

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Howard Peters

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Illinois Statecraft – Jim Edgar Oral History project

Interview # ISG-V-L-2009-036

Howard Peters, Director of the Department of Corrections, and later the Secretary of Human Services for the Jim Edgar administration, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Illinois Statecraft – Jim Edgar* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Nov 25, 2009 Location: Illinois Information Service Studio, Springfield, IL

Date: Dec 21, 2009 Location: Illinois Information Service Studio, Springfield, IL

Date: Jan 21, 2010 Location: Illinois Information Service Studio, Springfield, IL

Interview Format: Digital video

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Technical Support (cameraman, etc): Mark Suszko & Greg Lipe, IL Information Service,
Central Management Services

Transcription by: Tape Transcription Center

Edited by: Mike Czaplicki, ALPL Volunteer and Rozanne Flatt, ALPL Volunteer

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Session 1: Early life thru joining IL Dept. of Corrections

Session 2: Dept of Corrections thru Flood of 1993

Session 3: Dept. of Corrections and Dept. of Human Services years

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on Mar 31, 2011.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

Abstract

Howard Peters, *Illinois Statecraft*, ISG-V-L-2009-036

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Howard A. Peters was born on November 27th, 1945 in rural Proctor, Arkansas, and for his first few years was raised in a housing project in Memphis, Tennessee. The family moved to a better neighborhood when Howard was in 2nd Grade, and he quickly learned that education could be his path to a better life. He graduated from Mitchell Road High School in 1964, and enrolled in Tennessee State University. Throughout high school and college he participated in civil rights activities, and upon completing college he found work at the Jordania State Training School for Boys. In 1969 Peters enrolled in a new Criminal Justice program at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, IL.

In 1971 Peters began working at the Illinois Youth Center in St. Charles, Illinois, and over the next twenty years stayed with the IL Department of Corrections, steadily moving up through the agency in a series of ever more challenging positions. In 1990, while serving as warden at the Pontiac Maximum Security Prison, newly elected Governor Jim Edgar selected Peters as the Director of the Department of Corrections. Peters served in this capacity during a dramatic restructuring of the department's parole services, and saw the trend toward explosive growth in the prison population reversed. Several boot camp-style corrections programs were initiated during his tenure, as well as the Tamms Supermax prison for violent and dangerous criminals.

Following Governor Edgar's reelection in 1994 Peters became a Deputy Chief of Staff. During this time he worked on the reorganization of Illinois's diverse human services agencies, and in 1997 became the first Secretary of Human Services for the newly organized agency. He oversaw a dramatic reduction in the state's welfare roles and stayed in the position through October 1999, which included a year in the George Ryan Administration. At that time he left government service and began a career at the Illinois Hospital Association.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Memphis Tennessee; Jordania State Training School for Boys; Southern Illinois University Criminal Justice Program; Illinois Department of Corrections; St. Charles Youth Center; Governor Jim Edgar; Pontiac Maximum Security Prison; Flood of 1993; Tamms Supermax Prison; IL Department of Human Services; Gov. George Ryan; Budget Director Joan Walters; Chief of Staff Gene Reineke; John Wayne Gacy execution

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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