Interview with Kirk Dillard

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, September 29, 2009. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. It's my privilege today to be sitting across the table from Sen. Kirk Dillard. Good afternoon, Senator.

Dillard: Good afternoon, Mark. It's good to see you again.

DePue: I want to thank you at the very beginning of this for taking the time out of your busy schedule; and just to let the listening public know, in however many years they might be encountering this, you're at the beginning stages of running for governor of the state of Illinois yourself.

Dillard: I am, and it's an odyssey, but this a nice break from the day-to-day rigors of running for governor in a big state like Illinois.

DePue: We'll probably have two of these sessions. Today we're going to start with your background and certainly talk quite a bit about your time working with Governor Jim Thompson, who is worthy of study in and of himself, as well. In probably the second session we have, we'll really get into the experiences with Jim Edgar. This is part of the Jim Edgar project; I should say that, as well. But let's start at the very beginning, and you tell us when and where you were born.

Dillard: I was born on June 1, 1955, in Chicago, at Illinois Masonic Hospital, which is just a couple of blocks from Wrigley Field.

DePue: Well, that pretty much places it for anybody who knows where Wrigley Field is. Wrigleyville!

Dillard: Wrigleyville, near north side of Chicago.

DePue: Do you know how long the family had been living in the Chicago area?

Dillard: My father's family was from downstate Illinois—Kampsville, Beardstown; in that area—and my father was born in the city of Chicago; my grandfather and grandmother both came up from downstate Illinois to the city of Chicago. Through the Depression they owned restaurants so they never starved for food. So my dad was a city kid—went to the Chicago public schools and Chicago public high schools. My father was an all-city baseball player who actually went on and played in the Pittsburgh Pirates organization for a while. And my mother hails from Kentucky, from Madisonville or northern Kentucky. She came to Chicago to go to the Cook County School of Nursing. My mom was part of a big farm family in Kentucky: nine brothers and sisters. Most of the brothers became miners, and my mom came up here, again, to be a nurse. My mom and dad met at DePaul University, under the elevated tracks, as I like to call it, in Chicago, and I went to law school at DePaul University. So I tell people that without DePaul University, my mom and dad never would have met and I'd never be here.

DePue: What did your father do for a living?

Dillard: My father is a high school teacher. He started in the city of Chicago, and then we moved out to the town of Hinsdale, in DuPage County. My father got tired of a reverse commute on what's known as the Eisenhower Expressway, and I was lucky to be raised in the western suburbs of Chicago during the greatest expansion period in American history, where the suburbs were sort of created. So I grew up during a tremendous, magical time of suburban growth in the western suburbs of Chicago.

DePue: You make it sound great to grow up during that timeframe, but I would imagine you've got interstates popping up all over the place and construction that's causing some disruption, at least.

Dillard: Well, it's been wild to see the suburbs grow. They started to grow when I was a young child. The World War II generation was starting to build. I was born in '55, but you had a tremendous growth of suburbia. Now I'm a State Senator, and I get to see some of the areas, what's left of places like northeastern Will County and southwestern DuPage County, Naperville, Bolingbrook—places like that—where they have tremendous growth going on. Hinsdale, the town I grew up in, was a relatively old suburb, and so we didn't have a lot of growth in that actual suburb where I was. Most of the

homes were older homes; but starting about 1980, Hinsdale started to have what is known as the teardown craze, where they were tearing down homes that might be eighty to a hundred years old and replacing them with bigger, more modern homes—outrageously priced homes I might add (laughter)—on these lots. So I grew up in a town that was relatively stable; really the big growth area in Hinsdale, population fifteen or sixteen thousand, was the teardown craze in the 1980s.

DePue: That's well ahead of our storyline right now.

Dillard: We'll catch up!

DePue: When did you move from Chicago? How old were you when you moved from Chicago to Hinsdale?

Dillard: I was six years old. We had an intermediate stop in a village called River Grove, in Cook County, Leyden Township. And it was interesting: in the city of Chicago, where I lived for the first couple years of my life, my grandparents lived in a three flat with us. Then when we moved to River Grove my grandparents bought a house right next to ours—new construction—but it didn't take my dad long to get tired of that. Again, the commute was on the Eisenhower Expressway, whether we lived in the city of Chicago near Wrigley Field, where the Cubs play, or in River Grove. Eventually we bought a house in Hinsdale in late 1961, a ranch style home. So early 1960s is when I really settled down in the village of Hinsdale, where I live today with my wife and children.

DePue: There was a lot of movement out of Chicago during that timeframe. Did your parents ever get into too much of a discussion of why they moved, beyond the commute?

Dillard: Basically in those days, people moved to be closer to their jobs. May not be much different than why people move today, although some people today would move for better schools, and perhaps the physical safety if there were street gangs or crime in their neighborhood in a more urban area. But my mom and dad moved because my dad wanted to be close to the high school where he taught. He was a freshman baseball coach, so he put in a lot of long hours late at night coaching baseball. My dad wanted to be five minutes from the high school, not an hour or so.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about what life was like for you growing up then.

Dillard: It was funny you should ask that. I just was kidding with one of my two sisters yesterday that we were lucky to be born and live in what I think is the greatest age in American history. You left your doors unlocked. I just had my daughters out selling lemonade and I've got to watch them. It was a different world in the 1960s and 1970s in suburban Chicago. You just trusted people more and there didn't seem to be as many kooks, so to speak, that were out

there, that you had to lock your doors for or constantly watch your children when they're playing in your yard. It was a very good time. There was that show *Leave It To Beaver*. It wasn't quite like *Leave It To Beaver*, but it was closer to *Leave It To Beaver* than it might be in 2009, when we're sitting here recording this.

DePue: There was no Eddie Haskell in your life?[1]

Dillard: There were lots of Eddie Haskells in my life; (laughter) for purposes of this I won't mention who they are, but I remember the Eddie Haskells very well! In fact, I just saw my third grade teacher the other day, and I mentioned one child's name, and believe me, he was the Eddie Haskell of our class!

DePue: Was church a part of the equation when you grew up?

Dillard: It was. My mom taught Sunday school at the Union Church of Hinsdale. I still have—and got sworn into the state Senate—with a Bible I was given by Mrs. Grant Keller, my second grade Sunday school teacher; and so my mom taught Sunday school, growing up. I sang in the choir. I played in the hand bell choir at the Union Church of Hinsdale, which is still a beautiful old church right downtown in Hinsdale, so…

DePue: What's the denomination?

Dillard: It is United Church of Christ. My mother grew up, as I said before, in Kentucky. She was a Baptist, probably by training or religious upbringing, and my father was actually Catholic, but the Union Church of Hinsdale—a very good sort of non-denominational (unintelligible)… United Church of Christ had people from all different denominations, and it really is, in Hinsdale, sort of one of the focal points of the two or three big churches in town, and it is still today. I go to a different church; I go to Christ Church of Oak Brook, which is right up the street from Hinsdale and a bigger church, but the Union Church of Hinsdale continues to be a major, awesome… I still go to meetings and other things there. A great congregation; very much part of the Hinsdale fabric.

DePue: Did your father attend church with you?

Dillard: My dad was not… He would. He was an Easter and Christmas guy, where my mother was every week; so my mom was religious, my father not so.

DePue: Could you think of who were the stronger influences that you had when you were growing up.

[1] *Leave it to Beaver* was a popular television sitcom in the 1950s and 1960s, centered on the family life of Theodore "Beaver" Cleaver. Eddie Haskell, the best friend of Beaver's older brother, was a frequent tormentor of Beaver.

Dillard: Without a doubt, my grandparents were unbelievably strong influences in my life. Up until I was seven, when we really moved out to Hinsdale, Grandma and Grandpa—Grandpa Wally and Grandma Gerber we called her, Edith Gerber—

DePue: And were they Dillards?

Dillard: They were. That is my father's set of… My grandmother remarried about the time my mom and dad got married in the early 1950s. My grandfather Dillard divorced my grandmother. Divorce was pretty rare, I think, in the 1950s, but he moved out to Ventura, California—opened a couple of McDonald's. He was remarried, so really the grandfather on my father's side that I knew, was this great German immigrant, Walter Gerber, who lived right in the Wrigleyville neighborhood; who met my grandmother, Edith Gerber, who grew up in downstate Illinois, on a farm. My Grandfather Wally and my grandmother, Edith Gerber, were tremendous influences on me. They lived next door. They taught me how to read. Grandfather Wally was my idol. He called me pal, and he never had children of his own; so while he had other grandchildren, I lived next door and I was like his son. I still remember raking leaves with him and going to get the *Chicago Tribune* with him, and he'd always buy me a chocolate donut at some store in Elmwood Park on North Avenue. Mystical moments. Obviously my mom and dad were great influences on me, and I had lots of teachers. My teachers: it didn't matter what grade I was in, I idolized every teacher I ever had in grade school.

DePue: What were your parents' names?

Dillard: My parents' names were Edward Floyd Dillard Jr.—his father was obviously Edward F. Dillard Sr.—and my mother was Martina Raye, R-a-y-e, Whitfield. My mother kind of goes by the name Martye, M-a-r-t-y-e, so Ed and Martye Dillard; and they are, as we cut this in 2009, still in the house that we moved to in 1962, in Hinsdale. They're in their 80s, God bless 'em, and still living in that house, and it's great to have… Both my sisters and their families live nearby, Clarendon Hills, Illinois, and Westmont. We live in Hinsdale. It's nice to have Mom and Dad literally less than five minutes away.

DePue: Two sisters.

Dillard: Two sisters.

DePue: Where did you fall under the scheme here?

Dillard: I'm an oldest child, which makes me right, the smartest, the best, the most overachieving. I'm laughing as I say this, if the listeners can't tell. I was six years old when my first sister, Kimberly, was born, and I was eight years old when my sister Karen was born in 1963.

DePue: You were old enough to have some separation, so I would imagine you had friends around the neighborhood you played with more than little sisters.

Dillard: Absolutely, and it was nice. I wanted both my sisters to be born so I was ready for sisters. I thought it was pretty cool. But I had lots of friends in the neighborhood when we lived in River Grove, when I was like from three to age six, lots of buddies—Joey Coppage and guys that I would play with out in the streets. We played wiffleball and it was a neat time. Lot of swing sets in those days, and people's backyards—you just ran from backyard to backyard. You rode your bikes in the street, and you went down to the local school. It was a time when your mom and dad would let you run loose and not be afraid like you might be today.[2]

DePue: Where did you attend high school?

Dillard: Very proudly I went to Hinsdale Central High School in Hinsdale, Illinois, one of the great suburban high schools in Chicago, both academically and athletically. I was just kidding somebody from New Trier High School that Hinsdale Central ranks second in the number of state championships in athletics won in the history of the state of Illinois, but we are always generally in the top three to four high schools in Illinois in academics and ACT scores, as well. My father taught at Hinsdale Central. He was a history teacher, social studies teacher, and the freshman baseball coach, so I went to high school—I always tell high school students, when I go back and see them in the classes, "If you think it's tough, try having a father that's a teacher in the same school you go to. You can't get away with anything!"

DePue: Yeah, you had to behave yourself!

Dillard: You had to behave yourself.

DePue: When you were in high school, what were you thinking you wanted to do with your life?

Dillard: I wanted to be a doctor. My mother was a registered nurse, a surgical nurse at Hines Veterans Hospital in Maywood, and I always wanted to be a surgeon. And when I went away to college I also was a pre-med major, so I always envisioned myself being a general surgeon in a suburban hospital, and would love to be that today.

DePue: Something happened in the interim that we'll get to, I'm sure. (laughter) Tell us about, then, the decision to go to college. Where and why?

[2] Bikes and wiffleball were also staples of Jim Edgar's childhood. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 21, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL, 43-44 [All interviews cited below are part of this project, unless otherwise indicated]; Fred Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, April 22, 2009, 33-34.

Dillard: College was interesting. I wanted to play baseball, and I needed a university that would allow me to walk on as a baseball player and receive a scholarship. I remember looking at certain universities, but went down to Macomb, Illinois, to Western Illinois University—a beautiful spring day. The sun was out, the students were riding their bicycles around, and Western has a main administration building from the 1890s with a golden dome on top that sort of looks like the University of Notre Dame's golden dome, and it was mystical. It was everything that I thought a midwestern college should look like. The atmosphere was good.

Actually, it's ironic, it's a small world: my grandparents continue to live in River Grove, Illinois, in the house that they had when we lived next door to them. The people who bought our old house in River Grove, the DeSalvo family, their son Steve—I would go visit my grandparents, and we'd play when I was there in seventh and eighth grade and high school; we'd play wiffle ball out in the alley. He went to Western Illinois University, so I knew somebody who went to school there. Plus there were a lot of ties to Hinsdale Central High School with WIU Athletics. Our athletic director, a man named Gene Strode, football coach, went to Western Illinois University. Lots of ties, including a couple of football players—Bobby Harding, Bill Huskisson. There were guys who went to Western Illinois University that I knew from high school. But I went to WIU, just hit it on a mystical day, thought I could walk on and play baseball there, and that's how I selected my college. Life is full of things, but I remain very active with WIU today, and it was absolutely the perfect place for me to go to college. A great faculty. Even though we had about 16,500 students it felt like a small university, and I remain friends with administrators and faculty members and people I met there. It's a major part of my life.

DePue: A lot of people from Chicago end up at places like Western and Southern, in part because it's far enough from Chicago that you can spread your wings.

Dillard: That really wasn't my motivation. I looked at Northern Illinois University and don't know why I didn't go there. It's a great place, and the more I know about Northern the more I like it. Eastern wasn't on the radar screen. I became very familiar with Eastern Illinois University through Governor Edgar, my boss for many years, and Eastern is a great place. Knew a little bit about Southern Illinois University. Carbondale was a little bit far away, and Western was probably four hours, in those days, from my house in Hinsdale. Today with roads, some of which I take pride in having widened, it now probably takes three and a half hours to get to Macomb, three hours and twenty minutes, so it's much more tolerable to get there. But no, it was just a magical campus, perfect time. This is what I think, at age seventeen, a university should look like, and with a chance to walk on to play baseball at a good baseball program.

DePue: Was baseball the reason why you didn't want to go to a small, private college?

Dillard: Couldn't afford a smaller private college. I might've, if I'd figured out how to fill out the financial aid forms, been able to make it work. My mom was a nurse at a veteran's hospital and my dad was a schoolteacher. Funding was an issue, not **the** issue. My mom and dad gave us everything—all three of their children—everything we ever wanted, so money wasn't an issue, but it was an issue. Why wouldn't I go to a state school if I was happy there, especially since the tuition was less?

DePue: You mentioned baseball a couple times in this equation. Did you ever flirt with the notion that maybe you could develop into a good enough ballplayer that you could follow along in your father's footsteps?

Dillard: Yes. I knew my dad was a great baseball player. He played at the AAA level for the Pittsburgh Pirates.

DePue: What position?

Dillard: He played second base, and they had a guy named Bill Mazeroski, quite a famous baseball player. My guess is that it's like playing against Ryan Sandberg, or Joe Morgan if you're the Cincinnati Reds; my father was somewhat limited in his access, but my dad was a great baseball player.

But going to Western—I got there, I walked on, I played fall baseball the first year, very good baseball program; but you get there and suddenly you see, wow, these guys are a lot faster than I am, they're stronger than I am. I could hit well. I didn't have a lot of speed at foot—and speed was an issue. I ran like I had a piano on my back, (laughter) and it just doesn't cut it at that level. And then the bottom line is—I've said I was a pre-med major—getting on a bus traveling to Iowa or going through a major college athletic program takes away from your laboratory courses and your study time, and it didn't take me long to realize, wow, this is going to be really hard to play baseball. You're never going to play pro baseball. So I'd come back, I'd play baseball in the summers—I played a lot of softball—and I just said I'm never going to be a pro baseball player, I'd better concentrate on my studies. So that's what I was doing in the early years, a couple years, at WIU.

DePue: I asked about your father, so I have to ask what position you played.

Dillard: I played third base. In college I was trying to play third base. I played second base a lot, and in high school I was a pitcher. I was a two-time letterman in high school, and I'd pitch and play third base or second base in high school.

DePue: But you did mention that you changed gears and really focused in on the pre-med major.

Dillard: It was interesting because the epiphany came during the Watergate era of Richard Nixon's impeachment trial; and thinking I want to be a doctor, I really never thought about political science or law school, but the Watergate

era's going on. It's 1973ish, 1974, and there was a professor that I took for introductory political science named Donald Marshall, Professor Don Marshall—and just a level 100 class in political science He was a former aide to Congressman Tom Railsback; Tom Railsback was a key player in the impeachment of Richard Nixon, or leading up to the resignation of Richard Nixon. He was the local congressman from Macomb where I was going to school, so I'm sitting there right in the middle of these historic proceedings. Professor Marshall was a tremendous lecturer, and he made it all come alive. Suddenly I said, "Wow, I like this political science stuff." And I had a history teacher—it was Professor Egler, two semesters of the Civil War—and I thought, Wow, I like this history, I like this political science, I like this government stuff. Suddenly I said, "I think I might want to be a lawyer rather than a doctor. This is really, really great stuff."

Then I also got involved in student government, and through student government I liked the student senate. I became the student board member on the board of governors at state colleges, at universities; and suddenly my interest became much more government oriented than medically oriented. I was the president of my fraternity house, the largest fraternity at Western Illinois University, Delta Sigma Phi, and I had that honor twice. So the two-year president of the largest fraternity house on campus while I was a student member of the board of governors, very involved in student activities. And I'm proud to say that when I graduated WIU, I was the recipient of both the Outstanding Fraternity Presidents' award of the university and the WIU Man of the Year my senior year at a big assembly in the University Union Grand Ballroom. So yeah, I was a student leader at WIU, and it helped me evolve into the person that became Governor Edgar's chief of staff or a state senator, or today a candidate for governor. Those leadership skills I developed in the middle of a cornfield at a university called Western Illinois, a profound impact on my life.

DePue: This is a very impolite question. It wasn't too long after you graduated that *Animal House* came out, and (laughter) everybody's perception what it was like to be in a fraternity in a college—and Western had a reputation of being a little bit of a party school, as well.

Dillard: It was clearly a party school during my era there. It's much more subdued today, but I think all universities in the 1970s were pretty raucous and wild. It was a strange time. Alcohol was starting to be allowed on campus. Alcohol was allowed in the dormitories after my freshman year, and yes, we had a guy ride a motorcycle right in the basement of my fraternity house, (laughter) just like the *Animal House* movie! So I always kid my wife and others, I lived *Animal House* in reality, although I was the president so I tried to keep it from completely deteriorating. Our frat house still stands there today. It burned down recently. We rebuilt it. A one million dollar reconstruction project in Macomb is a pretty doggone big house.

It's amazing the number of leaders who came out of that system in Macomb. During my era at WIU, I think it's important to note that Paul Vallas, the former CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, was there. Mary Matalin, who was a regular on *Meet the Press*—she's married to James Carville, the political operative; she's an author—Mary Matalin was there. Also, Tim Mapes, who was Speaker Madigan's chief of staff, was at WIU during that time period, and the list goes on and on and on. Bob Nardelli is the chairman of the Chrysler Corporation. He's a little older than me. He made Home Depot into what it is. He was the former number two person at General Electric Corporation. He was a WIU football player during my era, and the list goes on. Eric Gleacher—little older than me; the University of Chicago Gleacher Center for Business in downtown Chicago—Eric Gleacher started out at Western Illinois University. So a lot of prominent people. Dan Webb, the great trial lawyer, is from Bushnell, Illinois, a suburb of Macomb. A lot of great people are being produced by not only Western Illinois University, but all our universities, and leaders in academia and education, the business community, and athletics, as well. It's amazing what our universities in this state produce. It's a wise investment.

DePue: I want to go back to that important decision of getting away from pre-med and into government and politics, and eventually perhaps going to law school. You went from the hard sciences to the social sciences, and that's a big change in and of itself.

