I thought we had an understanding. Now, the Joan Walters thing doesn't surprise me, but the rest of them, I thought we had an understanding.

DePue: In the political arena, when one politician is calling another politician a liar, that's serious business. Were you indeed furious? That's what the article says.

Edgar: Was I what?

DePue: Furious.

Edgar: I was very upset. I am still upset over that.

DePue: (laughs) You're still upset.

Edgar: That's the only thing I'm upset about. The only thing I ever really got mad about Pate—and (laughs) Pate was—I mean, the things he'd do you. I understand what

¹⁵ Mike McCormick, interview by Mark DePue, July 22, 2010, 87-90.

happened. George Ryan got to him because he wanted those jobs; they put those jobs out. Like the U of I trustee—Pate got one of his guys and his U of I trustee. That was what they were hoping for, because George was going to be a little more lenient toward them or give them more what they wanted. There were some people on my list that actually ended up getting appointed. I was at that point where this was the one thing that I wanted, to take care of some folks who... The reason we were in good shape financially was Joan Walters. She saved a lot of people by being tough. To this day I've always thought that's very unfortunate. That would have been a nice way for her to end her time in state government. **Highly** qualified. Everybody that we put into those spots was qualified.

DePue: To what do you credit Philip's objection to Walters? All those budget battles, or was it more?

Edgar: Oh, part of it—she's a woman. He thought she was too liberal, but she was a woman, too. Pate's not known for being—now, maybe he's changed and he's not—but at that point, Joan was never his favorite. There's other things I don't really want to get into, even in here. (laughs)

DePue: I love the adjectives that sometimes get into the newspapers, and here's one of them—

Edgar: Who wrote the story, Parson, or Long?

DePue: Christi Parsons and Ray Long. This is pretty far into the article, about six or seven paragraphs. Just picking up on the adjectives: "Though the bombastic Philip and moderate Edgar never have gotten along well, Wednesday's crossfire represents one of Edgar's most openly acrimonious comments about Philip to date."

Edgar: Yes, Pate and I were different. There were times we agreed, and sometimes we didn't. But this one really—I was upset about it.

DePue: Did you keep on speaking terms after that?

Edgar: Oh, yes, I spoke to him. Yes, yes. As I said, they called and tried to work out a compromise. I said, "No. First of all, these are governors' appointments. I held these back; the reason we didn't do a lot of these in the summer is we had to keep these people around. I needed them to run state government. That's not uncommon." Again, there was nobody there that was not qualified, and there were a lot of other people that got caught in that crossfire; that was unfortunate. I knew where it was coming from, too. He [Philip] didn't just think it up; the next governor wanted those appointments. Those appointments were appointments that came due under my administration. I wasn't trying to appoint anybody early that should have been under the next administration; those were ones that we had, and that was my prerogative. So we did not have a good (DePue laughs) last few weeks on that with the Senate president and the incoming governor. I never said anything to Ryan about it. In fact, I had him over at the mansion the next day, and the word I heard,

he thought I would probably cancel the meeting. But I never said boo about it. He denied it.

DePue: He denied having told Philip that?

Edgar: Yes, but I know from people in the Senate staff what happened.

DePue: Otherwise, it sounds like you were ending your second term on a very high note. Did you want to do anything special on your way out, as far as the rest of the staff was concerned? Did you do anything special?

Edgar: Some of them went on out in the private sector; I tried to help them as much as I could. Most of them, though, were pretty competent people; they found their own things. As it turned out, I think it helped a résumé to say you were part of the Edgar administration. If you had to quickly say you worked for the governor, which governor it was the last few years, to make that clear. I think from what they've told me, that's always been a plus on their résumé.

DePue: Any special party or anything like that?

Edgar: Oh, have a party? No. They had a party for me. They had a surprise party for me over at the—what was it? I can't remember when exactly it was. Maybe it was right around Christmas they had it. The presidents all called in and thanked me—Bush and Ford. I guess Ford couldn't call. Bush called, and Ford sent a special tape he had made. The staff gave me this gift; it's a signed document by Abraham Lincoln. That was my gift from the staff.

DePue: Original Lincoln signature.

Edgar: Yes, yes, on a naval—which are rarer than the army—and it's signed "Abraham Lincoln." A lot of times he'd just sign it "A. Lincoln." He never signed it "Abe"; he hated "Abe." He didn't like being called Abe. But he'd sign either "A. Lincoln" or "Abraham," and that's an Abraham. I like bands, and so they had the Springfield Municipal Band come over and play that night, too.

DePue: What did you think of the media's assessment of your administration, going out?

Edgar: There wasn't much. I thought it was somewhat shallow, or there just wasn't much. There were little stories in the *Tribune*. The *Sun-Times* I actually thought was better than the *Tribune*. That was about it, too. I don't remember the Springfield paper; they might have done something. I don't remember.

DePue: I'm digging around here. I need to pull out what the *Peoria Journal Star*—is that the right name?

Edgar: Oh, the Peoria paper might have—the editorials. Some of those other papers, yes.

DePue: Here is the assessment. I'm not going to read the whole thing, but I'm going to read excerpts from this. This is December 28, 1998, the *Peoria Journal Star*, and here's the headline: "Edgar Takes Stock: 'We Got a Lot Done.'" Here's how it starts: "Two terms in office, sky-high public approval, a legacy of rescuing the state from fiscal quicksand, and how is Gov. Jim Edgar being remembered? Competent, steady, a good caretaker. It's not exactly the stuff of legend. With his stiff manner and even stiffer hair, Edgar has never inspired gushing sentiment." And then farther down in here, "Edgar and the legislative leaders' deadlock delayed action on a new budget—"

Edgar: Wait a minute, who wrote that story? Is that AP [Associated Press]?

DePue: Christopher Wills.

Edgar: Oh, yes. That's AP, okay. I thought you meant it was the *Peoria Journal Star*.

DePue: Well, it appeared there.

Edgar: Because their editorial is much different.

DePue: Okay. "Edgar and the legislative leaders' deadlock delayed action on a new budget. Finally, weeks later, they cut a deal that gave Edgar most of what he wanted. But those victories so early in his first term proved to be defining events of his eight years in office." Now I'm going to be quoting House majority leader Barbara Flynn Currie: "'As governor, he was not someone who seemed to have larger plans.' But Edgar scoffs at the idea that a governor must have a sweeping vision: 'We couldn't be this vision kind of person that everybody talks about. We had to manage.' Others insist Edgar did have a vision, just not a flashy, expensive one that involved big legislative initiatives."

Edgar: I hate the word "vision." I think it's the most overrated—I have yet to see any vision that's ever worked anyway. What a governor has to do, and especially needs to do in Illinois—when I came in, and it needs now—you got to manage. If you can't manage, a vision doesn't do you any good. You got to manage. You might go back and ask Barbara Flynn Currie if she might have a little more positive (DePue laughs) recollection now after, you know... Most of her quotes lately have been pretty good.

But I think at that time, a lot of them—I don't think Wills was even around in the early nineties; I can't remember. But I thought things went well. To me, the most important was what did the public think? The public's pretty good in the end. The numbers I saw, the studies I've seen, the public thought things worked pretty well. They thought it then. I think in retrospect they think maybe even better. But at the time, we got high marks from the public.

We weren't real exciting for the media. There weren't great stories. I think also the media in Springfield has a tendency to focus on the legislature. The legislature's important, but in the overall state government, that's just really a

small part of it. To me, more important is what the directors do in the various agencies than what the legislature does on a day-to-day basis, and that pretty well gets ignored. Good government is kind of dull. A good fight in the legislature is a lot better thing to write about, and that's what most of the reporters concentrate on. I'm sure a lot of legislators were glad when we left, because they were hoping they'd get a governor that said yes to them, and they did; they next year they got a lot of what they wanted, and we've been paying for it ever since.

DePue: By December of 1998, you're looking at a month away from handing over power to the Ryan folks. What do you know about what you're going to do in your future?

Edgar: I knew at that point. We decided, I think it was October probably, sometime like that. It was after the last budget was resolved and everything, so I didn't want to finalize anything. One of the things [I considered] when I did the pluses and minuses—what do I like to do? What I like to do is talk to kids. I like to talk about government and things. So both U of I and Southern came to me and wanted me to come over and be something at the university and do whatever I kind of wanted to do.

DePue: Lawrence was already down at Southern.

Edgar: He was at Southern. Paul Simon was there, and Ted Sanders was president of SIU; he had been state superintendent during the eighties and had come back to announce my candidacy, to introduce me. We were good friends. He was at SIU, and he wanted me to come down there. Paul Simon wanted me to come down there. I think he was looking for somebody to take over the institute, because he figured he was going to retire at some point, and work with him. Paul and I had got to be real good friends when he came to the institute back in, what was it, '96, roughly?

DePue: Um-hm.

Edgar: In fact, he had privately counseled me on the Senate and things like that. He was trying to talk me into running for the Senate. Although he said he'd be for Carol Moseley Braun, he was telling me the reasons why I ought to run for the Senate.

U of I had auditioned me. They had had me over at the institute to talk about school funding; I gave a presentation on how that all passed, and I decided that was my audition here at the institute. Because I think they thought, Simon is at Southern; maybe it'd be good to have me at U of I. The institute people went to [James] Stukel—it wasn't Stukel coming to them—and said, "We'd like to have Edgar." So they both were talking to me. Actually, I think SIU might have given me a little more, but Brenda wanted to come here particularly, and she did not necessarily want to go down to southern Illinois for a variety of personal reasons.

DePue: But she's from southern Illinois to begin with.

Edgar: Yes. (pause)

DePue: You're not going to go into any more of the rationale than that?

Edgar: No. Her argument also was that U of I was a much more prestigious university than Southern was. Nothing wrong with Southern, but just U of I is more. And she liked Champaign. I also agreed. I liked the hills of southern Illinois, but this was a higher prestige. Also knowing that we'd probably spend time in Chicago, it was a lot closer to Chicago than being down there. So for a variety of reasons, even though I like Ted Sanders, a good friend of mine, and Paul Simon, and Mike was down there. That appealed to me a lot, but I thought the U of I, probably for all variety of reasons, would be better.

As I said, I didn't want to go to a corporation or something like that because I didn't want to get stuck. I wanted something that'd give me a little flexibility, and I'd spend time talking about politics and government and dealing with young people. I thought I might do some corporate boards if those came available, which everybody said they would. They probably wouldn't have today, but back then they did. Times have changed in that regard. So I made that call to do that. So we knew we were going to come over here. But part of the deal, I said, "I've been accepted to the Kennedy School to be a visiting fellow for a semester." Part of the agreement was that I could get a semester off right away to go do that. I was going to do it the fall of 1999.

DePue: This is in Boston.

Edgar: Yes, at Harvard. So that, and they let me have a couple months to recuperate in Arizona when I left, which I really wanted. I just wanted to get away and be out of town.

DePue: What were the terms of employment here then? What would you be doing and what wouldn't you have to be doing?

Edgar: I would be at the institute, but I didn't have to teach a class if I didn't want to. What I wanted to do was go to different classes, which I do. I would have some flexibility where if something came up—like in two weeks I'm going to go out to Rutgers. They've asked me to come out and sit with about four or five people—they're creating a center for the governor or something—and advise them and give them some thoughts. They wanted me to do training things through the institute. The classroom thing was really more my idea. I wanted to be in the classroom, but not necessarily day after day. I wanted to get around and do what I do; I get around to maybe thirty different classes a semester, so you get to see a lot of different students in a lot of different disciplines.

The institute puts on a lot of training things, conferences, for new legislators. We do a symposium after every election in Springfield. One of the things I did this summer, I went up and talked—had a thing to prepare young women to go into public service. It's a three-, four-day thing. I go up and talk to them every year. They have a training thing for municipal officials, which I usually go over and talk

to. So just a variety of things to give my observations and thoughts. I do a lot of talks to groups on leadership, on what I think leadership is, and use examples of what I found in state government. It's a chance to kind of share with whatever my experience in government was. I think with students particularly—I think it's good they hear the theoretical; I think they need to hear the practical, too.

DePue: You definitely would be able to give them the perspective of the practical. How long had the institute been in existence when you came?

Edgar: Oh, the institute's who picked me for the internship program.

DePue: And Sam Gove was the person there?¹⁶

Edgar: Sam Gove was the head of the institute then. I think the institute started sometime in the late forties, early fifties. I'm not sure. Sam came when he got out of school in the Navy at the end of World War II. He said they sent him over to work with Adlai Stevenson, when he was governor, for a year or so, and then he came back. I don't know if the institute was already formally established or not at that point. I don't know what happened to my telegram. The other day I was looking for that. I had the telegram Sam had sent me back in—

DePue: Yes, we had talked about that telegram many sessions ago.

Edgar: Yes, 1968. But the institute had been here for years. I thought it was somewhat ironic that I end up where I started out, with the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the U of I. I've enjoyed it. They've been very good to me. And they don't get too uptight when I dabble in the politics. Maybe a little.

DePue: (laughs) I would assume that they expected nothing less than that.

Edgar: Well, I think they don't necessarily want me running campaigns.

DePue: Do you have a special kind of relationship with Sam Gove?

Edgar: Oh, yes. Sam's still here. He's been retired for a long time, but he comes in. I don't see him quite as much because I run around a lot. But I always said Sam was one of those guys—that's why I got where I got. If he hadn't picked me as an intern back in 1968, I might have been a lawyer someplace working on divorces or wills or real estate transactions. I was going to go law school. I got accepted to law school—I think I told you the story—the first part of that day, and the second part of the day, I got accepted in the internship program, so never made it to law school.¹⁷

¹⁶ Samuel K. Gove (December 27, 1923–January 28, 2011) was a giant of Illinois government and politics: a longtime director of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs, co-founder of *Illinois Issues*, director of the legislative staff intern program that gave many officials, including Jim Edgar, their start in state government, and author of an important briefing paper for delegates to the 1970 state constitutional convention. <http://igpa.uillinois.edu/press/obit-gove>

¹⁷ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 22, 2009, 49-58.

DePue: When you're dealing with these young students today, I'm sure the subject of the internships comes up with them. Are you seeing a lot of potential here in terms of future legislative leaders?

Edgar: Any class I talk to, I always try to put a pitch in for public service and to get involved, whether they do it full time or for a couple years, and just be active in their community. I have to say, I've got a lot of confidence in the future. I think students today are very concerned about what's going on; they're willing to contribute. They're a little more pragmatic than I think we were back in the sixties. We thought we could change the world. I'm not sure they think they can necessarily change the world overnight or want to change the world. I will say if I have any concern, a lot of them don't see government as the way to solve problems. They don't think going into public service or politics is what we thought it was in the sixties. Of course, we were in a different period. We came through that period of the Eisenhowers and the Kennedys, and you thought that was how you changed things. Today I think there might be a lot more skepticism toward politics. Just watching this last campaign, it'd be hard not to. I mean, everything was so negative.

DePue: Well, they have an awful lot to be skeptical about if we're talking about Illinois politics.

Edgar: But I think in general. I don't think it's limited to here. All these negative campaigns and commercials, that's what they see and think. But there's no doubt the recent occurrence in Illinois have not endeared Illinois governmental service to a lot of young people. But they volunteer, they get very much involved in a lot of things that we probably didn't back when I was in school. So I'm very optimistic about the future and enjoy being around them, and I try to get some of them to at least think about going into government service.

I still think that you can have a greater impact in government service than you can anything else, maybe other than the clergy. Because in the private sector, you make a lot more money, but in the end of the day, that's the only advantage I can see. In government, even if you're working in a state agency and you're just an employee there, you deal with folks that come in and need help in many cases, and you might be the difference between somebody living or dying. You definitely can help that person turn their life around. I'm not sure you can do that in the private sector, not to the extent you can do that in public service. You don't have to be the governor to have an impact on people. Now, if you're the governor, you're going to have an impact on a lot more people, probably, but you don't have to be the governor to do good. So I encourage them to think about that. And even if they don't want to stay in all their life, I think two or three years in state government helps your resume. I've seen a lot of people who've worked in state government for a while go out to the private sector and do very well. I don't think they'd have done as well if they'd have gone straight to the private sector.

DePue: I want to finish up today with the handoff that you had with the Ryan administration and talk a little more in detail about that. We'll leave your retirement years for the next session. So specifically, was there a team put together to help that transition?

Edgar: We had a transition group to work with their people. We'd gone through that a little bit with them in the secretary of state's office, but this was a lot broader. The fact that they made the decision to keep about half of the cabinet made that transition—at least departmental, which is very important, I think—much smoother. They kept Steve Schnorf, the budget director, who had come in the last year and a half for me. So that transition was a lot easier in that regard. I had a couple meetings with George—gave him my thoughts on what he needed to think about and do. The key thing for him was who he was appointing, and since a lot of his cabinet were people who were already there, that made for a smoother transition. But in the end, it's the governor, and the parameters that governor sets, that really impacts. They probably were mad we didn't necessarily turn over all our files to them on boards and commission stuff. We didn't necessarily think we should show them all that stuff. Based off what had happened a few weeks before on boards and commission, we were a little leery about some of that information. And some of it, we just didn't want out. But for the most part, I thought—you'd have to ask their opinion—it went pretty smooth.

DePue: They were receptive to what you were telling them, what the team members were telling them?

Edgar: Oh, I don't know if it was so much telling. They might have been answering questions. To a great extent, you had half the cabinet and some of the big departments—really the bigger departments: Human Services with Howard Peters; Kirk Brown, Department of Transportation—

DePue: I know Jess McDonald stayed over.

Edgar: Yes. But I think that made it a lot easier. How they structured their office, they made that their call. We realized that there weren't the closest relations between the two groups over the years, so it wasn't like we expected or we tried to tell them how they ought to run the shop. They were going to have to decide themselves on that and answer what questions they had. But for the most part, a lot of my people of course were busy trying to figure out what they're going to do on the governor's staff. In fact, I forget who we had that kind of headed up the transition from our office. We had somebody designated to work from our office with their people in the transition. There were a couple little things, personalities and some things, that didn't maybe mesh, but...

DePue: Did your security team transition over to be his security team?

Edgar: Not necessarily. They're state troopers, and some did stay. But the head of the security detail—Jim O'Donnell, who had been my guy since I was first secretary of state—he left. I think they gave him something—he did something for a couple

of years—but he went off the executive security. Then George put his guy in, somebody who had been on his detail, to head it up. There were some people that stayed for a while. I can't remember exactly. I'm sure he brought a lot of his people on, and then some stayed—I think in Chicago in particular.

DePue: How about the mansion? Was there a personal tour that you or Brenda conducted for the Ryans?

Edgar: Yes, this happened the day after we got the shaft on the boards and commissions. (DePue laughs) That's the luncheon we had, and he thought I was going to probably cancel it. But I had them over. That was a different matter. This was one thing, and that... I had him over and didn't say a word. We took them around, showed them the mansion, and told them some things to expect and things they had to decide and how to do things. One of the big differences, of course, was we didn't ever let anybody smoke or drink, and that changed under them. (DePue laughs) We had a person who was in charge, and she left. She went to the women's health thing in Public Health. He brought in a guy who had been Thompson's mansion curator, who I think is still over there now. So it was a different setup in that regard.

DePue: Part of this equation obviously is finding a new home. Was there difficulty in moving out of the mansion, some nostalgia that maybe you didn't expect?

Edgar: No, but boy, we sure had a lot of junk, (laughs) stuff we'd accumulated. That's one of my great stories, talking about mistakes I made. I had a lot of books and knick-knacks people had given me, and Brenda said, "We can't move all that." We knew where we were moving; we'd already found a house. I'll talk about that in a minute. So I had to get rid of a lot of stuff. I had this one book; this freshman senator wrote this book about his life, and he gave it to me. I didn't really care. I mean, it was some freshman senator; I didn't think he was ever going to amount to anything, so I gave it to my daughter. Now she won't give me back Barack Obama's (DePue laughs) book personally autographed to me, his first edition of his book. I told her, "Get a dust cover for that book, will you? It's going to be worth money someday."

So once we knew we were coming to Champaign, we had to find a house. Of course, I was still governing and busy, but we'd come over and look, and we'd look. I had criteria: I wanted a house with trees and room for the dogs. Well, if you know anything about Springfield, it's a prairie, and there aren't any natural trees around here. Now, in the old part of town, there are trees, but if you go out in the new subdivisions, there's no trees because there just never was. We looked around, and we couldn't find a place. I was getting frustrated. I told Brenda, "If we don't find a place, I'm not coming. I want a place that has trees, because I can't plant them; I won't live that long. I want big trees." So we looked in Champaign-Urbana for a while, and we just didn't see anything that really had trees, a yard big enough, and the house in good enough... So we looked at a house out in Mahomet that had trees and had a yard. We actually made an offer on that house and they didn't take it. They later sold the house for less than we offered. They thought they could get

more, and they should have taken our offer. There was a house south of Champaign out in the country that had some land and some trees, but I wasn't sure about that.

Then a house came up between Mahomet and Seymour, on the Sangamon River, that had acreage and had big oak trees. Brenda looked at it first and thought I wouldn't like it because I would think it's too modern, and I like traditional—pillars and that kind of stuff. I was used to the governor's mansion. But Elizabeth was over here; she was teaching in Champaign when we first came over. She quickly got out of town after we came, but she was teaching that year. She went out with me. It had these huge trees around it, and the back end had a lot of glass, so you saw the trees. You felt like you were in a park. I knew right then. I figured out how I could fence it in, and there was enough room for the dogs. So I knew right then that's what I wanted. But it turned out all three of those houses were built by the same guy, and they're three different houses. So we made an offer and we got that. Then we had to have some work done on it, and that was done while we were gone.

Packing was a hard thing. Right up to the last minute, the night before we left, people were packing boxes. We had people helping us pack boxes, but there was just so much stuff in eight years you collect, so many things. I'm a packrat; I don't want to get rid of anything. Brenda just was having fits with me on all the things I wanted to take.

DePue: What were the rules as far as what you could accept and keep and what you could not?

Edgar: Anything.

DePue: There was no dollar limit on that?

Edgar: No, there was no dollar limit. Now, if you got anything given to you over \$150.00, at that time, I think you had to report it, you had to list it. I listed everything we got.

DePue: Was that taxable, then?

Edgar: Not that I'm aware of. I don't know, I never worried. You didn't get much. Probably what the staff gave me. That had some value to it. The Republican county chairmen gave me a grandfather clock; that probably had a few hundred dollars value. I'm trying to think.

DePue: Were any gifts that you gave to staff members?

Edgar: As I left?

DePue: Um-hm.

Edgar: No. I gave them Christmas gifts (laughs) every year, usually a book. That was always my tradition of giving books out. They had a lot of books they probably didn't want.

DePue: Sherry Struck—

Edgar: Yes. Sherry would know more of that than I would.

DePue: —your personal assistant, she remembers pictures of the capitol building, watercolors.

Edgar: Oh, yes, that might have been what we gave out at the end. Yes. I think we still got some of those left, too. I'm going to give you one. (DePue laughs) In fact, I was going through stuff one time and I found a bunch of those left. Oh, a lot of things like—see that vase there?

DePue: Right.

Edgar: We're looking at a vase here that has the Polish insignia. I got that given to me by the Polish government. Things like that. A lot of things from government that I got that I wanted to keep. A lot of those things are down at Eastern now. I haven't seen some of them for a while. But a lot of gifts from governments when I'd gone overseas and come through.

DePue: This clock that's been chiming through all of our interviews?

Edgar: This is secretary of state. The last secretary of state meeting I went to in 1990—it was during the campaign—was in Connecticut, and the secretary of state there gave out that clock as gifts to the secretaries. The plaque's come off and we got to get it glued on. We had that out at the cabin when I was governor and then brought it here when I came over here. Let's see, that was a map I had of the development of the Great Lakes. And I love that, because it has California as an island, which I always thought was appropriate. But I had that in the office in Chicago. Behind you, because they knew I was interested in Henry Clay, somebody gave me a letter signed by Henry Clay; I've got a picture of that letter.

DePue: And it's out of your eyesight here, but it looks like a signed letter from Franklin Roosevelt.

Edgar: That's something I bought at a signature... Nobody gave me that. I thought, though, it's appropriate to have a Democrat up here in a university environment; I shouldn't just have all Republicans. We still have stuff—come to our house—I don't have too much stuff from state government in the house. A lady did a watercolor of the mansion, gave to Brenda, and we have that up. But other than that, people come through and say, "Where's all your governor stuff?" I say "I don't have it here. I've got some in my office." I had an office in Chicago, and I had all the pictures of all the heads of state I've met, and I no longer have that office. Those pictures are in a box someplace. I had those up here at one time.

For the most part, it was knickknacks and memorabilia that I saved. As I said, I save everything. (laughs) We left the mansion; all the boxes came over here. Then

we went to Arizona and two months later showed up, and here were the boxes. I mean, they were up to the...

DePue: It would be intimidating when you're seeing those boxes.

Edgar: I know I kept saying, "Where are the governor's staff when I need them?" you know, the people in the mansion. The day I left office, we flew out of Springfield Airport in a private jet because it didn't matter then; I could fly in a private jet and not have to worry. It was Brenda, the two dogs and me, and one trooper. A trooper did go to take me down there, and then he came back. That was the last time I had a trooper. Flew down to Scottsdale. We had a new car; somebody had driven it down there, and I paid their way back. The next morning, I got the two dogs and we went out. I had a Beach Boys CD, put it on in the car, and I just remember we were going out to go for a hike. I had a smile on my face. And they're right, I didn't smile a lot; I usually was pretty serious. But I had a smile on my face that day—the two dogs and I, heading out to go hiking. That was less than twenty-four hours after I'd given up the governorship. And I felt pretty good. I was looking forward to that, and I felt good about what had happened the previous thirty years. I thought we came out of that in pretty good shape, so I felt pretty good.

DePue: Had to learn how to drive again.

Edgar: Well, I'm not like Thompson. Thompson let his license expire. There was always a question of how well he drove before, I guess, (DePue laughs) and they had to take him out to the state fairgrounds. But I had always driven as secretary of state, particularly when I left the state. Even as governor I'd driven some. Now, there was some worry; the staff didn't think I could function—not only drive, they just didn't think I could function without somebody around. For eighteen years, every day I'd had a state trooper, at least when I was in the state. Particularly for the past eight years, I'd had a state trooper every day no matter where I was. But as secretary of state, at least when I was in the state every day, I had a state trooper show up. So that was a different experience, but that was fine. I adjusted to that pretty good.

DePue: Do you have any memories of the actual inauguration for George Ryan?

Edgar: No, not too much. I just went over there. I remember we drove over in the car and we had number one on the plate, and when we left, we didn't have number one anymore, so I knew (laughs) there had been a change. No, at that point, I just wanted to go. We were tired. Brenda was really worn out from packing and worrying about all that stuff. So that physically was just tiring, and it was just time to go. I'd had all the staff and the cabinet and everybody over to give kind of a final State of the State speech over at the mansion, which nobody paid attention to but I thought was very appropriate. I'd done that a couple days before. I'd moved the Lincoln debate picture back out in the hallway. (DePue laughs) That was the last thing I did the day before I left to go over to the mansion, the day before inauguration. As I said, we were so busy packing we didn't go to any of the inauguration things. We were invited, but we just did not go, except for the

swearing-in. We had a quiet meal at the mansion that last night, just the two of us.

We enjoyed our eight years at the mansion. Being governor is the best job in American politics. People were very good to us. As I said, we felt like we'd accomplished a lot. Maybe we think we accomplished more than some people thought we did, but I knew from looking at polls and things, the public thought we had done a good job. That really was to me the bottom line. Not that you do everything to make the public pleased, but in the end, in a democracy, the public has to feel satisfied for you to be a success. It's nice to get the editorials, it's nice to get the stories and things, but more importantly, I think you just want the guy in the street to say, "Oh, you did a good job." That was then, and as events have turned out with the problems we've had since, they even say nicer things. But even then when they didn't know anything else, they just knew eight years of me, people felt good, so I felt good about it. I had good people around me. I can't stress that enough. I was fortunate to have a lot of good people whose priority was to do the right thing and also to make me look good. But I think they knew if they did the right thing, that would make me look good.

DePue: What was the accomplishment at that point in time that you were most proud of?

Edgar: Oh, at the end, I looked at everything. I thought the adoption was particularly important because if you can provide a loving home environment for children, to me, that's the most important. So much of what we had done and worried about was dealing with kids' problems, all kinds of problems, and then dealing with the problems if you didn't deal with kids—I mean, Corrections and all those things. But going from last in the nation to first in the nation in the number of adoptions—that wouldn't have happened if we hadn't made it a priority and really pushed at it. Like I said, never got much attention. We did get attention at the White House on it from the Clinton administration, but in Illinois, hardly any stories about that. It wasn't a fight. You know, you didn't get in a fight with Mayor Daley or the legislators or anything like that. It's like a lot of state government—to a great extent, it's not dealing with the legislature; it's just pushing your agencies, managing your agencies, making sure there's the follow-up and that you persevere and you get those things done. That's an example of something that was a priority to us, and Brenda was involved. We stuck with that, and they knew it in the staffs. The people in the departments knew it, and they kept pushing it. That's why it's important that a chief executive sets the parameters. I won't use the word "vision." (DePue laughs) Again, I think that's a—I got so tired of hearing about vision.

DePue: That "vision thing" that George Bush got stuck with.

Edgar: Oh, yes, it's just phony. The state was falling apart. We didn't need vision; we needed somebody to manage the place and get things moving again. But there were things we had, and people knew what our priorities were. We set those priorities. We didn't have to tell them every day; this was their priority.

There's another thing that we did, the thing we talked about before with schools. We put together a program that tried to make sure that all the services the social services agencies provided were getting to the kids. We worked through the schools. It didn't cost any money to speak of. But I remember the head of the School Board Association—he'd been principal of the Decatur Schools—said that was probably the most important state program he ever dealt with, and cost hardly any money at all. Everybody in our administration knew that was a priority. Project Success?

DePue: Yes, I'm looking it up.

Edgar: I think it's Project Success. That's something that evolved. It was a little different than I first intended it to be. Bob Kustra worked on it when they set it up, but it's something everybody in the agencies knew was a priority to me. And again, never got much headlines. Especially the Springfield press corps never understood it or cared about it. George Ryan got rid of it after he got in. But if you talked to a lot of people in those schools, that was one of the most important things the state did for them, and it helped them. It was those kinds of things throughout state government and all the agencies that never got any headlines but I thought made state government work a lot better and provided necessary services to folks. Those are the things that I think are the reasons I got the high job approval rating, because people knew that state government was working. We weren't flamboyant, but we were persistent.

DePue: How about on the flip side, then, a disappointment walking out of the office?

Edgar: The only thing I was mad about were those appointments. (laughter) I just felt bad because a lot of those people had worked their tail off. That irritated me. No, there was very little. In hindsight it's too bad that I probably didn't do a little more on succession. I'm surprised that George Ryan's in prison; I'm not surprised that George Ryan had problems as governor. It just probably was not his thing. I don't think there was any alternative at that point politically. As I said, if Jim Ryan had not had his bout with cancer, he might have been... If Bob Kustra hadn't just been beat two years before in the primary.

DePue: What was the office that he was running for?

Edgar: U.S. Senate. I always thought if he could have won that primary, he would very possibly have beat Dick Durbin in that election. He was better known. But he didn't get past the primary. That was too bad, I thought. Then Loleta ran for the Senate that time, in '98. Unfortunately, she got beat in the primary. I think she'd have won that Senate seat. She'd probably still be the senator if she had won that Senate seat that time, and we wouldn't have had Barack Obama.

DePue: A lot of history would have been changed, then.

Edgar: Yes, yes.

DePue: Do you ever think of that, if you'd run for that Senate seat?

Edgar: Are we going to talk about that next session?

DePue: Yes. There's a lot of politics to talk about in our following sessions here. But if you hadn't run for that Senate seat, the one that Peter Fitzgerald originally won.

Edgar: Oh, if I had run that time, yes; I'd have probably run for reelection.

DePue: And then, again, Barack Obama would not have been elected.

Edgar: Yes.

DePue: We started this conversation with that portrait of the Lincoln-Douglas debate being moved, and we kind of ended with that portrait of the Lincoln-Douglas debate—

Edgar: It got moved back. (laughs)

DePue: —being moved back. That's probably a good way to finish off for today. We've got more of your retirement and some fascinating discussions on politics to talk about next time.

(end of interview 23)

Interview with Jim Edgar

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Interview # 24: November 18, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, November 18, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Governor, I believe this is our twenty-fourth session. We've had quite a few. I'm with Gov. Jim Edgar. Good morning, Governor.

Edgar: Good morning.

DePue: We are in his office here in Urbana at the University of Illinois campus. Where we left off last time after a lot of talking, we had just gotten you out of office. We talked quite a bit about the election of 1998. We're at the point now where we can talk about what you've done with your career afterwards. We've already talked a lot about the institute here, and I'm sure that will come up again, but I wanted to ask you about that transition to being a private citizen again. With the secretary of state years, you were right at twenty years in these kinds of positions in the public eye.

Edgar: The transition continues to go on. It's been twelve years now, and there are still mornings I wake up thinking I'm still governor or I'm important. (DePue laughs) It is a transition, which I knew it would be. Part of the decision not to run for office again was that Brenda and I thought we needed to make the transition while we still could make the transition. But I think after you've been at that level—and really for another ten years as secretary of state—having people wait on you and do a lot of things for you, it is a transition. Whatever you say, people are going to print it in the newspaper, print it on television. If you have wants, people are going to take care of your wants because they want to keep you happy. So it's a transition I think that everyone goes through. And it's probably not limited to government; I'm sure people in the private sector, a CEO of a corporation... But when you're in public office, the visibility is so much greater than even a CEO of a major corporation. All of a sudden what you say doesn't really matter that much. You know, people don't seek you for your opinion as much as they did before, or whatever your opinion is doesn't mean as much. When you're governor or even secretary of state, if you want something done, it happens. If you think something, it has an impact on public policy. Now all you can do is talk to people that might have an impact on public policy. So the transition wasn't difficult, but there were things you miss, and you continue to miss those things.

DePue: Was there anything that surprised you in that transition period?

Edgar: I don't think anything that shocked me, let me put it that way. There probably were some things that might have surprised me. I know we had, it seemed like, ten million boxes we had to unpack ourselves over in our new house here in Champaign area. That just took time, and I think for both of us, that was part of the realization you're no longer governor. The story I tell about when I think it hit home the most...When we first left, we went out to Arizona. We had a little bit of an extended vacation, so that was fun. The weather was great and we were fine, but we got ready to come back. Now, we had flown out in a corporate jet, so we still had all the trappings of being important. That's the last time I had a state trooper that day; they met me and took me to where I was going. The next morning they flew back, much to their chagrin; they wanted to stay and protect me for six months, (DePue laughs) but I didn't think I needed protection, particularly in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Two months later, when we came back, we were going to drive back ourselves. I have an SUV, but we have a lot of clothes, and we have two big dogs. We've got to drive ourselves back from Arizona, and that's not just a short little

drive. Brenda was sick that day, I remember. She was just miserable. We delayed leaving, and I wanted to hurry up and get so far. I'm always one of these—once I start travel, I'm ready to get where we're going. Well, it's going to be at least a three-day trip, and we're going to go by Colorado and see the kids. We've got this container that goes on top of the car that I had never—I'm not mechanically inclined anyway—to put a lot of our clothes in, because we had these two big dogs and other stuff, and there was only so much room in the car. So I'm trying to figure out how to make that thing close and put all those clothes up there, and I think I get it closed.

We're about ten miles outside of Scottsdale on the expressway. I'm driving along, Brenda's sick as a dog, the two dogs in the back—that's going to be their longest trip—and we're just all trying to figure this all out. I look out and all of a sudden I see clothes start coming down from above. (laughter) I pull off to the side, and this thing—I had not figured out how to close it—was coming loose, and clothes were getting ready to fly all over the interstate. Brenda's sick, the dogs wonder what's going on, cars are whizzing by. I remember saying, "Where are the troopers when I need them?" (DePue laughs) I think that probably just hit home: you're no longer important, you're just an ordinary citizen, and you've got problems. That probably was the low point in a lot of ways in the transition because it just—I don't like to drive anyway, and I'm trying...

