# Interview with Kirk Brown

# ISG-A-L-2009-044

Interview # 1: December 22, 2009

Interviewer: Mike Czaplicki



Czaplicki: Good morning. Today is Tuesday, December 22, 2009. My name's Mike Czaplicki. I work for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, and I'm here in Springfield today with Kirk Brown, who was Secretary of the Illinois Department of Transportation under Governors Edgar and Ryan. He's been generous enough to sit down today and talk with us about his life and his service in the Edgar administration. So welcome, Kirk.

Brown: Glad to be here.

Czaplicki: All right, we may as well begin at the beginning. Where and when were you born?

Brown: Harrisburg, Illinois, in 1946.

Czaplicki: And do you have any brothers or sisters?

Brown: Nope, I'm an only child.

Czaplicki: How did your family happen to come to that area?

Brown: My grandfather on my father's side was an engineer, got his degree from Ohio State. And actually, which was kind of unusual, he got his undergraduate degree at Miami University—at Oxford, Ohio—in liberal arts and then went to graduate school in engineering. That's unheard of today. But he got his first job teaching for the Rolla School of Mines. He only had that for about a year, when he got a job with a mining company in southern Illinois, a coal-mining

company, and he became their chief engineer and moved to Harrisburg. On my mother's side—her family was in Missouri during the Civil War. There were just too many raids; there was a lot of guerrilla warfare in Missouri, and they decided to move to southern Illinois during the Civil War. The Bonds came up that way probably around 1860 or 1862, somewhere in that time frame.

Czaplicki: Did you say Bond?

Brown: Bond was my mother's name.

Czaplicki: B-o-n-d?

Brown: B-o-n-d. Actually, the family history says that we are somewhat—and I've never researched it to see if it's true—but that Illinois' first governor, I believe, was Shadrach Bond.

Czaplicki: That's correct; that's true. (laughter)

Brown: And I think the family lore is that somehow we're related to Shadrach through my mother's side. I don't know if that's true or not.

Czaplicki: What was your father's name?

Brown: My father's name was Robert Roy Brown. My grandfather and grandmother had two sons. He was my dad, and my uncle's name was Ralph D. Brown Jr.; both of them worked with my grandfather, who, after he left the coal mines, became the county engineer in Saline County for the highway department, and he kind of trained them in engineering. That was back in the Depression by that time. My grandfather came to Harrisburg in 1912, sometime in that timeframe. I don't remember exactly when. My uncle did start college at Miami University, where his father had gone, for about a year but then had to leave because of the Depression. They just couldn't afford to go to college, so they both studied engineering with my grandfather. Both took International Correspondence School engineering courses. Back then you could do that.

Czaplicki: Do you know the name of the—

Brown: International Correspondence School. That's the name of it. Oh, yeah. In fact, they were still active even when I was in high school and college. At that time they were doing supplemental stuff. So I think they both probably got some kind of correspondence degree. But they were both able to be licensed professional engineers because of the work that they did; they were grandfathered in, really, because there wasn't a licensing law back then. My father started a consulting firm with my uncle. Worked together for a while, and then my uncle went to work for the Illinois Department of Transportation—which was then the Division of Highways in the Department of Public Works and Buildings—over in District 9, in Carbondale, and my

father kept the consulting business. There just wasn't enough business for the two of them. My uncle eventually worked his way up. He was plans engineer in the central office for the Bureau of Design; then he became head of the Bureau of Planning at the central office; then he was deputy chief highway engineer for the department; and his final job was the first director of planning and programming for the Department of Transportation, when it became a Department of Transportation. He retired in 1972.

Czaplicki: That's when it was created, right? IDOT?

Brown: Actually it was created around '69 or '70. But he retired in '72. There was a change of administration that year, and he decided he didn't really want to stick around and train—that's when Walker was elected as governor, and he decided not to stick around. My father operated a consulting firm when he got back from World War II—he was in the army in World War II.

Czaplicki: Do you know what unit he served with?

Brown: I don't know the name of the unit; he was in the Pacific, and he started out in the infantry. He ran into somebody from Harrisburg—who knew him and was in the engineer corps—in Hawaii after he got sent over there, who said, "What in the world are you doing in the infantry?" and they put him in the engineer corps. So he saw a lot of action on the beaches. He got the arrowhead for the battle ribbons for being in the first—however-many waves it is. I forget now. But on Okinawa, and I can't remember. I can't recall. There were about three or four different assaults where he was in the first few waves, but he wasn't in the infantry. His job was to repair things that they needed to have repaired once they got there. So he was there with his head down and… (laughs) He said he never did understand why they were that early to get in.

Czaplicki: Small world. My grandfather was at Okinawa.

Brown: Oh, was he?

Czaplicki: At some of those battles. So your dad was—

Brown: He was there.

Czaplicki: —paving the way.

Brown: That was tough sledding back then. At any rate, he did work for cities and counties. It was a small firm, with him and two other engineers. I guess my first job was with him. I started work probably when I was in junior high, sweeping the floors, carrying out the trash. Harrisburg's a small town, and his office was on the second floor on the square. I'd take the mail around, the bills; he paid the bills, and I'd go to the post office and get the mail. Didn't work a lot of hours, but he started me working early. Made a lot of blueprints. Back in those days, it wasn't like it is today. We had handmade drawings on

linen sheets; it was a two-step process to make a blueprint, and it was really smelly, nasty stuff. (laughter) We then got ammonia printers, which were much better quality printers, but boy, that was even worse-smelling stuff that I had to deal with. But I made a lot of blueprints.

Czaplicki: Did you practice your drawing much? Did he turn you loose—

Brown: Oh, not when I was in junior high.

Czaplicki: Did you trace his on your own?

Brown: No, I just did—like I said, carried out the trash, swept the floors, carried the mail around. I probably only worked in the summers maybe two or three hours a day; that was all. But then when I was in high school, yes. I was working full time during high school for him. You know, carrying stakes on survey crews and over the years kind of learned the business—did soil testing, then did survey crews on my own. Worked all summer for him. Then the same thing when I was in college; I worked for my father as an engineer-in-training, really, in the summer, as well as doing engineering school.

Czaplicki: Classic apprenticeship.

Brown: Well, I thought everybody was an engineer. My grandfather was an engineer, my uncle was an engineer, my father was an engineer. Now, my grandfather's grandfather—he wasn't an engineer, he was a farmer in Oxford, Ohio, but he was the township road commissioner, so he took care of the roads. His father, my grandfather's great-grandfather,[1] my great-great-grandfather, had a carriage factory in Cincinnati, and it burned down. We've got all of his journals, if you can believe that, starting around 1830 or '40—I don't remember when—and then on up for many years. When his carriage factory burned, he didn't know what he was going to do, so he decided he'd just be an engineer. He got a job as chief engineer of the Cincinnati and Whitewater Canal Company and built canals in Ohio, and then he was also chief engineer of Cincinnati. So I came from a long line of engineers.

Czaplicki: He was probably a Whig, right? Internal improvements… How about your mom; what did your mom do? Did she work outside the home?

Brown: Nope. My mom was like his business manager, but she did it out of the house. This was a pretty small—I think he had the lowest overhead rate of any consulting firm around. (laughter) She did it with no pay and just kept his books, did his payroll, typed his letters—all that; but she did it out of the house. If he had something he wanted to have typed, he'd bring it home at night. She'd type it at night or the next day, and he'd pick it up. But he ate lunch at home, so… It was a little town of ten thousand; it wasn't hard to get back and forth.

[1] [Editor's note: He probably meant grandfather.

Czaplicki: Do you know what her educational background was? Did she ever take bookkeeping classes?

Brown: In high school. She didn't go to college. She just went to high school, but she did take bookkeeping and typing in high school. She'd had some jobs before as secretary and bookkeeper for businesses when Dad was in the Army, before I was born; she did work. She worked for CIPS, I think, as a clerk or a typist or that sort of thing.

Czaplicki: CIPS?

Brown: Central Illinois Public Service Company. They're Ameren today. Electric utility, gas utility… I think they were both gas then. I don't think they're gas now. I'm not clear on that, don't remember. But no, other than her sister and my grandfather on my father's side, I was the first one to go to college in the family for many—don't know how far back to go, because I'm not a tracer of roots.

Czaplicki: We'll get to that in a second. I just want to make sure we get this down. What was your mom's name?

Brown: Grace Brown. Grace Bernice Brown.

Czaplicki: And her maiden name was Bond?

Brown: Bond.

Czaplicki: Before we get to your college years, which I am very interested in, do you remember much about your parents' political orientation in terms of who they voted for? Or were they active in politics at all? How would you characterize them?

Brown: (laughs) I'd have to say that they were card-carrying Republicans in a Democratic stronghold in Saline County. There weren't many Republicans down there. Used to laugh about my mother—my wife and I did—that that if a Republican ran down the street naked, my mom would say, "I don't think much of it, but he probably had a good reason." (laughs) That's how strong they were.

Funny story with Governor Edgar that it reminds me of, which I haven't thought of: The day that he appointed me as secretary, had the press conference for the secretary, it was a very unusual thing. Mr. Morris was the mayor of Harrisburg, and he appointed him head of Mines and Minerals, at the same press conference. If you can imagine two guys being in the governor's cabinet from the little town of Harrisburg, Illinois. He got there before I did, and the governor asked if he knew me. Oh, yeah, and he knew my dad real well, of course. He told the governor, "I'm surprised. You know, Rob always votes in the Democratic primary." And the governor said, "Well,

is your dad a Democrat?" I said, "He votes in the Democratic primary, he has for years, because there isn't any Republican Party down there. There's two factions of Democrats in Saline County, and he's always worked with them and supported them because that's all there was to work with, really." So the governor thought that was funny; here he was appointing somebody whose father was a registered Democrat. But he voted Republican in the state and national elections, I can tell you that. He was a very conservative man, much more conservative than myself.

Czaplicki: So back in those days, there may have been some repercussions if he wasn't voting in those primaries?

Brown: No, no, I don't think so. I don't think that he looked at it that way at all. He was active, and he wanted to be active in helping the government and helping the people. He was city engineer for Harrisburg for years without pay. He did their engineering when it came up, but if the levees need reinforcing, the water line busts, he was out working with no pay. And if you wanted to be active and influential in who your government was, Democrat was it. There was no real Republican—there were Republicans, don't get me wrong, but it was largely Democratic. They were good people that he worked with, and he enjoyed working with them over the years. After he shut his consulting business down, he was county engineer for Saline County for many years and really enjoyed working with the members of the county board.

Czaplicki: You mentioned the Depression. Did they get any WPA work, PWA, anything in that time, that you are you aware of?[2]

Brown: Actually, during the Depression itself, they were in high school for the first part of it. When they both got out, they got their first jobs, which I didn't mention, with the Corps of Engineers and lived in Granite City, doing engineering work. I think my uncle did the engineering work on the levees, and my father did rail work, as I recall. I'm not real sure about that, but that sticks in my mind, hearing him talk about that. And then my uncle stayed with the corps. The corps gave them draft deferments during World War II to keep the civilian employees, because they had to keep things up. And they were getting old, too; they were a little older than some of the real young folks. But my dad decided that everybody else was going to go fight; by golly, he was going to go fight. And so he enlisted. Broke his toe at one of the camps in South Carolina—I can't remember the name.

Czaplicki: Camp Croft?

Brown: That doesn't sound right. Maybe. He would have shipped out to Europe. He would have been in the Battle of the Bulge, is what he told us, but he broke his toe and didn't go with them. So when his toe healed—he broke his toe in

[2] The Works Progress Administration and the Public Works Administration were two of the major New Deal agencies responsible for stimulating the economy through federally financed jobs and projects.

basic training in some physical activity they were doing—he ended up going to the Pacific.

Czaplicki: That was the same route my grandfather followed. He was trained in South Carolina. Joined the 45th Division, went to France in '44, and he was just south of the Bulge.

Brown: Was he? The unit he was in was actually in the Battle of the Bulge, I think. After he did all the stuff during the war, right after, as soon as the war wound down and before he got out, they sent him to Korea. He actually restored the water system for Seoul, Korea, and ran the water treatment plant and got it up and running. They had one of the few—in fact, probably the only—water system in Korea at that time after the war. Everything had been destroyed.

Czaplicki: Wow. So what's your earliest political memory, then? When did you first start tuning in to politics, do you think?

Brown: When I saw John Kennedy. I was in band at high school the first time I really paid attention to it. My parents always watched all the conventions—we watched those on TV. But I was in a high school band, and John Kennedy came to town when he was running for president.[3] Of course, the band was right down front, and I just thought that was the berries, to be right there, close. I'd only seen folks running for president on TV, and he was fifteen feet away, standing on the courthouse steps giving a speech.

Czaplicki: That must have been something.

Brown: We were thrilled. Actually—it's probably not good to say, card-carrying Republican that I am—became a big Kennedy fan. (laughs) But I was very young.

Czaplicki: I was going to ask you that, because I assume your household voted for Nixon that year.

Brown: Absolutely. Of course, back then, I didn't vote; you didn't vote till you were twenty-one.

Czaplicki: Right.

Brown: But I was, anyway. And then during college, Bobby Kennedy came down there, and we were pretty liberal in our thoughts back in those days.

Czaplicki: Let's talk about college. Where did you go to school?

[3] JFK visited Harrisburg on October 3, 1960. John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project*, Santa Barbara, CA, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25952.

Brown: Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. My dad had sent me to the University of Illinois for a summer training program with the Illinois Society of Professional Engineers at the engineering school. Of course, Illinois is one of the top engineering schools, if not the top engineering school, in the country, and it was back then as well; he really thought I needed to go to University of Illinois. It was a great program, and I enjoyed the summer up there, except I said, "You know, I've grown up in a small town"—it was summertime and there wasn't much going on at the university, and there wasn't much in Champaign then, other than the university, back in the early '60s—"I want to go to school in the city. I want to go to a big city. I want to see what that's like."

I really wanted to go to Washington University in St. Louis, because Harrisburg's 120 miles or so from St. Louis. We would go shopping there a lot, and I would go by Washington U; I thought that would really be nice. While Vanderbilt was expensive, Washington University was a lot more expensive (laughs) than Vanderbilt. My dad said, "Let's look into some other schools." We went to Rose-Poly, which is Rose-Hulman, out in Terre Haute [Indiana]. Then, it was out in the country, and Terre Haute wasn't a very big town.

Czaplicki: (laughs) All male, too, right?

Brown: Yes, but pretty much back then, most of the engineering schools were. I think we had maybe four females in my civil engineering class when I was in college. But they told me at Rose-Hulman—or Rose-Poly back then—that St. Mary's was right there, on the north side of Terre Haute; they said, "On weekends, we bring the girls in from St. Mary's for dances." (laughter) And for a kid who wanted to be in a city, to see what that was like because he'd never done that, that didn't hold much. Rose-Hulman is an outstanding engineering school. Vanderbilt—we took me down there because it was only 180 miles—Nashville is actually closer than Champaign from Harrisburg, because Harrisburg's in deep southern Illinois. When I got there, the campus was twenty-one blocks from downtown in the city, and I said, "Well, this could do." (laughs) So I picked it. It had nothing to do with the quality of school, although it was a good quality school. Clearly not the same level as U of I, but that wasn't in my criteria for college.

Czaplicki: Did it meet your expectations?

Brown: Oh, yeah, I loved it. (Czaplicki laughs) I had a great time while I was there. Studied engineering, or as my wife says, I majored in radio and studied engineering, (laughs) because I got involved with the campus radio station.

Czaplicki: What was the call sign?

Brown: WRVU. At that time, it wasn't an educational station, and we weren't on the air. We were an AM station on what they call carrier current; our transmitter plugged into the power distribution system of the university, and you had to plug your radio into the wall. If you were in a dorm, you could probably get it on a transistor radio just because of the wiring around.

Czaplicki: The signal went through the electrical wires?

Brown: Right, so if you got ten feet from a building, you couldn't get the signal unless you had an extension cord. The signal quality wasn't all that good, going through the electrical system; it had a little hum to it here and there. But it was a commercial station. We sold ads, we paid our log typists, and, of course, had to buy equipment, had to pay for repairs. But of course, everything else was volunteer work. Ad sales—we gave them a commission on sales. I got active in that and worked on it for three years, probably, while I was there, and then ended up getting a job on weekends for my senior year—on Sunday morning from six to noon—at WMAK, which was one of the Top 40 stations. There were two Top 40 stations in Nashville.[4] That was fun.

Czaplicki: What years would these have been?

Brown: I was in college from '64 to '68.

Czaplicki: That's something. So did you play 45s?

Brown: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. CDs—nobody had even thought or heard of. The only computers back then were big mainframe computers that you communicated with using punch cards.

Czaplicki: Had you gotten to use any of those in your time in engineering school?

Brown: What, the punch cards?

Czaplicki: Yeah.

Brown: Oh, absolutely. That's all we had.

Czaplicki: I wasn't sure if you were still doing pen and paper or if…

Brown: There weren't even electronic calculators. All the calculators were mechanical back then, and we used slide rules for all of our computations. Yeah, I had to carry a slide rule around. I wouldn't strap it to my belt, (laughter) but I had to

[4] The Top 40 format, which broke tradition by featuring charismatic deejays and repetitious playing of the most popular new songs, emerged in the 1950s and became a staple of American youth culture. Although Top 40 now refers to the popularity rankings of various tracking lists, one historian claims that "forty" emerged as an ideal, scientific-sounding number because it equaled the "number of songs a deejay could play in a three-hour shift." Marc Fisher, *Something in the Air: Radio, Rock, and the Revolution That Shaped a Generation* (New York: Random House, 2007), 10-16.

have one with me at all times. You'd type up those punch cards; you might have a deck of cards to run a program that'd be two feet long. You'd have to turn it in, they'd run them overnight at the computer center, and you'd get the results back the next morning. If you made one typo, the computer kicked it out, and you'd have to go through that whole deck of cards—well, they'd give you a printout of the cards, so you could look at the printout and find where you had the typos. If you had two, you had to find two, because the first one would kick it out, and you still had to… It was a lot more complicated than using a computer today.

Czaplicki: Although back then, you didn't have today's examples. So did it just seem cool as all heck using a computer then?

Brown: Oh, absolutely.

Czaplicki: Yeah?

Brown: Oh, yeah. I remember, one of the programs that we had to write in my structures class was to figure the stress at any point on a steel structure that was kind of U-shaped. You designed a program to do that, and it was fun to do that. Yeah, I enjoyed that. But it was not a day [when] all the software's canned. Back then, you had to design whatever software you wanted. (laughs)

Czaplicki: Right. Let me back you up just one second here before I go onto my next question about your college years. But back to Harrisburg. Growing up as a kid. You described it some, just in terms of what you did for your dad and playing in the band, but what was it like growing up in that town?

Brown: Oh, it was fun. I loved it. Great. Had a lot of good friends; still have friends there. I was in music, played in the band.

Czaplicki: What'd you play?

Brown: I played the trumpet. That served me well all through college; I played in the band in college and enjoyed that. It got you good basketball seats. No, Harrisburg was a great town. Of course, worked all summer, and went to school all fall and winter and spring. Some of the kids, of course, had to work at night during school. I didn't have to do that, so…

Czaplicki: Where would other kids work?

Brown: Shoe stores, a root beer stand. There wasn't McDonald's back then in a town like Harrisburg. But clothing store or gas stations.

Czaplicki: There's not much farm work?

Brown: A lot of kids did farm work—obviously in the summer, not during the year. Yes, there was a lot of farm work. Detasseling corn was all done by hand back

then; they didn't have detasseling machines. A lot of kids would do that. I was never doing that because I was out building roads, (laughter) surveying and testing soil, testing concrete, and all that sort of thing.

Czaplicki: So what would you guys do for fun?

Brown: While I was at high school?

Czaplicki: Sure, or even earlier.

Brown: We'd play—what all kids do—play touch football, which probably wasn't touch football. I lived across the street from a grade school which had a basketball court, outdoor, with oil and chip and potholes and all that. But we played basketball, played softball. Couldn't play baseball; when we'd do that, sometimes we'd knock the ball through the school windows, and that (Czaplicki laughs) was a bad thing; we were in trouble when we did that. It really wasn't that big a place, and there were no screens or nets. But did a lot of that. When we got old enough to drive, of course everybody cruised around and went to the root beer stand for french fries and root beer—drive-up stand. The kind of things kids did in the '60s—listen to radio.

Czaplicki: Given your family history, given the jobs you were doing, did you tinker much? Did you build your own transistor radio or work on any tree houses or structures or stuff like that?

Brown: You know, being an engineer does not mean that you're handy with your eye-hand coordination to actually (laughs) physically construct things well yourself. No, and I'm not really good at that sort of thing. A lot of engineers are, but a lot of engineers aren't. Engineering is also the conceptual design and that sort of thing. The actual craftsmanship of being careful and exact and precise and measuring and sawing—I'm not good at that, and I don't even care to do much of that.

Czaplicki: Jumping up to college, then. What did you do for fun when you weren't designing these computer programs and working out at the radio station? Did you go into town much?

Brown: Oh, sure. We would go to the movies. You could walk downtown from the campus back then. There were a lot of campus activities, intramural sports. I was in a fraternity, and in the fraternity you had to be on at least one intramural sports team. I loved to play basketball and softball, but I really wasn't very good at any kind of sports. I guess the eye-hand coordination. I didn't work out real good; they didn't think I was good on the basketball. I really loved to play basketball, but we had a lot better players than me. But I was tall and skinny then—I'm tall now, but I'm not skinny (laughs)—and I could run pretty fast, so they made me a receiver on the football team; I actually was able to catch the football. It was allegedly touch football, but let me tell you, when you jumped up to catch the ball, they touched you pretty

good. (laughter) So I played football for four years on the fraternity football team.

Czaplicki: What fraternity?

Brown: Phi Kappa Psi. And wasn't very good at that [playing football], but we were a small fraternity, and that was just my contribution. I was an officer for a couple of years—house manager—janitor. Maybe for a year, I was house manager.

Czaplicki: Did you live in the house?

Brown: Yeah. They allowed six students to live in the house then, and it could only be the officers. The reason I ran for house manager is I got my rent and my meals paid for that year, which was really a good deal. But to be honest with you, being a house manager to a fraternity house—you have to have a thick skin, because you can't please eighty guys (laughs) in how you take care of the house. It was a lot of work; we'd have parties every other week and cleaning up the house. I got a lot of help, don't get me wrong; a lot of people helped. But after a year of that, I thought, I can't be doing the radio, playing in the concert band, doing the marching band, going to engineering school, and do all of this stuff. So I gave up that thing and thought it was somebody else's turn to do that. But when we were in college, we did everything that kids did.

Czaplicki: Dance halls?

Brown: Not a lot of dance halls. There were always parties on campus at different fraternity houses or sorority houses. Occasionally we'd go off-campus, but very rarely back then. Things were a lot more staid, maybe, than they are today.

Czaplicki: I guess when I think of that area and that region, I just think of the musical culture that's coming out of there.