Dillard: A huge change, especially in the way you prepare and the way you study, but I'm a Gemini and I have an ability to feel very comfortable in a laboratory setting and then go over to the social sciences. And in fact, it's funny—as a lawyer, I was a product liability lawyer, and while I was a defense trial lawyer I loved working with the scientists and the engineers, so I am a latent scientist, still want-to-be today. I find engineering, mathematics, and science just fascinating as can be. I still find medicine as fascinating as can be, and, literally, I think that just comes with my personality, that I feel comfortable. Maybe why I'm a good, decent politician is I feel comfortable and have a genuine interest in so many things. It keeps me from ever getting bored in life, I'll tell you that!

DePue: (laughter) Did your parents support your career aspiration changes?

Dillard: My mom and dad never pushed me one way or the other. They were there if I needed them but they never pushed me in any direction at all. I think they were clearly happy that if I wasn't going to go to medical school, I was going to go to law school. Lawyers in our profession have fallen a little bit from the 1970s in terms of reputation, but no, I think my mom and dad were really proud that I went off and became a lawyer. I know they were very proud when I ended up at a pretty prestigious law firm, Lord, Bissell & Brook—now known as Locke, Lord, Bissell & Liddell since we've merged with a gigantic

Texas firm. But I never would have thought I would ever be able to practice law at a law firm of my level.

DePue: You got interested in American politics at a time when a lot of people, especially people of our generation, became very cynical about and were turned off by politics. So explain what excited you or interested you at the same timeframe.

Dillard: Congressman Railsback, a Republican, was not necessarily toeing the party line for the Richard Nixon White House, so I saw a very unique man of integrity. I watched him, and I thought, Wow, this is a gutsy guy who can take on his own party and do what he thinks is best for America. And then there was also a congressman who represented that area for a while—I knew his history and his past—and that was Congressman Paul Finley who was over from more of the Jacksonville area. So I was very lucky, just sitting there as a nineteen, twenty year old kid, to have a couple of very independent Republican congressmen who I thought were people of great integrity. And they were, so they gave me a good taste in a very bad-tasting era of American politics.

All politics is local. The general assembly might have, like the United States Congress, a very low approval rating, but if you generally ask your people "Do you like your local congressman? Do you like your local state senator?" the answer is going to be "Yeah, I don't like the Congress or general assembly but I like my own person." It's sort of like lawyers: most people don't like lawyers but they generally like their own lawyer. So that's what makes, I guess, the world go round.

DePue: You also grew up during a time—you were in high school, at least—at the tail end of the Vietnam War. These are very political times, as well. Now that you decided, okay, this is an interesting career path to pursue, how would you describe your own personal political philosophy at the time?

Dillard: I had a draft number of three, I think. It was a very low, low number. I remember my grandmother was all apoplectic when she saw—they do the draft on TV. These young people today, I don't think they realize that it was like Vanna White.[3] They were drawing lottery balls out; somebody shook them up, and birthdays were on these balls, and that's how you got your draft number. I graduated high school in '73—I'm in the very last group of men that ever had their lottery taken for the Vietnam War, but it was clear to me that the war was winding down. As I look back on it, at eighteen or seventeen my guess is there would have been some kind of college deferment, but I didn't know any better. My father and my two uncles were all drafted. My grandfather was drafted, and I never thought much about it. You're sort of,

[3] White is a co-host of the television game show *Wheel of Fortune*, whose duties include revealing the letters guessed by contestants.

when you're age seventeen, fearless anyway, and my guess is I would have gone off to college and not been part of the draft. But I wouldn't have had a problem if I was drafted at seventeen; two years of my—very different than it is today, or later.

I will say one thing that's missing. It's going to be a little different now that we are in a Middle East conflict where we have very courageous—I just talked to one on the phone a little while ago—men and women coming back from Baghdad and from Afghanistan, but we had a lot of Vietnam vets running around Western's campus. There was a veterans club, and they were a little older. They generally had longer hair, and it was interesting to see people's reaction, because most of these people were very proud, as they should be. A lot of times they would wear their Army jacket with their name on the pocket, and some students were sort of stand-offish. WIU, Macomb, Illinois, wasn't a radical place. It wasn't the University of Cal - Berkeley or Wisconsin. They had protests but it wasn't really a radical place, and we generally treated our veterans with respect. But it was very nice to have, literally, a lot of veterans who came back. I think it made the campus better. It made some of us be a little more serious, thinking, Yeah, we're off playing in Macomb, we're in college, but boy, these guys were just over in Vietnam; I think it made the campus much better and stronger to have these veterans. Most of them were pretty good students. They were more mature than most of us, and I thought it was also great that our government gave them the GI Bill,[4] since they gave up years of their lives to serve us. I always thought it was pretty neat. I still think it's great. The GI Bill is one thing that's worked well in this country, and it was nice to have veterans from Vietnam running around campus, when I was an eighteen- and nineteen-year-old young man off in the middle of a cornfield.

DePue: I know the reputation of Western today, at least, and for as long as I can remember it's got a very strong law enforcement administration program and also a pretty large and active ROTC[5] program there.

Dillard: Absolutely. The law enforcement program at WIU may be America's finest law enforcement program. And a young man—as I run for governor, as we sit here today—is a recent ROTC graduate of WIU. He's the former student body president, but he was a ROTC person at WIU, and Western has a very strong ROTC program. And I just read what was called the *Western News*, which is our alumni paper, and saw some pictures of WIU alumni serving very valiantly in Iraq and Afghanistan.

[4] The GI Bill was established during World War II to provide the means for veterans to attend college on their return to prepare them for jobs in a new kind of world and job market. The program was continued long after the war.

[5] ROTC: Reserve Officer Training Corps was a program to train college students for positions of military leadership; tuition was provided for a variety of courses, and the students were expected to serve in the reserve corps of the service upon completion.

DePue: Did you have any aspirations for running for office when you were still in college? A fraternity president—you said you got involved in school politics, if you will…

Dillard: None. I wasn't political at all; I wasn't in the College Republicans. I think I was a Republican because Tom Railsback and all the people elected locally in Macomb were Republican. I applied for the legislative staff internship program; in those days it was through Sangamon State University, now known as the University of Illinois at Springfield. I applied for this intern program. I'd applied to law schools, but a graduate teaching assistant named Neil Flynn had completed that program and he said, "This is a great program, you should try this out." There was a Professor Burton Southard, who was sort of Mary Matalin's—of the Bush White House's fame—Burt Southard was her mentor, as well, and he said, "You should do this legislative staff internship program for a year. Then you can go to law school."[6]

I applied, and it was funny—I remember at my interview for this program I drove over to Springfield in my yellow 1969—I think it was—LeMans. So I drive over to Springfield. I remember I had to buy a suit; I didn't own a suit. I owned a sport coat, but I bought my first suit at Herbert's Menswear in Macomb. I put on my best blue polyester suit from that era—yes, there was polyester in those days. And I remember they said at my interview, "Are you a Republican or a Democrat?" My answer was, "I grew up in DuPage County and I go to school in Macomb, so I guess that probably means that I'm a Republican," and a few people laughed in the room. But I didn't have a gigantic ideology, although I would say I was conservative, having grown up in the Chicago suburbs. My dad was pretty conservative, but all politics is local, and when you were in Macomb in the 1970s and you grew up in DuPage County, Illinois, even if it's today, you're basically a Republican, and that was my answer. So they instantly said, "Okay, then you should interview with the Republican staffs," and after they initially screened me they pushed me over to that. They said, "Do you want to work in the House or the Senate?" The House was scary to me because it was so big, and the Senate was smaller, so I said "I'd like to work in the Senate." So that's how I became a Senate Republican intern.

DePue: What did you do while you were there?

[6] Mary Matalin, a native of Calumet City, Illinois, is a Republican political consultant who served as chief of staff to Republican National Committee chairman Lee Atwater from 1988 until his death in 1991; as a political director on both of George H.W. Bush's presidential campaigns; and as an assistant to George W. Bush and counselor to Dick Cheney from 2000 to 2002. She is also noted for marrying her Democratic rival, James Carville, in 1993. "Mary Matalin," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Matalin. The Illinois Legislative Staff Internship Program also gave Governor Edgar, Carter Hendren, Allen Grosboll, and Terry Scrogum, their start in Illinois government. "Samuel K. Gove Hall of Fame," Institute for Legal, Legislative and Policy Studies, University of Illinois at Springfield, http://cspl.uis.edu/ILLAPS/ILSIP/SamuelKGoveHallofFAme.htm.

Dillard: As a Senate Republican intern I was assigned to education-type matters and some appropriations. The leader was Sen. David Shapiro from Amboy, Illinois. Doc Shapiro was a dentist, a very wonderfully nice man; really, a citizen legislator who on Thursdays, when the legislature would adjourn, would run back to Amboy and drill teeth, as he said. Doc was not a politician. He was a dentist first and just a wonderful man who died way too young from cancer.[7] I stayed a second year after the internship because the position to staff the education committee came open; so I became a full-time staffer for a year because a man named Dr. David Elder went off to become the executive director of the School Problems Commission. So two years out of Western Illinois University, I am staffing, by myself, the higher education and the education committees in the state Senate; and that was something I loved. But then I went to law school right after that because I didn't want to defer law school any farther. I was probably pushing the ripe old age of about twenty-five in those days, but wanted to go to law school. Went to law school full time at DePaul University in Chicago, and I lived in my mother and father's basement.

DePue: When did you start at DePaul?

Dillard: I started DePaul in the fall of 1979. I rode the commuter train in, and there was another young man from Hinsdale who was doing that, as well. He was living with his parents, and I lived in sort of a two bedroom suite with my own bathroom, in the basement of my parents' house—rode the commuter train 'cause it held down the cost. I wasn't going to socialize much anyway in law school, so it was okay living with Mom and Dad, and the price was right. I took the train every day to downtown Chicago for three years, to law school.

DePue: I want to go back to your timeframe when you were working in the legislature with Shapiro. I don't want to mischaracterize him, but my understanding is—I think you alluded to it already—David Shapiro was not one of the people most would consider a very effective legislator.

Dillard: Oh, I don't know. I was really young, so I wasn't into the power or politics as much as I was just kind of tracking education legislation. Doc got sick, and so that clearly, I think, lowered his ability to be a real tremendously dynamic leader. But Jim Thompson and he were close. Clearly, Doc was Jim Thompson's leader in the state Senate in some very early and good years. The Northern Illinois University law school, I believe, is named after Senator Shapiro.[8] But Doc was tragically stricken with cancer and that slowed him down. Was he a powerhouse like Speaker Madigan or former Senate president Phil Rock? No. But I don't think that was Doc's nature. Doc's strength was a

[7] Shapiro, a Republican from Amboy, first entered the General Assembly as a representative in 1968, and served as Senate minority leader from December 1976 until his death August 1, 1981. *Chicago Tribune*, August 2, 1981, 1.Carter Hendren, interview by Mark DePue, April 28, 2009, 13-14. Also see, Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2009, 63-65, for an anecdote about the only time Edgar saw Shapiro lose his temper.
[8] Northern Illinois University named its law library in honor of Shapiro.

very calming, cool influence; citizen legislator, which is what everybody ought to be about; he wasn't a dynamic, flashy personality. But Doc was, let me tell you, substantively solid. The man would be in his office early in the mornings preparing, and he would stay late at night, and he always did his homework. I think Doc was a very fine Senate minority leader.

DePue: You could've gone straight to law school out of Western, and you talked very briefly about why you went down to be a legislative intern.

Dillard: I thought it would behoove me and make me a better lawyer and law student to do this. I thought the experience would be great, and [I was] a little captivated with Springfield because I was a student member on the board of governors of state colleges and universities. We would meet several times a year in Springfield. Although I wasn't a political person, I thought it would make me a better lawyer and a better law student to see how the legislature worked for a year or two before I went off to law school; it did help me as a law student to have watched the legislature and the governor make laws for a couple of years. It made me a better law student to have actually experienced that. And while the professors were talking this esoteric theory, I'd actually seen how it worked for a couple years, and it made me a much better student. And for once, my assumptions were right! (laughter)

DePue: You mean they weren't always right?

Dillard: They weren't always right, but…

DePue: We don't have to pursue that one!

Dillard: But I always tell people, if you have a year or two and—depends: I was single, I didn't have any children—you can put off a couple years, it doesn't hurt you to put off law school for a couple years. But I always warn them—and I'm very proud of myself, that I was able to walk away—because they said, "Well, how about a raise? Stay a third year." And I said, "No, I want to go to law school," and I was able to break away. It was tough. I had mixed feelings, but I knew what I had to do, and that was to go to law school.

DePue: Law school is a means to an end, if you will. What did you see as your career goals while you were in that timeframe, just ready to go to law school?

Dillard: There were two things I thought I wanted to do out of law school. I wanted to be a prosecutor, a US attorney-type like Governor Jim Thompson was, so I thought I was going to be a prosecutor. The other alternative I thought was, Maybe I'll go off and do municipal or school law or finance. So I went to law school, and my classes were concentrated in criminal law or school law, municipal finance, where I could be a bond lawyer at a big law firm like Chapman & Cutler that does lots of school and local government finance. I interviewed with that law firm; they still are the major financial firms that most cities and states use in the Midwest.

But I interviewed with the U.S. attorney's office, and the story is that somebody I had met when I worked as that intern in the Senate became Jim Thompson's legislative director and said, "Why don't you come and work for Jim Thompson? We're going to be in an election year. Work for Governor Thompson for a couple years. You can always go to work for one of those big law firms." And that's sort of at the end of law school. Rather than going to be a U.S. attorney or a municipal bond lawyer, I went off and worked for Gov. Jim Thompson, which was probably how I got fully immersed into politics.

I started to work for Jim Thompson in 1981, my final semester of law school. I took classes on Fridays and Saturday mornings. It was set up where I could go to school from 7:00 a.m. on Fridays—and I had a night class, so 7:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Fridays—and I took Trial Techniques on Saturday morning. I was able to work for Jim Thompson four days a week and then go to law school on Fridays and Saturday mornings to finish up that last semester; then we were in a full-blown legislative session. The sessions ended on June thirtieth in those days, not in May, and I put off taking the bar until the February bar exam so that I could be around the general assembly full-time, working for Governor Thompson. So I took the February bar, passed it on my first try—I guess that would be February of 1982—and then I worked for Jim Thompson for about a year as his liaison to the state Senate; then I was for six years his director of legislative affairs.

DePue: I'm going to take a couple steps back again and ask you one more question about the internship and then getting into college. Did your political views evolve during that internship? Did you have some mentors in that respect?

Dillard: No doubt about it. My mentors while I worked for the Senate Republican staff were Timothy Campbell—he was from Jacksonville, Illinois—who later became chief of staff… Tim [was a] very prim and proper conservative Republican from Jacksonville, Illinois—chief of staff. Two men: John Washburn, who was the gentleman who got me to go to work eventually for Jim Thompson. John went over and worked for Jim Thompson after his time in the state Senate. John Washburn was the appropriations director of the Senate Republicans— conservative, fiscal conservative, Republican, still one of my best friends, saw him yesterday at my golf outing. John is now sixty years old and runs the state medical society's insurance company; but still a mentor, great friend. And then a man who passed away way too soon, Roger Sweet. Roger was a decorated, wounded-in-Vietnam Marine, bigger-than-life guy; just a great big guy who grew up in Springfield, went to Springfield High School. Roger Sweet was a conservative Republican.

These three guys, all about ten years older than me, showed me that you want to be a conservative, especially on the fiscal side, Republican. They were very nice people, and they made me philosophically a conservative Republican. Just great men with great ideals, and those were sort of the three people who brought me along on the conservative Republican side, along with

Senator Dave Shapiro, the minority leader who kind of reminded me of my father. I listened to my dad, and I listened to Doc Shapiro, another conservative Republican; and pro-business, pro-private sector guys.

DePue: How closely were you watching what was going on in the Republican Party at the national level? Because this is during a timeframe when Reagan is gaining more prominence; when Carter's having some challenges in his administration…

Dillard: I watched the federal a little bit… Ronald Reagan, I liked. Everybody liked him. He actually sort of looked physically like my grandfather, and he was also from Illinois; I knew and took great pride—like I do in Abraham Lincoln or people who are from Illinois—I knew Ronald Reagan was from Illinois. The other thing that made me take an interest in Reagan is, in 1976, when I was a student at WIU, I got to meet Ronald Reagan. He came to WIU. I remember meeting him in a loading dock at the University Union building, shook his hand—should have had my picture taken with him in those days; I wasn't thinking of the value of having the memory of meeting Ronald Reagan. I remember talking to him about playing football at Eureka College against Western Illinois State Teacher's College—which later became Western Illinois University— in those days, and I remember the President pointed to exactly where he knew the football field was. Western has a different football stadium today, but President Reagan knew where in the world that place was, and he goes, "That's where we played." He sort of laughed about, maybe it was leather helmets in those days or whatever; charming man, vintage Ronald Reagan. I'm just some nineteen-year-old gangly kid, but talking about Eureka College, playing WIU, knew where the football field was, and mystical. So I watched Ronald Reagan because he was from Illinois, and I once actually physically saw the guy in Macomb, Illinois.

DePue: Of course, he was not president at that time, he was just a candidate; the former governor of California running against the sitting president, Gerald Ford. So I'll put you on the spot here, Senator. Who did you vote for in the primary, Ford or Reagan?

Dillard: It's a good question. I voted for Jerry Ford because he was the sitting, incumbent president. As much as I liked Reagan, I thought he should probably let Jerry Ford serve his… In fact, I remember I wanted Reagan to be the vice-presidential nominee. I thought that would be a good ticket, but I thought Ronald Reagan would be a good president four years down the road. President Ford just passed away within the last eighteen months or so. They made fun of him on *Saturday Night Live*, but he was a pretty good, solid, healing president. But I idolized Ronald Reagan. I don't have a bust of Jerry Ford in my office; I have a bust of Ronald Reagan in my office.

History has a way of working itself out, and the world is a much better place because Ronald Reagan was the president, and Ford went on to lose. I

think Ronald Reagan probably would have won that race, but I was a novice in politics in those days. I still thought you shouldn't be running against the sitting incumbent President who I think is doing a good job.

DePue: You described yourself at this timeframe as a fiscal conservative. How about on social issues? Where would you have been at that time in your life?

Dillard: Probably more moderate than I am today. Where you're at when you're twenty is very different than where you're at as the father of an eight-year-old- and a six-year-old daughter at age fifty-three, (laughter) so—

DePue: Got started at that late!

Dillard: It just… So I was probably like most people: I was more moderate. I hadn't given a lot of thought to abortion issues, gun control—I didn't even know what gun control was back then; I thought everybody hunted and fished, like my grandparents. Going to school in Macomb, handguns and handgun violence wasn't even on the radar screen, so… But I've become much more socially conservative as I get older, and actually attend church with much more thought on the theological side than I ever did when I was twenty years old.

DePue: You talked quite a bit about the influences in the classroom when you were at Western. How about in DePaul and law school?

Dillard: Law school at DePaul—great place, had a great time. Very difficult first-year professors. I did very well on contract law. I had a woman contract professor, Marlene Nicholson, who was a tremendous professor; but the first year of law school was sort of a blur. Second year, I could take electives like I wanted to. I could take evidence and I could start taking advanced criminal procedure, and I got mostly straight A's second and third year of law school no matter what I took. And again, it was a mix of school law, of local government law, and then other courses that would allow me to be a prosecutor. So I did okay the first year of law school and then did gangbusters years two and three and graduated pretty high in my law school class. And I stay much more active and closer to DePaul's law school today—I'm on their dean's advisory council or board—than I did when I was there.[9] I was a commuter, I wasn't living on campus, so I went home at night. That probably had a lot to do with it. But got a real solid education.

I was on contract with the Illinois state Senate, helping them on Chicago school finance matters my first, second and third year of law school. So I did work a little bit during the day on some things for the state Senate, which probably kept me from being more actively involved in law school extracurricular activities. I think I was paid, like, one thousand dollars a

[9] Dillard is a member of the DePaul University College of Law Dean's Council. The school also has a student-run Dean's Advisory Council.

month. I needed one thousand dollars a month to have a life as a law student. That's how I bought my books, that's how I fed myself, it's how I bought my five cups of coffee a day at Dunkin Donuts. (laughter) There was no Starbucks back in those days. That's how I occasionally might have gone out on a date.

