

Interview with Mike McCormick

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, July 8, 2010. My name is Mark DePue; I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This morning I'm with Mike McCormick. Good morning, Mike.

McCormick: Good morning.

DePue: This is going to be fun, because Mike McCormick has worked for many, many years with Governor Edgar. You knew him when he was secretary of state, I believe; worked, especially during the second half of his administration; and have done an awful lot of work as an assistant with him. What would the official title be for your post-governorship years with the governor?

McCormick: I'm an assistant to the distinguished fellow at the University of Illinois.

DePue: Mike, as we always do, we're going to start with a little bit of background on you and your family. Where did you grow up, first of all?

McCormick: I grew up in Vienna, [pronounced VIE-enna, not VEE-enna] Illinois, in Johnson County.

DePue: And you were born when?

McCormick: I was born May 22, 1959.

DePue: How did your family end up in the southern part of Illinois?

McCormick: I guess I really don't know that. The original person in my father's line came from Scot-Irish and ended up in Summit Point, West Virginia, and owned a property that is still referred to as the White House, in Summit Point. It's still standing. He was a Dr. John McCormick. If you look through the history, it looks like my family may have somehow come from the West Virginia area to probably the Kentucky area and then settled on into southern Illinois.

In fact, my father was born in Pope County, Illinois, in a town named after my family, McCormick, Illinois, which is now—I started to say a spot in the road, but I'm not sure it's even that anymore—but it used to be a fairly thriving, very small community in Pope County, Illinois. My dad was born in Pope County, but then his family moved to Johnson County to start businesses. That's how he ended up in Johnson County, and other than being born in Pope County, he lived there all of his adult life.

DePue: It sounds, then, like your family fits the classic model of the mid-nineteenth century migration from the northern tier of southern states—Kentucky, West Virginia, Tennessee—into the southern part of Illinois.

McCormick: Yes, I believe so. That's my understanding, anyway.

DePue: What's your father's name?

McCormick: C.L. McCormick.

DePue: Does the C.L. stand for something?

McCormick: No, it doesn't. That was something that he had been asked about in all of his years of public life, and he used to joke that maybe his parents thought when he was born that he was going to die early or not be worth anything, so they didn't give him a name, they just gave him C.L. My great-grandfather was Christian McCormick, my grandmother's maiden name was Lay, and my dad's brother's middle name was Howard Lay McCormick, so I always speculated that they didn't give him a name, but that's what those two kind of stood for; but I have no basis for that.

When my dad was in the legislature, at one point in time there was an effort to find out what his name was. He had always told everybody that it wasn't C.L., and a reporter had found his Army record, which called him Franklin C.L. McCormick. So they kind of thought they had a little bit of a scoop and came to my dad. The story he told me was that when he went into the Army and they asked him what his name was, he said, "C.L. McCormick," and they said, "Well, what does the C and what does the L stand for?" He said, "I don't have a name. It's C.L. McCormick." They said that wasn't good

enough; (DePue laughs) “From the Army standpoint, you’re now Franklin C.L. McCormick.” So in his Army official papers it says “Franklin C.L. McCormick.”

When my dad passed away, because he was a veteran, he was entitled to a plaque on his gravesite. The problem with the plaque was that to the veterans folks, he was Franklin C.L. McCormick, and of course my mother didn’t want that on the gravesite because that wasn’t his name. I remember I actually called Paul Simon. I couldn’t get anything done, and I gave Paul a call, who, when my father passed away was the first politician that called my house. I called Paul and I said, “Paul, my mom’s going a little crazy on this thing because they want to...” He said, “I never knew your dad’s name was Franklin.” I said, “No, it wasn’t.” I explained the story, and Paul in very short order got that taken care of, so his little marker shows “C.L. McCormick,” not “Franklin C.L. McCormick.”

DePue: That’s quite an interesting story for something as straightforward as, “What’s your father’s name?” (laughs)

McCormick: I’m sorry to take so long on that.

DePue: No, that’s great; that’s fine. Your mother—what was her maiden name?

McCormick: My mother’s maiden name is Irma Lee Turner. She is originally from a little town called Cypress, Illinois. That’s C-y-p-r-e-s-s. That’s also in Johnson County.

DePue: So southern Illinois boy all the way through.

McCormick: Yes.

DePue: Talk about growing up and especially what your father did for employment, because this is very much part of the story of your life.

McCormick: Before I was born my father served in World War II. He served in Germany. He came home and ran for office—for alderman in one of the wards in Vienna, Illinois—as a young man out of the Army, and he won that election. In addition to running for alderman of the city of Vienna, he and my uncle ran a restaurant and a taxicab service in Vienna. Vienna was a small town, but because the war had used up a lot of the materials for cars and things like that, a lot of people didn’t have cars. So even in a small town like that, a taxi service was a good business to have because people would call you to take them home. My dad and my uncle ran that business. My uncle said that my dad got the political bug and started running for office; he got stuck with doing most of the restaurant work, and my dad went out politicking.

My dad was elected to the city council. I believe it was the early fifties, he ran against the Johnson County political establishment.

DePue: Which was?

McCormick: Names escape me now.

DePue: I'm not necessarily looking for names, but was that part of the state traditionally a Democratic or a Republican stronghold?

McCormick: That part of the state was Democratic, but our county was Republican. It has always been, with some dips—unless you're a Democrat; they would call those rises—but it has been a pretty Republican county over the years. But southern Illinois, that deep part of southern Illinois, is traditionally Democratic. Although if you would take a poll on issues and say, Do you believe this and that, there would probably be very little difference in what people believe in most of their political issues. But there are very strong family ties, social ties, to the parties down there.

So the powers that be were actually some folks who ran the Republican Party for many years down there. My dad decided to take on an incumbent county clerk that had served for many years; he took him on as a young man coming home from the war and time for new leadership.¹ It was a tough race, and my dad ended up winning that race as a county clerk. He was reelected four years later as county clerk. Then, in the middle of that term as county clerk—it would have been in the mid- to late fifties—he ran for the general assembly from that district and won his election by just a very few votes. In fact, the election results were contested, and it was a little bit of time before he actually knew that he had won that election.

Also, he got out of the restaurant business and in the early '60s started a little general store, in Vienna, called C.L. McCormick and Sons Little Big Dollar Store. When he started it out, it was a little general store; you walked in and there was nothing over a dollar. I always tell folks he was ahead of his time, because now you have the Dollar Tree and the Dollar Stores, but he was not part of a chain; it was just his little store. He started that little store, and it went from one little building on the square in Vienna to three buildings on the square in Vienna. So it was just a general—you could go in and buy your wife a pair of shoes, your boys some long-handle underwear.² You could buy oil for your car; you could buy your filters for your car; you could buy paint for your house. You could go in there and get about anything you wanted.

DePue: You mentioned, when we talked before, a campground in this mix, too.

McCormick: Later on. My uncle had started a campground in Johnson County called Cedar Lake Ranch. About the eighth grade year in school, we stayed out at the campground for the summer—just in a cabin out there, not as an owner or

¹ Mike's father was not alone in this decision. Veterans nationwide ran for political office, often forming "GI Tickets" with fellow veterans to challenge incumbent office holders.

² One piece, button-up, long-limbed underwear; also known as long johns.

anything, but we stayed out there. It was kind of a nice area. It had a lake, and I think Dad thought—as we were getting older, in teenage years—we might be better off out in the woods than what he used to say, “Settin’ down on hoods of the car, down on the square with all those other kids.” (DePue laughs)

So we stayed out there for a summer and loved it. Then sometime between my eighth grade year and freshman year in high school, my dad and my uncle got together and became partners in the campground. They owned the campground for many, many years. I think we went from forty campsites to about 160 campsites. We had a 123-acre lake. Our property was right in the middle of the River-to-River Trail, which is a hiking—back then, a horse trail that you could actually ride, with some exceptions, on trails through the Shawnee National Forest from the Ohio to the Mississippi River. So my dad was in politics, ran the store, and did his political things for most of the time that I remember growing up.

DePue: Did you and the brother get involved with the family business?

McCormick: Yes. We always had duties. We always had chores, I guess you would call them now. My dad would tell us that we needed to come in after school, when we were fairly young, and sweep the store. I remember there used to be old wooden floors, and he would once a year oil the floors. I don’t remember exactly why, but you would oil the floors; every month or so, in addition to sweeping them out, you’d put some red, like sawdust, stuff on those floors. We called it floor sweep, and you’d spread it all over those wooden floors. I think it maybe cut the dust down or something, and we swept...

So one of our jobs when we were very young—grade school or mid-grade school time, I guess—Dad would pay maybe a dollar for us to sweep the floor or something like that. Then between my eighth-grade grade school year and my freshman year in high school, during the summer I went in with my dad every day and worked at the store, stocking shelves, pricing items, cleaning, checking people out, doing the counter, waiting on customers. After that year, I pretty much did not go back into the store and work; I worked in my freshman year and all the way through my college years, in the summer I worked at the campground, basically mowing, cleaning toilets, clearing brush, fixing stuff that needed to be fixed, collecting camp rentals, hauling the garbage—after every weekend, haul the garbage to the dump—and those kind of things.

DePue: How about his other business? Did politics get discussed in the family household?

McCormick: I never remember a time that politics wasn’t discussed in my household.

DePue: Describe your father’s political philosophy.

McCormick: My dad served in the legislature for about twenty years from southern Illinois. This was the district that produced people like Clyde Choate and Paul Powell.³ I think a large part of his philosophy was that his job was to represent his constituents in his district and to, I guess, bring home the bacon to that district. He had a lot of the same theory from the state legislature's standpoint that I think maybe Kenny Gray had from the Congress.⁴ Paul Powell had the same philosophy: you went to Springfield to get things for your district and to do services for the people in your district; so the whole stories about Paul Powell saying he smells the meat a-cooking, and Kenny Gray being the king of pork...

When my father passed away, the *Southern Illinoisan* wrote an editorial that was very—in fact, I called the editor and thanked him for the editorial. But one of the things they said was that in their opinion, they'd had disagreements with my dad over the course of time. One of them was that they thought he'd taken somewhat of a limited look at his role as a state legislator, as being one who's primarily there to bring home money and jobs to the people in his district. Looking back over the years, I think I could make an argument—based on some votes that he made in the House, based on some speeches he made in the House in the late '60s and very early '70s—that that was probably a little bit of an unfair criticism. But I do think that he was very motivated by promoting the district and promoting things like Fort Massac State Park, and expanding Fort Massac State Park and Massac County and Metropolis, Illinois. We have two prisons located in Johnson County that he was critical in getting. Ferne Clyffe State Park, in Johnson County—

DePue: Ferne Clyffe?

McCormick: Yeah. So his philosophy was, I think to a large degree, that your job is to do constituent services and to bring jobs, people, and state money to your district—miles of highways... So that was kind of, I think, his philosophy. It was a different time.

DePue: What's the economic base of Johnson County—farming and mining?

³ Clyde Choate (June 28, 1920–October 5, 2001; D-Anna) served in the Illinois House from 1947 to 1976, entering the ranks of the Democratic leadership with his selection as minority whip in 1955. Over the next twenty years, Choate would served variously as whip, majority leader (1965-1967), and minority leader (1971-1975). Prior to entering politics, he received the Congressional Medal of Honor for actions in France during World War II. See <http://www.history.army.mil/html/moh/wwII-a-f.html> for Choate's citation. *Illinois Blue Book 1975-1976*. Paul Powell (January 21, 1902–October 10, 1970; D-Vienna) was elected to the Illinois House in 1934 and served there until he began his term as secretary of state in 1965. He was the leader of the House Democrats for many years, including three separate terms as Speaker.

⁴ Like C.L. McCormick and Clyde Choate, Ken Gray (D-West Frankfort) was a World War II veteran. Campaigning on a pledge to bring federal money to the 25th District, he won election to Congress in 1954. He was so successful at making good on his promise, bringing in roughly seven billion dollars during his twenty-four year career, he earned the nickname "Prince of Pork." Becky Malkovich, *The Southern*, June 8, 2008, http://thesouthern.com/news/article_9b338d99-5a1e-5021-ac55-ac3b5d358f64.html.

McCormick: No, Johnson County's a little bit too far south to have done any of the mining work, and our ground is not that good. They do some farming there. There is some corn and beans planted, of course. In Johnson County—with two prisons, a school system, things like that—I would say right now, employment is primarily government-related, meaning state government, county government, and school districts would probably be the major employers in that little county. You got to understand that Vienna has probably a population of twelve or thirteen hundred; the county has a population of maybe nine or ten thousand total. While not everybody from Johnson County works at the prison, there are probably eight hundred jobs at the prison. Then there are so many state institutions that surround Johnson County and southern Illinois, that people from all over southern Illinois—state employment is a big employer.

DePue: This gets back to reinforcing your comments earlier about what your father and people like Clyde Choate and Paul Powell saw as part of their jobs as politicians: to bring jobs to the community.

McCormick: Yes.

DePue: I went to the *Blue Book*, which is the place to go when you want to look at Illinois politics of the past, and I pulled out 1968. This was the 59th District that your father would have represented in 1968; of course, that changes with each census that you have. But on the top here, it's got Clyde Choate, then C.L. McCormick and Gale Williams—all three are representing the 59th District. So this is the opportunity for you to lay out one of the peculiarities of politics back then in the state of Illinois with cumulative voting.

McCormick: Right. In every legislative district in Illinois, there was a state senator and three state representatives elected from each district. As a voter, you had the opportunity to vote three votes for state representative. You could single-shot one candidate, and that candidate got three votes. So on your paper ballot, if you put one X in the state representative races, and you put one X by C.L. McCormick, he got three votes. If you put one X by C.L. McCormick and one X by Paul Powell, my dad would have gotten a vote and a half, and Paul would have gotten a vote and a half. And if you put a checkmark by Clyde; a checkmark by C.L.—in this case I see you've got Gale Williams's picture on that thing—and Gale, you would give each of them one vote. So every voter had three votes to cast among the candidates for the state legislature, the House of Representatives. So the thought, I think, behind that was that most likely—there were four candidates in the general election—there would always be at least one person in that district from the minority party.

DePue: So you're saying two Democrats would be on the ticket and two Republicans.

McCormick: Yes, would generally be the case. Now, there may be some district—we always had a race, always had a race—but there may be some districts where

they put three people on. In Cook County, they probably just put three people, and they were whoever the old man [Richard J.] Daley wanted, and that was the way it was. But down in southern Illinois, the politics was rough-and-tumble state politics. Not that Chicago politics wasn't rough-and-tumble, (DePue laughs) but I think probably back then and maybe even today, the state legislature was a training ground so you could go to the city council in Chicago.

Down home, a state legislator was somebody that brought jobs and money to an area, that you would go and talk to if you had a problem with an agency of state government. You used to not put little stickers on your license plates; you used to get new license plates every year or two. People would bring their license plate applications to my dad by the hundreds. He would go to Springfield, he would do his session, and he would go to wherever you went back then to get this done. He would bring home a truckload of actual license plates, and people would run by the dollar store and pick up their license plate. That was part of the constituent services.

DePue: I think it's illustrative, too, that two of the people we've been talking about here—Clyde Choate, who (laughs) had this stellar military career and was a Medal of Honor winner, and Paul Powell—are two powerhouses in the Illinois state legislature at the time. I think by '68, Powell had moved on to other, higher offices.

McCormick: Yeah. If you look at it, my dad and Paul Powell served together. They were from the same precinct in the same little county of Illinois.

DePue: And opposing parties.

McCormick: And opposing parties. But I must tell you, my impression, hearing my dad talk—and as we all do as we look back over our career, we probably look back with maybe some more fondness than when you were in the midst of battle—my dad was always friends with Clyde; my dad was always friends with Paul Powell. In our pre-interview I told you there would be a Labor Day parade in Massac County, which was in Clyde and my dad's district, in Metropolis. I'd usually go with my dad. Clyde was from Anna. He'd run by Vienna, and he would pick us up. Of course, I would sit in the backseat. Dad and Clyde would talk all the way down to Metropolis. Dad would go get on the Republican float, Clyde would get on the Democratic flat, we'd all go out and have lunch afterwards, and go home.

I may have told you the story. When my dad was a young member of the legislature, he had won one election very closely; he had worked very hard. The next election came around, and he didn't do very well in the polls. He won, but he still didn't win by what he thought he should have for all the hard work that he had done. Mr. Powell called him to his desk and said—back then they used to get paid. I can't remember if it was once a year or once a

term; you just got a check. Paul went to my dad, because my dad was sulking around a little bit. He was probably kind of crying in his own soup a little bit because he didn't think he was getting the attention that he thought he should get. Paul came to my dad and said, "C.L., did you get your paycheck today?" My dad said, "Mr. Powell, I did." He said, "Well, pull it out." My dad pulled his paycheck out, and Mr. Powell pulled his paycheck out, and he said, "Do you see any difference in our two paychecks?" My dad said, "No, Mr. Powell, I don't." He said, "I won by"—and I don't know what it was—"I won by ten thousand votes and you won by five hundred votes. We still get the same pay. Now, get to work." (DePue laughs) That always meant something, I think, to my dad, who was a young man who... Paul had actually worked for my grandparents at some point in time when they owned a little restaurant, and I think Paul owned a restaurant on the square in Vienna.

But the point I guess I'm making is that those guys would get together, and in elections they might cuss a little bit of the Party, and they might say, "The Democrats are better; the Republicans don't care about this or that." But until very much later in my dad's career—of course, I was a little bit more attuned to it—there wasn't the personal nature of this. These guys liked each other. Even when I went to Springfield to work for the governor, some of the old guys that served with my dad, the Democrats, would come up to me and say, "Oh, I really enjoyed working with your dad. He always came across the aisle and worked with us. We could always work with C.L. I really liked him. And I'm a Democrat, but I gave him five hundred dollars one time for one of his campaigns, and I told him to go ahead and put it on his campaign disclosure."

It seems like today, people don't like each other. It's not that we disagree on issues; it's that everything is personal. You dislike one another there oftentimes, and it become almost a situation where it's not as much of a club; there's not as much camaraderie, I think, among legislators today as there was back then. That's not to say that there weren't fights, and that's not to say that people didn't get their feelings hurt, but it was a different time.

DePue: Your father was there when there was quite a bit of change in how the legislature operated. When he started, I think they would go every other year, and it would be only for part of the year, and they really, truly did have to have a business. By the time he left in the mid-'70s, that had changed, hadn't it?

McCormick: Yeah. We went from a citizen legislature to a professional legislature, and it's been a debate... When I was in college, I took a class in Illinois government with Sam Gove, who is kind of a—I don't even know what to call him, but I almost want to say he's like the grandfather of Illinois government and politics in the modern day; he's just been involved in so many things. We always had this debate in that class, because I guess I came from an old school, and the debate was always, "Is the citizen legislature better, or is a

professional legislature better?” This probably won’t surprise you: I took the approach that I thought a citizen legislature was a better formula. Back when my dad served, you had teachers, you had funeral directors, you had farmers, you had lawyers—but not (laughs) nearly as many as you’d have today—you had a banker. You had a wide variety of folks in a wide variety of industries who served in the legislature. They all liked to be in the legislature, but they had careers. My dad was a legislator, but I’m sure somewhere in here it talks about him owning a general store.

DePue: Absolutely.

McCormick: I think my dad would have said that he was a business owner and a politician, and probably in that order. These folks knew what it was like to have to earn a living outside of their paycheck, but they also dealt with people on an everyday basis, and in areas that wasn’t necessarily, “Hey, I’ve got a problem.” I remember many folks who would come in, and there would be a death in the family or something like that. They’d come into the dollar store and talk to my dad. My dad would take the kids and get them shoes and socks and stuff like that for school, because the father who’d just lost his wife didn’t know exactly how to do that kind of thing with the kids; the wife had always done that before. You had a closeness to folks that I don’t think you get now.

My dad never had a district office in his life. People from Chicago, people from Springfield would call up and ask—they’d take his phone number, and the first thing they’d hear is, “This is the dollar store; can we help you?” They’d say, “Is C.L. here?” Then somebody would yell, “Hey C.L., you got a phone call,” and Dad would be coming from selling somebody a pair of boots and get on the phone. They’d say, “C.L., we’d like to come down and meet with you. Could you schedule an appointment? Where’s your office?” He would say, “Well, I’ll be here at the dollar store all day tomorrow; just come on in.” (DePue laughs) His district office was a little square, probably five-by-eight pegboard square, that had merchandise stacked on the other side of it in a little corner of his office, which you wouldn’t accept as your office if you were the lowest-paid person in the state of Illinois. That was his district office.

So you didn’t set up an appointment to see my dad; you went to the dollar store and you said, “Is C.L. there?” If he was there, he talked to you; if he wasn’t there, you knew he was going to be back in a few minutes because they had the dollar store open from 8:00 to 5:00, and from 8:00 to 8:00 on Saturdays. There was probably more politics going on in the back of that little old store than most places in the state. We’re immune from that, and I say we’re away from that completely now. Maybe some of the guys who are in there now, who are highfalutin and do this all the time, are probably smarter and probably have a little better sense of some technical things, but I still think there was a lot of benefit to that.

I know you need to move on to other things, but the other thing that cumulative voting did—and the fact that a legislator was known as a legislator but was also a teacher, a banker, a candlestick maker—was: I know some folks in the legislature now, and that’s their only job. A couple of them—it’s a pay raise to go to the legislature. You have to keep your job, and one of the ways you keep your job is to keep your leadership happy so the money will roll in. Back then, these guys all wanted to keep their job. Believe me, my dad wanted to keep his job more than anybody but if he didn’t, he knew he was still going to be selling long-handle underwear at the dollar store, or he was going to be working the campground, or he was going to be doing something like that. The point is, with cumulative voting that would allow you to get three shots from some small counties like Johnson and Pope County, you could be a little bit more independent of the leadership. I think everybody was more independent of the leadership because you didn’t rely on those guys to get elected. Who would care if Speaker [W. Robert] Blair came down, even in that time, to Vienna and campaigned for my dad? Who cares? Let me just say, my dad loved Speaker Blair. I don’t mean it neg—I think legislators could be a little more independent, was my point.

DePue: We are definitely going to come back to the issue of cumulative voting a little bit later in the scenario. It’s great to hear you talk with passion about this subject, because it is such an important issue that people still talk a lot about today. I wanted to know, though—did your dad get you and your brother Chris involved with the election campaigns?

McCormick: My brother was never much involved in election campaigns. He’s the smart one of the family, (DePue laughs) to be very honest with you. Chris was valedictorian of his high school class. Back in the day when I went to school, we had this split classroom thing, so if you did well on some kind of achievement test—I don’t remember everything about it—you got put in a split grade where, like first- and second-graders were together. The teacher would teach the first grade for a while, and then they’d do their homework and the teacher would teach the second grade for a while. My brother and I—I don’t know how I got in it—but my brother was always in the higher grade. So I would be in second grade, he’d be in first grade; I’d be in fourth grade, he’d be in third grade. I’d come home all bumfuzzled because I couldn’t figure out what I was supposed to do for the next day. Chris would do his homework, and then he’d come to me and go, “I think I remember what your teacher said about that.” (DePue laughs)

So Chris was the smart one, but he was never... When we were small kids; we always went to political events—not every one—together as a family. And I have no idea why, but I think I had a little more interest in it over the years. I think I told you this story before, but when I was down in southern Illinois—made a lot of speeches down there to Republican groups—I would tell them I’d been doing this for a long time. In 1958, my dad was running for the legislature again, for reelection, and my mom was helping him

put pole signs up in Hardin County, Illinois. Back then, you put long signs with your name on telephone poles; you tacked them up so that people driving down the road saw “McCormick, State Representative.” My mom got deathly ill. They ran her to the hospital in Massac County, and she found out she was pregnant with me. So I tell people I’d been out campaigning (DePue laughs) before I was born.

But I always tried to go with my dad to meetings, and I enjoyed going to the old Lincoln Day dinners. Our vacation every year was usually we got to spend a week with my dad in Springfield during the end of the session. So we would all go, and when I was real young, we’d stay at the old Leland Hotel.

DePue: Which is the Republican haunt in Springfield.

McCormick: Which is the Republican haunt, and Paul would stay in the St. Nick [St. Nicholas Hotel], which was the Democrats’ spot. So my dad always stayed in Leland, which I think is the Commerce Commission now or something like that. As we got older—and I guess the hotel thing—we’d stay out south of town at what was the Ramada Inn, out by the Heritage House. Then at my dad’s last years, he would stay at the Motel Six because he didn’t want to spend more than his per diem. We used to get onto him because back then at the old Motel Six, you had to pay an extra seventy-five cents a day if you wanted the TV. You could put a little key in the TV. And they didn’t have a telephone in the room; (laughs) you had to use the pay phone. He would stay there because he wanted to save money, because they only got so much per diem and he didn’t want to spend over his per diem. It would have been so foreign to my dad to have an apartment, a condo, or a house in Springfield and represent people in Vienna.

My dad always wanted a Cadillac—he **always** wanted a Cadillac. “I always wanted a Cadillac,” he’d say, but he said, “I never wanted to buy one even if I could afford it because I didn’t want people to think I was trying to get too highfalutin.” So he’d drive a Buick, but he’d never buy a Cadillac. Even after he was out of politics, he’d never buy a Cadillac, as much as he wanted a Cadillac, because he’d always say, “You know, I don’t want folks to think that I’m trying to be too highfalutin.” It was his philosophy.

DePue: Do you remember any stories as a young kid going out on the campaign trail with your dad?

McCormick: I’m trying to be as honest as I can here, but I guess I probably will embellish a little bit because it’s my dad. My dad was known as an orator. I mean, he could give a pretty good stem-winding speech. My basic memory is that he was always asked to get up and give a talk. I **never** saw him write down a note in giving a speech, whether it was on the floor of the House or whether it was at a political event. I never saw him take a note. I never saw him read from a note to make a speech, no matter what the context was.

To tell you a little bit about how politics had changed over the years and now even seems to have changed more, in one of his last races, in 1982, the party wanted him to run for the state Senate from his district against Gene Johns, who had been a senator there for a long time. But they thought they had a chance of taking over the Senate. Again, this is a situation where at that period in time in Illinois history, the Cutback Amendment had gone into effect.⁵ It was going to be a one-on-one race no matter what, and the party didn't want my dad and the other Republican state representative to run against each other in a primary. So they asked my dad to run for the Senate, and he did. He was defeated in that election.

But I can remember in that race, Phil Rock came down to campaign for Gene Johns. I can remember that they got on TV, on the news that night, and they said something like, "C.L.'s a nice guy, but you know, the last two years he's been in the legislature, he's only sponsored six pieces of legislation; in the last year in the Senate, Gene Johns has sponsored thirty-five pieces of legislation." The next day my dad was asked about that. First he said, "Phil's been a friend of mine for a hundred years, and Gene's a friend of mine. You know, everything they say about me is true. I have only sponsored six"—or whatever the number was—"pieces of legislation, and I'm confident Gene has sponsored thirty. The difference is, all six of my bills have become law, and none of Gene's thirty has."

I can remember at that time people coming up to me and saying, "Boy, this is getting nasty. This is getting terribly nasty. They're really on the edge here." I think now, (DePue laughs) that's like a... I remember my dad even said he ran into Phil later on and Phil kind of said, "Well, I had to get down there C.L., and do my thing." Nobody hated each other, because it was just politics. But nobody said anything personally bad about anybody; it was just that kind of thing. I'm not saying that there wasn't dirty politics back then, but as I think about it now, if that's the only issue that had been raised in a campaign—whether or not you sponsored so many bills—you'd think that was the cleanest campaign in the state of Illinois.