Brown: Of course, we had a lot of recording studios in Nashville at that time—probably still are.[5] Elvis did all of his recording there at RCA. I never went down to stand in line to watch him come in the door, but there would be hundreds of people when he was going in. He'd come in at two o'clock in the morning back then. I was involved in radio, and WSM, WLAC—big clear channel stations—WSM, country music, Grand Ol' Opry. Used to go out to Ralph Emery; he had a show that was on all night on Saturday night, after the Grand Ol' Opry. He and Tex Ritter hosted it.

[5] At the same time Brown was spinning his records at Vanderbilt, another future Edgar administration official, Howard Peters, was active in the local music scene and recorded two records in one of those studios. See Howard Peters, interview by Mark DePue, November 25, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL (ALPL), 34-35.

Czaplicki: Tex Ritter?

Brown: Tex Ritter. Remember…? Well, you're too young. Tex Ritter was a movie cowboy and singer back in the '30s and '40s. Used to go out to the studio—we were like radio groupies, although we were radio announcers, a couple of us—and we would go out there and sit around and watch them interview the different country music singers. We would come in and sit in the control room with them and learn what they were doing. We were just watching what was going on, and it was interesting. Tex Ritter told me he played the Saline County Fair at Harrisburg. He remembered Harrisburg. He said, "Yeah, I've been there." (Czaplicki laughs) "Played that once."

Czaplicki: So it sounds like radio is definitely a lot more—

Brown: Oh, I had a lot of fun.

Czaplicki: Were you thinking about doing this as a career, potentially?

Brown: Absolutely. My senior year I was on the air from eight till midnight on the campus station every night. Not every night—Monday through Friday, which my wife, who was my girlfriend back then, wasn't real enthusiastic about. And then on the air on WMAK from six in the morning till noon on Sunday, but I had to be there at five in the morning. We went off the air, I think, at three or four in the morning. They did transmitter maintenance, but I had to be there, because it was a remote transmitter—in the control room—to send signals back and forth to the engineer and test things out. I'd have to leave at like four o'clock and go to work on Sunday morning, so you didn't stay out real late on Saturday night either. But, no, I thought it was great. It was fun, exciting. The full-time guys were making twenty thousand dollars a year, and on the air four hours a day. They'd work maybe another hour or two on production, making commercials, that sort of thing. I thought, Boy, that'd be the berries to get that job. We were owned by LIN Broadcasting—WMAK was—and they sold the firm to—

Czaplicki: L-i-n-n?

Brown: L-I-N. They own WAND in Decatur, I think, still—the TV station. This was a big broadcasting company. We were like number fourteen in the market, out of, I don't know, twenty or thirty AM stations—or fifteen. We were second in Top 40, but the number one in the market was the other Top 40 station. But we had a lot of stations in between us. Mooney Broadcasting, out of Knoxville, bought the station they came in and said, "We're going to make this station number one in the market in a year." And I thought, Crazy. Of course, I'm a kid; I don't know, but, how in the world are we going to do that?

We had staff meetings every Monday morning, and came to work and some of the people weren't there. By the end of the time, they fired everybody that worked there, all the on-the-air personalities. We had Noel Ball; he'd

subbed for Dick Clark on *American Bandstand*, but he was getting older. They got rid of everybody and brought in all new people. They even replaced the ad salesmen. I can't remember if they kept the secretaries or not. The only on-air people they kept were us three weekenders; we'd sub for the other guys if they needed it during the week, but we did Saturday and Sunday. We were college students: a friend of mine, a fraternity brother of mine; and another fellow who was going to school at Lipscomb [University]. They were really good, and I was really bad. I thought I was good, but when I listened to the stuff, I wasn't good. So I started thinking about all of these things that—

Czaplicki: How did you decide that? What was it that made them good?

Brown: I didn't decide I wasn't good until maybe ten years after I left and went back and listened to some of the air checks. I was okay, but I really didn't have a lot of talent for it. But what I did decide is that there's not a lot of job security in this business and it's probably not a career that's going to last you into your old age. At that time I thought I was okay and good enough to get a job, but that may not be good enough to get a twenty-thousand-dollar-a-year job. (laughs) So I decided, Maybe I better pay more attention to my engineering—because I really liked that, too.

Czaplicki: How long had you been dating your girlfriend at that point?

Brown: I started dating her when I went to college. She went to school at Peabody for a couple of years and then transferred.[6] Her dad was a professor at the University of Illinois; he was a research professor at the experiment station in Dixon Springs, down in Polk County. She was studying special education and education and home economics—I don't know, she must have had two or three majors. I don't know how she was able to get a degree in such a short period of time, but she did it, going to three different colleges. We got married before she got out of college. She was two grade years behind me and was a year younger.

Czaplicki: That's what I was going to ask, if when you were making this job decision, you were thinking about marriage.

Brown: That's how I picked my location. When I graduated from college they had people coming on campus to interview you. The Illinois Department of Transportation came—actually it was the Division of Highways, Department of Public Works and Buildings then—and I interviewed with them. I interviewed with the Tennessee Department of Transportation—or Tennessee Highway Department then—the Federal Highway Administration, maybe a couple of consultants; I can't remember. But my dad told me, "You need to go to work for a department of transportation"—or the highway department, he

[6] George Peabody College for Teachers was an independent college prior to its merger with Vanderbilt in 1979. *Peabody College Chronology*, Special Collections and University Archives, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/speccol/digcoll/gpcchrono.shtml.

called it back then; we didn't have DOTs— "because you'd learn everything. You go to work there. You'll get trained in so many things that I can't train you in here, and then you can come back and work with me and take over the business when I retire."

I got off track about my wife. She transferred to U of I after I moved up here and took the job, and I picked out a place that had the U of I in it. (laughs) I could go to work at any place for IDOT, and I picked District 5 because it had U of I—Eastern [EIU]. She went to U of I 'til we got married; then she transferred to Eastern and we lived in Charleston, and she finished her last year at Eastern.

Czaplicki: Oh, really?

Brown: Yeah, she is a special education teacher. She's taught thirty years, probably, in several different school districts and retired here from the Springfield school district about two years before I retired from IDOT.

Czaplicki: You already started answering it. My next question was going to be your first job and how you went about taking that, but you already gave the answer to that with your dad giving you that advice.

Brown: Well, the other reason… Back then, the Vietnam War was going on. I did not want to go to graduate school, and I was ready to be drafted. They had the lottery, and I won it; I got a good low number for being eligible for the draft.

Czaplicki: A low number meaning you'd be likely to be picked?

Brown: Oh, yeah. I was on the list to be picked as soon as I graduated. In fact, they had me go for my physical in St. Louis before I graduated. I really wanted to start practicing engineering, and I didn't really want to go in the infantry. I could have enlisted, but then you had to stay in a year longer. As I recall, it was two years if you were drafted and three years minimum enlistment. At that point, IDOT said, we'll give you a draft deferment if you work on the interstate system, on construction. And by golly, that sounded pretty good, because I could start working and actually building big highways. I'd only built gravel roads working for my dad, and I thought big bridges, big highways would be pretty exciting.

So it was between them and the Navy, depending on whether I got my draft deferment. The Navy recruiter contacted me, and they were ready to give me a direct commission in the Seabees because they needed engineers like crazy in Vietnam for their port facilities, airfields, and that kind of stuff. That sounded more attractive than going through basic training, and at least I could practice the engineering. So I kind of balanced between the two, and "If the IDOT thing"—or Division of Highways thing—"doesn't come through," I told the recruiter, "I'll sign up for the Navy." But it did come through, so they did hire me. They were hiring engineers—they never even asked for my

diploma, and I didn't realize that. If you were a warm body, they needed… Because the interstate system in this country was such a massive engineering undertaking to design and build.

Funny story: When I was secretary—in fact, not long before I retired—one of the young gals came up from personnel to my secretary, my assistant—she was a character; she really ran the department—and asked Terry, "You know, we don't have Mr. Brown's college diploma in our files, (Czaplicki laughs) the personnel files." Terry yells in my office, because that's just the way she did things—she was a wonderful assistant; she really did run things—"Brown, did you ever graduate from college, or are you just faking it?" It just embarrassed this little girl, who turned red. (laughs) She was so embarrassed. I said, "Yeah, I graduated from college." She said, "Well, they don't have your diploma down there. You better bring it in here." (laughs) So I did. They asked for my diploma after I'd worked there for thirty-some years; probably thirty-two or thirty-three years before they ever caught up with me. But I had a diploma.

Czaplicki: We may as well get her name down. Terry?

Brown: Terry Layden. Yes. And she became my secretary—I guess administrative assistant is the proper term, because that's what she really was—when I became director of Planning and Programming back in '85, and worked with me until 2002. Long time. She retired at the same time I did. She was about my age.

Czaplicki: Personal feelings about Vietnam. How did you feel about that conflict?

Brown: I was in college during that. I told you already, we were really impressed with what the Kennedys were doing at that time. Both my wife and I—neither one of us were real thrilled about our involvement in Vietnam, didn't understand what good it was doing the country, but by the same token, my father was a big supporter of the war; my mother was a big supporter of the war. If I'd have had to go in the Army, I would have done my duty. I wasn't pacifist or necessarily—it wasn't like I was opposed to the war and didn't want to go, although if I got a chance to vote, I wouldn't have thought it was a great thing—but I really wanted to build things, big things. If I was going to go in the service, that's what I wanted to do, even if they were temporary things.

Czaplicki: Was there a lot of the tension, a lot of the activism that was going on around the United States on other college campuses—

Brown: Oh, absolutely.

Czaplicki: Was that going on at Vanderbilt too?

Brown: Yes. Oh, sure, it was. I didn't participate in any of that kind of stuff. Probably, to be honest with you, the civil rights movement did more for—there was more activism on college campuses back then.

Czaplicki: Especially given that location.

Brown: Yeah. And there were a lot of riots then in Nashville, terrible burnings of parts of the city, a lot of controversy.

Czaplicki: Was Nashville segregated when you were down there?

Brown: No, it was not, but my freshman year at Vanderbilt was the first year Vanderbilt was integrated, and there were people who left campus. Well, I won't say "people." I only know of one person, but when he showed up and found out that there were going to be African-Americans in college, he left. He wasn't going to go to school there, which I found incredible. Even though Harrisburg, as I said, in Illinois—schools were integrated the whole time I was there. Now, at one time, there was a black grade school in Harrisburg. We still did have what was called the colored section at the theatre, through probably my high school years.

Czaplicki: Really?

Brown: But there was never any sense of that in high school with your schoolmates. It was probably 15 percent African-American in Harrisburg. Never really felt like there was an issue of segregation or that sort of thing. But when you get in the South, it's a little different. But no, everything was integrated by the time I got there, except they were just starting at the college. We had the first African-American to play in the SEC on our basketball team when I was at Vanderbilt, and everybody was very proud about that.

I made one of my biggest mistakes editorially: I was station manager my last year of college, at the radio station, and there was a big controversy about Stokely Carmichael coming to campus to speak. Because we had what they called the Impact Forum, and they brought everybody, from Roy Wilkins, the NAACP; Strom Thurmond would be on the same bill. Back then he was not as old; he was a younger man then. (laughs) George Wallace while he was still governor of Alabama.[7]

Czaplicki: What was this?

Brown: Impact was the name of it.

Czaplicki: Impact.

[7] Southeastern Conference (SEC); National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Carmichael was the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He was a leading advocate of black power and grew increasingly radical during the 1960s.

Brown: It was a weeklong public affairs forum that they held in the gymnasium, Memorial Gym, and they'd fill it up. There'd be fifteen, twenty thousand people for a lot of the speeches. It wasn't that big—they didn't even have the balconies—but probably ten thousand people. Bobby Kennedy came. It was a big deal. Stokely Carmichael was coming., We'd had riots in Nashville before, and the newspaper, the *Nashville Banner*, ran a big editorial—and there was a big controversy—wanting the university to ban him. We ran an editorial that was freedom of speech, and he needed to come and talk. He showed up, gave the speech, and the town was on fire in spots before four o'clock the next morning.[8] (laughs) So I was probably young and impressionable and wrong. I don't know whether he did it or not, but he was blamed for it, and we had major riots that same day, right after he gave his speech. But civil rights—that was a big thing, and that was back in my mostly liberal days, I guess.

Czaplicki: Did you get involved in any movement activities beyond your radio station?

Brown: No, not really. I never was politically active—never—until I became secretary of transportation.

Czaplicki: I was going to ask you about your curriculum—something a little bit different. You had a straight engineering degree.

Brown: Yep.

Czaplicki: You never went to graduate school?

Brown: Nope. I had no desire. Well, I did, I should say. After I went to work for IDOT, after I'd been there for a few years—and my wife is still giving me the devil over this because she was going to graduate school, she wanted me to go. I was working on a construction then, and the hours—I just didn't see it. Then I finally decided I wanted to get an MBA, because I could see myself moving up into management. So I ended up getting about fifty hours towards an MBA—mostly with Indiana State. Then, out here, when it was Sangamon State, they didn't give an MBA. I just took some courses, mostly repeat courses that I'd already taken, because you can only transfer so much. I started working on an MBA at Illinois State, because they gave an MBA. Then I had to drop out because I had two professors who gave me C's because my class attendance was bad. I had A's on all the tests, and I went to see them both. They said, "Nope, class attendance is part of it." I said, "I'm working. It's sixty miles from Springfield to Bloomington, and sometimes I have to go to Chicago. I have to travel all over the state with my job. I can't get to class, and I've got to do my job." "It doesn't matter." I got a good grade here. So I got mad and quit. (laughs)

[8] The Nashville riots occurred April 9-11, 1967, resulting in 80 arrests and a score of injuries. The cause of the riot was a subject of intense debate. *New York Times*, April 9-10, 1967; *Chicago Daily Defender*, December 26, 1967.

Czaplicki: I was just curious, because I was wondering about debates that were going through the United States planning profession at this time. A lot of architecture programs and planning programs were arguing about community participation. There was a huge reaction against a lot of the projects, whether housing or highways, that were built in the 1950s. This is the time when people are arguing, democracy—we shouldn't be building… So I was wondering if those kinds of debates filtered down in your classrooms or if—

Brown: Oh, sure. I mean, I majored in structures when I was in college, so they didn't really get into that. We're designing bridges and beams and that sort of thing, trusses and all that. But I did take one class in highway engineering and another class in urban planning, and yes, those came into both of those. Yeah, absolutely.

Czaplicki: Did you have any feelings about those kinds of issues?

Brown: Only to the extent that, first of all, I was an engineer, and the goal is to provide whatever project needs to be provided—but only those that need to be provided. I'd worked enough with my dad, and I'd met with landowners, the public, out on projects. In fact, I remember one when we came to work one day and there was a whole barbed-wire fence stretched across this county highway gravel road, temporary, with wood—not even fence poles, just tree limbs and barbed wire—and a sign that said, "First person in road bad," and it was b-a-d, "will be shot." (laughter) I don't know if I was in college or high school. I was working for one of my dad's engineers that worked for him, and he said, "Go over there and let's take a shot; we're going to stake out this culvert." I said, "You go over there!" (laughs) "Aw, he's probably not there," and I said, "I don't care." So, no, I was pretty aware of the issues related to dealing with the public before I even got to college, recognized the impacts they [engineers] had on folks, and recognized that as part of the job. I think a lot of engineers did.

Really where the profession probably got the bad name in the '50s and '60s was through the political process, not so much the engineers. Of course, this is just my take on history, which may not be accurate. But a lot of the urban problems that came out of highway construction were more politically related because when they came to the choice of picking alignments; they wanted places where they had either the fewest voters or there were parks or open land. That caused people to get upset because you were taking either lower-income or minority areas, building walls in front of them. It wasn't so much an engineering decision as it was a political decision to do those. Congress then, after they kept making mistake after mistake, passed laws to make it harder and harder to do those things; today you have environmental justice as a major issue on projects that you have to deal with to show that you're not making any kind of disproportionate impact on low-income or minority populations. You can only take parkland if you can show there's no other prudent or feasible alternative to what you want to do, whether it's

highway or transit or whatever. So it really wasn't an engineering issue, as it was a political issue.

Czaplicki: On the environment, did the new environmental regulations that were being passed, sort of late '60s, early '70s—you mentioned environmental justice—did the EPA, both nationally and at the state level, have a major impact right out of the gate?

Brown: Oh, absolutely.

Czaplicki: On IDOT, or did that sort of trickle down later on?

Brown: Oh, no, right out of the bag. They passed rules, they issued regulations, and started a whole new process, a whole new business for people—and new professions. It's a major undertaking today; it was back in the '80s and '90s, but it gets more complex every year.

Czaplicki: How was that perceived internally, within the department? Was it split? Some people hated it, some people liked it?

Brown: If you were working and doing it, you thought it was the greatest thing since sliced bread. (Czaplicki laughs) If you were just a hairy-legged engineer that was trying to get something done, you thought it was just a bunch of wasted money and time that we didn't need to do. But an organization as large as IDOT, or cities or counties—the larger ones—they all have environmental capability, and they have environmentalists working for them: biologists, archaeologists. IDOT probably, while I was there, had the largest archaeological program in the country, as far as hiring archeologists to do recovery work, because of all the Indian artifacts around.

Czaplicki: Interesting. I understand that, politically, in the state of Illinois, some of these new measures were fairly unpopular. And there was a famous controversy about leaf burning. That used to be very—

Brown: Oh, yeah. That's still controversial. (laughs)

Czaplicki: So I was wondering, within IDOT, if right away this was something that said, Okay, we need to be on board with this or if there was bureaucratic resistance to the kind of mandates…

Brown: No. In any organization there's going to be some bureaucratic resistance, but I never sensed it. In fact, when we reorganized as a Department of Transportation back in '69 or '70, the office that my uncle headed was called Division of Planning, Programming, and Environmental Science. At that time, all the environmental work was part of the planning operation. It's been separated out since then. But one of the bureau chiefs in there was a gentleman by the name of Earl Bowman; he was the first chief of the bureau of environment. And I remember the first meeting I was at where he came to

talk about what we're going to be doing. I'd been with the department maybe two or three years; I was working out on construction. He gave me his business card, and it said, "Earl Bowman, Chief," and down below, it said, "Environment." I said, "Mr. Bowman, that's a big job." (laughter) He was chief of the environment. But they took it very seriously—the management of the department—at that time. I was down in the bowels, but Bill Cellini was the secretary at that time. Dick Golterman was probably the chief engineer, the former Cook County superintendent of the highways. They started right out from the get-go taking environmental work very seriously. Now, that doesn't mean everybody in the department took it very seriously, but the management and the direction was always to comply and exceed the recommendations—not that we ever got that kind of credit, because you make a lot of people mad. But no, I think the department has always, and continues to be a leader. You know how they're into Context Sensitive Solutions since I left, and I think they'll continue to push that envelope.

Czaplicki: Just to make sure we're clear on some dates here, when did you get married?

Brown: Groundhog Day in 1969.

Czaplicki: And you started working for IDOT?

Brown: June 15, 1968. So I was already working when I got married. I had to save up enough money to buy an engagement ring.

Czaplicki: Remember what you paid for it?

Brown: Yeah, I think I paid 375 dollars for the engagement ring. It was a high-quality diamond, but it's very small.

Czaplicki: (laughs) Where'd you buy it?

Brown: Oh, I can't…

Czaplicki: Did you go back to town, or did you…?

Brown: Went back to Nashville.

Czaplicki: Nashville?

Brown: Yeah. Proposed to my wife on the Vanderbilt campus after I graduated. We went back there for a weekend for a football game or something. I can't remember what for, but gave her the ring down there.

Czaplicki: What were your responsibilities when you first got hired by IDOT? What kind of jobs did they give you to do, and what were you working on?

Brown: One of the reasons I really wanted to go to work for them, in addition to the draft deferment, was they said, We got nine bureaus—everything from maintenance to design to materials to construction—and we're going to put you for a month or two in every bureau and train you in all of the stuff so you can then decide what area you really want to work in. And I thought, Man, that's great. My dad—that'll help me when I go back to work for him and leave the department, because that was still my plan. I went up to report to work a week before I was supposed to get there, because I needed to find an apartment—a place to live and all that—in Paris, "Gay Paree," Illinois. They took me in to see the district engineer, Mr. Malgrew, and he wanted to know all about me and my background—a very nice gentleman. Of course, I was scared to death. (laughter) He said, "When you come to work next week, you come in here and fill out the paperwork, and then you're going to go down to Casey [Illinois] to go to work on Interstate 70. We're building Interstate 70 down there, and we're just starting. You're getting in on the very first efforts of that." I said, "Oh, great." That sounded like a lot of fun. I said, "Okay, and then what bureau will I move to after construction?" He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Well, this training program." He said, "What training program?" And I said, "This training program where you work in every bureau." And he said, "Son, I don't know what they told you, but you're going to go down to Interstate 70, and you're not coming back until it's done." (laughter) And he was right. (laughs)

I worked down there for four years. We started before there was even any centerline punch-through, and punched the centerline through. My first job was to oversee the construction of five or six bridges. The six or seven bridges were on, like, a five-mile section, then I did the pre-grade, the dirt work and the box culverts—oversaw that. Did all the staking, layout, and construction inspection for about ten miles of pre-grade. By that time, we let the largest paving contract in miles that the state has ever let—not in dollars, but miles—three sections bid in combination, and we had about forty miles of dual-lane pavement from Marshall to Montrose, Illinois. Then I was like the assistant resident engineer overseeing it all, because we probably had forty, fifty people—construction inspectors and layout and that sort of thing. I was there 'til they opened it. And worked winters in design. So my dad's plan for me to go to this bridge office and get my structural license never materialized because I really liked what I was doing over there.

Czaplicki: I was going to say, you seem to have an unusual background—it's almost in your blood to be this engineer—so how did you feel when you were out there on the job site for the first time? Were you overwhelmed? Was it exactly what you should have been doing all along?

Brown: No, it just came natural. It was much bigger construction than I'd ever been involved in, and I learned a lot. I had an outstanding first supervisor, Heman Kravik, and he was just an outstanding engineer. Never got his license, so he could never really advance into management; he always stayed out in

construction for his whole career. But he taught me as much or more than anybody I ever worked for.

Czaplicki: How do you spell his name?

Brown: Heman, H-e-m-a-n, Kravik, K-r-a-v-i-k. A good Norwegian. He was a character. He was a tough taskmaster, but he knew his stuff, and he taught you to make a decision with the best information you had, take a risk when it's a calculated risk, and get things done and don't put off. I learned so much from him. In fact, IDOT has a tradition of twenty-five-year awards. After you've worked twenty-five years, they have a big banquet and they bring everybody in with your wife, pay for a hotel room, and feed you a nice meal. Then the secretary gives everybody a lapel pin and a signed certificate, and congratulates them and thanks them for their twenty-five years of service to the department. Everybody from highway maintainers to engineers, clerks, biologists, whatever. Of course one of the jobs for the secretary is to give a speech thanking everyone and then give everybody their award and have your picture taken with them and give them a picture. By the time I had worked twenty-five years I was secretary, so the department surprised me. I couldn't think of a better way of doing it; they brought Heman back from retirement, and Heman presented me with my twenty-five year pin, when I was secretary.