But DePaul's law school—great place, great faculty. It's a better law school today. It's a very good, good, good law school today, an up and coming law school, and today it would be much harder to get in there than it was when I went; but a great law school with tremendous professors. One thing I will say about DePaul when I was there: I had two sitting [Illinois] supreme court justices my last year of law school. I had the chief justice of the Supreme Court, Dan Ward, for appellate technique. Dan Ward was the former Cook County state's attorney. He was the former dean of DePaul's law school, and I took appellate technique with fourteen students from the sitting Supreme Court chief justice in Illinois.

I love to tell the story—and it's how I recruit students to DePaul—that that was on a Friday; and I would leave DePaul, I would walk to the train, the Burlington Northern Metra train (Dan Ward lived in Westchester), and I would ride on a train with the chief justice of the supreme court, and we would talk. He didn't go to Harvard, he didn't go to Yale, he didn't go to the University of Illinois, he didn't go to Stanford—but there aren't many places where you're going to have the chief justice of the supreme court not only as your professor, but ride a commuter train home with that person. And that is a tremendous asset that a city law school like DePaul has.

In the mornings on Friday I had another Supreme Court justice, the former attorney general of Illinois, William G. Clark, for ethics. So every Friday I had two sitting Supreme Court justices in Illinois for class. I also had John Powers Crowley, a federal judge, teach me evidence. John Powers Crowley was one of the finest federal trial judges in Chicago history or midwestern history. He was my evidence professor. And then at nighttime on that Friday I had a former member of the Illinois House of Representatives, Anthony Scariano Sr., teach me school law.

Tony Scariano: I would have dinner with him before my local government class in this little restaurant in the basement of DePaul, and he and I remained friends. He became an appellate justice of the Illinois courts, and he would call me every now and then on legislation when I was a state Senator. He's sitting on the appellate court, and he'd say "Let's go to the Italian Village on Friday afternoon and bend spaghetti." (laughter)

Again, with all due respect to the finest law schools in this country, I don't think I'd get to go bend spaghetti with a justice of the Illinois appellate court who was my professor, ten years, twelve years down the road as a contemporary and a friend. You don't have a John Powers Crowley teaching you evidence as one of the great federal judges, and you don't have two

Supreme Court justices sitting teaching you classes. So DePaul University is in a world unto itself, I think, when it comes to the practicality of a city, urban law school; I wouldn't trade my degree from DePaul University for any law school in America. I'm lucky to be a partner at one of the great hundred law firms in the United States, and it's because of DePaul. It's not because of anything else.

DePue: You spent a few years as an intern, and then working on the staff down at Springfield. You come back and go to school at DePaul, in the heart of Chicago. During that timeframe, what, if anything, did you learn about Chicago-style machine politics?

Dillard: I remember the death of Harold Washington and the turmoil that came after Mayor Daley's death.[10] Being around Chicago, you get to watch Chicago TV and read books, and you get the feel of the late Mike Royko of the *Tribune*; while I was really focused on the law, it was good for me, the suburban kid, to be in the heart of Chicago. It made me a better legislator, made me a better top aide to Jim Thompson as his legislative director, and chief of staff for Governor Edgar, to be in the Loop every day as a law student and meet guys. All those guys I mentioned that I had were all Democrats—Bill Clark, Dan Ward, former Cook County state's attorney, dean of the law school, and Tony Scariano—

DePue: Some would say they were machine, or products of the machine.

Dillard: Yeah. Scariano was an independent, sort of Abner Mikva-type Democrat, so I got to see both kinds of Democrats. Each has their virtues, each has their downsides, (laughter) and so… When I would come back and work as a Senate contractual employee, I got to work with the current Mayor Daley; he was the state Senator then, very quiet, very nice man—not at all like the Mayor we see today who wears his heart on his sleeve. Mayor Daley then was a younger man. He lost his son—spina bifida, I believe was the cause of death—and Mayor Daley was a man who worked on mental health and developed mental disabilities issues and was a very quiet legislator. Dawn Clark Netsch, former state comptroller, somebody who really had a major hand in drafting Illinois' 1970 constitution—I thought she was neat. She was a law professor. I liked Dawn. I loved having… She was somebody who I could go to with deep questions about constitutionality, and while she was a liberal Democrat she was not a machine Democrat. And then I got to work with Harold Washington before he was mayor. Harold Washington was on the education committees of the state Senate, and I got to work with Mayor Washington when he was then state Senator Washington; so when he became mayor, I knew the mayor. It's sort of like President Obama—I knew President Obama when he was a state Senator—and then boom, Harold Washington's a

[10] Governor Edgar's first chief counsel, Arnie Kanter, had been involved in the selection of Eugene Sawyer as Washington's successor. Arnie Kanter, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 17, 2009, pp 32-33.

bigger-than-life mayor. Today, obviously President Obama is a bigger-than-life character, as well, in the world. It helped me to work with these people. So going to law school in the heart of urban Chicago at DePaul not only helped me legally, but it also helped me politically.

DePue: You have talked a little bit about that transition to start working on Gov. Jim Thompson's staff, but I want to get to that by asking you: As you're finishing up law school, what were your immediate thoughts for a career?

Dillard: Prosecutor, U.S. attorney's office; and then, lo and behold, a call comes out of the blue from John Washburn, who used to be the appropriations director in the state Senate before I went to law school and was now the director of legislative affairs for Gov. James R. Thompson. He said, "There's an opening for the liaison to the state Senate, and Kirk, I think you ought to consider doing this. Thompson's a great guy, it's a great career builder for you, you can always go off to a big law firm"—out of the blue. I think these discussions started over Thanksgiving weekend of my last year of law school; and then, as I explained earlier, that last semester of my last year of law school I was able to take classes from 7:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Friday and trial techniques on Saturday morning and make it work. But I could go be Jim Thompson's liaison to the state Senate, and I just deferred the Bar until the February Bar so that I could work. And you believe in fate—it's amazing how I was able to make that Friday schedule work so I could take that job with Jim Thompson. If I can't make that work I'm probably a bond lawyer or a prosecutor today! (laughter)

DePue: (laughter) But you would've been working in the Chicago area?

Dillard: I went and bought a place in Springfield, so I was over in Springfield. If the legislature was in, I was in Springfield during Monday through Thursday. If they weren't, I just sort of worked out of the Chicago office. Again, I'm still living in my parents' basement.

DePue: I was going to ask you—you've been cramming in a lot of activities during this timeframe. Apparently, one of them that you didn't figure out was the dating scene or the family scene, if I can put it that way.

Dillard: Right. I had, in law school, a nose to the grindstone. I had a couple of girlfriends, and I eventually spent a lot of time with Carol Crumbaugh who I eventually married in the mid-1980s. She's still a friend, but we're no longer married. She was in my law school class. She was from Leroy, Illinois, in McLean County. She's remarried—I just talked to her a week ago. We still remain good friends. Divorce is always tough. It's painful. We never had any children. She's remarried, I'm happily remarried, so I'm proud to say Carol's still my friend and we still stay in touch. But law school didn't have a lot of time for relationships. I was really busy, studying a lot. It's interesting, you ask about activities—DePaul basketball. In 1979, DePaul went to the Final

Four in basketball. My second and third years of law school we were 26-and-0, the number one team in America, and we lost in the first—

DePue: The coach at the time?

Dillard: Was Ray Meyer, who I idolized. But DePaul basketball was bigger-than-life. It was sort of like going to Duke University today, or the University of Kansas, and standing room only—had my season tickets, and my life revolved around DePaul basketball. I'd go see a lot of movies. I would go out with Carol, who eventually became my wife, and had one or two good friends, but that was basically it. Law school, to do it right, is really a full-time, full immersion endeavor; and I had that contract with the state Senate to work on Chicago school matters. Chicago schools were financially crumpling in those days, and I worked very closely with the late Senator Aldo DeAngelis from Olympia Fields, who was somebody who put together what is known as the Chicago School Finance Authority.[11] But law school was DePaul basketball, a few movies, going out to dinner with my eventual wife Carol, and studying.

DePue: What did you learn about Chicago's school financial crisis, if I can characterize it that way?

Dillard: I learned that, every fall—and it will never be this way if I'm lucky enough to be governor—people forget it was "Are they going to open or aren't they going to open?" every year, year after year after year. The State would advance them $80 million, $20 million, whatever they needed, and every year you never knew whether they were going to open or not, so we set up a School Finance Authority that really made them put forth a realistic budget. It helped with teacher union negotiations; it helped the school board from giving away the store to the unions when they couldn't afford it. And so we put together a better financial mechanism, more reliable, and there has not really been a threat of a Chicago… We brought stability to the public schools, and that was a good thing, but there was a time period for ten, twelve years that you never knew where the Chicago schools stood financially. They still have issues, but we're not talking about closing the schools down; and that was a really difficult time for the Chicago schools.

DePue: This is a timeframe where, between the two Daleys, we're in the timeframe of the Jane Byrnes and the Harold Washingtons; but as I recall, the mayor doesn't have much to do with establishing that budget or administering the schools?

Dillard: Correct, in that time period. Later on, around the time Jim Edgar first got elected—and we'll talk about that in subsequent interviews—

[11] Jim Edgar was a participant at the summit meeting Governor Thompson called in early 1980 to meet the Chicago funding crisis, out of which the Chicago School Finance Authority was born. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2009, 68-73.

DePue: Yeah, that's quite a way from that, early nineties.

Dillard: —but we instituted what we call Chicago school reform, which actually then gave Mayor Daley control of the Chicago public schools. And it works much better that Mayor Daley is in control of the public schools today, I would submit, than it was in the seventies and early eighties when you had chaos every year.

DePue: I keep going back here and asking more in depth questions. I really appreciate your taking the time to flesh things out for us, but you were working in the Thompson administration; so the inevitable question is, your first impressions of Jim Thompson?

Dillard: Bigger-than-life, unbelievably brilliant man; a tinge of arrogance that was a healthy arrogance—maybe it was confidence—and somebody who I thought was a great governor and a very good worker. But he was, as I think back on my career, one of the smartest people I've ever met intellectually; he was literally and figuratively a giant.

DePue: I'll put you on the spot here: would you rate him higher as a politician or as an administrator?

Dillard: He was a better politician than he was an administrator, although he was a good, solid governor with a good, solid administration. He didn't hold the fiscal reins as tight as we'll talk about Jim Edgar did, but different times. Things were different in the go-go-go-go-go 1980s as they were in the nineties or in today's environment. It was a much looser time. Just ask the Reagan administration. But Jim Thompson was a mythical character; he's still a mythical character today. When Jim Thompson walked into a room, there was an aura there, and I think that's good. Believe me, they knew that Jim Thompson was the Governor of Illinois. He was a bigger-than-life figure.

DePue: What was it about his personality and his character that made him such an effective politician?

Dillard: People knew that he was brilliant, that he was witty. He had a sense of humor, and he had an ability to get along with anybody. I remember a time when he met my grandmother at the state fair, and he said, "Hey, Granny, how are you? Can a governor have a kiss?" And he could go from that and then go back to the office and be in the most serious review of a prisoner's clemency petition, or go to sit down with Wall Street bankers. He had the ability just to feel comfortable in any setting, in any place in Illinois, and he had just this tremendous demeanor. When the sky was falling he would always keep his wits about him, and I think that's a great trait. He really had no temper. He never really had bad things to say about anybody. Jim Thompson had a demeanor that I still today try to emulate. I think it's a great gift to have that type of personality.

And the other thing that I took from Jim Thompson—if I'm ever lucky enough to be the governor of this state—is the guy enjoyed being governor; and not the trappings of the office and things like that, but he thoroughly enjoyed the people of Illinois—I don't care if it was a grade school kid or my grandmother, as I mentioned. The guy loved being the governor, and that made him a very effective leader. And he was an unabashed cheerleader for this state, which I thought was cool, including little stupid things like putting a black-eye war paint on his face at a U of I football game. No pretense about the guy, but again, could go from that to a meeting with the CEO of General Electric, talking about moving a plant or a factory to Illinois, and feel completely comfortable.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about his managerial style.

Dillard: Managerial style was he was clearly in control. He made all the decisions, but one thing that Jim Thompson did well is he had great people around him. He could attract the best and the brightest, from Arthur Quern, who was his chief of staff, to Jim Fletcher, who was his first chief of staff. Jim Fletcher was a Winston & Strawn lawyer/scholar from Northwestern University. You just look at the people that Thompson had: Dan Webb, the director of law enforcement; Ty Fahner—who went on to become the attorney general and run Mayer, Brown & Platt, one of America's largest law firms—as, again, the director of the state police; Jim Zagel, a great federal judge, as the director of revenue and the director of state police; Dr. Paula Wolff as his policy director; Dr. Robert Mandeville as the budget director. The list goes on and on. Jim Thompson attracted world class people to state government, as he did when he was the United States attorney in Illinois. And Thompson knew he was the brightest guy around; he was never threatened by any of these people, and his managerial style was to recruit the best and the brightest and let them run the government—and he did that very well.

DePue: But you mentioned that he was a better politician than an administrator.

Dillard: Yeah, he didn't spend as much time on the day-to-day micromanaging of the government as perhaps Governor Edgar did. Now, at times—there was a recession in the Thompson administration, actually a couple of them—

DePue: Especially early on, in the '81, '82, '83 timeframe.

Dillard: Thompson knew what was in his budget. And don't get me wrong; he knew that budget cold. He would have major press conferences with the media and never need any staff assistance on the budget. He knew that stuff cold, but he didn't agonize over day-to-day decisions. He let his cabinet make those decisions: Art Quern, the good staff that he had. I remember one time, when he was running against Adlai Stevenson in 1982, he said, "This is not your daddy's governor's office. A governor in the 1980s can't sit behind a desk. I've got to be out there championing jobs and business every day." And that's

what Thompson did best. He would be out of the office, and he'd trust impeccably these great people that he had around him to run the government on a daily basis.

DePue: One of the people who you didn't mention, I think—Jim Reilly was a chief of staff later on, of course. I mention him because he's also going to be in the Edgar administration.

Dillard: Correct. Jim Reilly—again, best and the brightest—University of Chicago Law grad. And the fourth chief of staff was John Washburn, who actually got me to go to work for the office of Jim Thompson. Thompson had four great chiefs of staff; all a little different than the one before, but all four guys were very, very smart guys. Jim Fletcher, Jim Reilly, Art Quern—those were really well educated men. John Washburn—incredibly smart guy but more street smart than perhaps the other guys. But Jim Reilly was Governor Thompson's legal counsel before he was his chief of staff. Jim Reilly was a superb person when it came to working with the legislature. Tough guy—had a temper, which was a good thing, because Jim Thompson was pretty laid back and Reilly could be the tough guy. Art Quern was more professorial. Nobody ever wanted to disappoint Art Quern. When you worked for Art Quern, while he was young, he was like your father: you didn't want to disappoint him, and you always had to be prepared because Art would have great questions to answer.

I never was there or worked for Jim Fletcher, although he's a friend now, but Fletcher had the toughest of all jobs: he was the first chief of staff, so he had to put together the governmental and sort of the political direction of the Thompson administration; and he teed it up from the start pretty doggone well.

DePue: Characteristic of a lot of these people—maybe you can correct me on this—but a pretty young group, too.

Dillard: Pretty young group; other than Dr. Mandeville they were young, but Jim Thompson was young at the time. But they were all really well-educated folks, and some had had experience—Art Quern had worked for Nelson Rockefeller in New York and Paula Wolff had worked for Governor Ogilvie, so they had some experiences as young people, but it was amazing. And I was a younger person in my twenties; I wouldn't say these people were intimidating, because they were very nice people, but I just look at them and go, Wow, will I ever be that smart? Will I ever be like that? Wow, can I ever write that well? No, it was the best and the brightest. It was sort of the Camelot era of Illinois state politics.

And then Thompson also had a group of people who were around him on the outside: Judge Joel Flaum, who's now an appellate justice, was one of his best friends, and at one time his next door neighbor; Samuel Skinner,

former United States attorney; the Dan Webbs of the world were around; a man named Dan Wild, who was a buddy of Thompson's who was a partner at Winston & Strawn; Mike Hasson, who has passed away, as did Danny Wild—both these guys are now no longer with us. But Thompson had a real good mix of friends on the outside, and that kept Thompson very level; they were all friends with Mrs. Thompson, as well. They were all social friends of the Thompsons; and boy, I never would go to dinner with these people, but I imagine their level of conversation at a dinner at the Greek Islands in Chicago was pretty cerebral.

In Chicago, Governor Thompson also had Ilana Rovner, who was a federal judge. Ilana was like a fairy godmother. She ran the Chicago office for Governor Thompson. She was married to a world renowned neurologist, Dr. Richard Rovner, from Northwestern University—and just an amazing group of people that Jim Thompson was able to attract.

DePue: You were a legislative liaison for Thompson for one year, and then you became the director, as I understand, in 1983?

Dillard: Yeah, I was the Senate liaison in 1982 for Governor Thompson, and I went back and worked the Senate where I had worked before. Then I became the director of legislative affairs, which is over both House and Senate, with a staff of—I had two people who lobbied the House and one who lobbied the Senate, and then I was in charge of all of the legislative people for every department of state government. I was a member of Jim Thompson's senior staff, which was my first entrée into working with the Jim Reillys and the Art Querns of the world.

DePue: Here's my question: how old are you in 1983?

Dillard: Young! (laughter)

DePue: You had been talking all along and giving us lots of different names and how impressed you were—

Dillard: In my late twenties!

DePue: —and you're in pretty rarefied air here, but you're one of the senior members of his staff when you become the director…

Dillard: I was probably the youngest of that group. There's two other people I should mention. David Gilbert was Jim Thompson's press secretary; one of his longest, probably one of his first two staffers. Dave Gilbert came from the *Chicago Tribune*—he's still a friend, I saw him yesterday—and Dave Gilbert was just a tough-as-nails press secretary for Jim Thompson, and quite a character unto himself. The other person was Greg Baise. Greg Baise is today the president of the Illinois Manufacturers' Association. Greg started off as a traveling aide to Governor Thompson—like a son to Jim Thompson—and

Greg eventually became the secretary of transportation. But in those days, Greg was in charge of personnel for all of the administration, and so your senior staff would be Greg Baise—kind of a gruff character although he's one of my (laughter) best friends—Dave Gilbert, who scared the heck out of me in those days, who's now a good friend.

In fact, I was just looking at some pictures. As I run for governor, I had to find a picture, a working picture of the Thompson administration—it's on my website. And I remember me—I had black hair; I was nice and skinny—and it's Jim Reilly, it's Paula Wolff. I remember these very deep meetings we'd have with the governor, including some really difficult budget times. But the beauty of Thompson was he'd let all these senior people speak; I'd sort of be there and he'd go, "What do you think, Mr. Dillard?" So if I was too quiet, he would extract what I was thinking, because I was the legislative guy, and the legislature obviously had its fingers in everything. So he would always seek out my input. I liked the way Thompson conducted meetings—sort of a Socratic law professor method, but always in charge, and he always asked great, great questions.

DePue: I've heard the stories about Thompson not being remiss and going out to actually walk the floor of the legislature and sit down next to these senators or representatives and use the charm on them. Did that make life more difficult or easier for you?

Dillard: Easier. Jim Thompson would go up to the floor of the House and Senate. He would do anything that you needed him to do.

DePue: Were you the one who was kind of guiding him in that process?