⁵ In 1980, Illinois voters approved the Cutback Amendment 2,112,224 to 962,325; a margin of 1,149,899 votes. <http://www.ilga.gov/commission/lrb/conampro.htm>. The amendment did away with the state's cumulative voting system, under which voters in each state legislative district had elected a state senator and three representatives. The three representatives were chosen from four candidates, divided evenly between the two major parties; thus the system ensured minority party representation in the Illinois House. In For Edgar's views on cumulative voting and the passage and impact of the Cutback Amendment, see his interviews with Mark DePue for May 28, 2009, 52-56; June 9, 2009, 66-74; and June 10, 2009, 93-94. Other members of his administration also shared their opinion of this important development in Illinois governance: Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, March 4, 2009, 38-41; Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, June 4, 2009, 20-26; Kirk Dillard, interview by Mark DePue, September 29, 2009, 61-63; Jim Reilly, interview by Mark DePue, August 10, 2009, 41-43; Mark Boozell, interview by Mark DePue, August 18, 2009, 32-32. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

DePue: As a young kid, were you the type who would go door to door and hand out pamphlets, put up the posters, and do that kind of campaign legwork?

McCormick: Yeah. We would do folding of direct mail. You did it yourself. My mom worked for my dad in the county clerk's office, and when he was running for the legislature after they were married, he needed a little bit of extra money to finish up a direct mail piece. She cleaned out her account to do that. So we all were involved in it. We would lick envelopes and put mail in. As little kids, we didn't really do much. I didn't do much door-to-door stuff. I would help put up signs and stuff like that. But as I got of an age that you could go out and roam a little bit more—although it wasn't too bad to roam in Vienna wherever you were at... I have licked envelopes, I have walked precincts, I've put up signs—yes, all of those things. It was kind of like standard operating procedure.

DePue: A couple more peculiar questions for you: Vienna [VIE-enna]. Spelled just like Vienna [VEE-enna], isn't it?

McCormick: Right. The folks in Europe mispronounce it, but they spell it the same, yeah.

DePue: (laughs) That's part of the tradition of Illinois, though; there's lots of towns that have that tradition.

McCormick: There are lots of towns that actually have names of capitals of foreign countries, when you think about it.

DePue: The other peculiar question is not so peculiar, perhaps. Tell us a little bit about the tradition of the Lincoln Day dinners.

McCormick: I don't know that I know the tradition in the sense of when they got started, because they were just—it's kind of like going to church on Sunday in my house; as kids, we just assumed that there had been Lincoln Day dinners since the beginning of time. I doubt there had been Lincoln Day dinners prior to Lincoln being president (DePue laughs) and being assassinated...

DePue: And this is very much a Republican thing?

McCormick: Yes. If you read history, the Democrats, what we call Democrats now, had the old Jackson Day dinners, back in history. If you read about nineteenth-century politicians, the Democrats would go to these big Jackson Day dinners. Republicans, at least that I'm aware of down in Illinois, now have Lincoln Day dinners that are just a celebratory dinner in honor of President Lincoln. But the real purpose of it, quite frankly, is to raise money for the local candidates. As a county chairman, you work to get as big-a-deal politician as you possibly can get to go to your Lincoln Day dinner, so that you can have a crowd and can sell your twenty-five-dollar tickets so that you can raise a little money to help your local candidates in campaigns.

DePue: We've been talking an awful lot about your dad; we haven't talked nearly as much about your mother. Was your dad probably the most important influence on you growing up?

McCormick: Yes, but let me just say this: I think my mom doesn't get the credit that is due, because she wasn't the one out making speeches or maybe casting votes. My dad was out every day, politicking; my dad was out most evenings going to a meeting, or his constituents needed to talk to him, the chamber needed to speak to him—somebody needed to talk to him. There's a faction in the party in Union County that was mad at another faction, and he'd go in there... My mom kind of held everything together. It's fairly recent history, but most ladies back then, their husband worked, and they stayed at home and raised the kids. Well, my mom ran the dollar store when my dad was gone; my mom ran the campground when my dad was gone; my mom raised the kids when my dad was gone. We drove around in a '64 Chevy, stick-shift-on-the-column with a big box thing on the back of the truck that said, "C.L. McCormick and Sons Dollar Store," because Dad had to take the Buick because he was driving all the way to Springfield. So here's my mom driving an old '64 Chevy pickup truck with two kids, and running the store, running the household...

If you'd look from the outside, you'd say that my dad was the biggest influence. I think he probably was, but that's not to diminish my mom's influence. To be very honest with you, the longer I live the more I realize that there's no way, there's no way that Dad could have done what he did and been involved in as many things... I always thought that the dollar store was the best political thing he ever did, because it not only fed us, but everybody in the country came to the dollar store. Governor Ogilvie came to the dollar store; I've got pictures of the governor walking around the dollar store. Jim Edgar, when he's a young guy running for the legislature, comes down to talk to my dad at the dollar store. But you understand, you can't be gone and run a store. Somebody has to be there, and my mom... My mom was his deputy clerk when he was county clerk before they got married. She was actually appointed county clerk when he was elected, and served out the remainder of his term as county clerk. So my dad had served as county clerk, my mom had served as county clerk, my uncle served as county clerk, and I served as state's attorney in that little county. The point is that, yes, my dad was probably the major influence in my life, but I have to say that—I even hesitate to say—a close second, my mom. I would say a pretty consistent influence as well.

DePue: Was your family religious when you were growing up?

McCormick: Yes. One of the early memories of my mom would be rocking me, singing "The Old Rugged Cross." That almost sounds like we were way wacko, didn't have any fun, and that was not the case; I just remember that. And I can remember—I still have my dad's big old thick Bible—every now and then we'd sit down and take turns reading Bible verses. My dad always made sure

that we went to Sunday school. We sometimes didn't have to go to church, but he made us for...

DePue: What was the denomination?

McCormick: Baptist. My dad used to say that his grandmother thought you had to be a Methodist and a Republican to get into heaven, and that he hoped (DePue laughs) that at least the Republican part he got right so he might be able to make it to heaven anyway. But—

DePue: I assume not the Southern Baptists.

McCormick: Southern Baptist, yes.

DePue: Southern Baptist?

McCormick: Southern Baptist, yes. My family had been members of the First Baptist Church of Vienna.

DePue: You mentioned the story when we first met, about your dad's work with Len Small.

McCormick: My dad, when he was a young man, was a big fan of Len Small because Len Small built roads.⁶ In the thirties, when Len Small was running for his however-many time that he ran, my—

DePue: For what office?

McCormick: For governor. My dad apparently had written him a letter asking for campaign literature. My dad was born in 1919, so this would have been when my dad was a teenager or a little bit younger. He wrote Len Small for campaign literature. In fact, in my home, I have it in a frame—the response that Len Small sent to my dad saying, “Dear Master McCormick, Thank you for your interest in campaigning. Enclosed is some campaign literature.” My dad, I'm told—he said it, and other people said it—would take an old wagon around, and he would go door to door and campaign for Len Small because Len Small built roads for southern Illinois. And when my brother was born, he was born Chris Len, L-e-n, McCormick, after Len Small.

I kid my brother; I just read a biography of Len Small about a few months ago, and I made a little note to my brother and sent the book to him to say, “This is the guy you were named after,” because Len Small had his ethical issues as they related to his days as state treasurer—actually, even before that, when he headed up a mental institution in Kankakee. But he had his ethical problems as state treasurer and as governor. He was able to avoid a prison sentence. But to a young man down in southern Illinois where roads

⁶ Len Small served as governor of Illinois from 1921-1929.

were being built, and to my dad, who for some reason thought that was a great thing—so he was actively involved in that.

I had an old teacher of my dad's one time tell me that when he was a very, very small boy, they would always ask him to stand up every day in class and tell them what was going on in the world. Now, the world then was probably politics locally or whatever, but they would have my dad... She said, "The biggest problem we had with C.L. was I could never convince him when he was a little kid that the earth was round. I'd argue with him and argue with him, but he said that he read in the Bible that when Jesus comes back, an angel will stand on the four corners of the earth." He would argue with his teacher that a circle can't have four corners. (DePue laughs) But I think he got over that after a while.

DePue: Another story you mentioned before, and we're going to jump ahead a few decades here (McCormick laughs): the story about putting up Ogilvie signs.

McCormick: I think the story I mentioned was that there was an old county chairman down in southern Illinois. A big job down in southern Illinois in the day was getting a highway maintainer's job. Those are the guys you see in the orange trucks around the state. Those were high-paying jobs, and in the old day those were handed out primarily on a political basis. When your team left state government and the new team came in, you had no guarantee that you were going to keep driving the orange truck. There was an old county chairman—I cannot remember his name; I want to say he was from Wayne County, but I wouldn't want to hold myself to that. He got caught standing on top of an orange state highway truck tacking up Ogilvie pole signs (DePue laughs) and caused some kind of problem back then. But back then, it wasn't anything; it was never a written rule, but state employees contributed a percentage of their pay to the party. Now, nobody said, "You got to pay 10 percent of one month's salary," or whatever it was, but you wanted to keep your guy in power because he's your party and helped you get your job. So you supported that guy.

DePue: And most everybody, when they think of Illinois politics at that time—we're talking the late '50s, '60s, early '70s—thinks we're talking about Mayor Richard J. Daley, who was the master of working the patronage system to his political advantage.

McCormick: Absolutely.

DePue: But that wasn't going on just in Chicago.

McCormick: No, it wasn't. Coming from Vienna, I have no business talking much about Chicago politics, I'm sure, but in the books that I've read—you read Len O'Connor's book called *Clout* about Richard Daley, and you read *Boss* by [Mike] Royko about Mayor Daley, and you read about the party and the

building of the party there—I have a little bit different take on it. In the old Mayor Daley days, when a family had a death or a family had trouble, your Democrat committeeman, or whatever it was, was there. They brought you chicken or they cooked you a turkey or they helped you out with a problem—the trash wasn't getting hauled, or whatever it was. I think they built their party in some regards by being good neighbors at a very local level.⁷

Now, there was also—I'm sure there was—the shenanigans and things like that, but I always remember, as a much younger person, reading those two books about Mayor Daley and remembering that one good way to build a party is to provide a service to folks. You shouldn't do it probably because it'll help build the party, but quite frankly, if your mother just passed away and you're having a hard time, and the Democrat committeeman in your district is responsible for feeding your family or getting your family—I'm being a little facetious—a turkey or whatever... I think they built the party on the basis of some very good services that they provided their constituents. So I know there were a lot of shenanigans going on, but...

But in southern Illinois, people have always, I believe, taken their politics just as seriously as the folks in Chicago do. I also think that in southern Illinois, the state legislator means a whole lot more to their constituents than the state legislator does in the city of Chicago. The reason I say that is it seems like all of the media—all of the attention, all of the effort—is on what happens at city hall, that city hall controls life in the city. Not that it doesn't affect the people of Chicago, but what goes on in Springfield is maybe a little more directly felt in southern Illinois. If you're in Johnson County with a population of eight thousand, nine thousand people, and you have two state institutions placed in that little county that hire eight hundred people, that's a big deal. If you get good roads, that's a big deal. If you get a little extra money for your school district so that they can build a new building and hire a couple more teachers, that's a good thing. So state government is a little more—I want to say a little more **real**—and so they take their politics down there just as seriously as they do in Chicago.

DePue: You graduated from high school in 1977, so this is the Watergate era, to put it into a national context, and it's the post-Vietnam era as well. What were your political views at that time in your life?

McCormick: During every election, the teachers would come up to me at school if it was a close election. Back then, you didn't know at 7:05 whether or not somebody was elected on election night. The polls closed at 7:00. These folks were counting three-shot ballots all over the district—**paper**—by individuals, so there would be days when we wouldn't know. I always remember the teachers in that time period coming up to me and saying, “Have you heard anything

⁷ Len O'Connor, *Clout: Mayor Daley and His City* (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1975); Mike Royko, *Boss: Richard J. Daley of Chicago* (New York: Dutton, 1971).

about your dad's race? Have you heard anything about your dad's race?" I remember in that era that most people—and we did, too—would have a big deal because they wanted to get home in time to watch *Gunsmoke* or *Bonanza* or whatever show there was. I can remember making a big deal that Governor Ogilvie was going to be giving a nominating or a seconding speech to Richard Nixon's reelection at the convention in—it'd be '68, I guess. Is that right?

DePue: That was his first election; '72 would have been his second time around.

McCormick: Maybe it was '72, then.⁸

DePue: And Ogilvie would have been running as well in that year.

McCormick: We as a family gathered around the TV to watch Governor Ogilvie give that speech. I don't remember any radical activity (laughs) by my family on any political subject. I don't ever remember my dad saying, "Nixon's the greatest thing since sliced bread," nor do I ever remember him saying he should burn the tapes or resign. I can remember him saying that this is going to be a real problem in the party.

In either third or fourth grade, I got an excused absence from school to go sit with my dad and see Richard Nixon at the Williamson County airport.⁹ We sat in one row, and Mrs. Nixon was right down in front of us. When he got done with his speech, the crowd just started going like this, and if it hadn't been for security, I think we'd have been crushed. I don't know if it was where I came from or my parents, but I just don't ever remember any of those—I don't know if "radical" is the right word—but politics wasn't discussed on probably as broad a level as that. In my family, when you said "all politics is local," we really meant (DePue laughs) all politics was local.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that your father, and maybe by extension you, were more Republican than conservative?

McCormick: I think you would find that folks who served with my dad in the legislature would say that he was fairly independent of the party line vote at times. To be honest with you, at that time, I don't remember the label of conservative and liberal. It was always Republican or Democrat, and down in my neck of the woods, that didn't mean that much other than who you voted for. I never had a friend not be a friend because they were a Republican or a Democrat; I just don't remember that label back then. Maybe I missed it, or maybe I was just living in my own little world, but I don't remember a conservative or Democrat.

⁸ At the 1972 Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, Governor Ogilvie and Sen. Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME) seconded the nomination of Spiro Agnew for vice president. *New York Times*, August 24, 1972.

⁹ Nixon attended the 12:30 airport rally in Marion on October 30, 1968. *Chicago Tribune*, October 28, 1968. A short clip of Nixon's appearance at this rally is available at "Nixon Campaigns, Does TV, 1968," *WGBH Open Vault*, <http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/abc-news-videosource:37520>.

I think anybody who would look at my dad's voting record probably would say that he was conservative, although he handled many of the teacher pension bills in his legislative career. He voted for the income tax under the Ogilvie administration. So again, the cumulative voting thing made you where you could be a little bit more independent, I guess. I would say we probably would have identified ourselves as Republicans more than conservatives, because I don't think we knew what a conservative was back then. I don't even know that we knew what a Republican was, but Dad was a Republican and his dad was a Republican and his dad was a Republican, and of course we would be a Republican. I mean, it would be like if I was short because my dad was short because his dad was short. (DePue laughs) Until I was much older, I don't think I ever cared if a candidate—I never asked a candidate, when I was a kid putting on a bumper sticker or putting on a sign, what do you believe about this or that issue? He was a Republican running on the Republican ticket.

From my earliest memories, my dad would get up at the speeches, and he'd get rolling and roll his sleeves up and say, "You don't have to get a lot when you get to the voting booth. You don't have to think a lot. All you got to do is hit that single shot—one shot—just mark that one ballot, and everybody's taken care of on the ticket, and you'll be taken care of." So we identified ourselves as Republican.

DePue: Growing up, you were helping at your dad's store, you're helping out at the campground, you're going to school, you're doing the political stuff—helping out with that. Was there time for any other extracurriculars, like sports, growing up?

McCormick: I'm still waiting on my height growth spurt, so... (DePue laughs) But as a kid playing around, we had a great life. Vienna—your folks let you out in the morning, and you roamed all over town riding your bikes, playing all over town, so long as you got [home] when the fireworks were over.

DePue: Because everybody knew the McCormick kids, didn't they?

McCormick: Everybody knew everybody's kid. My folks told me one time, "You're not supposed to do a wheelie on your bicycle." Well, one of the neighbors saw me riding my bicycle on one tire and called my mom and said, "I want you to know Mike's riding his bicycle on one tire. I don't mean to be mad, but I don't want Mike to get hurt." Folks looked after—it wasn't the McCormick kids, it was everybody's kids. It was a small town; everybody knew everybody else. And we roamed all the time. I played basketball in the Methodist church parking lot; I played softball in the housing authority lot a couple blocks from my house; we rode bikes all over town; we trespassed over everybody's yard; we soaped their windows on Halloween. My dad caught us doing that, and when we were little, he stopped that. He would take us down to his dollar store and give us a bar of soap each, me and my brother,

and we could soap his windows at the dollar store so we wouldn't be soaping other people's windows. We just thought that was the coolest thing; (DePue laughs) we were really getting Dad by soaping his window. Played softball and basketball in grade school, played intramural basketball in high school, but not—always active, but I just didn't have the physical makeup or the ability to really be a sports star.

DePue: Towards the end of high school, then, what did you see as your future?

McCormick: I always wanted to be a lawyer, and I don't know why. I think my dad had a lot of influence in that, because he used to kid me. He said, "One of these days, we're going to get you a license to steal; we're going to send you to law school." (laughter) I remember him saying, "I wonder if I could have done more in my political career had I had an education." My dad graduated from high school, and he instilled in us the need to get an education. We never thought about not going to college, and particularly me. It wasn't because I was the brilliant kid, it was just, you went from first grade to second grade; well, you went from high school to college. It wasn't like we're going to sit around as a family and talk about whether you're going to go to college or not; just that was the natural progression, didn't everybody do that kind of thing. But I always wanted to be a lawyer. I think my dad had an influence in that. He never said, "You're going to be a lawyer." He was not a lawyer. He joked sometimes about lawyers. But I think as he was winding down his career, he saw that maybe he would have had a lot of other opportunities in life had he had an education. He was really damned and determined that we were going to have an education.

He was big on me going to U of I, to tell you the truth. When I was down there, for the most part everybody went to Southern Illinois University or Murray State University. My dad was big on U of I, and I think one of the reasons he was: he saw what kind of money went to U of I (laughs) as the flagship university in the state, and I think he was wise enough to know that at that time, with its reputation and being an in-state person, it was a pretty good buy for your dollar.

At career day in high school they'd ask me to write about three careers. I'd go to the teacher and say, "I really only want to write about being a lawyer," so they'd let me write about being a lawyer, being a judge, and being a court reporter or something like that, (DePue laughs) because they didn't want to give me an exception to the rule. I can't remember the time I said, "I want to go to law school," but I just always remember that as I was asked over the course of time, I always said, "I'd like to be a lawyer."

DePue: What kind of lawyer did you envision yourself becoming?

McCormick: A general practitioner that would practice in my little hometown of Vienna for the rest of my life.

DePue: What did you major in college, then?

McCormick: In college I wanted to major in pre-law, but I was in Vienna, and we didn't have a real intense counseling service at our little high school. So I found out from my counselor too late that to get into the pre-law program at the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois, you had to have two years of a foreign language. Well, I didn't have any years of a foreign language. I'm in Vienna; why do I need to learn how to speak Spanish, right? (DePue laughs) So the first thing we did was I went to Mrs. Monroe, the Spanish teacher, and we tried every way in the world to figure out a way that I could work extra hard and somehow get certified for getting two years in one year of Spanish. It just wasn't going to work out. They tried everything. So I'm kind of devastated. Then I think, You know, there's ways. There's got to be a way.

So I started doing some research on the thing. I called a couple people. I actually drove here and talked to somebody over on John Street, or something over there. I went through all this stuff, then found out that the College of Commerce and Business Administration did not have a requirement that you have two years of a foreign language to get into school. I applied to get into the College of Commerce and Business Administration because they said, "Look, Mike, your first couple of years are pretty standard stuff. You're going to take a little bit of this, a little bit of that, and then you kind of get worked in." So I went into the College of Business and got my degree in business administration.

DePue: Did you stay with that for the entire four years?

McCormick: I did. I loved political science, I loved history, and I took some of those courses, but I got to thinking: Law school's not a sure thing for anybody, and what if I don't get into law school? One of the things I think my folks did teach me is some practicality, and maybe too much so in some regards. I thought, I can know a whole lot about the three branches of government, but I'm not so sure what job that's going to get me; I can know that Henry Clay was the Speaker of the House in 1830-whatever, but I don't know what kind of job that's going to get me. I thought, I don't want to be negative, but I also want to have a marketable degree. So I took speech classes, political science classes, and history classes for all my electives, and then I took my major courses in business that I had to take and came away with a degree in business administration.

DePue: While you were in college, you got involved in a series of debates. I want you to go into how that happened, because this a crucial piece of Illinois history as well, I think.

McCormick: In 1980, my dad was running to go back to the legislature after a period of retirement. At that same time, now-Governor Quinn had worked to get enough signatures to somehow get on the ballot the Cutback Amendment to the—

DePue: Then—private citizen Pat Quinn.

McCormick: Then-lawyer from Northwestern University, but private citizen Pat Quinn.

DePue: You can probably do this better, but let me just start this. 1978, an election for governor; Jim Thompson's running for the second time. He'd run in '76 and got elected. He ran in '78 because of the new constitution. I think as soon as he was elected, there was a pay increase for the legislators, and—

McCormick: During the lame duck session of the legislature.

DePue: —can you pick it up from there?

McCormick: People were mad. A bunch of people had gotten through the election without the pay raise issue. I think maybe there had been a vote, and maybe it had failed earlier—I'm not sure about that.

DePue: And Thompson had run promising no pay increases.

McCormick: Yeah, but that was Thompson, you know. (DePue laughs) Jim Thompson, in my experience with him—one of the best politicians I've ever seen. He'd come down to southern Illinois, and he could talk a better drawl in southern Illinois than I could, and I grew up there. I'm getting off your topic, but the first time I met Jim Thompson, he came to Vienna, Illinois, and I had the Vienna grade school band—my dad and I worked on this. We blocked off a part of the square in Vienna. We had the Vienna grade school band there.

Jim Thompson comes in, in a big Winnebago thing, comes out, and he's this big, tall guy. He's got a flannel shirt and a pair of corduroy pants on. Here I am with a suit and tie on, and my dad's got a suit and tie on because the governor candidate's coming to town. He [Thompson] gets up to make a speech, and he's "you-all"-ing it and "How y'all doing?" and "It's good be down here in southern Illinois." He said VIE-enna instead of VEE-enna. He'd kiss a baby and eat a hot dog and pat you on the back. He said, "C.L., come with me." So my dad got in the van, because they were going down to a thing in Massac County, in Metropolis. This is '76. He said Thompson's in the van and they're talking, just kind of telling stories, just talking a little bit about the campaign. We're getting closer and closer to this big event that's going on in Metropolis, and my dad's thinking, Is he going to change? So finally my dad says, "Now, don't let me stop you if you need to get ready for this next thing."

“Ah, no, no, I’m fine.” Walked right into that big dinner with his corduroys and his flannel shirt on. But I think I digress from your question.¹⁰

DePue: We were talking about what enraged the Illinois public and caused the Cutback...

McCormick: Oh, right. So it was basically the lame duck pay raise. There was a large backlash on that, which Pat Quinn was able to harness at that time, really.

DePue: As you mentioned, in the lame duck session, the legislature passed the pay raise. Thompson immediately vetoed it with his autopen because he was down in Florida at the time. [The Thompson’s were actually vacationing in South Carolina at the time.]

McCormick: He was out of state, yeah.

DePue: And it was a wink and a nod kind of a deal where Thompson gave the legislature enough opportunity to come back and override the veto.

McCormick: Yeah. So it creates this big political mess, and Pat Quinn harnesses this into getting enough petitions to have this Cutback Amendment on the ballot.

DePue: What does that mean?

McCormick: What do you mean, what does it mean?

DePue: The Cutback Amendment.

McCormick: It meant that basically we were going to do away with the cumulative voting system. We would have one senatorial district with a senator, and that Senate district would be divided into two legislative districts, with a single state representative representing roughly half of that Senate district. So instead of electing three people through the cumulative voting process in that district, you were electing one state senator in the district, and then you were electing one state representative in a split of that Senate district. Instead of voting for three individuals, you voted a one-on-one—usually a Republican versus a Democrat—in that district, which by necessity meant that a third of the people in the legislature were not going to be in the legislature anymore.

My dad, of course, was the big beneficiary of the cumulative voting, coming from a Democrat district but having a couple of small counties that he was popular in and that were Republican. People in Johnson County, Pope County, and many Massac County folks would single-shot my dad, particularly if he was the only Republican candidate. So a guy from a smaller county would have a chance to win. Also, if you were in a Democrat district

¹⁰ Thompson’s style of dress in this campaign initially made an unfavorable impression on Governor Edgar. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 29, 2009, 91-92.

and you lived there—except up in the city of Chicago, because they'd run Democrats on the Republican ticket and all that stuff—you were assured that as a Republican, you were going to have a legislator representing you in Springfield, even if the Republicans were in the minority. Same way in reverse. Pat's proposal would mean that in primarily Democrat districts, the Democrat would be elected and serve, and Republican the same way.

I had read about this proposal. I was a senior in college, and I was taking a class with Sam Gove on Illinois politics.¹¹ (laughs) I kept reading about this, and I was listening to Quinn talk. Quite frankly, I thought he was being a little bit of a demagogue on the issue. So I got to thinking about it, and I looked at it, and I wrote this letter to the *Daily Illini*. I'm a college student, so the *New York Times*, nah, no, but the *Daily Illini* might mean something. So I wrote a letter to the *Daily Illini* saying that it's time for the Coalition for Political Honesty to be completely honest with the people of Illinois. I set forth all this stuff about minority representation. I don't have the letter now; I can't remember it all. I set forth, and I was so proud that that thing got published. I remember sending a copy of it to my dad saying, "Hey, look what I did." (DePue laughs)

It wasn't too long after that that I got a call from some folks. They said somebody in Champaign had sent them a letter that I wrote, and asked me if I would be willing to debate a state representative about the issue. I said, "I've been debating a state representative most of my life, (DePue laughs) but it usually had to do with could I have the keys to the car or negotiating a little bit on curfew or needing a little extra money to get through the month in college." So I said, "Yeah, I don't care. I'll go do it." The guy who called me—I'm not sure if it was him first, but at some point in time I was working directly, phone-wise, with Norton Kay, who had been Dan Walker's press guy. There was another guy. His first name was Bruce; he's a lobbyist now, or was when I was in Springfield. I can't remember his last name. So I went down to Arcola, to the Republican Women's Club, and debated Tim Johnson on the Cutback Amendment.

I'm a senior in college. Tim Johnson had been in the legislature, and of course everybody knew how well Tim did in terms of constituent services. All those Republican women loved Tim to death and had known him all their life, of course. I was a young college kid from the U of I, and what business I had of doing that, I still don't know. Probably if they'd have asked me today, I might say, "I'm not qualified to do that," but I was young and didn't realize how stupid I was. But I debated him. They had sent me some more information, I had done some research on my own, and I talked to Sam Gove as well. I talked to Sam Gove, and I think I talked to Jim Knowling, because

¹¹ Gove was a key figure behind the legislative internship program that launched Edgar's career. For Edgar's recollections of his application to and selection by the program, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 22, 2009, 54-67.

Jim had been a professor. Jim liked the Cutback Amendment at the time, I think, and I think Sam was against it, but I'm not sure. So I went and debated Tim. I thought I did okay. Of course, Tim's a very bright guy, and he treated me with respect because he knew my dad. But you could tell he was kind of crushing—I mean, it was like... (laughter) And he was right.

But apparently they had somebody in the crowd; someone went down to see what I did that night. When I got back a few days later, I got a phone call, and they said, "Would you be willing to do some joint appearances if Quinn would do"—I'd call them debates, but we would do radio stations; we would do like WDWS together. We did the public TV station together, and a couple of other things like that where Pat and I would sit down and either take calls or a moderator would talk to us about the issue. It was never like, "Your mother wears Army boots. No, your mother wears Army boots." It was always a discussion about the issues.

DePue: The pluses and the minuses of the Cutback Amendment.

McCormick: Yeah.

DePue: What was the organization that asked you to do this?

McCormick: Pat's was the Coalition for Political Honesty, I believe, and mine was the Committee for a More Representative Government or Committee for Representative Government. I'm not sure; it was something like that.

DePue: But was this an extension of one of the parties or what?

McCormick: Not that I know of.

DePue: Just a bunch of people got together who were opposed to the Cutback Amendment?

McCormick: Yes, as far as I know. Other than the gentleman named Bruce, and Norton Kay, I didn't know who was behind it; all I knew was I was against the Cutback Amendment.

DePue: Were they picking up some of your travel bills or anything like that?