Czaplicki: Oh, that's great. So you worked under a few different administrators then as you were—

Brown: Oh, a lot.

Czaplicki: —starting your career. As I have it here, you started with Bill Cellini, right?

Brown: I didn't know Bill Cellini. Actually, I started under Governor Kerner. He was the governor, and Virden Staff was chief highway engineer.

Czaplicki: Virden?

Brown: Virden Staff. I believe that was his name. I may have my history wrong. It's forty years ago, (Czaplicki laughs) but that's what I recall. Francis S. Lorenz was the director of Public Works and Buildings; Virden Staff worked for Francis Lorenz. We were in the Public Works and Buildings then; it wasn't Department of Transportation. It didn't become a DOT 'til after I… It might have been as late as '70 or '71 before it was, because I remember I was—

Czaplicki: The date I had said '72; that's why I was confused.

Brown: It might be '72. You could be right. I bet you're right.

Czaplicki: And the Bureau of Aviation got folded in, in '73.

Brown: You're probably right. I just didn't recall all of that, but now that I think about it, I was working in urban planning, so it was probably '72. I'd left construction. That's an interesting story, but… I went to Decatur to the first meeting and Mayor Rupp—who later became a state senator—he was the mayor of Decatur and quite a character.[9] We all signed in, and I signed in, "Kirk Brown, IDOT," at the meeting. He's looking at the attendance, and all of us from IDOT signed—the district engineer was there, and he signed "IDOT." And Mayor Rupp said, "Did you guys leave an *I* out of that?" (laughter) Idiot. Then he laughed. He was a good-natured guy. But that's my first memory of being in IDOT, of somebody externally—

Czaplicki: I never thought of the unfortunate acronym.

Brown: Jim Rupp was quite the character.

Czaplicki: So you didn't really know Bill Cellini, but then—

Brown: I got to know him over the years.

Czaplicki: But I was thinking, initially at that time, when you were so low down.

Brown: No, no.

Czaplicki: How about Langhorne Bond?

Brown: I met Langhorne Bond once. I came to Springfield in 1977. I was promoted to head the urban planning section. Dan Dees was my boss, and he took me down and introduced me to the secretary. That's the first time I'd ever met the secretary, and I was scared to death. I didn't know what to call him; I stuttered and stammered and all that, and shook hands and met Langhorne Bond. So that was the only time then that I met Langhorne. He left IDOT when Thompson was made governor and actually went out and became FAA [Federal Aviation Authority] administrator.

Czaplicki: I think Carter nominated him and that was his landing.

Brown: Yeah, right. And John Kramer was made secretary. John replaced my uncle. When my uncle retired, Walker brought in John Kramer. Of course, that was pretty controversial at the time: Thompson picked a holdover from the Walker administration as the planning and programming chief, which was really a non-political job in the past. John really wasn't a politician either. He was the guy who wrote the Highway Trust Fund for mass transit.

Czaplicki: Kramer did?

[9] James H. Rupp was mayor of Decatur from 1966 to 1976 and state senator from 1976 to 1986. *Memorial to Senator James H. Rupp*, HR 652, 90th General Assembly (November 18, 1998), http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/legisnet90/hrgroups/hr/900HR0652LV.html.

Brown: John did, yes.

Czaplicki: And I understand that Bond actually also wrote the DOT, the U.S. Department of Transit, the legislation that created that.

Brown: Correct. And Langhorne is quite the character. I got to know him more over the years. After I got to be secretary, he'd call and talk; we were working on the third airport. He had me out in Washington a couple of times to give some speeches to different groups. He was quite a character. He was a race driver who had raced sports cars. He is quite a gentleman. John Kramer—brilliant. Probably the most brilliant person I ever worked for. John passed away a few years ago, a tragedy. His wife was a member of Parliament. She ran for mayor of London not too long ago. She didn't elected; she got beat. She was head of the RTA or whatever they call it over in London for a long time.[10]

Czaplicki: You mentioned that U of I has a tradition as an incredible engineering school. So why does Illinois attract all of these heavy hitters in the field of transportation engineering? Langhorne Bond is a pretty big deal, Kramer is a pretty big deal, right?

Brown: Yeah.

Czaplicki: It seems like an embarrassment of riches for our state.

Brown: I think it does folks a lot of good to occasionally bring in people like that from out of state. Kramer's background: he went to Stanford, then he was Rhodes Scholar. Langhorne and his family had a big airline in Southeast Asia or whatever; he was a lawyer. So he'd been involved in aviation, and it brought a lot to the department; it made the department very strong. Then a lot of people through those years were department employees that they brought up. First, Harvey Hack, planning and programming, and then Harvey went on to be deputy secretary at Pennsylvania DOT. Jim Pitts came out of District 1; he was the engineer of the year, went on to be director of planning and programming, and after that, went on after to be the director of the Michigan Department of Transportation. Warren Dannom, Kramer brought in. He was the head of our federal affairs and did all of our work with Congress and regulations. He went on to be secretary of the Iowa Department of Transportation. Gene McCormick was director of programming after Jim Pitts; he went on to be deputy secretary at IDOT, and then went on to be the deputy federal highway administrator in Washington for the Federal Highway Administration. So there were a lot of folks that came out of that Kramer–Langhorne Bond era who have gone on to a lot of big things.

Czaplicki: Yeah, it's quite an incubator.

[10] Kramer died September 22, 2006. For a brief but useful overview of his life, see *The Independent*, October 13, 2006, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/john-kramer-419833.html.

Brown: Yeah.

Czaplicki: Could you explain a little bit: how does the relationship with Washington work, or how did that work in the ,'70s? Did you get to see much of that when you were coming up or was that something you learned later?

Brown: I didn't have a clue what happened in the seventies. I was so far down they had to pump air to me. (Czaplicki laughs) I didn't come to Springfield till '77, then I worked in urban planning with all the metropolitan areas in the state, doing the planning that we did for those. It wasn't until '83, when I became deputy director of planning and programming, that I started getting involved with the Washington stuff. So I can tell you about the '80s and the '90s. I can't tell you much about the 2000s because I've been gone.

But there was a very close working relationship. We had an office in Washington, the state did. We had people working for the governor's office assigned just to DOT. It was a major effort. We had a staff of maybe three or four here in Springfield that coordinated all of our responses to federal regulations—because those were coming out all the time and causing you problems that you need to adjust—coming up with policies and strategies for impacting legislation. We were always fortunate to have an outstanding congressional delegation. In those days—I don't think it's quite the same today, but I don't know that for sure because I'm not there today—but boy, in the '80s and the '90s, on the delegation it didn't matter whether you were Democrat or Republican, you worked very closely with everybody. A great deal of trust.

Dan Rostenkowski was chairman of the Ways and Means Committee with the very first highway bill. In fact, we held up the whole highway and transit bill for the nation 'til we got about half the money for the Kennedy Expressway reconstruction back in the first highway bill when Governor Edgar was governor. The governor was a Republican, and Mr. Rostenkowski was a major Democrat.[11] Denny Hastert, before he was Speaker, and certainly even after he was Speaker; Bill Lipinski, Jerry Costello, Dick Durbin—all of the folks; Ray LaHood, Bob Michel before Ray—everybody worked together. They met, I don't know, monthly or whatever. I spent as much time working with Bill Lipinski and Jerry Costello back in those days as I did with Denny Hastert and Ray LaHood. They were talking to themselves; there weren't any secrets. We'd all get on the phone together and talk about strategy on the highway bills. It was a very close working relationship that Governor Edgar had with all of those folks—and Governor Ryan after that—and with both Republicans and Democrats working together to do the best they could for Illinois. Enjoyed that part of the job.

[11] Daniel Rostenkowski (D-Chicago) served in the Illinois House (1952-1954); Illinois Senate (1954-1956); and U.S. House (1959-1995). *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774-Present*, http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=R000458.

Czaplicki: I'll have some more questions about that later. Let's get out of the '70s here. But there was one pretty major event: 1979, the Crosstown Expressway is killed.[12]

Brown: Yeah.

Czaplicki: Would you attribute that more to community opposition, or was it the need for the funds that killing it freed up? Because, as I understand it, $2 billion in federal funds ultimately ended up getting distributed to other projects.

Brown: Yep. And I was involved in some of that with my urban planning. That was where I first got involved in some of the programming. I got assigned to put together the transit portion of that disbursement, or the programming of those interstate transfer funds. The decision got made before I got really involved in it, so I can just give you my perspective from after the fact and kind of down in the bowels of the organization. My sense from where I stood was it was community opposition, that there just wasn't the political will to move ahead. They bought a lot of land and everything else, so it wasn't the cost—although cost was huge—it was the opposition. From a highway perspective, a transportation perspective, it was a very needed project, very needed project. I always thought it was because of the opposition. Because they couldn't get it going, then there became a demand, we'd better use this money for something else before we lose it.

Czaplicki: Carter's administration, I thought, initially was threatening to maybe yank it.

Brown: You always worry about those sorts of things. They'd have to change the law to do that, but you worry. There are so many needs out there, if you got one that gets its toe stomped, it's a problem; the others then bypass it.

Czaplicki: Do you think Jane Byrne's support for Sen. Edward Kennedy's challenge to Carter for the 1980 nomination played a role?

Brown: I don't know. I wasn't at that pay grade back then.

Czaplicki: Fair enough. I guess we'll jump in the '80s for a minute. In '87, Governor Thompson began a push for a ten billion dollar highway infrastructure program. I was wondering, how do you set such targets? What's the planning process to develop a proposal like that? Is it something that you're doing and then Thompson just kind of signs off on it and says, That's great? Does he have his own consultants who are working on this thing and coming to you guys with ideas?

[12] The Crosstown Expressway was to have run south along a corridor near Cicero Avenue, from the Kennedy-Edens junction to Midway Airport, then east to the Dan Ryan Expressway. Mayor Richard J. Daley strongly supported the Crosstown, but was opposed by Gov. Dan Walker and a coalition of community groups. The project was eventually killed in 1979. Roger Biles, *Richard J. Daley: Politics, Race, and the Governing of Chicago* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 196.

Brown: No, and I worked on that. (laughs) At that point I was—

Czaplicki: I thought you might have.

Brown: Yeah. In '87, I was director of planning and programming for the department. Greg Baise was our secretary. The way those things work: first of all, IDOT has an extensive data collection program on the condition of all the roads and bridges. They have extensive data on how much money is going to come in and an estimate over the future. IDOT budgets unlike any other state agency or government agency that you're probably familiar with. They construct their budget on—now it's probably a six-year basis—we did it on a five-year basis. Because it takes so long to get projects ready, you have to have a stable ability to project out the money that you have ahead. You actually do financial modeling over about a five-year period. Now, you pass a budget for one year, but it's based on that financial modeling.

So we would estimate. Let's make up some fictitious numbers, because I don't remember what the exact number is, and let's say 25 percent of the roads are in bad shape and need repair today, and X percent of the bridges are in bad shape and need repair today. They have the capability, IDOT does, of projecting that out over five or six years to say, here's what it's going to be with the level of funding that we have, and it's going to go from 25 percent to 30 percent over the next five years. What we would do is project out what our needs were going to be to maintain it at 25 percent over five years; to say, here's the additional money we need to hold it at 25 percent. Or really, 15 percent is probably where it ought to be, and here's how much it's going to cost for that. You can estimate that for roads and for bridges.

Then you give the governor—and we gave Governor Thompson—a set of what we call service packages, which said: For this level of increased money, we can let the roads get this much worse. If we do nothing, here's how bad they're going to be; for this little bit of money, we can do this much; for this much, we can hold them constant; and for this much, we can make them this much better. And we're never going to get them all; there's always going to be some of them that need—it doesn't have to be, but nobody's ever willing to pay that level of money. So we would give him a series of three or four options

Then on the other side you would come in and say, Here is how much money we need to complete all these new freeways; here's how much the Chicago Area Transportation Study says they need for congestion, add lanes projects. We worked with the RTA and the transit agencies on the transit side to say, Here's what they need to keep their system in repair and here's the new expansion projects they want to do; and set those out into some service packages, to set a goal for what we would then develop a revenue package to fund. I can't remember all the details of how we did it, but we might have narrowed that down to two service packages after discussing it with the

governor and giving him those options. You could narrow that down and put that on one piece of paper, what all these billions of dollars would accomplish, in very simple terms. It took a lot of planning and data to do that. Then for those service packages, you could come up with a different set of menus for revenue options, and you'd work that through his staff and finally with the governor to determine a plan.

In '87, we came out with a plan for a gross receipts tax—as I recall, if I'm not wrong—and I think there were only three people who thought that was a good idea: the governor, Greg Baise, and myself. (laughter) We went around the state and got nowhere with it. We really got beat up with that. But in '89, we were able to pass a gas tax and bonding program, and a major transit initiative, that stood us in good stead for a long time. Governor Edgar then was really successful with that first highway bill to get some more funding for the state.

Czaplicki: So basically in the time we've been talking, you've really described this enormous planning capacity at IDOT. Was this capacity ever farmed out for other agencies, that kind of expertise? Were you guys ever taken as a model for other agencies? Would they have sent people to see how you do stuff?

Brown: Sure, but it's a little different in that the other agencies don't have… First of all, there's really only four major capital agencies that are involved in capital with the state. IDOT's number one; the toll road would be number two. IDOT and the toll road, in the past—I'm sure they do today too—always worked very closely together.

Czaplicki: I was going to ask you what the relationship was.

Brown: The secretary is a member of the board. Rarely goes, though there was a time in the Edgar administration where I had to go. But the IDOT has historically done all the planning for the Toll Highway Authority. The Toll Highway Authority really is not a planning agency; they're an implementing agency. IDOT did the planning for the East-West Tollway in DuPage County. IDOT did the planning for the last toll road that was done. IDOT's doing the planning for the Elgin-O'Hare, which may be one of the next ones; or Prairie Parkway or the Lake County extension; or, if it's Illiana, my guess is IDOT will do the planning and toll road will then take it over.[13] That's the way it's been in the past because they don't have the planning capability, and they use IDOT's planning capability for the planning.

The Capital Development Board—they only do buildings—modeled their consultant selection process off of IDOT's while we were there. But DNR [Department of Natural Resources] does improvements—they do road improvements in state parks; they have delegated those off to IDOT to do, but

[13] All of these are proposed expressway projects in the Chicago metropolitan area.

they essentially do the planning and decide which roads to get done, and IDOT just does the implementation. Other than that, there really aren't capital agencies in the state where that's applicable. Where it is, it's being used.

Czaplicki: That's really interesting to hear. I was also wondering—just in terms of management practices, you have such an enormous, enormous staff. Were there seven thousand employees when you became secretary?

Brown: Something in that neighborhood, yeah. Seventy-eight hundred, I think. I don't remember anybody wanting help with their management. (laughs) They all liked the way they were doing it themselves, and we certainly didn't offer it.

Czaplicki: I guess we should move into you getting involved with Governor Edgar. When did you first meet Jim Edgar?

Brown: Probably the first time I met him, I was in Chicago and I needed a way back, and they said, The secretary of state's got a helicopter at some hospital up on the north side of Chicago or Evanston—I don't even know where it was. But they said, "If you can get up there in the next forty-five minutes, you can hitch a ride back." That's the first time I ever remember meeting him; all I did was introduce myself, and that was the gist of it.

I think the next time I met him was when we went to see him on the '89 package—no, I take this back, it must have been in '83, the first time I met him. I was with Greg Baise, and we were passing a license fee increase; Thompson had announced it, or we were proposing one. I don't remember what year it was. There were so many, and it all blends together in the past. But I remember we were in trouble because Thompson had announced this license fee increase and nobody had had the courtesy to tell the secretary of state we were proposing to raise license plate fees. The secretary was not in a happy mood, (laughs) and justifiably so.[14]

I had some involvement with him there, but honestly, it was maybe two or three times that I talked to him before he started talking to me about being secretary. I think George Fleischli, a number of the members of his [Edgar's] advisors, and the governor decided they wanted to hire a professional to be secretary of the Department of Transportation—not that the non-professionals had not done a good job. Greg Baise did an outstanding job. He brought the highway system up and did a lot with the transit system, got the third airport initiated. He really did an outstanding—and he was a politician. But they wanted to hire a professional so they interviewed a couple of us, and the governor interviewed me and picked me. It was simply: recruit a professional.

[14] For Edgar's discussion of the proposed fee increase and his response, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 22, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 66-68.

Czaplicki: We're going to get there. I definitely want to know more about that process. But go back to this meeting for a minute, because I wasn't aware of this. This is interesting. So were you successful in soothing Secretary of State Edgar for this license plate increase?

Brown: I don't think so. (laughs) I don't think so. You'd have to ask him about that. I don't recall a whole lot about it because I wasn't even director at that time—I think I was deputy director—I just happened to be in the meeting.

Czaplicki: But you went with Baise—

Brown: I went with Baise. I was his technical resource, and it wasn't a meeting where they needed a technical resource. (laughs) He did all the talking; the secretary of state did all the talking.

Czaplicki: What his style like in that? Is he a guy that storms? Would he yell?

Brown: Oh, absolutely not.

Czaplicki: Could you just tell that he was peeved?

Brown: Yeah, he was peeved. He was peeved. But no, his style is never… He is very laid-back, I guess. Don't get me wrong, he's very firm, has his own ideas, but he was always a very good listener, and was back then—always wanted to hear. But he would make his decision, and that was his decision. But no, he was always a gentleman. He never, *ever* used foul language or even rough language. I remember one time he got really mad at [James] Pate Philip for something that happened—I don't even remember exactly what it was. I think it had to do with maybe holding up the budget for Lake Calumet [Airport] that we were trying to pass. The governor was mad, and he was starting to get a little agitated. He doesn't get really agitated, but he was getting agitated, and he said, "Well, it's—he's—he's just…goofy!" (Czaplicki laughs) And that would be the strongest statement he would ever… You rarely even heard that type of a—you wouldn't even call it an outburst. No, he was very self-assured—which is good in this business—and very calm and deliberate about what he's doing.

Czaplicki: So would IDOT do much with the secretary of state's office?

Brown: No, not a whole lot. Fund them! They siphoned off road funds.

Czaplicki: Because there seemed to be some issues that came up under Thompson, where I scratched my head a little bit, because they were related to highway but you'd think it would be a secretary of state… One was a seatbelt law, which seemed to be something that the Department of Transportation was on board for, especially—

Brown: IDOT always took the lead—

Czaplicki: And the governor was, but I didn't hear much about secretary of state.

Brown: Right. No. The secretary of state is not a traffic safety organization. Now, they—

Czaplicki: But Governor Edgar pushed very hard for DUI stuff.

Brown: Correct. That was his agenda. (pause)

Czaplicki: Were you involved with any of those efforts when he was secretary?

Brown: No. Like I said, before he interviewed me, I may have met him three or four times. Maybe more—you'll see him at an event of something—but not a whole lot of involvement. I certainly had no political involvement.

Czaplicki: So you weren't involved in his campaign?

Brown: The engineers at IDOT—the culture I came up with is you would never get involved. You never voted in a primary. You were a professional. You didn't want to be identified with one party or another, and it worked very well. The IDOT was run by professionals in the middle and parts of the upper management, and we never… Of course, once I became secretary, I became active politically. But we intentionally stayed out of it.

Czaplicki: Internally, as Edgar ran, were you impressed with his candidacy? How did he strike you as a candidate?

Brown: Oh, absolutely. In the few times I'd met him, just the way he comported himself; yes, absolutely, I was impressed with his candidacy.

Czaplicki: While he was running, did you get a sense for who was advising him on transportation policy? Presumably they were having discussions about… I understand you guys can't be political. Is there a way that you still try to maintain contact with the different candidates because one's—

Brown: No, I didn't. No, I had no contact. The top management at IDOT—Greg Baise; Sonny Greco was the head of finance administration; and Mark Stron, our legislative lobbyist—they all maintained those kind of contacts. I'd hear stories of things like that, but I didn't participate. In fact, I had made my decision that I was going to leave IDOT at the end of the year.

Czaplicki: 1990?

Brown: Was that the year I was appointed? No, '90 was the election. I was appointed in '91. Yeah, at the end of the year. Right after the election, in November, I had put together my resume and an application because an opening for the secretary of transportation in Arizona came up. My wife always wants to move south or where it's warm. It's in Phoenix, and Arizona DOT at that time

was a vibrant organ—not that it isn't now, although they've closed the rest areas; they're having terrible budget problems. But I thought, It's time for me to be a secretary, and I'm never going to be secretary in Illinois because it's always been a political job or somebody nationally prominent, like Langhorne Bond or John Kramer, and I'm not that. I'm really tired of breaking in secretaries. I'd like to run one on my own, and Arizona's a smaller DOT. There'd been some interest in other states contacting me in the past, and I just said No; I didn't even want to talk to them because I was happy staying here. But I decided it's time for me to move on. It's a change in governor, and all that kind of stuff. I remember it was a bright, sunshiny day in November, right after the election, and I'd just sealed up my package with all my stuff to be considered, to mail to the governor of Arizona; they had a very structured process. I'm walking out the front door of the department to go to the post office to mail it, and Sonny Greco, who was our finance chief, was walking in the door.

Czaplicki: What's the name?

Brown: Greco. Al Greco. Sonny was what we called him. There's a Greco supply company. Sonny's passed away now. I'm walking out the front sidewalk at IDOT and he's coming in, and he says, "Do you know who's going to be the governor's staff person to support the transition for Governor Edgar?" I said, "No, I haven't heard, haven't a clue." He said, "Well, guess." I said, "Are you going to do it, or Stron?" And he said, "You don't have a clue, do you?" I said, "No, I don't." He said, "They're going to name you to be the governor's staff person for the transition team." I said, "You're kidding!" He said, "No." Mike Lane was secretary at that point. Greg had left, and Mike had been secretary for… I said, "I'm shocked." He said, "I'm telling you, that's what's going to happen." So I got in my car and started driving to the post office, and I said, If I'm going to do that, I can't be out looking for a job. It'd look too bad. So I got me a hamburger, came back to the office, and I threw it [the application] in the wastebasket. I became the staff person, then I got interviewed by the governor, and I got to be secretary.

Czaplicki: I was going to ask you who you had contact with on the transition team, but you were on the transition team?

Brown: I was not on the team. Those were all big honchos. I was the governor's staff person. I scheduled the meetings, I set up the agendas, I gave them briefings because I was also the IDOT person, and I helped assemble the big report, the transition report, that they put together.

Czaplicki: So for all of the transition, not just transportation issues?

Brown: No, just transportation; I just did the transportation piece. There was staff that did that other. I was paid by IDOT, but I was officially working for the incoming governor on that issue.

Czaplicki: Did you have strong feelings on who you thought might lead the agency?