Dillard: Sometimes he would do it on his own. If I knew he was in the building, especially if it was in the late days of session, I'd have the trooper sort of tell me. "Will you call me and let me know if he's walking around the place" But being the legislative liaison for Jim Thompson was the easiest job in the world, because nobody could tell him no. He could turn anybody around by his charm and his intellect; you didn't see Jim Thompson lose too many things in front of the general assembly. I don't think Thompson hardly ever lost anything in front of the legislature. He was a master, and everybody loved him. Even if they hated his politics he could still melt them down and get them to do things; it didn't matter what the personality was of the legislator, Jim Thompson basically could turn them if he really had to have it. He'd sit there with that big 6'7" frame—sometimes if he was standing up he'd put his hands on the legislators' shoulders, and he'd be looking down at them—like a big grizzly bear would put his hands on your shoulders (laughter) right before he was able to eat you. Or he would sit down in the big red chairs in the state Senate, and he would swivel around, and he'd say to Senator Adeline Geo-Karis, "Geo, I need you; this is personal. Your governor needs this." It was very difficult to tell Jim Thompson no; he could persuade you and then he

could charm you, and it was a tremendous gift. He knew your district as a legislator as well as you did. I should have paid to have the job of being Jim Thompson's legislative director because it was fun to watch. He was his best legislative liaison. He didn't need me!

DePue: What you're describing sounds similar to the stories we often hear about Lyndon Johnson and getting the Johnson treatment, but there was a more sinister side to the Johnson treatment, as well, that I'm not hearing. Is that a fair assessment?

Dillard: There is not a mean bone in Jim Thompson's body. There's no sinister side to Jim Thompson. He was, I think, universally respected by everyone; as long as I worked for the man he never said anything negative about another person. He was such an upbeat human being, and an absolute joy to work for. And same with Mrs. Thompson—Jane Thompson treated the staff with such respect. I would always try to value Mrs. Thompson and Samantha Thompson's time.

I would try not to bother the Thompsons. Now that I'm older and I've got an eight year old and a six year old and I know how stressful it is as a state Senator—well, it's one hundred times more stressful as a governor. I just pick up little glimpses of it, as I'm a candidate here in my first few months for governor, of the precious time you have with your wife and kids. I would always respect the Thompsons' time and would check things out with Mrs. Thompson before I'd ask to have time, because I wanted to let the Thompsons have their own personal family time. I just thought that was important—and I learned it with the Edgars—the first lady is extremely important, and some staff forget that the first lady is the partner of the governor. You want to keep the first lady on your side, and you want to respect the first family's time, privacy; and it really helps to have a good relationship with either Jane Thompson or, later on, Brenda Edgar.

DePue: How much time did Thompson spend in Springfield, versus Chicago?

Dillard: The early years Thompson was basically almost all Springfield. He had a place on Fullerton Parkway by DePaul University that he loved, and he would be in Chicago a couple of days a week, but he was at the mansion for the early years. Then later on as Samantha got older, he got a place on Clarendon and Hutchinson in Chicago and spent the lion's share of his time in Chicago. He wanted Samantha, his daughter, to be raised in a normal environment. When you push a zero on a telephone and a butler brings you Oreo cookies and a Coca Cola or milk, that's not a real existence; as Samantha got older the Thompsons said, "We've got to get her out of here and let her have a lot more normal life."

DePue: "Get her out of here," being the mansion.

Dillard: Meaning the mansion. It's not a real existence. You have to understand she was born into the mansion, so it wasn't as if she had any other frame of reference and a life other than people were there to wait on you. It's not like the White House. The living quarters of the governor's mansion are nothing more than an apartment. Even though you've got this beautiful home around you, your living quarters aren't great; but you do have staff. And it's a sterile environment. There's state police around. I don't blame the Thompsons one iota for saying, "We've got to get Samantha into a regular house where she can have kids from the neighborhood come over." There's still a guard and the state police, but it's different to have your own home than to live in the governor's mansion. So all the early years were Springfield.

But Thompson, even when he lived in Chicago in the last few years, loved staying at the mansion, and he would still have people and visitors down. He loved overnighting there, and I think Jim and Jane Thompson—especially Jim Thompson, with his love of history and antiques—loved that governor's mansion. He goes back there to stay every now and then, and I bet you he knows every nook, cranny, and nodule in the walls at that place.

DePue: It's awfully tempting to do a quick comparison between Jim Thompson's use of the mansion versus Jim Edgar's use of the mansion. Now hold off on the second part but talk about the first.

Dillard: Jim Thompson would use that mansion effectively for big meetings. He'd have summit meetings in what is a replica of the East Room of the White House. I remember one time when he had a large labor union gathering on the lawn, and they had beer kegs and got all these union guys. I went back over to the State Capitol, and the Senate president, James Pate Philip, was just furious. "He's got all these labor guys over there and they're drinking beer, and I bet you they don't have porta-potties out there; I don't know what they're doing!" But Thompson used the mansion for getting important legislation passed. He knew how to use the mansion as a tool, but importantly, he knew it would belong to the people; and that's why he would have a carpenter or an electrician come over, and he would have a big party each year with the Greek community, and he'd have a Seder dinner for the Jewish community.

The Greek parties were infamous. They were outside, and they'd be cooking lambs, and you'd have a lot of Greeks from around the state come over. It was usually toward the end of session, so Thompson would have this huge party, and he'd be using it to work. I'd give him a list and say, "Now you need to talk to these six legislators tonight, Governor. This is who you've got to go get. We need these people." He was a master at just doing that, and he loved doing that. I think it was part of the fabric of the job. He would say, "Hey, Representative, come on over here," and he'd take him off under the balcony. I'd watch him, and I'd be kind of laughing inside watching him sort

of work this state rep or state senator over; he'd come over and say "He'll be there, he'll be there, he'll be there." (laughter)

So the governor knew how to use the mansion, and he was very cognizant that it belonged to the public. He would let different groups—Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, whoever—use it; the mansion was alive under the Thompsons. He set up a fund where private money came into a foundation to help support the place. He was into the history of it. He had a curator, who is still there today, David Borland, take great care of the Executive Mansion. The mansion and Jim Thompson go together like a hand in glove, and I think that's still true today.

DePue: You've talked a lot about his relationship with the legislature, and we've talked about some of the key staff people, but we haven't much talked about the press yet—his relationship with the press and your function in that relationship.

Dillard: Jim Thompson was masterful with the press. I think he thought it was a cat and mouse game, and he loved it. He probably missed having jury trials, especially in the early years, so the press was sort of his ability to make the case to a jury, which is the people, and he was pretty accessible to the press. He loved banter back and forth. There were one or two press people, mostly columnists, that he didn't always like, but he was pretty good.

Mike Flannery, the CBS-2 reporter in Chicago, was in a bicycle accident one time, and I remember Governor Thompson going to visit Mike in the hospital. And he didn't do that for political reasons; he did it because he liked Mike Flannery, he respected Mike Flannery, and he viewed the press as part of the state government family.

He was incredibly generous with his time to the media, and really accessible. He gave them plenty to write about in a good sense, whether it was going down the big slide at the state fair on a burlap bag with his daughter; or letting them photograph him eating a corn dog; or riding a horse—as he did one time—around the third floor of the rotunda in the Capitol. Jim Thompson gave these reporters lots to cover, which I think in turn allows reporters to have a bigger place in their newspaper, a stature in their newspaper—has their editors, if they're out-of-town newspapers, say "What's going on in the Capitol?" It will let those reporters get more print space or more airtime, and I think reporters like that; and I think reporters probably had fun covering the Thompsons and the Thompson family. Different era but a very special man, and a man who knew that he had a complete mastery of state government. So there was nothing a reporter could ask him that was really going to trick him up.

DePue: How much of some of those things that you're talking about—riding the horse, going down the giant slide, the sometimes outrageous costumes that he

might wear on the campaign trail—how much of that was an act versus that's just who Jim Thompson was?

Dillard: That was just who Jim Thompson was. The first time I really saw Jim Thompson, I remember he had on an orange t-shirt. He was still really skinny. He was young. He had blue jeans on, a little gawky, a little… But he was who he was, he felt completely comfortable in whatever he did, and I don't think much of it was an act. The guy truly was a bigger-than-life character.

DePue: In terms of his relationship with the press, was it advantageous for him that he wasn't Dan Walker?

Dillard: Probably. I am a little bit too young to remember much of Dan Walker, but my guess is the confrontational era of Dan Walker—Jim Thompson was a breath of fresh air coming in. And probably not unlike Rod Blagojevich being succeeded by Pat Quinn, although Thompson is a much more gregarious person than Governor Quinn is, as we sit here today. But Thompson was good for showbiz. When he was the United States attorney in Chicago—I was in law school—he was a bigger-than-life character as a United States attorney back then. Obviously, to be governor of Illinois you've got to have an ego, you've got to know that it's show business from time to time. But Thompson was completely comfortable in his own skin; and while he might ratchet it up and obviously set up photo opportunities and things like that, it really wasn't completely hokey. He was very comfortable doing it, and he was himself, and there was plenty to cover naturally as himself.

DePue: Did you get involved very much on the political side? He had a campaign in '82, about the time you would've gotten there, and of course that was a very tough race with Adlai Stevenson III; and then '86, of course, which was the LaRouchie[12] years.

Dillard: Right. I really didn't get involved that much on the real campaign side. I would work legislators, I'd make sure legislators helped the Thompson campaign, but the campaign's not what I did. I did help with the recount, like everybody; it was all hands on deck during the recount on 1982. I remember going to Rock Island and Alton and all over the place doing a recount. I remember buying a bunch of white shirts at Marshall Field's—I was living in Springfield in those days—buying a bunch of white shirts and staying in hotels—and didn't have any more underwear—as day after day after day we did the recounting stuff in Chicago.

DePue: Time to change gears here and talk about some of the legislative initiatives that you were, I'm sure, up to your neck with, with Thompson, during those years that you served as his director of legislative affairs. I've got a couple

[12] Lyndon LaRouche was a highly controversial political figure who garnered a number of followers who became known as LaRouchies. His theories faded quickly.

listed here but let's start with just asking you, what are the battles that stick out most clearly in your mind?

Dillard: A program called Build Illinois where we had major infrastructure improvements in the state. I remember in 1981, 1982—tough economic times, budget crises—really spending unbelievable amounts of time trying to manage the state budget; lot of late-night meetings, especially on Sundays, at the old Bismarck Hotel, which was downtown Chicago at Randolph and I guess it's Wells Street. I just remember that we would have Sunday night meetings there and we'd have food catered in; literally we'd work till midnight trying to get the state's budget to balance in tough economic times.

In 1983 we had a temporary tax increase, which helped me immensely when I was Governor Edgar's chief of staff; to watch how Governor Thompson went about having a temporary income tax increase to get us through a very difficult time; how Governor Thompson would go around the state to various interest groups and make pitches for it; and how he worked and lobbied legislators. But the temporary income tax in 1983 was very tough. I was just leaving, but I came back to watch a gentleman named Zack Stamp be the legislative director when the Comiskey Park ballpark was rebuilt in Chicago, and we set it up as a state sports facilities authority. There were some great legislative times with Governor Thompson. Every year, we would have pretty major legislation, capital programs out there, but he was a master at working the legislature.

DePue: Put you on the spot here, because I'd like to have you, if you can, flesh out one or two of these battles a little bit more in terms of the give and take; working with the legislative leaders. Let's start with that 1983 temporary income tax. That would have been one of your earliest campaigns, if you will.

Dillard: It was, and I think I was in the Senate liaison still, so I was not the director of legislative affairs. Greg Baise was sort of put in charge of the whole effort, and Greg was the person who orchestrated all of the different interest groups, Thompson's speeches, appearances, and everything else. We had a running roll call of where we thought legislators would be, including trying to figure out everything in everybody's district that might be jeopardized if the state really had financial issues or crises. An amazingly well run operation, and Governor Thompson met with virtually every member of the legislature.

We would bring people down *ad nauseam* to see him in his office, and I'd say, "Governor, we're going to bring these three members down," and he was always a trooper. He'd roll his eyes every now and then, but he would sit there and listen to every sob story and every need of every legislator; some of these meetings were laborious and painful, and he would see everybody. I remember one meeting with Sen. Margaret Smith. He brought Margaret Smith down, and Margaret Smith wanted to talk about having an oil painting for her husband—the late Fred Smith, who was the dean of the state Senate—hang

somewhere in the Capitol building. And good-natured Jim Thompson would say, "You know, you're right. We ought to have a picture of an African American someplace, Margaret, in this building; and let me figure out where it would go and how do we get that done." And there were times when I would laugh with him and say, "Governor, from 2:00-4:00 this afternoon"— I call it stray cats and dogs day—"you're going to have to see an eclectic group of members here, and here's…" And he'd laugh and go "Ooh…"

But he would never complain, and he would just sort of say, "Give me five minutes. I want to call Jane." He would always make time to call Mrs. Thompson, which is something I learned from Jim Thompson and I admire; and I need to do it more myself. Every now and then he would just say, "I haven't talked to my wife today," and he would just want five, ten minutes alone to call Mrs. Thompson. I'd go out, and I'd close the door to give him privacy, but it would always be "Hey honey, how ya doing?" A very good trait. I learned that, and I could take lessons from a guy like Jim Thompson. He's been married to the same woman for a number of years, and there's a reason for it; he always had his priorities right.

But during that 1983 temporary tax, he had a lot of meetings with the legislative leaders; a lot of diplomacy where he'd be bouncing back with the two Republican leaders, and sometimes the two Democrat leaders; and *ad nauseam* meetings with the legislative leaders and their staffs. Takes a lot of work to pass an income tax increase in the state of Illinois, a state like this, and it took thousands and thousands of hours to put it together.

DePue: Most of this time there are just four or five legislative leaders who dominated what was going on in the legislature, and so much of the story of Illinois politics is about the Four Tops and the power that they wield. So let's start with this: why is it that, in Illinois politics, the four legislative leaders dominate what happens in the legislature?

Dillard: I'd say a lot of their power started in 1983. Legislative leaders have always been powerful and important, and you had real powerful ones like Russ Arrington before my time. But you had, in '83, Phil Rock—great Senate president, brilliant man, tough, hard-nosed guy; but always respected Jim Thompson and generally would be—I think people would say—Jim Thompson's major ally of the four legislative leaders. Because Phil—

DePue: A Democrat.

Dillard: A Democrat, former Democratic Party chairman. But basically, Phil Rock wanted to do what was right for the State of Illinois, and Phil could take heat, he was a tough guy. Speaker Madigan was just coming into his real—he was a powerful guy then, too, but he was really coming into his power. Thompson had a good relationship with Speaker Madigan, and Thompson was very good at also making sure that Mrs. Madigan, Shirley Madigan—who Thompson

knew before she married the Speaker—was always around. I think Jim Thompson thought that it was important to have a relationship socially with the Speaker and his wife, as well. Lee Daniels was a new, upcoming leader, a very smart tactician. Lee was the Republican leader. Lee wanted to make a name for himself, which made it a little harder for Jim Thompson to corral him and reel him in. (laughter) And then there was James Pate Philip, the Senate president.

DePue: DuPage County.

Dillard: DuPage County, the leader of DuPage… Cigar-smoking ex-Marine—or Marine; you're never an ex-Marine. He was a Marine, cigar-smoking, tough guy. One of the things that always made Pate so difficult to work with is, Pate never wanted anything. He just wanted to go home. There's nothing that he wanted. DuPage County in those days was an affluent place. It didn't need much, although later on it needed some infrastructure things. It needed some flood control relief because it had flooding from Salt Creek and other places, and it needed to have roads widened as it grew. So later on you could engage Pate a little more in the need to do some things governmentally. But Pate Philip: basically he didn't want anything. Constituents in DuPage County didn't have prisons and they didn't have state universities; and much tougher to get his arms around, but—

DePue: But he would be opposed to Chicago getting more than their share, I would imagine.

Dillard: Jim Thompson liked Chicago, had a good relationship with the mayors of Chicago, and Pate was not exactly your biggest friend to Chicago. Then you also had the undercurrent of Lee Daniels and Pate Philip: while they were allies, they were [also] like an older brother and a younger brother, and sometimes they didn't always get along. I wouldn't say jealousy was there, but they just had different styles and different agendas, even though they represented the same towns, because Lee's House district was part of Pate's Senate district. So that was always interesting for me, to have to walk on a fine line.

DePue: Now the four you've discussed so far—it sounds like Phil Rock was his best ally, and Phil Rock is a Democrat, again.

Dillard: Right, of the four legislative leaders, Phil Rock was the easiest for us to get along with. No BS, and he would never lead you astray. And to his credit, Speaker Madigan never lies to you; Speaker Madigan is just a little more coy, and sometimes you don't know where he's coming from, but the Speaker was always honest with us, as well.[13] All four of these guys were generally brutally honest, (laughter) but they all had different styles.

[13] Madigan also appreciated honesty from others, as Edgar realized. Jim Edgar, June 10, 2009, 39-40.

The one good thing, if I'm ever governor of this state, is I watched Jim Thompson, as later I watched Jim Edgar, work these different legislative leaders, and it's a balancing act. You see them alone, you see them sometimes with their chief of staff. You see the two Senate leaders, you see the two House leaders. Do you go to their leadership meetings? Do you go to their full caucuses? Thompson would go to full caucuses, especially of the Republicans, where Governor Edgar really wouldn't do that very often. Again, Thompson would go on the physical floors of the House and Senate. Jim Edgar would never go on the physical floors because of his belief in the separation of powers. So everybody's got their own style, but the real Four Tops, as we know it, around 1983 really started to evolve; and the constant has been Speaker Madigan, but Pate Philip was there for a long time. But starting in this 1983 era is when these four legislative leaders really amassed lots of power.

DePue: What happened in '83? Or what was it about that year that caused that consolidation of power?

Dillard: Lots of time where you had summit meetings with Jim Thompson and these four legislative leaders over the temporary income tax, *ad nauseam* meetings, with the press hanging out in the rotunda. And it's really where the appropriations chairmen were not—they're still important—but the budgetary power really then got sucked to the four legislative leaders. It was just the amount of time, and people just got used to seeing the four legislative leaders and the governor deciding all of these things.

DePue: Thinking back to my history of that timeframe, 1980 was the cumulative voting—Quinn's initiative—so 1983 would have been the time when the old cumulative voting practice would have ended, as well.[14] Was that part of the equation?

Dillard: I clearly think that getting rid of cumulative voting concentrated more power in the legislative leaders. It was very healthy to have the opposite view in Chicago and in suburbia by the Democrats and Republicans, respectively; and I think getting rid of cumulative voting helped, in a small way, give the legislative leaders more power, because they have a more homogenous caucus or chamber, as opposed to the old days when you had some wild cards that were out there.

DePue: We probably should explain very briefly, if somebody encounters this and didn't know about the old style cumulative voting, what's going on with that. So I'll ask you to explain that, and then you can weigh in with your opinion about whether it was good or bad that we ended that practice.

[14] In 1980, Illinois voters approved the Cutback Amendment 2,112,224 to 962,325; a margin of 1,149,899 votes. http://www.ilga.gov/commission/lrb/conampro.htm. The amendment did away with cumulative voting and multimember House districts, reducing the number of representatives from 177 to 118.

Dillard: Cumulative voting was where you really had three House members from one senatorial district as opposed to two today, so it really guaranteed that you'd always have one member of the minority party representing an area of the state. Out here where we're sitting today in Naperville, you would have a liberal Democrat. A guy named J. Glenn Schneider represented conservative DuPage County. In the city of Chicago you would have a Republican who would represent an inner city district. Some were African American in Chicago. So it was really healthy to have that extra viewpoint. Made for less partisanship. Out here, when I sit out in Naperville, I couldn't demagogue much, because I still have a loyal opposition who the *Naperville Sun* newspaper would go to and say, "Hey, Mr. Democrat, what do you think about this?" Same in the city of Chicago. So cumulative voting was sold as a way to cut expenses, I guess, and the state's got a big budget; so we lost a third of the legislature's size, but it really hasn't saved much money. We have more staffers. I think the legislative budgets are way up. But we lost this more bipartisan relationship that we had. Minority parties lost their influence in certain areas, and if you sit out in DuPage County, you're all represented by Republicans. If you're in the city of Chicago, you're essentially represented by all Democrats. I think that minority viewpoint was healthy, and I think the legislature worked better back then. And I think there's a lot of reasons why the four legislative leaders, before Thompson, amassed all this power, but I do think cumulative voting is just one of a number of smaller reasons why the Four Tops are more powerful today than before.

DePue: Let's talk about the Build Illinois project, because you said that was one of the more significant legislative initiatives that Thompson had while you were there as his director.