McCormick: No. I didn't really have many travel bills because it was pretty much here in central Illinois. I didn't really have much traveling expenses.

DePue: What was the essence of Pat Quinn's argument?

McCormick: You remember these guys come in after an election, and they raise their own pay, and don't you think the state would be better off with a third less politicians?

DePue: And what was the essence of your counter to that?

McCormick: That this had been tried, that this had been done in Massachusetts. This has been a long time ago, so I can't quote numbers. Pat said, "First, don't you want to get rid of a third of the politicians in the state?" That, you didn't have much of an argument for, because it would be like somebody putting on about, "Would you like to kill five lawyers today?" (DePue laughs) Everybody would go, yeah. But he also said, "There are fewer legislators, so that means it will cost less. That means fewer bills are going to be introduced. That means we're going to save money. There'll be more competitive districts; more minorities will win; more women will be in the legislature." He went through the whole thing by just saying it.

With all due respect to him, I was never able to get past, "Wouldn't you like to get rid of a third of the politicians in the state?" I always thought that once he said that, tying it to the pay raise, whatever I said might make sense to people, but they were so mad, it didn't matter. But I had research where—and others had helped me in this committee—Massachusetts had done the same thing a few years back. All of their data showed (laughs) just the opposite, that fewer bills weren't done, it cost more to run the legislature—all of these things. You go through it step by step, argument by argument: in the state that had done similar to what we were going to do, it didn't work out; it didn't fly. I believe, many years now after the fact, that if you take a look at each one of Pat's arguments for the Cutback Amendment, I don't think that you will find any of those have proven to be correct.

I had also taken the approach that I thought it was important to have a minority representative. I thought if you were in a totally Democratic district, there was nothing wrong, if you were a Republican, of having one guy out of that district looking out after your interests in Springfield. But the long and the short of it is, I don't know what could have been done to defeat that thing because it was one of those arguments—it's almost like standing up for the guys who just, in the public's mind, and maybe accurately, just pulled one on them. So I had both a victory and a defeat that night, because my dad won his election to the state legislature, but I lost on my Cutback Amendment issue pretty big.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that was Pat Quinn's entry into Illinois politics?

McCormick: Yeah, I think so. I think that is probably true. You've got to give Governor Quinn credit on this thing. He was a fairly young man at this time—not that he's old now, but fairly young man at this time. Not everybody can see the bitching and the moaning of the public and harness that into something, and pretty much—I would guess, if you talk to Governor Quinn—on a shoestring. As I recall, Pat was just driving around in an old car like I was. Pat didn't have an entourage; he'd just come in and do it, kind of wave me away after it was done, and move on down the road. He was smart enough to be able to

harness that into something that made a significant change. The political process in my area and in the state—I would say the change did not do what it was sold to do, in that there was no empirical data that Pat could ever point to that said it would, and we certainly know now that it didn't. But I think he believed it, because some of it made some common sense. If you're at the dinner table and you have twelve kids or three kids, it's probably going to cost you less to feed three kids rather than twelve kids. But that's really not the way it works in government, in politics.

DePue: So this many years removed from the Cutback Amendment passing, how has it affected Illinois politics?

McCormick: In my mind, there have been a few things. First, I believe that it has, among other factors, increased the role that party leaders play and the influence that they have in elections. It also affects the fact that if you're a Republican in a Democrat district, in these days of very partisan wrangling, who do you go to? This may be saying the same thing in terms of the leadership, the power of the leaders, but there's not as many what I would call independent legislators. They do the party line, so many of them, no matter what.

When Governor Edgar was trying to get his education reform, the tax swap issue done, I met with some southern Illinois legislators. I wasn't a big policy guy, but I'd been involved in those southern Illinois legislative campaigns, and we'd helped some of them get elected as a result of this. So I would sit down with some of these guys, and we could show them numbers; we could show them how this would help. The numbers were there. Nobody disputed the numbers. I would say, "You guys have different numbers, bring them to me, because I love southern Illinois more than I love this bill. Bring them to me, let me take them to somebody; let me tell everybody that we're wrong." Didn't matter. They voted with the leadership.

I think partly that whole thing about you live or die by your party—your one-on-one vote and your leadership is more important, and you don't have some of those rebels down there (laughs) that you had before, who could come from small counties and garner enough votes to have their input in the legislature.

DePue: Earlier in our discussion you talked about the citizen legislator versus the professional legislator. You've just described a scenario where it sounds like maybe that was really the explanation for what happened with the change in the legislature and the legislative process.

McCormick: Well, long before the Cutback Amendment, with all honesty, you saw a larger portion of lawyers in the legislature and more time spent in Springfield. When my dad first went to Springfield, his office was that square desk on the floor of the House. That was their office. Now they have fiefdoms, in a way. You have your Springfield office, and you have so many district offices... Bonnie,

who was the person who checked out people at the dollar store, answered the phone for Dad and said, “C.L., the governor’s on the phone for you.” (DePue laughs) Now, that doesn’t happen. That’s not to say that’s the right way or to necessarily go back all that way, but I think the Cutback Amendment had something... I’m going to tell you, the trend away from the citizen legislature was developing before the Cutback Amendment.

DePue: To put you on the spot here, you’ve been a practicing lawyer for your entire adult life, and you’ve—

McCormick: Well, to some degree.

DePue: You’ve indicated that you don’t think it’s necessarily a good idea that there are so many lawyers in the legislature.

McCormick: I don’t think there ought to be so many morticians in the legislature; I don’t think there ought to be so many farmers in the legislature... I mean, I think lawyers have a place in the legislature; I think citizens have a place in the legislature. Again, issues, I think, are more complicated. I remember one time sitting down and talking with Governor Stratton at an event, and he said, “I did my budget on a legal pad. I sat down and did my budget on a legal...” Well, things are more complicated than that now. Things are much more complicated, and I understand, but I don’t think you have to be a lawyer to serve in the legislature. I don’t want all lawyers in the legislature. Quite frankly, I don’t want all teachers in the legislature; I don’t want all dollar store owners in the legislature; I don’t want all campground owners in the legislature; but I don’t think it hurts to have **some** people whose sole goal in life and sole source of income and sole sense of being is that they’re a member of the Illinois state legislature. DePue: Did this experience in 1980, going around and debating Quinn on radio stations and some other venues, whet your appetite for a political career of your own?

McCormick: No. It was fun, but I was always interested in politics, so it was just kind of an extension of that.

DePue: Had you flirted with the notion of running for office yourself?

McCormick: At that stage in life, you probably think you might be president some day, you know what I mean? When you’re in college, you think, Who knows? I don’t have any memories right now of saying, “Boy, I’m going to run for X or Y,” at least when I was in undergrad. I don’t remember that.

DePue: You graduated one year after this, in 1981. What happens after that?

McCormick: I go to law school.

DePue: Law school where?

McCormick: At Southern Illinois University.

DePue: Earlier you said you were concerned when you first got into college, Wow, I can't guarantee law school. Was it a struggle to get into SIU law school?

McCormick: No, no. I was very lucky. I got admitted to a variety of schools. I had a good grade point average in college. I had a decent LSAT score—don't remember what it was; I didn't break any records—and got accepted to quite a few schools. But by that time, I thought I wanted to practice in my hometown. My dad was running for the state Senate.

DePue: This would be '82?

McCormick: This would be '82. My dad was in politics.

DePue: So this is the first election after the Cutback Amendment passed.

McCormick: Right. So I make a decision to go to SIU law school. I had a conversation with Ty Fahner, who was attorney general at the time.¹² He came down to Vienna for an event, and we talked for a minute, and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm going to go to law school." "Where are you going to go?" I said, "I'm going to go to Southern Illinois University." I thought some highfalutin' lawyer like Ty would laugh at me or just kind of be nice to me because he knew my dad. He said, "I'm going to tell you something. We have people who work for us from SIU. We have some law clerks, we have some people who do... They do an excellent job." Now, he was a politician, and he might have said that if I was going to go to Mike's Combination Hamburger Stand and Law School as well. (DePue laughs) But I remember him saying that. Because my goal in life probably by that time was being a lawyer in my hometown. I thought about running for state's attorney at some point in time. By that time I was thinking, Oh, maybe I might run for the legislature someday. I thought I could go to my hometown, practice law, and see kind of where it went from there.

DePue: You finished law school and passed the bar in 1984, then?

McCormick: Right, that's correct.

DePue: And after that?

McCormick: My dad had sold out the store by that time. Sometime while I was in law school, I guess, he sold out his store, went out of business—not like bankruptcy out-of-business. The Walmarts and the Kmarts at that time, and

¹² William J. Scott served as attorney general of Illinois from 1969 until July 29, 1980, when he was sentenced to serve one year and a day, after being convicted on a single count of income tax fraud. An hour and a half after Scott's sentencing, Gov. Jim Thompson picked Tyrone C. Fahner to replace Scott. *Chicago Tribune*, July 30, 1980.

the Targets and whatever, were just killing little stores like ours. My dad was a merchant at heart. Everybody thinks he was a politician at heart; my dad was a merchant at heart. If you came in and you had a good deal on purple pantyhose, my dad would buy a gross of them and try to sell them at the dollar store because he's getting a good deal. He'd try to convince women in Vienna that you ought to wear purple pantyhose, and he'd try to convince the hunters that if you put purple pantyhose underneath your hunting clothes, it would keep you warmer. He was a merchant at heart, because his father had been a merchant, his mother had been a merchant, and he was a merchant. So Dad had closed down the store, and my uncle and I and another worker revamped one of the buildings of the old dollar store and made a law office out of it. We built a law office, and I opened up: Mike McCormick, Attorney at Law.

DePue: A small town—were you the only attorney in town?

McCormick: No, a state's attorney was in town, and we had at that time one other lawyer in town, who was the father of the local judge in town. So there were four lawyers in Vienna: one was a judge, one was a state's attorney, me, and then another what I would call general practitioner.

DePue: Good business to start with?

McCormick: Yes, for a young guy just getting out of law school, I did have a decent business. The gentleman that was the other practitioner was kind of winding out his business. His son, who had practiced with him before he became a judge—that lawyer knew his son wasn't going to come back and practice, because judges never get not retained. I don't know what you'd have to do (DePue laughs) to not get retained, but... So Jack, the other attorney in town that was a general practitioner, gave me some cases to work on. The local banks I had borrowed some money from to start my office—in terms of the repair work that we had to do on the store—whether they trusted me or not, they gave me some business because I think they at least thought maybe I could give them some legal work, and maybe they'd get paid.

I might have mentioned this in our pre-interview: the mayor of the city of Vienna came to me and said, "I want you to be our lawyer." I told Paul Gage, Mayor Gage, "Paul, I don't know anything yet, to be very honest with you, and I don't want you to think..." I said, "I barely know anything about the law, and I sure don't know much about municipal law." He said, "You're from Vienna, you're a hometown boy, you're starting a business, and you're going to be our city attorney." I said, "Well, don't you have a city attorney?" And he said, "Yeah, but I'm getting ready to fire him; I'm going to let him go." I said, "Don't do that. Let me—is there a term or..." And he said, "I don't care; this is what we're going to do." So I said, "Why don't you call the attorney up?" The attorney's name was Matt Franklin. I think Matt's in Springfield; he used to work for the Department of Children and Family

Services. I called Matt and talked to him about it, and Matt said he understood.

So here I was out of school: the banks were using me, my little town was using me. I wasn't getting rich, but I was making enough money to pay the bank and—

DePue: I assume the Vienna city attorney isn't by any stretch a full-time position.

McCormick: Oh, no, no. I went to the city council meetings, drafted up a few ordinances. They wanted to give me a retainer, and I told them I didn't know if there'd be enough work to justify a retainer; just call me when they needed me. So no, it was not (laughs) a full-time job.

DePue: How would you define your politics at that time in your life?

McCormick: Republican.

DePue: And now, we're into three years of the Reagan administration where we do start to use words like conservative and liberal.

McCormick: That's true. Now it's cool on college campuses to be for Ronald Reagan; you can be a conservative on college campuses today, actually, believe it or not. When I was on a college campus, Reagan was not popular. I was a member of Illini for Reagan, and I would wear my orange-and-blue Illini for Reagan t-shirt around. People would actually stop you on the street and say, "I don't believe that you would be for that guy." And we didn't have that big of a group, but I was a Reagan guy.

I met Ronald Reagan when he was running for president. My dad was asked to introduce him at a meeting in Marion, Illinois, and I met him and Nancy Reagan. When I say "meet," that sounds highfalutin'. I got to shake his hand. My dad took him up and said, "Governor Reagan, this is my son Mike; and Nancy, this is my son Mike." So that's how I got to meet him; I shook his hand, and my dad introduced him to me. At that point in time, 1980, Governor Thompson had a little faction going on that was for John Connally.¹³ Some of the faction down in southern Illinois that probably, I'd say, wasn't highly supportive of my dad, was kind of going the Connally way, and my dad was going the Reagan way. So when candidate Reagan came in to Marion, they asked my dad to introduce him and endorse him and do all of those kinds of things, and he did. I think I got to see every presidential candidate in that 1980 race, because they all came through here. I think the only one I didn't meet was President Carter. Mondale came through; I met him. I went to everything, except I don't think I went to see [Edward] Kennedy. But I met each of the presidential candidates. In fact, John Anderson's daughter lived on our floor at Illini Towers.

¹³ For the 1980 presidential primary, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2009, 90-97.

So I was a Republican and probably at that time considered myself a conservative because I was a big Reagan fan.

DePue: Fiscal conservative, social conservative?

McCormick: Probably social conservative, because I didn't know anything about finances. If you'd asked me, "Do you want a tax hike?" I'd have said no, but it probably would have been more the fact that I wasn't making enough money. (laughter) But I would say more social conservative then. When you're young... I probably was a fiscal conservative, but I didn't even think that much about fiscal issues as it related to government and politics at that time.

DePue: Bush was also running. Was he one of the people you got to see?

McCormick: I did. Bush won the Iowa caucus, as I recall—

DePue: That's right.

McCormick: —and surprised everybody. But long before that, I got a call. They couldn't get rid of tickets for a breakfast to see—was it Ambassador Bush? Is that what they called him at the time?¹⁴ I got a call saying, "Hey, you want a couple of tickets to a George Bush breakfast that they're having" at what's now the Hilton Garden Inn, the old Ramada there on the corner of Neil and Kirby in Champaign. I said, "Oh, yeah, I'll take the tickets. How much are they?" They said, "Oh, we're having a little trouble selling them, so I'll give them to you." (DePue laughs) I said, "Okay!" I go, but George Bush ends up winning the Iowa caucus, so all of a sudden you can't get a ticket to this event—it's packed, it's crowded, it's everything—and there I am with my free ticket for breakfast with George Bush. So I met him.

I met John Connally at a reception. I liked John Connally. I could have been for John Connally, because I thought he was a conservative as well. He'd been governor; he'd been secretary of the treasury, I believe. He was probably the most impressive man in a room that I believe I've... I think Jim Thompson took over a room, but he was as impressive of a man—and I say that just in terms of the feeling that you have when you're meeting somebody—as John Connally was. I don't know if it was just because I was a short little squatty college student, and there's this huge guy with this wavy blond hair, who talked southern. I always thought that was a guy who really looked like a president. That's a guy you could look at and say, "Boy, that guy looks like he might be a president."

Met John Anderson on the floor of our dorm because his daughter lived there. I'm trying to think who else was running that year. Was it Phil Crane? Of course, I had met him before. It was really nice because all of these presidential candidates would come through Champaign. Of course, getting

¹⁴ Bush was a congressman from Texas, and had previously served as ambassador to the United Nations.

the opportunity to meet Reagan was good. So I probably was more for Reagan because my dad was for Reagan pretty much at that time, although I do remember wearing my Illini for Reagan [shirt].

My dad was known for a famous speech in the Illinois House of Representatives; it was the mosquito speech. In fact, they at one point in time amended the rules of the Senate to let my dad go over and give his mosquito speech to the Senate. He was trying to get some money for a mosquito abatement district. He got to talking, and by the time he got done speaking, the mosquitoes were carrying off tractors, (DePue laughs) women couldn't wear miniskirts, and his poor little kids couldn't wear shorts down in Vienna; you know, farmers were having to wear nets in their tractors. So all of a sudden the floor gets silent, and my dad—I hate to say this. I'm not trying to brag. My dad entertained. When he would be on the floor to speak, oftentimes the Senate would recess, and they would come over to listen. Governor Ogilvie told me one time—they had a speaker that you could hear the House from the governor—"I had a standing order in my office: when C.L. spoke, we turned the speaker up to listen to what C.L. had to say."

Reagan, to tell you how well-briefed he was on this event: Dad gets up and makes this stem-winder. "I want a man that knows how to do this and that, and that's why I'm supporting Ronald Reagan. I want a man that's smart enough to marry a lady like Nancy Reagan," (DePue laughs) da-da, da-da, you know, doing his old stem-winder thing. So Reagan gets up and of course thanks my dad and makes some niceties. He says, "Now, I understand that Representative McCormick has been known for fighting mosquitoes here in southern Illinois. And I want to tell you something: if you're out camping, you can deal with a thunderstorm, and you can deal with a tornado, and you can deal almost with a hurricane—but one mosquito in a tent will drive you crazy." (DePue laughs) And I always remembered.

So that was kind of my thing in 1980. I think I liked Reagan, but I almost—could have—went with Connally. I think my dad probably swayed me that far over.

DePue: Was this about the time that you would have had an opportunity to meet Jim Edgar as well?

McCormick: I was thinking about this the other day because I knew we were going to do this. I can't remember when I met Governor Edgar the first time. I remember talking to my dad about a race. I always worked on campaigns, not just my dad's. I would oftentimes be, like, a coordinator for Jim Thompson's campaign, just in my little county of southern Illinois. In fact, you interviewed Gene Reineke. Gene Reineke was one of my first field guys that I dealt with as a little county coordinator back in who-knows-when for Thompson.¹⁵ But

¹⁵ Gene Reineke, interview by Mark DePue, December 7, 2009.

the one thing I remember is Secretary of State Edgar had been appointed, and he was getting ready to run in an election. I remember my dad coming to me and saying, “Do you have a candidate? What are you going to do with this election?” or something like that.

DePue: This probably would have been the '82 election.

McCormick: I want to say it's got to be '82. It would have been the first time Governor Edgar was on the ballot as secretary of state.

DePue: '82.

McCormick: I can remember my dad saying, “You know, you do whatever you want, but if I was a young man interested in politics, I'd work for Jim Edgar. I've known Jim a long time. He was a staffer in the legislature.” And my dad would say things like, “He doesn't go around drinking all the time in Springfield, chasing women. He's a good guy.” I'd always worked for Thompson campaigns before, always supported Governor Thompson. I say working on campaigns—I'm talking about as a volunteer bumper sticker putter-on-er guy; I wasn't trying to make myself look like I was running a campaign or anything. So I said, “I don't really care. If you think he's a good guy, that's fine.” I had worked for Governor Thompson an election or two. In '76, I worked for him; '78, I worked for him, I guess. My dad was county chairman, so he appointed me (laughs) as Jim Edgar's county coordinator.

So sometime in that process I would have met Secretary Edgar, most probably in one of two ways, although again, I cannot for the life of me remember exactly how it was. But one of two things would have happened. It would have either been at a Lincoln Day dinner that I was at, or when he was down in southern Illinois, he'd often stop by and say hi to my dad. I may have met him in one of those two circumstances, but most probably at a Lincoln Day dinner.

DePue: I know it wasn't too long after he was appointed by Thompson to be the secretary of state because—

McCormick: Alan Dixon became United States Senator.

DePue: So he got appointed in 1980, and I'm pretty sure he immediately started thinking, I've got to run for office, so I have to start visiting the rest of the state.¹⁶

McCormick: At one point in time, my mom tells me, Governor Edgar looked at her and said, “Why don't you get up here and give my speech; you've heard this as many times as I have,” (DePue laughs) because my dad and mom would go together to these dinners sometimes. So yeah, Governor Edgar, in his early

¹⁶ He did. See Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 15, 1009, 57-67.

secretary of state days—and I'm not going to be critical: in my older days with Governor Edgar, I was one of the guys that had to beg and plead to get him to Lincoln Day dinners. In his early days, you didn't beg and plead with him to do Lincoln Day dinners; he did more Lincoln Day dinners than anybody. Now, they'll tell you that's not true, but I know. Jim Edgar did dinners that almost didn't deserve to be Lincoln Day dinners. He was everywhere. He knew what he was doing. He would be in Anna one night and Metropolis the next night. I mean, he was all over. And again, I can only speak [about] this point in time in his thing or my involvement with him, but he was very active on the Lincoln Day political circuit in southern Illinois.

DePue: Let's go back to your own personal political involvement. Was there a time when you were the Johnson County Republican chairman?

McCormick: Oh, yeah. My dad had a heart attack when I was a senior in law school. I was getting ready to take my last exam in federal courts, my last exam, and people were knocking on my door. For some reason, I didn't get a call at home, but one of my friends from the law school came in and said, "They're calling at the law school; your grandfather has had a heart attack." I said, "What?" So I called around, and it ended up being my dad. That would have been in '83, I guess. He had a heart attack, lived a few more years, and then passed away. When he retired as precinct committeeman after his heart attack in '83-ish, I became a precinct committeeman. And probably in '86, I became a Republican county chairman.

DePue: Tell us a little bit more about the role of a party chairman.

McCormick: Let me say about the role of a party chairman, say, back in the day, not today. I think it's changed significantly. When my father was county chairman, when Paul Powell was county chairman in Johnson County—in those days, the county chairman was—

DePue: I assume you wanted to be the party chairman of the same party as the governor?

McCormick: Yes, because that's where the jobs came from. My uncle worked for the highway department when Dick Ogilvie was governor. When Dan Walker became governor, my uncle was out of a job. He just let him go, gone; they did away with his position. It happened on the other side, too, but just to give you an idea. My father was in the legislature, at that stage possibly in the leadership of the legislature, and when Dan Walker became governor, his brother lost his job. Can I tell you something? I don't ever remember my uncle saying, "Well, that's unfair," and I never remember my dad saying... I think he was sad that my uncle didn't have a job, and he probably made a couple of phone calls, and it didn't do any good. But it wasn't like, "Those dirty SOBs, they're violating somebody's laws or rights," or something like that; it's just that, to the victor went the spoils back then, basically.

DePue: That goes back to the Jackson Day dinners, doesn't it?¹⁷ (laughs)

McCormick: It does, it does. Very much so. But what happened was, county chairmen back then were responsible for filling their county ticket, for supporting their county ticket, and for supporting the local ticket. The motivation in southern Illinois for county chairman, quite frankly, was to get your candidates in office, and particularly the governor's office. You wanted the governor and the secretary of state because they had facilities in your county, and there were state jobs there. You got to have input as to who would be hired at these state jobs if you were the county chairman. They didn't always take your advice, but they often took your advice on a number of jobs. If a highway maintainer would come up and you're an old-time county chairman, they would call you up and say, "You got any names?" Now, you couldn't put a guy that was blind and didn't have a driver's license; you couldn't do that because they had to drive a truck. But you didn't have to be ashamed that you were promoting a Republican, and you didn't have to worry about going to jail or whatever for promoting a Republican for a state job, to a Republican governor, as a Republican county chairman. So party people worked very hard to get governors and legislatures elected, because that was a large part of the funneling of state jobs into your county.

DePue: Who were you working with, as the party chairman for Johnson County, in the governor's staff?

McCormick: See, when I first started really working hard, Governor Thompson was in office.

DePue: You would have been working with the patronage chief.

McCormick: The patronage office. But you would also work with the patronage guys in the various agencies as well. Bob Kjellander, I think, was a patronage guy for a while. The personnel office—I guess is what they would call it back in the old Thompson days—from the Department of Corrections might call you and say, "Hey, we're going to hire five guards. You got any names?" As a county chairman, you'd be inundated, **inundated**, with people wanting state jobs. This was before the *Rutan* decision.¹⁸ So county chairmen in the day of my dad and Powell—I don't know if Clyde was ever county chairman, quite frankly. He was probably smart enough to own one but not be one. (DePue laughs) But jobs were a big thing, and you thought, Look, we have worked our tail off to get our party elected, and our party won. Last time, our party

¹⁷ DePue is referring to the rise of the "spoils system" under the presidency of Andrew Jackson, in which political supporters were rewarded with government jobs.

¹⁸ *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.

didn't and we didn't get any jobs, and now (laughs) it's time for our party to get a job.

DePue: So if you're inundated with people who are coming to say, I need a job for this or that—and pardon me for saying this—here's the opportunity for corruption to come into the system. How do you determine who's going to get the job?

McCormick: That's true, and it is tough. Every county chairman, I'm sure, back in those days—I can't even speak, to be very honest with you, how my dad did it. I know that I get phone calls from people on a regular basis saying, "I just want you to know, I just retired," or, "I'm able to sit on the porch and look out after my grandchildren in a nice house because your dad got me a job back in such-and-such, and I've got my state retirement now." But I think one requirement was (laughs) that you voted the Republican ticket. I think that, with some exceptions, county chairmen tried to put people in there that could do the job. Again, there are always exceptions to the rule, but you didn't really help yourself out very much if you had a guy that couldn't do the job and then got fired the next day. You got the hell for getting him the job, and then you got the hell from the family because you couldn't keep him on the payroll, because he couldn't do the job. So you didn't want there to be an embarrassment out there. You'd probably look at families in your county, big families in your county.

On the other hand, I can remember my dad telling me a story—I think it was after Governor Ogilvie got elected—that a Democrat came to him and said, "C.L., I've fought you all my life. I've even said bad things about you. My job is on the line, I've got two little girls and a wife, and I am in trouble." I can remember my dad making sure that that guy didn't lose his job. Now, was that a smart political move? No, because I can tell you, to this day, that family never supported my dad again, never supported me in any campaign that I ever ran or was involved in, never voted a Republican ticket. But I can remember my dad saying, "They've been friends of mine for a long time, they've been neighbors of mine, and they have those two little kids, and I could not do that to them." (laughs)

So there were opportunities to probably not do the right thing, and the right thing was not always done, **but** the party was accountable. The party was accountable. You got elected, you put your people in there, and if they didn't do the job, if they didn't perform, then you got voted out. So it was to everybody's advantage for whoever you hired, whoever you supported, to do the right thing—to put people in there that could do the job. You can always, I'm sure, point to a thousand different things where they catch the political guy sleeping on the job or something like that, but for the most part, I don't know that we had very many more scandals in that day than we're going through today.

DePue: Did you ever have a situation where somebody was offering you money to hire them?

McCormick: Never.

DePue: Would that have been against the law at the time?

McCormick: It would have been. Yes, yes, it would have been. Let me just say this: I'm confident it would have been.

DePue: How about the assumption that, Okay, we can bring you on board, but it sure would be nice if you'd buy a few Lincoln Day dinner tickets?

McCormick: I never had a Lincoln Day dinner in my county—we were pretty small—but I had other events in my county, which we need to remember to talk about because they were statewide, big events that brought politicians together. When it came time for raising money when I was county chairman, I went and bought a list of every state employee from the comptroller's office in Johnson County, and I sent them a letter asking them to send me money. I didn't say, "You're a state employee, therefore you have to give me money." I might send a letter saying, "The Republican Party's been good to the people of Johnson County. We have a state park, we have two facilities, we've got five hundred miles of new roads—we've got to make sure Republicans get elected, and I can't do that unless I have support from you. One of the ways you can support the party is by buying two tickets to the dinner," or to whatever it was.

DePue: So being a county chairman for all these southern counties is—

McCormick: No, no, for my county. Each county has a separate county chairman.

DePue: I understand. But I'm trying to suggest these are important positions for a variety of reasons.

McCormick: They were more important in the days of C.L. McCormick and Paul Powell than they were in the days of Mike McCormick, and more than they are now, in some ways.

DePue: You mentioned the *Rutan* decision. I've talked to a lot of people about the *Rutan* decision, so it's probably appropriate to lay out exactly what that is and how that impacted what we're just now talking about.