Brown: Oh, I hadn't even thought about being secretary 'til George called me — George Fleischli, who was the governor's infrastructure guy—and said, "Would you be interested in being secretary?" And I said, "Well, yeah. I can't imagine you'd consider somebody like me." He said, "No, the governor has decided he wants to hire a professional."[15]

Czaplicki: But independent of you, just as you were looking at the political scenario and thinking, maybe he's going to replace Mike Lane or something, did you have any other candidates in your mind that you thought might be a good… I know you weren't thinking of it for yourself, but…

Brown: No, I hadn't, because my focus had been on leaving and looking for opportunities elsewhere, because I figured I'd gone probably as far as I was going to go in Illinois. As I recall, back then I kind of thought Mike Lane would probably stay over.

Czaplicki: So George Fleischli delivered the info to you.

Brown: Greco delivered that I was on the transition team, but George was the one who called and asked if I would be willing to talk with the governor about the job, yeah.

Czaplicki: So you talked to Edgar.

Brown: Yeah. He interviewed me and Ralph Wehner, who was our director of highways at the time, for the job. He may have interviewed other people; those are the only two I know of.

Czaplicki: How long and involved a talk was that? Was it just one interview, or did you have a series of conversations?

Brown: As I recall, there was just one interview. It probably was an hour and a half. It was a long interview. Because there was a new highway bill coming up, he was very interested in what my thoughts were about how to get federal funds for highways and transit—the transit funding for the Chicago area and highway funding for the whole state. Wanted to know what I thought about all sorts of things. I don't recall all the details, but it was a significant interview in terms of time.

Czaplicki: Did Governor Edgar strike you as having a vision for transportation? Were there things he wanted to do development-wise or with the highway program?

[15] George Fleischli was a "very strong pusher" of Brown and explains why in his interview with Mark DePue, January 27, 2010, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 26-27.

Brown: Transportation wasn't his first priority. That wasn't the big thing he came in to do, as you might… Not that it was Thompson's first priority, but that was a big thing for Governor Thompson; it wasn't for Governor Edgar. Over the eight years he was governor, he wanted to make sure that the department was run effectively, cheaply—because he's very austere. (laughs)

Czaplicki: And the state was in financial crisis.

Brown: And the state was in huge financial crisis at the time. He wanted to make sure that we were taking care of the roads that we had, and he really was interested in helping economic development in some of the downstate areas because he was a downstater. He certainly was fine with Chicago transit and Chicago congestion and knew that we had to make a substantial investment there, but he wasn't necessarily going to lead the charge to do that. But he wanted it run professionally. He wanted a professional process. When we put the five-year program together, he wanted to make sure that we had a solid foundation in what we were doing on fixing up the existing roads and bridges. Not that there weren't occasions where some legislator wanted this—he might call and say, "Hey, we need to talk with this…" because of his legislative agenda. But the whole foundation for the whole program—he wanted it based on that planning. He wanted to be able to say, "I left the roads better when I left office than they were when I got there, or as good. If they're getting bad, it wasn't because we failed on the planning process; it was because we just didn't have enough money." And yeah, he might look at, we need to spend some money on building a road to Quincy in southern Illinois when we had the luxury of doing that. He would have definite opinions on those, based on what he saw as a vision for economic development for the state. And Thompson had those same—it was very similar in that. The difference was Thompson was very aggressive at this, and the governor [Edgar] was not.

Interesting thing—especially in today's day and age, in the way state government has gone on the last seven, eight years—Edgar always said he was not for raising the gas tax or license plate fees. But toward the end of his eight years, I was always coming in and beating on him, saying, "We're going to have to get some more money eventually." Well, you get another federal bill coming up right after I leave, but he said, "I just don't see that passing; I have other priorities for what I want to do." I said, "We really need to start. It takes time to get this going." He let me go out and advocate for a gas tax increase, and I was his secretary of transportation. When the reporters would ask him: "I'm not ready. I don't think I can support it." He hadn't made the case to me yet, that I'm for that, but he was fine with me saying what I… He could tolerate independence, to some extent, in his staff if he thought that they were not trying to get him in trouble, not trying to paint him into a corner. A lot of that laid the groundwork for the Illinois FIRST program, but the

governor had his priorities in education and health care and other things that he wanted to see implemented, which I wasn't involved in.[16]

I'm guessing that's what they were. I can't even recall, but education was a big one, and that's where he was looking to take care of things. We weren't on his—I could never get it on there. But he started recognizing that eventually something was going to have to happen. He let me go out and work underground on—I told him we needed another runway at O'Hare. He was opposed to another runway at O'Hare. But I worked with the business leaders in Chicago, trying to work things out. We were never able to get it done at that point, but—

Czaplicki: Did you say work "on the ground" or "underground"?

Brown: Underground. Not really out publicly. And of course, that aggravated a lot of folks like Pate Philip and Lee Daniels. But the governor was more than open in letting his staff, as long as they kept him informed of what they were doing—now, if he just absolutely was opposed, he would say … It wasn't that he ran a loose ship; he ran a tight ship, but he would tolerate independence, and he wanted to hear other sides of things that he didn't agree with, which I thought was outstanding.

Czaplicki: So was that the general rule toward information sharing? I often wondered—if you'd see an interview or a story, you'd see this person speaking on behalf of the administration, instead of, say, Mike Lawrence. What kinds of things had to go through Lawrence and be an official statement, and what kinds of things could an agency head talk about?

Brown: About anything. Now, you had to have the good sense to know that it was something, first of all, that you ought to be talking about. If it wasn't something you ought to be talking about, that's just good common sense. If there was something that you knew was exceptionally sensitive, I would call Mike Lawrence; or Dick Adorjin, who was my public affairs guy, would call Mike. But it was not controlled, in other words, in a way that we had to get everything approved before we said it. We would use our good judgment to know when to contact them, and I assume if we'd have exercised bad judgment… (laughs) And occasionally in any organization, that happens, even people who worked for me.

Czaplicki: Can you recall any times that happened?

Brown: No, I really don't. I'm sure it did—I'm not saying it didn't—but it wasn't so bad that I recall it now. But there were occasions where I had employees who

[16] The Fund for Infrastructure, Roads, Schools & Transit was a program approved by the Illinois legislature in 1999, which raised $6.3 billion in new revenues to secure the sale of bonds for transportation and school projects. Neighborhood Capital Budget Group, "Illinois FIRST," http://www.ncbg.org/public_works/illfirst.htm.

might talk to the media and say something that I didn't like, and then you'd call them in or call them on the phone and say, Hey, look, this is what we're doing here, and handle it this way next time. And they were always very cooperative. If they weren't, then you'd take further action, but I don't recall ever having to do that in IDOT. Not that people didn't say the wrong things at times—it happens—but you have to have an open relationship with the media. Or we felt we [needed to], in the Edgar administration—and did have.

Czaplicki: In terms of your selection to become secretary, what was the vetting process like? Did you have to submit financial statements, and this sort of thing?

Brown: Yeah, I don't even recall all of it. But you have to do all of that. I don't recall everything I had to do—it's been a long time ago. It's been, what, eighteen years ago, nineteen years ago? But yeah, you have to submit all kinds of things, fill out a lot of forms. I'm sure they ran you through all the criminal records and all of that kind of stuff. There might even have been an interview with the state police, where they ask you questions. I can't recall.

Czaplicki: I was just curious whether you were such a known quantity already.

Brown: No, it didn't matter. All the way through, we had to fill out the forms. Then you only get a two-year appointment. You didn't go through that vetting process every time, but you had to fill out all the forms, submit all the data, and all that kind of stuff, every time. So I don't know. I expect there are state laws that… It was routine stuff.

Czaplicki: So you get named as secretary. Were a lot of patronage pressures suddenly placed upon you? Was this a whole new kind of political dimension to your work that just had been absent in the past?

Brown: We were the poster child of patronage and patronage lawsuits, so I was pretty familiar (laughs) with the issue, having worked there. The *Rutan* lawsuits, the highway maintainers.[17] We had also been sued because of lack of minority hiring and hiring for political reasons. Thompson had even said, "What does it take to be a highway maintainer?"—one of his famous quotes—"A Republican is as good a qualification as any." (laughter) There were a few more. You had to be able to lift forty pounds, you had to have certain eyesight, but the Republican… He was quoted as saying that. We got sued, and the courts didn't agree with that. (laughs)

[17] *Rutan v. Republican Party of Illinois*, 497 U.S. 62 (1990). By a 5-4 vote, the decision extended the rule of *Elrod v. Burns*, 427 U.S. 347 (1976) and *Branti v. Finkel*, 445 U.S. 507 (1980), determining "that promotions, transfers, and recalls after layoffs based on political affiliation or support are an impermissible infringement on the First Amendment rights of public employees." Justice Brennan wrote the majority opinion. For Edgar's philosophy on managing his personnel as secretary of state, his expectations for their performance, and his attitude toward the civil-service-protected holdovers he inherited, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 15, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 7; 15-16; 24-31.

And actually we had a second lawsuit—I don't remember the name—but it affected minority hiring, and we were under court orders as to how we interviewed and hired our highway maintainers. The opposing attorneys for this lawsuit, for many years, had to approve the questions that we asked; we couldn't ask any other questions at the interview. They had to be scored numerically, and then they would periodically audit our files to see if we were following… We didn't have to do that on temporary [workers], but then we got sued on that, and we had to do that on temporaries to make them nonpolitical—and they were nonpolitical. We hired as many Democrats as we did Republicans. I'm not going to name names of Republican chairmen who were just furious about our hiring practices of highway maintainers.

Now, that's not to say we didn't do political hiring. We had Rutan-exempt jobs, and they continued to be hired through the political process. But even those at the management level, the governor's office would generally—they always sent me candidates for chief counsel, public affairs. Dick Adorjin, he was a public affairs guy, and he served every secretary, Democrat and Republican, for thirty-some years. He was selected on his merits. But it was a Rutan-exempt job. The director of aeronautics—the governor's office would say, I've got a couple candidates I want you to talk to, and give us your thoughts. They might say, I like this one, but if any one of them is unacceptable, you tell me, and we'll find somebody else. So while they were political jobs and hired through the political process, I could have said no. There would probably have been a limit to how many times I could have said no—I'm sure there would have been. Sometimes I might have a choice of two or three people, but it was still a political process; it wasn't an open…

Czaplicki: When you said the governor's office would give you names, would this be coming from a variety of people?

Brown: If it was something like director of aeronautics, it might come from the chief of staff, or Janis Cellini handled the personnel stuff under Governor Edgar.

Czaplicki: And did they also leave plenty of those picks just for you to make? Did you get to make your own patronage decisions?

Brown: First of all, I never made patronage decisions. When it came to IDOT employees, they were all based on what I considered to be merit and the most qualified person for the job. We did make patronage decisions for those that were covered.

Czaplicki: I mean, the Rutan-exempt ones, I was thinking about.

Brown: Oh, the Rutan-exempt jobs? Absolutely. I told you that we might get two or three… But even the Rutan-exempt jobs. There was a core of jobs at the department that every governor I worked for—I worked for more governors but was only involved, really, with three governors, Thompson, Edgar, and

Ryan. They wanted the secretary to pick the head of finance and administration, who handled the budgeting and all the financial planning for the department; they wanted the secretary to pick, for certain, the director of planning and programming, who did the technical planning for the capital budget; and the director of the division of highways—so those divisions. Those were Rutan-exempt jobs; they all had to be approved. But I never had an issue as secretary, for twelve years, in getting my recommended candidate approved. They were always professionals, either from the department or outside the department from state government, other agencies, or in one case, the governor's office for finance and administration, which had been in the Bureau of Budget. But the director of traffic safety, director of aeronautics, chief counsel—for those management jobs, I would get candidates. Now, if I had a candidate, I'm sure I could have put it in.

Czaplicki: Put it in the hopper.

Brown: Yeah. Some of them were sent with, "We'd like you to hire this person unless you have an objection, and if you do, we'll find somebody else." Or many times it would be, "There's two or there's three I want you to talk to and pick one out." And they might be talking to other departments, talking to those same people, too. But that's the way the process worked the whole time I was secretary, under both governors. So essentially, I had the professional team for the core of the department's professional operation, and it was that way before. Those weren't necessarily professionals that the secretary might pick, but the secretary got to pick their team for the core jobs.

Czaplicki: It's interesting, just as we've been talking and thinking about some of the past directors, your hiring was seen really as this break with tradition. That's the way the press portrayed it, that Edgar had this choice. He could go with [Gene] Reineke, former patronage chief, or he could go with this true-blooded professional. But you did have guys like Bond and Kramer.

Brown: Right.

Czaplicki: In many ways, it almost seems—

Brown: But they didn't come up through the ranks. I think that's what the press…

Czaplicki: Right, that's sort of the difference.

Brown: They weren't necessarily DOT professionals, but they were professional transportation people—Kramer a policy person, and Langhorne was mainly aviation.

Czaplicki: It was just interesting; that seemed to sort of drop out in a lot of the coverage. It was politics versus something, but—

Brown: Because it's a good story, I guess. Also, the fact that Harry Hanley was secretary for one year while Greg Baise ran Governor Thompson's reelection campaign, and Harry had forty years with the department; a solid professional. Then he retired after Greg got done with the reelection campaign, and Greg came back to be secretary. He took a one-year hiatus. So I wasn't even the first person through the ranks to be secretary, but all that got lost in the translation.

Czaplicki: The press also said there was quite a debate over whether to pick you or Reineke. Did you ever get a sense of that?

Brown: I didn't. I knew Gene was interested in the job, but I never got a sense of it. And I'd worked closely with Gene—he was CMS director, as I recall—and never had a… He had an interesting article after he left; I saw it in the press. I work with Gene occasionally now in our afterlives; I've talked with him. He said probably the best thing that ever happened to him was when he didn't get to be secretary of transportation, because he got to be chief of staff.

Czaplicki: Yeah, that's a nice plum. (laughs)

Brown: Yeah. And I, of course, worked with Gene as chief of staff, and he was excellent to work with.

Czaplicki: You've touched on this a bit already when you talked about your interview with Edgar and his attitude toward transportation, but in terms of agenda setting for the next several years of the department and your department's priorities, were there any particular projects—you mentioned that Edgar wanted economic development for downstate—that they felt really strongly about, that they wanted you to add to your agenda?

Brown: He was very concerned about southern Illinois, to some extent. He wanted us to do something on Route 13 down in southern Illinois. He was very concerned about western Illinois in terms of getting the highway done to Quincy. From his highway priorities, I would have to say that those were really important. The airport situation was very important to him in terms of the third airport, and he wanted to keep Meigs [Field] open. Major controversies, both of them.[18] Those were top priorities. His agenda was: keep the roads in as good a shape as you possibly can; don't sacrifice to build new roads; but if we're building new roads, we've got to help the folks down in southern Illinois, and we got to get that road done to Quincy; and we got to do something about the third airport. Meigs would be more like a firefight, the little thing that came up on the side.

Czaplicki: So from your standpoint as secretary, did those things that he named—where did they rate in terms of IDOT priorities? Did they suddenly become elevated because the governor was very interested in them?

[18] [When Mark gets to these events with Edgar, cite here]

Brown: No.

Czaplicki: Or were those things that were already on your radar and you said, "Oh yeah, he's right, we've"—

Brown: All of them were on our radar. When they became the governor's real priorities, they got a lot higher on our radar. Yeah. Oh, absolutely. IDOT has always seen their role as to get implemented what the governor wants to get implemented. They obviously want to keep the highways in as good a shape as they possibly can first, but one new road is the same as another as far as designing or going out on construction, for the bulk of the employees. They want work; they want to be employed. Now, when you get into the planning area, then people start having their own opinions.

Czaplicki: That's what I was interested in, in terms of the overall comprehensive plan.

Brown: That's what it is. But it's just been so ingrained over the years that our job is to give the decision-makers—or -maker in the case of the governor, which sometimes has to be ratified with the legislature—choices, and to be able to communicate those choices and the implications of those choices to them in ways that they can make an informed decision about what they're doing. We were never shy in making recommendations of what we thought they ought to do, but we also understood that wasn't our role as professionals. Our role is to generate the options for them to consider in terms of first, structuring the program and overall direction, and to get that in a way that they can understand it and make a decision. Then with major projects, get to them with options and ways they can make an informed decision to fit what they need for either other legislative agendas or their vision for the state, or both.

Czaplicki: I was thinking about this transition process. You said you're pretty much familiar with three governors.

Brown: Yep.

Czaplicki: How would you compare the transition process?

Brown: I can't compare the transition process to Thompson because I was down in the district driving stakes in the ground.

Czaplicki: Yeah.

Brown: He was governor forever or whatever—fourteen years. (laughs) I didn't come into Springfield until the middle of his administration. But the transition process was very similar.

Czaplicki: Between Edgar and Ryan?

Brown: Yeah. Very similar. We had a transition committee. I wasn't the staff (laughs) for the governor at that point because I was one of the directors being interviewed as part of the transition when Ryan was governor.

Czaplicki: Was there an effect on staff morale? Is it the kind of thing where, say the Rutan-exempt positions, they worry about their jobs?

Brown: No.

Czaplicki: No.

Brown: Well, I shouldn't say no. We always thought a little bit about it, but the way I felt about it… Even though I was thinking about leaving, I wasn't thinking about leaving because I was worried I was going to lose my job because the governor changed. I figured I was doing a good job. But I also knew that if I left my job, I could find another job someplace else, working for another DOT.

Czaplicki: With less snow.

Brown: Maybe. That would have been my wife's wish, and that probably would have been the case. I think most of my counterparts felt the same way: they'd like to stay, maybe a little nervous, but it wasn't going to be the end of the world. They weren't going to change how they did their jobs, because they hadn't changed, in the core. Now, the folks that did come through the political process, I'm sure there was a much greater sense of urgency and concern because they might change, and they did change with governors.

Czaplicki: How about your own transition? Five billion–dollar budget, almost eight thousand employees—was that just something that you were ready to take on? How did you get your hands around something of that scale?

Brown: I had already worked at IDOT for twenty-two years, so I had a great deal of knowledge. I was head of planning and programming, which meant I had been in charge of the capital budget and planning for about six years, and I'd worked in that office for about six years before that. So I had a great deal of background in the department when I took over.

Czaplicki: And planning and programming is high enough up the chain that you get a wide view of the department?

Brown: Oh, yeah. You control the capital for all modes: transit, aviation… I had been involved in everything that was going on. I guess one of the other things that's important about IDOT for as long as I can remember, and I managed it the same way—it was very collegially managed. Secretaries had lots of discussion. It wasn't that we had lots of staff meetings, but we might have lots of meetings where he would call in five or six key staff that related to an issue—if it was airports, it'd be the director of aviation, maybe the budget

guy, the public affairs guy, the lawyer, and planning person—and have lots of discussion on all options and potential problems and criticism. (laughs) It was a very collegial management style that Langhorne Bond had—I heard; I wasn't in the management then, but I was when Kramer was there, and Baise. So a lot of people had a lot of knowledge about a lot of things at IDOT over that twenty-five-year span. So I didn't see it as intimidating or daunting.

I had a lot to learn. In fact, I was still learning things IDOT did the day I left. Walk out the door, I'd find out something we were—I said, "Do we do that?" (laughter) And I thought I knew it. I'd worked there thirty-five years and been secretary a third of that time. It's a very large organization. But it's important to have that type… The governors that I worked the closest with, Edgar and Ryan, managed things the same way. There was lots of open discussion on policy issues related to transportation. I'm sure there were on other areas; I just wasn't included in those.[19] There'd be key governor staff and maybe myself and one or two other people from IDOT engaged in those, either with the chief of staff—generally with the chief of staff first—and then later with the chief of staff, with the governor.

Czaplicki: So you've given us a sense of a lot of your official portfolio, what IDOT does. Were there any duties that Edgar wanted IDOT to handle unofficially?

Brown: No, not that I recall.

Czaplicki: How about a typical workday for you. Any rituals? Is there a way you went about your business? Show up at 6:00 a.m.?

Brown: Oh, no. No, no. I'd probably show up at 8:30, maybe nine o'clock some days, unless I had an eight o'clock meeting. I get up very early in the morning, but I have to read a whole bunch of papers and drink coffee and have breakfast, and then I'd go in the office. I'd probably be in Chicago one or two days a week. We had an office in Chicago as well as in Springfield. I really never allowed my staff to schedule long meetings because I figured part of their job is to—just like I felt I needed to get the governor something that he could understand—spend the time to get something to me I could understand, if it was something I was not familiar with. Don't just come in and lay a whole bunch of gobbledygoop on me and make me sort through it. I'd generally try to limit the staff meetings to certainly not more than an hour, and many times less than that, so they needed to condense stuff down. Made an exception to that on the five-year highway program because I wanted to go through that. I probably spent a whole afternoon with the staff, both the financial and planning staff, on that to make sure I understood it thoroughly, knew exactly what they were doing and putting in and taking out.

[19] For the importance Edgar placed on the deliberative process, see Howard Peters, interview by Mark DePue, January 21, 2010, 27.

Because we couldn't work with patronage to really do anything. The only real power that the department had for the governor to exercise in getting a legislative agenda was the capital program, at that point. Because when they called to tell you they had a highway maintainer they wanted you to hire, you could say, "Get them an interview." (laughter) And then you'd get the calls, "How come you hired that Democrat?"

Czaplicki: How did your role change once you became secretary? What new responsibilities got added that you didn't have to contend with before?

Brown: Ribbon cuttings, groundbreakings, a lot more speeches. A lot of meetings with interest groups, different committees around the state wanting improvements. Even more meetings with the legislators than I had before, of which I had a lot. Getting involved in the flood of '93…

Czaplicki: I got that on here.

Brown: Incredible situation, terrible tragedy in the state. George Fleischli and I spent the summer—sometimes we were together, but most the time apart—just lived the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers for the spring, summer, fall of '93. Because of that, I was advance man for the governor. I got a whole bunch of stories there. Normally you would have an advance team, but there would be so many places—George would be doing advance work in one location, and I'd be setting it up to get him [Edgar] in to see a problem we had, what was going on here, so that he could see firsthand what we were doing and make sure we were doing the right thing. There are two stories to tell about that: one for the governor, one for George.[20]

The governor—we were down at Tamms; it was the Len Small Levee. It's a privately owned levee, and we were raising it. IDOT had our trucks out. My job was to make sure that all the local officials and everybody were getting the resources they needed. I met with mayors, county board chairmen, county highway engineers, township road commissioners, and coordinated our response out in the field. Of course we didn't even have cell [phone] service in a lot of areas back then, so it was a major chore. We had guys working—this is down in Alexander County—to raise this levee, and the river's rising. I told the governor's office—he was going to do a fly-around to different places to look— "You need to come down here because we got a lot of work going on and the folks are really working hard, and they're getting depressed. The population—they are worried, and I think it'd be good for the governor to come down. Put that on the agenda." So he did, and he was going to fly into Cairo Airport. I had one of our helicopters there to take us around. I get out there, and boy, we're just going great guns.