Dillard: Build Illinois was just a massive public works infrastructure program. It had a cute name, Build Illinois—and there was, later on, a Build Illinois II—but it was just a way to get a major capital bill passed.[15] Governor Thompson, rightfully so, thought that infrastructure—roads, bridges, mass transportation, university buildings—were all part of an ability to connect private sector jobs.

DePue: I heard something buzz back there. Do you need to check that out?

Dillard: Sure, let me see what… (pause in recording)

DePue: We took a very brief break here, and the senator and I agreed to give him an opportunity to do a little bit of research on Build Illinois so we can talk the specifics a little bit better. But we're already at two hours. It was a very fast two hours, and we covered an awful lot of territory; but we still have the end of the Thompson years, then going into private practice, and then obviously the main focus next time is going to be on Jim Edgar.

[15] See Kirk Brown, interview by Mike Czaplicki [get cite after Brown final edit].

Dillard: Right. One thing, Mark, as we do this, that I will take a look at before we begin our next session: there is a blue book called *The Thompson Record* that was put together at the end of the James Thompson years, and it's a great compilation of fourteen years of Jim Thompson's record. I'm going to take a peek at it and look at the Build Illinois part, but there's just different chapters on the Thompson years,—and the Edgar record, which we put together. But this is a book, and I'll take a peek at it; it's out there as a record.

DePue: Yeah, I've got the equivalent of the Edgar years. I've never seen the one that covers the Thompson years, and I need to be seeing that.

Dillard: I'll bring it in.

DePue: That would be great.

Dillard: Yeah, *Meeting the Challenge: The Edgar Administration*—very similar book.[16] In fact, we probably… There's no pride of authorship in state government. (laughter) I'll steal ideas, if I'm the governor of Illinois, from the governor of Indiana. My guess is that we in the Edgar administration looked at *The Thompson Record*, because the two books physically sort of look alike.

DePue: Let's finish with this comment here—I rarely make an editorial comment—but you've had the privilege of working with Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar—incredible differences in personal style between those two, but it seems like you have a great amount of pride in working for both of those gentlemen.

Dillard: There is no doubt when you look at the governors of Illinois that Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar are among the greatest governors this state's ever had; and we've had some good ones, but Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar, in my estimation, are among the top five governors this state has ever had. They had very different styles, very different upbringings, and, so much like American history, each served an era well with their style. Ronald Reagan's style might not have always worked in a certain time, and Franklin Roosevelt's style might not have worked at a certain time; but Jim Edgar and Jim Thompson, very different guys, served their eras very well, and I think they helped set the tone for their eras. But as I know, my limited knowledge of state government—but I am an aficionado of governors—I'd put Jim Edgar and Jim Thompson in the top five governors this state's ever had.

DePue: I think that's a great place to finish for today. Thanks very much, Senator.

Dillard: Thank you.

(end of interview #1)

[16] Tom Schafer, *Meeting the Challenge: the Edgar Administration, 1991-1999* (Springfield, IL: State of Illinois, Office of the Governor, 1998).

Interview with Kirk Dillard

ISG-A-L-2009-030.02

Interview # 2: November 9, 2009

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Monday, November 9, 2009. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here in Lisle, Illinois. Actually, I'm here in the campaign headquarters for Sen. Kirk Dillard, who is running for the governorship of Illinois. Good afternoon, Senator.

Dillard: (laughter) Good afternoon, Mark.

DePue: Let's get right into it. Last time we had a very good session about what got you into politics in the first place, and especially the timeframe that you worked with Gov. Jim Thompson. Today's focus is very much going to be on Governor Edgar. I know that's one of the themes that you are emphasizing as you go through your campaign right now. But where we had left off last time, we'd pretty much gotten done with the timeframe with Governor Thompson, so I'd like to have you go ahead and pick up with transitioning into private life, if you will.

Dillard: At the end of my service for Governor Jim Thompson, I had determined I was at a stage of life where, if I really wanted to go practice law, I needed to leave. And so with a heavy heart I went in one day to see Governor Thompson and said, "I believe it is now time, if I want to go off and try cases and be a real lawyer, then I need to start transitioning out." He joked and said, "You want to be a real lawyer, huh?" And I said, "Yeah, because if I don't do it and don't try it I'll never know whether I will have regretted it or not."

So I started to interview with a variety of law firms and eventually ended up with the law firm of Lord, Bissell & Brook, a large, older, established Chicago law firm, which among its many clients was known for being the attorney-in-fact for Lloyd's of London. Lord, Bissell & Brook—as I

found out when I arrived there—two of the three name partners were, ironically, former presidents of the village of Hinsdale, in which I happened to grow up and eventually would return to and live as I went to work for them. When I arrived at my law firm I did what I wanted to do, and that was to be a product liability defense lawyer. I was second-chairing a major six-week trial where I represented—along with a gentleman named Evan Burkholder—the General Motors Corporation. I was doing what I had always wanted to do, and that was be in a courtroom trying cases, so primarily in the Daley Center of Chicago. But in a big law firm like ours, you go all over the United States, wherever you have to go. So I practiced law for a number of years. I was a real lawyer, so to speak, billing a couple thousand hours a year to a variety of clients, concentrating in the area of product liability defense.

During that time, Governor Thompson was kind enough to appoint me as a judge on the Illinois Court of Claims, and I served concurrently as a practicing defense trial lawyer, and a part-time judge on the Illinois Court of Claims, hearing cases against the state of Illinois. I loved the court of claims. I served with some very distinguished lawyers as my fellow judges, including Ann Burke, who is now a Supreme Court justice in the State of Illinois. As first an associate lawyer at Lord, Bissell & Brook, I was made a partner in about October of the year that Jim Edgar was going to be elected governor. During the end of the Edgar campaign for governor in 1990 I had a friend and mentor, Carter Hendren, call me and ask whether it was possible to take a leave of absence from my law firm for the final six or seven or eight weeks of the Edgar campaign for governor. I'm going through a campaign for governor myself now, and you need every body on board that you can [get] in the tail end of a gubernatorial race. I didn't know Jim Edgar that well. I knew him as the Secretary of State. We were always friendly. He once, like me, was the legislative director for Jim Thompson, but Jim Edgar was a revered secretary of state. He was probably the most popular statewide official when he was the Secretary of State, known for his anti-drunk driving stance and mandatory auto insurance, and his literacy role as the state librarian. I admired Jim Edgar very, very much, do I said, "Yes, let me see if I can clear my cases off for a couple of months," and I began to travel a little bit with Governor Edgar, sort of as an extra seasoned hand to have out there assisting his traveling aide, who happened to be a fraternity brother of mine, Ken Zehnder, from Western Illinois University.

DePue: I wonder if I can spend a little bit more time on this period of time when you're actually in private practice. You've indicated you enjoyed it; what was it you enjoyed about being in private practice, actually getting into the courtroom?

Dillard: I loved working up a case, from interviewing witnesses to working with engineers. Because I did product liability defense work, I got regular, everyday people, everyday witnesses; but I got to work with brilliant minds—engineers and scientists and people that invented things, like having as a

witness the man who actually invented the flasher for emergency flashing that we put on our automobiles in the late 1950s. This gentleman actually invented the flasher. Met the man that invented turn signals. You get to meet a lot of interesting people and a lot of brilliant engineers. I'm a sort of science wannabe anyway, so product liability work was the perfect mix between trying cases… They were interesting.

The practice of law can be mundane and boring. It's not like Perry Mason, it's not like television. Even in the most exciting of cases, much of what goes on is mundane—filing of motions; research at eight o'clock, nine o'clock, eleven o'clock, midnight; coming in at 5:00 a.m. to get ready to do motions before you go to trial—so it's not as… It's glamorous, but it's not what people see on television. They only get to see little snippets and highlights.

DePue: If I can offer an observation: as a society, I would think that we tend to romanticize more the opposite side, the people who are bringing suit for product liability in the first place. Were you comfortable being on the side of the fence that you were?

Dillard: I was comfortable on my side of the defense, because the corporations I represented were top notch companies; I never met an engineer or anybody from a client of mine, where somebody was legitimately injured, who wasn't sympathetic and would not make full compensation for a person's injuries. So I was very comfortable with and only represented—at a firm like Lord, Bissell & Brook—probably the most reputable of companies, literally on earth. We had European manufacturers, as well. Stihl, the chainsaw company, for example, was one of our clients; it's the Cadillac of all chainsaws, so it's easy to represent a company whose reputation is top notch and geared toward safety.

One interesting thing that made my transition to becoming Jim Edgar's chief of staff more difficult is that right around the time (laughter) that Governor Edgar was elected, I became a full equity partner at my law firm.

DePue: That would mean that you were on the fast track for that, would it not?

Dillard: I came in as an associate but I made partner at my law firm in probably three years. Normally back in those years it would be a seven year track, sometimes eight, sometimes nine years; so [for] most people who want to work for a big law firm, that is what it's all about. This is now, again, the late 1980s. Today it's a much more rough-and-tumble world than even back then, and there's not as much loyalty; but generally in the 1980s, when you became a partner at a law firm like mine, that's where you stayed for twenty-five years and that was your life. Today there's much more jumping around, not as much loyalty, and the profession of the practice of law—it's still a profession, but it's become much more of a business, which is a problem. So I got an offer to become

partner—which most people would kill for at a law firm like mine—then lo and behold, after Secretary Edgar's elected I got a call, I think the Thursday after the Tuesday election, from my fraternity brother, the traveling aide to Governor-elect Edgar, Ken Zehnder. I think the Edgars went away to Florida or someplace for a little relaxation after a grueling campaign. Ken said, "The Secretary would like to see you next Tuesday." So the Edgars obviously didn't take a very long vacation, about less than a week—

DePue: Was this his primary election?

Dillard: This was the general election, so he won the election over Neil Hartigan, who was the attorney general of Illinois at the time. So I get a call saying, "Can you come and see the secretary in his Chicago office on Tuesday following the election?" So Governor Edgar didn't have much time to decompress after a long campaign. I show up at the Thompson Center in Chicago, and I go up there, and everybody's in a good mood—Secretary Edgar was just elected governor; people, I think, were still euphoric, although exhausted, including the candidate himself, (laughter) as I'd find out when I saw him. But I thought I was going over there maybe to be a member of a transition team between the Thompson administration and the Edgar administration. I remember sitting on the couch and laughing and congratulating Jim Edgar's longtime staffers—because I was not a staffer for Secretary Edgar, other than that volunteer for seven weeks or whatever I was. I did walk, a parade or two, during the summertime for Governor Edgar, so I was around. He got used to seeing me a little bit, but… During that campaign I would do some opposition research, and whatever Carter Hendren, the campaign manager, wanted me to do. So I provided a number of roles, including research.

But I remember sitting there on that couch; and I remember a gentleman named Erhard Chorle, who was a longtime Edgar staff member who headed up, I think, the securities division of the secretary of state, and he kind of smiled at me and said, "So you're over here to become the chief of staff, huh?" I laughed, because I had no idea what the governor wanted, and I didn't know whether Erhard knew or not; but he said, "Well, that's a rumor that's around here." I said, "I hope not. I just made partner at my law firm. I can't afford the pay cut." I joked about that, and then I also said that I didn't want to move back to Springfield because I was very comfortable living back in Hinsdale.

So Secretary Edgar comes out. I said, "How you doin'? You get any rest?" And he said, "Not much." He was fighting a little bit of a cold and hoarseness, but that's what's going to come from a campaign. The meeting where I sat down in his office was vintage Edgar: about ten seconds or fifteen seconds of small talk (laughter), and then boom, right into the subject of the conversation. It went like this… "Kirk, I'm interested to see if you're wanting to come back into government." I joked and said, "No, no, Mr. Secretary, there's nothing I want. I'm comfortable where I'm at. I just made partner at

my law firm." He said, "Yeah, I heard that. Congratulations." I said, "I'm on the court of claims. I'm very happy with what I've got, and I'm just—all I wanted to do was get you elected, because I think you'll be a great governor." And he said, "I'm not talking about coming back in any particular spot, I'm talking about coming back as my chief of staff." And I remember I thought, Wow, this is a surprise. That wouldn't just hit me out of the blue. I had no idea that's what he was thinking.

And I said, "Gosh, I can't move back to Springfield. I've got a house up here now." And he said, "I don't think you have to move back to Springfield if you'll get an apartment and come down whenever you have to. Now, you might have to spend at least half your time in Springfield, but you don't have to sell your house. I think it's good. I'm going to be a downstate governor. I'm going to live in the mansion, and my administration will require the cabinet to live in Springfield, so it's not necessarily bad that my chief of staff be Chicago based. And also," he said, "you have one thing that I need, and that is you have a very good relationship with all four legislative leaders. They all like you, they respect you, and you've worked well with them in the past as Jim Thompson's legislative director. But I particularly need a good relationship with James Pate Philip"—the Senate president—"and Lee Daniels"—the House minority leader then—"who both happen to live in DuPage County where you're a precinct committeeman. "My first year will be very legislatively intense, and you have a good relationship with the legislative leaders, and I think that's a tremendous plus. Plus, you have one thing that is unique: both the Thompson people and my own staff like you. You're a very good bridge between the old and the new. So please consider it." And so I agonized. I went home and I couldn't believe it; I literally had to do some computation to see if I could. I made decisions, like a purchase of a house in Hinsdale and other things, to see if I could live on the salary as the chief of staff, and within a couple of days I told Governor Edgar yeah, I'd be honored to do this.

DePue: One of the things we got past a little bit here—I know that there were some other things going on in your personal life when you got off of working with Governor Thompson. If you could talk about that a little bit, because I'm sure that factored in the equation, as well.

Dillard: Right. I'd gotten married to Carol Crumbaugh from Leroy, Illinois down in McLean County. She was working at the same time, so if I were to uproot back to Springfield, it affects her career, as well. We did not have children; that made it a little easier. If I had children and was going to go into a full-immersion job as the governor's chief of staff, that would be tougher; so I had to worry about my wife's career, and literally things like mortgage payments.

DePue: I wanted also to spend a little bit of time… You had the opportunity to campaign a little bit with Governor Edgar. You certainly saw that aspect of

Governor Thompson, as well. The differences between the two as campaigners?

Dillard: Both were great political leaders who were really in touch with what they wanted to do. Obviously Jim Thompson was looser, more gregarious, and would just go into a group of people and feel very comfortable. Governor Edgar's was much more cerebral of a style, felt more comfortable at a podium, not as willing to give an extemporaneous speech off the cuff. That's not necessarily a bad thing, because you stay on message, [about] which Jim Edgar was very disciplined. (laughter) Then that makes him a very good political person. But we had a message during that campaign: property tax caps forced the state to live within its means, and Governor Edgar was in support of continuing what was known as the income tax surcharge and not letting it expire. Those were messages, especially the property tax cap message in northeastern Illinois, that Governor Edgar needed to deliver at every stop, but Jim Edgar was a much more… I guess the way to explain it would be much more on message, not as extemporaneous style—with note cards many times. They are who they are and were both very good at what they did, but their styles were very, very different.

DePue: Some of the stories I've heard about Jim Thompson on the campaign trail involve Jim Thompson in parades, and I'm wondering your impressions of (laughter) Jim Edgar in parades.

Dillard: Jim Thompson in parades would—he'd wear anything from a Chicago Bears jersey, he'd go side to side on a parade route. And he would have this gentleman named Jim Skilbeck, who later worked for him—Jim is, unfortunately, deceased now—but Jim Skilbeck would be out there with a bullhorn, perspiring, saying "Let's welcome the first lady and governor of Illinois, Big Jim Thompson and Jane Thompson to Calumet City," or wherever it was, and it was a much more circus atmosphere. The Edgars—and I say the Edgars because when I picture Jim Edgar in a parade, while he would do some alone, generally I always picture Jim and Brenda Edgar walking down the middle of the road, holding hands a lot of times and waving—but behind a banner that just said "Edgar—Governor." The Edgar style was very different than Thompson's. Both work.

I walk parades as a politician myself, sometimes stoically and sometimes going back and forth. I wore a football jersey at Western University's homecoming parade the other day, and on Labor Day I might wear a Chicago Bears jersey with my name on the back. But on other days I'll wear a coat and tie, or a coat, and a windbreaker that has the state seal on it, walking down the road. I'm a Gemini (DePue laughs) so I can do it either way. But their styles were very different, both in speeches, campaigning, and parades.

DePue: Let's get back to being offered the chief of staff position. During this conversation, did Edgar get into a discussion with you about what he sought as the chief of staff, the kind of things he wanted you to bring to it?

Dillard: He said, "You need to help me transition between the Thompson administration; we need to respectfully set up our own style of doing things." And I remember early on he talked about, "And the legislature's crucial to my first year." I'm sure that's why he chose me to be his chief of staff. I don't think I'm breaking confidences by saying I went in early, because I did not know Governor Edgar that well and I had not worked for him as an employee. I said, "What do I need to know about Jim Edgar?" And I remember he smiled at me and said, "Contrary to what my staff tells you, Kirk, I take bad news well, as long as I hear it from you or Mike Lawrence, my press secretary, and don't read about it on page one of the *Tribune*." He smiled when he said it, and it was true. Governor Edgar—and I'd have to give him bad news, as would other staff—but if you gave him bad news, surprisingly, he wasn't happy but he would take it well. One thing I admire about Jim Edgar in this business of politics is he never used profanity. The hardest word I think I ever heard him say was "golly" or "jiminy." He would never, he would not raise his voice—and he would say, "Wow, how could we screw up like that?" (laughter) But he was fine. He did take bad news well.

Then he also said, "I'm not Jim Thompson," and he went into several things. You asked me about the parades, and that would be one of them. You'd never see Jim Edgar ever put on a hat. He would hold a hat if somebody gave it to him, but he wouldn't put it on. The way he traveled and the way he dressed was very different than Jim Thompson, and he liked his briefings a little shorter, where Thompson would read very, very lengthy memos.[17] Governor Edgar didn't require it because he really knew the subject of state government better than anybody that worked for him. We didn't have to have massive briefings; and you didn't have to have them for Thompson either, but Thompson was used to, as a lawyer and a professor, reading a lot more. But the Edgar style, I got used to.

Another thing he told me is that when Mrs. Edgar was not happy then Governor Edgar would not be happy. (laughter) I laughed at that, and I understand that completely! And that food—it was interesting and we kid him about it—food and the regimen of food, and when will lunch be, what will it be, when will it be… Governor Edgar was like my wife's family: somebody who wanted to know what time they were going to eat and what it was going to be for the day. So there were just certain nuances, and they worked well; and actually Jim Edgar was an easy gentleman, in retrospect, to work for, as was Jim Thompson.

[17] In fact, the first time he met Thompson, Edgar did not think very highly of his style of dress. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 9, 2009, 55. For the relationship between Edgar's work at a clothing store and his personal style, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 22, 2009, 12. See also, Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 29, 2009, 42, for his thoughts on the evolution of his fashion choices during campaigns.

DePue: Being offered the position of chief of staff, you're being offered what is one of the most storied positions in American politics—and lots of different styles. What was his expectation in terms of your management, what you would be doing with the staff, with the legislature, with the other directors in the state government?

Dillard: One thing that jumped out at me was how fast Governor Edgar came back—or Secretary Edgar—after running a grueling campaign and instantly said, "Wow, we've got to start to govern." And during the transition Arthur Quern, the late Art Quern—tremendous man, former chief of staff to Jim Thompson, former Rockefeller aide in New York, the former Public Aid Director of Illinois, one of the most decent and brilliant men I ever met—was the co-chair of the transition team, along with Ms. Nancy Jefferson, who is now deceased, from the West Side—she was a West Side activist. But I remember somewhat early on in the transition Art saying, "Kirk, I need to get in and see Governor Edgar because we've been working on the budget side of the transition and we have a budget hole of a billion dollars." In those days, in 1990, nobody really ever heard of a budget hole, a deficit, of a billion dollars. So I remember Mr. Quern going in to see Governor Edgar, and I remember Governor Edgar was stunned or surprised and obviously was worried about how we were going to fill a billion dollar budget hole. As it later turned out, then the economy went soft on us. We were in a recession, and it was a nightmare. We managed it well. But I still remember, the tone of the transition was always serious, but it got quite somber once we found, along with Governor Edgar, most importantly, that we had a budget hold of a billion dollars.