McCormick: The *Rutan* decision, in my world, meant that other than certain **very** identified positions, politics or party affiliation was to play no role in the hiring or terminating of state employees. You couldn't prefer a person because they were a Republican or a Democrat. So what I believe that got turned into is that if you were a Republican trying to get a job in a Republican administration, you couldn't. I would tell county chairmen after *Rutan*, "Don't recommend anybody. In fact, you ought to call and write a letter saying the guy you want

is a no-good son of a gun and that you wouldn't want him in that position under any circumstances," because then they might be able to hire them. But if they got a letter from a county chairman saying, "This is a good guy, and he's qualified," and they hired him, Mary Lee Leahy would subpoena the records and say, "You only hired him because he's a Republican; look here, the Republican county chairman endorsed him."

DePue: We should mention here that Mary Lee Leahy was the attorney who took this case—it was Cynthia Rutan, et al.—all the way up to the Supreme Court and won the case at the Supreme Court level in 1990.

McCormick: Governor Thompson I think pretty much skated-by having to deal—and I shouldn't say that, but I don't think he had to deal with the brunt of *Rutan*, because Governor Edgar won the '90 election. Everybody's still trying to figure out, What the heck is going to go on here?

DePue: But the irony is it was Rutan versus the Republican Party of Jim Thompson's administration.

McCormick: Right. So I'm a county chairman at this point for sure, and we're used to dealing in the Thompson way of doing things, and now we have a new governor, who I'm much closer with than I ever was with Governor Thompson or his people. There's a new sheriff in town as it relates to the governor. Even though there's a new party, there's a new guy in town—but there's this new rule. There's this new law, so to speak; there's this case. You look then, the governor's having to come in [during] a severe government financial crisis, and in a sense, a political crisis among the old hacks like me, because we're still thinking we're supposed to get a call if there's a highway maintainer's job opening or we're supposed to get a call if they're going to hire five prison guards. They're even nervous about giving you a call after they've already hired five Democrats for the job.

Thompson played the patronage game; all these county chairmen are used to the patronage game. Jim Edgar, the guy that I have been with forever, out front in southern Illinois, comes in town, so all these county chairmen are calling me saying, "Your guy doesn't give a damn about the party, Mike. Thompson, he cared about the party; we got five jobs from the prison two years before, and your guy doesn't care about the party. Jim Edgar doesn't care about the party; otherwise, he'd be giving us his jobs. We're getting killed down here because he's not giving us these jobs." And I would try to explain that when the Supreme Court says something, you've got to define it, you've got to know what the limits are, you've got to know how... These are not easy issues.

But these folks were getting phone calls; the county chairmen were getting phone calls. The guy on the street, who was trying to get a job for his son at the prison, hadn't read *Rutan* versus whoever it was versus. They didn't

care who Mary Lee Leahy was. They didn't really care who the Supreme Court was. They just knew that their kid was out of a job, and that he'd passed the prison test and ought to have a job because, "We've supported everybody all for our life—our father, our grandfather." So politically it was a tough thing for local county chairmen because I think they thought that Jim Edgar was going to be a little more Thompson-esque than Edgar-esque.

DePue: Pre-*Rutan*—you mentioned this already—the two people who really control government jobs are the governor's office and the secretary of state's office.

McCormick: Well, the others controlled, but the numbers were really at the governor's office. A county like mine would have three employees at the secretary of state's office, and maybe a little fair manager's job and a revenue collector's job where if somebody wrote the secretary of state a bad check for their driver's license or for whatever they wrote a check for, you'd hire somebody to go out and collect the check. So maybe there were five secretary of state jobs in a small county—maybe five, usually two or three. Historically, when Alan Dixon was secretary of state, the Democrat county chairman was the head guy at the secretary of state's office in Vienna. I mean, he was a friend of mine, a friend of my family's. In fact, he passed me on a driver's test on a motorcycle when I almost wrecked. He shouldn't have done it. He helped me on a test one time; he shouldn't have done it. (DePue laughs) But he was a Democrat county chairman. Nobody complained that Ralph Huckleberry was at the secretary of state's office because he was the Democratic county chairman, and Alan Dixon was the secretary of state and was a Democrat.

So life changed. Edgar comes in here, and I'm sure he said it publicly, but in his actions, basically says, "I'm going to comply with the law." We old hack county chairmen are trying to figure out how to continue to build a party, how to help our constituency, without the fact—in their minds it was, "How do you go to promote a candidate if they can't do anything for you?" The political hacks, the old precinct committeemen, the old county chairman back in those days, weren't talking about Chicago school reform; they weren't talking about, "Should we increase a formula here or there?" That was not what government was about. What government was about: you get your guy in, and the spoils should come your way. I don't mean you pay for it; I don't mean you bribe. I mean your guy was elected; therefore, you get the benefits of the fact that you worked to get your guy elected. I don't mean personal benefits, but many county chairmen were employed by the state, as they were during Democrat administrations.

I was kind of considered Edgar's guy down there—and a county chairman and a state's attorney—and I had every county chairman in southern Illinois calling me saying, "You got to talk to your guy. He's killing us." (laughs)

DePue: Did it work differently when you're talking not to the governor's office but to the secretary of state's office? Sec. of State George Ryan?

McCormick: First you have to realize that the secretary of state's office didn't have as many jobs, and people stayed there forever. There had been a Republican administration for a long time, so I didn't have so many opportunities to deal with Secretary Ryan's office at the time. I do remember when he was elected secretary of state. I got awfully upset with him as a county chairman. Was he elected secretary of state at the same time the governor was elected?

DePue: Right.

McCormick: I was never very close to Governor Ryan or his folks, really. They were friends of mine down in southern Illinois like other political folks, but they didn't call me in on strategy sessions on Secretary Ryan's campaign. I always got kind of pegged as Edgar's guy down there, and there was a natural animosity—I don't know about Governor [Ryan] and the governor [Edgar], but I'm talking about among the people. There were George's people and Edgar's people, and I was considered Edgar's guy. So I was not as privy, but I will say this: the perception was, "Well, George is taking care of us; how come Edgar doesn't take care of us?" Now, that was the perception.

My experience with Secretary of State Ryan was not a good one, necessarily. I supported him, I voted for him, I worked in my county for him, and my county carried him. When he got elected, he threatened to close my driver's facility, he took away a little fair manager's job from me, and he tried to take away the revenue collector's job from me. I had a meeting with him and some other county chairmen and kind of laid it out in front of some people, which I should not have done. I was young and I thought I probably was a little bit smarter than I was, and to George's credit, he helped me out; my driver's facility was kept, and he helped me get my revenue collector's job back. But I was never close to Governor Ryan or his people, and during my time as county chairman I don't know that I ever had a job request through Secretary of State Ryan. I only had a bitch-and-moan session with him one time, and after I had that bitch-and-moan session, I really was not... I probably said some things I shouldn't have said, out of respect for the office—I didn't call him names or anything like that.

DePue: Can you tell us more?

McCormick: Yes. I told him that I'm having a very hard time understanding and explaining to my people why I asked them to vote for you; that I would be better off if Jerry Cosentino had been elected secretary of state, and here's why.

DePue: The Democratic candidate at that time.

McCormick: Yeah. I want to say, to George's credit, he sent me a letter and thanked me for my candor, and my little revenue collector's job was saved. They didn't do

away with it, and that family that had just had a baby was able to keep that job. But from that point in time on, I didn't have a whole lot of... I mean, Secretary Ryan would always acknowledge me, but... I did not do the right thing at that point in time. I did the right thing in talking about it; I did the wrong thing by doing it in front of a couple of other county chairmen. I was more cocky than a young kid from Vienna county chairman should have been to the secretary of state.

DePue: There are a couple threads that we need to pick up here. You mentioned you were state's attorney for some of this timeframe. When did that occur?

McCormick: I was state's attorney from 1988 to 1992.

DePue: And that's a position you had to run for?

McCormick: Yes, yes it was.

DePue: And what was your role as state's attorney? Significantly different than being a city attorney?

McCormick: Yeah. I prosecuted all criminal matters in the county, and then I represented the county as their civil attorney.

DePue: Was that a full-time job, or did you still have a private practice?

McCormick: My last two years, it was a full-time job; my first two years, I still had a private practice.

DePue: And you ran for state's attorney as a Republican?

McCormick: I did.

DePue: You mentioned earlier that we should go back and ask about a statewide event.

McCormick: Oh, just from a historical perspective. Every gubernatorial election since the late '60s, my father put on a big gospel sing in southern Illinois: C.L. McCormick's Gospel Sing. The first one I remember, the Oakridge Boys, when they were still gospel, came to it. Every governor, every secretary of state, that was the big—we'd have ten thousand people packed in the high school gym (laughs) in Vienna. I'll take you back to my office in a minute and show you a picture—when we take a break—of one of the events. But every four years during the gubernatorial race, my dad would put on a huge gospel sing. It was kind of billed as a nonpartisan event, but to be honest with you, for the most part, only Republican state candidates were invited (DePue laughs) to speak. But this was a big thing. I don't know of any governor that ever missed coming to one of our gospel sings. This was the hugest event in southern Illinois in a political—

DePue: Republican or Democrat?

McCormick: It was the largest event.

DePue: Dan Walker, even?

McCormick: Oh, no. I'm talking about Republican governors. Now, you've got to understand, up until that point in time, if you think about it—I have a letter that was sent by Governor Stratton to my dad congratulating him on my birth, so during my lifetime, whether I remember it or not, the Democrat governors have only been Kerner and then the guy from Kankakee, his lieutenant governor, when he moved on.

DePue: Shapiro.

McCormick: Sam Shapiro. And Walker. All others have been Governor Stratton; Governor Ogilvie; and then governor for life, Governor Thompson. But that was a huge event, and the statewide political people covered it. The *Tribune*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. This was a major event that my dad put on every four years, and it was a very significant political event in Illinois politics. That's not really why I'm here, but I thought I'd throw that in.

DePue: I see why you mentioned that, though. What's fun about doing the interview with you is we're getting a real sense of the flavor of politics in these smaller towns—especially for southern Illinois, for obvious reasons—and how patronage worked, and the assumptions about that, and both parties.

McCormick: Right, and it was an education process for all of us. I hope that Mary Lee Leahy doesn't sue me—and probably the statute of limitations has run out—although I think she did depose me one time because she thought I was a bad guy, or somebody thought I was a bad guy.

Governor Edgar had just become governor. It was in the early part of his administration, and I was out Christmas shopping, so it would have probably been the first year of his administration. I know I was at Anna, Illinois, Clyde Choate's hometown, at the Walmart store, doing some Christmas shopping. I ran into somebody, and they said, "Hey, Mike, I understand they hired three highway maintainers at the Johnson County facility, and they were all three Democrats." I said, "Ah, I don't think that's right. You know, you hear everything." So I go ahead about my Christmas shopping, and I didn't really think much of it. When I got home, my answering machine was blinking faster than my Christmas tree, just (makes noises).

I'm exaggerating a little bit, but almost every precinct committeeman was on the phone saying, "Have you heard? Have you heard? What the hell is Edgar doing? You need to talk to that guy. What the hell is he doing?" And then a few of my co-county chairmen called and said, "Is it true that Edgar

put three Democrats on in your county?” They were kind of, I think, saying, “Well, you don’t hold much sway there.” So I called every one of them back, and I said, “Look, I don’t know. I haven’t heard anything. I imagine a lot of this is just rumor mill. Let me get back to you.” The next day, I called Janis Cellini and I said, “Hey”—

DePue: Edgar’s director of personnel, i.e., the patronage chief.

McCormick: Right. I said, “Hey, Janis. I am sorry to bother you—I know you are busy—but I need to stamp down a rumor.” So I told her what the rumor was, and she said, “Mike, let me talk to”—I think it was Billy Pyramid or somebody at the Department of Transportation at the time. So I said, “Okay, give me a call back when you find out, and I’ll call all these people.” She called me and said, “You’re not going to be happy, Mike.” And I said, “What do you mean?” She said, “They did.” I said, “What do you mean, they did?” And so she went through the whole thing, telling me what they did. She said, “You know, it’s the different rules now.”

DePue: “They” being who, now?

McCormick: The Department of Transportation. What I thought they did to me (laughs) was put Democrats on at the highway barn. And so I got to thinking about it, and quite frankly, the more I got to thinking about it, the more—mad is not the right word—irritated I got. And I say “irritated” in the sense that I just didn’t know exactly how we were going to work this whole process out. I think probably from a selfish standpoint, I was thinking, I finally get a guy in there that actually would probably listen to me and I have a little bit of influence with, I know all the people, and they’re putting... Don’t hire anybody, but don’t put a Democrat in there, particularly in my county, where I’m kind of considered your guy! So this was all flooding, and then I got another couple phone calls kind of giving me the stab. Then I got a couple of phone calls from some of Secretary of State Ryan’s folks saying, “Is it true what I heard about what they did to you, what Edgar did to you and Johnson County?”

So I finally called Janis, and I said, “Janis, I’ve thought about this a long time, and I understand... I’m not a very good lawyer; I’m just a Vienna lawyer, and I don’t understand *Rutan*. I thought I understood about patronage, but I don’t understand about these new rules. You know something? I think I’m too much of an old hack to be county chairman, because I’m afraid I’m either going to get me or you in trouble here. I’m going to resign as county chairman, and I want you to know that it has nothing—I love you to death. I’ve known you forever. I love you to death, and I love the governor. If the governor calls me up today and tells me to jump off the courthouse, I’ll jump off the courthouse for him, trusting that he will also call an ambulance and have it available for me.” (DePue laughs) “So it’s nothing personal against the governor. I will always support him; I will walk precincts for him; I will do

everything I can for him, but I think I'm too old of a hack"—now, of course, I'm probably thirty at this time—"I'm too old of a hack to do this anymore." "Oh, Mike, don't do that. We've got to you to... Oh, don't do that." I said, "Yeah, it's nothing personal."

So not too long from that I got a call and Janis said, "Would you be willing to meet with the governor?" I said, "Of course I'll be willing to meet with him." "Would you not resign until you talk to the governor?" I said, "Of course I won't resign until I talk to the governor." She said, "Well, he's going to be down in"—I think it was Murphysboro—"to dedicate a building," or something. So I went down to Murphysboro, and I watched his dedication of the building. We went back into a back room somewhere. "He said, "Hey, Mike, I understand we got a problem. What's going on?" So I said, "Well, governor," and I just kind of regurgitated. I just went (makes noise), just told him all my bitching and moaning. I regret that I wasn't as polite to Secretary Ryan as I was to Governor Edgar, but I did a little bit of the same thing. Just like, "This is what's going on; I don't know how to deal with this. This is not the way I learned how to be a county chairman, and this is not the way I learned all the work that we've done to keep the Republicans in power. Not only are we not getting rewarded for that, we're actually being discriminated against because of that. If I suggest somebody to you, you're going to say no, because you're afraid that somebody's going to sue you because I like the guy. So do I need to write a letter to you about everybody I like and say, 'This is a no-good SOB?'"

I moaned and groaned. The governor then looked at me, and he said, "Mike, what do you propose that we do about this?" I looked, and I thought for a minute, and I said, "Well, Governor, I've kind of only gotten to the bitching part of this whole process; I haven't gotten to the solution part of this." He proceeded in a nice but fairly firm way to make me feel like I might have wasted his time a little bit, by being nice but saying, "Mike, look. I respect what you have to say. If you need to get to me, I'll always listen to you. But it does me very little good for you to come to me with a problem unless you've got some ideas about how we can solve the problem. This is the law, Mike. This is not me saying I don't want to hire Republicans; this is the law. Now, I've got legal staff that's looking at what positions are exempt, what's not exempt, but I'm going to abide by the law. I know what you're saying, that the Ryan people are saying this. I can't worry about what the Ryan people are saying; I've got to worry about what I'm doing." And he went through a litany of all the things he was dealing with, which once again made me feel like I was a jerk for even being there.

DePue: (laughs) Like a budget crisis.

McCormick: Yeah, like a mini budget crisis. He and the Speaker are killing each other every day, and here I am talking about three jobs (DePue laughs) at the county highway department. So I had a very small perspective on life. It was my

world, but it was also people that had helped me and my family over all these years, and it was also people looking to me to try to explain what was going on. They weren't going to get to talk to the governor, but I could, so it was more than just that to me. I did this to the governor on a couple of campaign issues in '90 as well when I talked to him, where I had a very small perspective, and he let me know pretty quickly that I needed to travel outside of Johnson County (DePue laughs) once in a while. But the long and the short of it: the governor said, "Mike, look. We're going to comply with the law. Now, what limits I have—we're still trying to work out where there's room for patronage, where there's room for not... We're not sure yet exactly, but we're going to take the safe approach. But, from this point on, I want you and"—there was another staffer. Janis wasn't there; there was another staffer. I don't remember who it was. I think at the time, Arnie Kanter was the—

DePue: Legal counsel.

McCormick: —legal counsel, and Bill Ghesquiere. He said, "I want you to know, when Arnie and Bill have meetings about discussing this, you invite McCormick to those meetings and at least have the perspective of a county chairman in there, and then see what you work out. But I've got to tell you, we're not going to... I know it's rough on it, and, I'm catching a lot of heat from every corner of this state on this, but I've got to comply with the law." So I think I said something like, "Well, is there any chance we can do anything about those highway-maintainer jobs?" (laughter) just as a joke. I think he and I drove out to the airport together and talked about other political stuff. And I had meetings.

That first term, Jim Edgar wasn't politically a shoe-in for reelection. People don't remember this, but political people were mad at him because we were getting no jobs whatsoever, and what was worse than getting no jobs was the Democrats were also getting jobs. This sounds like I don't think a Democrat ought to work. I don't believe that at all, and I understand the decision. But what I'm saying is from a political perspective, it was very difficult, what was going on. If a Democrat was going to work, if the guy who I ran against for state's attorney was going to go to work for the state, they took the position that they shouldn't even call me to let me know first. That's how strict Governor Edgar was being on this. They felt they could not say, "Mike, I just want to give you a heads-up. We're going to make your life miserable in Johnson County; we just hired three Democrats." They had to wait till it was done, they felt—which I did not feel—to call me and tell me.

Needless to say, that first year or two was very difficult. The budget stuff was going on; the governor was saying no to everybody. From an old political hack standpoint, life was not going very well. So an editorial comes in the *Southern Illinoisan* that Edgar's a one-term governor. I can remember because I was so mad at that. I remember writing a letter to the editor about it, and I thought, I better be careful; I don't want to get in trouble. I remember

sending it to Mike Lawrence. I said, “Mike, I don’t want you to tell me what I can say, but would you just read that and make sure I’m not saying anything that will embarrass the governor or anything like that?” Of course Mike said, “No, you say whatever you want to say.” I didn’t need to do that, and Mike Lawrence probably at that point in time thought, What the hell is a county chairman from Vienna calling me for, (laughter) asking me about a letter to the editor? But I guess my point about this is, the governor was always willing to listen to the complaints, but he was tough to work through on the patronage thing. In fact, I didn’t see much room.

DePue: Let’s take a step back on this. This was not by any means your first experience with Edgar on this particular issue. You have already identified that you were an Edgar man, that you weren’t a Ryan guy.

McCormick: Let me just say this: George Ryan was never on the ballot that I didn’t vote for him, nor was I ever a county chairman precinct committeeman that didn’t support him. I have a picture at my house of my dad on the floor of the House seconding George’s nomination as Speaker of the House. But I think it is true to say that if I had one hour in the day to work on politics, and I had work for Governor Edgar and work for Secretary Ryan’s campaign stuff, I did the Edgar stuff first (laughs) and I did the Ryan stuff second.

DePue: So here’s the critical question, then: Why? What was it about Jim Edgar that appealed to you?

McCormick: First, my dad gave him a very good recommendation, so that kind of got me there. The other thing is that [while he was] secretary of state, I didn’t have that much... When he would come to southern Illinois, he’d visit my dad, he’d talk to me, I’d see him at meetings—but I really got to get a little bit more impression of him when he was running for governor. In ’90, he was nice enough to let me kind of be a member of the kitchen cabinet that met periodically about campaign stuff. When he would come down to southern Illinois, he’s oftentimes say, “Hey, are you going to be at this event?” and I’d say, “Yeah.” He’d say, “Well, why don’t you ride out to the airport with me?” or “Why don’t you jump in and we’ll go somewhere and talk about politics?” That’s why I really got to know him. I was always impressed with his record as secretary of state, particularly on the DUI stuff, but people don’t oftentimes remember that that was not as politically popular back then as it is today. In 1990, in southern Illinois, it was not that popular at all (laughs) in some quarters.

When he started running for governor, he started taking positions that I thought, being a southern Illinois guy, were crazy. He had positions on gun control; he had a position on keeping the temporary surcharge permanent. This bothered me, but it wasn’t a factor in my support. But with secretary of state, nobody had asked him about abortion. Ninety-nine percent of the people in southern Illinois would have bet their year’s salary that Jim Edgar was pro-

life, because he didn't drink, and he went to church. (laughter) But then he becomes governor and that issue comes out. So here I am; I'm down in southern Illinois, I'm an Edgar guy, and he's supporting gun control and he's supporting a tax increase.

The abortion thing, I didn't really talk to him about because I never thought that was a political—it's a political issue, but I never thought that you should... Mrs. Edgar was pro-life; the governor's pro-choice. I always thought Governor Edgar would have been better off politically in some ways to be pro-life. I never thought that was a political decision on his part, although I think in the scheme of statewide politics, it was probably an advantage now that I look back at it. But at the time I thought it was a terrible disadvantage.

I just remember talking to him about a couple of these issues, particularly the tax increase and some gun control stuff. I don't remember the exact thing. This was back in the time when I think he thought his opponent was... He was just, I thought, killing us on some stuff. I talked to him, and I always remember him being so—he knew the politics, but I got the impression that this is a guy that's not just going to say anything. Now, he is a politician. He is a politician. Everybody thinks he's a statesman, and I think he is in Illinois, but he is a politician as well, so I don't want to leave that impression. But I never thought it took that much courage to be against people killing you in a drunk car. I never thought it took that much courage to give more money to local libraries, to be popular as secretary of state.

But I thought it took some courage to do some of the things he did in that '90 race, because he was coming from a time when people were **so** tired of Jim Thompson, and the Republican Party had held the governorship for fourteen years. And here is a guy that's coming out and basically saying, "I'm going to raise your taxes, I'm going to be part of some sort of gun control," and, as my grandma said, "That guy you like's for killing babies." (laughter) I would talk to him about these issues, in a car from one thing to another, and he would explain to me. Like on the tax issue, he would explain to me, "I don't want to make a promise I can't keep, but most importantly, I don't want to make a promise that binds me so I can't do what we need to do if I'm elected." On the gun control issue, he said, "Mike, I understand you come from Vienna, where you think folks can still have gunfights at the O.K. Corral. But have you ever been in the South Side of Chicago? Have you ever spent any time talking to police, law enforcement people, victims, in a city like Chicago? Have you ever done that?" Well, the closest thing I'd ever done is talk to my sheriff while he was getting ready to go deer hunting, probably. (DePue laughs) You know what I mean?

So I was impressed not only with his knowledge at that time in my life, but I also was impressed with the fact that here's a guy that really isn't going to—he has his political moments like everybody else. I think at one point he held up a waffle and said "This will be the state seal if Neil Hartigan

is elected governor.” He had his moments, but as a general rule, this guy was a guy who was actually thinking about these things and not only looking at poll numbers and saying, “This is what I think.” He may disagree with it, but I always thought, politically, on the ground, it was a lot easier for us if he had not been for that income tax surcharge. He only carried five counties in southern Illinois in 1990.

DePue: Was Johnson one of them?

McCormick: Yeah. By not very many votes, but we carried him.

DePue: Knowing him at this point, what adjectives would you have used to describe Jim Edgar?

McCormick: At this point? Reserved.

DePue: Which wasn’t Jim Thompson.

McCormick: No. I think Jim Edgar would be reserved even if you weren’t comparing him to Jim Thompson, but because of the comparison, he even seemed more reserved. My adjectives for Secretary Edgar at that time, in 1990, would be reserved, thoughtful, a little aloof, and politically very savvy. And I would say politically courageous, although “courageous” probably sounds like I’m ready to build a monument. I don’t mean it like that, but I do think some positions he took, took courage in that race.

DePue: One of the positions that he had built his reputation on as secretary of state—and maybe it plays right into this comment about political courage—is his position on alcohol and DUIs and things like that. I want you to lay that out and how that played out politically in your part of the state.

McCormick: It was not as popular then as we look back now and think it was.

DePue: Probably need to be more explicit in terms of what he had done as secretary of state.

McCormick: He basically cracked down on drunk driving and put some teeth in the drunk driving laws of the state.¹⁹ If you got caught drinking and driving, you lost your license, basically. This was no longer, Pay your fine and get a few points on your ticket, and on your way. As important, looking at it from a state’s attorney’s standpoint back in 1988 and also looking at it from a political standpoint, he started the process of making it not cool to drink and drive. That’s a dated word, “cool,” but not acceptable to drink and drive. It was kind of a joke in some areas about, “Boy, he was really lit; I’m surprised he got home.” Secretary Edgar started the process not only of making the law so it didn’t matter what you thought, you were hooked bad if you got a DUI, but he

¹⁹ Edgar, June 15, 2009, 33-54.

is why, in Illinois, people consider it a crime instead of a violation. If I tell you I've had two DUIs, I don't mean you won't like me, but you're going to think, Oh, wow. If I tell you I got two traffic tickets, you're going to go, "Oh, yeah, you got a lead foot." You have to remember, there were some folks that didn't have much difference between speeding down the road or passing when you weren't supposed to, and being a little lit when you got behind the wheel.

Governor Edgar continuously **pounded** the message. It was like, "You're getting very sleepy, you're getting very sleepy"—he said it so many times that you actually got very sleepy. It wasn't like he could say, "Here's the law; we're going to get tough," and then go give a book to a library. My perception is he beat it every day of his life as secretary of state; he talked about it and he talked about it and he talked about it. He is responsible for starting the process, so that in our culture today, a DUI is a serious offense. If I say, "Hey, I got charged with battery" or "I got charged with a DUI," people go, "Oh, boy, I bet that DUI really caused you problems." So he's responsible for that.

But that took a long time, to get in a system, so in 1990 I couldn't keep signs in some counties because bar owners were giving away free beer to folks. Edgar bounty signs—they would get a case if they brought in a four-by-eight. Then he would have stuff painted on the signs. This is very local politics, but it was where the shoe leather hit the pavement. Literally, I'd call for signs because I couldn't keep them up; I'd find out that the tavern down the street was putting a bounty out on Edgar signs. So a lot of times people think, Well, that was an easy choice back then, and it was the right choice. But it wasn't as politically popular in some areas of the state when it first started as it is today. Now you don't have to have much courage (DePue laughs) to say, "We're going to lower the limit to 0.08." That's the right thing to do, but you don't have to have a lot of courage to do that, because you're just saying, "I'm tough on drunk driving." It was a little less clear politically what it would do. The right thing to do—I think it was pretty clear.

DePue: We've been at this close to three hours. Can you believe that?

McCormick: Um-hm.

DePue: This has been a great conversation, but I think it might be good to close off today with your defeat as state's attorney in 1992, which was a Democratic year.

McCormick: Yeah. We had a tough year in '92. I think we lost every one of our county races in that year. I was state's attorney and county chairman. We still had the straight party voting at that time. I got beat, and I think if you looked at the numbers, one of them was we had more straight Democrat ballots cast in Johnson County. I don't think there was that many straight Democrat ballots

cast in Johnson County when Roosevelt ran for president the second time.²⁰ I had Republicans upset about patronage in my county. I'm confident that was not **the** reason that I was defeated; I'm confident that some Republicans didn't vote for me or stayed at home and didn't vote in that race, because I think there were expectations that everyone was going to be employed by the state because I knew Governor Edgar. It was a bad year. (laughs) I had not had any problems as it relates to the office. I had the backing of all the police associations, I had the backing of the state police guys—I had law enforcement people for me. Neither my opponent nor myself had anything like, "Mike's not prosecuting people," or "Mike stole twelve dollars out of the kitty"—it was nothing like that. We had a very amicable campaign in that regard. There were really no issues, to tell you the truth. I can't think of any one issue that was brought up in the campaign.