[20] For recollections about the flood by other Edgar administration officials, see: Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, October 22, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 1-25; Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, April 1, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 37-46; Howard Peters interview, January 21, 2010, 4-8; Fleischli interview, 40-43.

I said, "You know what?" There was a little town—I don't even remember the name of it—that was down inside this levee area. I said, "I need to go see how many houses are…" because the governor was going to ask me. He was just always wanting to know: What's going on, Who are the folks, all this kind of stuff. I better go down there and look at that. I went down and looked, just so I had a feel, because I'd never been in the town; I'd always been along the levee. Get back up there, and there's nobody on the levee. All of our trucks are gone; there's nobody there. What's going on here, I'm thinking to myself. So I get in my car and I take off driving, and I see one of our maintenance trucks is driving down the road. Of course I flagged him down, and I said, "What's going on?" He said, "The levee just broke. We're driving through, house by house, giving an evacuation order." I said, "Oh my goodness, the governor's going to be here in an hour, and the levee just broke." And it broke right at the town. If I'd have been looking about a mile away, I would have seen the levee break, but I wasn't thinking that it was going to break.

So I go to the airport, the governor's flying in—and of course I called; he was already in the air, flying there first. I talked to the staff and I said, "Look, we've got a crisis down here. I think that the best thing for him to do is to have a brief press conference after he looks and surveys the damage and we see what's going on." The state police had a plane there, and I'd gone up to see what the extent of the damage was so I could brief him, but it was still flooding. He got there maybe an hour and a half after the levee broke, and he said, "We're going to have the press afterward. I want to see what's going on. We've had a tragedy here." So we got him up in the helicopter, flew around. Hadn't been up, maybe ten minutes. We see this area that's an island, and there's about six people and some livestock on the island. Of course, they wave at us. The governor said, "We need to get down there and get those people off." It's not like this was a flooding torrent. It was gradually rising water, but he said, "They need to get off of that. Just stop right now, get back to the airport, and come back here and get those people off." First thought: not, "What am I going to do, What am I going to say," but, "We got to get those people off that island."

Another flood story, on George Fleischli. We were at Alton, and we met George up there for lunch. We had a meeting with the mayor of Alton about getting some pumps and a few other things, and went downtown. They must have had, I don't know how many convicts and all these people sandbagging, and George said, "You know, the governor needs to come down here and thank these people for what they're doing." So we called the governor's office to come down to thank the folks, went to lunch, came back, and there wasn't a soul there—not one soul there. And he said, "Kirk, you find a place for the…" Because we were doing advance work, you had to find a place for the helicopter to land—all this kind of stuff. He said, "You do that, and I'm going to find out where everybody went." I got back there with the governor in about an hour, and all these people had come back. I guess they'd

taken a break. But we thought, here we brought him down here to thank them, and they were all gone. (laughs)

Czaplicki: Ghost town.

Brown: And of course they appre… It was really important for him to get around, because you can't imagine what a tragedy it was for the folks. A tornado is a terrible thing and the destruction is a lot worse; and a flood, it just floods your property, but it goes on and on and on and on. So part of it was making sure that he's there to see the mayors and the people, to make sure that we're doing our jobs; but part of it is just to keep folks moving and fighting, and he did a great job with that.

Czaplicki: While we're on that topic, we may as well talk a little bit more about that. IDOT did have a huge role—

Brown: We were the first. A guy from New Jersey, a friend of mine who was the head of the New Jersey DOT, said it best one time. He and I were sitting, talking, and he said, "In any kind of a major disaster, the DOT is the first responder and the last to leave," and that's true. The reason is because the DOT is the only state agency that has massive amounts of personnel and large equipment that they can deploy almost immediately. You have to be that way to get ready for snowstorms. You're geared up for that kind of stuff. So if there's a tornado, our trucks are generally there first to start clearing the stuff, and you're the last to leave because there's cleanup and you've got the trucks to haul the trash away.

Czaplicki: And is that formally built in? Before the flood, did Illinois—

Brown: No.

Czaplicki: —have a disaster plan?

Brown: We did periodically. We did storm cleanup. We always did that, but we were never as organized; we became organized. We weren't organized, when it first started, to cope with anything on that magnitude. We'd be organized to cope with a tornado going through a small town.

Czaplicki: So was the Plainfield tornado the biggest cleanup prior to that that you experienced?[21]

Brown: Probably. I don't know. I haven't really thought about it. It might have been. But we'd have tornado cleanup—would have been the gist of it. I don't know what it was like in the '40s and '30s. We weren't really thinking of all the

[21] On August 28, 1990 an F5 tornado killed twenty-nine people and caused $165 million in damages on its course through Plainfield, Crest Hill, and Joliet. National Weather Service, "A Study of Chicago's Significant Tornadoes," http://www.crh.noaa.gov/lot/?n=SigChiTorn.

things we could do at the time. That was part of my job, to get out there and make sure folks were… We weren't thinking about bringing in pumps, finding pumps. We weren't thinking about raising levees. That isn't what we do. Raising roads to keep the road from flooding, so you can keep a bridge open over the Mississippi River; helping them sandbag around a water plant to keep the water supply going. Not that they weren't able to do that, but our folks didn't know that's what they were authorized to do.

I remember one time the mayor of Quincy called me—Schultz, Mayor Schultz—and he said, "You guys are doing a great job helping us, but we got to ask you to do something out of the ordinary. We need help raising the levee on the Missouri side of the river, to keep the bridge over."

Czaplicki: Make it higher?

Brown: Um-hm. And he said, "We got to have sandbags. We need sand. We got the volunteers; we need to get the materials over there, and we're going to need quite a bit of trucks and material." We'd already repositioned people from the east side of the state over to Quincy, so we repositioned a few more sets of trucks, and we were working on a levee in Missouri, essentially. But it kept the bridge open between Hannibal, Missouri—which was important for the hospital is in Quincy for people who live in Hannibal. A lot of people might say we shouldn't have sent our folks out of state at the time. But that levee ended up breaking. If you remember, there was a fellow that got mad because he didn't want to go to work, and he blew it up, remember?

Czaplicki: Oh, that particular one? Because I know a few failed, but I do remember that specific case.

Brown: That was the levee that failed.

Czaplicki: He was the only one convicted, right?

Brown: Um-hm. Two of our employees got a presidential medal from President Clinton, and I went down to the ceremony in St. Louis.[22] They pulled an elderly couple out of a flooded subway, a highway that went under a railroad track, in Missouri. And not a single soul ever asked me why IDOT was getting the award for rescuing people out of their car that got submerged. Never. The question never got asked. So you had to do a few things that were… But Missouri DOT didn't have the resources to deploy.

Czaplicki: I was going to ask you how much coordination there was.

Brown: They talked to MoDOT, and MoDOT just… The Missouri was flooding; the Mississippi was flooding. They had their hands full, and they just didn't have anybody they could send right away. Mayor Schultz said, "Can we get help?"

[22] See Al Grosboll interview, October 22, 2009, 18-20, for his memory of the flood heroes ceremony.

And I said, "We'll redeploy from District 5 over to the Paris area and get people over there tonight," which we did.

Czaplicki: So your response, in many ways, would be fair to characterize as improvisational?

Brown: Absolutely. That's why I had to be out there, because we were always having to… All these folks that say, "Think outside the box"—those are the folks that get themselves in trouble. But the famous test pilot, who wrote the book—Chuck Yeager—it was "pushing the envelope." If you fly outside the box, you crash; but you have to be able to know when to push the envelope. That was what was required, why George and I were out there all the time to make sure that the state response—me, the DOT; George, overall state response, because he was my boss; and John Plunk, with IEMA [Illinois Emergency Management Agency]. It was a major effort. And Dale Risinger. He's a senator now. He was a district engineer in Peoria then. He's a state senator today. He retired.

Czaplicki: What was the last name?

Brown: Risinger. He was our district engineer. I remember taking him to a meeting up at Oquawka on the Mississippi. We're sitting down there—it was the first meeting he'd been to. I'd been up and down the river. And Dale was one of our most innovative, aggressive district engineers. He's a very talented engineer and administrator. That's why he's a state senator now. I told the mayor, "Now, Dale here, you met." "Oh yeah, I know Dale." I said, "Anything that you need with this flood, you contact Dale." He said, "I don't know that we're going to need any rock or…" I said, "Anything you need, *whatever* it is—if you need ambulance service, whatever—you contact Dale and his people, because we're going to be here working on the levees and the roads. Dale's the guy in charge. Dale, give them your home phone number." (laughs) Dale's told this story many times. He says, "You brought me in there and you told me, 'Here, do whatever this guy tells you to do, and here's his home phone number (laughs) so you can get him at home twenty-four hours a day.'" But that's what it took. It was a real crisis for the state and a terrible tragedy for the people that were going through it. It was just awful.

Czaplicki: How did Governor Edgar respond to this administratively? Was this just a pure exercise in delegation, like, "Guys, get out there; do what you do best,"—

Brown: No, like I told you… Well, first of all, he said, "I want all you guys out there. I want you on the front lines. I don't want to see you until you've got this problem solved and we've got it whipped. I want you to let me know where I need to be." Then he'd go places where we hadn't let him know, to check on us, to see if we're… He saw it as his role to make sure that the state had a full response because it was such a serious issue for the state. A huge economic

loss for the state and the people. No, he saw his role as assigning us to get out there and do the duty, but more than that, checking on us by meeting people and talking with people to make sure. He'd always ask them, "Is Brown doing what he's supposed to be doing? Are we getting things done?" He was a manager.

Czaplicki: Coming out of this experience, was there any follow-up meeting or report written where you sort of took your lessons learned and said, "All right, in the future…" to try to institutionalize your experience and not have to improvise as much?

Brown: No. Probably should have been. But there were things that we did do. We did a whole analysis of all the roads and bridges that we needed to raise—that were economically feasible—in case we have another issue. We got to revisit it again in '95. We had a lesser flood in '95. But no, we didn't. Probably should have, but it wouldn't matter because the people would be all new, and when that happens they're probably not going to pick up a book or manual to read that was written twenty years before. The last flood before '93 was in the '40s. My uncle was working for the Corps of Engineers. I don't remember whether it was '43 or what, somewhere in that timeframe, and he was doing a lot of the same things for the corps that I was doing with IDOT; but that was fifty years before. The next time we have to do that, it's probably going to be twenty, forty, fifty years. I'll be dead. The way we fought it in '93—there'll be different means, different equipment, different materials. So I don't know how relevant it is.

Czaplicki: So it's not the kind of thing you can put in institutional memory.

Brown: We didn't, and we didn't because we never really had the time to actually sit back and say, "Hey, we did a fine job there; we ought to do that." Even if we had, it would have been more patting ourselves on the back probably than what good it would do somebody thirty or forty years in the future when the conditions and every bit of personnel were different. It'll be different.

Czaplicki: You can't really drill—because IDOT must be involved in these Homeland Security drills they do.

Brown: Yes.

Czaplicki: Correct?

Brown: Absolutely, and we do all of those. Those earthquake drills, building drills—all of that. We have major tabletop simulations, then other… Yes.

Czaplicki: How long have you done those for?

Brown: Oh, twenty years.

Czaplicki: Twenty years?

Brown: Yeah.

Czaplicki: But the flood is just too big of an event to—

Brown: Yeah. It covered the whole western and central part of the state, up to, like, LaSalle, up the Illinois. Maybe they do that now. We didn't do flood drills. Earthquake, building blows up—all of those kinds of things, there were regular drills on.

Czaplicki: In the reading that I was doing, I did notice that before the flood, late ;80s and things, I saw a few stories here and there where IDOT would be involved trying to acquire properties that were in flood plain.

Brown: Um-hm.

Czaplicki: I was wondering where that fell into your area of responsibility. That's not something that would come to me. I figured DNR would do that—

Brown: They do now.

Czaplicki: —or Agriculture. How come IDOT was…?

Brown: The Division of Water Resources was in IDOT when it was formed. They were part of the Department of Public Works and Buildings, I guess. I don't know all the details. That might not even be right. But they were in IDOT as long as I could remember, as I came up through management. The Edgar administration moved them over to DNR because they thought they were more likely… And they do flood plain regulation. I told them that's great to take them, because regulation wasn't our strong suit at IDOT. Our people didn't like doing regulation; they wanted to build and operate. They operate the third-largest highway system in the country, and they want to build things and operate things. They're not big into telling you how to run your business or what you can build out of. That's not where they see their mission, and they don't do a good job—we didn't, and I doubt that they still do. I don't know, maybe they do. But that's just not the nature of the reason people work for IDOT; they want to do things and actually own and operate and do transportation projects. So I was more than happy to say, "Go over," because that was a regulatory arm of the department. But boy, I said, "If there's ever a flood again, then the key people work for me," because they were the ones who gave us the forecasting for heights. Their guys were out walking the levees to tell me when they were going to fail, and they had a lot better judgment than the Corps of Engineers.

Czaplicki: Interesting.

Brown: Yeah. I trusted those people implicitly. I remember sitting down at that Len Small Levee I told you about. The governor came later that day. We were trying to decide whether we needed to evacuate Tamms and some of the communities down there. They were calling into Springfield and they were giving me projections of where they thought the water was going, what they thought the elevation was going to be. The guy from the corps that was there, their engineer, told me we needed to evacuate. I said, "Well, our guys are telling us something a little different."

Finally I got the corps guy and the county engineer, and there was an old farmer that had been through I don't know how many floods. I said, "You go up in the state police airplane"—the state police had an airplane still down there—"and look at the…" The corps guy still wanted us to evacuate; the old farmer came and told me, "No, the water's going to go here"—showing me on a map. I'd kind of set up an emergency command center at the county highway engineer's office. So I told the county engineer and the sheriff, "I wouldn't evacuate. I'd put monitors here. We'll put people here, here, here, and here, and we'll man them twenty-four hours a day. I'll have guys there. We'll watch the water. This guy, he's seen it"—he was probably seventy-five—"I'm betting he knows what's going to happen. He's seen the levees break I don't know how many times. And our guys are saying something a little different but pretty close." It worked out. But those are the kind of things you have to deal with when you have that kind of a situation. It's not like the dam is… Right where the levee breaks, it's a terrible catastrophe: a horrible gush, a torrent, and it wipes out everything in its… But we're talking about huge areas that got flooded, and it comes up gradually, and you have time to react. You sure don't want to issue an evacuation order if it's not necessary.

Czaplicki: It's too disruptive for the people or—

Brown: Oh, absolutely.

Czaplicki: —it adds a burden to everybody else?

Brown: No. Well, they got to go someplace. They got to figure out… And it's disruptive to them, for their business. The guy selling gas—he wants to keep selling gas. If he doesn't sell gas that day, he doesn't make any money that day. The diner in town has to close because you evacuated the town; they don't make money that day. They're not on a salary. A barber can't cut hair.

Czaplicki: What was your relationship with the Army Corps of Engineers like during this disaster?

Brown: Oh, it was good.

Czaplicki: It was?

Brown: Oh, yeah. They provided good technical resources. I didn't mean to disparage the… He just had a different opinion of what needed to go. They were always on the spot. They were there..

Czaplicki: For a long time, the corps kind of had this mystique of just how professional and expert they were. Do you think the flood did anything to hurt that?

Brown: No, no. They are very professional. (laughs) They know what they're doing. They know what they're doing. This was a case where it was a judgment call.

Czaplicki: How are you doing?

Brown: I'm fine.

Czaplicki: Let me know if you want to take a break—

Brown: No, I'm fine.

Czaplicki: I don't think we have too much time here. Actually, I'd like to go back to 1991, your first year as secretary, just because several important things seemed to happen when you came in. One is that President Bush, as I understand it, was proposing his budget for fiscal year '92. He inserted this plan where road funds would increase gradually over five years, but he was cutting mass-transit funding. That was a target, to slash it. So I'm wondering how that factored in your calculations, and if you had much input, IDOT, into his budget process. Is this the kind of thing the White House listens to? Does it hear from the states, or was this just a decision that they made?

Brown: The answer to your question is no, the states would have no input. No state would have input in their budget process. Also, to be perfectly blunt, the president's budget process for transportation is just a nice thing for people to look at as you prepare the legislation for the next year. It's not like the state budget that the governor prepares and takes to the legislature, although in recent years that's been a disaster. The president's budget for highways and transit—they'll put forth what they want to say, and generally Congress gets it and says, "Mm, that's some good reading, that's nice." Then Congress sits down and works on a bill, and the administration is in there as a participant like everybody else. Now, they always have the veto pen at the end, but my experience in my twenty-five years of dealing with it—and I don't know what it is today because I'm not necessarily a participant; in fact, I'm not. I participate just on the fringes today. But Congress is the one that writes the budget and the transportation bills, with input from the administration. But just because it's what the president proposes, isn't… Bush proposed cutting Amtrak every year to zero, too, and it never happened. You're not going to slash the transit programs, and we wouldn't have supported that. We worked very closely with the City of Chicago on the legislative agenda for both highways and transit the whole time I was there, even though we were Republican administrations. I can't ever remember not having a united

approach to what we wanted to do with the City of Chicago on transportation agenda.

Czaplicki: So Sam Skinner's presence at high levels in the White House—because ultimately he becomes chief of staff.[23]

Brown: Yeah.

Czaplicki: So you don't think that necessarily gave Illinois a leg up or any sort of—

Brown: Oh, sure.

Czaplicki: —extra advantage, or did it?

Brown: Sure it did, but it wasn't necessarily in how they prepare the budgets. OMB [Office of Management and Budget] prepares the budgets. Transportation sometimes even struggles in department in how to deal with that. Of course, it's really nice to have a secretary of transportation where you can pick the phone up when you're secretary and know them by first name. (laughs) And then even chief of staff later on. It's just incredible. Here I was, a country boy from southern Illinois, who didn't know anybody—got to know the Speaker of the House. I worked with the president of the United States when he was in the Senate.

Czaplicki: Heady stuff.

Brown: It is when you stop and think about it. Of course, now Ray LaHood is secretary of transportation. I'm not at the DOT, but I worked very closely with him for many, many years, and I worked for Denny Hastert when he was in the House here in Springfield. That's a major advantage for the state, but it's really more on administrative issues and expediting, solving problems.

The Great Chicago Flood of '92, I was in Alabama, and I was at a shopping mall. My wife's folks lived in Alabama at the time, and we were on our way to spend a week down there to visit them. I can't remember the name of the town, but it doesn't matter; there was a whole bunch of outlet malls down there, and my wife wanted to go. We got there, and I didn't care about going into these silly stores, but she was having a great time. She went in, so I said, "Look, I'm going to go back and call the office." I didn't have a cell phone back in those days, so I'm at a pay phone in this outlet mall, and I call into the office to talk to Terry. I said, "Anything going on?" and she said, "Yeah. There's something bad going on. They're evacuating the Loop." I said,

[23] Starting in 1968, Skinner worked in the U.S. attorney's office under Jim Thompson and succeeded him in 1975. He then joined Sidley & Austin as a senior partner from 1977 to 1989, a period during which he also served as Regional Transportation Authority chairman. Pres. George H.W. Bush appointed him secretary of transportation in 1989, and elevated him to chief of staff from December 16, 1991 to August 23, 1992. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_K._Skinner.

"They're what?" She said, "They're evacuating the Loop." I said, "Why?" And she said, "I don't understand why, some flood or something." I said, "*Flood*?" (laughs) She said, "You need to talk to Wehner"—he was the director of highways—"He's on top of it. He can tell you what's going on." So I called Ralph, and he told me what it was. I was familiar with the streetcar tunnels. There have been a thousand plans for how to use them—none of them were any good (laughs)—over the years. I'd even been in them, so I knew what we were talking about and understood what had happened. At that point, I still didn't understand any issues related to IDOT.

We go on down to the house, and I'm watching the national news and interested because it's Chicago. It's a terrible situation. In fact, watching the national news that night at my in-laws' house, and Kirk Dillard called down there. He said, "Kirk, you're going to have to get back up to Chicago." I said, "Why's that?" "Because of this flood." I said, "I'll be glad to do whatever you want me to do, but I don't know what I'm going to be needed for." He said, "Sam Skinner wants you up there. We're having an argument with the city over who's going to pay for what and this, that, and the other. Sam said, 'Where's your engineer? Where's Brown?' And they said, 'He's not up there,' and he wants you up there. The head of FEMA is going to be calling you in just a few minutes. He's going to be there tomorrow, and they want you to be up there as part of these negotiations." And I said, "Look, if you and the city are arguing, I can't negotiate for the governor, and I don't even…" He said, "The president's chief of staff wants you up there. If he wants you up there, I think you better go up there, don't you?" and I said, "Yes, sir, I do." (laughs) Sure enough, the head of FEMA called me in about thirty minutes and said he wanted to talk with me up there the next morning. I said, "All right, I'll get up there."

So I called and said, "Send a plane down to pick me up at the airport at Alex City, Alabama." They came and got me. My wife said—I took enough clothes for two days— "Is that all you're taking? You're not going to take all the rest?" I said, "No, I'll be back tomorrow. They're going to find out when I get up there that they don't need me, and I'll come back. We're on vacation; I'm going to come back and finish out the vacation." I can't tell you how many vacations I had interrupted. I got up there, I went to this meeting with the head of FEMA and all the folks, and just as I suspected, there wasn't a whole lot that I could do or offer. There were issues as to who was going to do what, and that was between Kirk and the mayor's chief of staff. There was really little input that I could have on that.

Czaplicki: Wasn't there some finger-pointing about, IDOT was supposedly supposed to inspect the piling project, but you guys didn't inspect it because the city never told you they were done with it, or something like that?

Brown: No, no. Actually, there was no finger-pointing like that, that I recall, about the cause of the flood or anything to do with IDOT. Or there certainly weren't any

discussions at that point; everybody was just trying to find a way to fix the problem. This was an issue of what was declared disaster and who was paying for what and the federal reimbursement. The discussions were all financial issues related to federal reimbursement, as I recall.

I went back to my office after that meeting that morning. I called Aeronautics and said, "Are there any planes going back to Springfield? And I'm going to need a plane back to Alabama to rejoin my wife, or I'm going to be divorced." I was making my arrangements and my secretary in Chicago, Irene, came in. She said, "Wehner's on the line and he wants to talk to you right away." I got on the phone and Ralph said, "You've got to get down here to the Dan Ryan field office right away." I said, "Why's that?" He said, "Just get down here. You've got to see this. We've got a problem with Hubbard Street." So I get down there and they've got this video… The Kennedy Expressway, where it goes under—it's called Hubbard's Cave—there's what we call a main drain for the Kennedy Expressway, and goes right down the middle underneath that. It's a huge—I can't remember how many [feet] in diameter, but it's big enough for people to walk down. We got this video, and it looks like a carwash coming in everywhere because the river—we had bisected the tunnels with the drain and capped them off with concrete. Well, the river's higher than the main drain, and its water pressure is forcing water in. If you get a failure, it'll flood the main drain and flood Hubbard's Cave because it's lower than the elevation of the river. He said, "We got troubles we got to figure out." He had our consulting engineer, who had designed the thing, there. I said, "All right, let's get out there and figure out what we need to do." I had them get Kenny [Construction Company] on board, which was the contractor the city was using, so that we were coordinated. They were a big contractor that we used, too.