DePue: Were you the person who was expected to control access to the governor?

Dillard: (pause) Governor Edgar did not have as many folks who hung around him as Jim Thompson did. Jim Thompson had a group of friends—former United States attorney types and others—who were around. And access to Governor Edgar—I never was a gatekeeper. Obviously we would work and make sure the governor was scheduled appropriately, but I always found Jim Edgar, like Jim Thompson, to be very accessible; I didn't view my role as gatekeeping, other than to make sure that I wasn't wasting, or we as a staff, were not wasting Jim and Brenda Edgar's precious time. But there weren't people really knocking down the door. The governor saw his brother Fred from time to time, and Mrs. Edgar had family, but there weren't a lot of people who were just gravitating and trying to get in. The Edgars had very good friends from church. They had staff. Sherry Struck, who was the governor's personal secretary in Springfield, had lived next to the Edgars when they were secretary of state; Sherry and Earl Struck were personal friends of the Edgars, in addition to being his personal assistant or secretary in Springfield. So he did have friends, but there he would see Sherry in a much different light as his number-one person right outside his door every day.

DePue: How about running the schedule? Did you do that, manage a schedule, or did Sherry do that?

Dillard: We had a scheduler, Rhonda Miner. When you're the governor you have a professional scheduling operation. You get so many hundreds of invitations, it's impossible to stay up, so we would have a regular scheduling meeting about once a week. We'd look short term, long term, and then Rhonda would go in and see the governor, and the governor would say yes, no, yes, no. I do remember Governor Edgar would work, oh, he'd work a few weeks and then need a couple of days off. He did not like—and made it clear—that Sundays were a day for church and family. He would do, on a rare occasion, a late Sunday afternoon event; but Mayor Daley, he pointed out to me, really didn't do Sunday events either.

We regularly worked on Saturdays. Broadband or fiber optic cable had just come into vogue in 1990, '91, and on Saturdays we oftentimes had meetings with the senior staff. Those of us who were in Chicago would go to the Thompson Center, and Governor Edgar and the staff in Springfield would go to a building over on Jefferson Street, and we could talk through a secure internet connection. This is 1990 now—a broadband, not an internet, but actually our own state-laid fiber-optic cable that ran up through the middle of the state. We could conduct budget meetings then. I have found that you've got to have meetings of a serious kind when the phone's not ringing and staff's not around. We had some of our best meetings on Saturday mornings. Governor Edgar would manage the state at least six if not six-and-a-half days a week, and Saturday mornings, we regularly worked.

DePue: Were you expected to be the enforcer or disciplinarian for the other people on the staff?

Dillard: Fortunately, I didn't have to exercise much discipline. Governor Edgar's staff and those he brought over from the secretary of state, were a seasoned, veteran group of people, and he set the tone. He is a serious gentleman himself. He doesn't take himself seriously, but his job he'd take seriously. But I had to set the tone as the chief of staff. Mike Lawrence, as press secretary, was clearly serious and was somebody who was just a consummate professional. We brought on a woman named Sally Jackson to be the director of government operations. She later became the state president of the Illinois State Chamber of Commerce. She was a former professor at Western Illinois University, former director of the Department of Employment Security, and was a tremendous top-notch manager. Joan Walters, the state's budget director, whom the governor brought back from Seattle, was a woman who was incredibly professional. And all of the senior staff were accomplished professionals and serious folks. So we had veteran, seasoned staffers. There weren't a lot of young people at the senior staff level. I was perhaps the youngest, although Felicia Norwood—who was the Human Services staffer, a Yale Law School graduate—was young but beyond her years and was just an

incredibly talented, brilliant woman. So there wasn't a lot of horseplay. We had a good time, but we were not in need of a lot of discipline.

DePue: As the chief of staff, did you get involved as a policy advisor either in the political arena or on government policies?

Dillard: I would chime in. I was not his major policy advisor. I would say the governor's major policy advisors were what they called the Super Cabinet, which was the senior staff of Erhard Chorle; Felicia Norwood; Al Grosboll, for the environment and conservation; Arnie Kantor, the chief legal counsel, but very involved in healthcare policy; Felicia Norwood, tremendously involved in policy on human services and education policy. He had a couple of different education advisors: Dr. Mary Ann Lauterbach and Bernice Bloom, although Jim Edgar was the president of, I believe, the Illinois or the National… Let's just say a major education think tank group. And Bob Kustra you cannot forget that Bob Kustra, the lieutenant governor, was very much involved on issues dealing with education. Governor Edgar also was the president of the Council of State Governments while he was the governor of Illinois, so he had plenty of advice on policy from them, including a man named Dan Sprague, their executive director. The Education Commission of the States is whom Governor Edgar was involved with nationally, so he knew where he wanted to go on education policy. Then last but not least, if people go back and they study the Edgar record and they look at the books, Mrs. Edgar was a tremendous policy advisor with respect to adoption and children's programs, and she was clearly a partner when it came especially to human services and education.

DePue: What goals did you personally bring to the job?

Dillard: Let me just add: Mike Lawrence—very special man—the press Secretary. Mike Lawrence was a major policy advisor to Governor Edgar. We had a program called the Instant Check program, which was background checks for the purchase of firearms—which became sort of a model for the Brady Law at the national level—and that was the brainchild of Mike Lawrence, the press secretary, along with Terry Gaynor, the director of the Department of State Police. So Mike Lawrence was very much a policy person in the Edgar administration.

And then there were others: Karen Lobe and Edna Walden, some of the former folks from the secretary of state's office; and Mark Peterson, who ran our Chicago office, a long-time Edgar confidant, was sort of like me—a jack of all trades, chiming in whenever we thought we might have something to add on policy. Mark Boozell as the governor's legislative director, but much more than that. I mean, Mark was really a valued member of the senior staff who Jim Edgar had a very close relationship with. And then Steve Schnorf—who later became the state's budget director—a longtime Edgar friend from Eastern Illinois University—also would, on things more than just

Central Management Services, where he was the director that first term, come over and put his two cents in. And the cabinet would have influence, as well.

DePue: The names that you've been mentioning here are the ones that I know about—Grosboll, Mark Boozell, Joan Walters, Felicia Norwood. You said these were not young people, but you could hardly classify these folks as old. I would think they were in their late thirties or forties in most cases, were they not?

Dillard: Right. They weren't in their early twenties. Most of them were given, either under Jim Edgar or Jim Thompson, a lot of room to run when they were, like I was in my early twenties, and that was a hallmark. I give both Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar tremendous credit for the way they brought up young people. A fault that I have with the Republican Party today is that there are no mentors for younger people. There are no mentors for younger people. I try to, in my campaign for governor now, bring along young people; but Jim Edgar and Jim Thompson were big on fellowships and internships and going to the college campuses and finding individuals to come in and work in state government, and telling them that state government could be a very good career if they wanted or a very good bridge towards private industry later on. In the right sense of the word, in terms of training you, Art Quern—who I mentioned earlier—went off and ran a major insurance company through the skills that he acquired as a manager in state government.[18] We're not talking using your contacts in state government to make money; we're talking about using the skills that you learn while in state government, going out in the private sector and working with the private sector in the business world.

DePue: You've kind of alluded to a lot of this stuff already, but I wanted to delve a little bit more into the transition team, and if you could talk about the challenges that the transition represented.

Dillard: The biggest transition was you had a man who was the governor for fourteen years, who was literally a giant, and we had to have our own way of doing things. And we also politely had to get rid of a number of very fine people who were cabinet members of Jim Thompson and bring in our own cabinet. While Art and others and Dr. Paula Wolff did much of the transition-team work itself,

I spent the bulk of my time trying to figure out who would be on the governor's staff, who was going to come over with him. A woman named Donna Fitts was somebody we brought over who helped me organize the staff. Once I went to Governor Edgar and said, "Governor, if you want me to work with the legislature and you want me to do this, I really need somebody here to really operate the government on a day-to-day basis," and that ended up

[18] Arthur F. Quern was killed October 30, 1996, when the corporate jet he was traveling on crashed while taking off from Palwaukee Municipal Airport. At the time of his death, he was chairman of Aon Risk Services Companies. *New York Times*, November 1, 1996.

being Sally Jackson. He knew Sally and he said, "Yeah, that's a good idea. Let's make her the director of government operations."

DePue: Who was doing the vetting process for all these new people?

Dillard: There was a team of folks doing it that included Alexander Lerner from the State Medical Society, and we also used a couple of headhunting firms, so we went out like any company would and had a professional headhunting team. The headhunters, Sally Jackson and folks would say, "Hey, Kirk, here's who we think are five people; what do you think?" I'd go show Governor Edgar some of the folks, or others from the transition team would; and he would eventually interview two, sometimes just one, but he would interview these cabinet people himself. I remember sitting in a number of those meetings. I can remember Brent Manning's interview; Jan Grayson, who became our Commerce and Economic Development director; Desiree Rogers, the lottery superintendent—when we found her she was in private industry, and we brought her in. So Governor Edgar would spend a lot of time talking to and interviewing people to be members of his cabinet, and that's what I would do to make sure I was comfortable with these people to give to him; so I worked on developing the cabinet, putting the staff in place.

The governor wanted to cut a million dollars out of the governor's office budget. So I had to sit down and figure out, wow, how could we find a million dollars in a—I think we had about an eight million dollar budget—to set the tone that we were going to be leaner and meaner? The Edgars were going to live full-time at the mansion. Elizabeth was still living at home, and I had to get the mansion in order where you could have a full-time family in there. And so the mansion was in need of some direction as to where we were going there. Again, which staffers we brought over from the secretary of state's office: who stayed with the secretary of state's office, and who came over to the governor's office.

Then I had to transition out, and I received tremendous assistance from John Washburn, who was Jim Thompson's chief of staff. John and I are still very close friends, and John was one of my first bosses on the state Senate staff right after I was an intern in the late 1970s. John and I worked out of John's office during the transition period, which is on the blue carpet, as I call it, on the second floor of the governor's office. John had a little pullout drawer that came out of the front of his desk in there, and that's where I worked. And many times I'd be on one phone in the corner of Mr. Washburn's office, and he'd be on the other; and I'd be doing the transition things, and he'd be trying to get the Thompson administration wound down—but tremendous cooperation from John Washburn. It helped that we were very close friends, and the transition went easier because both Jim Edgar and I had a good relationship with Jim Thompson, and I'd be around in Springfield in the office a lot while Jim Thompson was trying to wind down. I still remember

Governor Thompson coming in and saying "Hey, you need this, you need that."

I'll never forget one of the great stories—I tell this to you because the painting is still there over the fireplace in the governor's chief of staff office—Jim Thompson came to see me, about the week before Jim Edgar was about to be sworn in, and he said, "Kirk, got something for you." And sitting out in the sort of lobby area was this gigantic painting, by a man named Mr. Sweet, of Abraham Lincoln—he's sort of half smiling. I remember Governor Thompson said, "You want this. Here's the card on the history of this painting; but you want this painting, Kirk, right above that fireplace over there so that when you're sitting in this office at one or two o'clock at night feeling sorry for yourself and thinking you've got woes, you look at Lincoln's painting and you think you got no woes like that man had." That painting is still there today, and I've been trying to, with the different chiefs of staff, always go in there and tell them the story of that painting and where that came from. But it's right there over the fireplace in the governor's chief of staff office. That's the kind of transition it was, including Governor Thompson saying, "Kirk, I have a little bit of alcohol at the mansion, and at the risk of your new employer pouring it down the drain, why don't you come over and take whatever alcohol—because you may need it." (laughter) So that's the kind of transition. It was very, very nice; and because it was a friendly transition we got great briefings, very honest briefings from the Thompson administration, and the transition went smoothly.

DePue: Let's talk about the briefings, and the issue, that you already mentioned, came up almost immediately was this huge budget deficit. That was not an issue during the campaign. You just mentioned you got very honest briefings from the Thompson administration; was it a surprise to them, as well?

Dillard: I think so. Much of the billion-dollar deficit we inherited was because the Democrat-controlled legislature overrode [the veto of] Jim Thompson, who was very good at upholding his vetoes throughout thirteen of the fourteen years of the governorship. But I think they said, "Jim Thompson, he's going to be gone, he's a lame duck, and boom, we're going to override this stuff." So that just shows you the importance of having a governor, whether it was Thompson, who had the persuasive ability to tell people, "No, don't override your governor on this stuff," or Edgar, who was a much harder line—they called him Edgar Scissorhands. Edgar could say no and would veto things or threaten vetoes. We tried not to have him have to do that. We just told him we would sign it. But a lame duck Jim Thompson—the Democrats overrode probably $700 million, I believe, of appropriations, and that's really what exacerbated the hole… Plus, the economy was starting to slow down. You could see the sluggish economy starting to set in, and that's how we got that billion-dollar hole.

DePue: Was there a budget line given to the transition team, or is that all private and campaign funds?

Dillard: We had some state appropriation. I can't remember what it was. It was not a lot, but there was money set aside for a transition. But it was not a great deal of money. A lot was probably for travel.

DePue: I think we're finally ready to get into his administration. Do you remember anything about the inauguration?

Dillard: I remember I was in a daze. (laughter) There was a man—without him we'd be nowhere—George Fleischli. George Fleischli was the physical superintendent of the State Capitol Complex when Jim Edgar was the governor, and I remember George Fleischli and those who did the inaugural did a tremendous job. I really had nothing to do with it, and I was worried, "How's it going to come off?" But it was perfect.

I've been lucky, he has endorsed my candidacy for governor; as I sit here taping this, I'm running for governor. One thing that Jim Edgar told me, "Kirk, you've got to run to govern." So he heeded his own advice that he's given to me: we were prepared to govern when we got there. He knew what he wanted. He knew that he wanted property tax caps. He knew that he had to put the state's finances back on track. One thing that I kept was every commitment that Jim Edgar had made while running for governor. I had a book, and I kept it right on the left side of my desk every day I was his chief of staff; I would go back and regularly check to make sure we kept the commitments that he made. And he clearly wanted to continue the surcharge for education purposes—not to let the income tax revert back to 2.5 percent but to keep it at 3 percent. He clearly had campaigned that he wanted to scale back the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs. He wanted some school reform, he wanted to make our state's economy and reducing the cost of doing business part of his legacy. Then he and Mrs. Edgar had an entire children's program legacy that they wanted, as well. He had campaigned on a number of things, so Jim Edgar knew where he was going and knew how he wanted to govern from day one.

DePue: What was the mood when you all realized that, golly, you've got this huge budget deficit and that is going to change the priorities that you were just laying out?

Dillard: It was tough. I think the governor wanted to improve funding for abused and neglected children. He always thought that the truly needy and developmentally disabled in a state as wealthy as ours—we rate forty-eighth or forty-ninth in what we do for those in the mental health system or developmentally disabled—and we weren't able to do a lot of things because of the budget crisis.

DePue: I'm going to ask a couple other questions, and then I want to go through as much as you can recall about the first year especially of the budget battle. How would you describe your own personal leadership or management style in this job?

Dillard: The first budget, I was much more instrumental in than any of the others, and it happened to be the toughest, and it was fun. I had fun, in retrospect, working on it. The House majority leader, Jim McPike, in those days really had a major budget role. Today we see Speaker Madigan—this is Speaker Michael Madigan—a lot more isolated and much more… He was, believe me, very powerful back then, but he trusted Jim McPike, the majority leader, to do a lot of negotiating. I spent hundreds of hours with representative McPike, with [Minority] Leader Lee Daniels, with Senate President Phil Rock—and the appropriations people and Carter Hendren, chief of staff for Senate president Pate Philip—but an inordinate amount of time with Jim McPike. Joan Walters was new as the state's budget director. She did a great job, she was masterful. I got to do a lot of the negotiating that in subsequent years was turned over to Joan Walters and to Mark Boozell, who was the governor's legislative director. But the first year, I was there throughout most of some very contentious meetings.

DePue: In other words, as the chief of staff, what you've described— you're playing more of the role of legislative liaison because of your extensive background in that?

Dillard: Yeah, and it wasn't quite that. It was also explaining to the media and doing a number of television appearances to explain the state's budget crisis. I would be remiss—Rep. Todd Ryder, but especially Sen. John Maitland from Bloomington was so helpful to me and would back up my fiscal conservative principles; those two gentlemen were very helpful to me in getting our points across to Senate President Rock. Howie Carroll, who had been a longtime Appropriations chairman, and Ken Busby—the Senate Democrats' lead negotiators—had been around for a long, long time and had their own ways of doing budgetary things. I needed John Maitland; he was a master at helping me bring those people along. So I did spend, that first year, an immense amount of my time focused on the budget.

DePue: Now, part of the budget recommendation that Edgar presented was an across-the-board budget cut for all departments, all agencies; I believe it was five percent. I could be wrong on that. When you were trying to sell this budget cut, was there anything that was especially difficult to try to sell?

Dillard: Clearly, any time you cut human services it's tough because you're going to have protestors and picketers around. You've got to prioritize; Governor Edgar was not big on across-the-board budget cuts.[19] He really believed you

[19] On Edgar's desire to make targeted cuts, see Joan Walters, interview by Mark DePue, July 29, 2009, 17-19.

needed to prioritize, and he would say, "Why would you cut something a percent or two that really helps truly needy children and adults, programs that worked? Let's go deeper into the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Let's go ten percent there." So one thing I learned from Governor Edgar was he did not like across-the-board budget cuts. He said you have to make these tough decisions, and you should go deeper in some areas, and some should probably be spared: funding for mental health services, funding for the developmentally disabled should be spared from these budget cuts.

The other problem—we had two other real pressures that were mounting: one continues to be an eight-hundred-pound gorilla today, and that's Medicaid starting to take off; it started to get out of control. We had more and more mandates, and Medicaid started to engulf us. Arnie Kantor, who was the legal counsel, and Felicia Norwood started to come up with some innovative ways to up our federal reimbursements, including something called the Hospital Provider Assessment or Hospital Assessment Tax, where we would tax a hospital with their consent and use that money to gain a fifty-percent federal match and then basically give them back a lot more than they paid us.[20] Illinois was an innovative leader in this, and most of the states do a hospital provider tax today. Through Arnie Kantor and Felicia Norwood's efforts billions of new healthcare dollars reached all kinds of portions of Illinois; but Mount Sinai Hospital in Chicago and others, including Cook County Hospital and some of the rural hospitals, would have really been in tremendous dire straits without the innovation that came out of the Edgar administration.

The other real pressure that was out there was the Department of Children and Family Services had been neglected and was a mess. There was a shooting of a young boy named Yummy Sandifer near the Cabrini housing projects that was well publicized. I'll never forget, there was a young child, a fight over M&Ms I believe, dropped out of a high-rise public-housing-project window. We had to get control of DCFS. I was looking at the numbers of employees that we had in the Edgar administration, and when we left there were 2,500 fewer state employees; yet we had to increase by thousands the number of DCFS case workers to take care of our children or the wards of our state, and prison guards. It would have been many, many more than that but DCFS… We brought in Jess McDonald as the director, who had previously been a director, and then brought in Anne Burke—who's now on the [Illinois] Supreme Court—as a special children's advocate and an assistant to the governor and Mrs. Edgar.

DePue: The case of Children and Family Services—wasn't there even a court case in the late '80s that mandated that increase, the case load?

[20] Arnie Kanter, interview by Mike Czaplicki [complete cite after edit]

Dillard: There was. We were constantly being pushed by the federal courts to get a handle on what was going on, in many cases rightfully so. The governor spent an inordinate amount of time in our first eighteen months of the administration, trying to get a handle on DCFS and finding ways to fund this new tidal wave that was coming called Medicaid. Without Jim Edgar's leadership on either of those fronts we'd really be in trouble.