DePue: The national trend was certainly on the Democratic side. It was Bush's reelection year, and it was "the economy, stupid."²¹

McCormick: And then the only other issue was that there were a couple of people who wrote letters to the editor saying that they thought it was not a good idea to have the state's attorney also be the county chairman of a party, which I thought was a pretty good thing on their part. I remember thinking, I can understand why somebody would say that. And you know what? The thing about it, as far as the Republican primary is concerned—I didn't have any races. I ran as an alternate delegate to the national convention, and I was way down on the ballot. In that entire district, I beat the guys that were on the top of the ballot for delegate; I actually had more votes than they did. But the general election just killed me. It was just one of those things. I think my entire county ticket went completely down. So '92, that night was a tough night. Yeah, it's tough to get beat, but my family had been through that before. But it was tough to just lose **everything**. And then you get to thinking, It's '92. In '94, we got a race coming up in the governor's office. What does this mean? So it was tough.

DePue: I guess it would mean at that point in time you're back to being a small-town lawyer again.

McCormick: That's true, which would have been okay with me, but one of the people that called me the next day after the election was Governor Edgar.

DePue: I'm going to recommend that we pick up the next session starting with that conversation, because I think that would be a good transition point here.

McCormick: Okay.

²⁰ Referring to Franklin Roosevelt's overwhelming victory in the 1936 presidential election.

²¹ "It's the economy, stupid" was a popular slogan of Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign, referring to voters' dissatisfaction with the state of the American economy.

DePue: This has been fun. It's been great to look into the life of a county chairman (McCormick laughs) and understand what that really means in the southern part of Illinois, in a state like Illinois.

McCormick: I know we're done here, but I think that what it meant during my time has now changed. I think it has changed because of the patronage thing. Nobody's doing the patronage thing. I'm sure there's a little here and there, but I mean for practical purposes. I think just as Governor Edgar changed the DUI thought about process, I think the *Rutan* decision—to be fair, the way Governor Edgar actually implemented it, there's little expectation of county chairmen these days to do that. Now, you can argue that's the reason why the political parties mean less and less these days. You can argue what's good or bad about that. But the role of county chairmen now—I'm not as involved as I was, but I never hear a county chairman that I talk to say, "Boy, I'm not getting any jobs." It's not because they're getting jobs; it's because that's not part of the game anymore, for all practical purposes. So I think there's been a shift in that.

Then the other thing that has changed from the days of Clyde and Dad and Paul Powell is that the ground game was a lot more important before media took over these races. Now, you really go around the party establishment oftentimes to get elected. It's not that you don't want them; I've always said a county chairman can't elect you, but he might be able to beat you. My dad, gosh, was on TV very little in these races. Now, every state representative—downstate Illinois... A lot of the folks in Chicago probably can't afford the Chicago TV market. But you did your work, back then in the days, by the precinct committeemen getting out and knocking on doors and driving people to work. Your precinct committeemen took election day off, back then. I wonder how many do that now. I don't know. But the patronage thing going away, the big money that's spent on directly contacting people through advertising and campaign material as opposed to that, maybe not better, but more personal touch on the ground game—I think all that has changed the whole dynamics of the local party situation.

Which leads me to believe that the local parties have started—and I could be wrong; I'm a little bit out of the loop on this—focusing a little bit more on making sure they have candidates for every county commissioner race; making sure they have a good candidate for county clerk; maybe, quite frankly, focusing just a little more on a level where they can have a little more influence than at a state level where you can't go to the person and say, "Hey, your family is going to get ten jobs." Now county organizations have to buy their own signs for their candidates for governor, oftentimes. I mean, **what?** You want a four-by-eight, go buy your plywood at the lumber yard, and you can order your... Presidential campaigns—you have to order them from the company to get them for your county. Whoever heard of that? You got signs from candidates back then; they were hounding you to put them up. Now if you want signs—and I'm saying this generally; I'm not sure about Brady or

Quinn—for the most part, they may give you some signs. There's not that emphasis on these local people by statewide candidates anymore, I think.

DePue: Like I said, this has been a fascinating discussion for me to get this side of the political system. We'll pick this up again in a few days.

McCormick: Okay, very good.

(end of interview #1 #2 continues)

Interview with Mike McCormick

ISG-A-L-2010-028.2

Interview # 2: July 22, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, July 22, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here in Champaign-Urbana—I think we're actually in Champaign—with Mike McCormick. Good afternoon, Mike.

McCormick: Afternoon.

DePue: This is our second session. Had a great session a couple weeks ago, hearing about growing up as the son of an Illinois politician (McCormick laughs) in Southern Illinois. (laughs) I was fascinated by the discussion, Mike, so I appreciate that.

McCormick: Sure.

DePue: There's more to follow. I think we pretty much got you to the timeframe when you're working with then-Governor Edgar. You're still the county chairman of Johnson County in the south, and you also talked about working on his campaign, I believe. What I'd like to do, though, is backtrack a little bit and

ask you about something that occurred to me later, and that's the death of Paul Powell. You'd mentioned him many times in our first interview, but we didn't talk about the death and all of the events that surrounded that afterwards.

McCormick: Of course, to this day in Vienna, you don't say anything bad about Paul Powell. He's a very well-respected politician in Vienna, Johnson County, and much of southern Illinois. When he passed away, I was a fairly young child. I guess the thing I remember is someone called my dad—I believe it was early in the morning, because I remember it woke him up—and told him about Mr. Powell's passing. Then I remember my dad being shocked that it had happened. So as a young kid, we never really knew—I mean, you knew the stories about the money and the shoeboxes and things like that, but really, down in Vienna, it was kind of a legend had passed away.

DePue: It didn't matter he was a Democrat and your dad was a Republican?

McCormick: No. Again, I'll tell you that it was a different time, as we talked about in the last interview. Secondly, my dad and Paul lived in the same precinct. My dad was the Republican county chairman; Mr. Powell, I believe, was the Democrat county chairman. They had known each other all their lives because Mr. Powell worked for my grandmother or my grandfather for a little while down in Vienna. I know when Mr. Powell was in the legislature, my dad served on the Vienna city council. I actually have a couple letters back and forth to those guys—from each other, I should say. They were acquaintances, they were friends. They disagreed politically, of course, on things.

DePue: We should mention here that when he died, he was secretary of state.

McCormick: When he died, he was secretary of state, and my dad was in the Illinois House of Representatives.

DePue: Which means that besides the governor, he controls as many jobs in the state as anybody does.

McCormick: Not counting the governor, probably so. Yes, yes. And back then, you did control the jobs, and it was not unusual for the Democrat county chairman to be, in a county, the head of the driver's license facility. That was not just Mr. Powell. When I got my driver's license, the guy that rode around with me was the Democrat county chairman of Johnson County. He was a friend of mine—a friend of my family's, quite frankly. He never voted for my dad, but they were always friends and got along just fine. But yeah, it was kind of amazing because in the little town of Vienna, twelve hundred people on a good day, and in the same precinct, Vienna precinct number one in Johnson County, you had my dad serving in the legislature and Mr. Powell serving in the legislature—Mr. Powell ultimately becoming Speaker of the House and then secretary of state. So for a little town in a little precinct in a little county in southern Illinois, it was a big thing that both of those guys were involved.

Of course, Mr. Powell, being a statewide official, was a really big deal. As a kid growing up, there was always the thing, “Oh, the shoeboxes,” and jokes a little bit about the shoeboxes, but you just never heard anything bad about Mr. Powell being talked about among the community members.

DePue: Well, I don’t want you to just toss out the comment about the shoeboxes without giving it a little context.

McCormick: Obviously, when Mr. Powell passed away, they ultimately found some boxes in the Leland Hotel with a substantial amount of cash in them.

DePue: I think it was around eight hundred thousand dollars.

McCormick: (laughs) It may be a little less than that, but yeah, in that neighborhood. So obviously that’s quite a bit of money today; in the early seventies, it was a big amount of money—even more so, I guess, then.²²

DePue: And this is for a guy who—at least one account I read—was making about thirty thousand dollars a year.

McCormick: Now, I don’t know what the salary would have been back then, but Mr. Powell I think also had an interest in at least—I don’t know this off personal knowledge, but as I recall, reading the book by the gentleman from Decatur, the former newspaper guy.

DePue: Robert Hartley.

McCormick: Yeah, Hartley. Mr. Powell had an interest in an insurance company in Vienna that did pretty good business with the racetracks in Illinois. I would doubt that Mr. Powell, if he never spent any money at all, on just his state salary would have accumulated eight hundred thousand dollars. At least my dad tells me that back in the day when the legislature met every other year and they got paid once a year or once a term, it wasn’t that much money; it was helpful, but it wasn’t that much money. So my sense was that yeah, that wasn’t money he was saving from his salary. (laughs)

But the thing that I remember as a kid is the funeral. I remember my dad going to the funeral with Governor Ogilvie. The big thing was that this weird animal—and I don’t mean that in a negative sense—but this kind of odd person was going to be coming all the way from Chicago to Vienna, and it was the first Mayor Daley.

²² Two months after Powell’s death in October 1970, John S. Rendleman, executor of Powell’s estate, famously revealed his discovery of eight hundred thousand dollars in Powell’s rooms at the St. Nicholas Hotel in Springfield. The money was “mostly in \$100 bills” and had been stored in “a shoe box, two leather brief cases and three steel strong boxes which were hidden behind old whisky cases.” *Chicago Tribune*, December 31, 1970. Such a sum would be equivalent to nearly \$4.5 million in 2010. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>.

DePue: Richard J. Daley.

McCormick: Richard J. And I don't mean this disrespectful—it was kind of like going to the zoo and seeing something that was from Africa or from Australia, because this guy... And we didn't know if he had to get a passport to get down here or what he had to do. (DePue laughs) But I can remember the big deal about that. As a kid, I remember riding my bike—we lived just a couple of blocks from the high school gym—standing near my grandfolks' house, watching the cars go into the gymnasium and watching my dad go in with Governor Ogilvie, and then seeing Mayor Daley's entourage; that was kind of a big deal.

DePue: Let's jump way ahead now, about two decades. I want you to talk about how you ended up working in the Edgar administration, because I believe that's basically where we left off.

McCormick: Did we talk about the campaign?

DePue: I know we did, but I believe after our last session, you said you wanted to talk more about it. I'll open it up to you with that one, then.

McCormick: I was trying to think where we stopped. I'm trying to think if we'd talked about the three-vote loss in one of my counties and...

DePue: That would have been the '94 election.

McCormick: Okay, so we're talking about '90 now.

DePue: Yeah. '92, and basically after your defeat.

McCormick: When I was defeated as state's attorney in November 1992, one of the first calls I got the next day was actually from Governor Edgar. He had been down to our big gospel sing that year, or big event—maybe it wasn't the gospel sing that year, but he'd been down to do a big event. Lieutenant Governor Kustra had come down and endorsed me. His administration was very kind to me. So he called me, and he said, "Hey, I'm sorry about your loss," and he told me about how he lost one time; I know you've heard that story.²³ He asked me what I thought I was going to do next. I said, "I'm going to hope there's enough old ladies in Vienna that need wills done that I can go ahead and start my private practice back up," (laughs) kind of joking with him. He said, "Well, listen, don't make any final decision on what you're going to do. I'm going to have Janis Cellini call you, give you a buzz and talk to you. My thought is I'd like you to be involved in the campaign." I said, "You know, that's some time off, but I'll talk to Janis." So we talked a little bit and talked to the governor a little bit. What I ended up doing was taking a job with the

²³ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 29, 2009, 47-55 and 94-95. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

Illinois Department of Transportation. I can't remember what my title was; I think it was a liaison title. I did a couple of things from about December 1, 1992 until June 1994.

DePue: But that'd be halfway through the campaign. You're past the timeframe of the primary, even.

McCormick: Right. I'm confident that I did not get put on paid campaign staff until the summer of '94.

DePue: Tell me a little bit more, then, about what you were doing with IDOT.

McCormick: As I recall, it was a liaison position. Where they put me was at the district office in Carbondale, Illinois, and I was in the land acquisition department. I had a variety of duties there. Because I had had a lot of background in real estate, one of the things that I did was aid the land acquisition department in purchasing property from landowners. So if you were a landowner and we were getting ready to widen the road in front of your house, and we needed to take a few feet out of your front yard, one of my jobs was to go to you and talk to you about it. I would bring the plans, and I was like, "Hello, I'm from the government and I'm here to help." (laughter)

DePue: "I'm here to take some of your land."

McCormick: It was interesting. We had to do a lot of our work—in terms of looking at plans, understanding the plans, understanding the appraisals—during the day. We could meet sometimes with folks during the day, but oftentimes, if it was a residential piece of property that we had to go, we'd have to meet with folks after supper or when they got off of work, so they could meet with the husband and the wife together—or if they had other family they wanted to meet. So you'd literally go to people's homes and throw the maps out. As a matter of fact, I think they privately contract most of that type of work out now. But we literally sat down with the folks and said, "Now, here's where the road's going to be. Here's the grade that the ditch is going to be, so we want to make sure you know that you can mow there if you want to. We're not going to make it so steep that you can't get your John Deere mower..." and all those things. We explained, and then told them what we were offering them for that taking, for the temporary easement to do the work around. So I did a lot of that kind of work.

The second thing that I did was, if a local county official had a problem, I would kind of go around and talk to them to see if I could help work with them, maybe with the district engineer—just to be kind of a liaison between local government officials and the department, on issues that they may have concerns about.

DePue: Did that then help you in expanding your horizons and knowing lots more people in southern Illinois?

McCormick: It did. I can't remember what the district number is in Carbondale, but I think it had twenty counties or so in that deep southern Illinois region. I knew a lot of those folks anyway because of all the years I'd been in politics and had been to every Lincoln Day dinner and a lot of other meetings. I knew at least a lot of the Republican officials. Some of the Democrat officials probably knew of me because I was the kid that was going to these Republican dinners and they weren't, and vice versa. So I got to meet a lot of those folks, too, that I hadn't had an opportunity to meet before. But yeah, it was a good opportunity for me because later on, as I got on the campaign, these were folks that every now and then would call me and say, Hey, this or that. Even later on in the governor's administration, the governor asked me in the second term to be a liaison between himself and the downstate mayors and local government officials in Illinois. So yeah, it was a very good training ground.

DePue: Did you have the expectation going into this job that you would eventually be working on the campaign?

McCormick: Yeah, really I did, to be honest with you. The governor didn't say, "You've got to do that." He never said that. But I think he was thinking about me maybe working on the campaign, and quite frankly, I would have much rather worked on a campaign than go and tell people that I had to take their front yard away from them for the widening of the road.

DePue: Do you think it was in his mind or just happy coincidence that this would help you prepare to be a member of his campaign?

McCormick: I don't think the governor thought it would help me prepare to be a member of his campaign. I think he knew me; I'd worked on his campaigns before. I don't know what he was thinking. I've been working with him for a long time, and I still don't know (DePue laughs) every time what he's thinking. I don't think he plays chess, but he's a very good chess player in the sense that he has a vision of things down the road, which most of us don't have; that includes people and where to place them, and who might do this and who might be good at that, in his mind. So I always thought two things. I thought that probably not so much out of like for me but more out of like and respect for my dad, he thought, Maybe I ought to see if I can help the poor kid down in Vienna. But I also hope and think that he thought, Maybe if Mike can do this, he can help on the campaign and maybe do something else because he likes politics. I think it was partly to help me out because I was a jobless, so to speak, and hopefully he also thought maybe I could help him out down in the future, either politically or in government some way.

DePue: Then let's get you into the campaign.

McCormick: I was kind of itching to get on the campaign. But the poll numbers were looking pretty good all the way along.

DePue: If you came on in June, early polling was already showing him significantly ahead.

McCormick: Yeah. Campaigns are, I believe, a large degree about how you use resources. I don't know how much they paid me at the Department of Transportation, but it was more than most field people get paid in the campaign, and I think the governor anticipated if I came on the campaign, I was going to get paid about what I was going to get paid in my government job. You put on as few staff as you can until you feel like you have to have them. I'm pretty confident it was in June '94 that I came on to the campaign. I was doing things anyway. Every night, I was out working. Now, that's being untrue, making me sound better than I was. Not every night, but many nights, I was out meeting with county chairmen. I was doing things like that in my free time and on weekends—going to Lincoln Day dinners, going to political things. The governor's folks would call and say, "Hey, Mike, can you cover for us at a meeting here," or, "Can you cover for us at a meeting there?"

DePue: Maybe this will help—and I don't want to belabor this point—but in talking to Andy Foster, he was explaining that June was an important month because the campaign decided to do an ad blitz then to try to take it from eight or ten points to something well into double that number; to basically put Dawn Clark Netsch away early.

McCormick: Ms. Netsch, uh-huh.

DePue: Were you already in the campaign when that happened?

McCormick: I was probably just starting on the campaign when that happened.

DePue: So that would be about June, then.

McCormick: Yeah.

DePue: What did you think about his opponent in the campaign?

McCormick: I was surprised that she ended up being the opponent in the campaign. Of course, now it's different. In the media age, I really thought she didn't look the part; I thought she came across somewhat professorial in her approach.

DePue: Well, she was.

McCormick: Yes. Let me just say this: She shouldn't have beat Governor Edgar, and she wouldn't have been as good a governor, in my mind, as Governor Edgar was. But of the Democrats that were running, with all due respect, I think our state would have been better off—if Governor Edgar had not won—if Dawn Clark Netsch would have been governor.

DePue: Versus Dick Phelan or Roland Burris, who were the other candidates.

McCormick: Yes, I do. I do. That's a personal feeling. That's not anything the governor's ever said to me. Ms. Netsch had been involved in government forever. She was involved in the writing of the constitution, she was—you know all that, and that's for another tape.

DePue: And the time she's running, she's serving as the comptroller.

McCormick: The comptroller. Very knowledgeable, very bright, very much concerned with policy. Remember, at this stage in my life, I don't care so much about how many stop signs are on the road; I'm worried about how many Republican votes I'm going to get in a certain precinct. I'm not so worried about policy at this stage in life; I'm more worried about the political things in life. But I also cared about the state. So I was surprised she won, because I didn't think she was a very good politician. I think if any Democrat that ran in that primary should have been governor, it would have probably been her, just in terms of experience, knowledge, concern about policy. Maybe she should have been a little more concerned about—again, I'm saying things. I wasn't in her campaign, and I was around it a little bit when I would track her around the state, but I always thought she was a very nice person, a very knowledgeable person. But I never thought that she was somebody that was going to be elected statewide in a high-profile position as governor.

DePue: What specifically was your job in the Edgar campaign?

McCormick: I did two things. My paying job in the Edgar campaign was I was in charge of roughly the south third of the state. I had roughly Effingham, south, with the exception of some counties on the eastern side of the state that went with an eastern division person, and I didn't have any of the Metro East area.²⁴ That was my day job, so to speak. I was in charge of doing all those. Governor Edgar had carried maybe five of all of those counties in 1990. I also served on Governor Edgar's—and I don't think we ever referred to it as this—little kitchen cabinet of folks who would meet periodically, sometimes in Springfield, most of the time in Chicago. Of course, Andy Foster would always be there; Sipple, the media guy, would—

DePue: Don Sipple.

McCormick: Don Sipple would usually be there. And there would be other folks who were knowledgeable in state government—in politics and things like that—and we would meet and just talk. The governor every now and then would meet with us, but we'd just talk strategy; we'd talk a little bit about a variety of things. I actually served on that before I was on the campaign full time.

There was a time in that primary where Roland Burris, Mr. Burris, was running ahead, or it looked like in some of the last polling. There were some folks in the Republican Party that were encouraging some of the regular

²⁴ Metro-East is the region composed of the suburbs lying east of St. Louis, in Illinois.

Republican folks, who would normally give money to the Republicans, to throw a little money into Roland's campaign, thinking Roland was probably the weakest candidate. That's not to say he would have been, but that was some of the thought. There were some normally Republican donors who were giving Mr. Burris some money to try to pull him over the top. Then the pool ad—

DePue: Netsch's pool ad.²⁵

McCormick: Netsch's pool ad came out, and the rest is history. So before I started the campaign in June, I served on the advisory committee, kitchen cabinet, and then started on the campaign.

DePue: Anything in particular that really sticks with you in that campaign?

McCormick: It probably wasn't as stressful to us as it should have been because our numbers were always pretty good.

DePue: I've already talked about this ad campaign in June. That put him over 20 percent.

McCormick: Right. Well, those numbers weren't always twenty. They didn't last. The thing I remember about this campaign was that our numbers were always pretty good, and that our numbers always got better, not so much when we talked about her tax hike, but when we talked about her death penalty position. And I remember that we were damned and determined as a campaign staff to aggressively do the campaign, whether we were one point ahead or whether we were twenty points ahead.

So the first real thing we were involved in that I thought was great politics was when she kind of kicked off her... The governor had his problems—meaning health problems—but she kicked off her campaign with a bus tour around the state. Her theory in life was that we should raise the taxes. In other words, a little bit like the governor ultimately decided to try to do later on in his administration: raise the income tax and lower the property tax, and a large portion of that money—I'm not a policy guy—would go to schools. The school folks liked that, of course, so one of her initial things that she did in the general election was to have a tour of Illinois, and she used a school bus; she, along with a variety of people, took a school bus from town to town in Illinois, touting her program.

I remember meeting with the rest of the campaign staff—Andy Foster was our campaign manager; David Bender was our field guy. In other words, he was the guy all us field people reported to. We all met and said, "What are

²⁵ In the 1994 Democratic gubernatorial primary Dawn Clark Netsch ran a very effective ad showing her playing pool, driving home the message that she was a "straight shooter." Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, July 2, 2009, 17; Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, October 22, 2009, 28.

we going to do? We can't just let her go around the state spouting this stuff and have no response." I was lucky because she started down in southern Illinois. She started down near Carbondale, at a little school down there.

DePue: "Spouting all this stuff"—what stuff was she spouting?

McCormick: Raising taxes.

DePue: So just her basic issue.

McCormick: The campaign people took that as, There can't just be one side of the issue; we have to respond. Every thing she does, everywhere she goes, we've got to be there. We have to do that. If she spouts off, we spout off. Whatever it is, we're there. She started in southern Illinois, in Carbondale. It was a little school as you're on your way to Giant City Park, and we found out that that's where she was going to start—obviously you find that out.

So the day before, I hooked up with a bunch of prison guards on their off time and had them do a press conference at the Williamson County airport. I told them not to wear their uniforms—didn't want to get anybody in trouble—(DePue laughs) but I organized a press conference of prison guards who asked Ms. Netsch, before she came to southern Illinois, why she was opposed to the death penalty in the event that a prison guard was killed by a prisoner. "We want her to explain to our family why, if I'm killed in the line of duty as a prison guard, she is opposed to the guy who killed me getting the death penalty." I had the press conference. On the day that she came down to southern Illinois, on the front page of the *Southern Illinoisan* was "Prison Guards" something "Netsch about the Death Penalty." Front page. So we got up early in the morning, got as many newspapers as we possibly could, took all the guts out of them, folded them up, and took them to Carbondale.

I think it was a Monday—I had a press conference at the school before her bus got there, with regional superintendents of school and state legislators from that area who were Republican saying, "Look, there's a whole lot of things we need to do in the education system, particularly in the Chicago education system, before we start raising taxes. So Ms. Netsch can raise our taxes by 30 percent, send our money to Chicago schools, (laughs) and this is not the right way to do things." So we had that press conference before. The bus pulls up, and as everybody gets off the bus, I have people that are handing all the press and anybody else that's on the bus, including Ms. Netsch, copies of the front page of the *Southern Illinoisan* stating how come Netsch won't support the death penalty, or something like that.

We had our people in place. They had their Edgar signs at her rally. We were very, very cautious to never boo, never applaud, never say a word. On my events that I covered, if anybody would have ever booed, said a word, we'd have asked them to leave, because we did not want that. We wanted

everybody to know that she was not going to go anywhere where she and her views weren't going to be contested, and at least in my counties, there were going to be Edgar people at every stop.

So that's the first stop. I thought it went pretty well. We got a little bit of press in the paper, that we'd had a press conference along with her. As I recall, the next stop was in Franklin County. I want to say West Frankfurt, something like that. We found out that one of the school districts in that area—I don't think Ms. Netsch ever knew about this; I know she didn't—in the paychecks of the school employees, they put a little note that Ms. Netsch (laughs) was going to be in West Frankfurt to talk about school funding at whatever day. Well, we had a press conference in that town, asking Ms. Netsch to reimburse the school district for the money it cost in manpower and postage, and things like that, for doing fliers on public money and public time. That one didn't get much coverage, but the long and the short of it—there were Edgar people there with Edgar signs. There was always me or someone from the Edgar campaign, if local media were there, to respond afterwards.

We went to Harrisburg, and we found out that Ms. Netsch's campaign had decided to do it at the fairgrounds. Where they had decided to do it at the fairgrounds was right next to where the Republican tent was going to be for the county fair. So the night before, I had them put up all the big Edgar signs. We got there, and the county chairman told me that the fair guy told us we had to take all those signs down because Ms. Netsch was coming to town.²⁶ I said, "Isn't this the Republican area?" and we went to it. So they had to move their event a little bit away from that so they wouldn't have the Edgar stuff there.

One of the next stops was Mount Vernon. There was an article that came out; I think it was in the *Sun-Times*. The city of Chicago schools had lost a bunch of snowblowers, which added up to a few hundred thousand dollars. So I started calling around, and everybody I knew, I said, "I want as many snowblowers at the Mount Vernon school as I can get." I had Rolland Lewis, the mayor of Mount Vernon, have a press conference before the event, with snowblowers as the backdrop, basically saying, "Look, there's no reason that we should start paying higher income taxes so that this can go to Chicago to pay for a bunch of lost snowblowers. People need to get their act together before we start raising taxes and throwing money anywhere." It was a pretty neat thing. I mean, we had a lot of snowblowers there in the middle of the summer, (DePue laughs) so it was fun. Not a lot of media there—some radio. Mount Vernon's a bad media market because they're a big town in southern Illinois but they don't have any media there. But they have radio and their little local station.

So what was funny after that, I was getting ready to go in to hear Netsch. That was an inside event in the Mount Vernon school. I'll never

²⁶ Harrisburg, Illinois, is in Saline County.

forget, it was Ned Mitchell. Ned was the former mayor of Sesser, Illinois, and a good friend of my dad's—a Democrat, a really nice guy. I remember Ned wouldn't let me in the event that day because, he said, "You guys have been causing trouble." I think he used another word, but, "You guys have been causing trouble today; I'm not going to let you in, Mike." I said, "Well, Ned, we've never caused trouble. We've always done our press conference beforehand. We've had people in your events, but I don't think anybody would tell you we've been disrespectful in one way. Nobody has been." He said, "I'm not going to let you in," so he didn't let me in.

But there was a school board member, who was a friend of mine and a Republican, that was right behind me, and they thought that she was with me. She kind of was, but not really—she was a school board member in one of the school districts—they wouldn't let her in either. So I of course took her to the local media and had her explain how she was a school board member, tried to get in, and they wouldn't let her in. And so we did that.

Her [Netsch's] running mate was Penny Severns, and Penny Severns had said we shouldn't raise taxes 33 percent—or whatever Penny said during the primary, because I think Penny was trying to run with somebody else or something. So when Ms. Netsch would go to a town, we'd put a big quote on billboards where we knew they were going to be, explaining what her running mate said about her tax proposal.

It was a theory in life that we were ahead, but we were going to contest everything. I would have the campaign people call me up and say, "Hey, Ms. Netsch is going to be down there talking about farm policy, and we need you to go down and respond." I'd say, "I don't know anything about farm policy." He said, "Well, we need somebody to go down there and respond," so I would do that. I'd go down, and they'd say, "Mike McCormick is going to respond for the campaign." Of course, I'm from Vienna, but I don't know anything about farming. But my response was always, "To be very honest with you, I don't really appreciate a lawyer from Chicago coming down here and telling us how we're supposed to run farms in southern Illinois." She was a lot smarter on farm policy than I was, (laughter) but it was part of the campaign. So the big thing I remember about that campaign, just in terms of the guys working the staffing stuff, the things that we were doing: we were awfully busy and awfully hard-working for a campaign that was as far ahead as we were.