As I said, Brenda was sick. In fact, she was sick the whole trip. We got into Taos, New Mexico, and we took her to the emergency room. This is during the ski season—that's a big ski area—and she's in the waiting room of the emergency room for at least five hours in this row, but she never gets seen. Every time it's about her turn, they bring in somebody from the ski slopes that had just broken their neck or something, and they've got to get taken care of first. So finally she gives up and just puts her clothes back on, and we do get a hold of a doctor back in Illinois and get prescriptions for some medicine. Then we holed up in a motel there for about three days while she recovered, and the dogs and I wandered around Taos. So that probably was the time—this was about two months after I had been out of office—it really hit home that, gee, life's a little tougher now. I mean, these little things that we didn't have to worry about; if we had any problems, we'd just call somebody in the office or the troopers would take care of it. We didn't have anybody to call. We didn't have any troopers to take care of things. So that was part of the transition. Then we finally get back to Champaign and go to our house, and here are these **thousands** of boxes that have just been put in the house, hadn't been unpacked, and we have to unpack. I wasn't shocked by it, but you realized that life was different now.

DePue: Was going through those boxes a nostalgic exercise for you or just a pain in the butt?

Edgar: No, it was a pain. (laughs) I mean, everything was in these boxes, and just to find something to sleep on, you had to get through the boxes. Now, I think the beds were in place, and the couches might have been there, but all our stuff was in

those boxes. We had a lot of stuff. Boxes were just to the ceilings, and we have high ceilings in our house. We found out who our real friends were; some people did come in and help us, but for the most part, it was just... Mike McCormick is a saint because Mike's the only guy that came with me from Springfield; Mike had to kind of make up for about fifty staff people that used to do all these things. So Mike spent a lot of time out there unloading boxes.

DePue: That was your choice, though. Tell us about why you picked Mike and what Mike's relationship is with you then and now.

Edgar: When I was governor the last four years, he was kind of the keeper of the gate, which is a very important spot. You want to come in and see me, he was kind of my personal assistant. Now, Sherry was also, and they kind of worked together, but whenever people needed to get something to me, they'd go through Mike. A lot of times they'd rather deal with Mike than me because Mike was a lot nicer to them, probably, and then he would bring things in to me. So Mike in those last four years was probably about as close to me, of the staffers, as anybody. Mike's a lawyer, and he's also a southern Illinois politician; he's got a very nice finesse about him, and he can BS pretty well when he has to.

DePue: We had a fun interview together.

Edgar: Yes, yes. He's very good at handling me, too. He was a graduate of University of Illinois, and he didn't necessarily want to go back down to southern Illinois, I don't think, and practice law. He was going to come over here and work with me at the institute; plus, I had appointed him to the Labor Relations Board, made him chairman of that, which provided a very good salary, particularly considering how much work they put in. Now, Mike probably put in more than most of them, but still, it was almost a full-time salary and a part-time job, so he was able to be here with me at the institute and run interference. Even though you're not governor, you still have a lot of folks thinking you're governor or thinking you have that influence, and they call you and want this or that. People do want you to come and talk and things like that. So Mike handled that, plus he did the Labor Relations Board. But he kind of got stuck with both Brenda and me.

There's a story—oh, this is about six, seven years later. We're in Switzerland on a trip, and we're going to fly back home out of Zurich. We had come from wherever we had been in Switzerland, and we were going to spend the night out at the airport. We got there in the afternoon. I'm one who always wants to explore. I mean, I don't want to sit someplace; I always want to be on the move. I said to Brenda, "We've got time; let's go to downtown Zurich. We've never wandered around Zurich." You have a real good train system in Switzerland; we could get downtown from the hotel out by the airport. She says, "I'm tired. I'm just going to stay here." Brenda's always tired when she travels with me because I'm always on the go, so she said, "I'll just stay here. You go downtown."

So I jump in a train—it's about three o'clock—I go to downtown Zurich, and I wander around until about six o'clock. I think, I'll go get the train and get back to the hotel. Well, I get to the train station and it's chaos. The electricity had gone off in all the trains in Switzerland. This country that's so efficient, (laughter) none of the trains were running. People always tell you, "Don't worry, everybody speaks English no matter where you are"—I couldn't find hardly anybody in that train station (laughter) that spoke English. Finally I found someone, and they said, "Oh, you got to catch that bus." Well, it was a riot, people trying to get on the bus. It was kind of like the last helicopter out of Saigon. People were pushing people to get on. Finally I got on a bus, and they took me partway. Then I had to get on another bus. This is all tricky because there aren't that many people that really speak that much English.

I was supposed to be back about six o'clock. I think I got back about 9:30, ten o'clock, finally, to the hotel. I said to Brenda, "What'd you think?" She said, "I didn't know what to think. I didn't know where you were." I said, "What were you going to do?" She said, "I was going to call Mike." (DePue laughs) I said, "Mike's in Illinois. (laughs) Mike's never been to Switzerland." She said, "I know, but whenever I have a problem, I call Mike." So that's kind of our thing; whenever we have a need, we call Mike. Used to be we'd called the trooper or we'd call this person; now it's just, we call Mike. That was part of it after eighteen years of having all kinds of staff and all kinds of people around you that took care of whatever needs you had. You had to get used to the fact that you didn't have those people. Poor Mike gets stuck with a lot of that now.

DePue: That story would also suggest that you didn't have a cell phone with you at the time.

Edgar: Oh, no, not overseas. They don't work. I probably wouldn't anyway, but you can't take your American cell phones overseas. You got to pay, you got to get a special deal, or at least you did then. A lot of times I won't have my cell phone with me, even today.

DePue: And you're happy not to take it?

Edgar: Well, I forget it. I don't like carrying it, necessarily. I don't like talking on a cell phone. The reception's not that well—I'd much rather talk on a regular phone. But the transition—it's not done overnight. You do go kind of cold turkey overnight on all these perks you had, but I think the adjustment takes a while.

We had been in meetings in the governor's conference, talking about it. A lot of ways, it's harder on the spouse because the spouse goes from being First Lady and having—for the first time probably in her life—people around her to do things, to nobody. As she pointed out, I had an office, I had a secretary, and I had Mike. She was out at the house doing things she hadn't done in a long time, and she really didn't have anybody. So I think in a lot of ways it's probably tougher on the spouse

than it is on the principal when you go through that transition, and that's what we'd been told.

DePue: Was Mike on your personal payroll, or was he part of the package that the institution provided?

Edgar: No, he was part of the deal when I came over here; they would provide not a huge salary, but a salary. Then with the labor board, we figured that combination, he could spend full time here at the institute. Once every two weeks or whatever, the board would meet in Chicago; he'd go to Chicago and do that, and he could handle that from here. Well, that didn't last real long because George Ryan decided he didn't want to leave me with anything, so they tried to reorganize that board so they could knock Mike off and he could appoint somebody. That got to be a fight over in Springfield. Finally both Pate Philip and Mike Madigan told the governor they didn't think that was a smart thing to do, that they should let Mike serve out the term. I think that lasted for two years, then after that Mike got with a law firm here.

But we got back here, too. Also, in that transition, I had to kind of carve out what I was going to do here at the institute. I remember the first class I went to, Christi Parsons, who now writes for the *Tribune* out in Washington—she had covered me in Springfield—came over to cover my first class. I think she was about seven months pregnant (laughs) if I remember, and it was hot. I was scared to death she was going to have the baby. (laughs) I took her afterwards for a Coke, and I said, "It was hot in there." She said, "Oh, it was really hot." She had her baby, and she's now one of their correspondents in Washington. But that was fun because I had a reporter around me; I really hadn't had many reporters around me.

When we went out to Arizona, one of the reasons I wanted to go out of state was I just wanted to get away. I thought, I need to get away; plus, I didn't think it would be good for me to be around right after a new governor comes in, because people are going to call you, there are going to be the comparisons, and you're going to be upset because this person did that with some of your former staff and has this policy you don't think is right. So I thought for a lot of reasons it was good to be out of the state. The university allowed me that option to go out for a couple months.

DePue: You didn't mind going places where you weren't recognized?

Edgar: I didn't think I would mind, but in Scottsdale, you might as well be in Illinois, because a third of the people in Scottsdale are from Illinois. I remember it was the second day I was there, the second day I was out of office. I don't know if I mentioned last time: the day after I got there, I got up in the morning, got the dogs, got in the SUV, and we were playing the Beach Boys CD. I was going for a hike. I go out in the middle of the desert, hiking around for about two hours, and I come across these two people walking toward me. It's this couple, and I walk up to them and say hello, and they look at me and say, "Aren't you Governor Edgar?" (laughter) About three days later we were out hiking someplace, and I remember

talking to these people; all of a sudden they looked at me and said, “You sound like the Illinois governor. Are you the Illinois governor?” And I said, “Well, I was.” (laughter) So you’d run into some people. But oh, it was a lot different. There’d be a lot of places nobody would have a clue who you were. But every so often you’d run into people from Illinois, and some of them didn’t realize I wasn’t governor anymore. It’s amazing how many people don’t really pay that much attention to what’s going on in Springfield. That surprised me a little bit. They knew I was governor, but they thought I was still governor; they didn’t realize there had been a transition.

DePue: Just walking around with you a few times here on the campus, it’s pretty obvious that the students here today, twelve years removed, have no idea who you were.

Edgar: Oh, no. Not unless I’d been in one of their classes; they wouldn’t know. I mean, these kids were—

DePue: That bother you?

Edgar: No, no. It makes me feel old, though. (DePue laughs) A lot of these kids were born when I was governor, but I wouldn’t know who a governor was when I was seven or eight, so there’s no reason they ought to know me.¹⁸ Every so often I’ll have students come up and say, “Oh, I told my parents you were coming and they were so excited.” Now it’s getting to be their **grandparents**. That’s what really hurt. It was after this last primary election, and I was in Chicago. I was at Mark Kirk’s headquarters, their victory celebration that night. This young lady who is a TV reporter in Chicago came up to me and said, “Oh, Governor, I’d really like to get a picture with you.” Well, good. Here’s this reporter, an attractive young lady, and she wanted to get a picture with me. So we got the picture taken, and she said, “Oh, my grandmother will be so thrilled.” (laughter) I just thought... Used to be, when I first got out, here, it was a lot of parents; now it’s getting to be grandparents, so I know I’m getting old.

DePue: You had a reputation in office—you still have this reputation—of being a very intense person, that you focus on the problem and just work on that problem. So how was it trying to learn how to relax and put that part of your life behind you?

Edgar: Oh, I don’t think I’ve figured that out yet. (laughs) I don’t. I’m not as disciplined. I sleep in, as you know. You can’t get me here early in the morning. Of course, as **governor** you couldn’t get me places early in the morning. I was over the other day talking to the new members. We were in the State House Inn. I said, “I get a little nervous coming in the State House Inn. I remember those seven o’clock breakfasts

¹⁸ By the time Edgar was twelve, however, he was very aware of Gov. William Stratton; he and his friends followed him around town when he visited Charleston, Illinois, and eventually got to shake his hand. He was the first politician Edgar recalled meeting. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 21, 2009, 54-56. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

I had to go to when I worked for Senator Arrington.¹⁹ I'm not an early morning person, and when I was governor, we did not have early morning meetings or breakfasts.

So I think I'm not as disciplined on time. There's a lot of time I spend walking with the dogs, or I'm on the Internet just playing around with horse stuff. I would say that, as you know, I don't do my editing on my transcripts for the oral history as quickly as I ought to. I just probably waste a lot of time now that I didn't waste before. I try to make sure that if it's a nice day, I take some time to take the dog and go for a walk. Nice days, to me, are premiums; you don't want to waste those inside an office someplace. I tried to cut my traveling back. When I got here, you're the former governor, you do get asked to do a lot of things. A lot of people figure you've got all this free time and they want you to do all these things for free. There are things you're invited to do. As governor you used to go to these things because it was important and you think, gee, I need to do these things. Then you find yourself just traveling and running all the time, and that didn't make a lot of sense. The first few years out of office, I was on some corporate boards, plus I was doing a lot of free things nationally, on education and some other things, and I was traveling all the time. Again, traveling as a citizen versus traveling as governor is a big difference, even before 9/11; but after 9/11, it's terrible, the travel, particularly if you don't have people parting the ways for you.

Another thing—it was right after 9/11. In fact, we were in Arizona, and I was going to California to meet with a group. They had invited me to come to this group of businesspeople; they had a few people from politics, and they had invited me to come over. I remember I was going through security at the Phoenix airport. I got pulled out, and I'm getting searched and talked to by this young lady. I said, "Where are you from?" She said, "Jordan." I said, "How long you been here?" "Oh, about a year." I thought, this is ironic. Here I am, the former governor of one of the major states in the union, and I'm getting checked security-wise by somebody who just got here from Jordan in the last year. Now, I'm not sure today that would probably happen. I'd get checked, but I'm not sure somebody just fresh from Jordan would be in charge of doing the security. But I just thought, boy, I'm no longer governor.

So when I first got out, I found myself going a lot of places, doing a lot of things, and I was getting worn out traveling. Traveling was getting to be a real hassle. I do a lot less of that now than I did eight, nine years ago when I first came over here.

DePue: Tell us about selecting a secretary here, because I know Sherry Struck obviously had been that very loyal, helpful secretary who was just as important to Brenda as she was to you while you were in the governorship.

¹⁹ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 28, 2009, 13-15.

Edgar: And of course Sherry didn't want to come over here. In fact, Sherry didn't want to do anything. Sherry wanted to get out of government. She could have done other things in government. She had offers, but she just didn't want to do that. A secretary has always been very important to me. My secretary has got to worry about a lot of things for me. But when I came over here, it was already pretty well set. I would get Stan Ikenberry's office, because he was going out East, and I got his secretary; I thought that'd be good because she knows the university.

Also, Mike was coming with me, so Mike knew all my personal quirks and knew people who were important to me. One of the things that's really important is having somebody who knows if somebody calls, this is an important person to me or this is something we got to get on or understand the background, the history. Anybody here is not going to understand that and not going to understand Illinois government and who matters and how you react to things. But Marcella, being the former secretary to the president of the university, we figured would be really good, and she was. I think it was very frustrating for her to have me because I was a completely different individual than Stan Ikenberry. I know there were many days she was ready to just throw up her hands and leave, probably, because I was used to, "Well, why didn't this get done? Why didn't..." (DePue laughs) Mike was here for a lot of that, and I think that helped, but if Mike hadn't been here, I think Marcella would have probably left the second I was here.

DePue: Did he have an office here, then?

Edgar: Yes, in the building.

DePue: And what was Marcella's last name?

Edgar: Oh, shoot. I'm terrible on names.

DePue: We can get that later, then. I know that somewhere in that process, you—

Edgar: But on Marcella, I just want to say that we're good friends. We still—Marcella, Brenda and I—have her to dinner, and she has us over. We became close, as we always have with people who have been our secretaries. But I just know for her, I was different than Stan Ikenberry, and it was quite a transition. Then she had all these new things that she didn't know what we were talking about. But Mike helped make that a lot smoother. If I hadn't had Mike over here, as I said, I think Marcella would have probably walked out about the second week, and I don't know what I'd have done. Mike assumed a lot of things that maybe Sherry would have done, and then Mike kind of got stuck with them.

My current secretary's been with me I don't know how many years now. It's probably about eight years. Marcella picked her; it was her neighbor, and that's kind of how I got her. (laughs) She now knows a lot of my quirks, plus she knows a lot of the things I do both here and outside the university, because a lot of those things have come up since she's been here. But I think when she first got here, it was also, what's all this Springfield stuff? She knew the university, but she had to

not only know the university; she had to all of a sudden know this world called Illinois government that still you have contact with, and people in Chicago and people in Springfield, and who matters, and who do you call when you're trying to get a hold of somebody.

DePue: That's Sue Grace Rominger. You say she's been with you for about eight years now?

Edgar: I think now, yes. I've been here twelve years, and I don't think Marcella was here any more than three or four, so she might have been here longer than that, now.

DePue: You had talked very briefly before about spending time on the computer, checking out the races, checking out horses and things like that. Mrs. Edgar has made the point that you have transferred all that passion you had for politics onto horse racing.²⁰ So this is a segue, if you will, for you to talk a little bit more about what it is about horses and horse racing that has attracted you. Lay that out for us a bit.

Edgar: Even when I was governor her dad had horses, and I used to dabble and be involved with him on that and talk to him. In fact, her dad and I talked every day until he died—that was after I left the governor's office—probably from 1992 to the day he died, we probably talked about every day on the phone, and 80 percent of it was about horses. You need to have something to get your mind off being governor and all that stuff; you got to have some side thing. Thompson had antiques. You would hear stories about Thompson: we couldn't find him days, he'd be out antiquing. I used to think, you got to spend time here. Well, after I became governor, I appreciated why he needed that, and I kind of needed the horse racing thing. That was my release. But I enjoyed it. I thought, If I don't run for governor, I can spend more time on horses.

Brenda's right. I don't do anything halfway. If I get into something, I'm very involved, intense. I don't go halfway on anything; I spend a lot of time. And so the horses—I guess it's a variety of things. It's the tradition, and I'm a big person on tradition. The breeding fascinates me, trying to put the right combination—they call it nicks, when you breed—

DePue: Nicks?

Edgar: Nick, a nick, n-i-c-k. Nicks is when you breed a certain mare to a certain stallion based off your bloodline.

DePue: So you're an avid reader of the *Sires and Dams* when it comes out?

Edgar: Well, I don't know that publication, but there's a magazine called *Blood-Horse*. The staff knew when I was governor that one thing you wanted to make sure—they could lose any of my papers, just don't lose the current issue of *Blood-Horse* or *Thoroughbred Times*. I read those. But I'll get on the Internet at night and look at

²⁰ Brenda Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, November 23, 2010, 24-26.

how certain stallions are doing—they call them crops each year—how their crops are doing in racing. I've got certain mares, and I think, is this the right breeding? Then you try to find a reasonable price. So I spend a lot of time doing that, and it's just fun. Like last night, I was looking at the sales results down at Keeneland.²¹ Now, I'm not going to buy a horse. I've got more horses than I need. But I sit there and look at what sold, why did that sell, and the catalogue paid, trying to figure out why it paid that much and things. That's relaxation for me.

DePue: When did you get your first horse?

Edgar: My father-in-law had these horses when I was governor. He always said, "Once you're done, we'll be partners." So once I got done, I officially became his partner on the horses. As I always said, when he passed away about five years later, he left money to Brenda and he left me the horses. Brenda got the much better financial deal. (DePue laughs) Now, he also left money to his other kids, but I got the horses. I know some of them thought, gee, he's getting these horses. I tried to explain to them that I actually... Her dad had got back every penny he'd ever put in on his horses; I ended up with the debt. (laughs)

I guess the first time I officially had a racehorse was actually in Arizona. I went out to Arizona when I spent the two months. I had been out there to speak to a conference on racing, and I ran into the guy that ran the track out there. I just said, "You know, I wouldn't mind finding somebody that maybe has horses, and I could get maybe 20 percent or 25 percent of a horse just to have something to watch that's mine." So he hooked me up with a guy there, and I think I had 20 percent of a horse. I didn't make any money off it, but I'd go—and that was the first time my name appeared. I was at least part-owner of a racehorse. That was in '99. That spring, we had babies on the mares we had, and from then on, my name started to appear on—I had half of those. But my father-in-law raised his horses in his backyard. He was very frugal, to say the least; he wouldn't spend much money on breeding and things like that. He'd always ask me if I knew somebody I could get a deal. I was always looking for deals.

We had these mares, and they'd have babies; we'd keep them and race them, and then they'd have babies. He always complained at the end we had too many horses, and I used to say, "We need about five horses just to hope one of them's healthy enough to run." Thoroughbreds are very frail animals, and you may not ever get them to the track. But then also I got him into harness racing a little bit, which he didn't care too much for. So we never really owned 100 percent; we usually would own maybe part of one. And to this day, I have part of a lot of Standardbreds. I don't own 100 percent of any Standardbred, but Thoroughbreds, I own 100 percent of more than I need to have.

DePue: We probably should make the distinction: Standardbred versus Thoroughbred.

²¹ Keeneland is a major Thoroughbred racetrack and sales center in Lexington, Kentucky.

Edgar: For the average person, Standardbreds are the horses that pull the carts and Thoroughbreds are the horses that race and have a jockey on top of them. There's more difference—I mean, they're different kinds of horses. But the other big difference from my perspective is that Standardbreds are very durable. They usually don't break down. They don't usually have as many injuries as a Thoroughbred. Now, saying that, this year, I have one that's going to be a really good Standardbred, a trotter—there's trotters and pacers in Standardbreds—and that trotter got hurt, so they do get hurt, but a Thoroughbred is a much more fragile animal than a Standardbred is. A Standardbred races more often—they can race every week—where a Thoroughbred, it's probably every two or three weeks at most you want to race them. And Thoroughbreds are more expensive, just the upkeep, the cost—

DePue: A lot more expensive?

Edgar: It's according to what kind you have, but just on the whole, they're more expensive. The purses are bigger, but you don't run them as often.

DePue: But the breeding rates are a lot higher, are they not?

Edgar: They are for some stallions, yes. Not necessarily the ones I go to, (DePue laughs) but yes. No, they are. I think the top stud fee for a Standardbred right now is maybe \$20,000. The top fee for a Thoroughbred is either \$150,000 to \$200,000. And that's down from what it used to be.

DePue: That would indicate that Thoroughbred racing is much more popular than harness racing. Is that the case?

Edgar: Overall it's more popular, yes. There are pockets, though. You go to county fairs in Illinois, the only kind of racing is harness racing. Well, they have some Thoroughbred, but it doesn't amount to much. You go to the state fair, the big racing is harness racing. DuQuoin, same thing. But you've got to go to the tracks in Chicago or the one down near St. Louis to see Thoroughbreds.

DePue: Do you favor one over the other yourself?

Edgar: I've got a lot more involvement in Thoroughbreds. I like either one if they win. (DePue laughs) Brenda wishes I'd just do Standardbreds because it doesn't cost as much; I'm in with other people, so it shares the cost. I have to say, if you had the choice between winning the Hambletonian or the Kentucky Derby, you'd rather win the Kentucky Derby.

DePue: Almost nobody's heard of the Hambletonian out there.

Edgar: Oh, they have in Illinois, because we used to have it. It's now in the Meadowlands.²² But people—not young people, but older people—if they know anything about Standardbred racing, they know about the Hambletonian. It's like Thoroughbreds. A lot of people, the only thing they know about that is the Kentucky Derby; they don't realize that's just for three-year-olds. They often will ask about a Standardbred, "Will that run in the Kentucky Derby?" (DePue laughs) You get movies like *Secretariat*; you have the one...

DePue: *Seabiscuit*.

Edgar: *Seabiscuit*. I can't believe I forgot. But Seabiscuit never ran the Kentucky Derby. He wasn't that level of horse at that age. People think you got to run in the Kentucky Derby.

DePue: When you're talking about horse races, inevitably you end up talking about betting as well. From what you've said so far, it doesn't sound like you're much into the betting side?

Edgar: I'm not. I'm a terrible handicapper; I'm just not good. And I hate betting two dollars and losing. I'll bet occasionally. I very seldom ever bet on my horses, and the reason was—I think I told you this story, maybe. When the lightning hit the plane, one of my father-in-law's best horses was running her first race and went off thirty to one, and I didn't bet her. Not because she was thirty to one, just because I thought I'd used up all my luck in that plane when we didn't crash after it caught on fire from the lightning.²³ The horse won. Then I decided I'd better not bet on the horse because it might jinx it, so I very seldom ever bet on my horses. If I'm at the track, I might bet on another horse if I know something about them, but I don't bet much. That's unfortunate, because that's what makes horse racing go. You have to have people bet, because that's where they get the money in the purses. If people don't bet, then you don't have that much in the purse, meaning you don't win much money.

DePue: I'm going to take this in a little different area—

Edgar: But the horse racing thing: I think it's competitive, and I'm a competitive person. I like sports, I like politics, I like to win. It's exciting when you win an election. The most exciting thing is when you watch your children perform and excel in sports—in anything, but sports are kind of a way you can measure them very quickly. Horse racing's the same thing. When you have horses that you have raised from babies and they win a race—when you see them break, and they're going to win the race—that's very exciting. And Brenda, who's not fond of horse racing at

²² The Hambletonian Stakes is a major harness race held annually at Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, New Jersey. It had been held at the DuQuoin State Fair in DuQuoin, Illinois, from 1956 to 1980. "N.J., N.Y. Seek Hambletonian," *Chicago Tribune*, August 31, 1979.

²³ This is the first time Edgar mentioned this story on tape. For a detailed account of the 1996 incident, see Kirk Brown, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 22, 2009, 111-117. On the danger of flying during his campaigns, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 15, 2009, 97-98.

all, I just tell her, “Brenda, would you rather me watch my horses run, or would you rather have me run?” (DePue laughs) She kind of backs down then.

DePue: Here’s the direction I’m going to take this that you might not have anticipated. Illinois has quite a checkered history when it comes to horse racing and politics. Otto Kerner’s demise was because of horse racing. Paul Powell...

Edgar: It wasn’t horse racing. I always point this out. It wasn’t because they owned horses. You don’t make any money; nobody could accuse you of trying to get ahead of the system by owning horses. They had stock in the tracks, in the racing part of it. That’s a whole different side of this equation. You have the horsemen who have the horses, who very seldom make money, who really are the guys who carry most of the weight. Then you have trainers and jockeys, and they get paid money, win or lose. Now, they get paid a lot more if they win, but still, they do get money. Then you have the race tracks, which is a whole different entity. They make money whether you win or lose, and most of them make pretty decent money. So what Kerner and those guys got in trouble with, they had stock in the tracks. They didn’t own race horses. As I said, nobody could accuse you of trying to get ahead in life by owning racehorses. People say, “Well, you know...” and I say, “Well, yes, if I was governor and I had stock in one of the tracks, because the state determines racing dates. That’s where the tracks make their money—if they have the racing dates.

DePue: Is that where the potential for corruption was, determining racing dates and payoffs for the legislators?

Edgar: That was the concern—that if people had investments in a track and had some influence on who’s going to get what dates, then that’s the conflict; that’s where the problem was. Why would people that owned racetracks give out stock to legislators or to a governor? Because they wanted them to be good to them.

DePue: In most cases they weren’t giving out stock, but it seemed like those stocks would flip before you knew it; it would be worth a few dollars one day and astronomical amounts...

Edgar: It was pretty cheap, what you... But also, that stock value would be enhanced if they got good racing dates. That’s a legitimate concern. That was a problem. Now, I can’t imagine Otto Kerner probably ever told the Racing Board, “Give this track good dates because I have stock there.” Somebody at the Racing Board might have known. But whether he did or not, the perception was bad, and I think rightfully so... They didn’t get him because he owned racetrack stock; that’s not why he got convicted. He got convicted because they said he didn’t pay enough tax on it. (DePue laughs) He had paid tax, but he hadn’t paid enough; that was the argument.

DePue: The tax man cometh.

- Edgar: Yes. Thompson, who was the attorney, got him on, I think, a little bit of a technicality.²⁴ I had a lot of legislators—not a lot—but some legislators had stock, too, but that’s a whole different thing.
- DePue: That was a big part of Paul Powell, as well. He was certainly heavy into it in the racetrack in the southern part of the state.
- Edgar: Yes, but.... I don’t know how much money he made off that. I never knew because most of those tracks went bankrupt in the end. He might have made some in the meantime. Powell would go to county fairs and watch racing; he actually liked horse racing. I’m not sure Otto Kerner or some of the others went to tracks very... But Powell did go, because I remember when I was a kid, Paul Powell showing up at the county fair in Coles County, watching the races.
- DePue: Did you ever get any criticism or suggestions that, you know, Governor, you need to back off from this horse racing passion that you’ve got, because it’s kind of coloring your reputation a little bit?
- Edgar: No. Again, I didn’t own anything, I didn’t own any track stock or anything which would have been a problem. People knew I liked racing. Actually, I remember my son said, “Dad, that’s good. You ought to get that out more, (DePue laughs) because you have this image that’s, you know...” I said, “You don’t want me to tell people I collect stamps?” “No, no, but the fact that you might bet on a horse and you like horse racing might help your image a little bit.” I think some people were surprised that I had this passion for horse racing. But that goes back to—as we talked about earlier—I’ve always liked horses and always kind of followed horse racing, even as a little kid, not that I ever had any ties to it. In fact, I did not know my father-in-law had horses. I think I was probably married to Brenda for ten years before I ever knew it. I didn’t know it. He didn’t talk about it; it was kind of a sore subject with him and his wife, and Brenda never mentioned it. So it was later on that I found out he actually had racehorses. I might have known he had them at one time, but I didn’t know he still had some.
- DePue: You mentioned a sore subject; maybe this is going to be a sore subject. There’s a lot of question right now whether or not harness racing will continue to thrive, or even exist in Illinois. Do you have any thoughts about that?
- Edgar: If they don’t get some help, like slots [slot machines] at the track—which I didn’t use to like—I don’t think harness racing will be in Illinois in two years. The purses have gone down so much at Balmoral, which is the only harness track, and Maywood, which they own, you can’t afford to race a horse there.²⁵ Now you can go to Indiana and the purses are three times as great, so why would you race in Illinois? Then the next thing is, why raise a horse in Illinois? There’s no advantage

²⁴ Prior to his successful run for governor in 1976, James R. Thompson made a name for himself as U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois.

²⁵ At the time of this interview, Duke Johnston owned both Balmoral Park and Maywood Park. “Horse Racing in Illinois ‘On Verge of Extinction,’” *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 27, 2011.

to raise a horse in Illinois than in Indiana, but if you bred the horse in Indiana, there's a lot of pluses, like there used to be to raise them in Illinois. So I think you'll see, if something doesn't happen in the next few months, I think racing—harness racing, and Thoroughbred's not too far behind—will cease to exist in Illinois.

The problem is not so much those of us who have horses—I mean, go find another hobby—as there's about thirty-five thousand jobs in Illinois, both with Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds. One of the things I always argued when I was governor, why we needed to make sure we kept horseracing viable, is the thirty-five thousand jobs. I was hearing the other day the unions in Chicago saying the state ought to get involved and refurbish Wrigley Field at three hundred million or two hundred million dollars because there's fifteen hundred construction jobs, which will last for maybe a year or two. We're talking about thirty-five thousand jobs in an industry that's here, and if people didn't have those jobs, I think they'd have a hard time finding other jobs. It's not just people at the track. There's a lot at the track, particularly Hispanics, who are very hard workers, but I think they'd have a hard time finding another job.

A lot of people out in the rural areas—for example, I keep my horses with a guy on his farm. He has another job, but this supplements his job, and he probably gets from me ten, fifteen thousand dollars a year that supplements his salary. Also, if you know anything about horses, they don't just eat any hay; they've got to eat premium hay—Thoroughbreds. It's not like cows. You can feed cows any kind of hay, but Thoroughbreds, you got to feed very high-quality... Well, that costs more, so there are people who raise that hay, who make a premium, and that's a nice little income for them. It's not their total income, but it helps. You've got people like where I break my horses, down in southern Illinois, so somebody will ride them. Again, there's nobody getting rich off this, but there's a lot of people who are supplementing their income from being involved in horse racing—not the owners, but the people who work in it—and if that goes away, that's going to cause economic hardship on folks whose basic income isn't all that much. Then you take away what they make extra for being involved in horse racing—they're not going to buy as many cars, they're not going to... It's going to be all over the state; it's not just in the city where the tracks are. It's particularly in southern Illinois, which already has its own economic problems, where a lot of the horses are raised.

So there's an economic reason why I think people in Illinois need to be concerned about horse racing surviving. It's not so much the taxes we get from the pari-mutuel tax—that doesn't amount to a whole lot anymore—but it's the jobs it creates. Thirty-five thousand jobs: there's no industry you could get that could bring in thirty-five thousand jobs. And it's dispersed around the state, too. That's why I think it's important that elected officials in Springfield try to make sure that horse racing stays a viable industry in Illinois. Right now we're on the verge of it not being viable anymore.

DePue: Would you say that's an uphill battle to get some legislation through?

Edgar: No, actually, I think if you put that to the legislature—solely just for horse racing—letting them have slot machines, it would pass overwhelmingly. The trouble is, they know that; they know there's a lot of support for that, so they tie more casinos to that to try to get them to vote for that. Right now, as we speak, that's the issue in Springfield. If they called just a bill to say you're going to put slots at the tracks, as many other states have done, it'd pass, I think, easily. But when you start talking about four new casinos downstate and one in Chicago, that begins to make it a little more controversial.

DePue: Isn't that the demise of horseracing in the first place, all the casinos and other outlets for gambling?

Edgar: It's hurt. I don't think it's the only problem. I think part of it is, horse racing made a huge mistake in the fifties. Early in the fifties, they were on television all the time. Then they decided, we don't want to give this away free. We don't want to be on television. We want people to come to the tracks. It got very expensive to televise horse racing, so TV went to something else, this other thing called NFL football (DePue laughs) and a lot of other things. All of the sudden, racing kind of got forgotten. Horse racing, until recently, was the number-one spectator sport; more people went to horse racing than anything else. But that's not necessarily true now. Even in California and New York, where you had huge crowds, they don't have probably a fourth of what they used to have. In Illinois, that's true. I mean, you go to Arlington. They used to, for their big races, probably get fifty thousand people. You never get that now. I think part of that is there's other things to do.

And there's no doubt when they brought in casinos to Illinois, that gave another option for people who just want to gamble. In most states where that happened, where you had horse racing that already existed, they already had investments based off the fact they kind of had a monopoly, and then all of a sudden, casinos came in. Racing got part of the receipts from casinos. That's what they did in Iowa; that's what they did in Indiana originally. Now they've given Indiana a track that can build their own casinos. They didn't do that in Illinois, never did compensate or alleviate the horse racing for the damage done by casinos.

Eleven years ago, they passed a bill: the then-riverboats no longer had to float; they could just stay at dock, and that was a big boon for them. Also, they created a new license, and horse racing was supposed to get the receipts off part of that new license. Well, all the boats no longer float; they haven't floated for eleven years. Racing's never got a penny, because they never built that new casino—Lisa Madigan and a bunch of stuff have held it up; they've never had it. Now, about five years ago, they passed a bill that said the wealthier casinos had to give part of their receipts to horse racing. That has been adjudicated at the Illinois Supreme Court, gone to the U.S. Supreme Court, been referred back to the federal courts in the Chicago area, and the judges have been sitting on it for now seven months. This is after the Illinois Supreme Court has upheld every—racing has never got a penny of that, either. Racing has never gotten any help—even though some things have

passed, they've never gotten anything from it, and it's helped the casinos even more.

So racing is kind of on its last leg, and that's why it needs to get some help, or I don't think it's going to exist. Again, from a personal point of view, I'd be disappointed because I've got an investment, and I'll probably just move all my horses to Indiana or just race there. But the jobs here in Illinois—that's why the state needs to be concerned about it.

DePue: Obviously horseracing has taken up a lot of your interest and a lot of your time. We talked about travel as well.

Edgar: It's kind of my enjoyment in life; I get to spend a little bit more time on my enjoyment than I maybe could as governor.

DePue: What are the other things, then, that keep you busy?

Edgar: The institute keeps me busy. I spend a lot of time in classes, which I enjoy. I consider that hard work. I enjoy that.

DePue: Does that mean you don't have to grade tests and papers?

Edgar: That's why I enjoy it. I have the ideal situation here. I go to different classes; I go to other people's classes and talk about state government, particularly how it might affect that discipline or whatever they'll talk about. Like I'll go to journalism class and talk about my experience dealing with journalists and the relationship, and what I think journalists ought to be aware of and how they ought to conduct themselves. I'll go to Ag students, talk a little bit about Ag policy, which there isn't a whole lot of at the state level; most of it's the federal level. But talk about how state government works. I'll do that with different disciplines. Probably spend less time with political science students than I do with others. I go to students studying health care: what's the politics of health care at the state level. I go to MBA classes, talk about leadership and what I think leadership is. I go to law school, talk about negotiations: how do you negotiate in the public sector? Maybe it's different in the private sector, but there were certain things like your word and all that.

But yes, you're right. I just get to walk in, I talk, I leave, and it's **great**. A different class every time. I can either be repetitious or inconsistent; unless that student happens to be in two different classes and hears me, they're not going to know that. Now, I've had professors tell me they have the same students every day and they're inconsistent and they're repetitious, too. (laughs) But I don't have to give tests or grade papers, so that's fun. I just get to talk. And I love to talk. I like the exchange with students. When I was trying to decide what do I like to do in life, one of the things I like to do is sit down and talk with young people about government and how it works in politics. I do more classes in the fall than I do in the spring, usually, but I'll do thirty, forty classes a semester.

Then the institute has a lot of programs they put on. Two days ago I was in Springfield talking to the new [legislative] members' conference. The institute helps co-sponsor that. Week before, I was in Springfield doing a program that the institute does after every election, analyzing the election, what it means, and things like that.

DePue: By the way, that led all of the news outlets the day afterwards; for the next day, day and a half, that's all you heard.