So we met out there that afternoon, and a representative from Kenny, our consultant, and Ralph Wehner went down to look at that, to see if we could determine what we needed to do to keep it from failing and closing the Kennedy Expressway. The guys came back up, and the fellow from Kenny said, "It's too dangerous. It could fail any minute. If it fails while anybody's down there trying to work—even trying to put bracing in could cause it to fail—it'd kill anybody that's in there. Our consulting engineer said, no, he thought that it was not that close to failure and that we could reinforce it and save it. So now I'm sitting here with two guys: our consultant saying one thing and our contractor that's going to do it, saying that. Nobody had lost their life yet, at the Great Chicago Flood. But if it fails, we close the Kennedy Expressway, and that's just the last disaster the city needed at that point. So I said, "All right, go back and talk to your guys, and I want to talk with Wehner without you guys here"—my chief engineer. Talked to Ralph, and Ralph said, "It's pretty dangerous. It's pretty dangerous. We sure can't afford to lose the Kennedy Expressway, but I think it's probably too dangerous." But he said, "I'm not an expert, you know; I'm a highway engineer." I mean, he is a

highway engineer, but he's not a structural engineer that designed huge sewers.

Czaplicki: Right. It's a different problem.

Brown: Yeah. We're all specialists in little things, but we get to be management over broad things. But that's why you want a consultant. You want a guy that knows that sewer, or the contractor. We got back together and the contractor told me, "I think maybe it's worth taking a risk." I said, "I've thought about it. Nobody's got killed yet. We're not going to get anybody killed yet. Ralph, flood the sewer." (laughs) And the consultant looked me. He said, "What do you mean, flood it?" I said, "Flood it. That'll lower the pressure, right?" He said, "Yeah. It won't stop the pressure." But I said, "You'd probably cut it in half." And Ralph said, "What if it rains?" I said, "If it rains, then we'll have to close the…" But there wasn't any rain in the forecast. (laughs)

So we flooded the sewer, set up all the barricades to close the Kennedy in case it failed, if it did fail. Had twenty-four hour people watching it, taking the elevations of the water in the drain after we flooded it, and—knock on wood, (knocks)—we were able to stop the thing; we were able to solve the problem, get the sewer pumped out. We went in and reconstructed it and shored it up and put it in good shape. But that was an interesting tale of…

Czaplicki: Certainly.

Brown: Got off the subject telling these stories. Got up there because of Sam Skinner.

Czaplicki: That's a great story, though. But I was wondering, in a case like that, is that something that you would keep the governor informed about? Would you just tell him after the fact, or would you just only tell him if it happened to come up?

Brown: No, that would be something that I told them as we were doing it. I wouldn't tell the governor. In fact, what I—

Czaplicki: The chief of staff?

Brown: The chief of staff and/or the press office so that they knew what we were doing. Interesting press thing was, as I told the guys when I got there, I said, "We don't want any press on this because we don't know what we're going to do. They're going to want to know what we're going to do, and they know there's a problem because they can see all these trucks, we got lanes closed, there's people running around, and there's all these TV trucks on the overhead." But they wanted interviews, and I said, "Decline interviews. Don't even tell them I'm here." Finally one of the guys came down and said, "WGN knows that you're down here, and they want an interview with you. They want to know what you're here for and what you're doing." I said, "I'll have to talk to them." So I talked to them, and they interviewed me, and I told them

what I could tell them that I knew. I said, "There's a problem. If it fails, we'll have to close the Kennedy Expressway, and we don't want that to happen. And no, we don't know what we're going to do about it yet; we're going to be sending some people down to look at it"—it was before we sent anybody down—I really can't tell you anything more than that."

I was telling friends of ours from Paris, Illinois, who are close friends we take vacations with—we were visiting with them sometime after that and, they were asking me about it. "Hey, we saw you on WGN." I said, "Yeah, I don't even know how they knew I was down there." They said, "Well, it's real easy. When they were interviewing you, you were wearing a hard hat, and it had in big letters on top, 'Secretary Brown.'" (Czaplicki laughs) Because you all have to have all the safety equipment when you're in these work zones. I'd just grabbed the hard hat off the shelf in my Chicago office when I went down there. It was one that they'd put together for a groundbreaking, a ceremonial one, and it had my name painted in letters that tall on the front of the hard hat. (laughs) They were sitting there with binoculars or the telephoto lens on the camera, and their cameraman said, "Hey, the secretary's down there." I wasn't a household face that they would have recognized.

Czaplicki: Not the best way to be incognito. (laughs)

Brown: No, not going around with your name and title on your hat.

Czaplicki: You should have given it to someone else and sent him somewhere else in the city. (laughter)

I wanted to ask you about the ISTEA [Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act] bill, also in '91.

Brown: Yes.

Czaplicki: The very end of '91, it gets passed. How important—

Brown: Huge.

Czaplicki: —is that bill, and how involved were you and your intergovernmental affairs staff in drafting it?

Brown: Yes, everybody. Well, not in drafting the legislation. We don't draft legislation; we come up with ideas. We had a consultant that worked with us, too, Ron Linton. He's no longer in business. He's retired. They might call him a lobbyist, but we didn't really use them as lobbyists; we did our own lobbying. You can't have a better lobbyist than the governor (laughs)—the way I always felt. But you needed a Washington resource that has staff that can keep you informed day-to-day on what's going on and help you formulate strategy. Because no matter how big a state you are, even as big a state as Illinois is, your delegation just gets little leverage points here and there.

You've got to be able to identify where those points are and then have enough sense to know what you want to do when you find one. Because you're not going to write—the country is too big; it's too big a process. It's not like the state legislature where we can go in and be a big force, IDOT. You have to look for little leverage points.

Czaplicki: That bill was particularly massive, and sometimes when there's going to be large bills, there will be so many little subprograms there. And I always wondered whether certain states are responsible for getting something put in there. So that's more of what I meant by "writing."

Brown: Sure, sure. The Interstate Transfer Program, back in the eighties, was an example of that. That hadn't been heard of; that was an Illinois program that Kramer came up with.

Czaplicki: Which was this?

Brown: The Crosstown transfer, the ability to transfer that money for other projects.

Czaplicki: Kramer came up with that?

Brown: Yeah. But that [ISTEA] was the largest increase the state has ever gotten; percentage-wise, we got the biggest of any state in the union that year. It made a huge difference. It carried the highway program for the Edgar administration really throughout his eight years. Like I said, we weren't starting to show signs of needing more money until the last couple of years of that administration. Not that we pleased everybody. Let me remind you to talk about Edgar setting the direction for the planning process that I haven't talked about, which was critical over the timeframe. But let me finish up on this.

We needed to fund the Kennedy Expressway. Reconstruction of the interstate system is a huge problem. It's being totally ignored today across the country. We felt like we had to get started on it; that's how we got going. In fact, we started on it thirty years ago with the Edens [Expressway]. The Kennedy was the next bit of… Dan Ryan [Expressway] has had two separate sections. Stevenson, Eisenhower—all those have to be torn out and completely replaced. They cost huge amounts of money. We needed to do the Kennedy back then. Fortunately it was in Chairman Rostenkowski's district, and he wanted to do the Kennedy. He would not renew the gas tax. The gas tax expires at the end of each highway bill. In other words, they put enough funding in to pay all the projects out over time. If you want to extend the program, you have to extend the tax.

Czaplicki: The previous highway bill was '87, right?

Brown: Yeah. The Ways and Means Committee had to extend the tax. He wouldn't extend the tax. I even had a call from the head of the California DOT, several of them, saying, you guys are holding up the whole highway program. I said,

"And we will until we get a guarantee out of the interstate discretionary fund that we're going to get the Kennedy Expressway—at least half the money. We're not looking for a free ride; we're looking for half the money." Rostenkowski and Governor Edgar talked to the whole delegation, and we got it. But that was a big thing for the condition of the highways throughout the state, that bill was.

Czaplicki: And you were going to say something about Governor Edgar and the priority process.

Brown: As we started winding down toward the end, the governor—I told you he was very austere. He really understood about how to manage a budget and to say no. In fact, a lot of people called him Governor No. He wanted to know what the plan was, and he said, "If it's not part of the plan to keep the highways in good shape, I'll make the decision for what we add in terms of four lanes or new expansion. And the answer is generally no. Just say no." And we did. We said, "No, no, no, no"—when people would say we got to build this—"no, we'd have to sacrifice keeping our roads up to build that road, and until we can raise more money, we can't afford to build that expansion project."[24]

And not only was that able to keep our existing highways in good shape; we were able to build the momentum that was necessary for a tax increase. If you give key people projects, there's no reason for them to ever want to take the pain of having to raise taxes. You oughtn't to be building roads or new transit facilities if you're not wiling to raise revenues to pay for those. He was a strong believer in that, and he backed me up. The department's professional staff feels very strongly that way; they don't want to see us spending our money on these expansion projects when we've got all these problems we're trying to take care of, because we've got to maintain those facilities. But he was the very best at backing up the professionals at the department and making that his plan because it made sense to him as a way to administer a budget. You got to have a plan; you stick with it. If you want to change the plan, I'm all for it, but we got to have revenues if we're going to change the plan. If we're not going to do revenues, we just don't build those. In fact, Governor Ryan ran saying, we got to raise money to do all this, because we haven't built a new road in four years. He had some line—I don't remember exactly what it was. That wasn't quite true, but it was close; it was close. He used that to his advantage to help get elected.

Czaplicki: And he gets Illinois FIRST, right?

Brown: Correct. First year.

Czaplicki: Which would you say was more important—ISTEA, Illinois FIRST? Both equivalent?

[24] On Edgar's budget management and attitude toward cuts, see Joan Walters, interview by Mark DePue, July 29, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 17-19.

Brown: Yeah, absolutely. Both key to the state's infrastructure—transit and highways. They both had about the same impact. Now, it was a lot smaller back in '92 than it was in '99. It's a whole different ballgame. Inflation is a big part. But they were both huge programs.

Czaplicki: Also in '91—like I said, it just struck me as a key year—the third Chicago regional airport controversy is starting to really heat up as they were winnowing-down the selection list. Your existing chairman of the interstate airport committee that they had—representation of Chicago, Illinois, and Indiana—resigned from that because he was chairman of Inland Steel. I was wondering if you could speak to some of the politics around that issue, what the governor's interest was.

Brown: The governor wanted to get a (laughs) third airport, a new airport. We had spent a lot of time convincing both Governor Thompson and Governor Edgar of the need for future capacity. I still believe there's a need for a third airport, even though we've seen the downturn and now may not be the time. To think that an airport that was built in 1960, no matter how you remodel it, is the only airport you're going to need for a hundred years or two hundred years—and if you don't at least get the land and plan for it for the future… If they hadn't gotten the land, they wouldn't have O'Hare today, because Midway was the world's biggest airport. And a lot of people said, "Why are you buying Orchard Field?" But the city of Chicago had a vision there. Governor Edgar had that same vision, and it's still appropriate today. And I think Governor Quinn supports the third airport and supports buying land and protecting the land for it. So he was very adamant at trying to do that.

The politics of it were that the suburbs were the biggest problem in all of that issue, the anti-O'Hare. It's kind of like if you're a Cub fan in southern Illinois, like I was, with the Cardinals, because your friends are rubbing it in on you all the time because the Cubs never win; you'd almost like to see the Cardinals lose more than the Cubs win. That's a bad attitude to have, but when I was a little boy, sometimes I had that attitude, because I was always getting my nose rubbed into the Cubs' losing. The suburbs were kind of that way. They wanted to keep O'Hare down more than they wanted to have a new airport that might help them out in the future. That dynamic made it extremely difficult because it was clear you needed another runway for O'Hare—at least one. The current plan's a great plan. In fact, it looks very similar to the third airport we laid out, because you can't have all these crossing runways to make it simple. But that runway that they just finished and opened is crucial to the long term for Chicago. The suburbs were opposed to any construction at O'Hare, and people wanted to pit the third airport versus O'Hare, and that was the wrong thing. The city never trusted the state because of the Republican control of the state and the Republican relationship with the suburbs.

Czaplicki: And a lot of jobs.

Brown: The city always viewed the third airport as we were going to use that as a threat to O'Hare. Neither Governor Edgar nor the Department of Transportation nor Governor Thompson ever wanted to be a threat to O'Hare—just wanted to plan for the future. Indiana wanted nothing to do with any airport in Illinois; they wanted an airport for Gary because Gary needs economic revitalization. So the politics were really bad.

Czaplicki: How did Indiana get involved in that? Was it simply because if Indiana went ahead… Was this something that the FAA mandated?

Brown: Um-hm. Sam Skinner, secretary of transportation.

Czaplicki: Because of the flight patterns?

Brown: And he established that committee. He came in and said, "We got to decide where we're going to put this thing, and we got to consider Indiana at the same time." (pause)

Czaplicki: You sat on that committee, correct?

Brown: No. I was staff to that committee. Greg Baise was secretary when that committee was being… That committee just about finished its stuff by the time I got to be secretary, as I recall. It might have had a meeting or two. But if you recall what happened in that committee, the first thing they did was they got together and voted out the Peotone site. Indiana and Chicago went together because it took two to tango out of the three.

Czaplicki: And they chose Lake Calumet or Gary as their top two, right?

Brown: They didn't do anything. We had three choices: Lake Calumet, Gary, and Peotone. The first thing they did was they got rid of Peotone. The next thing, they were working with the city to get the city to pick Gary. And Lake Calumet—what was the deal on that? I can't even remember. You'd think I'd remember all of this kind of stuff. But they were working with the city and we were working with the city. So we reached an agreement with the city that said we'll support Lake Calumet; that makes a lot more sense than Gary, because Gary is further away. In all the projections, it wasn't going to receive the same level of usage of either Peotone or Lake Calumet. It was clear to us; Lake Calumet would receive more travel. The objection we had to Lake Calumet is we felt they could never build it there; they had insurmountable 4(f) issues with endangered species and terrain. Gary had those as well.[25]

Czaplicki: Four-F?

Brown: Four-F. That's where you can't take parkland—

[25] On the airport site negotiations, particularly over Lake Calumet, see Arnold Kanter, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 29, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 49-56.

Czaplicki: So it's a zoning designation?

Brown: No, in the federal law, it says you have to show that there's no other prudent or feasible alternatives to take this kind of dune and swale landscape. There's nesting birds that are endangered. There is a prudent and feasible alternative: Peotone! So it might not do *all* the demand, but it'll do *most* of the demand. Might not be as *great* a place to have the airport as Lake Calumet or Gary. So we reached agreement with the city and voted Indiana out, and that was the end of it.

Czaplicki: What was going to be the financing for Peotone?

Brown: It would have to be financed through the federal government, revenues from the airport itself, and revenues from the state.

Czaplicki: And there was the rub, correct, because the other party was the airlines?

Brown: The airlines would be the piece that would… I can tell you a good story about that. Bob Crandall was the CEO of American Airlines at the time. I don't know if you've met Bob or know Bob, but Bob—

Czaplicki: He's out of my league, but I know exactly who you're talking about. I saw him in my in-flight magazines when I flew back then.

Brown: He was one of the leading CEOs of the country, of major corporations. Hard-nosed, tough customer, and very talented. Met with him on several occasions. They had no use for the third airport. They said, "We don't care what you do, but we're not going there because we're not going to split our hubs, and we're not going to leave O'Hare." We said, "We understand that. Peotone's going to start out as a point-to-point airport. We're not looking for United or American, but we'd appreciate you not fighting us." Well, they still saw it as potential—any more capacity that brought in any new airlines was a threat to their market. They're like any businessman; they wanted as much of the market as they could get. So we were unsuccessful in convincing them. We know you're not going to; we don't look for you; it'll start small; it'll grow over fifty, a hundred years, whatever. But we need enough room where we can land four airplanes simultaneously and not have noise problems.

He was unconvinced that he didn't want to oppose us, so he hired some folks—in fact, one of my former employees—to go around the state and meet with all the chambers of commerce and everybody to say what a boondoggle Peotone was in their opinion and why it wouldn't work, and it ought to be stopped at the state level and all that. Which meant I had to then follow them all over the state saying why we needed Peotone. Then they'd always ask the question, "Why is American Airlines opposed to it when they know more about it than you do?" I'd say, "Because it costs you X to fly from Chicago to New York, and it costs you X minus Y from Springfield or Peoria or Decatur or Champaign to fly to New York. You can go through Chicago

and get another flight. It's cheaper to fly because there's competition—because back then, you could go to St. Louis and TWA—and it threatens their pricing structure. More competition is not what they want, because of deregulation." Just explained the basic economics.

Bob took umbrage to my saying—the way he put it—that they were overcharging their passengers. So he scheduled a meeting with the governor to get the governor to call me off or fire me, or whatever the hell those kind of folks do. The governor called me; he said, "Bob Crandall's coming in; I need you to come over here." I went over to the governor's office in Chicago, and Mr. Crandall came in with John Carpenter—who was also another very fine person, their government affairs person—worked with him for years. Essentially, Bob said, "We're an Illinois company. Our headquarters is not here, but we employ all these people, and your secretary of transportation is out there trying to say that we're overcharging people in Chicago," and duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-dah. I start to say—and the governor said, "Now, Kirk, just listen. Let me do all the talking."

I probably didn't say three words in the meeting. He said, "Well, Bob, how about those fares?" He said, "We can't compete with TWA. They're a low-cost carrier; they don't have the same union agreements." The governor said, "I understand that, but what Kirk's saying [about] the fares is right. What about United?" "If we changed our fares, United would match them in a minute; we'd both lose money. It's not going to do any good. We don't need this third airport. We don't need that extra competition; we're doing a good job." The governor said, "Well, I'm really unconvinced that we shouldn't be pursuing…" (laughs) In fact, he was probably more convinced than he'd ever been that we needed the airport for future competition in the Chicago region. This is before the air industry hit hard times. So as he left the meeting, everybody thanked everybody—it was a very cordial meeting—and the governor said to Bob, "Why don't you guys take a look at those fares in Chicago?" That was the parting word (laughter) as they left. We ended up still fighting it out in the trenches with them over time. Eventually we at least prevailed enough to get the land acquisition underway at the airport.

Another interesting sidelight: I had a meeting with United executives not too long after that, and when I sat down at the meeting, they said, "We wanted to meet you and see the guy that shook his finger in Bob Crandall's face, (Czaplicki laughs) that had enough guts to shake your finger…" And I said, "First of all, I would never shake my finger in anybody's face. Second of all, in that meeting I probably didn't get to say two words; the governor (laughs) did all the talking." Because he was their big rival, and they thought that was great. I said, "I don't know how these stories get started, but I would never do that. Mr. Crandall was also very (laughs) nice, but he is one tough son-of-a-gun."

He was on the plane that left Portland, Maine, and went to Boston, that flew into the World Trade Center, but he changed; that plane went straight through. He's retired there in Maine. John Carpenter told me this three, four years ago. As tough a cookie as Bob is—as I told John, "If Bob had been on that plane, I don't know what would have happened to it, but I'll guarantee you it wouldn't have flown into the World Trade Center." (laughs) Because he was one tough customer and tough CEO. I digress. Just telling war stories.

Czaplicki: That's a good story. I had never known of that meeting or any of that. Sticking on this airline theme, I was thinking about Meigs Field.

Brown: Yeah.

Czaplicki: 1996, I believe it was, the city was going to shut it down when their lease with the Park District expired in September, but both you and Governor Edgar had pretty strong feelings about whether or not the city ought to be closing that airport.

Brown: Right.

Czaplicki: I was interested in hearing some of why you cared so much about that airport, because it seemed like you—and it was just quotes I'd read. You'd called it nonsense when the FAA decided that the city could close it. Governor Edgar seemed to spend some political capital on it, too. What was it about that field that made you defend it so strongly?

Brown: It's really easy to say that's all for the state bureaucrats. The mayor said, "Oh, it's so the state bureaucrats could fly back and forth to Meigs Field." That wasn't the people who were using Meigs Field. It was the people who were coming in for trade shows, on their jets. When there was a big trade show—and look where we are now with McCormick Place. There's other problems, granted, and I'm not trying to lay it all on that. But there are businesses that want to have their headquarters in downtown Chicago and want access for their executives to get there easy. They don't have that now; there are businesses that have moved to the suburbs. The purpose of that airport, which Governor Edgar saw, and I saw, and a lot of people saw—it wasn't just the two of us; there were a lot of people—was that it was important to the economic future of both the city and the state. There's a price to pay for not having it; we probably paid that price in people moving out of downtown that would have had access. Then you'll say, yeah, but it's only fifteen minutes to Midway [Airport]. Sometimes it's thirty; sometimes it's forty-five. So I think that was the real driving force. Once you have a major public facility, you shouldn't be giving it away; you shouldn't be selling it. That would have been his philos—I don't want to put words in his mouth. That's my philosophy. Because you don't know how you're going to want to use that twenty or thirty years from now. That was an important transportation link to have, for economic reasons.

Tell you a funny story, the Meigs story. First we liaised to public relations, information, trying to convince them not to do it, and that didn't work; the city was bound and determined to close it. I remember we had a meeting with Gene Reineke, who was chief of staff. I was very strong for saying we really need to go ahead, we need to do something. Gene said, "I agree with you, but do you really think the governor's going to want to go toe-to-toe, and how are we going to do all this?" I said, "Probably not," and we were kind of thinking maybe we'd reached about the end of what we were going to be able to do. Tom Livingston, who was the governor's traveling aide at the time, came in, and he said, "Oh, I don't think so. I think you guys better talk to the governor about this." Gene called the governor and was telling him. The governor said, "Get over here. I want to talk to you." We get over there, and he said, "No, you figure out how we keep that thing open, what we have to do. Let's take it away from them, whatever we have to do." And we did; we passed legislation to take it away from them and then reached agreement with them to keep it open for a period of time. I don't know if he vetoed the legislation or passed legislation to take it off the books or whatever, but he felt very strongly about that; that that was the wrong thing to be doing with a public asset. It was there, it had economic value to the public, and it ought to stay a public asset, a transportation asset.

Czaplicki: So on that theme, and especially considering Chicago has had something of a fire sale—they sold the Skyway, they sold their parking meters, they're trying to sell Midway. Did that discussion ever come up, especially during the fiscal crisis?

Brown: No, nobody even thought of that kind of stuff.

Czaplicki: Never?

Brown: Never.

Czaplicki: Privatization of any of the roads?

Brown: Not back then. Actually, none of that really came up much until after I left state government.

Czaplicki: Also in '96, unfortunate from your perspective—aviation incidents. You were on a flight with Governor Edgar and Tom Livingston, I believe, whom you just mentioned, and a few others. Gary Mack.

Brown: Gary Mack, um-hm.

Czaplicki: State police bodyguards, some other names I'm not familiar with.

Brown: Correct.