DePue: What's your reaction, then, when you hear the allegations, especially from Netsch supporters, that this got to be a pretty nasty campaign?

McCormick: It's nastier when you lose. I guess you look at it as being a little bit nastier when you lose. In today's world, I'm trying to think what she would think would be nasty. Maybe the thing about them not paying their real estate taxes. Wasn't that something that happened, which got blown out of proportion; that

Mr. Netsch had forgotten to pay a property tax? That she opposed the death penalty? I'm not sure what... You may know what you're talking about, but in today's world, I can't imagine that campaign was that nasty.

DePue: I talked to her, but only in the pre-interview session; we haven't discussed this in the interview itself.

McCormick: She got out-spent; she got out-campaigned. But again, I look at these campaigns today, and I would never consider the '94 campaign a nasty campaign. Now, I'm from the approach of winning and the approach of liking a little the give-and-take of the politics, but I'd be interested in knowing how she got mistreated on that campaign, from a nasty perspective.

DePue: Again, I don't want to speak on her behalf—.

McCormick: No, I understand.

DePue: —but I will definitely be talking to her about it, and I'm looking forward to that interview. I think when we talked before, you mentioned being an emcee down in Marion. Was that this incident that you talked about or another one?

McCormick: No, no, no. I got an opportunity to do a variety of things—introduce the governor around. When he announced for his second term, he asked me to kind of warm the crowd up and act as an emcee when he started to announce for his reelection in Marion.

DePue: So this was the first event where he's announcing for the entire state of Illinois?

McCormick: Yes.

DePue: Why Marion?

McCormick: He announced earlier in other parts of the state when he made the fly-around.

DePue: Okay.

McCormick: But the election night, I emceed the last rally in southern Illinois as well, and introduced the governor during the campaign.

DePue: Was it much of a hiccup for the campaign when Edgar suddenly and unexpectedly went into the hospital and had quadruple bypass surgery?

McCormick: Yeah, I remember getting the call—I don't know if it was Andy or from Bender—telling me. The first response, of course, is, "How is the governor, and how is Mrs. Edgar getting along?" But then you think this could be a really devastating thing for a campaign because what will people think? Will people think that he's not up to doing the job for the next four years? Will he

be up for doing... When you first find out, you don't know what the doctors... When my dad had a heart attack, the doctors told him, "You need to get out of politics." So you didn't know. First, from my perspective, it was like, Oh my gosh, I hope the governor's all right. Then I guess selfishness walks in a little bit, too, and thinking, Oh, what's going to happen to the campaign? What are we going to do about that? It was a worrisome thing, both from a personal standpoint and a political standpoint.

But I think Andy will tell you that during all this period of time, the polls stayed pretty constant, pretty good. The governor might have been in bed recuperating or in the mansion recuperating, drinking low-fat shakes to try to build up a little weight, but we were out there every day. We were out there every day on that campaign, whether we were twenty points ahead or thirty points, whatever the polls. We truly were out there every day working on that campaign. In fact, they were so worried we wouldn't work hard that they had all kinds of—I used to kid Andy and those guys: "You've got some of the craziest reports. 'Who have you put a bumper sticker on?'" I never filled out any of those reports usually. They wanted to make sure that they felt there was some accountability, because you were going to work; you were going to make sure that this campaign didn't... We should work as if we were twenty points behind as opposed to twenty points ahead or ten points ahead, or whatever we were.

DePue: I did have an opportunity to speak with Andy Foster, who you've mentioned several times. He's another one of those pretty young kids. You are as well, at that time.

McCormick: Well, Andy was younger than me, I'm sure. I'm sure he is. But yeah, I was probably the oldest guy on the campaign, other than Lawrence, who was part-time on the campaign. Mike Lawrence, he's an old guy like me. But I'm trying to think. We had Andy, who was younger than me; we had Bender, who was younger than me. Every one of the other field guys was younger than I was, so I was the old man, probably, as far as just kind of grunt campaign staff.

DePue: Old man at what age?

McCormick: That was '94, and I was born in '59. (DePue laughs) Talking about age, I remember when the governor was elected—I don't remember how old I was, but I was in the thirties—and somebody whispered the governor, "Hey, it's Mike's birthday today." So the governor came out like he remembered it and walked up to me and said, "Mike, it's your birthday today. I want to wish you a happy birthday." "Well, thank you, Governor." He said, "How old are you?" I said, "I'm thirty-something" or whatever I was. He said, "Oh, I was secretary of state when I was that age." And I said, "Well, thanks a lot." (laughter) But I was one of the old guys on the campaign.

DePue: Let's jump to election night, then.

McCormick: Well, I don't want to take your job, but I have one other campaign story I don't know that we talked about.

DePue: Okay.

McCormick: It's one that I tell when I make talks to political science courses here at U of I or to groups. In reading political history in Illinois, I think that Bill Stratton, who ran forever in Illinois—he was even a congressman-at-large at one point (laughs) in time in Illinois—had a very good sense of the state of Illinois, politically, geographically, and everything. Jim Edgar is better than anybody I've ever read about or known, in terms of just the political environment in Illinois. He and I remember this just a little bit differently, but I'll go ahead and tell it on the tape because everybody's going to believe him anyway.

It was toward the end of the campaign. I was down somewhere in southern Illinois where you couldn't get cell phone coverage, but I got a beep, "911," a 911 page. We had these cell phones that were as big as your head probably, and we had beepers, so you had both. You didn't use your cell phone because the battery would only last for thirty minutes at the most, but they'd beep you and then you'd call in. I had no cell phone coverage, but I could get my beep. I think it was the campaign beeping me, and they said, "911." Finally I get to a phone booth somewhere—I don't even think it was in a town. It was almost like an old Hitchcock movie: (DePue laughs) you're in the middle of a four-way intersection where no one's around, but there's one phone booth there. It wasn't that bad, probably, but it was somewhere in a county that I hadn't spent much time in. I was trying to make sure signs were up or whatever I was trying to do—get list of precinct workers. I can't remember what I was doing. I remember the 911 page.

I call into the campaign. "You need to call back; the governor wants to talk to you." Well, to be honest with you, Andy, Bender, and the guys—we were practical joke people once in a while, as you might imagine, and Foster could do a pretty good Jim Edgar impression. So if you ever got a phone call from the campaign and somebody would go, "Hello, this is the governor," even if you thought it was Andy, you'd say, "Oh, BS, it's not the governor," because you're afraid, Well, maybe it is the governor. I said, "Oh, guys. I've got a lot of work to do; you guys are messing with me." They said, "No, no, the governor really wants to talk to you. Call the mansion number."

So I called the mansion. The troopers answered, I think, and I said, "This is Mike McCormick. (laughs) They tell me on the campaign that the governor wants to talk to me." "Yeah, the governor wants to talk to you." He gets on the phone. He always starts out with, "Hi, Mike. How's the weather down there?" He's a big weather guy. If he hadn't have been governor, I'm sure he would have been on WGN news doing the weather; I'm convinced.

“How’s the weather down there?” “Well, it’s hot,” or “It’s cold,” or whatever it was at the time. He said, “What’s going on down there?” I think, Here’s my opportunity to impress upon the governor just how brilliant of a southern Illinois politician I am. At that point in time, I could tell you how many precincts there were in every one of my counties, I could tell you definitely who the county chairman was, and I could tell you who a lot of the precinct committeemen were in each of the precincts—not all of them, but in the major precincts.

So I started my, I’m a brilliant kind of guy. I started, “You know, Governor, in Bond County, we got X number of precincts, and those always go Republican, and I think we’re going to do better there.” I think he kind of flirted with me a little while, let me just kind of spout off. Maybe he was finishing his lunch or something, and he didn’t care at the time. I remember, though, he kind of cut me off; he said, “Well, I’m not really all that worried about that. What do you think about Gallatin County?” I didn’t say this—I thought just briefly to myself, I can tell you everything about almost every county in southern Illinois, but Gallatin County is a very small county on the eastern side of the state, and it’s been Democrat since the beginning of the world. I mean, when dinosaurs roamed there, if they did, (DePue laughs) they voted Democrat, and they always have and they always will. I was thinking we might carry Pulaski County; we might carry Cairo, Illinois; we might carry a variety of these counties. But he’s asking me about one county in the state. In all of the counties I have to deal with, thirty counties or so, he’s asking me about this one county.

He said, “I’m really worried about Gallatin County.” So I said, “Governor, I don’t think any governor has ever carried that county. I think we have a lot of better opportunities.” He tells me that I told him that everything was okay in Gallatin County, not to worry about it. I thought I had left the impression that we’d go do some stuff and see what we could do, but that’s a tough county. His memory is better than my memory as a general rule, but the long and the short of it is: whether he’s telling the story or I’m telling the story, what I think is an amazing thing is that out of 102 counties in this state, a sitting governor of Illinois, running with a twenty-point lead or whatever the lead was, right before the election, is calling about—and it’d be the same thing if he’d have called about my little county; it’s nothing about Gallatin County—Gallatin County, Illinois.

I called back into the campaign, and I remember telling either Andy or Bender—I don’t know which one I talked to, probably Andy, but maybe both of them; they got me on conference call— “What was **that**? (DePue laughs) That was **weird**. Here I am, trying to tell him about all these other things that are going on in southern Illinois, and he keeps asking me about Gallatin County.” So the governor called, the governor asked about it, and I made a point to get over there and meet with the county coordinator over there, go through the plan. I think the governor did say, “If I need to send Brenda down

there” or something like that, “I can do that.” I said, “I’ll get down there, and I’ll talk to my people.”

The long and the short of it is, election night rolls around, and we were having a good night, as you know. The things were coming in at 7:05 or 7:04. CBS news comes on and says, “Governor Edgar’s won the race,” so it’s not like we have this long night of worrying. And everybody’s winning everything—every county. Cook County, county after county after county. Everything’s coming in. Toward the end of the night, I get a phone call from—I’ll never forget his name. I saw him at Walmart probably three or four months ago—Boone from Gallatin County. Boone calls me up, and he says, “Hey, Mike, I got good news for you. We won by three votes.” I say, “Really?” He goes, “Whoa, whoa, wait a minute. I looked at the numbers wrong. We lost by three votes.”

Immediately my mind went back to that phone call of Governor Edgar’s that picked out the county. It wasn’t like he had polling numbers from Gallatin County; you don’t have polling numbers from Gallatin County. (DePue laughs) And I just thought, **What**—I mean, that’s not a freaky thing to happen. You don’t just wake up one day and say, “I think I’ll go call Mike McCormick and ask him about Gallatin County.” He had analyzed that thing to the point of no return. I don’t know how he did that. I always, to this day, don’t know how—I don’t know that he knows how he did it. I don’t know.

DePue: The obvious question is how many other counties did he end up losing?

McCormick: I was it. My county was it. I was responsible for the area where he lost one county by three votes.²⁷ I’ve got to tell you, I’ve been a loyal Jim Edgar person probably longer than anybody that worked on the campaign, because I was older than anybody who worked on the campaign and knew him longer than anybody that worked on the campaign, and I really felt bad. Here we are, we win by the biggest—

DePue: Sixty percent; Netsch pulls 34, so a third-party candidate got a smattering of it as well.

McCormick: I’m happy, but I’m thinking, My God, how could this be? I remember the governor called. We were in Springfield that night; we weren’t in Chicago. The governor called down to the campaign and thanked everybody for their work, and I think he asked—somebody said, “Hey, is McCormick there?” I said, “Yes, sir, Governor, I’m right here.” He said, “Well, you’ve made one decision for me easier.” And I was thinking (laughs) it was going to be, “I know what campaign staff guy to fire before...” I said, “What is that, Governor?” He said, “If we have to put a nuclear waste dump somewhere, I know what county we can put the waste dump in.” (DePue laughs) That was

²⁷ Netsch defeated Edgar in Gallatin County, 1,537–1,534. It was the only county he lost. State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast at the General Election, November 8, 1994*.

that story. So in the scheme of life, historically, the reason Governor Edgar will go down as not winning every county in the state was because of his three-vote deficiency in a county that he called me about a few weeks before the election, telling me that that's what he was worried about. Unbelievable.

Now, I've heard about that many times, (DePue laughs) not only from former campaign staff, but every now and then the governor will figure out a way to remember that and tell me about it in a lighthearted, although still (laughs) making the point, way. But I will say this: the campaign staff was nice to me. I think Andy and Dave knew I was upset by that. After the election, Rick Pearson wrote an article—I think I've got a copy of it—in the *Chicago Tribune* that was about, instead of getting fired, I was likely to get a promotion; because the last time Governor Edgar ran in southern Illinois, he only carried five counties, and this time he carried all counties, except one by three votes. I think the campaign and Lawrence and those guys probably could have made that story spin that McCormick is pretty weak or McCormick did a good job; I think they helped me out a little bit there in terms of that. So I always kept that article because I think those guys probably said, "Look, we're not going to trash McCormick. He worked hard, and here's..." I appreciated that.

DePue: That gets us to the point of talking about the next step: what happens after the campaign. It seems to have turned out all right for you.

McCormick: It depends on who (laughs) you talk to, but yes.

DePue: What was the next step for you in the Edgar administration?

McCormick: To back up one very small step, when the governor did the last fly-around of the state on the eve of the election, he asked me to emcee the event in Marion at the Marion airport, which I did. After the event was over, he said, "Come on, let's take a walk." We walked around the parking lot, I think, or maybe the tarmac; I can't remember. He basically asked me the same question that he asked me when I got beat for state's attorney. He said, "Now what are you going to do (laughs) after the campaign?" I gave him the same response: "I hope there's enough elderly folks in Vienna that need wills." He said, "Don't make any decisions." And then he said, "Have you ever thought about moving to Springfield?" I said, "No, sir, I never thought about that." He just said something like, "We're going to win tomorrow, and we'll talk." We shook hands, he took off on the plane, and I think I probably got in the car and started heading to Springfield for election. Or actually, I stayed in southern Illinois and then ran up to Springfield late election afternoon. I was in Springfield, the campaign headquarters, for election night.

So the first time we'd actually talked about me doing anything else with him was probably the day before the election. Everything's over, the election's over. They keep me on the campaign for a while, and then, if I'm

not badly mistaken, I go back to the Department of Transportation for a little while—not long. During this period of time, a bunch of people were calling me—Andy and Dave and all. He said, “What do you want? What do you want? The governor will give you a job, give you something you want.” I said, “I don’t really want anything. I didn’t do it for that.” So I just kind of didn’t respond much to those guys.

One funny story I have that I always kid Dave Bender about: Dave had lunch with me one day, and he said, “I talked with a guy, and he said the governor thought about me”—not me, but Dave Bender—“being the manager of the state fair in Springfield. I thought that’d be a pretty good job until I talked to so-and-so, and they said that’s a terrible job.” A few weeks later, Bender had forgotten that he talked to me about it, and so Bender called me up and said, “You know what a good job for you might be, Mike?” I said, “What’s that, Dave?” He said, “I think the governor would make you fair manager if you wanted to be fair manager. You get a house you can live in on the fairgrounds. You take care of all the fairground stuff. That’s a pretty big thing in Springfield.” I said, “Well, Dave, didn’t we just have lunch about two weeks ago, and you told me how you wouldn’t want that job because it was so bad?” He said, “Oh, was that you I had that lunch with?” (laughter) So I always kid him about that.

I would periodically get phone calls from folks saying, “What do you want? What do you want?” I never did. Finally I think I said, “Look, guys, if the governor has something in mind for me, obviously that’s fine, but I didn’t do the campaign for a job,” and that kind of thing. So I got a phone call from somebody that said, “Are you going to be up for the county chairmen Christmas party?” I said, “Oh, yeah, of course I’m going to be up for the county chairmen Christmas party.” They said, “Could you come up a little early, run by the governor’s office? He wants to meet with you.” I said, “Sure.” I’m a guy that grew up—I mean, legislators and governor—I have a lot of respect for those people. To me, they’re not jokes, they’re someone to look up to. Now, some recent (DePue laughs) activities make you think a little bit different. But I grew up in an area where you didn’t—my dad never said anything. The only governor I ever heard my dad say anything bad about was Governor Walker, and never personally. You didn’t talk about Otto Kerner bad; you didn’t talk about Paul Powell bad. These were public servants; these were people that you respected.

So I’m in Vienna. I put my best suit and tie on, and probably even got a haircut, and drove up to Springfield. I remember driving up, walking through the door, and as I’m walking to the door, four or five people come up to me and say, “I saw you were on the governor’s schedule. What’s going on?” Because the governor’s schedule went out to staff. I was getting phone calls from people in the governor’s office: “Hey, we saw you’re on the governor’s schedule.” “I don’t know, guys; the governor just asked me to

come up and talk to him. I'm going to come up and talk to him. I'm going to be up here anyway."

So I wait, and I wait, and I wait. Finally, Sherry Struck, his secretary, who is one of the nicest people I met in Springfield, came out to me and said, "The governor went on over to the mansion. He was running late; he's not going to be able to meet with you." I said, "Okay." I walk on over to the mansion to do the Christmas party. The governor and Mrs. Edgar would always stand on top of the steps, and you walked through a receiving line. I walked through the receiving line, said hello to Mrs. Edgar, shook the governor's hand, and the governor basically said, "Hi, Mike, how you doing?" and that was it. I was thinking, Well, you just blew me off (laughs) on a meeting. He didn't just blow me off. There was some sort of strike or union problem happening over in Macon County that day, and he was meeting with people, so he was running late. I don't want to leave the impression that he just said, "Well, McCormick, I'm not going to meet with him."

So I'm around the county chairmen. I see the governor a couple more times; we talk a little politics or I say, "Hey, this guy did a good job for you.". I leave; I think I stayed at what's now the Abraham Lincoln Hotel, because that's where the county chairmen were meeting the next morning. I remember somebody from down home called me and said, "What did the governor want with you?" I said, "I don't know. I didn't get the chance to have the meeting. When I saw him, he never said anything to me, so I don't know what he wants." So I went to the county chairmen's meeting the next morning. The governor comes in—I think he pats me on the back and says, "How are you doing this morning?"—makes the speech to the county chairmen, walks out the door, and takes off.

I'm getting ready to go back to Vienna. Now, I would have been coming up to these events anyway. One of his troopers came in before I left, and he said, "Hey, what are you doing now?" I said, "I'm getting ready to head back to Vienna." He said, "Would you have time to stop by the mansion and talk to the governor?" I said, "Sure." So I drove over, went to the mansion, and he and I sat in the office at the mansion and talked about what he envisioned me doing for him if I wanted to. We talked about that. When we talked, he said, "It's a little bit different than any particular position I've had, at least on a long-term basis." Somebody that was overseeing his schedule, his advance, making sure that he was seeing the right people that he needed to see; making sure that he was getting the briefing material that he needed for events—doing a lot of that type of work, and just kind of coordinating his stuff, if you will. That's the official term for it. He said, "Now, obviously, you'd have to move to Springfield to do that. I know you have a little bit of an aversion"—I don't know that he used that word. I said, "Governor, to tell you the truth, I don't think that I'm much of a city person. I love southern Illinois, and I'm pretty comfortable down there, I know everybody down there..." So we left it. I said, "I'll think about it."

DePue: Well, as cities go, at that time, Springfield was probably just shy of a hundred thousand; the Chicago metro area was probably at five million.

McCormick: Right. You got to understand. I was still thinking you might have to have a passport to get to Chicago. (DePue laughs) It was a big change in my life. I had friends in southern Illinois; I had excellent contacts, not only through the work that my dad had done over all of those years, but I had picked up doing the political stuff fairly young in my life.

DePue: We haven't talked about this much, but do you have a wife or do you have any family in that region?

McCormick: I don't have a wife. At the time, my mother lived in Vienna, so my family was my mother in Vienna, who wasn't really very old. My father passed away when he was only sixty-seven. My dad died in '87, so my mom was in her late sixties at that time.

DePue: But it sounds like you didn't have those complications to move.

McCormick: No, I did not. I mean, I had friends; I had a girlfriend in southern Illinois who had a job. But really, you're right. It wasn't as if I had a job down there. I could have. But it was southern Illinois. It was Vienna. It was my home. When I went to law school, I didn't go to what would be considered better law schools that I got admitted into. I went to Southern Illinois law school because I wanted to practice law in southern Illinois. I wanted to be in southern Illinois. That was my home; that's the place I loved. That's where I wanted to be.

DePue: How long did it take you, then, to decide, Okay, I will do this?

McCormick: I don't know, but it was a little while. It wasn't a long while, because the governor wanted me to get started pretty quickly. He wanted me to start working, though, before he wanted to pay me, as I recall. I think there was some kind of gap that I had to do—which was fine. I'm not saying that critically. But there was some reason why I couldn't... So I think he wanted me to be up there January 1 or January 2, but he wanted to start paying me January fifteenth—and that wasn't him, it was bookkeepers or lawyers, probably.

DePue: Were you still on the DOT's payroll?

McCormick: I must have been on DOT's payroll then, because I'm sure he wouldn't have wanted the campaign to pay me for that long. That period of time between the campaign and coming to Springfield is a little bit fuzzy for me. The reason is because there was a whole lot of stuff going on. I was trying to have some input on some positions in the administration. In my mind, I wanted to try to make sure—both in '90 and this time—folks from southern Illinois were involved in the administration, and that kind of thing.

DePue: Still on the kitchen cabinet?

McCormick: Well, there wasn't much need for a kitchen cabinet because the governor had his transition committee, and I wasn't involved in that really at all.

DePue: But it's the transition committee which would have given you that voice that you—

McCormick: I would have talked to the governor.

DePue: Of course, Jim Reilly served as the chief of staff during that critical year of reelection, but Gene Reineke now is going to make that move into chief of staff.

McCormick: Right. Gene and I knew each other when he was doing what I did for Edgar for Jim Thompson. (laughs) When he was putting signs out to places like Vienna, coming by my dad's house to give out Jim Thompson signs for Vienna, that's when I first (laughs) met Gene.

DePue: Talk with us about when you first got into that new job. Was this a job that had been filled before, or was this something new to him?

McCormick: No, the governor said it was something new. They didn't have a title for it, they didn't know what they were going to pay me, and the governor didn't really get into that. The only advice the governor told me—he wanted me to talk to Gene. He said, "You talk to Gene about the pay and all that, but you remind Gene that you're a lawyer. That ought to be worth a few extra thousand dollars to you because you're a lawyer," (DePue laughs) and he just kind of laughed.

DePue: What was it about his first term as governor that made him think he wanted somebody who served in the capacity of personal assistant?

McCormick: I don't know the answer to that question. I know that he was reorganizing the way that he set up his team.

DePue: Correct me if I'm wrong here. He had a series of deputy chiefs of staff, but he also had—what was Al Grosboll's role? Was it the executive...

McCormick: I always thought that during the first thing, he had a few people who were in charge of a variety of agencies.²⁸ This time, in '94, he had more of what I called the deputy chief of staff positions. Howard Peters would be a deputy

²⁸ During Edgar's first term as governor, he assigned broadly related policy areas to "executive assistants" who constituted a "super-cabinet." The first six executive assistants were Michael Belletire, George Fleischli, Felicia Norwood, Allen Grosboll, Erhard Chorle, and Mary Ann Louderback. In his second term, Edgar scrapped this system in favor of two deputy chiefs of staff.

chief of staff.²⁹ I don't know if Al was a deputy chief, but I think he might have been. Those people were responsible for running—

DePue: I think Andy was as well.

McCormick: Andy was a deputy chief of staff. Those guys all were much involved in policy issues. Al would deal with environmental; Al would deal with DNR. Andy would deal with Chicago issues; Andy would be a liaison with some of those business people, things like that, in Chicago. The governor was always nice to listen to me (laughs) if I had an opinion on anything, but I was not a policy guy. I don't think the governor ever really considered me a policy guy. I hope what the governor was thinking was that I didn't have an agenda of my own and that I was loyal to him. This sounds like I'm bragging on myself, and I don't really mean it like that, but I think maybe he thought I had the personality to deal with a variety of different people who were vying for attention, time, et cetera.

DePue: That would suggest in part you're the guy who's controlling access.

McCormick: I'd like to make you think that and just put that as a thing: I was the total gatekeeper. But I will tell you, anybody who knew the governor knew that he was his own scheduler and his own gatekeeper.³⁰ You could advise, you could tell him, but you didn't put anything on the governor's calendar. I spent a lifetime, it seems like, trying to get decisions made on the governor's calendar—which nine times out of ten, you think a staff person could just go ahead and make—because that was not the way it was. The governor's time was valuable, and the governor took his time very seriously.

But look, if Gene Reineke wanted to get in to see the governor as the chief of staff, Mike McCormick didn't say, "I'm the gatekeeper, Gene; you're not going to get in." (DePue laughs) Gene would come to me and say, "Hey, Mike, I need to get in to see the governor the minute he's available," and I'd make sure that happened, but I knew that I wasn't going to say, "Gene, that ain't going to happen today. Come back another day." If I'd have said that to Gene, all Gene would have had to do is say, "What's the deal? McCormick didn't let me in to see you," and McCormick would have probably been manager of the state fair—only in DuQuoin as opposed to...

DePue: Geography in these things does matter, so where was your office in relation to Sherry Struck and in relation to Governor Edgar?

McCormick: When the governor walked out of his office, Sherry was right next to his door. When he walked out the next door, that was my office. My office was a hallway. My office had less room than any other office in Springfield, in the governor's office. It was next door to the place where people got coffee,

²⁹ Howard Peters, interview by Mark DePue, January 21, 2010, 26-28.

³⁰ For Edgar's approach to scheduling, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, April 23, 2010, 6-8.

Cokes, and the toilet. But as things go, it was prime real estate because you were in the glass doors. The chief of staff had his office, I had my office, and the governor had his office. The governor told me when he met with me that day in the mansion, "I want you to be right outside my office. I want you to be the guy right there, kind of keeping track of what's going on."

DePue: Did you serve as something of a political advisor? If you're not a policy guy, are you the political side?

McCormick: Well, no. If somebody said, "Hey, we've got a bunch of Republicans that want the governor to go to a Lincoln Day dinner. We got a bunch of mad Republicans down in" somewhere—other than Gallatin County (laughter)—yeah, I'd go in and talk to the governor about that, or I'd do what I needed to do. The governor asked me to sit in on a variety of things. If it had to deal with local government, he oftentimes liked me to be in there. If it had to deal with clemencies, pardons, he oftentimes wanted me to be in the meeting because I had served as a state's attorney. And because I was an attorney, I'd been a liaison with all these local government officials.

He thought mayors and local government officials were extremely important people in Illinois, both governmentally and politically. He oftentimes told me, "You think we have a lot of problems. We're not getting a call at six o'clock in the night because somebody's tree blew down across the road. The mayor's getting that call." He was always very respectful, and it didn't matter if it was the mayor of Vienna... I would go to an event, and I'd say, "Governor, we got a really good county chairman here. He's worked for you a long time, a really good precinct. Can I let him ride out to the airport with you?" He'd say, "No, no." If I'd say, "Governor, there's a mayor; he's doing a good job down here. Why don't you ride out to the airport with him, tell him he's doing a good job, and talk to him a little bit?" I didn't have any trouble with that. He was big on local government. He wanted their input. He was always, I think it's fair to say, very popular with the municipal league and those kind of folks.

So I guess I was a political guy in the sense that people knew I was involved in politics, I enjoyed politics. I did look at things at times: what are going to be the political ramifications of these things? I would have done that if I was just sitting in Vienna, reading the newspaper about what he was doing.

DePue: (laughs) This might be a good time, before we really get into the meat and potatoes of that second administration, to take a quick break here.

McCormick: Okay, good.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We just took a quick break. What I want to do now is get into the administration itself. Many of the things I'm going to be asking you about are the substantial policy initiatives that Edgar pursued. You already expressed to me that you weren't the policy guy, so I don't know that you'll have much to say, but I want to give you an opportunity. But before we get to those, there's a series of personalities, because what makes any institution or administration work is the people. Let's start at the top, and I'll ask you about your new boss: What surprised you about Governor Edgar when you actually started working for him in a new capacity?