Edgar: Slow news day over in Springfield, I guess. Yes. Then they have other training things here, like the thing we do with legislators. In the summer I go to Chicago and talk at—they host about a three-day thing for women in college who want to go into public service and leadership things. They go to this program, and I'll go up and spend a couple hours with them, talk about my perspective on leadership. So I do a lot of that, and I enjoy that. Every so often they'll ask me to go talk to an alum group or talk to the people outside the university that are important to the university, and I'll go do that for the university.

I've tried to limit it, but I'm involved in a few not-for-profits that are dealing in government in some way. I co-chair something called Advance Illinois, which is a group of people who are working on trying to do education reform in Illinois. It's funded by some of the big foundations in the state. Bill Daley—Mayor Daley's brother—and I are the co-chairmen of that. And I feel like part of that is good for the university. I think that's part of my job here; I do those kinds of things because I think that's the university being involved, which I think is very worthwhile.

Interesting, the only real conversation I ever had with Governor Blagojevich was he wanted me to come in and serve as president of the Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation; that was the group that really kind of runs that place. There had been a lot of problems as a result of the Ryan years; that got to be political, and it got behind schedule. I think the thought was that if he had appointed me, a Democrat asking a Republican to do it... And I did it. I will say, he stayed out of it. I told him I'd do it, but I didn't want any political interference. I didn't want people sent over that we had to hire who weren't qualified. He kept his word on that; I have no complaints about that. I did that for a few years, then I thought we were pretty much up and running, so I stepped down from that.

I'm involved in what used to be called the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations; I think it's now called global affairs or something, so we don't conflict with the New York council, and I'm on the board of that.²⁶ That's my passion for international affairs. About six years ago, probably, I co-chaired a task force that looked at immigration policy. The co-chair was the former head of immigration during the Clinton years, I think. Our recommendations pretty much were used when they put the immigration bill, and both the president and Ted Kennedy were pushing. So I'll get involved in those things. I could be gone every day to those kind of things, but I've tried to limit those so I'm here more.

²⁶ Edgar is on the board of directors of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

DePue: Every politician stepping out of the public arena says that one of the reasons they're doing it is because they want to spend more time with family. I know that was one of your stated objectives as well. Have you been able to do that to your satisfaction?

Edgar: I wanted to spend more time, particularly with our grandkids. My kids are working; they don't have time to see me. (laughs) It's kind of that song, "Dad, it's great if you call; I don't have time."²⁷ But I wanted to watch our grandkids grow up. We spend the summers in Colorado, which is where all our grandkids are. We usually are out there for a week in Christmas and at Easter. Sometimes we get out there for a week in the fall. Brenda just spent two weeks out there, kind of babysitting while our daughter and her husband went off to celebrate their tenth anniversary. Then she brought our oldest granddaughter—our son's daughter, Cali—to Washington. I met them there, and we spent three days with her seeing Washington, DC. We have a deal: whenever our grandkids turn twelve we take them to Washington, DC, and show them the sites in Washington, DC. Fortunately I still know some people there and we can get in. I was getting a little nervous, but we still know people. So we see a lot more of our grandchildren than we would have if I was still governor, and we've gotten to watch them grow up. The oldest one, Dakota, is now fifteen, soon to be sixteen, and I've been able to spend time with him. We go out to a cabin in the mountains a couple of years in a row, and see some of his sporting events. Brenda gets to spend a lot of time with the grandkids. So that's been fun.

Brenda and I probably spend too much time together at times. (laughter) You know the old saying, "For better or worse, but not for lunch"? There are probably times we are together too much. But again, we can control our own schedule, which is nice. The university is very good. I can control my schedule. If for some reason there's something—like taking Cali to go to Washington, DC. It worked out it was Veterans Day and the next day. Well, I have enough flexibility I can go do that. If I had a job at a major corporation or something like that, I probably wouldn't have all that flexibility, and I wouldn't be able to spend that much time with the grandkids. Grandkids, I've found, grow up much quicker than your kids do. There were times I never thought our kids would get out of the terrible twos or their troubled teen years, (laughs) but the grandkids just (snaps)—they grow up overnight. So that's been good. There's no doubt I spend a lot more time with my family than I would have [as governor], or if I'd have had some other type of job, too.

DePue: We're going to take a break for lunch here. I think this is probably a good time to do this in the sequence that I've got. This afternoon, I'm going to get you back into the political arena and get your reflections on a lot of the things that were going on in Illinois politics after you stepped out of the arena, but also go through a series of decision points in your own life about whether or not you wanted to go back in. So we will pick that up in about an hour.

(end of interview 24)

²⁷ Probably a reference to Harry Chapin's hit song, "Cat's in the Cradle."

Interview with Jim Edgar
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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, November 18, 2010. This is Mark DePue again. I'm here this afternoon with Gov. Jim Edgar. We just had a nice lunch, and we're ready to go back at it again.

Edgar: Is this a different session now?

DePue: This is a different session.

Edgar: So if I hear this is session thirty, it doesn't mean thirty different days, it just means different sessions?

DePue: This is the twenty-fifth session, I believe.

Edgar: Okay, I'm just trying to think how far I'm behind on reading through.

DePue: And you've been editing session four?

Edgar: I think I got about four, yes. (laughs) Four or five.

DePue: Governor, you've got a little homework to do.

Edgar: Got a lot of work to do, yes.

DePue: There's a lot of fascinating history in there, though. We talked this morning about that transition period of being in the political arena and then being a private citizen and making those adjustments. I want to take you back to politics again; obviously, just because you step out of the political arena in a very formal, specific way, doesn't mean that you're no longer interested. There were several different points we're going to be talking about where you had some decisions to make, and I'm sure you also were a passionate follower of everything that was going on in Illinois

politics. Boy, have the last twelve years been interesting in Illinois as far as politics is concerned. So let's start with your impressions early on with the George Ryan administration.

Edgar: George and I are two different people, and our administrations were different. I pretty well had no involvement in that administration. He never called, asked for any advice. I think the day after the election, we sat down and I gave him some thoughts, and that was pretty much it.

DePue: And you already mentioned you deliberately got out of his way for a while.

Edgar: Yes, went out to Arizona. But when I came back, it was rather tense. In fact, when I came back, one of the first things I did was a speech in Springfield. I wanted to try to get a copy or at least the video of it. The institute had something we did at the state library. I just talked a little bit about my style, and it was pretty different than his style. Talked about spending money, holding the line; he'd already had a pretty expansive budget before the general assembly. Also there was concern that he had gone back on his promise not to raise taxes and things like that. I just talked about, you don't want to mislead the public. So the press kind of thought I was jabbing at him, and I really wasn't. But the same day, he tried to justify pay raises for his staff—pretty big pay raises—and he said, "That's because they work a lot harder than Edgar's staff did." That all happened in one day. It was interesting: that evening, we were all to be in Chicago to honor the state party chairman, Harold Byron Smith, who was stepping down. I had made a special effort to fly up to that, which (laughs) was a pain when I was in Springfield and had to get back to Champaign that night. So that was kind of a long day. That was a rather tense day.

DePue: Were the two of you together?

Edgar: We were at the same function. We weren't together. I was sitting out in the crowd someplace. But when I got introduced, I got a very good hand, so it was the party folks.

DePue: (laughs) That was your revenge?

Edgar: That was my revenge, yes. The people were getting a little bit nervous at that point. I purposely never went to the governor's mansion while he was governor. I just didn't. He had a different style, and I—

DePue: Did you get invited?

Edgar: Invited a couple times, two or three times, I just didn't go. I think we had maybe a couple conversations. We had the incident I talked about earlier, when early on he tried to reorganize the labor relations board so he could get rid of people I'd put on there, including Mike, and the legislative leaders stopped that. I had a chat with them, and they told him it really wasn't worth getting in a big fight with the former governor, so they didn't do that. I had talked to them on that. They had said to call him. Madigan, I remember, said, "You got to call him," and Pate Philip said, "You

got to call him. He'll do what you want done, but you got to call him." I just didn't really care for going through all that.

But for the most part, I just stayed away. I was back in April, and then in September I left to go to Harvard. I was there for the rest of the year. When things began to really fall in for him, when the investigations of what happened in the secretary of state's office and all started to heat up, I was out of state. By the end of the session, there were already rumblings about raising the license plate fees, which he said wasn't a tax, but people didn't buy that. So he was beginning to have some problems.

DePue: I've got to believe there were other people you knew well who were still in the political circles there, who were calling or writing or somehow getting messages to you, maybe venting about what they had seen going on in the administration.

Edgar: Oh, there were people in the administration that got changed in their job so they couldn't get an answer. I remember I was still in Arizona when he presented his first budget, and it was pretty expansive; they were spending money right and left. Steve Schnorf, who had taken over from Joan Walters the last two years as my budget director, called me.

DePue: And he was Ryan's budget director.

Edgar: He was Ryan's. He called me the day of the budget. He said, "Governor, I just wanted to call up and say two things. One, I want to apologize to you. You know, I used to get on you a lot; I thought you were pretty stiff when you gave speeches and things like that. I just sat through the governor's budget speech. God, it was terrible." And he said, "The other thing was, he wouldn't meet with the press to talk about the budget. I tried to tell him you always did it and Thompson always did it, and he said he didn't care, he wasn't going to do it." I said, "Well, I saw the outline of the budget. You guys are going spending wild." He [Schnorf] said, "Governor, you have to understand. I am the fiscal conservative in this administration." I used to always get on Schnorf about being a big spender. I said, "Oh, good heavens, we're in trouble." (laughs)

One of the things that I always watch very carefully, because I had made a promise that I was going to keep head count—while I was governor, government wasn't going to grow; we were going to keep it lean and mean. And we did. There were fewer state workers when I left the governor's office than when I came in. And government was functioning. Now, Blagojevich claims that, too, but I would say government (laughter) was in disarray when he left. He [Schnorf] said, "I went in when we were putting this budget together and told him, 'Now, this budget you're talking about, your head count's going to be two hundred over what it was last year.' And he [Ryan] said,"—well, I won't say exactly what he told me George said, but he [Ryan] said, "Your predecessor used to worry about that. Well, I don't care about the head count. I don't care what it is." That was kind of George—it was more of a legislative attitude than maybe my attitude. You have money, you'll

spend it; that's why you save it for a rainy day. We left about a billion-and-a-half cushion in the budget, and they spent that and more. He had a big building program—Illinois FIRST, I think they called it.

DePue: Illinois FIRST.

Edgar: Yes. It was the capital bill that we knew we needed. In fact, I had suggested we do it before, and the Republicans wanted to wait until he got in because they figured they'd get more of it.

DePue: But it was a bond initiative, wasn't it?

Edgar: It was bond, part of it, but you had to raise some taxes. I will say to his credit, versus Blagojevich, he raised revenue to pay for the bonds.

DePue: And this was a \$6.3-billion-dollar initiative.

Edgar: Well, it was more than that when it was all said and done. I think it was more like twelve or something, but it should have just been about eight.²⁸ It needed to be done, and it was just a matter of whenever you wanted to do it; the problem, I thought, was they went overboard. They threw everything, the kitchen sink. He gave the legislature carte blanche on a lot of stuff, which you got to be a little careful on. You can give them some, but he gave them—

DePue: So pork works the same in the Illinois legislature as it does at the federal level.

Edgar: Yes, yes. And you didn't need to, because they always vote for a capital bill, but he, I thought, threw too much stuff in there and gave away too much. But that's his... Where he got in trouble on that was the only fee he really did raise was the license plate fee. He had this one commercial saying, "I'm not going to raise taxes," which I thought at the time was a foolish thing to say, because I knew he was going to have to raise gas tax and license fees. Now, he didn't do gas tax, which I thought was a mistake; he did it all on license fees, which was a huge increase, and it's more regressive because everybody pays the same amount regardless of how much they drive. At least the gas tax, the more you drive, the more you pay of that.

DePue: And regardless of how much the car costs that you're driving.

Edgar: Right, right. With license plate it's that way, because we're not like some states that have it based off the value of the car. Well, people viewed that as a tax increase, and people started grumbling that he'd lied to them. But I stayed away. The only kind of contact I had with him was when George W. Bush was getting ready to run for president, and they were getting ready to put together the Illinois organization. The Republican governor is always the chairman of the campaign. That meant he

²⁸ The Fund for Infrastructure, Roads, Schools & Transit was a program approved by the Illinois legislature in 1999, which raised \$6.3 billion in new revenues to secure the sale of bonds for transportation and school projects. Neighborhood Capital Budget Group, "Illinois FIRST," 2007.

was going to be chairman; I wasn't going to have a role to play. But they did ask us to come over, and at the last minute—I think I got the call the night before the rally to come over—they wanted Thompson and I to be there.

DePue: Who's "they"?

Edgar: The Ryan people who were running it. I already knew it was going on, but they just never invited... So Thompson and I were invited, and that's about the only involvement I had from them on the Bush campaign.

DePue: They didn't want you to go out and raise funds for any of these campaigns?

Edgar: He didn't want the former governor involved; that's fine.

DePue: But certainly your name on an event brings in sponsors, brings in money?

Edgar: Maybe. Now, I'm not governor anymore; it doesn't bring in as much as you think. [They didn't want] that or me to even go out and speak. I remember they did a train trip through Illinois; they went right through central Illinois. I wasn't invited to be part of that. That's their call.

DePue: Again, this is the Ryan people who are working on the Bush campaign. So it wasn't the Bush people who neglected (unintelligible).

Edgar: No, because they had to turn it over. Now, later in the campaign when it was obvious George was becoming more of a liability—a year later when his numbers were going really south—Bush was coming into town. This was sometime, probably August, September.

DePue: Of 2000?

Edgar: Two thousand, yes. He didn't come to Illinois very much because they didn't think they had a chance, but they decided to take a shot and came back in at Arlington Heights. I remember they told me this story that was going on in the Bush campaign about deciding they wanted me to introduce him. They didn't want George to introduce him, but they had to get George out of the state, so they had George go to some other state. They were moving governors around to campaign, so they had George go to some other state. That gave them an excuse that, "Well, since you're not going to be there, we'll have Edgar come and introduce him." That was the one time I had anything to do with the campaign; I introduced Bush in Arlington Heights at this big rally. Then they had a rally late in the election, and they asked me if I would come and take part and have a speaking role. They wouldn't have George introduce the president; they had somebody else introduce the president. I couldn't come because Elizabeth was getting married in Colorado, so I had to duck out. I said, "I can't, I've got a wedding I got to go to."

DePue: One quick question for you.

Edgar: Yes.

DePue: During that campaign, did you feel closer to Bush's campaign or to McCain's campaign?

Edgar: Oh, I was for Bush, and I'd always been for Bush. In fact, I think back in '96 I had been in Iowa to do something, and the guy—I'm terrible on names—this guy now doing the Simon Institute in Carbondale was the political guy for the *Des Moines Register*.²⁹ I was over there, and I remember he came up to me and said, "Are you thinking about running for president in 2000?" I said, "No, why would I do that?" He said, "You're from Illinois, and Iowa's an important thing. You could do well over here." I said, "I don't want to be president. I'm too moderate to be president. It'll be George Bush." I just threw that out. And he said, "You think so?" I said, "Yes. You got name recognition and everything. I think he might be interested in that. And that's who I think it'll probably be." I got a call from Karl Rove about two weeks later thanking me for putting in that positive plug (DePue laughs) for Bush. I never got anything from them, but they got that.

In the 2000 election, I was pretty much kept out of it. Both the Senate and House campaigns came to me and asked me to do things for candidates, which I usually did back then.

DePue: You're talking about at the federal level?

Edgar: No, state level. Because at that point, Ryan was particularly becoming a drag to them. They needed somebody to go out and speak, and my numbers were still good. I did commercials for some candidates in both the House and the Senate, and I also went out and made some appearances for some of them. But I didn't really have any role in the presidential race except the one time in Arlington Heights, when the governor was out of state so they had me introduce him. That was the 2000 election.

DePue: Let's go back one year. What did you think about Ryan's trip to Cuba?

Edgar: I thought it was irrelevant. I thought it was a lot to do about nothing, to be very truthful. I mean, Cuba's a little island. Even if we started trading with Cuba, there's not enough there. I'd much rather he go to Mexico. I don't know if he ever went to Mexico. He was supposed to go to Asia, and he cancelled it, I think. If you're making those trips for trade purposes, you go to Mexico. That's our biggest trading partner, along with Canada. When I left, Mexico had moved in. So I thought that's where you ought to go, not Cuba. George liked to smoke cigars; I just thought he went to get some cigars. (DePue laughs) I was at Harvard, actually, when that happened, but it didn't impress me one way or the other. I just didn't think it served any real purpose for Illinois. Now, it got him a lot of headlines because nobody goes to Cuba and all that, and he sat there and listened to Fidel harangue for a while. But from the state's point of view, I didn't see that there were any positives

²⁹ David Yepsen, who at the time of this interview was director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University.

to that. If he'd have spent that much time and effort going to Mexico, then I'd have said that's what you ought to do. Or even an Asian trip—they're not fun trips, the Asian trips, but it's more productive than going to Cuba.

DePue: He also had a technology initiative to try to boost the state's ranking nationally, to try to get more technologically-based industries coming to the state. Do you think he was successful in that respect?

Edgar: Didn't know he did that.

DePue: Let's go to one I'm sure you're aware of, and that's the whole issue about the death penalty. Tell us your reaction to, first of all, the discovery that we've got people on death row who are actually innocent, proven by DNA testing; then his response to that by eventually, after a lot of agonizing—if you believe what he's saying about the death penalty—of releasing everybody from death row.

Edgar: That's not how I remembered it about the DNA. That's not what was the big issue then. There was a case where at the last minute somebody else came forward and said, "I committed the murder; he didn't."³⁰ It don't think it had anything to do with DNA.

DePue: The Northwestern journalism school—

Edgar: The one the front page of the *Tribune* is now saying is under investigation for their illegal activities? (DePue laughs) I found that very interesting. Yes, but they found somebody who they claimed said, "I did it." I am a little familiar with that case because it came up when I was governor, and then they pulled it out and the [state] supreme court looked at it again. It was interesting. They never claimed the guy was innocent. That never was an argument made by any of his attorneys. The argument was that his IQ was so low, he shouldn't be held responsible for what he did. But I just remember I had some initial discussions with my staff on that before the supreme court pulled it back to look at it again. Under Ryan's tenure, right at the last minute before the execution, somebody stepped forward and said, "I did it." I think Northwestern had helped find that person, which nobody had ever suggested before.

So very possible. Here was a guy who maybe was not guilty of that, but the system... The argument I would make about the death penalty was, there are more checks and balances on the death penalty. There are going to be people convicted of the death penalty that are innocent, but it takes almost twenty years. Even if it ran the way we were supposed to, it'd take five to six years at least, and you have the best attorneys looking at these cases. So yes, you're going to find some people who are innocent, and that to me proves the system works; there is a check and balance in the system. What I walked away from the governor's office convinced of was I

³⁰ Edgar is referring to the conviction of Anthony Porter, who was convicted of the August 1982 murder of two people in Chicago's Washington Park. Porter was freed after Alstory Simon confessed to the crime. *Chicago Tribune*, February 5, 1999.

do believe there is not the same safeguards for people arrested and convicted of armed robbery, things like that, so I think there's a lot more of those folks in prison who probably aren't guilty of those crimes. By the time the death penalty cases I dealt with got to me, they'd been looked at all which way. To this day, I do not think the system is broken. Now, you may be opposed to the death penalty. You're going to talk to Dawn Clark Netsch; she's opposed to the death penalty. That's fine; I understand that. If you're opposed to the death penalty, then I think you should be for repeal. But if you're not opposed to the death penalty, then I think you've got to make the system work. And I think the system works.

In the case of Governor Ryan, we both were state legislators and voted for the restoration of the death penalty back in 1977. Never heard George Ryan ever—anytime—ever question the death penalty, even when he ran for governor. It's not a pleasant part of the job. It takes time, and you've got to agonize, because you're the last stop between a person living or dying, and that's not fun. I don't think George had ever thought about that until he became governor. I think there's a lot of things he didn't think about until all of a sudden he had to make that decision. I'm sure this one case would make you say, "Let's take a look at this system." I had no problem with that after that happened: look at the system. I was surprised—I wasn't shocked—because of what was going on in Illinois: George Ryan's ratings were coming down, big-time.

DePue: We'll get to that in a little bit, because all his...

Edgar: But that's all together. And he was getting beat up, particularly by the *Chicago Tribune*. Every year, the *Chicago Tribune* comes up with some issue that they try to win the Pulitzer Prize for, and they really go after it; that year it was the death penalty. Not that they were opposed to the death penalty; they just said it was flawed, that there were people on death row who were found to be innocent, and that meant the system was flawed. You've got article after article, editorial after editorial. So they pressure: "Governor, where are you on this?" Well, you're trying to get the *Tribune* off your back. You're all of a sudden saying, "We're going to take a look at this." That's kind of where George started. My sense always was that George started more to keep the *Tribune* happy. If you asked me today, I think George Ryan is adamantly opposed to the death penalty, and I think he believes it. But when it started out, I think it had to have a lot more to do with the *Tribune*, based off his previous position, up to right then, on the death penalty. I think politically, he was trying to figure out a way to make them happy. That's the major paper in the state, and they were being brutal to him.

And then this other case gives you a reason. I had no problem when they said, "We're going to take a look and see if there's things we can correct," because of that one case. They did, and they made those changes. They made those changes ten years ago, but no governor's wanted to put up with that. Again, it's not fun. It's a very unpleasant part of the job to have to make those decisions. I always thought governors don't like making those decisions; it's a lot better just to push that off. And that was kind of my view. Again, I think George today is very much

committed, being opposed to the death penalty. I think that's evolved. If you're around folks that feel that way and you hear those arguments, I can understand it. When Netsch ran against me for governor, it was one of the issues we raised. She's opposed to the death penalty; I'm not. Her rationalization: "I'd still enforce the death penalty." I don't know how you enforce the death penalty if you're opposed to it.

But the death penalty thing, I thought first was a political reason. Now, as we speak in 2010, I think he truly believes it. I don't necessarily think he was quite that true a believer back in 1999 or 2000, whenever that issue came up. I think the—

DePue: It really came to a head right at the end of his administration.

Edgar: At the end, I thought after he had promised the families he was not going to do a mass stay on the death penalty, that he'd look at each case individually. That takes a lot of time. Details were never his strong suit. I'd worked with him many times. He had a pretty good broad-picture view, but details were not what he... You've got to read through each one of those cases; that goes on forever. Instead, he just made a blanket [decision], and I thought that was unfortunate. I don't have any problem if you look through and you make the decision, Hey, this person should be stayed, but I don't know if you do a blanket. I think you got to look at each case individually.

So we still are in limbo on the death penalty. Either you have it on the books, enforce it, or take it off the books. There are people who want it off the books. We had a referendum on that in 1970, and it was pretty overwhelming; people wanted it. I think polls show that maybe there's more opposition now, but I think the majority probably still wants it in Illinois. But I have no problem—let's have a referendum: if it passes, then enforce it; if they don't want it, then do away with it. I think you can make a legitimate argument. It is costly. It costs a lot of money to provide all this legal talent for these people on death row. Do you think that's a legitimate deterrent? Is that a legitimate punishment? In some cases I think it is. But if we did away with it, that wouldn't cause me to want to move out of the state of Illinois. I think we're being a little phony about it right now, and I think we have been for a while. Politicians don't want to take the wrath of the voters who want the death penalty, but they also don't want to go through what you've got to go through to enforce it.

DePue: What did you think then when he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize?

Edgar: Well, anybody can nominate you for the Nobel Peace Prize. That's not a big deal. That's my understanding: anybody can be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Again, I think George today sincerely believes that, and that's fine. Originally I think it was more trying to get the *Tribune* off his back, because there was never any indication to that point that he opposed the death penalty. Never heard it once.

DePue: The other thing that you've already mentioned here, and they are intricately woven together, is all of his legal problems—the corruption allegations, the things that had

been going on long before he became governor in the secretary of state's office. What sticks in the public's mind is that while he's secretary of state, Rev. Duane Scott Willis and wife and a whole bunch of kids are traveling down the interstate, I believe, in the Chicago area—

Edgar: In Wisconsin.

DePue: In Wisconsin, you're right, in Wisconsin.

Edgar: They were from the suburbs, but they were in Wisconsin. Hit by a trucker licensed in Illinois.

DePue: Yes, but illegally licensed. Six of his kids died. This ends up being the thing that captures the public's attention and epitomizes what's going to be happening now as all of these allegations to start to percolate out; especially his secretary of state years, but also obviously what was going on while he was governor. It becomes known as the license-for-bribe scandal. You'll probably know this a lot better than I do, but in a thumbnail: people would come in—maybe they would be immigrants, maybe their language skills wouldn't be so good—and if you made a contribution to the Ryan campaign, you could get yourself a trucker's license. It would certainly expedite the process of getting a trucker's license. That's the allegation where all the other things seem to spring from, beyond that point. I'll turn it over to you from here.

Edgar: Well, I think where his problem started was, there was a perception among many that he had lied to them in the campaign. He'd said, "I'm not going to raise taxes," and he did. The case about the tragedy of the family had been out there during the campaign, and it didn't seem to have much traction.³¹ But after he became governor, early in his administration, they put through the license fee increase and had this huge spending bill. I think a lot of people said, "Wait a minute"—I don't know how many times I heard it—"he said he wasn't going to raise taxes and he did." This really did not become major until the fall of 1999. In fact, I was out at Harvard [University] when this really got to be heated. But people already were beginning to have questions based off they didn't trust him; they thought he had lied on this tax issue.

DePue: Part of it, he'd already had close to thirty years in government, and he came from the Kankakee machine.

Edgar: Yes, but only we insiders know what that means. To be very truthful, most people don't know anything about politics or politicians to speak of. They know the mayor; they know the governor. Now, he'd been secretary of state, and they knew his name, but they didn't know that much about him. It's when you become governor

³¹ The accident happened November 8, 1994. Allegations that the driver of the truck was operating with a "fixed" license circulated for several years, but were finally confirmed when a trucking company official testified to paying off McCook testing station workers. *Chicago Tribune*, August 27, 1999, and September 27, 1999.

that people begin to form opinions. Early on, the opinion I think they formed of him was, “Wait a minute. He lied to us.”

DePue: We’re talking about the people of Illinois, the public of Illinois.

Edgar: Yes. The public of Illinois. He’d run this commercial during the campaign which they all saw—“I’m not going to raise your tax”—then he doubled the license fee. The problem—because I know, I used to be secretary of state—is that’s not something deducted from your paycheck that you don’t necessarily see; (DePue laughs) that’s something you write a check out to. People, especially seniors, who write checks know how much they did last year. So they were really up in arms about it.

DePue: Or people who have two or three or four or more cars that have to write—

Edgar: Yes. So people notice that. What I’m saying is that they already began to have reservations about George because of that. Then in the fall, along come these accusations that these terrible things happened as a result of shenanigans in the secretary of state’s office, and people are to the point where they’ll believe bad things about him. Now, that’s what I think. That’s how I viewed what happened. Then you had one thing after another. The other problem with poor George was, he looked the part a little bit. I had people tell me, “He looks like that old throwback kind of politician,” and he kind of talks that gruff voice and all that. So he had all that working against him. But the main thing was, people didn’t trust him at that point, so if they heard something bad about him, they were going to believe it.

You could watch his numbers in the fall just continue to decline. The *Tribune* had a headline—this was late in the legislative session or something like that—“Ryan Takes Care of Rich Pals.” I don’t know if it was something to do with Duchossois at Arlington or what.³² That headline and that feeling started to be out there. I remember just listening to the reaction. People were forming opinions. They voted for him—barely; it ended up being a closer election than we thought it was going to be. It’s those first few months in office when people really form an opinion of a new governor, and that sticks with you. I think, unfortunately for George, they weren’t positive. They turned out to be negative. At the end of that year, when this investigation really started heating up about the secretary of state’s office and all these charges were made, people believed that he was guilty of them—not so much that it was his people. They held him responsible; [they thought] he was in there taking money, which I don’t think he was. I don’t think anybody’s ever made that charge.

DePue: There is one other personality that we need to interject here, and he’s going to (laughs) come up for Blagojevich as well—Patrick Fitzgerald, the federal prosecutor up in Chicago. No one’s ever accused him of not being dogged when

³² Richard Duchossois, owner of Arlington Park, a major horse racing venue.

he's on the case, especially of some of these politicians, because he was the guy who went after Scooter Libby.³³

Edgar: He didn't start this. He did not start this. He was not appointed until 2001.

DePue: So he's a Bush appointee.

Edgar: He's a Bush appointee. This investigation started before Fitzgerald was on the scene.

DePue: But the reason I mention it is, of course the newspapers pick it up. They know that he's being investigated, and as you say, there's always the story and the speculation of what's going on in the prosecutor's office as well. Was this prosecution, in your recollection, started before he was even in the governor's office?

Edgar: Oh, yes, definitely. They started at least in 2000. In Illinois, [Peter] Fitzgerald didn't get a chance to nominate somebody until sometime in 2001, so there was already an investigation underway before [Patrick] Fitzgerald came in as U.S. attorney.

DePue: I always have the hardest time keeping these two guys straight: Patrick Fitzgerald is the...

Edgar: Is the U.S. attorney, yes.

DePue: And Peter Fitzgerald was the senator.

Edgar: Yes, he was the senator who had submitted [Patrick] Fitzgerald's name, who was a guy in the U.S. attorney's office, but was from out East.

DePue: You've spent a long time working with Ryan and knew Ryan, at least professionally.

Edgar: Oh, I used to have dinner with him a lot back in the legislative days.

DePue: What's his fatal flaw? What was it that got him in trouble?

Edgar: I think George was of the old school. I think if he'd have been governor forty years before—

DePue: Four or forty?

Edgar: Forty. Excluding the secretary of state incident, that tragedy that happened in Wisconsin, I don't think anything would have ever been raised about it. The other problem is, George at heart is a legislator, and that's a different mentality than an executive branch person. I don't think he made that transition. He still wanted to

³³ Scooter Libby was vice president Dick Cheney's chief of staff, and a key figure in Fitzgerald's investigation into the 2003 leak of a Central Intelligence Agency employee's covert identity. He was indicted in 2005.

make everybody happy, always said yes, never used the word no. And always thought, We can figure out a way. Like, I'll say in the campaign, "Yes, we're not going to raise taxes," and then I'll rationalize later, Well, this is just a fee; it's not a tax. He wasn't good on details. George loved to make people happy, but he didn't really want to read the fine print. I think I told the story about when we did a bill back when I was a legislator and he was Republican leader, and it was kind of complicated.

DePue: Yes.

Edgar: He didn't have a clue what was in the bill. The night we were supposed to learn that, he said, "I'll go to bed; you worry about the details." That was just kind of George. As a legislator, you can kind of get by on that if you've got staff, if you've got people around you. I think it's harder when you go in the executive branch. But saying all this, I never thought he was dishonest. Because I was with him at dinners, and we'd sit around and talk about investigations—you don't want to do this wrong, or whatever. I just don't think he would have knowingly done something illegal. Now, if something half illegal got done, he might say, "We got to get rid of this issue" There was that "I'll kind of sweep it under the rug" kind of thing. But I don't think he would initiate and take money. And I think any of these stories of, oh, some people, some buddy of his or a lobbyist maybe giving him five hundred dollars to go play the slot machines or something like that, George just viewed that as a gift, just as a friend to a friend.

The thing that always got me about George Ryan was he'd give things away to people that were nasty to him. I mean, it wasn't like, "You trade this," because he just wanted people to like him. That's kind of a normal trait of normal politicians. I just think that was kind of old-school. I think the governor's office was really not where George's strongest suit was. I think it was better in the legislature, where you like to wheel and deal, and there's checks and balances if you do get a little carried away. But unfortunately, as governor, if you're wheeling and dealing, there's no real checks and balances, and I think somebody that wheels and deals...

The other problem with George a little bit—he had some good people around him, he had some bad people around him. That's why I always stress staff is so important. He wasn't real good at sorting good and bad sometimes with staff. All he cared about was loyalty, which is important, but almost loyalty to a fault. And he did not like criticism. I remember times when I worked for Thompson, he'd do something and I'd go in there and say, "You know you can't do this." He'd just react like, You're not my friend if you're telling me I'm wrong. I think a lot of the good staff got to the point where they didn't feel comfortable telling him sometimes, and he wouldn't listen to them.

DePue: He had the reputation for a temper. Did you see that?

Edgar: Oh, yes, he'd get mad, but some of that was show. When I was the legislative guy in the governor's office, I got called down to his [Ryan's] office one time. He had

some people... He just started yelling and screaming at me. And this is George Ryan; I mean, I'd nominated him for leader, we'd served together. That doesn't mean he has to say yes to me, but you don't treat me like... Later I saw him and he said, "Now, you know that was all for show." I said, "Well, I didn't appreciate it even if it was for show. You can tell me I'm wrong, but you don't go through all that stuff." He would get mad, but we all get mad. Some of that was more for show.

But George also had a big heart. George wanted people to like him. I remember telling my troopers when I left, "If you guys are going to work for George, you'll like him. He'll be very good to you guys. He'll make sure you get fed and take care of you." It turned out some of those guys got mistreated, I think, not because of him, because of some of his staff people. Again, I think the biggest problem was George probably just should not have been governor. I just think that was not the niche for him, and I think it was too easy to get in trouble.

DePue: But his whole career was headed in that direction.

Edgar: His whole career, he wanted to go someplace. He wanted to be Speaker, and then he wanted to be secretary of state when I got the appointment. I think we all in government want to rise to the top and be the governor. George can be a very engaging guy, very loyal guy. I remember when he first came to the legislature; I was working with Blair and picked out who would be on committees.³⁴ We put him on appropriations, and I thought he was a guy that would take hold. But the details were not his thing, and sometimes that can get you in trouble. The other part was that when he put a staff together, loyalty was so important, sometimes he overlooked ability.

DePue: Let's talk about loyalty and how that possibly got him in trouble here. March 2003, I think the first person in this scandal was convicted, and that would be Scott Fawell.

Edgar: I don't think he was the first. I think there were other people in the office, lesser people.

DePue: Yes, but he was Ryan's chief of staff.

Edgar: He was the closest, yes.

DePue: In the process of getting Fawell convicted, you've got somebody who's more willing to cooperate with the prosecutors. He starts to give testimony against Ryan and lots of other people in the administration. December 2003: I've got that Ryan and lobbyist Lawrence Warner are indicted on twenty-two separate counts. I probably should throw in here also that one of the people who Fawell is trying to protect is his girlfriend, [Andrea] Coutretsis. So there's that little bit of sex in there

³⁴ For Edgar's work as an assistant to Speaker of the House W. Robert Blair, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 28, 2009, 40-101. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

as well to liven up the pages of the *Tribune*. That's past the timeframe that we've got another election, so Ryan—

Edgar: Two thousand two, yes.

DePue: —has already stepped down from that part of it. What was your thought of Jim Thompson stepping forward and helping with the defense?

Edgar: I was a little surprised he was quite as visible. They did not have the closest relationship when he was governor and George was lieutenant governor. Now, they became closer when Thompson was out and George was in office. Thompson's law firm did a lot of work—got a lot of work; they didn't do it free—during the Ryan administration, so they maybe developed a closer relationship at that point. But Dan Webb is the guy who really was the defense attorney. Dan Webb was the guy you always say, "If you're in trouble, you want Dan Webb to be your attorney." I mean, I would. I think Thompson—that's the same firm—so that was kind of tied there.

DePue: Well, this gets us past the time when we had an election. Let's go back here a year, 2002 or maybe the run-up to the 2002 election. I think early on, it was obvious Ryan was not going to run for reelection. He was going to be nothing but a drag-on on the Republican ticket, if he didn't take the entire ticket down with him. Your thoughts on the Republican primary that year?

Edgar: It's not so much the primary. I think you probably want to talk about six months before the primary: who's going to run if he doesn't run? Jim Ryan wanted to run, and even publicly put pressure on Ryan to make his decision, because George hadn't made his decision—indicated if he ran, he'd run against him. There was concern among the Republicans—most agreed George couldn't run—about who could run and overcome that problem. I don't know if at that point, people were quite as worried that Jim Ryan's last name would be as much of a problem as it appeared to be through a lot of that campaign. The feeling was just, Who can overcome the problems of George Ryan to the party? I know that they had a group of the party leaders, which had some meetings, trying to figure out who ought to run. They approached me and wanted me to reconsider. Bob Kjellander was kind of the go-between; he was the national committeeman. The two Republican [legislative] leaders and the state party chairman were probably there. There were some others there, probably somebody from the medical society—I think Al Lerner might have been at that meeting.³⁵ They talked about and thought that I probably had my own reputation one way or the other, and George Ryan was not going to have an impact on that. They came and asked me if I would think about it. I wasn't real crazy about it. I'd been out for less than four years and did not really want to go back.