Czaplicki: And you were going to—

Brown: Quad Cities.

Czaplicki: You were going to Quad Cities, but you were by Peoria.

Brown: We were over Peoria, yeah.

Czaplicki: And you were struck by lighting—

Brown: Yes, sir.

Czaplicki: —on your flight. What was that like?

Brown: It was scary. (laughs) Big loud pop, and I saw the lightning actually hit the wing—left a little black spot on the wing—and the lights all dimmed and then came back up. Then in about, oh, I can't remember how many seconds, the flames started shooting down from the top of the cockpit—about three or four inches, sparks and flames.

Czaplicki: My goodness.

Brown: We were going to Quad Cities to announce the five-year road program, and I'd had back surgery two weeks to the day. That was like my first day back to work, and I could hardly bend over. The fire extinguisher's under my seat. Gary Mack was sitting across from me, the governor was sitting beside me, and Tom was sitting over there. I told Gary, "Gary, you're going to have to get the fire extinguisher out; I can't bend down to get it. Before we use that fire extinguisher, Tom, let the pilots know we got a little problem here." So he tapped Benny Thome, who was the pilot, on the shoulder, and said, "We got a little fire here, you know." He looked up, and he said, "Okay. Everybody get ready; we're going to depressurize the cabin. I'm going to drop the oxygen masks; put the oxygen masks on."

He wanted to get rid of the oxygen; we had a fire. They were shutting down electrical stuff, too. You don't want to have a fire in an airplane; that's not a good place to be on fire. Of course, we were up in a very high altitude and there was less oxygen there. Oxygen masks dropped, we put the oxygen masks on, he depressurized it. The minute he depressurized it, the whole airplane filled with smoke. I mean, you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. I wasn't scared at all at that point, because I could see the instruments. I've flown it. I'm a Flight Simulator buff at home.[26] I can't afford to be a regular pilot, but I fly on the computer, so I'm pretty familiar with the King Air. We had no warning indicators on the master control panel that we had any major faults. So I wasn't worried until I couldn't see anything, and I was thinking, Hell, the pilots couldn't see the instrument panel, and nobody could see anything. After about ten seconds, it was gone, and it was crystal clear in

[26] Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* is a popular and long-running software franchise. Coincidentally, the simulator's default starting airport was Meigs Field, until Mayor Daley closed Meigs in 2003.

there. We depressurized, sucked all the smoke out, put the fire out, everything was fine—but it must have been one heck of a fire. Benny said, "We're going to make an emergency landing at Peoria. Everything's fine with the aircraft, not to worry, but we'd better make an emergency landing. We've had a fire. I think we were struck by lighting; we don't know what damage it could have done."

We landed at Peoria, and when we got out, got ready to go in the thing—we were walking out; I was hobbling with my back surgery. I said, "I want to look at this airplane before we go in." We walked around to the back. The King Air has a T-tail on it; there's a cone at the end, and it just blew that cone right off. It had a big crack down the top of that top tail surface, but fortunately it didn't affect any of the control surfaces that would have caused the pilot a problem controlling the aircraft—either the rudder or the elevators. But it was a good thing we made an emergency landing.

The governor then said, "Come on. I'll get the state car." (Czaplicki laughs) "We'll skip the Quad Cities; we'll go to Chicago and do the road"—we were going to Chicago after that.

Czaplicki: Not by plane, but by car?

Brown: In the back of a state trooper car, because that was the first thing we could get there, obviously. We're not going to get one of his cars there, and of course there's state police cars everywhere. Or I could have gotten a station wagon or something, but they already had the state police there when he landed. I said, "Governor, you're going to have to do this one by yourself. I'll have our district engineer there, but I got to get up and walk around about every thirty minutes. You're too impatient. You're not going to want to stop the car for me to walk around for ten minutes every thirty minutes. I can't ride in the car all the way from Peoria to Chicago with this back." He said, "Yeah, you're right." So he left, and I stayed there. I got a car from the district and drove the pilots back to Springfield.

The next day, I went out to Aeronautics—and they'd ferried the airplane back, gotten approval to fly it, inspected it to make sure it was okay to fly for repair. I said, "I want to see what caught on fire." I went out there, they showed me, and it was a little—what do they call it? Not a particle board, but like, transistors…

Czaplicki: Like breadboard?

Brown: Breadboard or something. Like what I'm talking about with transistors and all that kind of stuff?

Czaplicki: Circuit board.

Brown: Circuit board. About an inch square. I said, "What?" It was all black. And I said, "How could that have caused all that smoke?" They said, "Well, dummy, that wasn't smoke. You were at twenty-five thousand feet; the temperature was probably something below zero. You were at seventy degrees inside the airplane with all your hot breath and air, and it sparked. You got all the sparks, and it burned, and that's what was shooting out the bottom. It was the temperature control for the heating system, and it shorted out and caught on fire and burned. But they said, "Once it burned up, it was just a little bitty piece, and the smoke was a cloud inside. The minute you depressurized the plane to take all the air out, all the air from the outside came in, which had very little oxygen in it." That helped put out any fire that we had, but immediately all the water vapor that we had in there turned into a cloud. Then he said, "Once all that got expelled, that was it." So what really scared me was nothing; it was just a cloud.

Czaplicki: How'd you process that experience? Was everybody very serious? Did anybody pray? Or was it just sort of like—

Brown: Oh, no.

Czaplicki: —jokes, black humor?

Brown: No, there wasn't a lot of talk; there wasn't a lot of jokes. There just wasn't a lot of talk at all. I remember telling the governor right after we went through that and I looked, "Governor, there's nothing wrong"— he was looking concerned, but not panicky or anything. Everybody was concerned. Anybody would be. I was concerned. But I said, "Governor, there appears to be nothing wrong with the aircraft from at least what I can see here." Then about three or four minutes, the pilots assured us that there was nothing wrong with the aircraft but they were going to make an emergency landing. They called it an emergency landing because we had to request clearance, but it was a normal descent and landing, nothing out of the ordinary. The only thing was, I saw Mack grinning as we were coming down because he was already trying to figure out what he was going to be doing with the media on this issue. He knew he was going to be facing a challenge there, and he was already trying to figure out what to do.

Of course, everybody was concerned because the news got out real fast. Obviously, the governor's plane. And of course the staff was all concerned: Is everybody all right? I said, "Everybody's fine. I'm fine, the governor's fine, everybody's fine, but right now I need to talk to Dick Adorjin because we want the governor's office to handle all requests from the media on this issue. Get a hold of Aeronautics and just tell them to forward anything they get to the governor's staff." Because that's the way Gary wanted to handle it.

Czaplicki: So that was a case that you would run through that office?

Brown: That was a rare case, a very rare case. But that involved the governor personally. You didn't want them going out and talking to people, and people speculating on this, that, or here's what might have happened. But the governor called that plane Sparky (Czaplicki laughs) and never really wanted to fly on it.

Czaplicki: Yeah, but he kept on flying.[27]

Brown: Yes, he did.

Czaplicki: I was going to ask you if you had a sense—I don't know if you thought about this much; it's kind of a geeky question—did he have a favorite mode of transportation? Because I noticed he seemed to—

Brown: Horse.

Czaplicki: He seemed to really like the fly-arounds. But horse?

Brown: Horse. He loves animals, loves animals. I got a dog that originally was raised—they thought the governor was going to take it. When he moved in, he had Emy—you know, "Executive Mansion's Youngest." He wanted a darker one, which he ended up getting Daisy out of—I believe it was a rescue animal or something. But George told me—I was looking for a dog at the same time—"They have this golden retriever. Would you be interested in that?

Czaplicki: Fleischli?

Brown: Yeah, George Fleischli. I said sure, so I went and looked at it, because the governor wanted to get a different one. So we took that dog, who was a nephew to Daisy. After that, a lot of times we went to any event—if my wife would meet me there or I'd drive over—we took the dog with us. And he [Edgar] always would take time, when we'd go over to a drugstore or a restaurant, to see the dog and play with the dog. And he's into horses and horse racing. He really loves animals. I don't know if that's his favorite mode of transportation; that was a joke. He drove, but mostly he flew.

Czaplicki: That's what I was thinking; and to announce his candidacies, he did the state fly-around, and he flew over the—

Brown: You have to if you're going to… Everybody can say, "What a perq that is, for the governor to be able to fly." Every governor's been criticized for it, but if you want to get around the state, it's a big state. If you want to see the people,

[27] Nor was this Governor Edgar's first close call involving a plane. On August 16, 1981, he and his wife Brenda were traveling with Ken Zehnder to a fundraiser in Moline for State Rep. Ben Polk (R-Moline). When the plane's landing gear would not retract shortly after takeoff from Springfield, controllers ordered the plane to return. It did so, and the still-stuck gear collapsed on touchdown, sending the plane skidding off the runway. *Chicago Tribune*, August 17, 1981.

hear what the people are saying, and find out whether you're doing a good job or a bad job, you're going to have to fly or you won't get much done.

Czaplicki: Also in '91—I thought this was an interesting little incident, and I was wondering if you could shed some light. It seemed to be a case where maybe Edgar—I don't know if he overruled you, but seemed to intervene; and that was Harvard, Illinois, and Harmilda the Cow.[28] (Brown laughs) Do you remember Harmilda the Cow?

Brown: Oh, God, yes. Hell, I hadn't been on the job a month.

Czaplicki: Right, so an early challenge for you. August '91, I have this going on.

Brown: Okay, I guess it was a little later than that. I didn't remember. But it was early on. Yes, the cow. Boy, what a deal. That was a mess. One of the things I learned; it takes a while. First of all, the governor didn't know me. Yeah, he interviewed me for an hour, hour and a half; he had people that talked to him about me—I'm sure he talked to a lot of people that knew me. But we hadn't worked together a whole lot; the staff hadn't worked together a whole lot; I wasn't part of the campaign. There's a time—and it was even the same way when Governor Ryan was governor, even though I'd known George for years because he was lieutenant governor with Thompson—with the staff; I wasn't part of the campaign. You're not one of the guys or gals that got them there. Neither of us knew how to work together real good early on. That's the same way with any administration, I would suspect, because like I said, it was the same way in the Ryan administration. I think the governor's office, just to be blunt, jumped the gun on that. IDOT wasn't intending on necessarily getting rid of the cow.

Czaplicki: What is this cow?

Brown: It was on the square. It was a sculpted cow, before the Chicago Cows, and it was the pride of—there was a business there.[29] They were a dairy center. And all our district office had done was schedule a public meeting where they were talking about different alternatives, to get public input, which you have to do.

Czaplicki: Because you were going to redevelop that intersection.

Brown: We had to redesign it. It was unsafe. Yeah, it was a real problem. The cow sat in the middle of the road. (Czaplicki laughs) It was in the middle of the intersection.

Czaplicki: Really?

[28] HARvard MILk DAys, a festival in Harvard.
[29] Chicago's Cows on Parade was a wildly popular exhibit in 1999 that featured hundreds of fiberglass cows—decorated by local artists and sponsored by local businesses—scattered about the city.

Brown: Yeah.

Czaplicki: Like on an island?

Brown: Yeah. And all they were saying was, We're starting this process. They have to come up with some alternatives. They might include this, that, and the other, but if you've got alternatives… Introductory things. Well, people jumped the gun at Harvard: "By God, they're not going to do anything with our cow!" They knew they were going to have to do something, but they didn't know whether for sure they had to do anything with the cow, either. Now, who knows what one of the engineers might have said to somebody. I don't know all that. But it wasn't far enough into the process where we even knew what we wanted to do.

I remember I got the call from—I don't remember whether it was George or Kirk—and they said, "What is this all about?" I said, "I just heard it on the radio, too. I don't know any more about it than you do. Let me find out about it." "Why in the world would you want to move their historic cow?" I said, "I don't know that we're going to. Let me find out." Then I talked to the district engineer: "We don't know either. We just had this public meeting. Yeah, they're all in an uproar. I don't know that we're going to move the cow. Tell them we'll try to keep the cow where it's at." People reacted very quickly and said, "By golly, we're not going to get rid of the cow." I thought they jumped the gun, and I think a lot of it was they weren't as familiar with how we did business as they might have been maybe even a year later. We certainly got the cow still there, but I don't think it's in the middle. I think we worked out a deal and we got it off to the side.

Czaplicki: I think you did manage to move it twenty feet or so.

Brown: Yeah, we got it to where it wasn't a hazard. But that was more of an entertainment. I think it was a lot of overreaction at Harvard to what we would do, and it was something that the media could really jump on. I think the governor wanted to establish early on that, by golly, we're not going to mess with their historic stuff. I think he feels pretty strongly about that. IDOT condemned his family home when he was a young boy.

Czaplicki: Really?

Brown: Yeah. Had to take part of his property in Charleston to build Lincoln Avenue and Route 16. So he was very cautious about any type of taking of people's property. I wanted to get those controversies resolved before they went to the governor. He understood the necessity for it. Governor Ryan, he was even worse. He wasn't even sure the state ought to have the right of eminent domain. He understood why maybe we had to, but taking people's property—that's very serious business. Both of them made sure that I understood that we were not to do that lightly, and we tried not to.

Czaplicki: Was that something you talked about in your initial interview with Governor Edgar, or did this come up over time?

Brown: No, I learned that over time. Oh, no, that wasn't in the…

Czaplicki: Through cases like Harvard?

Brown: Oh, sure; yes, things like that.

Czaplicki: I think Wilmette saved their nine elm trees.

Brown: Oh, yeah, those are issues over time. Yeah, right.

Czaplicki: Do you remember when IDOT took some of his family property? That's the first I heard of this; it didn't come up in—

Brown: No, I don't. I just heard him mention that to me before. That was long before my time. You'll have to ask him about that. He can tell you about that.

Czaplicki: Yeah, we certainly will. Was your sense that he mentioned it just telling you the story, or was he using it as an example of why you need to be careful?

Brown: The way he used it with me is that he understood why it needed to be done—there was no bitterness or anything—but it had a major impact on him as a youngster. When we do that, we better know what we're doing because it has serious impacts on people; he had experienced that. He wasn't opposed to us taking—he understood that we had to… And he never said that we shouldn't… Governor Ryan was much more concerned about it, actually, than he was, but he was very concerned about that. He mentioned it to me maybe two or three times while I was secretary. He said, "Well, you know, IDOT took a piece of our property…" But it wasn't like, "You shouldn't do that," or "We were treated badly," or anything else. But I didn't quiz him closely on that. I figured he'd tell me what he wanted me to know.

Czaplicki: I was going to ask you a question about the relationship between IDOT and the tollway, but you answered that very early in our interview. However, in 1994, there was that scandal at the Tollway Authority, where Robert Hickman had to resign his position, and Ralph Wehner—

Brown: Um-hm. That's the same Wehner I told you about.

Czaplicki: Right, that's what I was thinking. So he took over as executive director at the Tollway Authority. How involved were you in that move? Did Governor Edgar come to you and say, "Give me a name"? How did that happen?

Brown: He came to me and said, "We got a problem at the toll road, and you got to get up there and figure out how to get it solved (laughs) right away." The

secretary has always been by nature of job—I can't think of the Latin term—a member of the toll road board, but—

Czaplicki: *Ex officio*?

Brown: *Ex officio*. A lot of people think that means "not voting," but it means by nature of your office. Never have secretaries gone to the toll road board meetings. Instead, we met, generally quarterly or monthly, whenever there needed to be, and coordinated our activities with the secretary and the executive director of the toll road and never tried to interfere. While people say they're two state agencies, we always tried to work very closely together. We had differences of opinion and all that, but we were talking constantly, and we did all the planning for the toll road back in that day. I assume that's the case today, although I don't know that.

But the governor said, "You're going to have to get up there. Do you have any ideas for who to put up there as executive director?" I said, "Yes. You interviewed him for my job. He is an outstanding engineer, but he's not really experienced in dealing with the media, and he's not real comfortable dealing with the media. But he's as honest as the day is long, and he's a micromanager. He'll get right down to the bottom of what's going on and make sure that things are being done on the up-and-up and with no problem." When I reminded him he'd interviewed him, he said, "Yeah, no, I know." He knew who Ralph was. And he said, "We'll think about it." The next thing I knew, they called me back and said, "We want Ralph to go up there and be the executive director, but you got to go up there and start going to all the board meetings and start working with the chairman on agendas, because Ralph's a professional engineer; he's not necessarily equipped to deal in the political side of things that need to go on." So I spent about a year—until Julian D'Esposito was named as chairman of the Authority—I spent a lot of time at the toll road with Ralph, helping him with the board to get those things done. So yeah, I was intimately involved in that.

Czaplicki: I thought you might have been. Do you remember when he came to you to say, we have a problem? How early on was that?

Brown: No. All I remember is getting a call. It might not even have been from the governor; it might have been from George or the chief of staff, asking if I had any ideas. I did go meet with the governor. He didn't tell me anything about the problems; he just said, "I want this thing run straight." He had no discussion with me about what had gone on in the past and what hadn't gone on. It wasn't any of my business, and I didn't ask. But I knew what my assignment was, and Ralph knew what his assignment was.

Czaplicki: There was another one I wanted to ask you about. 1996. Palumbo Brothers construction firm.

Brown: Oh, (laughs) horrible situation.

Czaplicki: Apparently you did an audit of some of their work and realized that they were overcharging IDOT for some materials they were using on a project?

Brown: Not quite. We had an employee that worked for IDOT—who was very concerned about what his future might be or anything else—who got word to the central office that he thought there were irregularities in what we were paying for versus what we were getting on the project. We sent our auditing team in to audit the records, and that night I got a call from my chief auditor. I remember I was getting off a state airplane at the airport, and he said that the employee who had called said that they were burning records at our field office after the auditors showed up to start the audit.

Czaplicki: Who was burning records?

Brown: Our staff, IDOT staff, in their field office. So I said, "What do we do?" (laughs) I didn't know what to do. In fact, my chief auditor is retired; he's spending Christmas with us this year. It was Dave Campbell, and he said—

Czaplicki: Dave Campbell?

Brown: David Campbell. David said, "I'd recommend we get the state police. I've already got a call in to the state police, but I need your authorization. We seize the office, seize all the records, and stop whatever's going on so that we know what's going on." So we sent the state police into our own office to seize the records. Then we started finding that, yes, we thought that maybe there were some irregularities with tickets that were given to us to pay for material that wasn't delivered. We started coring, and we made it into a cheese, (laughs) Swiss cheese, from coring and taking samples. One thing led to others. There was a lot of concern of which court system it ought to go in—Cook County court versus a history of dealing with the Palumbos in the past—

Czaplicki: I'm not familiar with that history.

Brown: There were just a history of strange things happening in the Cook County court system, and our staff was very, very concerned. I don't remember all the details of that; you'd have to ask some of them. But they were concerned about that, and I said, "If that's the case, then let's"—this was a state-only project—"federalize the project." Which we could do, because we qualified it for federal funds. I said, "Let's just go to the federal government and ask for reimbursement—qualify it for federal funds," which we did. Then we turned it over to the FBI and U.S. attorney's office to investigate, which put us in federal court rather than Cook County court.

It was a very trying situation. One of our employees committed suicide—a field employee who was overseeing the resident engineer. We have no reason to believe that he did anything wrong, but he may have suspected it,

didn't do anything; he might have been unstable. I don't know what the deal was, but it was really traumatic for everybody in the department—all of this stuff. But the department came through. That was the state's largest contractor, and the folks went after him tooth and toenail for stealing, because he was stealing and that's a bad thing. (laughs) They went to jail. They got a big fine.

Czaplicki: Yeah, the ultimate indictment that I saw was thirty-seven counts of racketeering, fraudulent billings totaling twenty million dollars, dating back to 1985.

Brown: Right.

Czaplicki: And this is '96 that you caught them.

Brown: Right.

Czaplicki: Initially you suspended them from bidding for a year, so I was just wondering what the mechanics of that—was that something that—

Brown: That was another trying situation. Yeah, I initially suspended them right away from bidding, but the state law only allowed me to suspend them for a year. That was the state law. The investigation took longer than a year, and then they started bidding again, and I legally could not stop them from bidding. The media, of course, was like we were a bunch of ninnies. "Why would you let people that you think are stealing from you, bid?" I said, "I agree, but I legally can't stop them from bidding." With that bad press, we were able to get legislation—I can't remember the details—but we were able to suspend them longer than that. But one of the things we insisted on—as did the Federal Highway Administration, the U.S. attorney's office, and attorney general here in the state—was that they be banned for life from public work, which they were, as part of the fine and the conviction and the sentence. So they cannot bid anywhere in the country on public work.

Czaplicki: You don't have to have the exact number, obviously, but what was the size of your auditing staff? How did you check for things like that?

Brown: Now all the auditing has been removed from IDOT, and CMS does all—they've centralized everything since the Blagojevich administration, so I have no idea how things like that are going now or how they would react to—

Czaplicki: But in your time, when you were secretary.

Brown: In my time, I don't recall how many auditors we had, but we probably had—I'm guessing—ten, fifteen, maybe twenty. Somewhere in that ballpark. But again, this wasn't found by audit. Most of the problems we've ever found, of cheating—we do a lot of audits, and occasionally you'll find a problem with audits—but generally when you find that there's corruption in a contract,

whether it's a construction contract or an engineering contract or any contract, it'll generally come… You've got to have an atmosphere in your organization where employees are not afraid. They will know it before an auditor knows it, or they will suspect it. So it either comes from your employees pointing out a problem, which has come out several times, or an employee of the firm that's doing the stealing—either disgruntled or very disturbed because of their personal ethics. You've got to have a system to where you can get those complaints. Hotlines are great and all that, but there's got to be a non-retaliation atmosphere in the organization. It was even tough at IDOT, because this was the state's biggest contractor. A lot of people were afraid to even be involved in the controversy.

I assigned our chief counsel and Dave Campbell, who was our head of audits—accounting, administrative services, and audits came under him—to work with the attorney general, the U.S. attorney's office, the state police, and the FBI on the investigation and had them pull in the staff that they needed for whatever they needed. The one fellow in the Central Bureau of Construction who did the most to help—because the FBI or the U.S. attorney doesn't understand all of this stuff; it's very technical in the ways they were stealing—was a fellow by the name of Stan Grabski, who was a field engineer in the Bureau of Construction. We took him nearly full-time on that investigation, poring over records to give the U.S. attorney and the attorney general, because we had to work with them, and the FBI. And of course, the employee that brought it to our attention. We made sure that they were well recognized. I made Grabski a district engineer right after that, first opening we had, down in Effingham. He's retired now. It's very hard on the employees involved in very controversial issues like that, because they're afraid for their future. I think the department did a good thing. You bring them in, and the folks that really ferret these things out move up; they don't get shunted off.

Czaplicki: Do you think that culture changed over time? Was there a time when you thought people were more fearful to talk about that, and then there were things IDOT did, or was that just always the culture of IDOT?