McCormick: I found him to be more intense than I thought he was. I actually found him to be much smarter than I (laughs) thought he was.

DePue: You were already impressed by his political...

McCormick: I've always been impressed by his political ways, because I would have people come up to me every day, and they'd say, "You know why I like Jim Edgar?" And I'd say, "No, why?" They'd say, "He's just like everybody else. He's just one of us." In some ways, that is a very true statement; in other ways, that is not true. There's no one I have more respect for than Jim Edgar; he has been, other than my own family, better to me than anybody and given me more opportunities that, really, somebody from Vienna probably didn't deserve. The governor, I always thought, was in some ways the most disciplined person that I've ever known. In some ways, he could be very undisciplined, but when it came to decision-making, when it came to a feel for government and governing and how government works, I came to think that he was actually a better policy manager, leader, than politician. I would have told you just the opposite of that had I not been intimately involved in his day-to-day activities as governor.

DePue: What kind of demeanor did he have?

McCormick: The governor was always professional—always. If he was at the state fair going through the hog barn, the governor wasn't wearing a t-shirt that said "Edgar 1994" or "I'm the Guv."³¹ I know this sounds weird—he always was dressed properly. He didn't wear a suit to the horse race—I don't mean that—unless we were coming from another event. He had a sense that how you acted and your demeanor reflected upon your office. He was very cognizant of acting appropriately; of dressing appropriately; of being careful what he said—how he said things, what he said. I used to think that was more a little bit because he was like every other politician, probably a little bit vain. But for the most part, I'm now convinced that he had a great respect for the office, and that was part of his way of showing respect for the office. I never saw him sitting around in the governor's office with a bunch of guys, smoking cigars and having a cocktail. When he was in the office, he was generally in a suit

³¹ McCormick is referencing Jim Thompson's style of informal engagement with the public.

and tie, and he was doing business. When he was out in the public, he conducted himself—in his manner, in his dress, and in his way of dealing with the public—[in a way] that I think reflected highly on him. But just as important, I'm convinced, in his mind was that there's something about not just being Jim Edgar—although I think that's important to him (laughs) as well—but being the governor.

He has a great political sense, he has a great sense of government, but he also has an absolute, wonderful sense of history. I'm convinced those three votes in Gallatin County had as much to do with his concern about a sense of history as it did with a sense of politics. He was going to be governor, no matter what Gallatin County did. But he could say, "Now I'm a part of history"—maybe I'm going to be that asterisk (DePue laughs) as to why he didn't do it. He combined a political sense, a sense of governing, and a sense of history that quite frankly surprised me. I did not know how well-read the governor was. The governor would talk to me about countries and leaders and history and books that he had read. I'm kind of a reader too, but I became more so because I felt like I was getting left behind big-time by the governor. He was very well-read, very intelligent.

On the other hand, he was not a good writer. It was difficult for him sometimes to write a long, lengthy—he was very good at what he wanted; he could talk to you and tell you, "This is what I'm looking at," and then he was really good at honing it, but he wasn't the greatest writer in the world. I think he would acknowledge that. And I would tell you, for a politician, he wasn't the Bill Clinton—

DePue: Or Jim Thompson.

McCormick: —orator, or the Jim Thompson slap-you-on-the-back, pat you... In the time I've spent with Jim Edgar, I never saw him grab a baby and give it a big ole wet kiss. Now, maybe he did, but I never saw it. We would have those big gospel sings. Jim Thompson would come in, he would grab a kid in one arm, a hot dog in the other arm, and walk down in front of a thousand people. In the middle of a big gospel sing, he'd get up and start clapping, and every Pentecostal person in that crowd thought that the Holy Ghost had risen on Jim Thompson. (DePue laughs) I don't think it was the Holy Ghost, but I think he was having a good time, and if he wasn't, the only person in that room who knew he wasn't having a good time was Jim Thompson.

Governor Edgar would come to these events. He was much more popular in many ways, but he would walk in, he'd wave, and he'd sit down. I remember one time, I reached over to him and said, "Mr. Secretary, it's okay to show you're having a good time." Thompson would be over there (DePue laughs) clapping and stomping and snorting, and Jim Edgar would be his reserved self. It was a different way of acting.

DePue: Just these last few weeks, we have been reading all the nitty-gritty details about Gov. Rod Blagojevich's trial, and very much part of that is, let's say, the salty language.

McCormick: I'm glad you brought that up. I remember a lot of "gosh darn-its" and "dang it" and "shoot." I remember a few curse words when he would repeat what he saw in a movie that he and Mrs. Edgar had watched from what he would call "Video Blockbuster." (laughs) I was around him in almost every circumstance, and I saw him when he was in Springfield most every day of his life. Not every day—every working day, and oftentimes on weekends we had events and things like that. I will say in my experience, whatever few hours were played in the Blagojevich [trial], that's sixteen lifetimes of Jim Edgar's cursing, times ten. One time, Eric Robinson and I were on a plane, and the governor repeated a bad word that he heard. He was quoting from a movie, and Eric and I almost fainted because he quoted the word. We thought, Did he say that? Because this was not him, this was not him; he did not do that.

DePue: Was he the kind of person who didn't allow anybody else to speak that way?

McCormick: I never thought the governor was one of those people that say, "I don't drink, therefore you can't drink; I don't cuss, therefore you can't cuss." But I can't think of too many people who will walk into the presence of a governor and do that. So I've probably said a couple of words, not terrible words, in front of the governor. I just don't ever remember a circumstance where somebody coming in wanted to throw around the F-bomb twenty times. Maybe a staff person would blurt out something like, "Well, that's an f-ing bad idea," but everybody kind of looked, the guy would look down, and then it would go on.

This was the governor's business. He was serious about this business. When he called five staff guys in to talk about something, he might start off with, "Did you see this" or "Did you see that," or, "I watched the History Channel," or, "Brenda and I rented a movie last night," for a few minutes, and then you're down to business. I never in my life heard the governor tell an off-color story—never.

DePue: How about when he got mad? How did you tell that he was mad?

McCormick: You could tell he was mad because he let you know he was mad.

DePue: He would just flat-out tell you?

McCormick: One of the first times I started working for him, I didn't really know what I was doing. Some people would say when I left office (DePue laughs) with him, I didn't know what I was doing. But I didn't really know. We had this one conversation, and he said, "You're going to kind of be my guy; you're going to be my eyes and ears. You're going to control my schedule," you're going to do this, and you're going to do that. Then he took off to Florida for vacation after he got inaugurated. So we had a poor scheduler over there that

didn't know what my role with him was; we had staff saying, "Hey, Mike, you're sitting right out of the door, what..." It was a little awkward at first because, "Hey, do I go to the scheduler to talk about getting on the governor's schedule, or do I talk to Mike? How's the briefing process going to work?" See, I had not been involved in any of that. So I'm walking in, I'm at my job, and the governor's not there; he's on his vacation. I think he went every year down to Florida to some union stuff, so I guess it wasn't technically a vacation.

The first day or two he got back, he called me in two or three times and asked me a question. He had told me before, "If I ask you something and you don't know, you tell me you don't know. I want to know. It's okay if you don't know; you tell me that." You think that's an obvious thing to do, but you have a governor looking at you and asking you a simple question, and you have to look him in the eye and say, "I don't know"? It's harder than you think. It really is. In fact, I think there's some staff people who found that out periodically. But the governor called me in a couple of times that first day or two, and he'd say, "What am I doing next?" and I would say, "I don't know." Or "What does this person want to see me about?" and I would say, "I don't know."

Nobody had told me exactly what the—I just got this broad thing; this was really not set up structurally yet. I said "I don't know" like three times, and on the third "I don't know," he got very close to me and said, "It's your job to know. That's what I have you here for." And he was pointing at me. Now, he wasn't threatening in any way, and he wasn't like, "You're the most worthless person in the world," although I felt that way. But he let me have it. This is what I considered my first day at work, because it was the first day at work I was with the governor. He was irritated with me, and you could tell it. He didn't say, "Mike, you're the most worthless person I've ever seen," and he didn't call me a bad name, but he let me know pretty quickly that "I don't know" about what I was supposed to know about was probably not going to cut it.

I was devastated. I get back to my office and I'm thinking, The guy comes in here the first day, he never does tell me (laughs) really what I'm supposed to be doing, and he's already yelling at me. Now, I didn't say that to him, nor would I have ever. So I'm kind of down, to be very honest with you, and I'm praying that he doesn't come out of his office and ask me another question, because I think if he'd have asked me what my name was, (DePue laughs) I might have told him I did not know. We were still feeling each other out in terms of me and the staff. This put me in between some staff that didn't used to have an in-between to go through.

DePue: Did you have anybody else on the staff as a confidant?

McCormick: No, not really. I had friends on the staff, but some of those were people on the staff calling me now to get in to see the governor. But to go back to that first day when I got yelled at a little bit. Again, he wasn't mean, but when the governor was upset at you, you knew it. It wasn't like one of these things that, "Well, maybe he'll do it right." He needed to let you know you weren't doing it right, so you didn't do it wrong the next time, I guess.

At the end of that day, he came out and said, "Got anything else for me?" and (laughs) I quickly said, "No, sir." I think if I'd have had a stack of stuff a mile high for him I would have said "No, sir," because my only goal in life was for him to get out of there and not disappoint him one more time that day. Then he said, "Won't you come with me?" We walked down the hall and out the back door toward the mansion. He said, "Little rough day for you today. I was a little rough on you today." I said, "Well, I guess I didn't do very good today." And he said, "I want you to know what's going on here. I've got to have somebody who does that, and you're going to be right outside the door. You need to know these kinds of things." I said, "Governor, I guess I've decided that I can either get yelled at by somebody because I don't have their will done or their document done in Vienna, or get yelled at by the governor of the state of Illinois. Maybe I'm in a pretty good position here." He laughed and I laughed, and we went about our way. He went on to the mansion, and I went back to work.

But it took a while for me to work with everybody, not because I wasn't willing to, and I don't think because they weren't willing to; it's just you're sticking somebody in a position that is kind of in the middle. The theory was, I'd have staff people come in all the time and say, "Hey, can I get in to the governor? I've got some good news for him." I'd say, "Sure," and we'd get them in, and then that same staff person the next day would come to me and say, "Hey, listen, Mike. You need to tell the governor this didn't work out very well." So I was often given the opportunity (laughs) to go in and talk to the governor about things that weren't going like they were supposed to go. I think staff had to feel our way around; I had to feel my way around. You have to understand, this was really new. This was different. This was different than anything that I had ever done.

So that was one time I knew the governor was upset with me, and I was disappointed in myself. The governor would get mad, he would get angry, but it was over. If he got mad at you because you didn't do something right or he was disappointed in what was done—"No, no, no, that's not right; you've got to go back and do that" or "No, no, no, no, no, that's not right"—the next day, it wasn't like he would say, "Now, you remember when you didn't do that right the last time; well, I want it right." He was never like that. He'd let you know he was not happy, but he was not out of control.

DePue: How about the flip side. How did he let you know you were doing a good job?

McCormick: Didn't very much. He kept you around. (DePue laughs) I never screwed up bad enough to get promoted. Because the old joke was, if you really screw up bad, they don't really want to fire you because you've been loyal and all that, so they—

DePue: Are you talking about in general, or is this specifically a joke about working for Jim Edgar?

McCormick: No, this is general in state government. Well, I didn't screw up bad enough to get promoted, so they kept me around. But I don't think the governor was a great person at giving praise to you on an ongoing basis. You weren't doing it for that, for one thing, I guess. Every now and then, the governor would come up and say, "That was a good event" or "That was okay." But he is not—was not—an effusive praise-giver about your job. You probably had a lot better chance of knowing when he was disappointed in the product than you were when he was happy with the product.

I would get calls from the travel aide. I was kind of in charge of coordinating the advance people too, and we had an event (laughs) that occurred outside. I guess it was on one of the hottest days, and something about the tent didn't work, and everybody just melted in the event. I mean, just literally—I think some highfalutin women had their hair all drooping (DePue laughs) and all that. I can just remember I would get a call from the travel aide, the body guy, and he would say, "Get ready, Mike. It's not going to be good." It wouldn't take long. The governor would call me, and he would be really upset about how the event went and how this can't happen again. So the travel aide guys were very good about giving me a heads-up that the governor wasn't happy about something.

What I would do is hear it out, and then I'd talk to the people who were involved in the event—see what happened and how we could do it better next time. Then I'd always try to get back to the governor. If you took responsibility, if you made a mistake, the governor really respected if you came to him and said—and I've done it more times than I'd like to admit on this—might want (DePue laughs) to take this tape off. I would come to the governor and say, "Governor, I messed up here. Let me tell you what happened. I should have done this," or "I messed up here." He might say, "Yeah, you should have done that." Again, when I would tell him that I messed up and take responsibility for something that went wrong, I think he respected that. I don't think he was very good at suffering excuses when things went wrong; you just took responsibility for it and moved on down the road. But that's a long way of saying, in my own personal experience with the governor, I've always known when I displeased him (laughs) more than when I have pleased him.

DePue: What I'd like to do next here is have you reflect on the personalities and your relationship with some of the other inner-circle people in his administration.

Let's start with the new chief of staff, Gene Reineke. Also had to be pretty young at that time.

McCormick: Young, young.³² Excellent. Organized. Surprisingly good, in my mind, because I was not originally one of Gene's biggest fans. Gene was what I thought was a Thompson guy. I thought he was more political than governmental; I was concerned about that. Let's see, who did we have as chief of staff? We had Gene, we had—

DePue: Reilly before him, and Kirk Dillard.

McCormick: When I was working there, it was Gene, it was—

DePue: Mark Boozell.

McCormick: —Mark. I think Gene is as good a chief of staff as you... He was well-organized; he was down to business; he was good at follow-up; he knew government and politics. Had a temper, but wasn't abusive to anyone, but you would really know when he was upset. I went from a position of not being Gene's biggest fan, to being a big fan of the work that Gene did in the governor's office.

DePue: Was he the taskmaster of that inner circle?

McCormick: Chief of staff is a terrible job in so many respects because, first, you're dealing with the governor—and that's enough—and you're dealing with the legislators, you're dealing with lobbyists, and you're dealing with a bunch of staff people who all think their idea is the best idea that they've ever had. Then you're dealing with a scheduler or an advance guy that has to bitch about somebody, and it is absolutely... I may have used this analogy before, but if you ever watched the old Ed Sullivan show and saw the plate spinners that would run around the stage and keep the plates spinning, that was the chief of staff.³³ You just hoped you didn't hear a lot of crashing. (laughter) So my respect for Gene Reineke increased the longer that I worked with him.

DePue: The next name I'm going to ask you about is not normally at the top of a list of people in the inner circle, but Mike Lawrence, who is the press secretary.

McCormick: The most important person other than the governor in the administration, with a close second being Joan Walters. Mike had a great deal of respect for the governor but, at least in my humble opinion, did not hesitate to look the governor in the eye and aggressively tell him he disagreed with him or he was

³² Reineke was 38 years old when he became Edgar's chief of staff in 1994. Gene Reineke, interview by Mark DePue, June 4, 2010, 2-3.

³³ *The Ed Sullivan Show* was an incredibly popular evening variety show on television in the 1950s and 60s. For an example of what McCormick is talking about, see Erich Brenn's 1969 performance on the show: <http://www.edsullivan.com/artists/erich-brenn-plate-spinner>.

wrong. Mike was, second to the governor, the most important person in the administration.

DePue: What does it say about Governor Edgar that Mike Lawrence was in that position in his administration?

McCormick: It says what I think everybody will tell you about Jim Edgar: he knew who needed to be where. I know we'll probably get to this in the post-gubernatorial days: when he was thinking about running again over the last few years, one of the points that I would try to make to him is, "Don't think that things will work the way they did, because the people won't be the same. You somehow were able to put together what I thought was a very unique combination of folks who made things work." Now, I may be saying that because I was there and saw it, and we all probably think we're a little bit better than we really are—and we're probably not as bad as some of the other folks think we are. (DePue laughs) Jim Edgar, as I said before, may have never played a game of chess in his life, but he's the best chess player that I've ever known.

Mike Lawrence is well respected by everybody in the media because Mike Lawrence told the truth. Mike Lawrence didn't BS people; Mike Lawrence didn't lie. If Mike told you something, you could take it to the bank, and if you told Mike something that wasn't right and he told somebody it, I wouldn't want to be that person. Mike is very important in the administration because, number one, he had the governor's respect. He had the guts and the gumption, and a sense of right and wrong, that if any of us thought something was wrong, if any of us thought something was going crazy, Mike Lawrence would be a guy you'd bounce it off of. Mike had a political sense but not a great one, but he knew what was right; he had a good compass on him. My theory is if you had to take three people and run the world back in those days, it would have been the governor, Lawrence, and Joan Walters. (laughs) The rest of us were bit players.

DePue: What a perfect segue, then, to the next name on my list, Joan Walters.

McCormick: I don't know what to say about Joan's importance and the crap she would take from some of the legislators and some of the people because she had a tough job to do.³⁴

DePue: Let's mention that. In his first term, and I think for a couple years into the second term, she was the budget director, so she was the one doing the heavy lifting on the budget when they were trying to slash it down to the point where we could finally say it's balanced.

McCormick: Exactly right. And Joan did a yeoman's work, as I could tell. She was in with the governor a lot.

³⁴ Joan Walters, interview by Mark DePue, July 29, 2009, 32-33.

DePue: What was it about Joan that made her the right person for the job?

McCormick: She'd worked with the governor in the secretary of state's office, so the governor knew her. I don't know what her job was in the secretary of state's office.

DePue: I think she was the chief of staff for many of those years.

McCormick: Well, Al was... Maybe you're right. The governor knew Joan from those days. I was not close to Joan in the secretary of state days at all. I mean, Joan and I weren't best buddies in the administration. We liked each other, respected each other, talked. But Joan had the governor's complete confidence when it came to budget issues and would, like Lawrence in many ways, have the ability... Anybody can go in to the governor and say, "Governor, that's not that good of an idea," then just walk out, and strut yourself out the hallway and say, "Boy, I told the governor." But Lawrence and Joan would go in and say, "Governor, this is not a good idea, and this is wrong, and this is why" or "This is why we don't have the money to do this" or "No, we can't do this." First, they knew their jobs better than anybody, and secondly, they had the respect of the governor, and when you have the respect of the governor, the governor is going to listen. He won't always agree. He and Lawrence would disagree. I know he and Joan would disagree.

I think another thing it comes down to is I never thought Joan and Lawrence had their own agenda. I never thought Lawrence was looking so that he could be the chief bottle-washer at the *New York Times*, and I never thought Joan was, because she was in state government, looking to become the chief controller for IBM. They were dedicated to the job, they were dedicated to their governor, and dedicated to the state and to the process. They respected the process; they respected it. And it wasn't a means to an end; it was the way you did things right. So I would say Lawrence, Joan—professional, blunt, forthright. If I had to pick three people to run the world, I'd pick Joan, Mike, and the governor—and I'd pick the governor first, and then down the line.

DePue: Who should we discuss next, then?

McCormick: You name it.

DePue: Mark Boozell. You already mentioned him.

McCormick: Mark was the legislative guy when I was there, then he became chief of staff, and then he went over to Insurance.

DePue: But that would have been after the administration.

McCormick: No, no. Governor Edgar named him insurance director at some point in time.³⁵ Mark was a very personable guy. He used humor more than the others I have mentioned. Could be sarcastic at times. I think had a decent relationship with the legislators. Mark had a good staff around him. Loyal to the governor.

DePue: That legislative liaison job, I'm assuming, is a very important job to Edgar, not only because of the influence that gets you to get your policies done but also because that was where Governor Edgar came from.

McCormick: Yeah. We used to kid that that's got to be the worst job because nobody did it better; if you don't believe it, just ask the governor. Here you had the job the governor did, so he, in his mind, knew how to do it better than anybody else. That made Mark's job a little bit difficult. I also think that what made Mark's job a little bit more difficult—I think it goes back to this respect for the office—you didn't see Jim Edgar going down on the floor of the House twisting arms or offering this or that on the floor of the House to get a bill passed. The governor wasn't one of these guys to, "Hey, call them all in; let's have a drink and get this done."

DePue: Again, a contrast, complete contrast, from Thompson.

McCormick: Right. And I always thought that the reason Jim Edgar could win after fourteen years of Thompson is because he was not Thompson. I have a great deal of respect for Governor Thompson, but we'd had fourteen years of the back-patting and the I'm-not-going-to-raise-your-taxes/I'm-going-to-raise-your-taxes, and all of that stuff. Had Jim Edgar been Bill Clinton or Jim Thompson—the boisterous, slap you on the back, eat the hot dog, kiss the baby, in your face all of the time—he could have been defeated in that election [1990].

My point with that, though, is it might make the legislative guy's job easier if the governor would go and tell every legislator how beautiful they are or how nice their tie looks or "Boy, why don't we throw a few hundred thousand dollars in your district even though we don't have it?" That would make a legislative aide's job much easier. So Mark had two things going against him: one, he had the governor who knew how to do that job better than anybody, and he had a governor that wasn't going to go down and make a call just for the heck of making somebody feel good, quite frankly.

DePue: That's (laughs) a very interesting way of putting his particular job. How about some of the people who served in the deputy chief of staff position: Andy Foster, Howard Peters, Al Grosboll.

³⁵ Governor Edgar named Boozell director of the Department of Insurance in 1995. Mark Boozell, interview by Mark DePue, September 9, 2009, 1-21.

McCormick: Andy (laughs) had a great sense of humor. Andy had a good political sense about him, I thought. He had the Washington sense about him as well; he had some Washington experience.

DePue: With the Bush administration.

McCormick: With the Bush administration.³⁶ I think he had a very good sense of that. I think he was a much stronger political person than he was a governmental person—probably me too, so I don't mean that as a criticism. We all have our strengths, and we all have our weaknesses. I think he was served well by Gene being chief of staff, because I think they were different. They both knew politics very well. Gene ended up being a much more reserved, down-to-business taskmaster-type person, making sure all the plates are spinning. Andy then, as a deputy, was getting out and dealing with the business community in the state, dealing with the city of Chicago issues, and things like that. Unlike the last governor, Governor Blagojevich, the governor spent more time in Springfield than in Chicago. We spent a lot of time in Chicago, but we were in Springfield most of the time. Andy's job was to kind of keep the Chicago office on task as well, without as much time being spent in Chicago as we did in Springfield.

DePue: Howard Peters?

McCormick: I first met Howard Peters because I was against him being director of the Department of Corrections in the first administration. I wanted a southern Illinois guy by the name of Larry Mizell to be Corrections guy. I was a young guy. Again, this was back in '90, after the governor had won the election, and I had put together what I thought was a very impressive group of people, political people—hacks, like myself. We did petitions; I met with everybody I knew to meet with, because I thought that my guy ought to be director of the Department of Corrections. Remember, this is back in the time that I talked to you about, when I was an old hack politician and liked that kind of stuff. Because, hey, you know how many prisons there are down in southern Illinois; now, a southern Illinois guy ought to have that job.

I raised all kinds of—I had the county chairmen writing letters to the governor, and I was thinking I was doing the right thing. I was causing a lot of pressure on the governor because he had the political stuff, and he didn't think Larry was the right guy for that job. I can remember the governor met with me on the job, and he told me about Howard and how he thought Howard was the guy. One of the things he worried about, quite frankly, was a problem in the Department of Corrections—riots and things like that. He said, "You just don't know." He talked about Howard's experience, and he told me what was going to happen. I told him, "I think that's a mistake. I think we've got all

³⁶ Foster worked in the White House Office of Political Affairs. Andy Foster, interview by Mark DePue, July 12, 2010, 24-40.

these political people out there...” That did not go that well with the governor. On these appointments like that, I learned that if you walked in as an old hack politician and said that—a lot of people thought that Gene Reineke ought to be on the Department of Transportation because a lot of these Department of Transportation jobs were out there and Gene was an old hack politician. Well, in 1990, Gene was at the state party or something like that. So the governor put together professional folks in his cabinet. For the most part, if you look at these guys, they were professionals.

I met Howard first when I was state’s attorney, really, but I knew of Howard when I was trying to make sure he wasn’t the director (laughs) of the Department of Corrections. Anyway, the governor and I worked out an arrangement. Larry Mizell, my guy, was a very good Corrections person. He wasn’t a political hack; he was a good, career—he had been a warden at a couple of the prisons. So that all worked out, and Larry got a job that served the department well and served the governor very well.³⁷

I kind of started out with Howard thinking, Ah, that’s the guy who got the job that my guy from Vienna should have gotten. Got to know Howard a little bit, then, over the course of time. But in ’94 when he was appointed deputy chief of staff, I was just impressed with his work ethic—working all the time. Very professional. If you called Howard and said, “Hey, Howard, the governor needs this,” it was almost tough to get your hand thing back on the phone before you got a call back from Howard saying here’s what the deal is. Responsive, professional, smart, didn’t take a lot of bull from people, and knowledgeable in his areas.

DePue: Al Grosboll.

McCormick: I always thought Al was a lawyer. (DePue laughs) I never knew Al wasn’t a lawyer until I got to Springfield, because Al is one of the smartest people—not that lawyers are smart; I can attest to that—Al was one of the smartest people in Springfield, governmentally, and he had some political sense to him as well. But Al had a way of taking a complicated issue and explaining it to the governor the way the governor liked it explained to him. Now, everybody else you talk to about Al, including me—other than talking to the governor—would tell you, “Oh, God, here comes Al; it’s going to be an hour.” Because Al will tell you about walking up the Himalayas; he’s got a story about everything, and he can talk to you for five hours. But he had an uncanny ability—if you had something really complicated, and you went through it with Al and said, “Go in there, Al, and talk to the governor about this,” Al had a way of communicating with the governor on some complicated issues that worked with the governor. To tell you about the governor’s confidence in Al: when the flood hit, he put Al in charge. That says a lot.

³⁷ Edgar named Mizell chief deputy director.

- DePue: The next name is not one I've asked a lot of people about, but you're in a different position, so you might be the perfect person to address Sherry Struck's role.
- McCormick: She kind of was like all the people there in the front office's mom in one respect. She always was worried about everybody and kind of made sure the travel aides were taken care of. She oftentimes, unfortunately, got the first call from the governor in the morning, which no one wanted to take. Sherry probably got most. Lawrence got the second most because the governor would get up and read his clippings, and there'd be something there he didn't like, so Lawrence would get that call. Sherry was pleasant, Sherry was efficient, and Sherry did everything for the governor and Mrs. Edgar—everything. And probably more loyal, or as loyal, as anybody on staff.
- DePue: How about the legal side? I think that would have been Bill Roberts when you first got there.
- McCormick: I knew Arnie Kanter beforehand, and I knew Bill Ghesquiere, who worked in the legal department. Bill Roberts was exceptional. The reason I think Bill was an exceptional lawyer is because of his background. Bill was a state's attorney; Bill was a federal prosecutor. Bill knew politics as well as the law, and he had as good a judgment as any lawyer I know. Today, if I have somebody with a really complicated matter that our firm doesn't deal with or know anything about, I call Bill Roberts and say, "Bill, you got anybody over at your firm that works on this kind of stuff?" A testament to Bill Roberts is if you look at Bill's client list right now, you probably have a bunch of Republicans and a bunch of Democrats that have him on retainer or [who he] represents. Plus, if you went out and met Bill at the county fair, like you'd think Al is a lawyer, you'd think Bill's not one. Just a nice guy, really nice guy.
- DePue: Lieut. Gov. Bob Kustra.
- McCormick: The first time I ever heard about Bob Kustra is I sent some Young Republicans from Johnson County up north—I can't remember if it was Naperville or where it was at—to a Young Republicans convention. One of my best friends came back and said, "We heard this guy named Kustra or something like that speak; he is a dynamo." I didn't know him, and that's the first time I'd ever heard of him. I worked a little bit with him on the campaign and visited with him a little bit, but got to know him and Kathy a little bit better during the administration. Smart, positive, gregarious, and my other word would be restless. I think that's the nature of the lieutenant governor's job, probably. You kind of think, I'm the lieutenant governor. I'm going to be sitting in all the meetings, and I'm going to be deciding where the budget is, and the governor's going to be calling me up and asking me for advice all the time—

DePue: We didn't mention in this particular interview—it's come up in others I've had—that he just about bailed on Governor Edgar.