³⁵ The Illinois State Medical Society sells malpractice insurance to doctors through ISMIE Mutual Insurance. At the time, Al Lerner was chief executive of both the medical society and ISMIE, which was a major donor to Republican candidates. *Chicago Sun-Times*, May 27, 2003; "Doctors Split Over Curbs for Insurers," *Chicago Tribune*, May 27 2005.

DePue: Were you aware at that time of the budget hole that you'd probably have to go back and fill again?

Edgar: Yes. I knew the budget was not anything like it was when I left there; it was, of course, in pretty good shape (laughs) compared to the next two times. I had talked to Carter Hendren, and he just said, "The budget's a mess." Kjellander told me, "If you run, they'll all support you." I said, "Jim Ryan really wants to run, and I like Jim Ryan, and I think he can overcome the Ryan thing." He said "Well, they'd feel better if you'd run, and they said they think they can explain to Jim." Pate was supposed to be in the meeting, and Lee Daniels and all of them; I was getting all of this secondhand. I was in Illinois; I was getting ready to go to Colorado for the summer. Brenda was already in Colorado. I called Brenda and said, "You know, they're talking to me about wanting me to run, afraid that nobody else can win." She wasn't crazy about that. I was thinking, "I want to go to Colorado; I don't know if I want (laughs) to stay here and campaign." I said, "Let me think about it overnight."

The next morning, I called Carter again and Carter said, "Well, Pate and George Ryan just told Jim Ryan they're going to support him." I said, "Oh, then it's resolved." He said, "Yes. The word we got, you weren't interested in it." So I called Kjellander, and that's the first Kjellander had heard, because he had left the meeting. I said, "Nah, It's done. It's fine. I don't really want to get into a fight, and I don't really want to do it. If Jim Ryan really wants to do it, I'd hate to keep him from his chance to do this." So I went out to Colorado. Then, George Ryan wouldn't announce he wasn't going to run. They got kind of nasty, then finally George Ryan announced he wasn't going to run, and Jim Ryan announced. I said, "I'll probably support you. I'm just not ready yet to take sides; I don't want to get in yet." I just wanted to let him out and see how he did for a while. I would guess probably early October sometime, I did a fly-around with him and endorsed him.

There were a bunch of them, some of the party folks, that just didn't want Jim Ryan for a variety of reasons, and I think that was part of why they were trying to get me to run. A lot of them ended up going with the lieutenant governor of George Ryan, Corinne Wood. She was more moderate. They thought it was going to be tough to have somebody as conservative as Jim Ryan win, because he was anti-choice [on abortion] and things like that. So they said, "We're going to go with Corinne Wood." I said, "She's not going to... First of all, she's George Ryan's lieutenant governor. I think that's a problem for you." She came and talked to me, and I said, "I like you, but I think if I'm going to endorse, I'm probably going to endorse Jim Ryan." So I endorsed Jim Ryan, and a lot of them went with Corinne Wood. Then you had the senator from the southwest suburbs who's a real right-winger, O'Malley, that ran in the primary. Those are the three.

I was supportive of Jim Ryan. It was funny, though, the right wing went after him; they said he was too liberal. I'm thinking, (laughs) Jim Ryan would be the most conservative guy we ever had as governor, if he won. Especially after Thompson; then George, who everybody thought was conservative, turned out to be

moderate-to-liberal. George changed on everything after he got to be governor. I thought those people would be happy to have Jim Ryan be the nominee, but they really beat him. Then they made the argument he was close to George Ryan, but George Ryan and Jim Ryan didn't like each other. They wouldn't talk. The only thing they had in common was their last name was Ryan—no relation. Of course, a lot of folks out there thought Jim Ryan was George Ryan's son because he looked so much younger.

So the primary went along, and Corinne finished third, O'Malley was second, and Jim Ryan was first. And what really upset me: After the primary, Corinne was very good; she got up and endorsed Jim Ryan. O'Malley kept complaining about him, kept saying he was tied to George Ryan and it was going to drag the party down, and just, I thought, did a lot of damage to Jim Ryan after the primary. It was uncalled for, and I thought it was really, very, very detrimental. Next to George Ryan, O'Malley was probably the biggest reason that Jim Ryan lost the election that fall. But Jim Ryan also had to spend a lot of his money in the primary, because it was a pretty bitter and costly primary. Unfortunately, because he was the leading candidate, they directed all the negatives at him and put him behind the eight ball starting out against Blagojevich, who also had a close race. But nobody knew these people; it was close, but in public it wasn't as vicious. People knew Jim Ryan, so if they made a charge on Jim Ryan, it stuck.

DePue: Why was George Ryan's scandal, what happened to him, so damaging to the Republican Party?

Edgar: Because he was a Republican, and a lot of times people don't go any farther than that.

DePue: But it doesn't seem that Blagojevich, who took the corruption a couple notches, significant notches, above what happened in the Ryan administration, has hurt the Democratic Party.

Edgar: Yes it did. They lost four congressional seats, they lost a U.S. Senate seat, and they lost in the legislature. You got to remember, this legislative map was drawn by the Democrats, so it had a firewall already built into it, and they still lost seats. The only thing they didn't lose was the governor's office; they won it by about twenty thousand votes. I would argue that it had more to do with the philosophy—or at least the perceived philosophy—of our candidate in this case.³⁶ If it had been somebody that was viewed as middle-of-the-road, I think we'd have won the governor's race handily. So the Blagojevich thing did have an impact. It's just that the Democrats start out with a big head start in Illinois: one, this is a Democratic state now, and two, on the legislative map, they drew the map. So they should have done better.

DePue: I don't want to get into the 2010 election yet—

³⁶ Pat Quinn defeated state senator Bill Brady (R-Bloomington), whose conservative social views were heavily publicized by Chicago media.

Edgar: I'm just saying that's the difference. The other thing that hurt to some extent: we had the White House. Now, that wasn't a bad off-year election for us, but it usually is not a plus for you either.

DePue: As I recall, though, the Republicans might have actually picked up seats.

Edgar: Yes, they did pretty well, but it wasn't like if the Democrats had the White House, and two years later you have this reaction. It was okay, but we didn't get all that much help from the top. But the biggest problem was—and you'd have to be here—Blagojevich ran against George Ryan, and very well.

DePue: This is something that I'm totally unfamiliar with. You always hear about the Democratic Central Committee and basically what they call the slatemakers. That goes back to the Daley administration, but the thing—

Edgar: The original mayor, not this guy.³⁷

DePue: The original mayor, absolutely.

Edgar: And they don't do it anymore like they... Madigan tries to do it.

DePue: But did the Republicans ever have anything like that kind of party discipline in selecting who the candidate should be?

Edgar: No, no. If you had a governor, the governor might have been able to shape it. I shaped it a little bit in 1990 when I ran, even though I wasn't the governor. I think George Ryan would have been the secretary of state nominee anyway, but there's no doubt that with me supporting him over Greg Baise, that quelled any discontent.

DePue: So the Republicans get to fight all this stuff out in the primaries.

Edgar: More so than the Democrats, historically. Now, that's not been true recently of the Democrats; they've had battles.

DePue: But they did have a serious one that particular year, 2002, and it basically boiled down between Blagojevich and Paul Vallas. Talk to us about that one from your perspective.

Edgar: You had Paul Vallas, who had been the head of the Chicago schools, who I think most people thought had done a pretty good job. You had Blagojevich, who was a congressman; his claim to fame was he had a father-in-law who was very powerful politically in Chicago.

DePue: Dick Mell.

³⁷ Richard J. Daley, former mayor of Chicago and father of Richard M. Daley, who was mayor at the time of this interview. For Edgar's thoughts about the difference between the two, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, September 9, 2010, 36-40.

Edgar: Dick Mell. Nobody was impressed when Blagojevich was in Springfield or impressed with his congressional [service], it was just his father-in-law was able to get enough—and you didn't have to get 50 percent. I think he probably won it with about 32 percent of the vote; I can't remember. But you had Burris in the race; he always was in the race, and he'd always get 25 percent—

DePue: He came in third.

Edgar: —but he never gets anything more than maybe 80 percent of the black vote. He was in to keep votes from Vallas, a lot of people thought, because Vallas was going to do pretty well with the blacks, because of Chicago schools. Was there a fourth candidate that year?

DePue: I think there was. I can't recall who it was, though.

Edgar: I can't remember. The feeling was it was between Vallas and Blagojevich in the end, though I'm sure early on Burris showed well, as he always does, because he starts out with some name recognition. Vallas could not raise money very well. He wasn't very well organized. Vallas had not been in politics like that, whereas Blagojevich—they were well organized. Mell had a lot of the party operatives in the Chicago area, then they'd cut deals with people in St. Clair and Madison and Rock Island, where you have some Democratic control; I hate to use the word “machine”—they're not really machines and they're not that efficient—but they have organizations. He had that support downstate. I think Vallas had Glenn Poshard, but I think in the end, Blagojevich actually did better in Glenn Poshard's area than Vallas did. Vallas's support was more in the city and the suburbs, but it was more by his reputation than by organization. It went right down to the wire. But Vallas never had as much money as Blagojevich, was not organized as well, and I think it was settled by 1 or 2 percent. It was late that night—it was southern Illinois—when the final votes came in. Blagojevich won it downstate. They'd cut the deals with party operatives down there. I credit his father-in-law for that; Blagojevich couldn't have done that. I can't remember if [David] Axelrod was involved in that campaign.

DePue: He was already a political consultant.

Edgar: He might have been involved a little bit with that, too, because he's from the North Side. So Blagojevich, I didn't know how to pronounce [his name]. I was doing commentary on WGN that night, and all that day I tried to practice saying Blagojevich's name because I thought, He might win; I might have to learn this name. I was scared to death during that night I'd blow that name; every time I'd say his name, I'd pause to try to think through it because that just was not a name... I had never learned the name when he was a legislator; I didn't need to.

DePue: It's the same as listening to the national commentators six and a half years later trying to pronounce the name. (laughs)

Edgar: Yes, they all like “Blago.” But that night, I was a little surprised. When it came down, I thought that maybe southern Illinois—that Vallas, if he had Glenn Poshard’s support—but it didn’t seem to do that much good.

DePue: What did you know about him as a person, as a candidate?

Edgar: Who’s that?

DePue: Blagojevich.

Edgar: Not much. I knew he was a legislator. He was just viewed as kind of a lightweight; that all his successes had been because his father-in-law had moved him along.

DePue: That’s an interesting seat, because it was Dan Rostenkowski’s seat, then Republican [Michael] Flanagan held it for just one term, then Blagojevich, and then it’s Rahm Emanuel.

Edgar: Rahm Emanuel. Yes, I always say, “Rahm Emanuel is a smart version of Rod Blagojevich.” I didn’t take Rod Blagojevich serious when he first announced he was going to run for governor. But when you have multi numbers running, you don’t have to get 50 percent. The feeling was that Burris didn’t have a chance, but they got him in the race so he could siphon enough black votes away from Vallas to help Blagojevich. If that’s true, it was a good strategy, because it did. Vallas did much better than Blagojevich did with black voters. He did have a pretty good number, but he’d have had a lot more if Burris hadn’t been in there.

DePue: I think Vallas also did pretty well in the Collar Counties and the suburbs.

Edgar: Yes, but there aren’t that many (laughs) Democratic voters, unfortunately for him. But where he did lousy was downstate in the Democratic strongholds, like Madison, St. Clair, and Rock Island. That made the difference in that primary.

DePue: Let’s get Blagojevich into office, then. How soon are you starting to hear grumbling?

Edgar: Well, let’s talk a little bit about the campaign.

DePue: For the general election, yes.

Edgar: The general election, Jim Ryan got behind the eight ball, because instead of getting a lift from winning the primary, O’Malley kept attacking him, and here was a guy that had run against... Whereas Blagojevich, because he was not an incumbent—and Jim Ryan was as close to being an incumbent as you could be—Blagojevich kind of got a lift because he won this close primary, and Vallas held his breath and endorsed him. He was the very gracious loser, whereas O’Malley wasn’t. Jim Ryan never got that lift. He had to keep fighting the primary, and he was out of money. So that put him behind as spring went along.

Then I got complaints from a lot of the Republicans, worrying about the organization of the campaign. Both congressional and state guys didn't think Jim Ryan was very well organized, and he wasn't, very truthfully. The thing that struck me was he's a very smart guy on the legal thing, very good guy, but running statewide and understanding all the nuances of a governor's race was completely different than running for AG.³⁸ When I did the fly-around with him, I was surprised how many groups he didn't know; he didn't have contact with a lot of groups or understand that stuff, and his people didn't because they were all focused on the attorney general's office. So there was the fear that he didn't have the right organization. There was a lot of pressure to get Carter Hendren to come over and run the campaign. I spent time talking to Carter.

DePue: You were trying to encourage him to do that?

Edgar: Yes, I was trying to encourage him, because I thought they need somebody like that to run the campaign. So he came over to run it. Then they came back and said, "We want you to be the state party chairman." I was in Colorado. I said, "Why? State party chairman doesn't have anything to do with anything. Your campaign runs..." They said, "Well, the perception would be great, because people think we need you involved, and this is a way to get you involved." I said, "I don't want to be state party... That's a no-win proposition, and I don't see..." "Well, we'll get you..." I said, "You don't have any money there." So everybody in the party started saying, "Oh, yes, that'd be great." All of a sudden there was this perception that if I became state party chairman, that was going to help Jim Ryan in this election, which made no sense to me. I was all for Jim Ryan, and I was willing to do things, but I thought this was crazy. Carter was really bugging me to do it, too. He said, "Now, you called me up and talked me into doing this; I need you to do that." They said, "We'll get a staff for you, and..." They wanted to make it appear like I was running the show on the campaign or something, or just have me involved. I said, "I don't think so. First of all, I don't know how the university would react. It's one thing for me to endorse, but become state party chairman? I don't think there's any legal problem, but I just don't know."

(pause in recording)

Edgar: I talked to Jim Stukel, who was President of the U of I, and he said, "No, I don't want you to do that. I don't want you to be right in the middle of all..." That's a little different than endorsing, because that's kind of... I said, "It's not a full-time job, but that's fine if you don't want me to do it. I don't want to do it anyway." I told them no. I did go out and campaign a little bit. They did not ask me to do any commercials or anything. I had done one in the primary, I think, but they didn't ask me to do any in the general election.

Unfortunately, Jim Ryan started out behind because of the hangover from the primary. He had trouble raising money. Blagojevich did not have trouble. Once you

³⁸ Jim E. Ryan had been elected attorney general of Illinois in 1994.

get a lead, you don't have trouble raising money. If the polls say you're going to win, then the money comes in. If the poll says you're going to lose, it makes it much more difficult to raise the money. As a result, Jim Ryan did not have the dollars to match Blagojevich in that general election, and just never was able... Also, the George Ryan thing was a huge thing. Blagojevich, I think, very effectively hammered away at that, and there was confusion up to the last minute; a lot of folks thought that Jim Ryan was related to George Ryan. We tried to make that clear, but that unfortunately didn't come through.

The other thing that was interesting in that race was that Pat Quinn had got the nomination for lieutenant governor. He was probably the last person most of the Democrats wanted to be lieutenant governor, but he had name recognition from his activist stuff. Also, he was state treasurer for a while, so in the Democratic primary, he had the most name recognition, and most people running for lieutenant governor don't have any name recognition. We thought, That'll be an interesting ticket. We didn't know how they'd get along, but they both were able to get along to get elected. So it didn't cause some of the problems we thought it might cause.

But unfortunately, as I said, for Jim Ryan, that campaign just never got in gear. I think Carter helped when he got there, to create better relationships with some of the party folks around the state and begin to set up a more effective campaign organization, but it just never happened that election.

DePue: That gets us to the point of talking about the Blagojevich administration itself. Again, you're very much on the outside—you've been outside for four years plus—but I suspect you were getting calls from people telling you what they were seeing, and you certainly were paying attention to what you were hearing about in the news.

Edgar: I had no experience with Blagojevich; I never dealt with him when he was a legislator or as a congressman. It was probably about two or three weeks after the election when I got a call from Lisa Madigan; she wanted to see if I would meet with her and just give her some advice. I said, "Fine, but I'm not"—

DePue: She's brand new to office.

Edgar: She's fresh into the attorney general. I said, "I'm not an attorney; I don't know that much about the attorney general's office." She said, "Oh, no, you've been a state official." So I said fine. I think I went up to Chicago and met with her and spent about an hour and a half—a very nice conversation. She asked me what I thought about staffing. She had some people who had worked for me at one time and some other things. Right at the end of the thing, I said, "I know you got a lot of things to do, but this is a smart thing you did today, making me feel important. You know, I get calls from the press asking me what I think about things once in a while. Not that I would ever say anything negative about you, because your dad and I are good friends, but I don't know you as well." In fact, that's really the first time I had ever talked to her at any length. I said, "You go talk to some of the old-timers that maybe

don't get asked their opinions that much, and that'll keep them from complaining about you." And she just smiled. Then we left.

About four days later, I get a call from Rod Blagojevich; he wants to meet with me and pick my brain. (DePue laughs) I laughed, and I thought, I wonder how that came about. He said, "I'll come over to see you in Champaign." I said, "No, no, you don't have to do that. You're the governor; I'll come to you." We set up a time, and I went to Chicago to meet with him there. So I'm up in Chicago. About an hour before the meeting, I get a call; he's canceled the meeting because he has to meet with Emil Jones. All right. They did that four times. Call, set up a meeting, then at the last minute, they canceled. Finally I told Sue, "Don't worry about that call next time. I don't think this is ever..." (laughs) Never did happen. But that's kind of Rod Blagojevich. He was known for not showing up, canceling, and things like that.

I really never had any dealings with him except on the presidential library. He called after months of speculation and me being told by a variety of people that he was going to call me. In fact, Steve Neil used to write about it a lot, that I ought to be the person. The reason I think that Blagojevich named me was that Steve Neil had written these columns. Steve Neil was one of the few press guys that wrote favorable things about Blagojevich, because Blagojevich liked history, and Steve Neil wrote history books. So they'd talk. Steve Neil had been a columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*; he wrote a column three times a week, and he'd been very critical of George Ryan on the way he handled the presidential library. So Blagojevich went along with whatever Steve wanted to do on the presidential library. Richard Norton Smith; that name had really come from Steve Neil. My name, to be the president of the board, came from Steve Neil. Steve told me that because he got tired of waiting for Blagojevich, he finally wrote a column one day saying that he expected Blagojevich to name me. So Blagojevich called me that day saying, "There's a column out there saying I'm going to name you. I want to at least get the credit." I said, "I'll do it, but I don't want any political interference. Don't send us anybody to hire that's not qualified or anything like that." He said, "No, no, you and Richard run that place."

DePue: Richard, we should say—

Edgar: Richard Norton Smith. He was executive director of the presidential library. I have to say, at least when I was involved, when Blagojevich was there, he didn't mess with the presidential library. They did send names occasionally; they didn't force them, and in most cases they were pretty qualified people, so we hired them.

DePue: Let's leave Blagojevich alone for a little bit, because we can pick him up in a few years down the road. I want to get to the 2004 Senate campaign. As always, I would imagine, by 2003, people might be approaching you.

Edgar: In late spring of 2003, Peter Fitzgerald surprised most people and said he wasn't going to run for another term. Now, there had been concerns that he would have a

hard time getting reelected. Part of it was he had problems with some of the party folks because he had a tendency to want to go out and pick fights.

DePue: He was somewhat of a lone wolf as far as the...

Edgar: Yes, I think that's a good way to describe it. But I can't say that he'd pick up a whole lot of support from the public in general. Senators aren't that visible in Illinois. They go off to Washington, and they're never seen again. Because Dick Durbin's a leader, maybe you see him more on television, but even that—people just don't think about senators like they think about the governor or the mayor. So even though he [Fitzgerald] had been there, he hadn't built up all that much... You'd do his job approval; head-to-head with other possible Democrats, he didn't run all that strong. He looked like he could have a tough time. I think he would have probably won, but no guarantee. Also, he had a young family, and that took time away from that family. He was kind of a lone wolf in the Senate, too, even among the Republicans in Washington; it wasn't just in Illinois. I had some talks with Trent Lott; he kind of rolled his eyes about it, said, "It'd be nice to have you here—somebody we could work with." (laughs) Peter had been that way in Springfield, too, just kind of his nature, but in some ways that was his strength to a lot of folks. I got along with Peter, actually. I was one of the few Republican leaders in Illinois that had an ongoing conversation with him. We didn't always agree on things, but I thought we got along pretty well—probably better than I did when I was governor and he was a state senator.

I have about a hundred-yard lane from my house down to the road where the mail and the newspaper come. One morning, I walked out and picked up the *Tribune*, opened it up, and it said, "Peter Fitzgerald Not to Run."³⁹ I'm thinking, "Oh, this is going to be a long day for me." I already had some indication from some people that they thought I'd run for the Senate. I had said, "I think Fitzgerald..." They said, "Well, he may not." I said, "Ah, he'll run." So I just thought, Uh-oh, I'm going to have people on me after this. So I walked in the house and said, "Brenda, this is going to be a long day." She said, "Why?" I said, "Fitzgerald just announced he's not running for the Senate again. I think I'm going to start getting phone calls."

An hour later, I started getting phone calls. I can't remember if Karl Rove called me first... Somebody called me from Washington. Then somebody called me from Springfield and said, "We need you to think about this." I said, "I'll think about it. I don't have any plans to do this, but I'll think about it." That night, actually, we were going to Springfield. Carter Hendren was leaving the Senate staff. Pate Philip had gone out as leader that year, and Frank Watson had become the Republican leader; they were jointly having a going-away party for Carter, and I'd been invited. I'd already told them I'd come over there. I thought, Oh, of all nights to go to Springfield. I know what this is all going to be about. I got several more

³⁹ "Fitzgerald Not Going to Pursue Re-election," *Chicago Tribune*, April 15, 2003. The headline Edgar would have read the following morning was "Edgar Leads GOP's List to Replace Fitzgerald."

calls during the day from people in Washington and Springfield about I ought to run for the Senate; I needed to run for the Senate.

So we get over to Springfield, and we go into what was [George] Baur's—I'm not sure what they call it now—over by the capitol building. I go in, and the whole press corps is there to meet me first and ask me. So I say, "I was surprised. People have asked and called today, and I told them I'd think about it. I don't have any plans at this point, but I'll think about it." Then we go into the function, and what was to be a going-away party for Carter started to be a "let's recruit Edgar to run for the Senate." Pate Philip gets up and makes this long speech about why I'm the guy to run for the U.S. Senate and blah-blah-blah, and "oh, by the way Carter, thanks for your service." (laughter) It was really a phenomenal thing. It's something that was interesting because, of course, all of a sudden this was the only game in town and there wasn't anything else going on. We didn't have any statewide races this year, so this was it, and it surprised everybody. So there was a lot of visibility on what am I going to do.

Now, on the Democratic side, you already had a lot of people lining up to run against Peter Fitzgerald. You already had Obama, who everybody thought was probably about the third candidate on the list. You had a very wealthy guy who was going to spend a fortune to run. There were a couple others, actually, that were figured—

DePue: Dan Hynes?

Edgar: No. Dan Hynes ran. I think Dan Hynes finished third in that race. Who else? Read through the names there you have.

DePue: I've got Barack and I've got Dan Hynes.

Edgar: There was somebody else that was a multimillionaire who had donated a lot of money. He got in trouble; they found out he had a very nasty divorce, and that came out.

DePue: Oh, you're talking about Jack Ryan.

Edgar: No, that's the Republican side. This is the Democratic side. There was a question about spousal abuse and some really nasty things that came out.⁴⁰ He was the frontrunner, because he'd been working at it and had given a lot of money to a lot of Democrats. He was considered the frontrunner, but he fell aside as it went along. So the Democrats were already lining up, thinking that Peter was beatable. There were already people out there, but not any huge name. Dan Hynes was state comptroller, but that's not a huge name necessarily. So all of a sudden the focus is on: What's Edgar doing to do?

⁴⁰ Blair Hull, a wealthy options trader, was leading the Democratic field in the 2004 U.S. Senate primary, until the media began reporting on the order of protection his wife had filed against him during their divorce in 1998. *Chicago Tribune*, March 9, 2004.

DePue: But they're focusing on you because there's this vacuum on the Republican side, a lack of really prominent names out there.

Edgar: Yes, there was really nobody else out there at that point. Some lesser names maybe began to [emerge], but it was all, What's Edgar going to do, before anybody really jumped in on the Republican side. It was very intense. This was in the spring; it was very intense for maybe a month at the most, then I finally made a decision. You never know if you can win. People always said, "Well, if you had run, Barack Obama wouldn't be president." I don't know. After he made that speech at the convention—but maybe he wouldn't have made that speech, he may not have been... We had some joint supporters, financial supporters, and there was talk that "If you run, we'll talk him out of running." I don't know if that would have happened.

DePue: We'll talk Obama out of running?

Edgar: Yes, because Obama was somewhat of a long shot at that point. As I said, in the polling he maybe came in third on the Democrat side.

DePue: At that point.

Edgar: At that point.

DePue: This is even prior to the primary then.

Edgar: Oh, yes. No, this is before the primary. This is before he did the speech.

DePue: When he's still pretty obscure.

Edgar: Yes. He's just a state senator who had lost a congressional primary; he'd finished third in a congressional primary.

DePue: And he's a state senator who was not all that prominent in the state Senate either, was he?

Edgar: No. I mean, he wasn't one of the leaders, but that doesn't mean anything when you run statewide. But he was also not from the black Democratic organization; he was from Hyde Park, which is a whole different thing. I think it helped him win statewide, but it didn't assure him that he was going to have the South Side of Chicago for him in a primary. Because they always viewed him somewhat as an outsider, and he was in Hyde Park; Hyde Park's a whole different ballgame to the rest of the South Side.

DePue: That's probably like being a lakeside liberal.

Edgar: It is, except it's on the South Side. (DePue laughs) It is very liberal and very independent. I didn't know Barack Obama well, but I knew him somewhat, and I thought, You know, he'd probably be a good United States senator. African

American and all, bright guy, and he wants to go. I'd gone through this four years or six years before, and I wasn't really sure I wanted to be a U.S. senator any more today than I did then.

The big difference was 9/11. Because of 9/11, I felt that the Senate does have a real, important role to play on national security and foreign affairs. And while I may not personally want to do it, maybe I have more responsibility to do it now than I thought back in '98, when you didn't have that kind of problem out there. So that weighed on me a lot more than anything in '97 that said you ought to run. I had people calling, so I made a few phone calls around. I talked to some people that I knew could be with Obama, and I just said, "Hey, if I ran..." They said, "We'll be with you; we'll try to talk him out of running." This independent group out there that I thought I could appeal to—I didn't necessarily want to lock horns with Obama. I probably gave Obama more credit that he might be able to emerge as the nominee than most people did at that point in the process. And again, we're talking almost a year before the primary. This was 2003, and the primary wasn't until March of 2004. A lot of time, a lot of things change.

I got a call from the president, and he said, "I would like you to think about this. Now, I'm not telling you, you got to do it, but I just wish you'd think about it. I could use the help in the Senate, and you could also help me in Illinois in the election in 2004." We had been friends before. So I said fine. He said, "If you ever want to talk to me about it, you give me a call." I said, "Fine, I'll think about it." Then the Senate campaign committee people came out and talked with me; they were much more organized than I thought they were in '97 when I'd talked to them. They had answers to questions, and they were very candid and very good, I thought. But it was one of those things: every place you went, that's all people asked, "Are you going to run?" I mean, people on the street, so you knew this had a lot of traction. Guys on the street, who you didn't think knew about politics, knew this and wanted to know if I was going to run. We met with the guys on the Senate campaign committee. I still had the same concerns I'd had six years before: Can I afford it, because it's costly, expensive to live out there; two, would I get bored? I always worried about being in the legislative branch after being in executive branch, but I also thought the stakes were higher because of 9/11. Also, the kids were all in Colorado; I'd be in Washington and it would be hard to see them.

Brenda and I talked it over. Then they set up the two of us to go have dinner with the president and Laura Bush at the White House. I said, "You don't want us to come if I haven't decided I'm going to do this." They said, "We really kind of want to be sure that if you're coming to have dinner with him, eventually you're going to say yes." They had a date all set and everything. I said, "Let's hold up, because I'm not there yet." The Democratic National Committee was putting out things against me to stir up the media to try to keep me from running. I think they questioned one of the corporate boards I was on about some of the things they had done. It's just all that kind of stuff, which didn't bother me, but it's just kind of a...

DePue: Did they resurrect MSI?

Edgar: Oh, no, no. I don't think MSI had a whole lot of legs. By that point, everything had been cleared up. No, Kemper Insurance Company had gone into run-off, and they had to cut out their pension plan and some things. They raised a fuss a little bit about that, which Blagojevich also did four years later. It was hard for him to make that stick, since it was his department that approved all these actions. (DePue laughs) You just thought, Oh, shoot, this is going to be nasty. That's what some of the press said, "We're really a lot nastier than we used to be." So for a whole host of reasons, Brenda and I finally decided we're not going to do it.

We were going to go up to Chicago and make that announcement. We were driving up that night, and we stopped at Manteno to get some gas and go to the restroom. Brenda was in the restroom at the filling station in Manteno, and some woman who she didn't know said, "Well, is he or isn't he?" (laughter) I remember Brenda coming back: "We've got to get this thing settled. We've got to get this thing over with." So I went up, and we did a press conference—in fact, at the University of Chicago's downtown campus across from the PR firm I was doing some work with—and made my announcement I wasn't going to run. I never did get that dinner with the president and the first lady. In fact, we never got invited till the last week of the Bush administration. (laughs)

DePue: That gets us through the preliminaries to the Republican primary, and the Republican primary eventually selects Jack Ryan. I don't know if there's much more of a story to that or not.

Edgar: Unfortunately (laughs) his last name was Ryan, too, which we had (unintelligible).

DePue: What a run.

Edgar: Yes. Jack Ryan was a very impressive young man; in fact, he reminded Brenda of John Kennedy, Jr. She'd spent an evening with Kennedy at a function in Illinois, back when she was first lady, and was always taken by how handsome he was. Jack Ryan kind of reminds you of John Kennedy, Jr. a little bit. He'd been a very successful investment banker at Goldman Sachs, was very committed to improving education in the inner city. In fact, he had spent time teaching—he had left Goldman Sachs and was doing that. Just a very nice, impressive young man. Didn't know much about politics at all, had never been around it. I think was very sincere. He won the primary. Then Barack Obama won the Democratic primary because this other guy had self-destructed. Obama clearly emerged as being very articulate; he had good support among white suburbanites. He was the African American who could win white votes.

DePue: By this time, I would think, David Axelrod is one of the political advisors in his corner.

Edgar: He had been throughout, yes. He had been throughout. But he [Obama] had originally spent time at one of the big law firms downtown when he came to town. I always say people forget he's half—he was raised by his white grandparents; he's

as white as he is black. He could move in that circle very comfortably, and people felt very comfortable about him. So his strength really was from white suburbia in a lot of ways, but he also got, needless to say, a lot of votes out in the African American community because he was viewed as African American. This other guy self-destructed over this nasty divorce with his wife earlier; all the things that had been said just killed his campaign. Hynes never really caught on. There was somebody else who they thought might, but Obama caught on and won that primary.

So I thought going into it that Obama definitely had the advantage, because he's a very good speaker; he's very comfortable in the white community. He's kind of like a Colin Powell. He's the kind of African American that white voters could vote for very easily. Whereas Jack Ryan, getting up and making a political speech was not his forte, and he had to learn a lot of things; still, I thought he was a credible candidate. Then it unfortunately came out about his divorce; they got into divorces now because of what happened on the Democratic side.

DePue: Well, it also had that peculiar thing where Jack Ryan had somebody shadowing Barack Obama wherever he went. I don't know if you recall that one or not.

Edgar: That's pretty common in all campaigns now, though. I don't think that was unique to that campaign.

DePue: Yes. But go ahead, talk about the divorce.

Edgar: It came up that he'd been divorced from his wife, who was a Hollywood star or something like that.

DePue: Jeri Ryan. She was a star on *Star Trek: Voyager*.

Edgar: Yes, it was something like that. Unfortunately, to get divorces, sometimes you have to tell things or claim things just to make it so you get... There were some questions about some activities they had had in Paris, France, where he had asked her to do certain things and go to some lounge or someplace that was questionable. All of which, anybody who knew this couple said, was completely turned around. He was the most strait-laced, shy, kind of reserved guy, and she was a little more... And he'd created her career. They had a child, and he was very concerned about the child, didn't want to...

DePue: It's got to be a pretty short range, but a nasty little court battle whether or not to release some of those child custody records.

Edgar: He had always thought that they'd never release those, and you should never think that when you're in politics. If there's anything out there, no matter what, it's going to get out. Eventually it's going to get out. And he didn't realize that. Again, it was a little bit of his naiveté toward being in politics. So all this was brewing, and there was a lot of, Well, wait a minute, maybe we got the wrong guy on the ticket; maybe we need to... He called me to say, "All these stories are going along, but I want you

to know there was nothing. My wife and I went to this French bar. We got in there, it was rather risqué, and we left. She cried—she was upset—and we left. There was nothing to any of these...” I said, “Okay, if that’s it, you don’t have a problem.” The next day the press said, “What do you think?” and I said, “From what he explained to me, I don’t see a problem.” The next day these things got released. It was pretty vivid stuff, and it was obvious he had misrepresented what was in there to me. Now, not to say that he was all—but what he had told me was completely wrong, or he didn’t tell me...

DePue: Why did he call you in the first place? Why you?

Edgar: I’m one of the party people the press comes to and asks, “What do you think?”

DePue: Was he or other people in the party still thinking, Maybe Edgar will get back in there?

Edgar: It wasn’t so much that; it was just there wasn’t anybody else in the party to go to.

DePue: Which is part of the problem.

Edgar: Yes. I was the person at that point they wanted to have my support and my blessing; they knew the press would come and ask me what I thought. Also, since I didn’t run for the Senate, they had talked me into being chair of the Bush campaign in Illinois. I said, “Well, he won’t spend any time here.” “Oh, yes, we’re going to spend time in Illinois,” and all this and that. The people running the Bush campaign got me to Washington and got on me; everybody in the party said, “No, you’re the one person we need doing this,” blah-blah-blah. So okay, I’ll do it, which I knew was going to be a waste of time, and it was.

The day after he [Ryan] called me was the day we were announcing that I was going to chair the Bush campaign. The RNC chairman was out here to go around with me, to make the announcement that I was going to chair the Bush campaign. Well, we spent the whole day talking about Jack Ryan, and I was defending him based off what he had told me. That night, it comes out what had happened, which was far worse than what he had told me. In fact, Christi Parsons—who’s now at the *Tribune* in Washington, DC and was the one who came over and covered me that first time—asked Eric Robinson, my former press secretary, “Jim and Brenda Edgar think this is normal stuff in a marriage?”⁴¹ (laughter) Right when I heard that I knew... So I put out a statement; I just said that what Jim Ryan told me yesterday is far different than what was released tonight.

He called me. I said, “Jim, that’s not what you told me. I was out there for the whole day defending you based off false information, and I don’t really appreciate that.” So he had that press conference. I don’t know if you were around then, but he did this press availability after the stuff came out. It was terrible. He had not

⁴¹ Parsons had shown up to cover Edgar’s first day of teaching for the University of Illinois at the Institute of Government and Public Affairs. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, November 18, 2010, 9.

thought through how to handle it. He thought they'd trust him or believe him or whatever; they didn't, and it was a terrible thing. It's unfortunate, because I am convinced that he's probably not guilty of anything bad. I think he's just the victim of a divorce case, and it's unfortunate that he panicked and misled me and other people. But I think at that point he did the only thing he could do, and that was get off the ticket. He could have stayed on, but he'd have been humiliated, I think, throughout the campaign.

DePue: How far beyond the primary are we when he did that?

