

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Philip R. O'Connor  
Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Illinois Statecraft – Jim Thompson* Oral History project  
Interview # IST-A-L-2015-035

Dr. Phil O'Connor served in the Gov. Jim Thompson administration as director of insurance, political strategist during the 1982 reelection campaign, and chairman of the IL Commerce Commission. He was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Illinois Statecraft – Jim Thompson* oral history project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: August 14, August 25, August 27, and September 1, 2015.

Location: PROactive Strategies, Monadnock Building Suite 1115, Chicago, IL

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mike Czaplicki, ALPLM project historian

Transcription by: \_\_\_\_\_

Edited by: \_\_\_\_\_

Transcript  
being processed

Total Pages: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Time: 2:19 + 1:08 + 2:52 + 2:59 / 2.32 + 1.13 + 2.87 + 2.98 = 9.30 hrs.

Session 1: California roots and learning the ropes in Illinois and California politics.

Session 2: Governor Ogilvie's 1972 campaign and assessing Gov. Thompson as a candidate.

Session 3: Thompson's 1982 campaign and the 1983 Chicago mayoral election.

Session 4: Spreading the gospel of competition: O'Connor's work at the Dept. of Insurance and IL Commerce Commission.

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on January 6, 2016. The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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# Abstract

Philip R. O'Connor, *Illinois Statecraft*, IST-A-L-2015-035

**Biographical Information Overview of Interview:** Phil O'Connor was born to Philip J. and Irene G. O'Connor in Vallejo, California, on September 16, 1948. O'Connor's father worked as a machinist at Mare Island Naval Shipyard, and young Phil lived in Vallejo until he was eight, when his family moved fifteen miles north to Napa. Foreshadowing his career in politics and government, the precocious O'Connor immediately organized the neighborhood children to march in front of the polls in support of Adlai Stevenson's 1956 presidential bid. O'Connor's mother ensured he would marry his interests to a strong work ethic, pushing him to work from a young age. O'Connor held a variety of jobs from elementary school through college, including seasonal inventory work at Woolworth's department store, cleaning at a local resort, his aunt's prune ranch, gas station attendant, a local apple juice factory, and Irwin Memorial Blood Bank in San Francisco. But it was his last college job that opened a path to Illinois government.

O'Connor attended the University of San Francisco for his first two years of college, then spent his junior year abroad at Loyola University Chicago's Rome Center for Liberal Arts. After transferring to Loyola for his senior year (1969-1970), he worked as a part-time office assistant in Illinois governor Richard Ogilvie's (R) Chicago office. He continued to work for Ogilvie after starting a PhD program in political science at Northwestern University. Part of his duties included opposition research on Paul Simon ahead of the 1972 gubernatorial campaign. Simon's loss in the Democratic primary to Dan Walker made that work irrelevant. Ogilvie lost in the general election to Walker.

Returning to California, O'Connor served as an assistant to Democrat George Moscone, who was then majority leader in the California Senate. In 1974, he ran Democrat George Miller's successful campaign for Congress, a role he repeated in 1976 and 1978, and he managed Miller's district office from 1975 to 1977. These experiences in Illinois and California gave him an excellent practical education in campaign operations and strategy. Although O'Connor was backing notable liberals in the California campaigns, he identified as somewhat conservative in outlook, a traditionalist.

Wanting to finish his PhD, O'Connor returned to Illinois in 1977 when Mathias, now Governor Thompson's director of insurance, asked him to serve as his deputy director for research and urban affairs. O'Connor took over as director from 1979 to 1982, leaving the department during Governor Thompson's heated reelection campaign against Adlai Stevenson III to serve as director of strategy. The following year, Thompson appointed O'Connor chairman of the Illinois Commerce Commission, where O'Connor strongly advocated for restructuring energy regulation around market competition.

After leaving the Thompson administration in 1985, O'Connor entered the private sector, starting his own consulting company before moving to Constellation NewEnergy as an executive. He did not abandon government, however, serving on several Illinois boards and commission and as Gov. Jim Edgar's 1994 campaign chairman; the 2001 Bush-Cheney Transition Advisory Committee on Energy; and as an advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity from 2007 to 2008, working out of the US Embassy in Baghdad. These experiences are not part of this interview.

In this interview, O'Connor discusses major events of the 1960s and early 1970s, Illinois Gov. Richard Ogilvie's administration, California politics in the 1970s, his role in the Thompson administration and relationships among the staff, Thompson's managerial style, his work at the Department of Insurance, state pension funding, Thompson as a political candidate, the 1983 Chicago mayoral election, and the role of the Illinois Commerce Commission. He offers especially detailed discussion of his mentors and development as a campaign strategist; the 1982 Illinois gubernatorial campaign between Governor Thompson and Adlai Stevenson III; the connection between the administrations of Governor Ogilvie and Governor Thompson; and his philosophy of competition, which underlay his push for deregulation as chair of the Commerce Commission.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** Philip R. O'Connor; Illinois Department of Insurance; Illinois Commerce Commission; James R. Thompson; 1982 Illinois gubernatorial election; energy deregulation; political polling; FAIR Plan; Richard B. Ogilvie; Jeremiah "Jerry" Marsh; Bernard Epton; George Miller (California congressman); Terry Barnich; Adlai Stevenson III

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