Brown: No, I guess I didn't state myself very well. I think employees are always fearful of doing that, regardless of what organization you're in, when there's a perceived powerful vendor. They overestimate their fears of that vendor. Governor Edgar is as honest as the day is long. There is no way he would *ever* interfere if he thought somebody was stealing from the state or even considered stealing from the state. And George Fleischli—every boss I ever had. George Ryan, despite all the things they would say, would *never*—you would never see someone like that interfere on behalf of a vendor that they thought was stealing from the state. Never—Thompson—I never had anybody do that, and never did under this situation. So I think employees overestimate that, but I think that is a standard fear on the part of employees. There's not a whole lot you can do about that except, when the cases come up, make sure that the employees who did the work are recognized and rewarded for what

they did. That's the only way I knew how to handle it. The other way is, if you did bad things, then you have reinforced that fear. But that fear is always out there in government, particularly in a large organization, and it's always overestimated, in my opinion, on the part of the employees.

Czaplicki: In terms of the auditing function, when you said that you're always running audits, do they have *carte blanche* to just audit as they feel necessary, or is it more of a complaint system, where they wait and upon receiving a complaint, they will then go audit?

Brown: Yes, they will do that, because that's what we had done in this case. But no, there are standard requirements for audits over a certain period of time that everybody has to do. Even the federal government will come in and re-audit us, and our auditors, and go do local audits to make sure they… There's a whole system set up for audits of transportation projects and requirements that they be done on a regular basis. But audits won't necessarily find… I had a guy tell me one time—it wasn't involving anything illegal or anything, it was just a guidance to planning commissions on what we wanted to do on accounting and bookkeeping and all that. The Feds weren't happy. One of my staff, a young fellow, said—and I was drawing up all these rules that I thought we ought to do— "No matter what you do, there's about ten times more folks out there, thinking of ways to get around those rules, than we got here. And no matter how smart we are, ten brains are smarter than two any day; (laughs) they're going to find a way around them." You got to do audits, and sometimes they do uncover things, but the ones that really find corruption are generally stimulated by some tip. It's usually from an irritated employee of the firm. It's either getting even or upset—can't live with what they've been doing.

Czaplicki: Conscience kicks in.

Brown: Conscience kicks in, correct.

Czaplicki: On that note, and abstracting out a little bit from this, just think about Illinois in general, because we've had some trouble with some of our governors and certain laws in the books—certain laws about leaving executive employment and being able to do state business immediately—things that aren't legal at the federal level but are legal at our state level. Why do you think, or do you think—I don't want to put my values on you here—Illinois seems to have a different ethical culture?

Brown: I don't think Illinois does have a different ethical culture. We just only read the papers in Illinois. We don't read the papers in Alabama, Mississippi. Now, there's certainly states like Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa that exalt themselves to be the purest of the pure, but the statistics I've seen show that there are issues all over. New Jersey's not exactly the greatest place, from what I read, either, and that sort of thing. Now, I'm not saying that makes it

right or that's good or anything else. It's not. It's not right. Nothing should be done that way.

But I don't know that passing laws on state employment—it's not right to tell engineers at IDOT that they can't go to work for a consulting engineer that's had a contract with IDOT. It would be right to tell them that they can't go to work to an engineering firm that they *awarded* a contract to—that would be right. You should do that. You shouldn't be able to give a firm money and then get a job. But if you're a civil engineer in Illinois—what's "civil" mean? It means you work for the government, do government engineering. You can either do that working for the state, if you're a highway engineer, or a city or a county or a consulting engineer. If you say that they cannot get a job working for—first of all, they're out of work at the state, maybe because the administration changed, and now you tell them you can't go to work for a consultant for a year, you can only go to work for the city or the county. Unless you can find one of ten cities, and you probably can't find a city that pays the level you do, and maybe three counties—they'd have to be looking for somebody at that point in time. So you essentially discourage anybody who's a professional that wants to have a career after state government from taking a management-level job at an agency like IDOT. That's what they've done, and that's the wrong thing to do.

When I was there, I thought it was a reasonable rule that said you can't… First of all, I recused myself before I started even looking. I announced a year ahead of time that I was going to retire at the end of the year, so that everybody would know; there wouldn't be any secrets. About six months into the year, I sent a memo out to everybody, that said, "Don't bring me anything about any kind of consulting engineer." I told my secretary, "I will talk to them about department policy or whatever, if they want to complain—but I don't want to talk to them." I never participated in the consultant selection process anyway, as secretary; I did before, when I was director of planning and programming. I said, "I don't want any contract issues. I'm not signing any more contracts." "Keep me out of any issues with consultants," for the last six months that I was there. Which is a bad thing, because they're paying me to deal with those issues. But I said, "Nope."

Then when I first started talking to firms, I disclosed to all the department staff, my key staff, who the firms were that I was talking to so they would know and take whatever action they thought in the public interest, as they did their dealings, so as not to embarrass the department. I think most people have done that and would do that sort of thing. I had a prohibition that I could not solicit work from the toll road or the Department of Transportation for two years after I left employment—or couldn't lobby, go in and ask for work. I was not banned from working on a project, but I couldn't seek a project and talk to a department employee about getting them. To me, that was a reasonable precaution to avoid… But I work for an engineering firm now, and you could say the same thing about me. I left and went to work for a

company that had work with IDOT. Two hundred and fifty firms had work with IDOT, okay. I'm probably not going to go to work for a small firm, (laughs) because they don't need somebody like me.

So those things, while we talk about them—that isn't what's wrong with our government. What's wrong with our government is political contributions tied to contracts, if such thing exists. And I have no idea it does. But that's a real problem. What's wrong with government is lack of statesmen. Governor Edgar might not have got along with everybody, but he ended up finding a way to work with everybody. George Ryan was able to easily work with everybody. But Governor Edgar worked with Speaker Madigan just fine. They had their differences. But today, there are no statesmen. I'm not going to single out anybody in particular, but everything today is about party and power, whether it's Republican or Democrat, and it needs to be more about governing ourselves and taking risk. Governor Edgar said, "I only got to please 51 percent of the people." He'd remind me of that every now and then. "We've got to do the right thing. I want to keep 51 percent of the people happy, because I don't know when I'm going to want to quit running." He didn't say that in a way to say, "I'll do what I want"; it was, "There will be political cost to doing the right thing." But he assessed his odds—we got to do the right thing; we may make a lot of people mad. We don't want to make more than half of them mad.

Czaplicki: That's interesting. I don't know if you can speak to this for Governor Edgar—although if you can, please do—but at least for yourself, in general, is it kind of utilitarian: greatest good for the greatest number? Because that's fundamentally majoritarian, right? Fifty-one percent—don't make them mad. Let's try to do that for at least a little bit more than half. But are there cases where you have to make that judgment call and it's more important to, say, protect a minority or push something through for a minority interest?

Brown: I'm not going to speak for Governor Edgar because I can't. I don't know how to speak for him on that issue.

Czaplicki: I didn't know if that ever came up at some point.

Brown: No, it didn't. But I will give you the way I view that for the way that he performed, which I think is the way all executives would perform, and which I frankly saw in the other two governors I worked with, too. They aren't going to handle it on any one particular issue; they've got a whole vision in their head of a whole range of issues. They might do one thing that makes 90 percent of the people mad, but they're doing four other things that makes 80 percent of the people happy; till where in the end, they're keeping 51 percent of the people happy. They're trying to do a vision of what they want to accomplish.

One story is a George Ryan story, not a Jim Edgar, which is what I'm here for. The issue that he had—I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was something to do with what the state did regarding abortion, which made all of his right-wing supporters really mad. He reversed his position on that mid-term on some legislation and really got criticized roundly for it. Or the deliberations he went through on the death penalty. Just flying with him different places, every now and then, he'd bring things up. Those kinds of issues—and I know Governor Edgar had those same kinds of issues to deal with—where they had a conscience about what they needed to do. Now, I think they both kept it in that 51 percent parameter, but there were things that they had to do, and that's what a statesman is. That's just my opinion.

Czaplicki: And I think some of Edgar's budget cuts those first couple of years would be a—he had some hard decisions to make.

Brown: Horrendous budget cuts.

Czaplicki: Yeah, and my understanding was he didn't particularly want to do that.

Brown: That's right. No, he didn't want to do them at all; he thought it was awful.

Czaplicki: Another broader question for you. I know in general, you prefer to keep politics out of IDOT, particularly when you're doing the engineering work and planning and programming, but as IDOT's secretary, when do you think the IDOT secretary needs to get involved in politics?

Brown: Oh, the minute they get to be secretary. I did. It's a different world at that point. And politics—there's big-P politics and there's little-P politics; then there's general assembly politics, and there's all sorts of things. When I became secretary, I became the governor's transportation expert. My job was to make sure that the governor did a good job and was perceived by the public as doing a good job. If I didn't do a good job, he wasn't perceived as doing a good job. I was his agent, and you're immediately part of politics at that point. You're going to be providing the governor with opportunities to have groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings, all those sorts of things, and you'll be looking for things because you're there to help him and give him good advice, have him make good decisions. That's your responsibility. Now, his decisions are his. During the reelection campaign, he had Howard Peters and I out on the campaign trail at the Republican events. He had to go to the areas where it's close, and if he didn't have time to go someplace, Howard and I ran all over the state that year, giving speeches at Lincoln Day events.[30]

Czaplicki: This is the '94 campaign?

Brown: Yeah. That was part of my job. That's a very political job, and even not during the election year I would go to a lot of Lincoln Day events on behalf of the

[30] Peters interview, January 21, 2010, 19.

governor, if he couldn't attend. They'd send different directors, different times. But that's part of your job, to represent the governor, his policies, and what he stands for at those events. So people have an opportunity, if they can't get to the governor, to at least get to somebody in his administration. Oh, the secretary job was a very political job.

Czaplicki: Let me see if I can ask in a different way. Are there cases or issues where the secretary of transportation shouldn't be involved in politics? Or is there a danger that people can't distinguish between the secretary acting in the political role versus the department?

Brown: You can never distinguish acting in a political role from the department. My uncle told me—he lived till maybe eight or nine years ago, so he was still alive when I was named secretary; I used to visit with him a lot up in the Chicago area.

Czaplicki: Did he give you good advice?

Brown: We'd tell war stories and all that; he'd had the job as head of planning and programming that I had for a number of years. When I called him to tell him the governor was going to have a press conference the next day and name me secretary, his reaction was, "Well, you'll be a damn politician now." (laughter) Does that answer your question? You're perceived, the minute you're secretary or director of a department, as a politician. And you really are, because you're serving at the pleasure of an elected official, and you're going to be acting on his behalf all through your job. I never found, with any of the governors I worked with, or even when I wasn't secretary— when I was a professional a level below the secretary with Governor Thompson—that anyone ever asked me to do anything that was not in the best interest of the state. There's different ways of doing things, but that never happened. But there's no way you'll ever divorce the politics from the secretary, I think, even when you're a professional like me. That would be the closest, but still, nobody's going to believe that I'm not going to be doing what I can to help the governor.

But it also means that agencies and secretaries and directors—I can never remember, with any of the three governors that I worked under, where I ever had any restrictions on working with members of the general assembly, regardless of what party they were from, and trying to assist their needs and meet their needs. Now, if they wanted a four-lane highway, that would be something we'd talk to the governor about. But if they got a road that's bad that needs resurfacing, it doesn't matter whether it's the most ardent opponent of the governor in the general assembly: if we look at it and it needs fixing, we're going to fix it; if it doesn't, we'll tell them no. If it's the strongest Republican supporter and they want this road fixed, and we go out and look at it and say it doesn't need fixing, we could tell them no. That never varied. But if the Speaker would call up and say, "I need to have this road and this road

fixed," by golly, I'm for sure going to coordinate with the governor's legislative office before I solve those problems. (laughs) That's standard because that's the capital we have to deal with for him on his legislative agenda. But the treatment of the members is the same. Politics comes in on the big issues.

Czaplicki: All right, just a couple more questions. You mentioned George Ryan.

Brown: Um-hm.

Czaplicki: You worked under Ryan; you worked under Edgar. Could you briefly compare and contrast the two men, their managerial style?

Brown: You know, no. (laughs) Let me say this. Edgar was a much more hands-on governor. He wanted to know and participate maybe one level further down that what Governor Ryan might have done. But other than that, the management styles… He wasn't my supervisor or day-to-day manager. The governor might call me once a month; I might be in to brief him once a month or once every two months on an issue, so I can't comment on either one of their management styles.

Czaplicki: How about their staff picks? Did the staffs have different flavors? The people that you normally would be dealing with on a regular basis?

Brown: No, not really. They're different, and everybody is a different person. With any new administration, unless you're part of the team that got them elected—I mentioned this before—you're going to go through a year of proving yourself, your worth. You either prove that you're worthy, and then you're part of the team, or (laughs) you don't have a job anymore. But when you come in as an outsider—like I did in both administrations, because I wasn't part of the campaign for Governor Ryan—there's a year that is really uncomfortable because you're getting to know each other; they don't know whether to trust you or not trust you. If you're Ryan, "Well, he's an Edgar guy," even though it's the same party. It's the same issue, I'm sure, with Quinn-Blagojevich guys; people who were holdovers from before, have to prove themselves today in the state government for Governor Quinn.

Governor Edgar was into a more structured approach in dealing with the legislative agenda. George was more a "let's cut a fat hog" with the members of the… But they were his—he'd been in that body for so long. Edgar was in it for a little bit of time, but most of his time was handling Thompson's legislative stuff, before he was secretary of state. Governor Edgar was really more hands-on and wanted more details. But both of them always expected a briefing on the policies and the potential outcomes and the options. They both wanted to know those implications. I probably got to be better friends with Governor Edgar, which is unusual because transportation wasn't

his… I mean, we still keep in touch; very little, but we still do keep in touch. I enjoyed working for both of them.

Czaplicki: When you mentioned that your wife had transferred to Eastern, I wondered if maybe you had any (unintelligible) in Charleston?

Brown: No, there was no connection, although he was from Charleston. I didn't know him at all at that point.

Czaplicki: Maybe doing some shopping at that clothing store he worked at. (laughter)

Brown: I hadn't.

Czaplicki: So overall, when you reflect back on your career—and really, any administration; it doesn't have to be in Governor Edgar's administration—what in your mind is the most notable accomplishment, what's the thing you're most proud that you did?

Brown: Oh, Lord. I couldn't say. The fact that I survived. (laughter) Twelve years is a long time to be secretary of transportation; thirty-five years is a long time to work at one agency. There's so many roads that I drive on that I'm proud of; probably the proudest is Interstate 70 because it was my sweat and toil down there that did that. But I still like to look at the Clark Bridge, that big bridge over the river, and all I did was work on financial plans and all that kind of stuff.[31] I'm proud of the Kennedy Expressway, because I worked on funding for that; our people did all the other work. I'm proud that the third airport's still alive, although (laughs) not going very fast right now. All those things. As an engineer, you take pride in a lot of things that you can see and touch, but the thing that I enjoyed the most were the people I worked with. A lot of good times. We had a lot of fun at IDOT. I had a lot of fun with the folks in the Thompson, Edgar, and Ryan administrations.

One of the things George Ryan said—he was telling me he had something he wanted us to do, and I was saying, Yeah, but it's going to cost this, and there's this precedent, and he said, "Brown, the only reason we're here in government and the people pay our salaries is to find a way to do good things for people." Now, he might have done too many good things, (laughs) but that was his philosophy about government. It was Governor Edgar's philosophy about government, too, and Governor Thompson's.[32] I'm not saying it's not our current governors'; I just didn't work with them. When you're in government, you have the ability to do those things, and sometimes you forget about it when you get close to the details. Governor Edgar,

[31] Clark Bridge is an innovative bridge that crosses the Mississippi River at Alton, Illinois. The bridge was featured on the "Super Bridge" episode of *NOVA*. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/bridge/.

[32] In the case of Edgar, this philosophy was shaped by the example of his key mentor in the Illinois Senate, W. Russell Arrington. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 28, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 26-28.

Governor Ryan, and Governor Thompson—they always reminded you of those sorts of things, which I think is good.

Czaplicki: What do you think Governor Edgar's administration will be most remembered for?

Brown: I think fiscal responsibility, no question about that. The state was in terrible budget… Left with a budget surplus. That's a remarkable accomplishment. People made fun of him and called him "Governor No," but he didn't spend money we didn't have, didn't borrow money we couldn't pay back. When people wanted to sell bonds to build roads, he said, "If we're not going to raise revenue, we're not going to sell more bonds; if we raise revenue, we can sell more bonds." So he'll be remembered for fiscal responsibility. It's out of my area, so I'm probably talking about things I don't know, but he'll be remembered for education. He did try to prioritize what budget he had into education. At least that's what it looked like to us, and we're on the receiving end.

Czaplicki: I know you came in with some notes, and we've been going a little over four hours.

Brown: Are you kidding? Is it two o'clock?

Czaplicki: You're a horse. Yep.

Brown: I'm sorry. No, I've got all kinds of stories here, but I'm not going to get into them.

Czaplicki: I wanted to ask you if there was anything that you wanted to bring up that we missed. Is there something important?

Brown: We might have even worked it all in. I had Meigs—we told that story.

Czaplicki: We didn't talk about rail. I feel really bad about that, but we could go twenty hours, I think.

Brown: I don't want to talk about rail; I'm involved in that now.

Czaplicki: Are we going to get a high-speed line?

Brown: Oh, yeah. Are we on the record now?

Czaplicki: We still are on the record, yeah. (laughter) You don't have to tell me anything secret.

Brown: I don't know anything secret. If I—

Czaplicki: How about looking forward? Looking down the road in terms of Illinois' future transportation, what would be the number-one priority in your mind, besides maintenance of the existing roadways?

Brown: For Illinois transportation?

Czaplicki: Um-hm.

Brown: Number-one priority is reconstruction of the interstate system. Except the few miles that have been, it needs to be torn out and rebuilt. Illinois should be spending probably two billion dollars a year on that today, and we're spending zero. I shouldn't say that. Maybe three or four hundred million. It's because it costs so much, you can do so few miles, and we haven't raised revenues. We're trying to bond everything right now—although there were some revenues raised, it's not clear yet that they'll all be used for transportation. But no, the number-one need that's unfunded is those interstate highways. We take them for granted, but you can only repair them three or four times. And each time you repair them, they last a shorter period of time. We're going to be out resurfacing them every year if we don't start tearing them out and building them from ground up with new facilities, because they're forty, fifty years old. Truck traffic is probably ten times what they were designed to handle.

Czaplicki: You wouldn't support making that a private project? You think that should stay public, be a public work?

Brown: All this private project stuff—there's a lot of misinterpretation or misunderstanding of what that is. I'm not opposed to making anything a private project; the problem is that nobody in the private sector is going to want to do a private project unless there are revenues that flow to them that are greater than their expenses. Where are they going to get the revenues to rebuild the interstate system? We could convert them all to toll roads. I think there's about as much chance of that as there being no snow in Chicago this year, that people are going to want their interstates converted to toll roads. Now, if they want to do that, you can do it that way.

But if you wanted to do it yourself, you could do it publicly a lot cheaper than you can do it privately, for two reasons. One is, there's no profit, and somebody's going to want a 10, 15 percent return on their money, at a minimum, of what the cost of all these things are. And second, you've got a tax issue, if you're going to do debt financing, on the cost of the interest versus tax-free versus taxable. You can also say the private sector could do it more efficiently than the government. Do you really believe—if you've got 10 or 15 percent profit, you got a 30 percent issue on the taxes on the debt—that you could do it for 50 percent cheaper than the government? *No*…you can't. It'll cost more to do it that way, but it might be the only way you can get it done and get public support for doing it. And for that, it's good.

The other way is to give them tax-free financing; then you might be able to build it for 10 or 15 percent less, cut corners, and hire your brother to do it rather than take public bids. Not that it's wrong. Your brother might be the most qualified. You're grinning, but that might be the best way to get it done. You might get it done cheaper that way, rather than, we got to advertise and have everybody bid, review everybody. That costs money, that takes time—time is money. But the public sector has certain rules that they have to follow when they do that, and that's how the private sector can maybe save some money. Their engineers aren't any smarter than the public sector engineers. But if you give them tax breaks on the debt, that's a government subsidy; you're cutting the taxes that they pay. All of those things factor in, so there probably aren't roads in Illinois that you could build on their own as a private [project] without a significant government subsidy, because you've got to have that revenue equation to give them more revenues than their expenditures.

Czaplicki: One last question for me, because in your answer right there, you just touched on something when you said, You might be able to sell a project to the public easier, in terms of talking about privatization. Why do you suppose that rhetoric is so powerful; that the public seems skeptical of publicly-financed public works but private really rallies people? What is it—

Brown: Because *everybody* knows that the private sector knows better than the public sector about *any* issue. I mean, that's just common knowledge, whether it's true or not.

Czaplicki: But that's what I was going to say: where does that come from? Because we've just talked about your agency—which had this unbelievable planning expertise/capacity in it from the late sixties, early seventies—and talked about this incubator of management and planning talent, and yet that seems to have—

Brown: The mayor of Decatur wanted us to put an *I* in the middle of our name. (laughs)

Czaplicki: Where do you think that comes from, or did that ever frustrate you?

Brown: Oh, sure. It frustrates every person that's been involved and had a career in government. I think probably where it comes from is the private sector is able to react much more quickly to change. They are able to react to the economy; they're able to react to all sorts of things. The government, first of all, are hide-bound by law, they're hide-bound by regulations; they're hide-bound by bureaucracy, whether it's local or state or federal. You've got all those things that bind how you—just like I couldn't suspend Palumbo for more than a year. Private sector—if they stole from them, they'd say, (laughs) "Good-bye. We're never dealing with you again," and that would have been the end of it.

So we require our public agencies to do more things, and by doing that, we require them to be harder to navigate and change course.

I always told people that running IDOT, I felt like I was steering a battleship. Sometimes the wheel was so tall my feet weren't touching the ground, (Czaplicki laughs) and I'm yanking on it, hoping that it'll turn. And if you're coming into port with that big thing, you better know way ahead of time where you're going. The private sector can maneuver much faster than that, take immediate action. Look how long it takes to hire publicly, how long it takes to fire publicly. The private sector does it… People see that, and they conclude that the private sector is better managed, in general, than the public sector. And it probably is in aggregate because of all those things. That's not to say there aren't really well-managed public sector things and really badly-managed private sector things—but they go broke. So I think that's how that culture comes up; everybody believes the private sector—"If they're willing to put their money into it, it must be a good project," rather than a boondoggle from some member of the general assembly or Congress. And if that sells a project, that's great. It's probably going to cost you more money to do it that way. They're not really putting their money in; (laughs) they want to take money out. But if it sells, it sells.

Czaplicki: All right. If there's nothing else you want to bring up, I think—

Brown: No, I'm fine. I didn't realize I'd gone on this long.

Czaplicki: No, it's great. Like I said, we really ought to spend many hours on you, but it's all we have time for, I think.

Brown: I talk too much.

Czaplicki: Nope. Thank you very much. We appreciate it.

Brown: Mike, thank you very much. I enjoyed it; it's been fun.

(end of interview)