Edgar: Oh, jiminy. We're probably in June or early July at this point. I think we're at least in June. I could be wrong. I think we might have even been in early July. I just remember when we flew around to do the thing on Bush, it was hot, but it was before the Republican convention, because Alan Keyes was at the Republican convention. It must have been June, because I didn't go to Colorado. I tried to get Kirk Dillard to do it, knowing that he probably wasn't going to win, but he could make a credible race and build up IOUs for later. We thought he was going to, and then he backed out. Then there was somebody else I thought we had lined up. I got this call from Judy Baar Topinka, who was state party chairman, and she said, "These guys are nuts, the central committee." (laughs) She said, "They want to bring in Alan Keyes." I said, "Alan Keyes? That right-wing ..." "Yes." I said, "Well, he doesn't even live in Illinois." She said, "You don't have to live in Illinois. That's who the Senate Republicans are pushing."

Then Dillard, who's on the central [committee]—I called him and said, "What?" He said, "I'm not there, but I'm telling you, I'm getting pressure from the Senate Republicans and from Denny Hastert's office to be for this."⁴² I said, "That's the craziest thing I've ever heard." I made a couple other calls, but Topinka didn't even have a vote on state central, because she was the chairman but wasn't a state central committeeman. Dillard had a vote, but it was already too far gone. So (laughs) they nominated Alan Keyes. Dillard voted against it, to his credit, and a couple others did, but most of them voted for Keyes. He is just, needless to say, almost a greater disaster than George Ryan was to the Republican Party. He made outlandish statements because he was a radio shock guy, and I think he was trying to enhance his radio listening audience. Just one thing after another.

I have a guy who shines my shoes at Nordstrom, and he has for years. He's an African American, he loves politics, and he's very conservative. I mean, he probably thinks I'm too liberal. But he's a conservative Republican and he's black, so I'm thinking, At least this one guy in the state is really going to be happy with Alan Keyes being our nominee. So next time I was in Nordstrom, I said, "I bet you're happy with our nominee." He said, "You got to be kidding me. Keyes is crazy. Plus he's a carpetbagger." And I thought, Wait a minute, this guy thinks he's

⁴² Dennis Hastert (R-Yorkville) was a member of the Illinois House (1981-1987) before serving in the U.S. House (1987-2007). He was Speaker of the House from 1999 to 2007. *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774-Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H000323>.

crazy and a carpetbagger; we don't have any chance. Needless to say, (laughter) we had no chance. It was a disaster.

On top of that, we had Keyes before the Republican convention, because I remember that's the first time I'd met him. He was sitting next to me, because I was vice chairman of the delegation. Judy got to be chairman because she was the state party chairman. I said make her chairman. I was sitting there, and he came and sat by me. I said hello and all that. The next day, he made some attack on Dick Cheney's daughter, who's a lesbian; he talked about how she's going to go to hell and all these things (laughs) and kind of took a shot at Cheney, too. I was just thinking, Oh no. Of course the press doesn't have anything else to cover but things like that at a convention, and I got hit by all the press about what do I think about this and that. At that point I just figured, There's no use on this guy.

Then Obama did that speech at the national convention, and I'm not sure I could have beat him after that. That made him a rock star. During that campaign, I had invited both candidates to come to the University of Illinois, not in a debate, but just to make an appearance. Obama agreed, so Obama came over here. It was like having a rock star. I'd never seen anything like it. We had it over at the law school. The place was packed; kids were hanging out on the rafters to see Barack Obama. Of course, he did a good job. Then I got worried. We knew we were going to have trouble with Alan Keyes. Some people were going to demonstrate and stuff if he came. Fortunately, he declined to come, because I wasn't sure (laughs) what I was going to do with him, but we had to offer. But he didn't come.

That was a disaster at the top of the ticket. I ran into Bush, and he said, "I'm not coming to Illinois. You guys are nuts out there. Alan Keyes?" (laughter) I said, "Well, don't look at me; I didn't have anything to do with it." So Bush only came in once. In fact, Pat Ryan had a fundraiser at his house; that's the only time he came in.⁴³ After that, the whole campaign was to raise money, because he didn't want to get close to the Alan Keyes thing. They thought that was crazy.

DePue: Were there any people who were mad at you because you hadn't taken that up; "See what happened to us afterwards?"

Edgar: Oh, no, I don't think they blamed me for that. I had people call me up later and complain, "Oh, you should have run, you should have run." I said, "If I had run, Hillary Clinton would have been president." (DePue laughs) That worked until Obama got into office, and then it stopped working; they said, "Well, we'd rather have her." But up till then it worked. They said, "Yes, that's true. I don't want her."

DePue: That was the carpetbagger argument: Hillary Clinton had proven that you can be a carpetbagger and win.

Edgar: Well, that's New York.

⁴³ Yet another unrelated Ryan active during this period, Winnetka billionaire Patrick Ryan is retired executive chairman and co-founder of Aon Corporation.

DePue: Yes, that was New York.

Edgar: That isn't what beat him. Alan Keyes beat himself. I mean, he was just terrible; just made outlandish comments.

DePue: But it wasn't a case where it was a combination of two bad candidates, and just see who could beat himself; Barack Obama clearly won that race. Would you agree with that?

Edgar: He was going to win that race, but he wouldn't have won that race with 70 percent of the vote. Against Dillard, he'd have won maybe 55–45. He wouldn't have gotten a free ride. I think he'd have been challenged a lot more. I think he'd have probably won that year, because Bush didn't do well in Illinois at all, and after that speech Obama was a rock star.

DePue: Before this election, everybody was saying, "Oh, look at all of the damage that George Ryan did to the Republican Party," and now people are saying, "See, this is the damage that George Ryan did to the Republican Party." Do you think this further damaged the Republican Party in this state?

Edgar: Oh, yes. The Alan Keyes thing was a disaster. People just laughed at us. In some ways, we couldn't avoid the George Ryan thing, but we (laughs) could have avoided Alan Keyes. The guys on the state central committee that put Alan Keyes for it, that was just the dumbest thing they could have done.

DePue: You've been saying "the guys," and you said that Judy Baar Topinka was not one of these people who were advocating for Alan Keyes coming in. Who were some of these people?

Edgar: A lot of the Senate Republicans who were on the central committee—not Dillard, but some of the others. It's my understanding that Hastert's office was pushing it, too. They had a political operative that was here.

DePue: [Christine] Radogno's in there now; Pate Philip was in there before.

Edgar: No, no, on the central committee. You got to look at who were on the central committee. Frank Watson was a Republican leader. I know Dave Syverson from Rockford was quoted in the paper as being for it, and he admits that he had a role to play in it. I can't remember if [Steve] Rauschenberger, who used to be a senator, was on state central committee. For some reason it seemed like his name came up. They just thought that they could get African American votes but they'd have a conservative. It was just not well thought out. Now everybody runs from it. I got this all secondhand but from people who were there, telling me who was pushing it. It was too bad, because we could have had somebody that maybe could have got 40 to 45 percent of the vote, and we also wouldn't have been the laughingstock that we were. That, on top of the Ryan thing, just really hurt the Republican Party.

DePue: That gets us back into state level politics and the governorship. Now we're into the time period when it's time for Rod Blagojevich to run for reelection. By this time, the public in Illinois had seen quite a bit of what a Blagojevich administration was going to be, so I want to get your views on him as governor. Let's start with his relations with the legislature.

Edgar: His relationship was not good. Particularly it wasn't good with Mike Madigan, which is important. He seemed, when he first came in, to go out of his way to pick a fight with Madigan, like he wanted to prove to Madigan he was the top dog, not Madigan. To me, that was really foolish, because you're the governor; you are the top dog. Even if you're incompetent, you're the top dog—you're the governor, you have all kinds of power, and you have the bully pulpit. You don't want to pick a fight with Madigan. Madigan, after my first four years as governor, kind of changed his attitude; he was going to try to work with whoever the governor was and not pick a fight, because he couldn't win those fights usually. He worked well with me the last few years I was governor; he worked very well with George Ryan. While Rod Blagojevich probably wasn't his favorite, he was willing to work with him from what I could tell. For some reason, Blagojevich wanted to prove that he was going to run things, not Madigan, even in the House. I think that started that relationship to go really sour.

The other thing—I don't know what especially it was, but from my conversations with Madigan, apparently Blagojevich lied to him on something. There's nothing that makes Mike Madigan madder than if he thinks somebody lies to him. I don't know what the incident was, but just watching the way that Blagojevich was trying to pick this fight or prove that he was the top guy—he'd go around Madigan a lot and do things—you could tell this thing was not going to work out. That, I think, really hurt Blagojevich's relationship with the legislature. But then I think the Republicans didn't necessarily work well with him either. The only one of the leaders that got along with him well was Emil Jones, the Senate Democrat leader. So his relationship with the legislature was not good.

DePue: Why the different relationship for Emil Jones than for Madigan?

Edgar: Emil Jones got a lot of things. His wife had a good job; his son had a good job.

DePue: You mean, he got a lot of things because of—

Edgar: From Blagojevich. Yes. His university that he just takes pride in, Chicago State, got a lot of things. That was the feeling. The other thing that was amazing was—I think it was his second or third year—they made him [Blagojevich] sign a memorandum of agreement on projects and things.

DePue: "They," the legislature?

Edgar: The legislature, before they would pass the budget. That basically means you don't believe the guy; you don't trust his word. That never had happened before. No matter how much we used to fight, once I promised something, they trusted me

enough to take that to the bank. But they didn't trust him, and that was an indication, I think more than anything, that this governor had real problems of credibility with the legislature.

DePue: Would you say it's a fair characterization that Mike Madigan was the most powerful politician in the state at the time?

Edgar: I think he had a lot of power. The governor still has—even if you're incompetent, you still have a lot of power. Mike Madigan was probably in some ways more influential, but in pure power, I think the governor still had the power.

DePue: This is the second time you've used the phrase "even if you're incompetent." You think Blagojevich was incompetent?

Edgar: Oh, I think he was, yes. You just look at his governorship. I just think he never understood, he never worked at it. He didn't spend much time in the office, and he didn't really understand things. They tell the story that one of the Republican leaders, Frank Watson, was in, and in the budget Blagojevich submitted, he cut out a prison that was in Frank Watson's district, which was a complete slap. He apologized; he said, "Frank, I didn't realize Centralia"—I think it was Centralia—"was in your district; I thought it was over by Danville." Now, there are some people who would say, "Well, he was just kidding Watson." But as Watson said, if he was doing that just to get at him, that's unfortunate; but if that's really true, he didn't know where it was, that's even worse. This is the governor of the state, and he doesn't know where cities are in the state of Illinois. My sense was he had no understanding of downstate Illinois and didn't care to have any. He not only didn't spend much time down there, it just seemed like he had no interest. If there were going to be budget cuts, Cut those things; they don't mean anything to me. And the thing that frustrated me was just, if you're going to be governor, you got to work at it. George Ryan worked at it. He was in the office; he did things. Rod Blagojevich was never in the office, even in Chicago, from what I could tell, and to me, that's unfortunate. You need to make the effort, whether I agree with what you do or not.

Some of his appointments were purely political, or they were purely because they contributed money to him. I mean, these people didn't make sense. And these things you heard on the streets about if you wanted to get something, what you had to do. All of the things that ended up coming out were things you were hearing out there, and it was a tragedy for the state to have the governor not care, not mind the store—just basically give positions to people who were his major campaign contributors or purely political, not anybody based on qualification. Even if you're going to be very questionable and political, you at least spend the time at it; you try to... And that just didn't faze him too much.

DePue: Maybe even worse than all these things you've already laid out, by this time you were hearing rumors or allegations that he was very vindictive and mean-spirited in how he conducted business.

Edgar: He is, but that's not unusual. A lot of governors are that way. (laughter)

DePue: Would you classify George Ryan as that?

Edgar: Oh, he could be at times, a little bit. Not to the degree of Blagojevich, but you know, even I probably withheld things. He was that way, but you could kind of understand that a little bit; it was more just how everything seemed to be for sale. And the morale: he had the early retirement—which he didn't put in; he inherited that—which left a lot of vacancies.

DePue: Offering early retirement for state workers.

Edgar: So there were a lot of vacancies in key positions in state government he never filled; or he brought people in who weren't qualified; or he created jobs they didn't need, but didn't fill the vacancies they did need. Every time there was a budget problem, he blamed it on the bureaucracy, and he'd cut the bureaucracy and cut back. And just, to me, mismanaged government to a great extent.

DePue: How about the—

Edgar: Also, the other problem he had: it's not just what you do with government, it's kind of how you conduct yourself, how you are as a person. He was known for not showing up or being late, canceling at the last minute, and as governor, you've got to be careful about doing those kinds of things. When the governor's coming, that's a big deal. He was notorious—he'd be late for funerals. I remember the Paul Simon funeral. He invited himself on as a speaker. He wasn't originally picked. He insisted to Southern [Illinois University], who ran the funeral, that he would be a speaker, and they couldn't very well tell the governor no. Then he showed up half an hour late. They had to wait. We were sitting down there. I remember it was half an hour late getting the program started because Blagojevich was late. Everybody else was there from Washington, DC, from Chicago, and he's late. And there were other funerals—I was told about Vince Demuzio's—or skipping the governor's prayer breakfast, which was unheard of.⁴⁴ Just things like that he did, which I always thought—Lincoln Academy, something that governors usually attend, at least some of them, I don't think he ever attended a one.

DePue: The one the National Guard was running?

Edgar: No, no. Lincoln Academy is an award that's given out every year. It's not a huge thing, but it's just tradition. George Ryan didn't always attend, but he did sometimes. I don't think Blagojevich was ever there. And one time he sent his chief of staff, who had had too much to drink and kind of really made a fool of himself. It was a combination of all those things that just left me feeling he completely mismanaged and was incompetent as governor in many ways. It was unfortunate for

⁴⁴ Vince Demuzio (D-Carlinville) was a former state chairman of the Democratic Party, and the longest serving member of the Illinois Senate at the time of his death in 2004. *Chicago Tribune*, April 28, 2004.

the state because the governor has got to be the guy that manages, and you can't go a long time without somebody at the top managing.

DePue: I don't mean to get too far ahead of this, but of course in the impeachment hearings, what got him in trouble with the legislature were the abuses of power.

Edgar: Overstepping his constitutional power (unintelligible).

DePue: Exactly. Your thoughts on observing that, of taking a lot more power than the executive branch was ever supposed to have, and just finding ways to fund things that had never been funded by the legislature.

Edgar: See, if he had done the governorship right, he wouldn't have had to do that. He could have got a Democratic legislature to do most of those things. But he just kind of thumbed his nose at them and then tried to do it that way. So that gave them a constitutional reason to throw him out. I think there were probably a lot of other reasons. There were reasons that led up to those constitutional things, and some of those things you'd have to prove in court; you couldn't necessarily...

DePue: But the things he was doing that seemed to be extraconstitutional were pretty obvious.

Edgar: They were, and they were something I think they could clearly document in the impeachment proceedings. There are a lot of reasons that he probably should have been removed other than just what they made in their charges, but I think they made in their charges things that were very clear; they could define and leave no question in people's mind that this wasn't just taking out revenge over a guy that mistreated them, but there were specific things where he had overstepped his powers and forfeited the right to be governor.

DePue: You're more than a disinterested observer in all of this; this is a job you held for eight years and had great passion for and cared about. Did it pain you to watch what was happening with the governorship?

Edgar: Oh, yes. I thought it was terrible. It was terrible because of the impact on the state, and it was going to take a long time to recover. There are a lot of people who got hurt in government because of his mismanagement. There are a lot of problems this state's going to face for many, many years because of his mismanagement, and it's going to cause additional pain for a lot of folks who are little folks. I'm not talking about being abusive to a state legislator. I mean, that's unfortunate, but I'm thinking about the people who aren't going to get services from state agencies or from a social service agency that had to close their door because the state's broke; things that very often could make the difference of life and death, because this guy, it was kind of a joke to him. I mean, he just didn't take it seriously. He didn't take seriously anything he did. But as governor, you have to take that seriously. A legislator, you don't. There are many other legislators, and you're not running anything, per se, but there's only one governor, and he's running a multi-billion-dollar business that impacts the lives of over twelve million people; it's important.

You don't have to be perfect, and you don't have to be the greatest thing since sliced bread, but you've got to try to do your job. And it just didn't seem to me that he tried to do his job.

DePue: It always impressed me that anytime there's any kind of a question that deals with politics in this state, one of the first people Illinois journalists think to talk to is Jim Edgar. There had to be a lot of journalists who were talking to you about your views, your opinion about what was going on in the Blagojevich administration. How did you deal with that?

Edgar: I tried to hold my tongue during the Ryan years because I didn't think the former governor necessarily ought to be out, but I also view my job here at the institute to be involved in public policy and to be available to the media and make some comments. And about six months into Rod Blagojevich's administration, it was obvious to me this was a train that was off the tracks and this was going to be disaster. Sam Gove, who's been here for years, heard or read one of my remarks and said, "That's pretty critical." I said, "Well, this guy's a disaster, and he's governor." So I probably was pretty hard on him just because I was somewhat outraged that here's a person that got to be governor, who completely failed at even trying to do the job, it seemed to me. George Ryan, I could argue that maybe he wasn't the right person, his managerial skills left—but I think there was an attempt there to do the job and to try to do what he thought was right in most cases. I never thought that was really true [of Blagojevich]. My one dealing with him on the presidential library was fine, but I think he was afraid of Steve Neil and his column. And he should have been, because Steve Neil would have blistered him if he'd have done some stuff. So even when he did some good things, I'm not sure it was motivated because, Gee, I've got this responsibility as governor. In most cases, he seemed to just disregard that, so yes, I was pretty critical of him. It was based off watching him for a while, and I thought, This is a disaster, more so than I have ever seen. I really had hopes that the voters in Illinois would see that this guy was a disaster and they wouldn't reelect him. But you got to understand, a lot of folks didn't really feel this way until after he was reelected.

DePue: Yes, yes. This all leads up to running for office again in 2006, and inevitably this is going to start in 2005, maybe even earlier than that for you.

Edgar: There were some people who said, "Shoot, if Edgar's going to run again, don't run for U.S. Senate; that's a waste. Run for governor next time." That was the comment I got back when I was trying to decide on the Senate thing. That was particularly from people in Springfield.

DePue: My impression is the first time this came up, in 2002, you kicked it around for a day or two but you were never really serious about running for office.

Edgar: Yes.

DePue: In 2004, from what you just told us, you kicked it around for quite a while, and it was something you weighed, though maybe your heart was never in it. Now we're into the 2006 election, and maybe 2005 when you're really starting to struggle with it.

Edgar: Well, 2005 is when you got to decide. As the season started out, I thought, We got to get him out. I mean, he just cannot be governor again. The media was beginning to do a pretty good job of documenting his ethical shortcomings, but I wasn't sure. An incumbent governor has a lot going for him, and this state's a little more Democratic than Republican. Bush wasn't doing well, so you figured that wasn't going to help. So I really worried about how are you going to beat the guy. Then I had a lot of folks says, "You got to run." Bob Kjellander, poor Bob Kjellander, he came back and said, "You got to run."⁴⁵ In fact, it was actually at the 2004 Republican convention. I had lunch with Bob, and he was pressing me. Brenda and I had talked about it on the way up, because I knew this was going to come up about next time. She was not adamant against me running. And at the 2004 convention, there was beginning to get a buzz about, Would Edgar run this next time? The media was on me a little bit about that. And I told Kjellander, "I'm open. Based off discussions Brenda and I have had, I'm not ready to tell you no yet. I mean, I'm open."

So we got into early 2005, and there was beginning to be more talk about it. People were talking around the state, and people were talking to me about it. I began to think, There's a lot of things that have to happen before I do this. I've got to worry about a primary battle, I've got to make sure there's money, I've got to make sure there's a lot of support other than just Republicans—I started thinking through in my mind all these things to get me back in. It kind of goes up and down. People talk about it, then other things happen. We were in the spring, and I was not pushing on—there was not a whole lot; there was some talk going on to me about it, and the legislature was dragging on. I went off to Colorado, as I do in the summer, and really there had been no resolution. There were people out there who wanted to run for governor, who were making noises and wanted me to say no or whatever, and I just wasn't ready to say no; I also wasn't ready to say yes at that point.

I was in Colorado and the [Illinois] state fair was meeting. You get all the party people together during the state fair. I decided I wasn't coming back to the state fair because I wasn't ready yet to decide, and I knew that's all anybody was going to ask. So the state county chairmen were meeting, and I sent Carter and Mike McCormick over to meet with them, just to be there, which to some was a tip-off that I was seriously thinking about it. I remember Rick Pearson of the *Tribune*, when he saw those two guys walk in, (DePue laughs) he said, "Edgar might be

⁴⁵ Robert Kjellander had worked on Nixon's 1972 campaign and for the Illinois Medical Society before entering the Thompson administration as liaison to the Senate (1977) and personnel director (1978). He replaced Edgar as legislative liaison when Edgar became secretary of state, then resigned nine months later to direct Thompson's 1982 re-election campaign. Kjellander was the Republican national committeeman for Illinois and treasurer of the Republican National Committee during the period Edgar is discussing here. *Illinois Issues* (April 1977), 32; (February 1981), 31; (November 1981), 40; *Chicago Tribune*, August 18, 2005.

seriously thinking about this.” And the county chairmen said, “He’s got to decide today. You got to decide right now.” And they said, “Well, he’s not going to decide right now. If you want him to decide right now, he’ll say no, because he’s just not ready yet.” So they got all excited and passed a resolution, and we told them that was foolish. I said, “If you guys want me to say no, I’ll say no.” “No, no, we don’t want you to say no now, we just want you to say yes now.” And I said, “Well, we told them I’m not going to say yes.”

So I stayed out in Colorado. But again, I was getting word from—somebody told me they had got a call from the cardinal’s office, which I found ironic. (DePue laughs) They were just fed up with Blagojevich and thought I was the only guy that could probably beat him.

DePue: And fed up with this good Catholic boy, huh?

Edgar: Well, he’d lied to them. Now, they knew where I was, and it wasn’t necessarily where they are on a lot of issues, but at least they knew that I told them the truth.⁴⁶

DePue: By this time you’re starting to hear rumblings that he couldn’t even get along with his own father-in-law.

Edgar: That’ll come up later. Alan Dixon sent word that the St. Clair folks would support me if I ran, because he’d lied to them. And you would get a lot of Democrats coming to me and saying, “Run.” Topinka wanted me to run because she didn’t want to have to run for governor; she just wanted to stay state treasurer, or run as my lieutenant governor or something like that. She really pushed me to run. She talked to Mell even, and Mell said, “Why in the world would he want to run?” because they’d had an article in the paper about how much money they thought I was making on my various jobs. Mell had read it, and he said, “Why would somebody making that kind of money want to run for governor, for Pete’s sake? But if he does, we’ll figure out some way to help.” He said, “I may not officially come out, but there’ll be help.” Topinka was calling around to some of the Democrat committeemen she knew, so we were getting a lot of—

DePue: Again, this is his own father-in-law.

Edgar: Well, this was after he had completely dumped on him. You got to remember. Here’s the guy that put him in office, and then the governor attacked him. He started attacking him because he thought politically it would make him look like an independent if he attacked his father-in-law. I mean, talk about... Now, this was Topinka telling me, and I don’t know for sure. Mell might have a different perspective. Mell and I didn’t know each other well; we’d spoken over the years and it had always been cordial.

⁴⁶ Edgar’s pro-choice position in the debate over abortion is undoubtedly the biggest issue. The call would have been from the office of Francis Cardinal George, head of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Carter was on me all the time, “You got to run, you got to run.” He said, “This won’t be like past campaigns; this will be a whole different thing.” I said, “I’m not worried about the campaign; I think I could win this campaign. What am I going to do if I do win? I’ve got to govern, and this state’s in a mess. You know that.” He said, “Oh, it’s in a mess.” I said, “Plus, what happens? I’m in office three months and I realize I have the same—nobody wants to make any of the tough decisions, and I got Mayor Daley complaining up north and all that.”

DePue: What was the budget deficit at that time?

Edgar: Oh, I don’t know what it was. It wasn’t as bad as it is now, but it was bad, a lot worse than it was four years before.

DePue: Somewhere between four to six billion?

Edgar: Probably, yes. You’re talking about a tax increase and cuts and all these things—not to the degree you’re going to have to do now, but enough to make everybody mad at you. And when I got back from Colorado in August, I had set down in my mind what I thought needed to be met. Everything was met, all the things and more. I’d run for office a lot, and I’d always had to talk people in—ask them for their help. I’d never had a response from all over. It was because they thought I could beat Blagojevich; they weren’t sure anybody else could, and a lot of folks who really followed it knew that it had to be done.

I finally said, “No, I’m not going to...” I drove over and did a fundraiser for a state rep in Peoria. Mike McCormick was driving me over, and I said, “Mike, I’m not going to do this. We got to get this thing put to rest here in the next week or so, but I don’t think I’m going to do it. I don’t want to go through all this.” So we drove over and we were in Peoria. This guy had a fundraiser, but before his fundraiser, all the high rollers—he had all the main business guys in Peoria—met with me and said, “You got to run for governor.” (laughs) That’s all they were there... They were telling me, “We’ll do this, we’ll have this, but you got to run. We’re dying; we got to have you run.” So then I did the fundraiser, and everybody coming through this guy’s fundraiser was saying, “You got to run for governor.” It was another one of these rallies for Edgar to run for governor. And it was Peoria, which is always an interesting place. On the way back we stopped at Steak ’n’ Shake, and Eric Robinson joined us. Instead of saying, “I’m not going to run,” I said, “Okay, now if I run, we got to figure out this and that.” (laughs) They’d kind of got me all pumped up.

A few days later I was scheduled to speak to the Naperville Chamber of Commerce, which is a huge event out in DuPage County. Probably had a thousand people at this luncheon. Every Chicago TV station was out there. Actually, a lot of people thought I’d announce out there I was going to run for governor. But it was one of those great events you have. You get up; they laugh at all your jokes; they give you several standing ovations. We go to Q&A, and they’re all about, You got to run for governor, and what can we do to talk Brenda into it—because they all

thought Brenda was the one holding me up. It was probably the greatest event I'd ever been at, as far as reception from people and knowing you had a lot of key people here in DuPage County that were really—they were excited about it, you had great TV coverage, and just... I thought, Boy, this is one of the best events I've ever been to. I remember, though, we left, and about two o'clock in the afternoon, Eric Robinson was driving me back to Champaign, and I said, "Eric, I'm tired. I don't want to do this (laughs) for the next... I don't think I can do this. I'm just worn out. This was great, but I want to go home; I don't want to run around the state." So I was kind of thinking, I don't know if I'm going to do this.

But then Carter and a bunch of them came over to the house on a Sunday night; they had poll numbers, and I had a fifteen-point lead over Blagojevich. But again, I'd never worried too much. Carter said, "Listen, you run, and you won't have to campaign real hard. You can go around the state, and there'll be huge crowds. We just need you there, though." So we were talking, and I was sitting there thinking, Okay, maybe I need to do this, because I can win—and I'm not sure Judy can win, at that point—and maybe I owe this to the state. I don't really want to do it, but maybe I would. Finally I kind of said, "Okay, maybe I ought to do this." Then they said, "Now what are you going to do about your horses?" I said, "What do you mean, my horses?" And they said, "You can't keep your racehorses and be governor." I said, "There's nothing in the statute that says I can't have racehorses." (DePue laughs) I said, "It's not racetrack. You guys get this confused with [Otto] Kerner." They said, "No, no, it's the perception, and there could be an implication that because the racing board's named by you..." I said, "That's racing dates. That has nothing to do with owning a horse." And they said, "No, we don't think so." They said, "We'll have"—oh, my chief attorney, my third one.

DePue: Not Roberts.

Edgar: Yes, Bill Roberts.

DePue: Bill Roberts, okay.

Edgar: I thought, I'll get Bill Roberts. He's an old pol. Of all the guys, he was in politics; I can get him to give me an opinion and it'll be all right to do this. But I said, "Guys, wait a minute. You want me to run for office, which will probably shorten my life for four or five years by doing this. Right now everybody loves me in the state; everybody's going to hate me because to do what I got to do is going to make everybody mad. It's going to cost me personally a lot of money to give up what I'm making now, giving up stock options and all these things, to go for a job that is a little more than the pension I'm getting right now, let alone what I'm making at my university. So this is going to cost me a lot of money to do this. Then, on top of all this, the one thing in life I enjoy to do—I don't play golf, I don't fish; I have horses, and I like to race—and you're telling me I have to give those up. This does not sound like a good deal at all, guys." And Brenda, who hadn't said a word the whole night, was sitting there. She said, "Now, Jim, you need to think about this. Those horses mean a lot to you. (DePue laughs) You know how important those horses... I don't

think you really want to give up those horses, would you?" You know, Brenda, who does not like the horses at all, but this was her way to say, "You're not going to run." (laughs) So I said, "I don't know."

I talked to Bill Roberts the next day; he said, "Nah, you can't keep those horses. Not in this day and age. Some U.S. attorney will use that for an excuse to go after you. You just got to give up those horses." I thought, This is nuts. I had all these other reservations, but on top of it, this was kind of like the straw that broke the camel's back. So I finally said, "I'm not going to do it. We're going to set a date, though. I've got to do a thing for *Illinois Issues* up in Chicago on a Friday at noon. I'll make the announcement after that at the Union League Club," thinking I wasn't going to run. Usually you make an announcement you're not going to do something on Friday, because Friday's a terrible media day.

So we set that date, and the next week came. Kjellander's still working on me. Poor Bob. He'd got burned on the Senate thing, but he was working on this. He had Karl Rove call me again; he was talking to me, and I was telling him... And Karl Rove called up Kjellander and said, "Edgar's not going to run. I just talked to him. There's no way he's going to run." And I said to Bob, "Well, I haven't completely made up my mind. Friday I'll announce it, but I don't think so, Bob."

So I was driving up to Chicago on a Thursday, and I was going to announce on Friday. I was driving up, and I thought about Kjellander beating on me again, and then Karl Rove, and I thought about all these problems and things. And they had called that morning and said, "We've taken another poll, and you're up twenty points." I said, "How about Topinka?" And he said, "She's up about 4 percent over Blagojevich." I was thinking Blagojevich was going to get indicted, because there were a lot of rumors right at that point. So I figured, If she's up now and he gets indicted, it's over. She'll win. I don't really have to run, even though I have this twenty-point lead, which will fluctuate. As soon as you announce, it'll probably come down, because that usually happens.

I was driving up, and I was thinking, Eh, maybe I ought to run. Maybe I have this responsibility. I was going back and forth. I had just hit the tollway up at Chicago, and I was thinking, I think I probably do need to run. And I got a call from Eric Robinson. He said, "Governor, the press asked Mayor Daley about you running and he went off on a tirade about how you're anti-Chicago, and the *Sun-Times* has called and wants to know if you want to make a response." And right then I got a pain in my chest. If I had been near a hospital, I would have stopped, thinking I'm having a heart attack. But it hit me, Oh, gosh, Daley's still the mayor, and he's unreasonable; he's just impossible to deal with. And I thought, I'm going to have the legislative... I mean, do I want to go through all this again? I went through this for eight years, and I got out pretty good, but I don't want to put up with all this again. So I thought, No, I'm not going to do this. I drove to our apartment in downtown Chicago. Brenda and I talked, and I said, "I'm not going to do it. I'm going to tell them tomorrow I'm not going to do it." She said, "Well, you sure?" I said, "Yes."

I had a meeting that night. One of my boards had a meeting. I was walking down Michigan from our apartment, and I was running into every—panhandlers on the street were stopping me to say, “Are you going to run?” They didn’t ask me for money, they just asked me, “Are you going to run?” I had people all up and down, “You going to run? You’re going to run, aren’t you? We want you to run. We’ll support you.” Panhandlers would support me. So I was thinking, I got to get this thing resolved tomorrow for sure. I came home, planning I don’t run.

We got up, and we went to this event. Brenda and I were pretty sure we’re not going to run. We got over to the event, right before the lunch thing, which was a separate thing, to introduce Lisa Madigan, Tom Cross, and a couple other legislators to talk about future state problems. But we got there before that, and we were sitting in the other room where we’re going to do the—and Brenda said, “I think maybe you should run.” I said, “What!” because they’d already sent the word down to Springfield, to Carter and those guys, that I probably wasn’t going to run. I said, “What are you talking about?” She said, “Well, maybe we have an obligation to do this.” And I said, “I’ve been saying that all along, (laughs) but when did you...” So we talked for a while. I said, “All right, I’m going to think about it during lunch.”

DePue: That comment from her suggests how she felt about Rod Blagojevich at the time, too.

Edgar: Yes, she didn’t think he was a very good governor. And all these people were trying to get me to run.

DePue: They were going to her, too?

Edgar: And I think she began to feel a little like maybe we have this obligation, and she didn’t want to be the one, at least on record—because she knew everybody would blame her. She always felt she got the blame for me not running for anything, which wasn’t true. I knew she wasn’t crazy about it, but in the end, that wasn’t 100 percent of why I didn’t run. That was part of it, but not all of it. So (laughs) I went to lunch, and I was still not sure what I was going to do. But again, it’s like in 1997, I could always decide whatever I want. Once I decide it, that’s it, but I still have time. But Friday was not a good time, and I probably wasn’t going to say I’m definitely going to run; I figured if I wanted to do something, I’d say that I’ve looked at this and we’re now past the stage of just speculating, and I’m going to set up an exploratory committee, and I feel there’s problems... I figured I could get through it.

So (laughs) I was thinking it through at lunch. And of course everybody at lunch—Lisa Madigan said, “What are you going to do? What are you going to do?” I said, “I don’t know yet.” I had called her dad the day before and said, “Would you get Lisa to run? You know, get Blagojevich out of there.” “No, no, we don’t want to get in a primary battle,” Mike Madigan said. I said, “I told your dad you ought to run.” “Oh, no, no, no,” she said. And of course all the press was there. That’s what *Illinois Issues* loved about me doing this, because I got all the press there for their

event—none of which got any coverage that night; it was all later—but they were all there and they were covering.

I got up, and my opening remarks were, “You know, after weeks of discussion, Brenda and I have talked about it, and I have decided—oh, it’s the wrong speech.” (DePue laughs) Then we switched, and I introduced these four, and they started talking about the state’s problems. It was such a depressing discussion, and they were off on goofy things. When Rick Pearson heard them talk, he said, “No way Edgar’s going to run after listening to this discussion.” Brenda was sitting at her table, and she listened to that for a while and said, “Oh, we don’t want to get back in this stuff.” And it was funny, I had the same decision listening to them, and I started writing down my reason why I was not going to run. I went in there and Brenda said, “I got a thought,” and I said, “I’m not going to run.” She said, “Good. I was sitting there listening to that discussion; I thought, We don’t want to get back into that mess.” Because it wasn’t a very good discussion. They were on all kinds of tangents, and you knew if this is what they think of the major issues, this is going to be impossible to get these people to really resolve it. Later, Pearson told me he came to the same conclusion. He didn’t know what I was going to do for sure, but when he heard that discussion he said, “There’s no way Edgar’s going to run after listening to this discussion.”

It was a very, very hard announcement to make because, contrary to 1997—when I always knew in the back of my mind, Someday I could run again—I knew this was it. If I was ever going to run, the perfect time, the right time, was in 2006. I mean, that was the perfect time to come back into politics.

DePue: When and where, then, was the official announcement?

Edgar: It was the Union League Club in Chicago. It was on a Friday. I don’t know what date it was—late September.⁴⁷ It was getting late. People were getting on me about, You got to decide. But I wasn’t too worried; I had Topinka in the wings, and I’d just as soon have Topinka than some of the other people out there talking. I thought she’d be the best candidate. But I broke down. I did break down in this one. And I had kind of practiced it in my mind. I was surprised, but I think it was just realizing, This is it. I had never said “never” before, but I said “never” at that point. I just said, “No, this is...” If I was going to run, it would be now. I was sixty years old, I’d been out eight years, and this was the perfect time to come back, for the right reasons. You had the support you needed. Now, I still wasn’t sure how I’d get through governing. I thought it was going to be a huge challenge, but I thought I could get through it; I thought I would go in with enough public support that I could do it. I had some doubt—would I get in there and just think, I made a terrible mistake, but it’s too late now? That was a tough press conference, the toughest one I’ve ever had to do. Much tougher than the speech in ’97. I got through it, and that was it.

⁴⁷ September 30, 2005. “Tearful Edgar Won’t Run,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 1, 2005.

DePue: When you got done in '97, you told me that you felt relieved, very relieved. How did you feel coming out of this one?

Edgar: Oh, I felt relieved. I didn't feel as good as I felt in '97. I thought it was the right thing to do, though I've had second thoughts a lot of times about it. But the next week, we flew out to Colorado and spent a week with the kids, and then two weeks after that we took a trip to Austria. I figured, If I'm not going to run, I'm going to go enjoy life here real quick, and we did that. We went to Salzburg, and spent a week there. Brenda was a big *Sound of Music* person, and we wandered around there. But that was a very tough decision to make.