You mentioned what was difficult. While the governor of Wisconsin got a lot of national credit for welfare reform, we in Illinois were right there with him.[21] We eliminated a program called General Assistance, which is where the state was giving a cash grant to single and able-bodied people just for a welfare payment, but we didn't just eliminate it to get rid of it. We worked with companies like United Parcel Service, and United Airlines in their better days, to hire many of these people who were getting a cash grant welfare check, who were single and able-bodied. We found them careers and jobs and healthcare better than the state probably provided; it was being paid for by the private sector, and we gave them dignity, most importantly. We did spend an inordinate amount of time on education, but I just remember we got in there and wow, suddenly we have abused and neglected children's issues; we have this thing called Medicaid, which I don't think many of us focused on during the campaign; and then we had pressure from the courts to have to deal with; we had a billion-dollar budget hole we didn't really see coming; and then the economy started to go soft on us. So it was a challenging time.

DePue: All of this is going on in Edgar's administration, and you're right in the middle of it, making these recommendations to deal with Medicaid, welfare reform, Children and Family Services… Some of these are the bread-and-butter issues for Democrats, and I'm sure there's things that the Republican side of the aisle were objecting to, as well. So I wonder if you could give us a thumbnail sketch, since you were in the midst of this negotiation with the legislature, how the various leaders and the various caucuses in the legislature were pushing back or cooperating.

Dillard: Medicaid wasn't very glitzy. It might have been for some Chicagoans who kind of understood it, but it's like pensions, it's not a glitzy issue like education. Headlines aren't made off of the fact that you provided more money for Mount Sinai Hospital or Roseland Hospital in Chicago or some poor rural hospital. DCFS was making headlines; so we clearly had the help of the *Chicago Tribune* and other entities in telling… We'd go upstairs to the third floor where the legislature is and say, "We need a supplemental appropriation, we need another hundred million" or whatever we needed for DCFS. And while they might not pay attention or respect the courts, there was some public sentiment that when you're dropping children out of buildings and shooting kids over M&Ms, something has to be done; we had to get a

[21] Tommy Thompson was the governor of Wisconsin from 1987 to 2001.

handle on that for the sake of these children. So the legislature… It was a tough sell.

At the same time we're doing this we're trying to continue and find the votes to keep the income tax from reverting to 2.5 percent, and we were able to do that. We also, that first year, expanded McCormick Place. You can't lose sight of the fact that you've got to do things that will help you create jobs, because the best way to fill whatever budget deficit you have is to put people to work so that you have more money in the state treasury. So that first year We expanded McCormick Place. Then very importantly—we had to fight Speaker Madigan over it because he didn't like it—we kept the legislature in [session] an extra seventeen days or so that first year. Later on, under Blagojevich, overtime sessions became the norm, but they weren't that normal other than a couple of days' overtime. Seventeen days was a very long time in the month of July then, because we used to adjourn on June thirtieth, as the legislature. It was a very hot summer; I remember that vividly. It was in the high nineties, with huge humidity or large humidity; I remember I would be drenched just walking from my apartment to the State Capitol. That's how physically hot it was that summer when we were in those extra days, but we kept the legislature in and we were able to get property tax caps for beleaguered homeowners in the collar counties of Chicagoland. Those folks were seeing double digit increases, 17, 18, 19 percent every year, driving senior citizens out of their homes; we capped it at 3 percent or inflation, whichever was—we had a floating scale between the two.

So it was a very, very trying and difficult but very successful. When it was all over, every newspaper editorial board had Jim Edgar a big winner in terms of his legislative prowess and his budget success his first six or seven months as the governor. It was interesting because I was always trying to figure out—I still go back to that conversation, "What do I need to know about Jim Edgar?" "I'm not Jim Thompson." We were able through a variety of circumstances to show how Jim Edgar was different than Jim Thompson. It's not easy to come out of a shadow of a guy who was there for fourteen years, but Jim Edgar did it very well his first six months or seven months as governor.

DePue: Senator, I'm going to put you on the spot here. You got the Four Tops, as they are oftentimes known, in the Illinois legislature. I wondered if you could kind of go through those four personalities and what parts of this budget battle were difficult with each one of them.

Dillard: Pate Philip always ends up being an ally of a Republican governor because he'll hold down spending where a governor wants to hold it down. What made Pate always interesting was he never wanted anything, so there's nothing you can do when you're negotiating with him to move him. There's nothing that he needs or wants, so it makes him always the unique guy in these meetings.

DePue: He always has the reputation of being the old guard, the old school.

Dillard: Right, and there's nothing that he wants. His loves were hunting, fishing, conservation, which was a love of Jim Edgar; actually, later on, that helped make them stronger together.

We were very much helped by the fact that Carter Hendren, Pate Philip's chief of staff, was a longtime friend and confidant of Governor Edgar's, his campaign manager. Carter Hendren, my guess is, could have been the governor's chief of staff, he could have been the secretary of transportation. I remember going to Carter during the transition saying, "Carter, are you sure you don't want to be the chief of staff? Are you sue you don't want to be secretary of transportation?" He said, "Kirk, first of all I don't like wearing a coat and tie all the time, and I'm a legislative person," and Carter stayed where he was. But without Carter Hendren it's much harder to have a good relationship, a healthy relationship with Pate Philip. Carter was a calming influence on Senator Philip.

Phil Rock. Phil Rock is one of the most brilliant people I've ever met. He is a decent man who was obviously a partisan Democrat, but somebody who liked to make government work. He had a great, great relationship with Jim Thompson. It was not as good or as cordial with Jim Edgar as it was with Jim Thompson, but nonetheless Senator Rock and I were longtime friends. We worked together for many years, and Phil was very, very helpful.

DePue: Was he pushing back hard against the Medicaid or the welfare initiatives?

Dillard: No. He represented Oak Park, in the city. He understood the need to have Mount Sinai Hospital and these hospitals get what funding they needed. Phil was always a big, big advocate for children's programs, so he was on board; and he was, in typical Phil Rock fashion, fairer and quite easy to deal with.

Lee Daniels—very helpful. He and Governor Edgar got along, I think, very well. In those days, I think that first year, there was a chief of staff, Michael Tristano, who was an interesting fellow—very bright man, a little Machiavellian, so you never quite knew where he was coming from. But Lee knew the budget well; Lee's the House minority leader and he's trying to get whatever leverage he can for the House Republicans over Speaker Madigan.

Speaker Madigan was incredibly powerful, even in 1991—unbelievably hard worker, clearly the best prepared, I think, of the four leaders most of the time, although Rock and Daniels clearly understood state government very well; so did Pate Philip, but Pate was just a different style than a Daniels or Rock. But Madigan, I think, ended up liking Governor Edgar because the two of them were very disciplined together. Neither of them were flashy, and they actually got along pretty well in the end. The one contentious thing we had that first session with Speaker Madigan is he did not like

property tax caps. That was one thing he did not like. In the negotiations for continuing the surtax, which Governor Edgar wanted to go to education, Speaker Madigan insisted that an extra one-tenth go to local governments, so he wanted to get a little more of that money for local governments and—

DePue: Local governments, i.e., Chicago.

Dillard: Yeah, but it goes proportionally to cities like Downers Grove, Naperville, Carmi, Prophetstown, Murphysboro—but clearly he wanted to get his piece for the city of Chicago. So to get it passed, we had to have the help of the local governments, and so they got their little chunk of… And in the Illinois income tax, local governments get an automatic share, either one-tenth or one-eleventh depending upon when it was; but they get a little bit, an automatic cut of the state income tax; Speaker Madigan drove that bargain for local governments.

DePue: At the time, going beyond July first without a budget for the fiscal year that begins July first, was unprecedented in Illinois. The primary reason—was that because of Madigan and the Democrats in the House?

Dillard: Yeah, I think it was. And we had to look at all kinds of things that I think Rod Blagojevich and Pat Quinn have gotten used to, and that's: what happens when you're getting close to not making payroll, and can the comptroller issue checks? Can the governor send a letter to the comptroller and treasurer saying "I guarantee I'll sign enough money to cover the first couple of weeks of payroll?" So we had a little—I wouldn't say chaos—but once a couple weeks went by we had a lot of legal research to do over whether the people at the universities and other places could be paid.

DePue: I want to just kind of take a couple steps back and ask you some general questions about the first year or so as the chief of staff. Any particular thing that surprised you about that job?

Dillard: The job's hours were, I guess, not surprising, but it is full immersion when you are in the governor's office: twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. You are always on call. In those days cell phones were around. I had a cell phone; it wasn't the gigantic bag phone cell phone, but it wasn't as easy as today's iPhones or Blackberries. Computers in those days—we had them. We were some of the first people to have computers. I mentioned before, we used broadband or fiber optic cable for communications. But the job was a 24/7 job, and that's why most people don't last for more than a term, four years in that chief of staff job. The same goes true for the governor. How the governor, like the president, physically does it. I watched Jim Edgar age. There's no doubt about it, the job is physically very, very demanding; it was 24/7, and you really couldn't even take a vacation. I'm not sure I really took vacations then.

And you've got all kinds of pressures, too, from—you're trying to govern the State of Illinois, but you've got the National Governors Association, you've got the Midwest Governors Association, the Republican Governors Association, the Council of Great Lakes Governors—you have all of these outside groups that are demanding the governor's time, as well, that most people do not see. And to boot, Governor Edgar was the president of the Council of State Governments. So a very, very demanding, demanding schedule, and that's why somebody like Governor Edgar would take two consecutive days off maybe once a month. You don't get much time off as the governor of a place like Illinois. That's why, when I saw Rod Blagojevich come in and saw what his schedule was like, I just thought back to Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar, whom I watched govern this state for twenty years; those men never stopped. It was up early, it was nonstop, it was constantly on call, and it was a seven-days-a-week, 365-day endeavor, and you can't leave the State of Illinois.

DePue: Any particular anecdotes that come to mind when you think about that first year especially, or anything about your tenure as chief of staff?

Dillard: One of the jobs that a chief of staff has was to try to keep the Edgars' life as normal as possible. I tried to always make sure that the Edgar children and Mrs. Edgar were clued in. It's funny, one little story—and I've told this to other chiefs of staff—we had a great relationship with Bob Kustra, our lieutenant governor. I had a little post-it note that I kept on my phone that said "Call Kustra," and then I had one on there that said "Call the First Lady." You get so caught up and things happen so quickly that you don't want to do anything without consulting the lieutenant governor or informing the lieutenant governor that something's going on, and the same holds true with the First Lady. And I remember those things were yellowed and frayed on edge by the time I left, but my job was made so much easier by the fact that Governor Edgar had a good relationship with his lieutenant governor and the lieutenant governor's staff, and that Mrs. Edgar was such a tremendous governmental partner, and then life partner for Jim Edgar. She made the staff's job a lot easier.

DePue: On the lighter side, perhaps, remember the governor's dogs?

Dillard: I do! I love dogs. I'm used to having dogs around and I love my dog at my feet. The governor's dogs, he clearly… Those were the new children of his; Emy and Daisy were constant companions in the Capitol building office and around the mansion. The governor would have the dogs in all the staff meetings, and these dogs—

DePue: In the staff meetings?

Dillard: The dogs would be running around the staff meetings, and… (laughter) And you were supposed to love the governor's dogs and pet the governor's dogs,

although they were clearly Jim Edgar's dogs. These dogs adored the governor, and they were clearly his dogs. They weren't Brenda's dogs, they were his dogs. But it was nice. It was nice having dogs around. They were a calming effect. And again—I mentioned you tried to keep things as normal as possible—and the Edgars were very normal people, including buying that log home north of Springfield, where we had staff meetings. We'd go out there. If you wanted to see the governor sometimes on a Sunday afternoon, he'd say, "Yeah, why don't you come out about four o'clock to the cabin?" And you'd go out to the cabin north of Springfield.

One thing that I remember when we went to new governors' school during the transition: there were a couple of things that the old governors told the new incoming governors. One is: the mansion is not a house. Keep your own residence; you need a place to escape, and as great as a governor's mansion is, it will never be home. You need a home. And that's why the Edgars, I believe, bought the log home. They needed a place of their own, without staff, without state police running around a different floor, without tourists going through it—a place you could run around in your bathrobe if you want to and have privacy. The second one was: if there's ever an emergency in your state and you're out of the state, get home as fast as you can. And the third one was: when you're putting together your cabinet, you need to get your emergency services and disaster agency director in place as one of your first cabinet appointments.[22] And those are three things I remember from the first meeting we ever had with the National Governors Association on just tips from former governors.

DePue: Let's get back into more serious things here again. January 1992—you already mentioned these are tough economic times—and the administration finds out the hole's bigger than we thought, even with the draconian cuts that we took. We still have a bigger hole to face. Do you recall that timeframe?

Dillard: I do, and it's never good when you're going to have to go back to the legislature and say, "Hey, we've got to cut more." We did a lot of research on what we could do or couldn't do, and could the legislature give us an ability to reduce budgets by us making the tough decisions so they didn't have to, but the recession was brutal, and we had to continue to downsize or cut. '92 was probably the fiscal and economic low point.

DePue: What I've got here is another 350 million dollar round of cuts and agencies and directorates and another 500 million in short-term borrowing. Then in March, I would think he has to present the budget for 1993, and with the economy the way it was at the time there was another round of cuts that was recommended. Were you in the middle of all that, or was that mostly Joan Walters?

[22] Mike Lawrence also remembered being warned at this conference about the importance of disaster planning. Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, April 1, 2009, 38-39.

Dillard: It was mostly Joan Walters by that point in time, but we clearly—and I had to, like all of us, reach out to interest groups and let them know why we were doing this—we weren't some cruel and unusual people. So you had to go out, and you had to send Al Grosboll to the conservation groups and agriculture groups and say, "This is why we need to cut." We had to send Bernice Bloom out to the education groups and say, "Wow, we're going to have to maybe delay your second school-aid payment in the month of June." And you had to send Felicia Norwood out to the hospitals or the nursing homes and say, "Here's what's happening." So you'd send each of your staffers out to talk to their constituencies, and it was tough. We had to go out. One thing I learned well from Jim Edgar is, you can make a lot of difficult decisions but you still have to explain them; if you explain them to people, generally people get it and they stick with you. So we tried to explain to the people of Illinois and the constituency groups that were out there why we had no choice but to do what we were doing.

DePue: I think you already said this—'92 was even tougher budgetary-wise than '91?

Dillard: Yeah, it was, and also what honeymoon we had—I'm not sure we ever had a honeymoon—but the benefit of the doubt that you give a first-term governor or first-year governor probably had worn off. I'm a legislator today; legislators, they might make one tough vote, but they don't like to be asked to do two and three and four! (laughter) Why don't you make us do it all at once? If we would've known what was coming down the road, maybe we would've got it all out of the way at one point in time. But it's like taking my children for inoculations. "How come we can't just get one shot, Dad? How come we have to get three?" It was tough, but Governor Edgar and our administration, I think, did a good job of explaining it to people, and once we made that round of difficult decisions… We were able to reprioritize some things; then when the economy turned around and we started to create jobs—and I will say Governor Edgar, during his administration, created manufacturing jobs at a rate greater than the nation—we started to get good money into the state treasury so we could expand and grow the programs that were our priorities, like early childhood education, and programs for children.

DePue: You anticipated my next question. I'd been focusing so much here on budgetary challenges, but that by no means was the priority that Edgar had going into the office. What was he able to address in those first couple years?

Dillard: He clearly was able to get his surtax in place—and not have to expire—for education, or I can't imagine what the state of education would be today. He did get property tax caps, which he wanted. He did come up with an instant-check program for background checks for those purchasing firearms.

DePue: And you mentioned the welfare initiative, as well.

Dillard: He clearly was a national leader on welfare reform. He did, and said when he campaigned he was going to retool and streamline the state's economic development efforts, and that paid off big time. Again, we were above the national average in creating manufacturing jobs. He was able to double the funding for programs dealing with abused and neglected children. And when you have tough times you're able to demand more accountability, whether it's from your human service providers or education, and that was good. He clearly spent a great deal of time, since we had to focus on human services anyway, reforming the state's mental health system by adopting zero tolerance towards substandard conditions in state institutions; he was able to move people from a warehouse-type setting in our state institutions out into more humane settings in the community.

I remember, he had campaigned on to crack down on drug kingpins and he signed legislation to impose the death penalty on those who pushed drugs—and [ones] that included the expansion of a billion dollars for McCormick Place; the expansion of Scott Air Force Base, down in Southwestern Illinois. A very important thing happened, and that was we were able to expand the Great Lakes Naval Training Center up in Lake County. It was eighteen thousand new jobs, and we brought those jobs from San Diego and Orlando. Governor Edgar spent an inordinate amount of time with Gary Mack, his Chicago press secretary. Gary Mack spent the better part of a year working on the expansion of the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, and the people of Lake County have eighteen thousand, minimum, new jobs in their area to show for that. I will also say that Governor Edgar was able to have coal research in southern Illinois improved and expanded, and what he did in the area of coal development is really going to pay dividends, even now, fifteen, sixteen years later. So property tax caps, and the budget deficit, too. We were able to close the gap in funding levels between school districts, and we have a school system in Illinois that is so highly inequitable between rich and poor districts that in a tough budget time you're able to kind of close that gap a little bit.

DePue: Now, I know the education initiatives, just by nature of what he had to deal with that first administration, was something that he would take up in earnest after his reelection, so that gets a little bit beyond your timeframe. I did want to ask a couple other questions here, just general in nature. You've been talking about Edgar a lot here, but now you've been working with him for a couple years. What words, what terms would you use to characterize who Jim Edgar was?

Dillard: Decent; tough, but fair; very disciplined; serious, studious. He would read more than anybody that I've ever seen; and I don't mean briefing papers, but that Governor Edgar would be an avid reader. You saw this as the secretary of state in the way he handled libraries, his duty as the state librarian. Governor Edgar could read books faster—and he could even get through Henry Clay's biography, some of the dullest (laughter) of works that were out there—as a

student of history. He was an outdoorsman and a conservationist. I think that's one side that people didn't see, but Governor Edgar rode bicycles, he hiked, he clearly loved the outdoors. He was a horseman. He loved the agricultural side of horses. The fact that he loved his dogs—and he's got a new one today, a cockadoodle that I just saw, a pretty big, standard-poodle size. So he clearly appreciated the outdoors. He played tennis. He was an avid tennis player, but just an all around very decent gentleman.

And he was quiet, and he was shy. Mrs. Edgar was shy, as well. I always thought it's pretty interesting, these two folks, Jim and Brenda Edgar; they're just regular people who came into public life with no money, and they went out of public life with no money, but along the way they were able to do a lot of good and leave a legacy of honor. I tell kids all the time you don't have to be named Kennedy or Bush or Daley to succeed in America or a place like Illinois, and Jim Edgar is living proof. He grew up, essentially, without a father. He came from very modest means, and through an internship worked his way up through state government with no connections whatsoever and became a very good governor of Illinois, and a great, great secretary of state, as well.

DePue: I wonder if you could just talk very briefly about a typical day for you as chief of staff; part of that question is to address what you had mentioned earlier before, that Edgar offers you this job saying, "You can keep your residence in Chicago, spend part of your time in Springfield."

Dillard: My day as chief of staff would begin with a quick look at what was called the Wang computer for overnight e-mails in those days—this is pre-internet—hoarding as many papers as I could get my hands on to see what was going on in the papers. It was sometimes flying, getting that first state plane to Springfield or vice versa. So if I was going to change cities, I would do that. In the office 7:30, quarter of eight. I already would have read at home, taken documents home, looked at the papers, looked at the computer set up at my home and my apartment, as well, so I'd already put in a couple hours before I'd get to the office at 7:30 or 8:00. Tried to have an hour to sort of figure out what phone calls I had to return or get the staff ready.

The governor would generally mosey on in at 9:30. His days were sort of the same as mine: he would exercise, he would eat a light breakfast, he would read a briefing book we would always send him to wherever he was the night before. Sometimes he would call with questions on that briefing book—if not to me, then to the person who was writing the briefing. He would read the news clips of the day, and he would come over at 9:30. There was no typical day, but if there was one—and this would be a non-legislative session day—this is what it would be like, and then we would begin our day. I mean, the governor would be on the road many days traveling around the state, and I would sometimes hook up with him, other times not, but that's how I would begin my day: just a ton of meetings, phone calls left and right, drop-ins.

