

An Interview with Mike Rotello

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

Interview # ISL-A-L-2017-097

Mike Rotello, former Illinois State Representative from northern Illinois, was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's Illinois Statecraft Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: Oct 26, 27, Nov 15 & Dec 2, 2017

Location: North Suburban Library, Loves Park, IL

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Ernie Fuhr, ALPL volunteer

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript
being processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 2:09 + 1:20 + 2:17 + 1:16 / 2.15 + 1.33 + 2.28 + 1.27 =
7.03 hrs

Session 1: Early life and serving on the Rockford City Council, 1975-1982

Session 2: Campaign for state senator in 1982 primary, Winnebago County Auditor 1982-1991 & campaign for state rep in 1990

Session 3: 1990 State Representative campaign and serving in the IL legislature, 1991-1993

Session 4: Service in legislature, 1993-1995 and failed re-election bid; 1996 Winnebago County Board Chairman campaign and life after politics

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on March 7, 2018.

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

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Abstract

Mike Rotello, *Illinois Statecraft*, ISL-A-L-2017-097

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Michael V. (Mike) Rotello was born on October 29, 1952 in Rockford, Illinois. He grew up on Rockford's northwest side, and attended parochial schools, graduating from Boylan Catholic High School in 1971. He graduated from Northern Illinois University with a BA in Political Science in 1976. Rotello was elected as a Democrat to three public offices, serving at all levels of state and local government: Rockford city alderman from 1975-1982; Winnebago County Auditor from 1982-1990; and State Representative for the 67th legislative district from 1991-1995. In 1996, he ran unsuccessfully for Winnebago County Board Chairman. In 1997, Rotello switched his political party affiliation to Republican. He worked for the Illinois Department of Human Services from 1997-2004 and the Illinois Department of Commerce from 2004-2014. Currently retired, Rotello resides in Loves Park, Illinois. He has one daughter, Bernadette.

Representative Rotello reflects on his 20-year political career, with a special focus on the city of Rockford and Winnebago County. He discusses his involvement in various presidential campaigns and his friendships with prominent political figures. Rotello has long been considered a fiscal conservative and an advocate for good government. As a young alderman, he led a successful referendum that reduced the size of the city council from twenty to fourteen seats. Later, as county auditor, he played a key role in establishing the post of an elected County Board Chairman, a model used by similar counties across the state. As a state legislator, Rotello was an advocate for education reform. In his first term, he co-sponsored a major bill with Speaker Madigan to reform the school funding formula. He was an early proponent of school-to-work "tech-prep" education, twenty years before career academies were established in Rockford. In 1992, due to redistricting, Rotello was given a more difficult and Republican-leaning district, and was narrowly re-elected. In 1994, a Republican landslide year, he was defeated for re-election. Rotello discusses his experiences serving in the legislature and the political dynamics between downstate and Chicago interests. Rotello also discusses the national trend of deindustrialization and its negative impact on the Rockford community and its economy. In the final interview session, Rotello reflects on his personal decision to switch political parties.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Illinois state & local government; Illinois legislature; Rockford, Illinois; Rockford ethnic groups; Rockford politics; Rockford neighborhoods; Rockford home rule; Winnebago County, Illinois; education funding in Illinois; education reform in Illinois; deindustrialization in Rockford, Illinois; vocational education; redistricting in the 1992 Illinois primary; presidential politics; labor union politics; Adlai Stevenson; Jimmy Carter; Dick Gephardt; Mike Madigan

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