DePue: What did you think about the campaign that Topinka ended up running?

Edgar: I thought Topinka did fine. Topinka never got the support from the party folks and the money people that she should have gotten. Blagojevich did a good job of identifying her before she had a chance to identify herself. Judy had a tough primary. The right wing beat her up a lot. But I think what hurt more was that she used up what money she had in the primary, and the usual Republican money never came across because Blagojevich quickly went on the air—he had all this money built up—and attacked her, made her look like she was George Ryan's twin sister. Blagojevich got away with running against George Ryan for two elections, and he was on the ballot neither time. If you were here in the state at that time, the commercials had Judy and George Ryan polkaing. I don't know where they got that home video from, but it was very effective; he got a big lead in the poll and people said, "I'm not going to give her money; she's not going to win." And he raised the money.

I must say though, I thought the media did a good job leading up to that election and during that campaign of documenting his problems, but the public, particularly in the suburbs, just watched the commercials and didn't pay much more attention. She carried downstate pretty handily, but she got beat and just didn't run at all in the Collar Counties like you need to run. Is that the picture of it there?

DePue: Yes, this is it.

Edgar: The counties that Blagojevich carried were the big Democratic counties, but he didn't carry them by huge amounts, and she carried the other counties by a big—so I think she won by about 10 percent downstate, which is pretty much the norm these days for a Republican, even when you lose.

DePue: Still, when you're looking at the overall numbers, I think you'd qualify this as a landslide victory for Blagojevich.

Edgar: It was, though he didn't get a majority of the votes.

DePue: Forty-nine percent for Blago and 39 percent for Topinka.

Edgar: Yes, the 10 percent that went for the Green Party candidate, I would guess if they'd have thought that was a close election, Topinka would have gotten 8 of that 10 percent.⁴⁸ But at that point, everybody thought, She's not going to win, and I want to be a protest vote.

DePue: Well, doesn't that address that she wasn't an attractive candidate; she wasn't a strong Republican candidate?

Edgar: There isn't a strong Republican candidate these days, is there? The money. She got outspent two to one. So if she'd have had the money, she would have been a stronger candidate. Now, you say, "Well, she wasn't a strong candidate; she couldn't raise the money." She couldn't raise the money because she was behind in the polls. She may not have been the strongest candidate, but of the people in that primary, I think she was by far the best candidate. She had difficulties raising money, and she couldn't get over that image he had created of her being George Ryan's twin sister, almost. And you got to remember, George Ryan's trial was going on during this campaign, so you had that working against her.

DePue: Did she run an efficient campaign?

Edgar: I think it was better than Jim Ryan's campaign. She understood, I think, statewide gubernatorial politics better than Jim Ryan did the first time he ran. She knew the groups; she knew the ethnic groups. Judy can be a little eccentric. And I think it's hard for a woman.

DePue: Yes, she's certainly a colorful candidate.

Edgar: Yes, and I thought the color would work. The color was viewed a little more eccentric than color. She had led the Republican ticket four years before. She got more votes than Rod Blagojevich did four years before. I should have known this from my own experience as secretary of state, but it's a different depth people understand you as opposed to governor. But I think the money thing, the tough primary... There are a lot of people in the right wing of the party that probably didn't vote for her in that election because she was viewed as too liberal on social issues. But she worked hard at it. She occasionally would maybe say the wrong thing, but for the most part I thought she ran a better-organized campaign than Jim Ryan's was, especially at the beginning. Now, at the end, Jim Ryan—I think Carter got that a little better controlled. But Judy went into it better prepared than Jim Ryan had, understanding what it took to run for governor, understanding the issues, and understanding the groups you had to deal with.

DePue: You suggested early on, though, that her heart, if you're talking about 2005, wasn't in it. If you were in it, she would have been content to be running for treasurer again.

⁴⁸ Rich Whitney (G-Carbondale) was the Green Party candidate. The party turned in its best performance in Whitney's home county of Jackson, picking up 25 percent of the vote. State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast at the General Election, November 7, 2006*.

Edgar: Oh, yes, but once she was in it, she was in it. I mean, Judy wants to win. I think she would have been as happy (laughs) if I'd have run and she'd have just been lieutenant governor, next in line, or stayed the state treasurer. But once she made the decision to run, she didn't have any reservations about it. She had been in the legislature, and [given] all the politics you deal with, I think she was just a little more familiar than Jim was the first time he ran. Now, I wasn't around Jim Ryan when he ran this primary, but I'm sure he had a better feel this time than he did the first time.⁴⁹ Any reasonable person—and Jim Ryan's very reasonable—was going to pick up and learn, but Judy had a little bit more [experience], particularly dealing with the ethnic communities and the various organizations, and knowing people around the state outside of just her bailiwick of the treasurer's office. Jim Ryan knew people in the legal community, but he didn't know as many people outside that, whereas Judy had a better feel.

It's hard running against an incumbent governor. There's a lot of folks that don't pay any attention. They just knew Blagojevich's name by this time, and he was governor, and Yes, there's a lot of static about this or that, but this other person, she seems to have been close with George Ryan, and we know he's on trial. There were a lot of those kinds of things, I think, that entered into that race. Unfortunately, most voters don't spend the time or worry about who they're going to vote for as much as some of us insiders do.

DePue: The postscript for Judy Baar Topinka is she just won the constitutional office of treasurer again this last—

Edgar: Comptroller this time.

DePue: Comptroller, I'm sorry.

Edgar: Yes. She'll make it fun for comptroller. Treasurer, you're just kind of off doing your little thing over here. Comptroller actually does get involved in some of the budgetary stuff and the paying of bills, and you can make a governor's life a little miserable. I just hope Pat Quinn's ready, because Judy will have a lot of advice for Pat Quinn, and more advice than Pat Quinn is probably (DePue laughs) ready to take. So it'll be interesting to watch that. Judy is colorful, nobody knew the opponent, and they knew her, but I think there was probably a lot of buyers' remorse, realizing, Maybe I should have voted for her last time.

DePue: Um-hm. This will be the last question for today, and maybe a bit on the unfair side, but seeing how well things turned out in this election, especially in Blagojevich's second term in office, do you have any regrets that you didn't run?

Edgar: Oh, there are days I feel guilty about it. I mean, not personally. I think personally I'm much better off; I probably haven't shortened my life that much. But from a state perspective, I think it would have been better for anybody to win instead of

⁴⁹ Ryan pursued the Republican nomination for governor in 2010. He finished fourth in a crowded field of seven candidates.

Rod Blagojevich last time. I think I could have won, but whether I could have got us through this mess we're in, I don't know. I think I at least would have tried. And whether I could have got the legislature to go along, whether I would have made the right choices, which you don't know till after you do it and you see how things work... But yes, there are times I feel guilty about it. I don't personally feel like I missed anything, but I feel... I think I'd rationalized pretty easily that Topinka could win that race; that Blagojevich very possibly might be under indictment by the time election came, or so close to it that [the election] would have definitely tilted toward Judy's favor. If I had known then what I know now, would I have done something different? Possibly. I don't know.

DePue: If there's one thing that Patrick Fitzgerald does, he takes his time and makes a very thorough case before he indicts anybody.

Edgar: And there's also the thought that you would not indict a governor during a campaign; that you would wait till after the election. But you got to remember, this was back in September of 2005, fourteen months before the election, still about three months before filing. Really at that point, the thought was an indictment could happen anytime because there were a lot of things that had been floating around for a while. And the things you're reading in the paper—the U.S. attorney's office is always leaking stuff to the paper—you had the sense that maybe they were getting ready to do an indictment before filing dates, so that would give the Democrats a chance to put somebody else up. Now, somebody else did run in that primary, an alderman, and all the Democrats who quickly said [later] they had nothing to do with Rod Blagojevich, they all endorsed him in that primary; they didn't support the other guy, who was a halfway credible candidate.⁵⁰ He wasn't some fly-by-night. But nobody supported him. They all endorsed Blagojevich, for which I think they should be held responsible to some extent—except Lisa Madigan. I think she was the only one of the Democratic leaders who did not endorse him. So at that point, there was time. Now, maybe that was my rationalization for me not to run.

DePue: Didn't he also get a decent amount of endorsements from some of the newspapers?

Edgar: Only one, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and that was a deal. The publisher of the *Sun-Times* forced that on them. He'd got some award that Blagojevich had shown up to present. That was very questionable. I think the editorial board was very, very upset at the *Sun-Times*. That's the only endorsement I know he got. All the suburban papers they owned were told they had to run the Blagojevich endorsement. None of them wanted to endorse. The *Sun-Times*, the actual editorial board didn't want to endorse him, but the publisher controls that thing. And at that time, jobs at the *Sun-Times* were pretty insecure.

DePue: (laughs) Like we said two and a half hours ago, Governor, Illinois's had a pretty interesting political history.

⁵⁰ Edwin Eisendrath was alderman of Chicago's 43rd Ward.

Edgar: They've had a tough ten years, unfortunately.

DePue: We've got a little bit more of that to talk about next time. I think this is probably a good place to break it off for now, if that's okay with you.

Edgar: Sure.

DePue: Let me finish with just one other quick question that occurred to me. One of the other digs—and this is a very Springfield-centric criticism of Rod Blagojevich—right from the beginning, from practically day one, it was clear that Blagojevich had no intention of living in that mansion in Springfield.

Edgar: No. I publicly said—and Brenda, too, as a mother and former occupant of the mansion—we both said we could understand why they didn't live there with their family, because they had young kids. That's not a great place to raise young kids, and probably why you shouldn't run for governor when you have young kids, because it's not conducive to... Jim Thompson had moved out of the governor's mansion when Samantha turned six, and moved back to Chicago, but he still spent a lot of time in Springfield, and he spent time at the mansion. The Thompsons would come down on weekends and spend time at the mansion. There's ways you can deal with that much more than Rod Blagojevich. He just didn't come. I mean, not only not in the mansion, very seldom in Springfield, and if he was, he was just in and out. And I think that is a symbolic thing for downstaters—not just Springfieldites, but everybody downstate. The mansion is downstate, and when a governor doesn't spend time there, it's kind of a rebuke of all of downstate. It's way out of proportion—there's a lot more important things than whether you sleep in the mansion or not—but it was symptomatic of his whole attitude toward downstate.

DePue: And most good politicians understand symbolism.

Edgar: Exactly. As Republicans, we used to always campaign downstate and say, "You elect those Chicago Democrats, you know, they don't care about us." Well, I never believed it because I thought they know they're from Chicago and they know there's this suspicion downstate. They'll overcompensate; they will try to at least have the perception they know and care about downstate. Rod Blagojevich didn't. He almost went out of his way it seemed at times. The classic was late in his administration, cutting budget things. He decided, We're going to eliminate 4-H. I think it was going to save him four hundred thousand dollars, and it's 4-H. I mean, that's holy in downstate Illinois. That's just part of growing up in rural areas in downstate. You're going to eliminate that, and all you're going to save is about four hundred thousand dollars. I just thought that was the dumb—I can't believe he did that intentionally to stick it to downstate; I just think that he had no sense of what that meant downstate and thought, Well, who cares about 4-H? That's not something we do on the North Side of Chicago.

I don't think he ever got out of the North Side of Chicago. Physically he almost never got out of the North Side of Chicago. He wouldn't even go downtown

to the Loop, the office. Stayed at home and read books and ran. That, I think, is a legitimate [criticism]. Not living in the mansion is not as legitimate [to criticize], if you overcompensate, as I think Thompson did. Though I know when I ran for governor, I had a lot of people say, "Oh, are you going to live in the mansion? It's terrible he doesn't live in the mansion." I said, "You're not kidding I'm going to live in the mansion. I've been looking for forty years for somebody to pay for my housing." (DePue laughs) And my comment was, "It's a great place to live. It's not a place to raise kids, though." I mean, you're in the public... But remember, Brenda told Thompson, "Keep running; we're not ready yet," and I think there's some truth to that.⁵¹ I really think somebody who has young kids has got to think long and hard before running for something like governor.

DePue: That's a good place to finish for today. Thank you very much, Governor.

Edgar: Thank you.

(end of interview)

Interview with Jim Edgar
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DePue: Today is Tuesday, December 14, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Governor, I think this might be the last time you get to hear my introduction. I'm with Gov. Jim Edgar. Good afternoon, Governor.

Edgar: Good afternoon.

DePue: We are in his office here in Urbana on the University of Illinois campus. Last time we spoke, we were talking about a series of decisions that you had to make about whether or not you wanted to pursue your political career further: first in 2002 and running for governor after George Ryan looked like he was going out in disgrace;

⁵¹ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 28, 2010, 48.

then in 2004 and the possibility of running for the Senate. Of course it was Barack Obama who eventually ran that year, and you declined to run that year. Then apparently a much more serious process that you had to go through in 2006, debating whether or not you wanted to jump in the race because of Rod Blagojevich and what had happened in his first four years in office. So let's get to that point now in 2006, when you have finally made the decision. How did things change for you? How did you change after you made that decision and finally put a period to your political career?

Edgar: There was no doubt in my mind when I made the decision in September of 2005. I said, "I will not be a candidate for elected office." That's the first time I'd ever said that. In my mind I thought, that's it, because if ever I was going to do it, that would have been the time to come back. I didn't do it, so I felt like time had marched on and I was history.

DePue: Did people start telling you, "You know, after you made that decision, you changed a little bit?" Did you feel like you had changed at all in your demeanor, your outlook?

Edgar: No, no, not really. I think I had been much more relaxed, candid—maybe too candid—ever since I had been out of office. I don't think that how I dealt with the media, how I acted, really was any different. Because even 2002, 2004, and 2006, I didn't sit around thinking as I had in 1989 and '90, I'm going to run for governor and I've got to do these things. I just did not think about running for office even though people took a run at me. In two cases I gave it serious consideration. The only thing we did immediately after I made the announcement was, we jumped on a plane, went out to Colorado and spent a week; then about two weeks later we went on a trip to Europe, which we wouldn't have done otherwise and we hadn't planned. But no, I don't think it changed me any. There might be times when I sit and kind of stare off. I might think, well, it's over; whereas before, I always knew, it's probably over, but maybe not. You don't know. But after that decision in the fall of 2005, in my own mind I thought, it's over. I don't think about it any since. But I don't know if it's changed how I act or conduct myself.

DePue: I think I know the answer to this question, but do you consider yourself retired now?

Edgar: I am an elder statesman. I think that as far as a candidate, I am definitely retired. I mean, that's something in the past.

DePue: But you still work here at the institution.

Edgar: I still work. I'm not retired completely. I'm still trying to make up for those years when I was in government and didn't make any money, (DePue laughs) to make money now. One of the positives about working in government—it's not the pay, but you do have pretty good benefits. Now those are under (laughs) threat and may

not be there, so even another reason that you've got to go make some money while you can to make up for past time.

DePue: Has your schedule or your lifestyle changed dramatically since that decision?

Edgar: No. If I can sleep in, I sleep in. But I've been doing that for... When I was a secretary of state looking to run for governor, I was out every night, I was on the go. As governor, I was on the go—not so much the second term as the first term. But once I left the governorship, no; I've pretty well controlled my schedule, and it's a pretty limited schedule. That really hasn't changed any since 2005. It really changed in 1999.

DePue: I want to get us back into a little bit of politics. Anybody who pays attention to Illinois politics over the last few years knows that if there's something going on in politics, then it seems like the media and pundits and people inside politics all end up beating on the door to your office and asking your opinion about a variety of things. So we're going to avail ourselves, and if you want to opine on some of these things, you can, or pass if you'd like. But I wanted to go back and talk a little bit more about Rod Blagojevich, especially his second administration. A lot of these are very general kinds of questions. What are your reflections on the nature of the relationship that Blagojevich had with the legislature?

Edgar: It wasn't good. Now, there's always tension between a governor and the legislature, and there should be. If there's not, I would say maybe something's wrong. There maybe wasn't enough tension between George Ryan and the legislature early on, and I think probably some things happened that shouldn't have happened. It later became a little more [contested], particularly with the Republicans. But you've got to have an ability to work with them. They don't have to necessarily like you, and you don't always agree, but at the end of the day, you have to be able to sit down and solve the problems, whatever the problems are that session. With Rod Blagojevich, that just didn't seem to happen. Early in his time—and the Democrats had control of the legislature the whole time he was governor—they kind of just papered over some of the problems. They would borrow money basically, but they never really came to grips. Then later, they would hardly talk to each other. I think the Democratic leaders, particularly Speaker Madigan and the governor, were just at huge loggerheads, just did not get along. So I think his relationship with the legislature was probably the worst by far of any governor. Probably up till that point, in my time, Dan Walker had the worst record. But he looked like he and the legislators were best friends compared to the relationship that Blagojevich had with the legislature. If they love you, there's maybe a problem if it's too close. But you've got to have an ability to work together, and that didn't seem to exist, particularly toward the last.

DePue: Just paying attention to what you read in the newspapers at that time—and I know you were hearing from much closer sources than that—you got the strong impression that Madigan and Blagojevich just flat out didn't talk, period; that there was no relationship there.

Edgar: The last three years, particularly the last two years, I would say that was true. I think the first two or three years there was some conversation. I'm not sure that they were on the same page, but they did talk. I think there were attempts by the Democrats to... Of course, it was to their advantage, too. If Blagojevich fell flat on his face, it didn't just hurt Blagojevich, it hurt all the Democrats. So I think for selfish reasons—not because they wanted to help Blagojevich, they wanted to help themselves—there was more of an attempt during the first term to not solve the problems, but at least appear to solve the problems.

DePue: So much of the dialogue about the relationship with the legislature does focus on Madigan; it doesn't focus on either Watson or Cross, who were the Republican leaders of the Senate and the House.⁵² Is that because they were in such a minority position that they were kind of irrelevant?

Edgar: They were in a minority position; they couldn't do anything by themselves. They were factors. I mean, they had their problems, particularly Watson. I think Frank probably had more problems with Blagojevich. Cross and Blagojevich had been friends, apparently, when they were legislators, so there was a little bit of a relationship there. But I think the reason for Madigan: Madigan is the most important person in Springfield, particularly when you talk about the legislature. He's the guy who, if you're going to move a major piece of legislation, is going to have to be on board. You can move major pieces of legislation without the minority party, but you can't do it without the Speaker. Now, Emil Jones, who was the Senate president, was very much in lockstep with Blagojevich. That was probably part of the problem; he would kind of badger his guys along. But the key was you had to have the House, too, and because of that deteriorating relationship between Madigan and Blagojevich, that made it much more difficult. It also made Madigan even more visible as a player than maybe he would have been if he'd have been, like Jones, in lockstep with the governor.

DePue: Again, what you were hearing on the street about that relationship was there was a time or two where Madigan felt like Blagojevich had either betrayed or basically lied to him. Are you privy to the inside of any of that?

Edgar: The word is lied. (laughs)

DePue: Lied.

Edgar: And that is something that Mike Madigan views very dimly. If you lie to Mike Madigan, it's hard to ever get back to where he'll deal with you. Fortunately, when we dealt, I was always pretty candid with him; if I said something, he knew that was it. But Blagojevich, he felt, had lied to him. He never told me specifically what it was, but I know that was the feeling. I know when I would talk to the Speaker—I would periodically go to Springfield and I'd chat with him—he had no trust in the

⁵² Senate Republican leader Frank Watson (R-Greenville) represented the 51st District from 1983 to 2009, when he resigned following a 2008 stroke. At the time of this interview, Tom Cross (R-Oswego) was the House Republican leader.

governor. Again, in the political world, at least in Springfield, there has to be some trust. It doesn't mean you have to like them, you don't have to always agree with them, but you have to have some trust that if they tell you something, they're going to keep that commitment.

I forget which year it was—it was in the first term—the legislature, to finally end the session, required the governor to sign a memorandum of agreement or something on some projects, that he would release the money. That had never happened before. If you got down to the end of the negotiation and the governor said, “All right, I'll do these four things,” that was always all you needed. I mean, no matter what they thought of the governor, they just knew that if he promised that in the negotiations, he would keep it. But there was a feeling in the case of Governor Blagojevich that you couldn't trust that and you needed it in writing. When that happened, that, to me, was a clear indication that something's gone wrong here in this relationship that's probably going to result in a very counterproductive Springfield. If you look, Springfield has been extremely counterproductive during the Blagojevich years.

DePue: What did you think of Blagojevich's penchant to resort to special sessions—to keep bringing the legislature back in—to try to force some kind of agreement on issues?

Edgar: Well, I did that myself on tax caps. Sometimes you will do that, because the legislature has a tendency—sometimes they don't want to take up the issue you want them to take up. But I think he carried it overboard, and it became counterproductive. I think any political advantage that might have created, he probably lost in just deteriorating relationship with the general assembly. Even when we did it, we tried to do it when they were in town or right before they left town. He had a tendency to do it when all of them would be on vacation (DePue laughs) or something. It was a disaster just waiting to happen.

Overall, it always struck me that everything he did, he was playing for the media and it was pure perception. There was very little reality in that administration. There's got to be some reality if you're going to be the governor. The governor's not a legislator. You've got to deliver; you've got to make sure that government continues to function. It just never seemed to me that Blagojevich really cared about that part of it. He was more about the perception out there. A lot of things that never made it to the media, I think a lot of things were collapsing in state government, in the bureaucracy. There were some real problems, which still exist today, that were not headline-grabbers, but I think probably were just as important as some of the things that made headlines.

DePue: You just mentioned the governor is not a legislature. But he had the tendency also, if he didn't necessarily get his legislation passed, he might do it by fiat, by executive order, and just make it happen. And not in minor cases, but things like child healthcare issues.

Edgar: I think there's no doubt he overstepped his legal boundaries. There are powers the governor of Illinois has—some of them very broad powers—that you'll use. That's part of the battle with the legislature: they know you might use those, and that gives you some leverage. But I think he had a tendency just to ignore the legislature, or actually they turned him down, then turn to those other approaches. I think he misjudged what his powers were. That was one of the points raised against him in the impeachment, that he had overstepped his constitutional boundaries. I always felt that was a mistake. I don't think that was necessarily grounds for impeachment; I think there were other things. But if you're going to do something, particularly after you know you're defying the legislature, you'd better be sure that you're on sound legal grounds. Again, I never got the sense he really cared. It was just a great story for the day, and it was just kind of stirring the pot. If you're a bomb thrower someplace, that's fine. But if you're the governor, you've got to provide some stability in state government; there was very little stability, it seemed to me, during those six years.

DePue: So if Blagojevich basically implemented initiatives by fiat and going around the legislature—an abuse of the constitution certainly was charged in the impeachment trial—and you say that wasn't grounds for impeachment, what was?

Edgar: No, no, I said I don't think he would have been impeached just for that. I think what was far worse was just some of the things he did: how people got jobs, how decisions—the impact of money and personal gain. I think that's just...

DePue: So the old patronage thing that's always haunted Illinois politics.

Edgar: No, that's not patronage. Patronage: you might give a job to a guy because he's a Republican. Never considered proper to give a guy a job because he gave you five thousand dollars. That's illegal, and I think everybody understands that. We can argue over some of these constitutional points, but I think it's clear: when you write a check for twenty-five thousand dollars to Citizens for Blagojevich, then you get appointed to the University of Illinois Board of Trustees or get some appointment like that, then I would say that's over the boundaries. That's far different than patronage. I don't think you can drag patronage down to that level. Now, patronage may be something of the past, and it's not always maybe the best, but this was far worse.

DePue: This is a bad analogy, but the gorilla in the room was this huge and ballooning deficit that the state was facing. It started at one billion dollars when he took over office from George Ryan, and by the time he left office, it's \$13.5 billion. So he came up in 2007 with the concept of the gross receipts tax. What did you think of that initiative, that suggestion?

Edgar: I didn't take it too seriously because he had very little... At that point, to push a tax increase—a governor's got to go out and push it and got to sell it—he's got to have some credibility. But then, he had no credibility. This was after his reelection.

Things had begun to fall apart. I never took it too seriously, and I never spent that much time looking at all the specifics, but it just didn't seem like it was going to go anyplace. Now, I didn't have a problem with the idea of a tax. In fact, if you look at some new taxes, you've got to balance, is the new tax going to cause some other side effect, like is it going to drive some businesses out of the state? There were some businesses that argued they were penalized more than others under that. He had a tendency to do that. He did a series of small tax increases or things that really weren't broad. I remember a guy in the printing business who was telling me that he was going to buy a new press and expand his business in Illinois, and after one of Blagojevich's taxes he put in—this is in the first term—he moved it to Indiana.

So I never took the gross receipt tax too seriously because I didn't think it was going anyplace. I never thought that they probably really thought it through; it was just something they threw out there to counter the fact that they continued to spend more and more money, and we didn't have that money. Now, as you said, he inherited a deficit from Ryan, but he didn't do anything to correct it; in fact, he did a lot to make it even worse. So by that time, there wasn't a whole lot that he proposed that I took very seriously.

DePue: Maybe Speaker Madigan didn't take that seriously, either, though he brought it to a vote; maybe his sweet revenge on that one was it got exactly zero votes in the House.

Edgar: Yes. That's not uncommon on a tax bill (DePue laughs) if the leaders aren't there yet. People say, "Is a tax going to pass, or is he going to vote for it?" It never has enough votes to pass till you actually call for the vote, because there's a lot of people who aren't going to vote for it. They have to get persuaded, and they're not going to get persuaded till the last moment, or you're not finally going to say, "I'm going to vote for that," till the last moment. So that was a slap at him. But more than the gross receipt tax itself, it was just a slap at him personally. It wasn't so much on the tax. As I said, I never lost a lot of time thinking about it because I didn't really think they were real serious, and I didn't think they could push it. You've got to have some credibility as a governor to be effective, particularly to push things that are tough—and a tax vote's tough.

DePue: The first couple years of your own administration were overwhelmingly focused with the issue of trying to get the budget balanced in some very tough economic...

Edgar: All eight years were—it's just that we were in a lot better shape (laughs) the last four years. That was my first priority every session, even in the good years, because you knew if you didn't, you could be right back in the mess real quick.

DePue: So what did you think about watching all of this—watching the state's financial situation deteriorate and watching Blagojevich and the legislature continually raid pension funds—to continually go to the borrowing; to continually push off paying the creditors that were all over the state? Your personal feeling about all of that?

Edgar: Actually, it started with George Ryan. He did make the pension payments, but he spent more than they took in, and they began to draw out the payments a little bit at the end. I thought that was unfortunate. I regretted the fact that I hadn't stuck the billion and a half in a rainy-day fund; I just didn't think the legislature would want to get back in that mess that we had just got them out of a few years before. But legislatures like to spend, and if they have a governor that wants to spend, then they're all for it. Governor Ryan was basically a legislator, and he wanted to spend. Blagojevich wanted to spend. He was basically a legislator; he had never had any executive experience. I thought it was unfortunate, and it was very disappointing to watch state government react that way.

It wasn't just the budget—the budget was the biggest part—I also worried about the people who worked in state government. Under the Blagojevich years, he spent a lot of time using the bureaucracy as the fall guy, and any time there were budget woes, he would cut from the bureaucracy. He'd create new programs that we couldn't afford, but he would cut... In fact, today, I was having lunch and there was a guy there who worked in Children and Family Services; he said they still haven't filled a lot of the vacancies that occurred under early retirement, and that that was a problem. Again, Blagojevich didn't do it—it was done by Ryan and the legislature—but that left a void of a lot of good people who did important jobs that never got replaced. Then every time there was a budget crisis, Blagojevich would freeze bureaucrats' pay or never fill those important jobs. They created some jobs at the top that were high-paying and pretty useless, and put in political people. So that bothered me too, because it's not just the budget. The budget's extremely important, but it's also the overall morale in state government.

For state government to work, it's not enough just to have a governor and a legislature; you've got to have the people who really provide the services, the people in the bureaucracy. They have to have the tools, the encouragement, and have the right enthusiasm to do the job. That really was beginning to wane, particularly under the Blagojevich years, and that bothered me too. When we left office, we had money in the bank. But also, most state workers have since told me those were the golden years; that was the best time to work in state government—that they felt like that they had the tools they needed, and they were shown respect by the directors. There was the feeling they were part of a team and they were getting things done. That began to deteriorate. So along with the budget, those are things I watched that bothered me. But the budget—you could see that was happening. Unfortunately, as we sit here with a new governor who's been in for two years, we still haven't really begun to deal with that issue.

DePue: So a couple more questions, but I don't know if you'll want to answer this one. What is it about Blagojevich, if you were to psychoanalyze the man?

Edgar: Oh, I don't know if I'm good at psycho—I just think he was not equipped to be governor. There are some people who—the term I use—they're not wired to be governor. I don't think he was wired up. Some people might have the right intention or right desire; they're just not wired... I'm not even sure he had the right desire.

I don't know why he even ran for governor. He thought he could be president that way. In Congress, he didn't have to work; he could just show up for enough roll calls from his district. But you can't do that as governor. As governor, you got to put in the time. And Governor [Pat] Quinn, I'm not sure sometimes that's his best place, but he tries. He's there; he works at it. He puts in the time; he's sincere. I just never saw any of those traits with Blagojevich. Even George Ryan, who I think was better in the legislature; that's probably where he was... But at least there was some attempt to be governor. He maybe didn't work twenty-four hours a day, but he did show up to things. Blagojevich just never showed up. Very seldom ever in the office in Chicago or Springfield. He usually was kind of a joke; it was just kind of a lark to him. You can't afford to have that attitude in the governor—not the chief executive. You can have it in one of 430-something legislators in Congress or even maybe in 177 state legislators, but you've only got one governor, and that guy has to be trying to do the job. Whether they do it right or not, they have to at least try, and it just didn't seem like to me he tried.

DePue: What do you say to those, then, who apply words like “narcissist” or “sociopath” to Blagojevich?

Edgar: I never took those courses; I don't even know what some of those words mean. (DePue laughs) But there's no doubt—I've had a lot of people who know a lot more about that than I do that think there's something wrong there. The whole thing on the Obama seat—he said he was just kind of joking or whatever. When you're under investigation, why would you even think of trying something like that?

DePue: That brings up a good question: How much did you personally know about the investigations—not one, but several investigations—and the legal problems he was in?

Edgar: I just knew that they were looking at him. In fact, prior to the 2006 election, I thought he might be indicted. That's one of the reasons I thought Topinka had a good chance of winning that race, because there were some real rumors—but I always know those rumors, half of them are planted by the U.S. attorney's office and the FBI; that's kind of how they operate—so I figured there was some fire behind all that smoke. But I didn't know specifically. Nobody came and talked to me and told me what they were looking at, but I knew enough anecdotal things on the street—just how they were operating this—and this was a disaster waiting to be indicted. I'm sure I missed a lot of things when I was in the legislature, even as governor, but this was obvious; this was something I had never heard, never seen before in all my years in state government. No matter how bad some of the Chicago politicians might be in the eyes of us downstaters, not anything like you were hearing during the Blagojevich years. To me it was just a matter of time. If anything, I couldn't figure out why it took so long. It's unfortunate that it hadn't occurred prior to the 2006 election. I think we'd have saved a lot of problems in the state.

DePue: Of course, it didn't happen until December 9, 2008. This was a month after Barack Obama was elected president, formerly Illinois Senator Barack Obama, which meant that Rod Blagojevich was in the position of having to nominate somebody or fill that seat. Before, I probably used the wrong word of "patronage"—it was pay to play, and now he's got an incredible opportunity to do that. Were you surprised when that news broke?

Edgar: I was surprised because of where we were in time. Everyone knew he was being looked at by the U.S. attorney's office, so you would think with something that visible, you'd be extremely careful.

DePue: And this is Patrick Fitzgerald, whose (laughs) reputation is dogged persistence on this.

Edgar: But you think, how did Blagojevich get elected governor? He got elected governor because George Ryan screwed up. He wouldn't have won that race if George Ryan hadn't screwed up; Jim Ryan would have been governor. There's just no doubt in my mind. Blagojevich had **nothing**—I mean, he didn't have any credentials, nobody knew him—it was the alternative to George Ryan and the Republicans. So you'd have thought if he got elected because of that, he might be a little careful, and just the opposite. It seemed like, if he had come before George Ryan, they'd have never (laughs) indicted George Ryan; nobody would have thought anything wrong with all that compared to what happened with Rod Blagojevich.

I ran into Blagojevich the night of the election. We were at Channel 7—

DePue: Which election, now?

Edgar: The 2008, the Barack Obama election. It was obvious Obama had won. So I'm walking off the set, he's coming on; that's one of probably the three conversations I ever had with Rod Blagojevich. I just said, "Hello, Governor. You're going to be a popular person. Everybody's going to be your friend now, wanting to be U.S. senator." He said, "Yes." I said, "That gives you some leverage." I was thinking of political leverage; I never thought he would think it's **capital** leverage, and he would go out and... You knew that a lot of folks wanted to be U.S. senator; a lot of people would come to him. I just never thought about him trying to auction it off. That's the last time I ever talked to him.

I'll never forget the morning: I get a call about seven o'clock in the morning—I'm in bed—and it's my former press secretary saying that WGN wants to talk to me on radio, that Rod Blagojevich has been or is going to be arrested for trying to sell the Senate seat. I said, "Oh, you've got to be kidding. I can't believe that. I can believe a lot of things about Blagojevich, but he wouldn't be that dumb." Finally I got on the thing with WGN. I said, "Now, are you guys sure about this story?" It was Spike O'Dell—he's since left. I said, "I just can't believe this." He said, "No, I agree." They came back and said, "No, no, the U.S. attorney is going to announce it here pretty soon, and it's definitely going to happen." I was just

dumbfounded that anybody could be that arrogant and that foolish to try something like that.

DePue: Of course, he's shortly thereafter impeached by the House, 114-1; then it goes to the Illinois Senate, and they convict him and remove him from office. The vote there in the Senate is fifty-nine to nothing.⁵³ That's January twenty-ninth, so this moved fairly quickly as these things go.

Edgar: It did, and they needed to move quickly. In fact, I was a little worried after the arrest that they might drag—I mean, they needed to move quickly. Everybody knew this was a disaster, and they now had a reason to move quickly. Because the state wasn't functioning, and you couldn't have a governor who basically had been arrested running the state. It's just not going to happen. We needed to get new leadership; we needed to move on. I thought it was probably the best the legislature performed during that decade. Not saying a whole lot, because they really haven't done much in the last decade. I thought they came together, the two parties, and I thought they did it in a very professional manner. It was a very difficult thing, even though I think they all agreed he had to go. Still, you just don't impeach a governor at a whim. You've got to have a case, you've got to approach it in the most professional manner, and I thought both the House and the Senate did that. I was very encouraged. Not only that they moved Blagojevich out, which they needed to do, but the manner in which they did it—very bipartisan, very professional. I was very hopeful that we were going to get the state back on track. Unfortunately, my hopes did not prove to be true.

DePue: That leads to the next person here. I don't want to necessarily go into nearly as much detail, but just get your reflections on Pat Quinn as governor, and you've addressed some of that already.

Edgar: I think Pat Quinn cares and means well. I've changed my thoughts on Pat Quinn. When he first came on the scene, I thought he was kind of phony; I thought he was just out for populist—using that, and attacking the establishment because he wanted in. I think he's sincere. I think it's been hard for him to make the transition from being a bomb-thrower to a bomb-catcher. (DePue laughs) I mean, it's a lot harder to catch them than it is to throw them. He really had very little experience in a chief executive position. Treasurer's office isn't that large, and as lieutenant governor, you're basically a glorified gadfly to some extent. Unless the governor gives you some specific things, and you go and do them—which, really, Blagojevich never gave him. He had to go out and kind of create his things. But you're not running anything.

DePue: One of the things he had going to his advantage at that point in time was that he had a notoriously bad relationship with Governor Blagojevich.

⁵³ Blagojevich was arrested on December 9, 2008, impeached by the House on January 9, 2009, and removed by the Senate on January 29, 2009. Blagojevich was the first Illinois governor to be impeached.

Edgar: It was a lot more notoriously bad after the arrest than it was before. (DePue laughs) When he first was nominated, we thought, oh, this is a disaster waiting to happen; Blagojevich and Quinn will be impossible. Well, Quinn pretty well folded in and went along, and then for reelection... I mean, he didn't challenge Blagojevich; he didn't say anything. He ran with him, said that he thought he was a good, honest person during that campaign. As the investigation heated up, his distance became more noticeable. I think what happened during the first few years, Blagojevich just kind of ignored him, which is not unusual for some governors and lieutenant governors, particularly if they didn't run together.⁵⁴

That's a huge fallacy we have in our system; the governor ought to pick the lieutenant governor. I really think we ought to do the federal system where whoever the nominee is picks a person and maybe gets the state party to certify or approve it. I think that's even better than [filing separately to] run together. In my case, I picked my running mate, and there was a relationship there. I felt very comfortable delegating things to him, and he did a good job. But still, he had never been governor either. That's a huge difference in being lieutenant governor. As I said, treasurer is a very small office. If he had been secretary of state, he maybe would have had a little more experience in just the day-to-day. So again, I think he came in, in a very difficult situation, but he also came in with—I think everybody wanted him to succeed. I think in some ways maybe he squandered that opportunity a little bit. I don't think intentionally, I just think kind of his nature.