There would always be a crisis or two a day, (laughter) and it would quiet down, 6:00, 6:15, and I would go back to my desk.

I would always tell my secretary—you can do this when you're the governor's chief of staff—get me a home number or get me a cell phone number, and let them know that I'm liable to call them at home or any time, but whoever wanted me it wouldn't be at mine. It's like if the president or the governor or governor's chief of staff or whoever's going to call you, you don't care when they call you, you would just be happy. I would call people sometimes until 9:30, ten o'clock at night; and a lot of times, at least two times a week, I would use it to clean off my desk: I would have dinner brought in to my desk, and I would eat at my desk. And sometimes I would leave the Capitol building or the Thompson Center at one o'clock in the morning and go home and do it again the next day, but I always took two nights a week to literally just go through things and work very late. Again, I told you before, we generally worked Saturdays; and if we're lucky we'd have Sundays off, but sometimes we'd have to work Sunday nights.

DePue: This doesn't sound like you've got much time at all for any kind of a personal or family life. Did your wife stay up in the Chicago area?

Dillard: She did. Yeah, she'd come to Springfield every now and then. She was working. I didn't have children at the time, and so that made it a little more tolerable. But no, it's a full immersion job, and you've got to really love it.

DePue: You're running for governor now with your eyes wide open, so to speak, on all of this.

Dillard: I am, and when I went to see Governor Edgar and said, "I'm thinking about running for governor: I've had a talk with my wife and my wife understands it," a couple things that he asked me right off the bat was, "How old are your kids?" And I said, "My children are eight and six." And he said, "They're girls, right?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, there's no good time, but that's not a bad time. You wouldn't want to leave your wife with younger ones, and you certainly would never leave your wife with teenage girls, would you Kirk?" (laughter) He smiled and he laughed, so he said, "I guess the ages are okay." And my children—they've grown up in politics, they do parades. They're good. And my wife is a descendent of Governor Oglesby from Decatur, a three time governor of Illinois, and my wife understands the business.[23] Then Governor Edgar looked at me and said, "Well, you have one thing that I don't think anybody else has that's running for governor: You have a wife who actually wants you to be governor." And then he said without

[23] Richard James Oglesby (R-Decatur) served as governor for three non-consecutive terms: 1865-1869, 1873-1873, 1885-1889. In his second "term," he immediately resigned the office after inauguration in order to serve in the U.S. Senate. Oglesby has also been credited with originating Abraham Lincoln's "rail-splitter" image. Mark A. Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-splitter: Governor Richard J. Oglesby* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001), ix-x.

pausing, "But you need to warn her, Kirk, that after you're elected she may be without you a lot for eighteen months. It does not get any easier. And you above all people should know it." So I hadn't quite thought about it that way with my wife, and I went back and I said, "Hey, Hon, Governor Edgar wants me to warn you that it's not going to get any easier." And she said, "It'll get a little easier because we'll be around and it won't be the campaign and you won't be traveling every day," which is probably true. The governor would travel several days a week but not every day. I'm on the road, constantly running for governor all the time, so it does get a little better, but I understood what the governor meant.

DePue: How did your job change during the flood of '93? So you finally got the economy moving upwards, things are looking much better for the budget and all, then you get this massive flood in 1993.

Dillard: The flood of 1993 was literally almost of Biblical proportions, and I will say Governor Edgar was on top of this immediately. He called me, I remember, when it first really looked like we were going to start having flooding. He called me at home on a Saturday—it was a Saturday morning—and he said, "Kirk, this is going to be really bad, and we need to have somebody down there immediately." I said, "We already have ESDA[24]down there." Governor Edgar was at the helm on this flood, and he deserves all the credit for putting together what I think is the finest effort in a natural disaster in the state's history. Governor Edgar was there at the river every day during this flood, and he gave me good advice, too. He said, "I don't know a lot about flooding. You guys up in Chicago have flooded a lot along the Des Plaines River, but, after the exhaustion's over and people see, and the waters start to recede, there's going to be despair, people are going to be angry, and we need to be really prepared and organized." I think the flood of '93 was one of the Edgar administration's and Jim Edgar's finest hours. We also had the little break—and it was very different, it wasn't nearly as big or as hard as the flood of '93, but it was kind of scary—the hole by the East Bank Club in Chicago, in the Chicago River, where we had the tunnels flooding in Chicago.[25] So we faced, along with a couple of tornadoes, some disasters, but the flood of '93 was… We were organized, very proud of the fact that the city of Valmeyer, which was literally wiped out by the flood, has been rebuilt. Governor Edgar led an effort, along with Al Grosboll, Mike Lawrence, and our National Guard and emergency service personnel. They were phenomenal.

DePue: Did you play a direct role in that, or was your charge to kind of look over everything else while he and others were focused on the flood?

[24] Emergency Services Disaster Assistance

[25] See Kirk Brown, interview by Mike Czaplicki [rest of cite after edit] for Brown's discussion of the Chicago freight tunnel flooding. Brown also was involved extensively with response efforts to the flood of 1993, [pp].

Dillard: The governor was clearly the guy and the man in charge. John Plunk, as the director [of the Illinois Emergency Management Agency], was just amazing, as was Al Grosboll from our staff; they just did yeoman's work. We had everybody, including [prison] inmates, out there sandbagging, and the local governments worked well with us, and it was…[26] I couldn't help when I looked at Hurricane Katrina—obviously that was on a bigger magnitude than this—we executed quite well, along with the governors of Missouri and Iowa.

DePue: There were a couple health issues that came up early in his administration—I'm not talking about 1994—but I believe he had an angioplasty and perhaps a gall bladder incident, as well?

Dillard: (laughter) Yeah. On the angioplasty: I was in Springfield and I got a call, and again, it kind of went like this: "Kirk, this is the Governor. I'm over here at Memorial Medical Center. I think you and Lawrence ought to come over here because I think some people have seen me come through the lobby." And I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "Well, I'm having just a little bit of discomfort in my chest, and I'm just getting it checked out. Why don't you guys come on over here, because I think some people recognized me." (laughter) So we went over, and he was tremendously in control of… I think I'd be scared and I wouldn't have taken it maybe as calmly as he did; but he was great, had his angioplasty, and wanted to reassure the citizens of Illinois that everything was fine.

I learned a great deal from him about the way he turned his issues with his heart into an educational experience with people, including the opening of the Taste of Chicago. He would say, "There's healthy alternatives. There's skim milk. There's vegetarian pizza. You can use low-fat mozzarella on your pizza." Governor Edgar was a trendsetter for a healthier lifestyle, and he clearly changed the dietary habits around the governor's office. I lost through osmosis—and I needed to, and I should be on that diet today—I think I lost twenty pounds because I ate his diet, essentially, because we were together so often, and it worked great. Mike Lawrence lost a lot of weight, too, so we went with the no-fat legacy in the Edgar administration!

DePue: I wanted to turn next to your own decision to run for the Illinois Senate, which I would think happened shortly after the flood issue kind of receded a little bit; but before we get to that point, what haven't I had the opportunity to ask you about?

Dillard: (pause) I think you've covered… So much of those early years was about reprioritizing. I clearly want to commend the first lady, who had her projects: Help Me Grow, which was a tremendous program; she had what was called the P.J. Huggabee Bears—she gave out thousands to foster children, and they

[26] Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, October 22, 2009, generally, for his involvement with the flood response; and pages 6 & 23 for the use of prison labor.

were also sold at the old Marshall Field's. But Mrs. Edgar clearly increased awareness of existing services to help children and their families; and she set up a tremendous partnership between Ronald McDonald charities and twelve state agencies, including a toll-free number as a single point of contact and information on children's health and safety services. She also spearheaded what was called Project Heart, which encouraged adoption by cutting red tape and cost. The Edgars were awarded by President Clinton for having the state with the highest increase in the number of adoptions in the United States, and Mrs. Edgar was a tremendous, tremendous partner on these kinds of programs.[27] We had a pilot program called Project Success that integrated some of the hygiene and health needs of students, especially in economically deprived areas of Illinois. I don't want to underestimate how important Mrs. Edgar was in all of these activities.

DePue: Let's turn to the Illinois Senate race in '94, and especially how you came to decide to make that…

Dillard: I didn't decide to do that. One day somebody came into my office—I can't remember who it was—but said, "Has the governor talked to you about running for the state Senate seat up from your old area?" I said, "No, why would he do that?" And they said, "We know Senator Philip was going to ask him to ask you if you would ever consider running for a state Senate seat, because Tom McCracken," who was the state Senator from Downers Grove, "wants to retire, and Senator Philip thinks you're the logical person to fill the seat where you grew up and wanted to talk to the governor about whether he could have permission to talk to you about running for the Senate seat." So that's how it sort of came about. It was like being the chief of staff: I had no clue it was coming. I had no clue that Senator Philip, the Senate president, wanted me to run for the state Senate seat; and I had never—even though I'd worked around the legislature—ever envisioned me being a state Senator.

But as it turned out, Tom McCracken, Jr. had a number of young children. His wife said, "Enough, Tom, of going down to Springfield for a hundred-some days a year." At that time, Mayor Daley and Governor Edgar—their relationship was professional but it wasn't always the most cordial, and they did good things. We did the McCormick Place expansion, we worked together on a third airport; they got along fine, but it wasn't really, really, really a close relationship. But Tom McCracken was somebody who both Mayor Daley and Governor Edgar knew; both gentlemen had to sign off on the chairman of the Regional Transportation Authority, and Tom McCracken happened to be a unique individual who could get Mayor Daley and Jim Edgar's approval. This is like a joint appointment. So Tom, then, could stay at

[27] Governor Edgar announced Project HEART (Helping to Erase Adoption Red Tape) in his first State of the State address, February 13, 1991, and Brenda Edgar organized the project and formally launched it November 4, 1991. The number of DCFS wards permanently placed increased from 724 in FY1992 to 7275 in FY 1999. *Illinois Issues* (January 1992), 33. Data from DCFS Wards Adopted FY1976-2007," Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, http://www.state.il.us/dcfs/adoption/index.shtml.

home, he could practice law and run the mass transit system of metropolitan Chicago.

So the seat's open. I had to run in a primary, and I went in to see Governor Edgar. I said, "Well, what do you think? How are we going to do this? You're going to be up for reelection." He said, "Look, as long as it's now, it's okay. Let's ask Jim Reilly," who at that time was running the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, and who used to be Governor Thompson's chief of staff—former state legislator from Jacksonville, a very brilliant man—"let's ask him if he can take a leave for a while from McCormick Place," which is the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority. They run Navy Pier, as well.[28] "Let's see if he can take a leave there and come back and be the chief of staff to get me through the election." And we were able to work that out. So I went off, and at the end of December of '93—so I really have been a State Senator since '94—got elected to the Illinois State Senate. I won my primary against a woman who was a member of the county board of DuPage County, a very popular vote getter. I had a primary and I had to run, had to go door to door as the former governor's chief of staff—a very humbling experience going, knocking door to door. I was able to win that primary, and the rest is history.[29]

DePue: Pretty safe Republican seat?

Dillard: Safe Republican seat—had to get through that primary.

DePue: Kind of deliberately, you and I had decided not to spend too much time beyond this point to keep the focus primarily on Jim Edgar, so I think we're ready for some concluding questions for you.

Dillard: Okay.

DePue: I think you'll like this question to start off with: Give me your overall assessment of the Edgar administration.

Dillard: Jim Edgar's tenure as governor and secretary of state was—I think to put it the way the *Chicago Tribune* put it—a legacy of honor. Was he splashy? No, but he clearly was a tremendous governor. We grew the economy, especially

[28] The Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, nicknamed McPier, is a municipal corporation that owns and operates the McCormick Place convention center and Navy Pier, both in Chicago. The authority, which was created by the Illinois Legislature in July 1989, is governed by thirteen directors and a chief executive. The mayor of Chicago and governor of Illinois each are responsible for selecting six directors; the mayor also appoints the chairman of the board, while the governor appoints the chief executive. Governor Jim Thompson named Jim Reilly as the first chief executive of McPier in 1989.

[29] On October 1, 1993, Dillard announced his candidacy for McCracken's seat. His announcement came a day after Patricia Trowbridge (R-Downers Grove) had announced her candidacy. Two months later, December 10, Pate Philip, DuPage County Republican chairman Jerry Kinney, and Will County Republican chairman Bud Findley picked Dillard to fill McCracken's vacant seat. In the primary held March 15, 1994, Dillard defeated Trowbridge. *Chicago Tribune*, October 2 & December 11, 1993; March 16, 1994.

manufacturing jobs, at a rate better than the national average. I was reading, preparing for this interview, a commentary by Jim Nolan, a political scientist. He wrote this for *Crain's Chicago Business*, and he said a lot of people would say Jim Edgar wasn't flashy or he wasn't a risk taker, but he was a risk taker. He ran for the governorship by saying we needed to keep the surcharge for education, that extra half a percent for education; that was a massive risk that he took, but where would we be without that money for the schools? Jim Edgar was tough. He told Mayor Daley no to a land-based casino the size of four football fields long. He went toe to toe when he had to, but got along with Mike Madigan, the Speaker of the House, when it came to property tax caps.

Jim Edgar was very fair. People said that, as a downstate governor, he didn't have a feel for Chicago. Nothing's further from the truth. In my history, no elected official has spent as much time on the West Side of Chicago, with African Americans, as Jim Edgar. He spent time, long before it was in vogue in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the Little Village and Pilsen neighborhoods of Chicago, working with Latinos. He brought record amounts of healthcare funding to the city of Chicago. He expanded McCormick Place. He oversaw the reconstruction of the Kennedy Expressway and Lower Wacker and Upper Wacker Drives in Chicago. I think he was as balanced and as fair of a political leader for all parts of the state as we've ever had.[30]

He was innovative. What he did for the way we fund Medicaid and getting us billions of new dollars for healthcare from the federal government has been followed by all of the other states. While Wisconsin may have always been the poster child for welfare reform, Jim Edgar was every bit as much at the front of welfare reform in this country as the governor of Wisconsin was at that time. He turned the Department of Children and Family Services into a success. It was a disaster. Children were dying, being dropped from multiple-story windows in housing projects, and he gave children—the ones who need the most help in our society—a real chance to succeed in Illinois and in their lives. Jim and Brenda Edgar together led the nation in adoption and foster care reforms, and the results have been that children now have safe and stable homes. And again, the economy of Illinois, especially manufacturing, grew at a rate greater than the American average. School reform in Chicago became a reality because of Governor Edgar in the mid-1990s. Chicago had a reputation of having the worst public school system in America, and Governor Edgar led the effort on Chicago school reform. He gave Mayor Daley control of the schools, which led to Paul Vallas and a man named Gary Chico running the public schools. Chicago schools got a long way to go, but at least today, in many instances, children in Chicago have the same chance that affluent students have in the suburbs to move their life forward.

[30] On the financing behind the Kennedy reconstruction, see Kirk Brown interview [post-edit pp].

So there have been very good governors of this state, and I would put Jim Edgar right at the top [of those] I can count on one hand in terms of the greatness of the governors of Illinois. Jim Edgar was a very fine governor, and is still—as we sit here, gosh, more than a decade out of office—an incredibly popular and respected figure. I will tell you, from our own political polling in my race for governor, that our pollster tells us there is no more respected political figure who has been out of life anywhere in America for over ten years than Governor Edgar. I think it's a tribute that he continues to be a major leader on public policy in the State of Illinois, and I think he's the single most respected person in this state when it comes to the State of Illinois' financial situation. So I was honored to work for him. He's a great and decent man, and unlike a lot of people in public life, he didn't cut and run. He's still there, serving college students and the people of the State of Illinois today.

DePue: You might consider this a very unfair question for somebody who's doing what you're doing right now, running for the office itself: How would you rate Thompson versus Edgar as governor?

Dillard: Both in that handful of the greatest governors this state's ever seen. They were very different men at very different times. I respect both of them dearly. I'm obviously much closer to Jim Edgar than I was to Jim Thompson; although when I was a young man working for Jim Thompson, like most of us who worked for Jim Thompson, we idolized the guy, just like somebody who worked for Ronald Reagan. Jim Thompson was a bigger-than-life character, and that's one of the reasons that he was such a good governor. Jim Edgar was more of a normal man, but somebody that we all respected just as much as you would respect any other governor. They're just different people at different times of Illinois' history, and both of them, I think, are on my single hand of the greatest governors this state has ever seen. And when people go back—and I know Mr. Howard, who used to write for the *Chicago Tribune*, has the book *Mostly Good and Competent Men*—I don't think you're going to find a twenty-some year period in Illinois history where you had two gentlemen who provided stability in the governorship and decency better than Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar.

Like I said, we need mentorship and we need to bring young people along. The people of Illinois were very well served by both of these gentlemen, but obviously I'm closer to Jim Edgar; and my career will be very much intertwined, for better or for worse—and for me it's 99.999 percent better that I worked for Jim Edgar.

DePue: I think this is one you can answer in probably just about a sentence: the thing you're most proud of in terms of the accomplishments that you or the administration achieved during the timeframe you were with him.

Dillard: Job creation, school reform, and just leaving a $1.5 billion surplus after we inherited $1 billion of debt—and having a legacy of decency and getting people to put children and their safety and education right at the forefront of the way we look at what services state government should provide.

DePue: How about the flipside of that? Any regrets about what was not accomplished?

Dillard: (pause) One big hole that we never, over an eight year period, could get done was trying to figure out what we're doing for air traffic capacity in Chicago. The third airport was talked about for years. There was a proposal to do the Lake Calumet Airport, South Suburban Airport, but we have now wasted another two decades. O'Hare Airport and Midway Airport are great economic engines to Chicago; Illinois is the transportation hub of America. I regret that we didn't have a coherent air transport policy, and that's one thing we should have done.

We've never been able to solve the inequities between the haves and the have-nots with respect to education funding. I know Governor Edgar tried to do that his second term without success; I wasn't working for him then. I was a state Senator who represented a suburban district that had some of the finest schools, and I viewed it as a Senator for 24th or 41st senatorial districts, which I represented. But we need to once and for all have our school systems in this state be more equitable when it comes to funding, and while we made strides on education reform, especially in Chicago, there's so much more that needs to be done.

DePue: Senator, you've been very, very generous in your time with me. Here's my last question. Why, in the midst of your own campaign—you've got plenty of serious competition in running for governor of the State of Illinois just on the Republican side, and close to that many running on the Democratic side—was it worth your time to do this interview?

Dillard: The people of Illinois need to know that they've had and elected great public servants like Jim Edgar and his wife Brenda, the first lady. So I want to leave a legacy of letting folks know many years from now that we did have a clean and competent governor in this man—he's a product of Illinois like I am—named Jim Edgar. People ought to feel real good about that. And I also am incredibly proud of the record in the Edgar administration over our eight years; those who worked for Governor Edgar when he was the secretary of state should be equally as proud.

Preparing for this interview, I went through about eight gigantic file folders of personal notes and reflections, and I read a book on the Edgar administration. I'm astonished at how much we were able to accomplish, how hard it is, and all of the little things you didn't know were going to hit you, whether it was the governor's angioplasty for his heart issues, a recession, a

Biblical flood along the Mississippi River and Illinois Rivers, or a hole knocked by a barge along the Chicago River. (laughter) You just never know what's going to happen in this life. So I was just reminiscing about, wow, we really did a lot of good for a lot of people: we grew manufacturing jobs at a better rate than the rest of America, and we left $1.5 billion in the state treasury without an income tax increase. That's a record, along with how ethical the administration of Jim Edgar was, that I'm very, very proud to have been a part of; I've got to say it was the time of my life. I don't regret it one bit and just am honored and delighted that he offered me the job, and I thank God for telling me to take it.

DePue: I want to thank you. It's always fun to talk to people like you who were in the inner circle, who were there in the midst of all these struggles. I'm always impressed by how willing people like you are to kind of bare your soul and reflect on things and offer insights. I know that's exactly what Governor Edgar had in mind when he started the project.

Dillard: Thank you; and what you're doing. Your research is phenomenal for the people, and this project is highly, highly worthwhile, so thank you.

DePue: Thank you.

(end of interview)