DePue: In what way, though?

Edgar: I think he should have moved quickly and brought in a lot of new people, replaced the Blagojevich people. I think he should have tried to sit down with the legislature and come up with what is doable. In his defense, he had a very difficult situation with the Speaker, who thought his daughter might be running for governor, and I'm sure that had some impact on the relationship.

DePue: His daughter Lisa Madigan, the attorney general.

Edgar: Right. I would have to think that had to have some impact. And I also think it's just his style. He is different in style than probably what they had been used to of governors that they had been able to work with. It's a huge change from lieutenant governor to governor, and I'm not sure that he was ready for that quite yet. Anyway, I think there was an opportunity in that session to try to solve some of the problems. It was a year out to the election. It wasn't the session of the election year, and there was this feeling of good spirit. You also had a new Senate president in John Cullerton, which was huge; that was almost as significant as the change with Blagojevich, because there had always been problems between Emil Jones and Madigan, and the Republicans didn't really have a whole lot of faith in Emil Jones

⁵⁴ On his decision to run for lieutenant governor, role in the 1990 campaign, and thoughts about the responsibilities of the position, see Bob Kustra, interview by Mike Czaplicki, January 28, 2011, especially 3-18 and 32-37. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

in the Senate. So I think with Cullerton coming in, that created a much better atmosphere with a new governor, new Senate leader, to get some things done. Unfortunately, that didn't happen.

DePue: One of the critiques that we have heard recently about Pat Quinn and those first couple efforts to push tax increases through the legislature, is that he wasn't able or willing to stick to his guns like former governor Jim Edgar was back in the days when Edgar was taking on the legislature.

Edgar: I always said I thought Governor Quinn's first instincts were pretty good; his second instincts were usually terrible, and too often, the day after his first instinct, he would announce the second instinct. (laughter) I think to be successful we all have to grow in office. If you're just as good at the end as you were at the beginning, then you're not very good. You've got to be a lot better; you've got to learn. Hopefully he'll learn that before he takes a position, he needs to think it through, even if it takes a little more time than some people want. Once he takes it, except on rare occasions, he needs to stick with it, because the legislature needs to know the guy's serious. If they don't think he's serious, they'll never... And usually you've got to wear down the legislature. Eventually they say, "Hey, he really means this, so we're probably going to have to do it." Unfortunately with Governor Quinn, that didn't happen. Also, what complicated that, I think, was his relationship with Madigan and the possibility that his daughter could be running against him [Quinn].

I'll give Governor Quinn some credit; I think that was a very difficult situation. That's been over now for a year. (laughs) I haven't seen as much as I would like to see as far as trying. I thought the biggest problem was he didn't have his own team there. He had very few people. The people that were there were stretched thin. Jerry Stermer, his chief of staff, who I had known from his other position and liked—somebody said he's probably not the guy to cut a budget, since he was kind of a spender—I thought he was someone you could talk to.⁵⁵ But he had to do a lot of things because they just didn't have the backup. And they still had a lot of Blagojevich people around in directors' positions and stuff. I don't think that people felt like, this is the Quinn team, and I'm not sure that he had the people to fall back on. Because as governor, you can't do it all.

I remember one time meeting with him early on. (laughs) I had heard that he takes notes all the time. He was taking notes. I said, "You shouldn't be taking..." I said, "These are things that you shouldn't have to worry about. You ought to have a staffer in here listening; maybe he worries about it. You shouldn't worry about it." "Oh, no, I'm going to pass these on." I think he follows up on all those things. That's fine if you're the lieutenant governor or the state treasurer, but you can't do

⁵⁵ Prior to his work as Quinn's chief of staff, Jerry Stermer had extensive experience in children's issues and human services, serving as an assistant to the director of the Department of Children and Family Services (1973-1979), executive director of the Legislative Advisory Committee on Public Aid (1979-1985), and board member of the Governor's Task Force on Human Services Reform. Edgar created the task force in 1993. "Jerry Stermer," Voices for Illinois Children, http://www.voices4kids.org/aboutvoices/jerry_stermer_bio.html.

that as governor. You've got to keep your focus on the big picture, then you've got to have other people doing a lot of these details. I thought that was a problem.

And now that he is the governor in his own right, hopefully... I'm sure there were people they might have liked to have who said, "Oh, I don't know if I want to leave my job to go work for you; you may be out in a year." It looked like he was going to be out in a year. It didn't look like he could win the primary, then I didn't think he'd win the general. But now he's got four years, so hopefully they will begin to put together a team. I have to say though, we're now a month and a half since the election, and I haven't seen a lot of movement yet. So we'll just have to wait and see.

The thing about Governor Quinn, though—he is sincere. That's very important, and I think that's one of the reasons he got elected, because whether they agreed with him or not, whether they thought he was doing a great job, people thought, this guy's sincere, this guy wants to do the right thing, and we haven't had that for a while. It's character people vote on just as much as party labels and political ideology, at least for governor in the state of Illinois, and I think Pat Quinn is a very sincere person who wants to do the right thing. Hopefully he'll grow in office. He's had that two years, a very difficult situation, and hopefully he's learned from that and the next four years will be better.

DePue: The next person I wanted to ask you about is President Barack Obama. We had talked about him before, but it was always in the context of these other decisions that you were making or with the Blagojevich situation. What do you think about his emergence as a politician?

Edgar: Oh, it's phenomenal. I mean, here's a guy that's a state senator, and all of a sudden he's president (laughs) of the United States within a matter of, what, a little more than two years. That's a phenomenal accomplishment.

DePue: Did he have a prominent role, as you recall, in the Illinois Senate?

Edgar: No, no. When I was there, he was a freshman member, and he was in the minority party, so that's about as insignificant as you could be. I think he was elected in '96, so the last two years I was governor, he was in the state Senate. But I remember early in that session after the election, my staff person who was working the Senate came to me and said, "Boy, there's really a bright new African American in the Senate. He is really impressive." I was rather dubious. I had heard that before. As I often said, when I was a young person, we thought Jesse Jackson was really special; then I think most of us decided that wasn't true. So I was a little... They make good speeches; sometimes they don't follow up. So I wasn't real sure. But I didn't have many dealings with him.

I think probably the only time I can remember, there was a bill that the Simon Institute at SIU had pushed—Mike Lawrence had been very much involved—on campaign funding laws. Obama had been a cosponsor, along with Kirk Dillard—

(laughs) unfortunately for Kirk Dillard, because what later cost Kirk Dillard the governorship was doing that commercial saying that Obama had worked across the aisle, which was true. That was probably one of the few times I was around Obama while I was governor. The thought, at least in our office, was, he does seem like a pretty impressive young man, and maybe he is different than a Jesse Jackson. This might be real. But I don't think any of us thought at the time about being president. About that time, a little after I left office, was when he ran for Congress in that primary—

DePue: Against Bobby Rush.

Edgar: Bobby Rush—but he finished third. Bobby Rush was the incumbent and supported by the black Democratic political organization, of which Obama had never really been part. He was from Hyde Park, and you've got to understand, Hyde Park's the University of Chicago; that's far different from the South Side of Chicago black Democratic organization. It was funny when Emil Jones talked about, he's like a son to me.⁵⁶ I don't think anyone ever thought that was true back early on, that Emil Jones had this rapport or feeling toward Obama quite like that. When he finished third, you just figure, he's at a dead end; Hyde Park Democrats don't usually do well in the city because the rest of the Democratic Party doesn't think like Hyde Park. That's a very liberal, independent kind of...

DePue: It's almost like being a lakefront liberal?

Edgar: Nah, it's even different. Lakefront liberals are just wealthy; Hyde Park is more intellectual and more removed from the rest of the area around there. It's kind of an island in that thinking, as opposed to the rest of that area, particularly in Democratic politics. Hyde Park Democrats sometimes might make coalitions with Republicans to do reforms and things like that, though Obama was a little more of a regular Democrat than that. But he was not from the South Side; he just happened to live on an island that was located in the South Side.

So he seemed fine. I remember talking to him one time right before the Senate race came up. I ran into him and talked to him for a while, just sitting outside of a meeting someplace. We had some mutual friends. I thought he seemed like a pretty impressive young guy. When the Senate race came up, initially I didn't have any thoughts of it because I thought we were going to have our incumbent senator running, so it wasn't something I had to think about. I thought, Obama would be a pretty attractive candidate if he could get the nomination. Later on, when I was in the mix a little bit, one of the things I thought, well, Obama really wants to be senator and might be a pretty good senator; I don't know if I really want to be senator. But at that point, he was running about third in the Democratic primary. I always thought he would do better than that. I thought he probably was the kind of African American who would play well in suburbia. He's the Colin Powell type,

⁵⁶ After Obama's inauguration, Jones said "My godson's the president now. I feel good." Greg Hinz, *Crain's Chicago Business*, January 19, 2009.

which I think is what you need to win in a state like Illinois. So I thought his speech at the Democratic convention was one of those turning points in American politics. I mean, that made him. From then on in that campaign for the Senate, he was kind of like a rock star. I had him here at U of I. We never could get students to turn out for anything, outside of maybe they show up at a rock concert; I don't go to those, I don't know.

DePue: Or the Illini playing.

Edgar: Or a really good game, yes. But they showed up for Obama. I've never seen anybody political coming to town that can draw any kind of a crowd. They were hanging off the rafters. You just knew this was kind of special, the way he connected with folks.

DePue: Your limited experience with him from the Illinois perspective: did you see him as a moderate Democrat, then?

Edgar: My sense of him was that he was somebody who could work with Republicans. He was very articulate, very bright. He wasn't necessarily caught up with, you know, it's all Democrat. He was a smart guy that had to work across party aisles. He had a record of that, I thought; I wasn't in the Senate, so some of them might have a different perspective. When he was in the minority, he was pretty good at working with the majority. Of course, you had to work with the majority if you were in the minority. I'm not sure how he worked with the minority when he was in the majority at that point. But I was surprised and disappointed that it seemed like he started out more partisan as president than he should have, and I think that cost him. As we talk here, the tax cut compromise is working its way through Congress. That is the type of Obama I thought we would see: much more pragmatic. I think that's what that 20 percent in the middle who elected him—that independent kind of voter, some Republicans, probably, some Democrats—that's what they thought they were going to get. Instead he became viewed as much more partisan. Now, not all his fault—the Republicans are pretty partisan, too—but as president, you've got to rise above that.

When he started to run for president, I thought it was too soon. I didn't know how Hillary Clinton and the Democrat primary... Now, I thought if he could get to the general election he could be pretty tough, but in a Democrat primary, I thought the Clintons had that all sewed up. That, to me, is amazing that they didn't have that all sewed up. That he was able to win the nomination was quite an accomplishment. I think when you got to the general election, the way things were going, whoever the Democrats nominated were going to win that election, probably. But for him to win that Democratic nomination against Hillary Clinton at that point in history was somewhat amazing.

DePue: What do you think, then, about the critique of him from the conservative wing of the Republican Party? It's been pretty candid and harsh in many respects—calling

him a socialist, all the questions about his birth certificate—but especially about his politics and how left he is of center.

Edgar: Well, probably not a whole lot different than some of the Democrats are doing about George Bush not being very bright and just being this right-wing... I think they both are not to that extreme, though I do think (laughs) a little bit more came out of Obama from that community organizer background, rather than some state senator who had a good track record of reaching across the aisle and working with the Republicans. I think a little more of that prevailed.

DePue: Were you surprised when the stuff came out about his church and Jeremiah Wright?

Edgar: Oh, no, no. I think that's a lot to do about nothing. I'm just glad he went to church, for Pete's sake. Most politicians don't really go. They claim they do, and very few of them do. Those that do, unfortunately, sometimes the churches are so extreme. And many of the black leaders were members of that church. I've not spent a lot of time in black churches—I've spent some—and they're different than white churches. The ministers talk differently. I don't think you got to be blamed for your minister, what the minister says. I mean, how often can you get in trouble in American politics for going to church, and he got in trouble for going to church. I just thought it was kind of ludicrous.

I also thought the thing about where he was born... First of all, I don't care; it's where you grow up that matters, not where you were born.

DePue: Well, it's a constitutional issue, though.

Edgar: I know that, and all I know is wasn't McCain born in Panama? But that was okay! I have no reason to think he wasn't born in Hawaii, but I think it's a lot to do about nothing. I think far more important: where did he grow up? Now, if you want to question, "Well, he grew up in Indonesia part of that time," all right, take a look at that. I think that has pluses and minuses. Maybe he missed some of the things that we got growing up here, but he also has a much better perspective of the world. I like to have a president that has a perspective of the world that's probably a little more relevant than someone who grew up in Charleston, Illinois, and never traveled.

You figure his combination—he was raised by his grandparents, who were white, so he was exposed to probably more of the white culture than the black culture, until he got out of college and was a community organizer in the South Side of Chicago. That is maybe where he got his black experience. Now, growing up in Hawaii—I'm not sure Hawaii is your typical state, but it's a multiracial culture. I think somebody who can be comfortable in any environment, I think that's good for a president.

DePue: Some would say Hawaii is an example of how you can have a harmonious mixture of a variety of different ethnic groups and religions and the whole spectrum.

Edgar: Yes, yes. And the warm weather probably helps too. I don't know. But yes, he came out of an environment where he didn't get hung up on some of these things that we get hung up on, and we probably shouldn't get hung up on. I thought his background actually was the best you could have to be the first African American president, because he's half African American and he's half-white. We don't have too much of that because we wouldn't have racial marriages—that was tabooed. But I think he came in kind of understanding both far better than anyone else would have. So again, I thought that was a plus.

I have to say, election night, I was in Chicago, and I was excited for the nation: the fact that we had elected an African American president, and I thought he was someone who engendered a lot of enthusiasm among young people, which I think is important. A lot of people who had never been involved or who had been turned off seemed like they were involved. I thought that's good, and I still think that's good. I wish to some extent he'd had a Republican Congress off the bat, and I think he wouldn't be viewed as partisan as he's viewed by many of the Republicans. There's some from the right, it doesn't matter what he does, they're going to dislike him and they're going to attack him, just like Democrats who did that to President Bush. I also thought President Bush might have been viewed more favorably by more Americans if he'd had a Democratic Congress to work with, because they both had track records—

DePue: Well, he did his last few years.

Edgar: But not the first, not to start off, when you have all that goodwill going with you and you have a lot of momentum when you're elected president. Because they both, I thought, had track records of working effectively with the other party before they became president.

DePue: There's a couple of different directions I'd like to go here. You just brought up the issue of George Bush and goodwill. We haven't asked you about your view of 9/11 and what that meant to America.

Edgar: I wasn't alive, of course, for Pearl Harbor, but that was my generation's Pearl Harbor. There is nothing more dramatic that's happened in my lifetime toward America than 9/11. The Korean War wasn't as dramatic.

DePue: You came of age in the Vietnam era.

Edgar: Yes, and the Vietnam War was an unfortunate thing, but I don't think it changed things as much as 9/11 did. I don't think things ever will be the same after 9/11. America for the first time found out we're vulnerable, we can be attacked. And national security doesn't necessarily just mean protecting our ships halfway around the world; it means protecting our cities here in the continental forty-eight states. That was a huge switch. Vietnam, something over there, it was unfortunate, but outside of the disagreement over Vietnam here, it wasn't a threat to America, per se. Probably the other major thing was the fall of the Berlin Wall, because that was the

official end of the Cold War; though I really think when Reagan and Gorbachev were in Iceland, that to me was the end of the Cold War. That wasn't dramatic, but that's just for us political junkies; I don't think most people... But 9/11—all of a sudden we were attacked, and we couldn't stop it. It wasn't just one: it was the Pentagon, the Twin Towers, and then you had that other plane that fortunately was brought down, or I think it would have probably hit the Capitol building. To me, that is the defining moment in America. There are other things that are very important, but that, as far as a moment, is very dramatic.

I have to tell you, when that happened, that was the first time I felt like, did I make a mistake not staying in government? Do I have a responsibility to go back in government? Because now we're at war, and the U.S. Senate—which I wasn't sure in 1997 was all that in the center of things—short of the presidency, was probably the most important place for an elected official to be. In 2004, that had a lot to do with me thinking seriously about the U.S. Senate race for a little bit, because the feeling was, hey, we all have a role to play, because we're at war. I'm not going to carry a gun, that's obvious. I don't know if you're going to carry a gun in this war; you're probably going to run a computer someplace. But yes, that was extremely dramatic. I think it still affects this country. I think we still live in fear that the other shoe's going to drop in that war.

DePue: Another one of the things that has definitely been changing about American politics—you can say since the beginning of the Reagan era, but it's certainly becoming apparent today—is the shift in the polarization of the two parties. What's gotten a lot of attention recently is what's happening in the Republican Party. Your brand, if you don't mind me saying this, has always been as a moderate Republican. I want you to reflect, as a moderate Republican, on that shift that's going on in conservative circles.

Edgar: I think one of the geniuses of our American political system was the two-party system, which I'm a great believer in, because it gives us a choice on election day. But also one of the geniuses was that they overlapped. You had moderate to liberal Republicans—I haven't seen a liberal Republican probably in the last fifty years—but you have conservative Democrats, and in some ways Democrats, at least where I grew up, were probably more conservative than the Republicans were. That overlap, I think, provided some stability and continuity in our political process, which we're losing today, and also provided the ability to reach compromise or consensus, which is very difficult today. For the Republicans, particularly in a state like Illinois, it's critical if we're going to win elections. This last election proved that you can't go too far, or be perceived as going too far, to the right and win in a year that anybody should have won. If we're ever going to win the governorship, it was this year. I think Bill Brady was just perceived as too far to the right, whereas Mark Kirk—the last week particularly—started talking about his independent, more moderate positions. I think that is why Kirk prevailed. If we keep moving to the right, at least in a state like Illinois, I think we are going to be always in the minority.

Nationally, I think we'll be in the minority too; the demographics are moving against us. The Republicans' attitude towards immigration—switching from trying to be somewhat sympathetic, particularly with Hispanics, to being just anti-immigration—I think is going to be the final nail in a coffin for us nationally. If Hispanic votes go the way of the African American votes, there's not going to be enough votes left for Republicans to win. So I think the party has made some major mistakes for short-term gains. I think many Republicans are doing it purely for short-term gains. It's not they believe it. This DREAM Act the other day: you had about eight senators, who used to be for it, get off of it because they got a tough primary coming up or they want to appeal to the right. Maybe it gets them past the last primary, but I think they're going to continue to be in the minority.

DePue: So you don't see what's going on as an ideological shift as much as it's for political benefit?

Edgar: Oh, I think there are people coming into the party—there's people involved now in the party, a greater percentage—who are much more far to the right than before, and many of those in the middle have left the party and are now not involved, or have become Democrats, or are just independents.

DePue: But the polls are saying America is generally right-center. That's the term you always hear.

Edgar: I think we've always been right-center. I don't think the Republican Party is right-center; I think the Republican Party is moving to the far right, and that's not where the American voters are. Again, I'm not sure how far right-center we are if you look at the demographics, because I don't see that many African Americans or that many immigrants who... I think there's a lot of reasons why immigrants, particularly Mexican Americans, ought to be Republicans; but it's hard for them to be Republicans, even though they agree on some things, if they view Republicans as anti-immigrants—and that means anti-them.

DePue: Well, is that in part because the Democrats and the media are doing a good job of painting of them as anti-?

Edgar: No, I think it's because the Republicans are voting that way on this immigration issue. I think George Bush was right, what he was trying to do, and he got undercut by his own party in the House. They made the political decision that this was the way to go. Then you saw it again the other day on the DREAM Act.⁵⁷ Now, I'm not saying the Democrats were all for that for good motives; they're there because they

⁵⁷ George W. Bush advocated for an expanded guest worker program and a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants. The House passed the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437), which did not contain these provisions, focused on punitive measures, and was supported primarily by Republicans. The Senate soon passed its own version of immigration reform, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 (S. 2612), which provided for both guest workers and a pathway to citizenship. Congress failed to reconcile them in conference. The following Congress (110th), the Bush-backed Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007 (S. 1639) was blocked in the Senate. <http://www.thomas.gov>.

think there's votes there. But if you look at Hispanics, we were coming on very well with Hispanics; that's all changed now because of our position on immigration.

DePue: If you were back in the political arena again and running in a state as diverse as Illinois, with a large black population and a large and growing Hispanic population, what philosophical or ideological issues as a conservative would you appeal to in those groups? Why should they be Republicans? Let's put it that way.

Edgar: You don't spend money you don't have, and the importance of the family and values, without trying to impose those, necessarily, on other people. That's the other thing: I think you look at a person, and I think in American politics your personal life has always been a factor. But even though you're a conservative, if you're a conservative Hispanic, you want to be respected; this immigration issue knocks out any advantage we might have on free enterprise, importance of the family, and things like that, if you think, hey, your party's against us. So that's the first issue, and you don't get past that.

DePue: From what you've said so far, you don't see much short term future for the Republican Party, at least in statewide elections in Illinois.

Edgar: This was the year we should have won. I will say that in the Republican Party in Illinois, the far right hasn't taken over like in some states. We still usually nominate someone perceived as more moderate. Bill Brady didn't get the nomination because he was far to the right; he got the nomination because he was the only downstater. It had nothing to do with ideology; it was all geography. If Kirk Dillard had been the nominee—actually, they agree on some things, and some they don't, but the perception was that he was more to the middle. I think that would have helped him, and I think he could have won. But if Republicans in this state nominate people who are too far to the right, at least for U.S. Senate and governor, then I think we'll have difficulty winning. As I said, this year was our year, and unfortunately we didn't win.

DePue: Let's talk a little bit more about that gubernatorial primary race. You mentioned Bill Brady, the downstate Republican, who is more conservative, both socially and fiscally, but especially social issues; Kirk Dillard, your former chief of staff, so you had something in that as well; and Jim Ryan, a former attorney general who had run and lost against Blagojevich in 2002. As I recall, though, you came out for Kirk Dillard, but you came out fairly late in the primary season.

Edgar: No, no, I came out before they even filed, but I did not come out early in the primary process. I think he announced sometime in July; I think I endorsed him sometime in September. He filed sometime in November of this year. I know I endorsed him long before he filed.⁵⁸ Part of it was I wasn't sure how good a candidate Kirk Dillard would have been. I was a little surprised when he said he was going to run for governor. I thought he might run for AG. In retrospect, if I'd

⁵⁸ Edgar endorsed Dillard on October 12, 2009.

have come out for him maybe a month or so before, would that have kept Jim Ryan out of the race? I don't know. I think Jim Ryan was looking at numbers, and you don't like to go out a loser. Maybe he would have run anyway. I don't know if that would have kept Andy McKenna out either. They both asked for my support, and I—

DePue: "They" being Dillard and McKenna?

Edgar: McKenna and Jim Ryan. Particularly Jim Ryan called a couple times, and I just said—at that point it was pretty late, because he kind of came in late... Really, nobody had emerged, I'd have to say, in that race early on, where they were going to win it. I think Jim Ryan looked at poll numbers, and with his name recognition, he did pretty well in the early polls. But no, before the filing, I was for Kirk, and I was very much involved. And even if I hadn't been involved, Kirk wouldn't let anybody forget. He did mention quite regularly (DePue laughs) that he had been my chief of staff.

DePue: When I interviewed him, he talked about it a lot.

Edgar: Yes, yes, (laughs) right. I figured I had to be for him; he was going to mention me every time. But I thought he turned out to be a very good candidate. He started with really no name recognition. I think he was a little surprised; he thought he maybe had more in DuPage County. But state legislators for the most part just don't have name recognition, and Jim Ryan had it from his run for governor and his eight years as attorney general; that built up more name recognition than a state legislator gets. Andy McKenna had a lot of money and he spent a lot of money; that's why he was a factor.

DePue: Well-known in the Chicago area but not downstate?

Edgar: No, no, no. He was known to businessmen, but not to the average person. He just spent a lot of money on television commercials.

DePue: There were others in the race. I don't even know if I can pronounce the next name.

Edgar: I can't pronounce his name.

DePue: Adam Andrzejewski.

Edgar: He was the Tea Party guy, kind of.

DePue: And Dan Proft.

Edgar: Dan Proft—now, I didn't know him—he was a commentator on radio, and very conservative. Very articulate guy. I was really surprised he didn't do any better than he did. If you could have eliminated McKenna or Jim Ryan, either one of those guys, Kirk Dillard probably would have won that race.

DePue: And he lost by only?

Edgar: A hundred ninety votes.

DePue: Took forever to determine it.

Edgar: They didn't do a recount; you just had to wait till you had all of the canvassing done.

DePue: Did you campaign for Dillard during the primary?

Edgar: Oh, yes. Well, I say I campaigned for him; we had a commercial which got played a lot. Actually, I was gone for a lot of that last month.

DePue: Did he want you to do more?

Edgar: Oh, and also I did a robo-call, if you know what that is.

DePue: Yes.

Edgar: Yes, which I hate to do, but I did it. They didn't play it as much as they... For some reason they pulled it downstate, which I couldn't quite understand. The only thing I think in retrospect I maybe should have done was, the last weekend when you make that fly-around—they didn't ask me because they knew I was gone—maybe I should have been available for that because that was kind of the last... But again, they were running my commercial a lot, so most people thought I was out campaigning every day, because they saw my commercial every day. I could have been out campaigning every day and not had a commercial and it wouldn't have had one tenth of the impact. So a commercial is kind of the key thing.

DePue: Did you do any campaigning for Bill Brady, then, afterwards?

Edgar: I was asked twice. One, they wanted me to endorse him, and—

DePue: Did you do that?

Edgar: —I did. They said they wanted to do a live endorsement in downtown Chicago, which I wasn't... I said, "Okay, I'll do it." I had my schedule cleared, and they changed their mind and decided not to do that, and they just put out a press release. I think they were fearful that my position on taxes might embarrass them or cause them a problem. Then they came back and asked me to spend a day with him in the northwest suburbs, where we knew he was going to have problems, which I agreed to do. Cleared my schedule. They then called back and said they'd changed their mind right before it, and instead they were going to do a Tea Party rally in Will County. I was welcome to come, but they had a conservative former senator who was going to head that up. I passed since they had changed (laughs) what we intended. So those are the two things I was asked to do, which I agreed I would do—appearance, campaigning with him—and they changed their minds.

DePue: I'm going to quote an article that Rich Miller or David Ormsby, one of the two, wrote in March 10, 2010, and this is obviously—

Edgar: Who's Ormsby?

DePue: I'm not familiar with that name. Rich Miller, of course, does—

Edgar: I know who Rich Miller—*Capitol Fax*, yes.⁵⁹

DePue: And talking about your, I think they would say, very lukewarm support for Bill Brady's campaign.

Edgar: When was this written?

DePue: March tenth.

Edgar: Well, I hadn't endorsed him yet, hadn't done anything yet. That was right after the primary, so that's a little irrelevant.

DePue: Premature.

Edgar: A little irrelevant, yes.

DePue: "Former Republican governor Jim Edgar took a not-too-subtle swipe at GOP gubernatorial nominee Bill Brady's 10 percent across-the-board proposal to fill Illinois's budget's twelve-billion-dollar hole, calling it 'naïve.'" And then their last word was "Ouch."

Edgar: Um-hm. Well, it was. He later said that's not what he intended, and I said, "Fine, if that's not what you intended." Because I've done that. I've done budget cuts, and you don't do it across the board; you got to set priorities.⁶⁰ He said he had been misinterpreted; he didn't mean across the board. And so that was fine.

DePue: Use a term to describe the nature of your support for Bill Brady versus Pat Quinn.

Edgar: I endorsed Bill Brady.

DePue: Strong support, then?

Edgar: Well, a lot stronger than... My comments about Pat Quinn: I don't think anybody would have used them in a campaign, outside I said I think he was sincere. I made the comment once, "I'm not sure he's wired to be governor." He had his opportunity.

⁵⁹ *Capitol Fax* is a daily political newsletter Miller began publishing in 1993. Miller also is a columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

⁶⁰ Governor Edgar's administration tried to avoid across-the-board cuts as they wrestled with the huge budget deficit they inherited. See Jim Edgar, April 23, 2010, 18-19; Joan Walters, July 29, 2009, 15-19; and Jim Reilly, August 11, 2009, 21. All interviews by Mark DePue.

DePue: Do you think Bill Brady was wired to be governor?

Edgar: Oh, much more than I think Pat Quinn.

DePue: But he's coming from a legislative background again.

Edgar: Yes, but he's had a business. He has run a business; that gave him some experience. The other thing, though, is I have to say the two years we'd had with Pat hadn't proven to be real good. We didn't know for sure about Bill Brady. You know what you've got, and is this working, and is it worth taking a chance on an unknown; to my thinking it probably was. I also thought Bill Brady would probably have some pretty competent people around him, because I know who was involved in the campaign—some of them anyway. The other thing, too—I probably wasn't going to get involved in the primary if Dillard wasn't a candidate. I mean, I am loyal to my former staffers. As Brenda says, "Those people had to put up with you; you sure ought to do something for them." (DePue laughs) I had said I kind of wanted to back out a little bit. I was very much involved with Topinka in 2006 because I really thought Blagojevich was a disaster, and I was very much for Jim Ryan. He didn't have me do commercials, but I campaigned for him in 2002 because, again, I just didn't think Blagojevich--just what I knew about him when he was a legislator--was the right person to come in and deal with. With Pat Quinn, I didn't have the same kind of feeling of, this guy is just terrible, as I did toward Blagojevich. Also, just the university and stuff—I just kind of wanted to back off a little bit.

DePue: I'm sure you were interested in watching the Democrat primary as well, and maybe the months leading up to the Democrat primary. You already talked about Speaker Mike Madigan and that big question mark that had been out there so long about what his daughter's intentions were. Different race if Lisa Madigan decides to jump into the Democratic primary?

Edgar: Oh, yes, yes. You probably wouldn't have had that many people running on the Republican side; they'd have all been running for AG. (DePue laughs) Seriously. I don't think Jim Ryan would have run for—but I think Kirk Dillard might have. I don't know if Andy McKenna would have got in; Jim Ryan may not have got in. Everybody kind of thought Lisa Madigan would probably win the thing. Now, there was some question about, will her father be an issue? There's no doubt, in a Democratic primary, that might have been a problem to some extent, but I always said I thought it was an asset. I would have liked to have just had a second cousin as the legislative leader, let alone having my father as somebody that's looking out for my interest. But no, I think the whole dynamics would have been different in both primaries.

DePue: The Democrat primary wasn't quite as tight as the Republican side, but Dan Hynes was the main candidate against Quinn. Lisa obviously didn't run. Bill Daley, Christopher Kennedy, and Jack Franks were the other ones in the race.

Edgar: No, they weren't. They were talked about.

DePue: Okay, they declined. I'm sorry, you're right. Any other comments on Pat Quinn emerging from that group?

Edgar: Again, I think everybody was surprised. Everybody thought at the end that Hynes was going to pull that off. He'd been behind, and he was coming on, coming on, coming on, and it didn't seem that Quinn had a very good organization going. All of a sudden Quinn held on, very similar to how he did the general election. I guess we should have learned from that. There was a period there, election night, when you still thought Hynes might win it. It was close enough. I remember standing with Kirk Dillard, and he said, "We want Quinn to win, don't we?" and I said, "Yes, I think you want to run against Quinn; the race is over." Hynes could be a tough race in a general election. But Quinn won that primary in very similar fashion to how he won the general election. As he told me after the election, "I'm a marathon runner." Well, he was.

DePue: If it'd had been Dillard that had won on the Republican side against Quinn, then in your mind, would Dillard be the governor-elect today?

Edgar: I believe so. You don't know for sure. You never know, especially someone who had never run before, though based on how he had run in the primary, the way he had conducted himself, handled the issues... He got through that primary and almost got nominated; he refused to do the "no new tax" pledge, and that was a **huge** issue in that primary. That was probably, next to the Obama commercial, two of the major things he had kind of working against him in that primary. A lot of people here, professors in the university, took Republican ballots to vote for Kirk Dillard because they just didn't see the Democratic side was going to solve the problems or win, and on the Republican side, that was the only one they thought. So I think Dillard would have won the general election. You don't know until you've run it, but I think most political people feel that way. In fact, I even had one of the Democratic leaders tell me just about two weeks ago, "I wish he would have won. If he had been the nominee, I might have endorsed him." I said, "Well, it's a little late for that." (DePue laughs) I think there was the feeling on the Democrat side, too, that he was somebody they could work with. I'm not sure they felt that way toward Bill Brady, but I don't think that had as much impact... There's a lot of folks I talked to around the state who just said, "Dillard's position just seemed more realistic to deal with the problems of the state." I think he would have picked up votes, like college professors here, who I know in the end voted for Quinn.

DePue: So we do end up with Bill Brady as the Republican candidate, and obviously you've got Quinn on the Democratic side. The election is behind us; we know what the outcome is: Quinn wins. It was a close election, but not nearly as close as the Republican primary was. Was this one of those races where it was a matter of which candidate was going to be more determined to lose it?

Edgar: I think a lot more folks voted against than they voted for. Contrary to what the governor says, that he has a mandate on the tax—I don't think he has a mandate. You can be for a tax increase and still win in spite of it, (laughs) I don't think because of it. I'm sure there were some that voted for him because a lot of folks thought he was more realistic on the tax issue, but I don't think he necessarily ought to take it as an overwhelming (laughs) endorsement that people want their taxes raised. People never want their taxes raised. But I think what it shows is that you **can** be for a tax increase and still win, so it's not the third rail of Illinois politics like so many people have thought.

And it wasn't just his race. There were some legislative races where senators actually voted for the tax increase—it had passed the Senate—and ran against Republicans. I think of the Elgin district; we had [Steve] Rauschenberger, the former Republican senator, who most people in the district probably thought was still the senator, because he was much more well-known than the Democrat who had gotten elected four years before when Rauschenberger had given up the seat to run for lieutenant governor. One of the big issues in that race was the income tax, and Rauschenberger, who probably had as much if not more name recognition than the Democrat did, lost that race. Now, it was close, but he lost it. So again, not an **endorsement** for the tax, but you could be for the tax and survive in a swing district. This wasn't a Democratic district. So probably more of a swing district than the state of Illinois is. I think that issue gives people a little more cover, a little less anxiety, if they end up voting for an income tax increase.

DePue: So what were the issues that lost it for Brady, that [made] people vote against him?

Edgar: They thought he was too far to the right. You look at where he lost it, you look at how Mark Kirk ran versus how he ran—he ran behind Mark Kirk in the suburbs, particularly among women. On the abortion issue, the pro-choice people really beat him up pretty good; I think that had part to do with it. The other thing that surprised me, there wasn't as heavy a turnout downstate as I thought there would be. The turnout downstate was about the same as it was in the city, and that surprised me. I thought we'd have a much heavier turnout downstate, which would benefit Brady. Even in some of the counties, Brady didn't run—like in Champaign County, where I thought he'd run a little better, I think he got 53 percent of the vote. But the difference was in the suburbs, and that's where we said all along, that's where Republicans always have had a problem, with suburban women, and you got to do better there.

DePue: The abortion issue is one that you mentioned. I'm sure you have a strong opinion on this one, but how much does the governor have to say about the abortion issue anyway?

Edgar: Very little. But (laughs) a lot of times elections turn on issues that don't exist after you're elected.

DePue: Another one that was thrown up there was creationism, teaching creationism in the school.

Edgar: Yes. And again, I think that had more to do with impressions—it made him sound like he was a far right-winger. I have to say, in the general election, he'd just as soon not talk about those issues. He knew those weren't... But those were positions he had taken, and votes. One of the liabilities sometimes of being a candidate for any office, if you've been a legislator, is you've taken a lot of votes, and some of those votes could be taken out of context. But the other issue was he'd made the comment about maybe doing away with the minimum wage. It's been hard the last several years to get the labor folks excited. Well, you throw something like that out, (DePue laughs) or you're for right-to-work—I mean, those kinds of things that he has uttered are fine in his district, but statewide, those probably aren't things... You put those all together and it begins to leave the impression, This guy is kind of far to the right. The creation thing, I heard from a lot of folks. I'm not sure people laid awake at night worried about it, but they just thought, boy, that's an odd thing to want to be out there. Now, if you listen to what he said, it wasn't quite how people took it, but again, they keep hearing those kind of things, and it left people with this perception, here is somebody that's, boy, really pretty far to the right. Younger voters—that doesn't play well. It might play well with some older voters, and there's no doubt there are some Tea Party-type voters that maybe like that, but while they're very vocal and they may be the majority in a Republican primary, they are not the majority in a general election in the state of Illinois.

DePue: Even after everything you just said, does Bill Brady win the election if Scott Lee Cohen isn't an independent in the election?

Edgar: When you only lose by twenty thousand votes, anything (laughs) might have made a difference. Perhaps, perhaps. The thing that surprised me was I really thought he was going to win that election pretty handily. I didn't think it was going to be twenty thousand votes this way or that way; I thought he would actually run ahead of Mark Kirk. I thought his campaign had played better than Mark Kirk's had, and people had paid more attention to it. The only thing they knew on Kirk was, well, he lied on his résumé, and the other guy, his family had some questionable ties in the banks and stuff like that. That's about all people knew about the U.S. Senate race, whereas in the governor's race they knew more things and it got a lot more attention. I thought Brady conducted himself pretty well. He tried to avoid a lot of those issues that I think came back to haunt him. He did one time get asked a question on creation, and I think all he said was he would allow local school boards to decide whether that's taught. That's a little different than saying he believes that. But it just brought that up again and just kind of rekindled this idea, this guy's kind of far to the right.

DePue: Well, how would you have answered the question?

Edgar: (pause) I don't know if I'd let the local school boards do it (laughter) myself, but I'm a little more, probably... But that's different than saying, "Gee, I think they

ought to teach that in school.” I mean, that is a little different. You can argue that’s your local control of schools, too.

DePue: You’ve mentioned the Tea Party several times in this discussion. Here’s my perception of it, and you can agree or disagree. This is truly a grassroots movement that certainly would benefit the Republican Party, but in many senses these Tea Party folks are trying to cut their ties from the parties. What is your assessment of it, and how has that impacted politics?

Edgar: I think it varies from state to state and probably from locality to locality. There is no uniform Tea Party. They just don’t like government; they think government’s... I think a lot of it got kindled from the health care thing. People thought, gee, government’s coming in and taking our money and telling us what we got to do, and we don’t like that.

DePue: That and the deficit issue.

Edgar: Yes. It varies from people... But they’re just mad. They just don’t think the current political establishment’s working—that they got carried away, they’re spending too much money and all. But there are some in there who are probably more socially conservative, and some who are fiscally conservative. There might even be a few who are bigots, but I think the vast majority are not. I think they have a tendency, in some states, to make huge mistakes at the cost of Republicans. Delaware is a classic example—a seat there. Mike Castle was probably the only Republican in Delaware who could have won; he was the one Republican who could have beat anybody, including Biden, if he had come back and run.⁶¹ Unfortunately he couldn’t get by a primary that didn’t have a very big turnout. One of my theses is, if you really want to change politics, if you really want to see the middle begin to reemerge—where I think most people are—they’ve got to vote in primaries. That’s where elections are being decided. Unfortunately, in Illinois we had an extremely early primary when a lot of people didn’t vote that might have voted.

DePue: Most people would say it’s an early primary because it was engineered to be that way to benefit Barack Obama the last election cycle.

Edgar: It was, but they should have changed it; they didn’t. They did change it for next time. It’s March. That’s still too early, but that’s a lot better than February, what, second? Groundhog Day? Yes. Actually, if we’d had it a little later, the Tea Party might have been a little more organized, though in Illinois you still have much more of a moderate element in the Republican Party than you do in a lot of states.

DePue: I’m going to read a letter to the editor that was written on November 17, 2010, so this is a week or so after the election. It’s responding to you; in fact, it’s directed to you, and I’ll just say—

⁶¹ Beau Biden, son of vice president Joe Biden.

Edgar: Oh, is this the one from Roeser?⁶²

DePue: Frank Masters of Carlinville. You might not even be aware of this one.

Edgar: No, I'm not. What paper is this?

DePue: *State Journal-Register*.

Edgar: Oh, no, okay.

DePue: "Last Wednesday the *State Journal-Register* published an article quoting former governor Jim Edgar's admonition that had Bill Brady moderated his extreme conservatism, he could have won the election. Governor, I recognize you as a good man and a strong leader"—okay, now you're being set up.

Edgar: Yes, right. (laughter)

DePue: "—but on this notion, you are dead wrong. The people have awakened to a renewed appreciation and an appetite for conservative thinking. One of the finest notions that exploded into the hearts and minds of people all across the land of late is that a man or woman should be guided always by their values and principles. Electing leaders willing to compromise on their values and principles for practical political purposes is what got us, this precious nation of ours, into such a huge mess in the first place. Yet, Governor, that is exactly what you proposed in your own words, that Brady should have tempered his conservatism for practical political reasons." I'm skipping over some of this. "Governor, Bill Brady is a good man who follows his values and principles, and he is never going to compromise on those, nor should anyone want him to. Bill Brady didn't lose the election for his passion for conservatism, he lost the race because he was up against the entrenched Chicago machine politics on steroids." And this is just an average submission.

Edgar: Well, I didn't say that. I didn't say, "Bill Brady ought to change—he tempered his"—that's not what I... I said Bill Brady lost because he was perceived as too far to the right. Didn't suggest; I'm just saying because that's how he was perceived, that cost him the election. I think a person ought to back up their principles. I think some issues—in fact, I've had conversations. I think some of those, years ago, he decided that's where he needed to be on the party. Now, on abortion, he's Catholic; my sense is he probably believes that, and I don't think he can change it. On abortion, I've said many times, you've got to follow what you believe. But I know an awful lot of Republicans who, if it was a secret ballot, would be much more pro-choice, but they're not because they're worried about their primary. I know enough of them, know where they are, but I would never say anybody ought to change; I'm just saying that they probably shouldn't be our nominee, though. You've got to face reality. That's not where most folks are. Somebody shouldn't change just to get elected, but maybe that's not the person you nominate, then.

⁶² Jack Roeser is an Illinois businessman and conservative activist who founded the Family Taxpayers Foundation. He unsuccessfully challenged Edgar in the 1994 gubernatorial primary,

DePue: Well, this is very much part of the political environment we're in. It seems like in both left and right, there are much more ideological differences than we have seen in the past.

Edgar: Oh, much more, and I think that's not necessarily all that good. Because like we talked, abortion's not an issue the governor spends a lot of time on. A lot of these things we get all hung up on, we don't spend a lot of time on. Governors can't do a whole lot about the deficit in Washington. That's one of my arguments I used to make about why we shouldn't have straight-party voting, because who you're voting for, for governor, determine who's going to get elected county clerk. I mean, those are different things. But ideology, unfortunately, has crept more into the political scene, and I think that's made it more difficult to reach consensus and solve problems. We'd rather have philosophical arguments than practical solutions. As a result, I don't think government's as efficient as it used to be.

DePue: We're going to change gears now and step away from politics. Something you and I haven't really talked much about is your passion for reading and your passion for history, so I want to finish off, at least before we get into some general concluding questions, with your involvement with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, and your love of history and politics.

Edgar: I've always loved history. In fact, I read history books all the time. I don't have to be assigned by a teacher. (DePue laughs) Most of the other nonfiction (laughs) had to be assigned by a teacher. I just enjoy history. First of all, history is real. It happened. You study a lot of things, you talk about a lot of things—it may or may not happen, but history happened. I think there are a lot of lessons you can get from history. And it's always interesting: how did we get where we are, how did people deal with problems, how did they... So I've always enjoyed history.

It started back when I was little. I think I commented on this. I'm at that age where I repeat myself so much and I can't remember what all I've—and we've talked so long I'm sure I've repeated. But the first thing I remember on history was, I had this stamp book of Abraham Lincoln. You used to get these books—I forget what company made them, but they'd make them on different topics, like dinosaurs. I didn't care about dinosaurs, but they had one on Lincoln, and probably about second grade, I got one of those. I loved stamps—I mean, those things you could put in books, and they were all glossy-looking. I had one on Lincoln, and I think it was around Lincoln's birthday; it just all kind of clicked. Of course, I grew up in a town where Lincoln's parents were buried south of town, and where one of the debates had been held. So I kind of grew up with Lincoln.

I remember when I was young, reading books on the Civil War. There was a series of books called the Landmark Book series. These were books for kids in fifth, sixth grade, junior high, and they were books on American and world history. Landmark was Random House, I think, wasn't it? They printed these, and about every month, it seemed like, one would come out. We used to fight at school to get those books when they came in, because we liked to read history. I think I read

most of them. That was early on in the things I would read. So anytime there's any history in a story, it intrigues me, and now we're able to travel some. I love to travel, particularly to Europe. I spend most of my time walking around, looking at old castles and trying to figure out what king did what to whom. Also, my favorite period of history is probably the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in Europe after World War I and leading up to World War II. My great hero is Winston Churchill in that period. So I read a lot in that period.

DePue: What guided your decision, then, to become involved with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum?

Edgar: Late in my governorship we finally had some money to move ahead on the presidential library for Lincoln, because he didn't have one. It made sense it ought to be in Springfield. Julie Cellini, particularly, and Lee Daniels had been after me for years. In fact, Daniels had put an item in the capital bill my first year as governor. I said, "I won't veto it, but I'm not releasing it; we don't have any money." Finally, I think it was in '98, my last year, in my budget speech I announced that it was time; we had some money and we ought to start moving on this. So we put money in the budget and released it for the first time and spent it. We hired the architect and the engineer.

DePue: Do you remember how much money it was?

Edgar: Oh, it was just kind of a startup; it wasn't a huge amount. We probably estimated it was going to cost fifty or sixty million, and it got more expensive under Ryan. I also met with Newt Gingrich, who was Speaker of the House, to try to get an appropriation from the federal government to help fund that. The deal we had was they'd give us money but they didn't want to take care of it. I said, "That's fine, I don't want you taking care of it; I just want your money." (DePue laughs) They didn't want to have to run it like they do most of the presidential libraries. It was too costly. Unfortunately, Gingrich didn't survive as Speaker; he left pretty quickly, and I left. Then George Ryan worked with Denny Hastert, and they were able to get some money from the federal government.⁶³ But we also entered into an agreement with Springfield. The mayor of Springfield was Karen Hasara. We entered an agreement about the land, where we were going to do it.

Then I remember Al Grosboll, who was on my staff and was working that area along with some people from historical preservation, and Julie went around the country and looked at some museums, and started beginning to put it together.⁶⁴ So when I left office, we had the engineers, we had the architect, we had the agreements with Springfield, and we started spending the money. I was very excited about it, because I wasn't able to spend money on many things, and this was something that I really thought would be great for the state to have; I thought it was something that was appropriate.

⁶³ Dennis Hastert replaced Gingrich as Speaker of the House. Hastert was an Illinois native whose journey to Congress began in the Illinois House, where served from 1981 to 1987.

⁶⁴ Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, November 6, 2009, 32-36.

Unfortunately, during the Ryan years, it got tied into some kind of personal politics, talking about his chief of staff was going to go over and be the executive director. We always viewed it ought to be somebody with historical credentials, not a political appointee. That created a stir. Because of a lot of the things going on with that, and with George's problems, it became a controversy. Then he hurried it along and had a somewhat premature opening of the library part of it, which was somewhat controversial. I think they had the symbolic—they had a fence or something that kept people out. I heard about that; I wasn't involved in it. In fact, the only time—when they got ready to do the original groundbreaking on Lincoln's birthday, I was invited to come and watch it, not to take part in it. It was pretty obvious that it was now his project and he really didn't want me around, so I didn't go to the groundbreaking, even. In fact, it was the same day that a Chicago columnist had written about how the Republicans wanted me to come back and replace him, (laughs) so it probably didn't do anything to add to his pleasure of seeing me in Springfield that day. (DePue laughs) We had a ceremony inside, and I remember they just made reference to me. So I wasn't involved at that point. I was disappointed when it became a political football. It became very controversial in Washington, too, questioning about how some of the money was being spent. So when Blagojevich came into office, it was kind of in limbo. They didn't have an executive director. They'd had an advisory group; they did away with that and created a new foundation.

Steve Neal, who was a columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, also wrote historical biographies. He wrote a great book on the 1932 Democratic convention; if you haven't read it, you ought to read it. He was very interested in this, and Blagojevich knew that he cared about this, so pretty much whatever Steve wanted on this, Blagojevich would do because he wanted to keep Steve happy. So Neal, I guess, convinced him that I ought to be chairman of the foundation or president of the foundation, and it would show bipartisanship and all that. Of course, Steve and I were good friends, and he probably thought he'd be safe if I was there. I got calls from people saying, "Would you do it?" I said, "Yes, if there aren't any strings and I don't have interference from the governor's office, but I'm not seeking it." And they said, "No, you should get a call."

Well, for six months I heard that. It was the typical Blagojevich not getting (laughs) around to doing what he was supposed to do. Finally Steve Neal wrote a column saying that Edgar was expected to be named, because he got tired of waiting for Blagojevich to call me. (DePue laughs) Later that day, Blagojevich decided to call me because he said, "If Neal is writing his column, I want to get credit for this." He called me and said, "Would you do this?" And I said, "I'll do it under one condition: you guys don't send us over anybody for the museum, some political person; you let us run it." Richard Norton Smith had just been picked to be the executive director. He said, "You and Richard will run it." I have to say, Blagojevich was pretty good to his word. That's the longest conversation I think I ever had with Blagojevich, and that lasted for about three minutes on the phone when he called me. He was very good at that. They'd send over people for us to look at, and most of them were pretty good. If they weren't, they never put the

pressure on us. He left that alone. I think part of that was because of (laughs) Steve Neal; he didn't want to make Steve mad. But that's how I got involved.

I just wanted to do it to get it going, to get it launched. Richard was a very visible executive director. He was the right guy to have, to get the thing launched and get it finalized. So he did that, and then we got it going. Then after about a year, he wanted to leave. I mean, he didn't have a driver's license. A little hard living in Springfield if you don't have a driver's license. He left, and then we brought in somebody else. He seemed to be doing well, and this was about two, three years later.

DePue: This would be Rick Beard?

Edgar: Yes. He was a historian, had good credentials, and I thought seemed to be operating pretty well. Everything seemed to be going pretty well, so I stepped down. I said, "It's time for me to get off," because then we were becoming more of a fundraiser, and that's not what I wanted to do. I was more worried about just getting the thing started and making sure it worked, and that it was kept out of politics. That had happened. We were drawing big crowds, we were having ongoing exhibits, and everything was working, and that's when I decided to step down. I wanted to go off the board. They wanted to leave my name on the board. I said, "All right, but I'm not going to be around. I've done my time." I felt good. Everything went off, and about six months later, (laughs) unfortunately, the executive director's arrested for shoplifting, and they've kind of been in a quandary since.⁶⁵

I think it has proven to be everything we had hoped, if not more, and it definitely has been a huge attraction to Springfield—not only the museum, but the activities that go on. When I was there, they named a lecture series after me; I do try to get back every year to introduce the speaker. I think a museum has to be more than just you go see objects; it's got to be kind of a living, ongoing thing. I think that has definitely brought a lot of interest, not only to Lincoln, but to history, and a lot of participation.

DePue: How well do you think the exhibits, the museum itself, tell the story of Lincoln's life and legacy to us?

Edgar: Oh, I think it tells it in a very good way that everybody can understand. It may not please some of the purist historians, but all I know is I brought my grandson, who really wasn't too much into this stuff, over there when he was ten years old, and he was just blown away with it. To me, that's the bottom line, because you've got to get people interested in history. The Lincoln scholar could go there and probably pick over this or that, but most people aren't Lincoln scholars. Unfortunately a lot of young people don't even know who Lincoln is. It's a little bit of Disney, which you got to have, but it also tells a story. The thing that always got me the most was the map that showed the fatalities in the Civil War, watching how that accelerated

⁶⁵ Shortly before this interview, Governor Quinn appointed Eileen R. Mackevich executive director.

at certain times and where the [battle] lines were. In about three minutes, you had a feel for just how destructive the Civil War was.

DePue: You're seeing the lines on the map adjust back and forth as the Confederates or the Union move forward, and at the same time, there's a clock on the side rolling up the casualty rates.

Edgar: Yes. Now, I have to tell you, there is one thing I never did like, but again, I'm not the historian that put this together. I never liked the final thing when you go and see Lincoln's body in state, in the state capitol. I just think that's kind of morbid (laughs) myself.

DePue: And there was a very conscious decision to devote a huge amount of territory in that museum to Lincoln lying in state.

Edgar: Yes. It's fine, but it's just a little morbid to me. I would have probably done it a little different. I also was a little taken aback—they didn't play up the debates as much in there as I thought they might, if I remember, because Charleston didn't have much recognition. They have something up there now, I think, but they didn't...

DePue: At the opening moments of the war, you mean?

Edgar: No, no, the debate, the Lincoln–Douglas debate.

DePue: Oh, okay, yes.

Edgar: That didn't seem to have quite as much play as I always [heard] growing up; you always heard about the Lincoln–Douglas debate. Of course, I had the picture over my head all the time I was governor. Even the gift shop I think is kind of neat. I used to buy a lot of gifts over there. The restaurant food wasn't bad for a cafeteria in a museum. I used to go over there and test that out. We used to spend a lot of time arguing about the restaurant and how much we were getting from that.

What's kind of ironic is very few people go to the library, which is really what it's all about. It's the museum which draws the most people, but the library is the important part of keeping up the research and having it available for scholars. But the museum is extremely important because it does make a lot of folks, who don't think about history or know that much about history, appreciate history more.

DePue: And it does get a national and international audience.

Edgar: Yes.

DePue: Let's get to the concluding questions. I've got a few. We've been at it for well over fifty hours already, Governor. I want to start with a quote, if I may, right out of *The Illinois Governors: Mostly Good and Competent Men*, which I'm sure you're very familiar with. This is the second edition, which included you and Thompson and a

little bit of George Ryan, written by Robert Howard, and revised and updated by Peggy Boyer Long and Mike Lawrence. Before I read this, do you know who actually was the main author for yours?

Edgar: Boyer. Lawrence wouldn't do anything with mine.

DePue: He felt he was too close to it?

Edgar: Conflict, yes.

DePue: Here's how she starts, then: "Jim Edgar was the right governor at the right time. Cautious and credible, he moved into the state's executive mansion in the aftershock of the high-spending 1980s, in the wake of an administration given to grand gestures." I wonder how she'd start a chapter for Quinn. "After fourteen years of Big Jim Thompson, Illinoisans were content with a governor who was comparatively dull, and Edgar remained popular throughout his two terms. Though he risked raising the subject of taxes during his first campaign, voters believed his promise of fiscal discipline, and after delivering on his pledge not to surprise them, they reelected him by the second-widest gubernatorial margin in state history. Only Governor Thompson's 1976 campaign netted a greater margin of victory."

Edgar: But that wasn't reelection. (DePue laughs) I always say there's a difference.

DePue: You're quick to come up on that one.

Edgar: No, no, because we always talk about I was reelected by the largest margin in the history of the state.

DePue: So this is a great introduction. I just wondered, the one comment in there about being "comparatively dull"—what's your reaction to those kinds of things?

Edgar: Well, to the media I was. I always say, "Good government's dull." The media want excitement, they want grandeur, they want ... Thompson was a lot better at that, but as I said, that doesn't necessarily make government work well. There is something in there that is just flat-out wrong. The whole thing we talked about in the first election was tax increase. Democrats called it a tax increase; I talked about making the... Peggy, nice lady, but the media had a tendency sometimes to forget after that campaign, that's what that election hinged on and that's why it was so close, probably. I didn't say we weren't going to raise taxes, but we have to make the temporary permanent, and the Democrats, well, that is a tax.

DePue: You **did** or you **didn't** say you were going to raise taxes?

Edgar: I said we were not going to raise taxes any more than making the temporary permanent, because (laughs) I'd used up my tax chip.

DePue: But that essentially is not a tax increase.

Edgar: That's true, but you could not prove that during the campaign (DePue laughs) in 1990. The Democrats did not—I just wish they'd have given me credit for that then, in that campaign. It would have been a little easier night than it was, because that's what everybody wrote about, "Edgar wants to basically raise your taxes."

DePue: So are you content? You can live with that kind of an intro to your chapter in the book?

Edgar: Oh, I don't mind the dull part at all. I think it does underscore the media maybe has a tendency to the wrong priorities.

DePue: In the risk that I might be appearing to be groveling too much here, it hasn't been anything like dull in talking to you for these fifty hours; (Edgar laughs) it's been fascinating for me. So let's get to the next question: Given everything we've talked about in what's happened in Illinois government and politics, especially politics, since you left office, what's your reaction now to know that Illinois politics is a punch line for late-night talk hosts?

Edgar: It makes me sick. It's something that I took a lot of pride in and felt good when we left. In fact, we've got polls that show us as probably the highest point, particularly the governor's office, in the history of the state. I mean, people really thought things were working and things were good. You talk to state workers—they felt good about working in state government. The joke about us around the nation is unfortunate, but what worries me is just the public has very little confidence in Springfield. Workers who work there, the morale, I think, is an all-time low. Unfortunately it didn't improve after the removal of Blagojevich, like I'd hoped it would. I think one of the challenges for Pat Quinn is not only the budget and restoring confidence, but he's also got to make people who work in state government feel good about working in state government, that they're doing something worthwhile. So it's very unfortunate.

Also, people say, "What do you view as your important legacy?" At the time, I always said that if I had died the day I left the governorship, they'd put on my tombstone, "He inherited a budget deficit and left a surplus in the budget." The trouble with that—within two years it was gone. So those aren't (laughs) meaningful, long-term legacies, doing the budget; it's very important, but it can go away very quickly. The other thing, "Well, what do you feel best about it?" I think I always said it was people thought government worked. They felt good about the governor, they felt good about state government, and they don't today. That is unfortunate. You like to think you've left some kind of legacy, whatever you do in life, and then you see it all destroyed in the next decade, and it is unfortunate.

DePue: Are you comfortable with the role you get to play now in Illinois politics of being the elder statesman, the guy that everybody turns to for advice and insight?

Edgar: Well, the media comes to me; I'm not sure they turn to me. They ought to listen to me a lot more than they do. (DePue laughs) I have to say that you feel good. It's

like I told Lisa Madigan: it was smart of her to talk to me after she got in, because I'm not sure we have any good advice, but it makes us feel a lot better. No, I'm very happy. I tell you, I've said many times, one of the great things about being governor is having the opportunity to be the former governor, because you don't quite have all the stress and pressure, but in some ways you get all the glory. People come up and they call you "Governor"; they're deferential to you; they say nice things about you. I have more people who thought I was a great governor than ever voted for me. (DePue laughs) I had people always wanting me to get in, and I said, "You never voted for me when I was in before." So yes, I feel very comfortable about being an elder statesman. I do worry about the state. I wish that I was more optimistic, at least in the near future. I think in the long term, things will begin to straighten out, but it has been a very tough decade for the state of Illinois. Hopefully the next decade will be a little better.

DePue: Being a long-time student of history and of Illinois history and politics, I'll put you on the spot here: How would you rank your own administration, your own governorship, since the 1960s?

Edgar: Oh, I don't think I could do that. I think you'd have to have other people do that. I feel good about it. I thought highly of Governor Ogilvie. I think Jim Thompson did a remarkable job just surviving for fourteen years and had very good instincts. But I feel good about our administration. How do you measure that? I'm not sure the pundits of the time are the best. I think the public has a role to play, not just polls, but just even in retrospect. But it's hard to say how that... Whoever writes the stories have their own views, and I may or may not agree with their views. As I look back, there aren't many things outside of maybe some personnel changes, and maybe I should have paid more attention to Phil Rock when he told me to chill out.⁶⁶ Maybe more important is to enjoy each moment as governor because once it's over, it's over. Sometimes I was uptight, (laughs) worrying about things which maybe I didn't have to, and I should have enjoyed it a little more. I leave it up to some other people to rate how I stand and how our administration stands. But I think with the public, from everything that I've been able to tell, we stand pretty well, and to me, that's the bottom line. Not that you do everything by public opinion polls, but you are there to serve the public. With time and people thinking about it, I think people felt like we did a pretty good job, and I'm pleased with that.

DePue: If we were to fast-forward fifty years, how would you like to be remembered?

Edgar: (pause) He was a good governor. "Good" includes a lot of things. There are probably things you could put underneath "good," but you don't have a whole lot of room. I always think about tombstones—you don't have a whole lot of room on a tombstone.

DePue: Well, considering who you've been running against here lately in terms of gubernatorial reputations...

⁶⁶ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, November 17, 2009, 64.

Edgar: Excluding the last decade. Compared to Jim Thompson I was dull, there's no doubt about it. But I think a lot of things we got done very seldom get too much mention, and from where we started to where we ended up was good. But you can do so very much as governor. But again, I'm not sure being a good governor is great newspaper or media stuff. Illinois has some wonderfully entertaining politicians, (DePue laughs) and I was not one of them. I like to think I was a wonderful official, but I was not entertaining, (laughs) there's no doubt about that. There's no doubt I was extremely stiff and uptight most of the time, because we had a lot of problems. They were talking about how [George W.] Bush was going around doing his book signing. Everybody says, "Oh, he's so relaxed." Well, yes, he's relaxed; he's not president anymore, (DePue laughs) for Pete's sake. You know, he's like me; you took that seriously. You had to worry about if you said something wrong or did something wrong. In his case, millions of people could be affected; in my case, maybe it was just a few thousand. But that probably was always part of it, at least with me: I took it very seriously, so I tried to be very serious. Again, that's not real entertaining. The one thing that will hurt us longevity-wise is we didn't have much money, so we didn't build many buildings. That's really what survives, a lot of times, buildings and things... We didn't have a whole lot of that. The other thing is that—

DePue: It's George Ryan's name on the cornerstone for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

Edgar: Yes, right—that's one of the few things I actually spent money on. The other thing I take credit for is the state library, and they named it after somebody else. (laughs)

DePue: You do have a piece of terrain called Jim Edgar Panther Creek.

Edgar: Yes, yes. That's in spite of the Ryan administration, too. (DePue laughs) I have to thank Bomke for that. He put that bill in.

DePue: Larry Bomke.

Edgar: Yes. He put that in, and they passed that. But they didn't do an official ribbon-cutting or anything (laughter) on that; they just stuck a sign up finally one day. I'm proud of that, too, because we did do a lot in natural resources, which again, you never read much about. I mean, Peggy Boyer I don't think knew those things existed when she did that. There is longevity there. There is no doubt—that place over in west central Illinois is by far the finest park we've got in downstate Illinois.

I always enjoy—I think I told you this story earlier, but I did have some help. (background noises) Ryan's people didn't necessarily go out of their way to be nice to me. A lot of my former directors were directors under him, and so about four years, three years after I left, I went over to the Jim Edgar Panther Creek—that's the longest title in the world—park as I often did, and here are all these beautiful blacktop roads throughout the state park. I ran into Kirk Brown and I said, "Jiminy, that was great." He said, "Well, you told me right before you left office to take care

of that place, and I took care of it.” (laughter) I said, “Boy, you did. Do the Ryan people know you put that much blacktop in over there?” If you’ve been over there, that really made that park, because originally it was all gravel roads, and now most of the roads are all... I haven’t been over there for a few years, and chances are nobody’s spent any money on that place for a long time, but that’s a nice park.

DePue: You’ve addressed this a couple times before, but I’ll ask you one more time: the thing you’re most proud of that you accomplished in that administration.

Edgar: The thing I’m most proud of is people thought we did a good job. To me, that’s very important. They thought it the day we left; they still think it. There are a lot of things we did that I’m proud of. The one that I think is perhaps the most important and gets almost no attention is, we took Illinois from last to first in the number of adoptions. We wanted to help children, and there’s nothing more important than to put a child into a loving home. Education and all these other things you do for children are important, but a family environment that most of us were fortunate enough to have—to me you can’t compare that to anything else.

It didn’t happen by accident. There was concerted effort. Brenda was involved in pushing some things. We did things. Children and Family Services. There were a lot of folks who spent a lot of time and hours to change public policy in that way. Adoption is the most significant. We changed public policy on child care, to make the child a... That is extremely important. We did a lot in education; we reorganized higher education in Illinois and how it’s governed, and we created the foundation level. But I think when you’re doing something for a child in its environment—making it safe, providing a loving home—that, to me, trumps education and all those other things. Now, a lot of folks already had [a loving home], so education is very important, but I think those [other] things were extremely important.

I’m always very pleased when former, or people who still work in state government come up and say, “Boy, those were the best years of my time in state government.” I have people from the secretary of state’s office, people from the governor’s office, and that makes me feel good, because they’re people who’ve been there through several administrations, who really do the work. We kind of get the glory at the top, but the guy that works in the agency, that’s who the public deals with, that’s where the service is delivered. They felt like that was a great time to work in state government. Even though we had to do some layoffs and we had to go without pay raises a couple years, they all felt it was done in a fair manner, there was leadership, and it made sense in trying to do what was the right thing, not just the political thing.

Again, how people felt was important, because for government to work in a democracy, the public has to feel like it’s working. They’ve got to feel like they’re getting their dollar’s worth, that they care. Not that they’re always going to agree with them—there are always going to be stories about politicians and all that—but that they basically feel like the system works, they’re getting service, and the people

at the top care and are trying to do the right thing. Those are the feelings that I still get today from talking to people about our administration, and that makes me feel good, and I'm proud of that. I've said many times, the key to my success was I just had a lot of good people around me, and they were a good team.

DePue: Isn't that a way of saying that the key to your success is you **chose** a lot of good people?

Edgar: Yes, but they were who they were, and because they were those kind of people... I might have chosen some and didn't realize just how good of people I chose till I worked with them for eight years.

DePue: You think you got lucky, then?

Edgar: Oh, you've always got to get lucky. In life, you've always got to be lucky, but you've also got to be prepared to take advantage of luck. So I got lucky, there's no doubt. There were some people I named as directors I didn't know that well, but I think a lot of folks out there could do a really good job if given the opportunity, if given the right environment, if given the right encouragement. It's like I've often said for governor, there's probably a lot of other people who could have been just as good a governor as me; they didn't get the break, they didn't get the opportunity. They didn't get named secretary of state when they were thirty-four years old by Jim Thompson, or they didn't get assigned to work for Russ Arrington when they were twenty-two years old. They just weren't traveling through Illinois at the time the guy that had beat you the year before announced he was going to run for the state Senate, so you had the opportunity to put out a press release before you had to leave the state again. There were a lot of breaks I got that other people didn't get. I'm sure there were probably other people I might have been able to pick to work with me that could have done a good job, too, but the ones I did pick, 99 percent of them were the right people. To this day, I think there's still a feeling like we were part of something that was special and that was good, and they always know that if I give them a call, they got to do what I say. (DePue laughs) Somebody said he didn't know the job was for life.

DePue: On the flip side, always have to ask, disappointments?

Edgar: There were some people that disappointed me—not many—and I maybe made some wrong choices.

DePue: Care to share some of those names now?

Edgar: No, no, I don't think we need to do that. (laughs) Very few. I've often wondered—I think at the time it was right, but in hindsight, that constitutional amendment that was going to require the state to do more equity in education... I thought we could get that all done later, and we didn't. That was too bad in a way. I was opposed to the constitutional amendment maybe in some ways; I thought it was drafted wrong. I probably got more uptight toward the legislative leaders than I ought to have; there were some I should have just taken a little more with a grain of salt. I

probably wanted to strangle Pate Philip more than I needed to. (DePue laughs)
But for the most part, I don't have many regrets.

I do wish I would have maybe savored the moment a little more than I did. When you're there, you're so uptight and worried about doing these things; also you think, well, tomorrow I can do some things. These aren't the big things; these are maybe the little things and some of the ceremonial things. But there are very few regrets I have about that. I tell people that it was a great opportunity, great thing to do. There's a book that's going to come out in a few months about the office of governor. The author, who interviewed me and interviewed some other people—

DePue: Is this from the Illinois perspective?

Edgar: No, no, this was national. Somebody from the Eagleton Institute's going to do this.

DePue: Okay.

Edgar: I said, "What's the title of the book?" He said, "It's what you told me, and what other former governors I talked to said, *The Greatest Job in American Politics.*" Being governor of Illinois in the 1990s was the best job in American politics—far better than being president in the 1990s—because you could get something done. We came in, things were terrible, and we were able to do things; when we left, things were a lot better. I always said I enjoyed mowing the yard because it's one of those things you could do and know what you had accomplished; you could see mowed grass, kind of like painting the house or something. Well, being governor in the nineties was kind of that way, because everything was in shambles when we came in, at least financially, and when we left, things were in very good shape. So I have very few regrets. I look back—probably the best eight years of my life, as far as that is the pinnacle of what I've done. Since then, it's nice—I like being around the students, and I get to travel—but it doesn't compare to being governor.

DePue: This is our twenty-sixth session. I suspect we're over fifty-five, fifty-six hours now—more than that, perhaps.

Edgar: You got to distill this down to about five so it's useful, yes.

DePue: You and I, when we both started this, didn't imagine we'd be at it for this long, but I think it's been well worth it. Let me ask you this question: Why did you agree to participate in this in the first place? Why did you want to do this?

Edgar: I think I've told you this before. Somebody told me—I think it was Zell Miller, the governor of Georgia. We were sitting around, deciding not to run and talking about our legacy, and we were talking about how we ought to write a book, do some kind of record or something. He said the quote from Mr. Churchill was, "Mr. Churchill, how's history going to treat you?" and he said, "Well, because I'm going to write it." Now, I'm not writing it, but I do think oral history is one way that you have the chance of at least giving your side of the story. I was often frustrated that the media had a tendency to miss a lot of the story, or be more interested in the exciting or the

entertaining than the real part of it. So I think that's why I wanted to do this. If I have any regrets, we should have done it about five years ago. I'm amazed how much I forgot in twelve years, and I can't imagine waiting (laughs) much longer.

I recognize, too, that this is my perspective on it. It doesn't mean it's all right. Somebody's going to have another perspective, and it doesn't mean they're right or wrong either. You've got to look at whatever you have here from all sides and try to get at least some sense of what that era was like and how state government was. Hopefully people will at least look at the nineties and say, "State government worked." I mean, it may not have always been pretty, and it maybe wasn't always exciting, but government solved the problems.⁶⁷ It wasn't just the governor; it was the four leaders, who were about as diverse as you could possibly have four leaders. I can't say that we'd all want to live next door to each other, but in the end we got things done. Particularly, as you look at how state government is today, it's probably even more remarkable in many ways. Even prior to that, I think they got things done, but I think we got things done as well as any time I was in Springfield, a variety of things done. I thought they did things very well in the Ogilvie years, but they didn't do it very long, and there probably weren't as many things as we had to touch on. Also, I think we did it in a manner where we were able to bring the public along in most of the cases and they felt good about it, which sometimes you don't do. Sometimes you get kind of carried away and you forget to bring the public along. Really, to get a lot of tough things done, you've got to bring them along. They may not like it, but you've got to bring them along.

DePue: Okay.

Edgar: Okay? We done?

DePue: One more question.

Edgar: Okay, okay.

DePue: I've been asking all the questions; now this is your opportunity to talk. Say anything you'd like here in closing.

Edgar: I've been saying everything I like throughout (laughter) all this anyway.

DePue: Thank you very much.

Edgar: I appreciate the chance to do this. I appreciate the thoroughness that you folks have shown, not only on me but on a lot of other people you've talked to. Hopefully this will be helpful and give some insight to historians, and maybe helpful to people down the road who get in positions I've held or positions that some of the other people you're going to talk to have held. Unfortunately there's not as much history written about Illinois as a lot of other states. We sometimes lack an identity as a

⁶⁷ An approach to governance Edgar first appreciated as an assistant to Senate president Russell Arrington. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 28, 2009, 26-28.

state, and I hope this will help encourage that or at least provide a source for people to [understand], “Now, just what did happen in the nineties? Did things work? What kind of things did they have to deal with, and how did they deal with them?” Because again, watching what’s happened in the last decade, (laughs) we probably need to get back on path.

DePue: You’ve certainly given them the opportunity, because we’ve covered just about anything and everything that’s happened in Illinois politics and government in the last fifty years, maybe even more than that.

Edgar: Not quite fifty years.

DePue: Well, from the mid-sixties on, I’d say.

Edgar: Yes, yes, late sixties on. Sixty-nine was the dramatic year.

DePue: Thank you very much, Governor.

Edgar: Thank you very much.

(end of interview 26)