McCormick: That's true, but that's unfair in one respect. If you're talking about the heart attack time and going to the radio station, if that's what you're talking...

DePue: I think his talk about going to be a radio commentator preceded the heart attack.

McCormick: That's correct. Here's the thing I think about in that regard. I was not in the middle of those conversations, but I'll tell you my perception, and this is mine alone: Bob and Kathy had been serving—Bob was in the legislature; he's served as lieutenant governor, which is a frustrating job. I don't care who you are: you're a politician, and you're sitting down there in a little cubbyhole at the end of all the pictures of the governor, and you're sitting down there at the end, and the governor's not calling you every day. You've got to make your own way. You've got to get out—and he did that. Here, a situation comes up where something he'd be very good at, (laughs) kind of pontificating about politics and government and stuff, current issues—plus, my gut tells me that's a pretty good paycheck, too. So of course, would that opportunity... But I would never use the term “bail.” I don't believe that. Plus, why would you bail on a guy that's twenty points ahead in the poll, right? I don't believe the bailing word; I think that's a bad word to use. Governor Kustra and I were never close like the governor and I. But he had the opportunity to do that and he didn't, because the governor asked him. I think that's the story. The story's on the back side, not the front side of that whole thing.

DePue: One more name: Brenda Edgar.

McCormick: I knew that name was probably going to come up. I remember at one of the last gospel sings I did, Mrs. Edgar didn't want to speak. One of the things I got to do was introduce; I would kind of act as emcee. Since it was my event, I did the microphone most of the time because I wanted to say the most words, I guess. I wanted to introduce Mrs. Edgar. I can't remember exactly what I said, but it had something to do with, I have never known a more sincere person, honest person, caring person, in my life. Mrs. Edgar has been able, even though all of the things she has been able to do—all of the people she had met, living in a mansion, being well off after gubernatorial life—[to remain] a lady from Anna, Illinois. [Mike, is my edit of this last sentence okay? It seemed like that's what you were saying, but I don't want to change your meaning(??)] I include the governor, and I hope he doesn't read this, but there is no more genuine person that I have ever known in my life than Brenda Edgar. To this day, I call her Mrs. Edgar. She has told me a thousand times, “You call me Brenda,” and I can't do it.

She is much more important in the history of Illinois than she will ever get credit. In the speech I made about her one time, I said, “One of these

days”—back then they had a cabin in Sherman—“when you and the governor decide to retire, you and he are going to be swinging on that swing on the front porch of your cabin in Sherman, and you’re going to know that there are children alive today and women alive today who have a better life because of the things you did for women and children in Illinois.” I am convinced of that. I think she never got the credit she should have gotten. In my biased view that I have, I will put her and what she has done as first lady up against any other first lady in the history of this state, ever. I would also argue that she had more to do with the governor’s success—I think he will give her credit for that; I think he will tell you this—than anybody would ever know.

I’d also describe her as shy, as somebody who, if she gave a speech to the Vienna Women’s Club, probably sweated over it because she’s shy—she’s reserved, she’s nervous. But she did it. I hope this comes out, because I’m impressed. I am impressed, and I continue to be impressed.

DePue: Is there anybody else that you’d like to mention?

McCormick: Oh, gosh. Now here you go. There were some guys that—guys in this case because they just happen to be guys. There were some folks on staff that made life a lot easier for the governor, who never get any credit. You’re not going to interview any of them, and they’re probably in the back of that book. We had young guys that traveled with the governor, and they were the travel aides. Their job was to make sure the governor had what he needed when he was traveling, whether carrying the briefing book, making sure mustard’s on the sandwich, making sure lunch is there, making sure—all those things.³⁸ If the governor would say, “Remember, tell McCormick that I told so-and-so that I’d meet with him one of these days.” They bodied the governor, and they were there. They didn’t run state government, but they made life a lot easier.

Those folks were very hardworking people. People like Mark Shouerty(??) and Nick Paluzolo(??) and others—Scott Rice(??). Their hours were terrible. They got to see a lot of things, they got to be with the governor, they got to do a lot of things—but they weren’t out making speeches, and nobody was calling them saying, “Hey, I hear you’ve got the governor’s ear.” They were actually making sure that mustard was on the sandwich and the right magazines were there for the governor to read while he was relaxing from one place to another. Quite frankly, sometimes, if they were the only other one on the plane, they were the one that was kind of getting the brunt of something that didn’t go right. I say that because those guys worked for me for the most part, and they had a tough job—some of them with families, doing that, so they’d be gone for days at a time.

DePue: Apparently they’re the ones who are calling you up and saying, “Hey, this event didn’t go too well.”

³⁸ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, September 2, 2009, 55.

McCormick: Or they'd tell me, "The governor's horses lost today." (DePue laughs)
Actually, back then, the governor didn't have horses; his father-in-law did. Every now and then he'd watch a race, and he'd be so upset if his father-in-law's horses didn't win. So yeah, those would be the guys who would call me up and give me a heads-up that I might be getting a phone call.

DePue: We're going to transition into talking about some of the policy initiatives and legislation and other events.

McCormick: Can I say one—I don't mean to interrupt.

DePue: Yes, please.

McCormick: Could I say one thing? I think I said this before, but I want to say something about staff, and not individual people. Coming from a political hack like me, the people that Governor Edgar put in his cabinet as agency directors—look at them and look at their qualifications and lack of political (laughs) background, for the most part, and that tells you a lot about Jim Edgar's seriousness about running government. You can argue whether somebody was the greatest secretary of something or the department of something. You look at Kirk Brown at the Department of Transportation. I think Howard Peters was at Human Services for a while. You look at Brent Manning at DNR, Natural Resources. Take a look around those agencies. Public Health. Children and Family Services. You just take a look at those agencies, and you did not see—sometimes to my chagrin, I might add—a bunch of political hacks at the head of those agencies, like was oftentimes the case in both Republican and Democrat administrations.

The other thing I say about staff is that one of the legacies, I think, will be that the governor had a great sense of who to put together, who to put in what position—playing that chess game, if you will. Also, like my story about me wanting to get my guy in as the (laughs) head of the Department of Corrections, when it got right down to it, running the government was bigger to him than making 102 county chairmen—maybe not quite 102, but I had close to all of them (DePue laughs)—happy.

DePue: So let's move into some of the other things that he was doing during that administration. One of them was the reorganization of the Department of Natural Resources, and you just now mentioned Brent Manning. I don't mean to put you on the spot, because you've already said you're not the policy guy here, but just anything you recall about those initiatives.

McCormick: I was not involved in that type of thing, so I don't have a great sense of that. I would get a phone call from folks down in southern Illinois worried about, "What about Mines and Minerals?" (laughs)

DePue: Can you address, then, how important it was to Governor Edgar in terms of some of the land acquisition issues and just being an outdoorsman himself?

McCormick: I think the governor had a theory that the land acquisition for public parks—I don't know if we even used the term "green spaces" back then—was all part of the quality of life in Illinois; that businesspeople didn't just come to Illinois because you were willing to give them a one-time million dollars, and then live in a place that didn't have some other amenities.³⁹

DePue: "Businesspeople," meaning industries.

McCormick: Industries. Because the business guys are going to live here; they're going to bring their families here. I think he looked at the economic—this is maybe getting off from what you're trying to say—but I think there was a period of time in Illinois where there was a thought that you had to throw money to people to have them come in. I think the governor's theory was, that one-time influx of money—there's other important things as well, and what effect does that have on the businesses that have been here for a hundred years and you've never given them a bunch of money, but they'd been loyal and stable.

As far as the green spaces, the resources of the state, the parks, the upgrading of some parks, and those kinds of things—I think the governor, being an outdoorsman, obviously, loving hiking and those types of things, thought it was important. I think he looked at it as a quality of life thing that went beyond just, "Boy, that sure is a pretty park." As I get older, I realize, I sure like the fact that I've got a place to walk my dog. (laughs) In the Thompson era, it was, "Boy, I've got ten million dollars I can give to a business that hopefully will stick around for five or six years." The DNR world, in terms of the outdoor space, was part of a quality of life thing in the governor's mind. I think a lot of the reorganization stuff was, whether true or not, an idea that maybe combining and consolidating, you can do more things more efficiently.

DePue: Would you agree that in the second term for Edgar, the main initiative, his main focus, was educational reform?

McCormick: I hate to say "the main." I'd say a top focus, probably. I'm trying to think when he really started the campaign to do that.

DePue: Let me rephrase the question, and maybe start from this perspective: Much of the campaign in 1994, Dawn Clark Netsch is saying, "We want to raise the income tax by a certain percentage; we want to displace that with some property tax reductions." Edgar is coming strong against that.

McCormick: We're out running down her bus and saying, "Don't raise our taxes," in the campaign.

DePue: And there is going to come a point in time when he's moving that direction himself.

³⁹ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, April 23, 2010, 47-51.

McCormick: Let me just say this. This is from a guy that's pretty stupid on policy, okay? A guy that's watching it but not involved. Nobody asked me how the school funding formula should change. Nobody asked me, "Hey, Mike, what do you think about X this and X that?" But when I was in Mount Vernon with the snowblowers because the city of Chicago had lost two hundred thousand dollars' worth of snowblowers—and I don't know if it's two hundred thousand, but I'm just using that as a figure.

DePue: That would buy a lot of snowblowers. (laughs)

McCormick: I imagine it probably bought a lot of things. But my point is I don't think you saw the governor moving that direction until he saw some reform in the Chicago school system. I'm not even close to as smart as he was, but talk to some people that are: the idea was there's nothing wrong, the swap may work, but we don't want to raise people's taxes so that somebody can lose two hundred thousand more dollars' worth of snowblowers. So I think part of the thing here, as I read history a little bit and articles and things like that, is Jim Edgar brought Mayor Daley kicking and screaming to the Chicago school reform. Until Chicago school reform happened, you didn't see the governor moving on to that next step.

DePue: That's certainly my understanding as well, that it was June 1995—so early in the second administration—when he's able to get legislation passed which does a dramatic reform of the Chicago school administration. The essence of that reform is now Mayor Daley is in charge of the Chicago school system, and he chooses a chief executive officer—not a superintendent. He brings Paul Vallas, who had no educational experience but had been his budget director before in the city of Chicago, in charge of the school system.

McCormick: Right. I imagine you might hear this when you have your (laughs) taping session with Mrs. Netsch, but I do think people who make this comment—"Well, Edgar said no when Netsch ran against him, and all of a sudden..." My sense is that's a little simplistic.

DePue: I can tell you Senator Netsch is somewhat resentful of the way that worked out after she lost that election.

McCormick: You know what? If I lost by that much, I'd be resentful too. I don't blame her. I can understand that. I can understand that.

DePue: Anything else in terms of school reform?

McCormick: No.

DePue: Here's a different kind of topic altogether, and then we'll go back to policy issues. Remember his birthday party in 1996?

McCormick: The fifty?

DePue: Yes, the fifty.

McCormick: Of course I do, yes. I guess the only thing I remember about that birthday party was Joan Walters singing “Happy Birthday” to him in her Marilyn Monroe outfit. No, I do remember the fiftieth birthday party. The fans that we handed out had his picture when he was a young boy. Yes, of course.

DePue: How about the Republican National Convention in ’96, in San Diego. Did you attend?

McCormick: I did. Boy, I remember that because we had a joke going with Lawrence. Mike Lawrence attended. Lawrence was never a political guy. I don’t think Mike liked the Democrats, and I don’t think Mike liked the Republicans, really. We always kidded Mike. Mike would say, “This wouldn’t be a bad event if there weren’t so many Republicans here.” (laughter) So we all got together and got a picture of Mike holding up an “I love Newt” sign.⁴⁰ (laughter) I remember the convention. I think the governor spoke. I remember going over with him prior to and walking through the speech. And I remember how small that convention center, wherever we were at—

DePue: San Diego.

McCormick: It was small, very small. I just never thought from a political perspective that Senator Dole had it, had what it would take to win.

DePue: But I’ve got to believe that Dole was Edgar’s kind of Republican.

McCormick: Absolutely. A fairly moderate Republican, a practical Republican. Midwestern—I think that’s fair to say, Kansas is in the Midwest. Great experience. Hero. Ethical. Yes, no doubt. No doubt.⁴¹

DePue: In 1997, there’s another major reorganization—I think Edgar would say this is more important in terms of reorganization—and that’s the Department of Human Resources.

McCormick: Um-hm.

DePue: Anything that you recall from that one?

McCormick: No. Obviously, I would have a lot of meetings to set up with folks about that. I think one of the things the governor was good at—all major policy issues, including the reorganization stuff—was to make sure that all of the stakeholders in a major initiative had a seat at the table, particularly when they

⁴⁰ Reference to Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, the architect of the Republican’s stunning takeover of Congress in 1994. One of Edgar’s key political strategists spent some time working with Gingrich in the mid-1980s; see Carter Hendren, interview by Mark DePue, April 28, 2009, 57-66.

⁴¹ Edgar respected Dole, but supported George H.W. Bush in the 1988 presidential campaign. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 22, 2009, 29.

disagreed. A lot of people can take no, so long as they have had an opportunity to put their case before a governor or a governor's chief of staff or deputy chief of staff. So I don't have a lot to say about that specific thing other than on that, as well as other major initiatives, I found that the governor was always thinking about who ought to be in a meeting if we were talking about bringing stakeholders in. There'd be somebody to say, "That guy's going to disagree with you" or "That guy's nuts" or "That guy's way off on the other side." Sometimes those guys way off on the other side got in, and I think it was not because the governor necessarily thought that he was going to go all the way over (laughs) on that side, but he thought, They've got a stake in this; we ought to hear them out. Even if they become our critics, we've given them a chance to tell us their point of view, we've listened to it, and we take it seriously.

DePue: The next subject that I've got on the list here is a different kind of issue altogether, and that's his scandal. That's what people on the outside, I'm sure, would say—that the MSI scandal, the Management Services of Illinois scandal, was the major hit on the Edgar administration. How much was this an issue that consumed him or distracted him?

McCormick: Looking back on it, I always thought he should be more disturbed about it. I'm sure that it concerned him while it was going on, but I always thought that for some reason, the governor, in times like this—at least in my dealings with him—was very... He acted like a person who (laughs) had a clean conscience. I didn't necessarily sit around and talk a lot about some of the internal stuff, and I wasn't in some of the meetings with the lawyers, but in my dealings with him, I was always surprised that it didn't consume more of him in worrying about it—not that he had done anything wrong. I came to think that it's because he was confident he didn't do anything wrong, and he thought that when they had found out there might be a problem, it was handled the way it should have been handled. He hadn't done anything wrong, and if anyone else had, nature would take its course. And my sense, from what I could understand, was that there was cooperation in all things—

DePue: That he cooperated?

McCormick: That he and the administration cooperated [with the investigation].

DePue: Did you get directly involved in any of that?

McCormick: I did not.

DePue: Anything else that you'd want to say about the MSI scandal, then?

McCormick: No. I got a chuckle out of it because it was big news everywhere. One day, I was somewhere in Illinois. The governor said, "Why don't you go out and advance that event for me, because I want you to talk to somebody." This is when I found out that getting out of Springfield is not a bad idea, because I

had a guy come to me that had been for the governor all the time; he said, “You know something? You need to get the governor situated with that phone company. Is he not paying his phone bill, or what is the deal?” He thought it was the phone company, MCI, instead of MSI. I got the feeling there was a lot more angst about the MSI scandal amongst the folks that were in Springfield on a day-to-day basis (laughs) than there was among the public.

Here’s the other thing about that—and I hesitate to even use the word “scandal.” (pause) Most people in Illinois, after thirty years of public service—or not quite thirty years at that point in time—knew Jim Edgar. I think most people have to call the state’s attorney’s office once in a while and say, “Hey, my son got a DUI, right?” It’s hard to keep their own family in order and not have a little problem here or there, (DePue laughs) let alone sixty or sixty-six thousand employees in the state of Illinois. I think people had made up their mind long before this as to whether Jim Edgar was an honest public servant or a political hack looking out for his own best interest.

I always think it’s comical when I listen to these people, and they’re all saying, “We’re not going to give you our tax returns.” The governor loved to give his tax returns, because it showed that he made a hundred thousand dollars as governor of the state of Illinois, and a few hundred dollars in interest on his bank account. I think that over the years, the concept that he’s kind of like us—when oftentimes he really wasn’t in so many ways—was because this wasn’t a millionaire guy who bought his way into public office; this wasn’t a guy who all of a sudden became governor and now was a rich guy; this wasn’t a guy who was flamboyant, who was in your face all your time, who was out at Morton’s Steakhouse buying booze and meals for everybody in the country.

In fact, one of the first times I ever advanced an event for the governor—I wasn’t working on his campaign yet; it was at Mount Vernon at the mall—he walked up to me, came over, and said, “Go get me a Coke.” I waited for him to give me some money, and he just stood there. I didn’t realize he didn’t want to pay for it. I had to go pay for it myself. (laughter) He was just a normal... People had made up their mind about Jim Edgar. Absent there being evidence that the person himself was involved or condoned it... And then the way it was handled: when he had a problem, he dealt with it; it wasn’t like, Let’s try to run. As I recall, it was the administration that turned in the information—anonymous information—that there was a problem.

DePue: We didn’t even really lay out some of the background. MSI had a contract to review public aid, Medicaid payments, find out where there was possibly fraud, and then collect some fees because they had found that. They were a major contributor—“major” would be a term that you might disagree with—but a contributor for the 1994 campaign.

McCormick: Doesn’t seem like as much today probably as it did then, yeah.

DePue: They had a “lobster list” of lots of gifts that they were giving to people, meals that they were paying for—people like Steve Schnorf, Carter Hendren, Mike Bass, other people who were within the administration were on that list?

McCormick: Mike who?

DePue: Mike Bass, probably.

McCormick: Mike was on paid staff. I like Mike, but he was not in the governor’s staff. But he would have been a good staff person.

DePue: Mike Belletire was another one that they got a little bit closer to once they got to the point of issuing some indictments, I believe. So these are some of the people. This became an issue because Mike Lawrence received this anonymous letter, and I believe took it to Governor Edgar, and quickly it became public.⁴²

McCormick: Right. Obviously, the way you handle something like that in the initial goings tells people a whole lot about whether you’re doing anything wrong. (laughs)

DePue: Anything else?

McCormick: Let me tell you something: if I’m cheating on my income taxes, I don’t give the IRS a call and say, “Hey, listen, will you guys come over and look at me?” In a sense, you had somebody that said something’s going wrong, and the administration went to the appropriate authorities and said, “Here’s what we’ve got; do what you have to do.”

DePue: The next issue, then—

McCormick: Coming from a biased reporter.

DePue: This is going on about the same time, but August 20, 1997, Governor Edgar announces formally that he’s going to retire. But there is an awful lot that went on before that time. I wonder how involved you were in 1997 with his decision of what to do with his political future.

McCormick: I think I was involved in most meetings—I won’t say all. I was involved in listening to the various versions of the speeches at night at the mansion.

DePue: You need to flesh all of that story out for us.

McCormick: We had a lot of meetings about what needed to be done. Sometimes we would meet at night at the mansion. I think maybe the state fair was going on during one period of time. We’d meet at somebody’s trailer, out at the state fair—a

⁴² Lawrence turned the letter over to the state police. Lawrence, July 2, 2009, 55-71.

mobile trailer—and we'd sit around and talk. The governor wanted to listen to everybody's options.⁴³

DePue: What were the options he was considering?

McCormick: Running for another term, running for the United States Senate, and retirement, would be the three major things. As you know, that length of time between then and the election is a lifetime in politics, but the thought on the street politically was, Here's an unusual situation where a guy is more popular than when he went into office in 1991. The thought on the street was, Here's a guy that can have the governor of the state of Illinois for a third term or be United States Senator and have a better chance than most to that path. So we would meet and meet and meet, and talk and talk and talk.

It was difficult, because as somebody who was trying to advise the governor, you had to try to figure out what part of your advice was you looking out after your own self. (laughs) That was really one of the few times when I'd talk to the governor about stuff that it was so difficult for me, because I had the best... If the governor had run again and said, "Hey, I'll put you over in an agency if you want to be able to make big bucks later on because you know how to run the Department of Revenue," I might have said, "Governor, could I just keep my job, kind of just grunt work for you?" It was a great job. I got to be around somebody I respected; I got to be in the middle of stuff. I was always trying to figure out: when I say, "Governor, you should run for this" or "You should run for that," am I saying, "Governor, you should keep me on the payroll for another four years" or "You should keep me on a payroll somewhere else for six years"?

I don't know that I was the best adviser to the governor in that regard, because here's a guy who's fifty years old, who's served as (laughs) secretary of state—

DePue: For ten years.

McCormick: For ten years, [who's served] as governor of the state of Illinois. And quite frankly, what you could argue is his political prime—arguably. His poll numbers are great for having served as a—nobody likes a politician, but his numbers are good. Look at numbers against various people, and they're all good. So the question is, Why wouldn't you do something? I can't remember who it was—Lawrence was out of the picture in terms of being in Springfield—but I don't know if it was Lawrence or somebody else that brought up a question, and I know that the governor had thought about this: "If you run for a third term, what is it that you want to accomplish?"

⁴³ For other perspectives on Jim Edgar's thinking about his course of action after his second term, see Al Grosboll, November 6, 2009, 44-46; Joan Walters, August 13, 2009, 31-32; Mike Lawrence, July 3, 2009, 2-12; Reineke, June 4, 2010, 68-71. All interviews by Mark DePue.

To be honest with you, I think that of all the different things we told him about or advised him about or just threw our thoughts to him about, I think when it all came down to it, that may have been the critical question he had to answer about running for governor: “What is it that you want to accomplish in your next four years?” He never said this to me, but I have this sense that he was never able to answer that question, and that the answer, “Well, I get to be driven around, and I get the plane, and I get the mansion, and somebody cooks for me,” wasn’t a good enough answer for him. So if I had to say what was the pivotal question, I almost think it was the question, “What would you want to accomplish in the next four years?”

DePue: Was yours one of the opinions he was seeking out in terms of which three to go for?

McCormick: I was in all the meetings and was given an opportunity to spout off (laughs) as I felt necessary. I was hesitant to advise him to retire from public life. Again, I still think about this sometimes—was it because I was having a good time? I hope not. But I looked at a guy that was young, that was popular, that was smart, that government was kind of his life in many ways. On the other side of the thing was here’s a guy that’s served for eight years, and too many politicians leave the hard way or are asked, so to speak, to leave. I thought he had a role in public service, and if he was tired of the governor’s office, that maybe the Senate was a place to go, that maybe he would enjoy the environment of the Senate. So we started looking into that a little bit.

DePue: “We” being?

McCormick: The governor, the staff, and just thinking about it. I think the governor got to thinking about—as governor, you’re used to running something. If the governor told me to go knock down the courthouse in Vienna, we ran down and tried to knock down the courthouse. If you’re a senator and you tell somebody to go knock down the courthouse, my sense is you have about seven hundred committee meetings, (DePue laughs) and then you have a thirty-year-old guy from the president’s staff calling you up. If you’re a cabinet member, you have a... You know what I mean?

DePue: What made the run for senator even a viable option?

McCormick: He was a very popular politician.

DePue: But who would the opponent be?

McCormick: The opponent, Carol Moseley Braun, had some political concerns herself; I think it’s fair to say not strong politically. So political guys that I talked to—I would call around the state and talk to them and go, “What do you think the governor ought to do? What’s your thoughts?” I’d report back to the governor. Most everybody said, “Why not run again? You’ve got to run for governor again.” But then we got to looking and said, “Well, yeah, yeah, these county

chairmen, everybody wants to have a Republican governor,” even though not like it used to be.

I think you look into what it cost to live in Washington, DC, and you look at... The governor was never good about these long meetings, and listening to a bunch of senators spout off, reading questions that their staff write about: Sir, isn't it true that on the third of June, the oil went this way or that? The hearings and all that just didn't seem to be a good fit for the governor, in his mind, I think. And I think he could never get a sense of what, if he ran for either one of those seats, he was doing other than just running and winning an office.

DePue: You had worked with him for a long time by this time, and you've already kind of addressed this—being an executive versus being a legislator. In his heart, did it belong on the side of being a chief executive?

McCormick: I always thought that Jim Edgar's heart was in running something; I always thought George Ryan's heart was in the legislature. I thought one of George's problems was he was never able to get out of that—and my dad had that legislator mentality as well—“You're my friend; I want to help you. I'll get you a bridge here if you vote for my bridge there,” and those kinds of things. I think that Governor Ryan was never able to go the other route. I think Governor Edgar, with his personality, probably never had his heart in the legislative process so much.

DePue: But talking to Mike Lawrence, the way he described this decision-making process, it was almost agonizing for the governor. He talked about one occasion especially, where there were three speeches that were prepared.

McCormick: There were.

DePue: Do you recall that?

McCormick: Yeah, and I also recall listening to them at the mansion at night, and I can remember the governor getting emotional after doing the, I'm-going-to-retire version of the speech. It was stressful because you saw the governor was really going through—this was the rest of his life, so to speak.

DePue: Do you have a sense of how much Brenda weighed in on the issue?

McCormick: I obviously wasn't privy to their personal communications at that time. I talked to Mrs. Edgar; I would talk to the governor. My opinion is that there is a misconception out there of two things. One misconception is that Mrs. Edgar was the one who precipitated the decision, and the second misconception is that the governor's heart was too bad to run again. I wouldn't make that statement to say that the governor's health wasn't a factor in his mind in running again. You're going to ask him about this, I'm sure. I never got the impression the governor said, “Boy, I can't run again because I had a heart

problem” or “My heart can’t take it” or “The doctor’s saying my heart can’t take it.” Now, maybe they did and he didn’t tell me. I am fairly confident that both of those things are not true. I don’t think Mrs. Edgar likes politics; for a lady that has had to endure it (laughter) for a long time, I don’t think she likes politics. But I think she knew her husband, and I think she probably knew the first date they had, he was going to try to do something in politics. Knowing him, he probably told her he was going to be governor.⁴⁴

DePue: I don’t think she believed him the first time she heard it.

McCormick: (laughter) He’s got something that he can say, “Now, I told you so.” I think every other time since then that there’s been this major decision—are we going to do this or are we going to do that—we’ve always talked, and obviously they’ve talked; never have I heard the governor say to me, “The reason I’m not doing this is Brenda just said it ain’t going to happen this time.”

DePue: Let’s move on, because after he made the decision and the announcement that he’s not going to run again, that put your relationship with him in a different position. What did you do for the rest of that term?

McCormick: Same thing as I was doing before, in the sense that I was still helping with the schedule, doing all the... Government didn’t stop just because the governor decided not to run again.

DePue: But the inevitable thing is, Wow, I’m going to be out of a job in a year.

McCormick: No, that’s true. Here I am again (laughter)—or what was it, here you go again? The governor didn’t tell any of us what he was going to do. I did not know for sure, until I heard the speech, what his decision was. I knew in my heart what it was, I thought, but I didn’t know for sure. I knew that he was just good enough that maybe (laughter) he was going to go the other way and surprise us all. So after this is over, of course, the government goes on, but everybody on the staff is thinking, Well, now... Everybody’s least concerned about me because I don’t have a wife or a kid, so if I starve, the only person that’s hurt is me. But all these folks with wives and kids and families—

DePue: I suspect you’re still thinking, There are widows back in Vienna.

McCormick: I am. I am thinking that, but I’ve been out of Vienna for a period of time, and can you go back? How many times do you start from scratch? So what ultimately happens is, the governor and others and I—he starts pondering his future, and I think all the staff starts pondering their own future. So we had our conversation again: (laughs) “What are you going to do?” “What are you going to do?” The governor starts talking with and thinking about doing

⁴⁴ Edgar did tell her on their first date. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 22, 2009, 31; Brenda Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, August 17, 2009, 24.

something with the university. I was either getting ready to do or interviewed with a law firm in Chicago that might have had some interest in having more of a presence in Springfield.

I think I had dinner with the governor one night, over at the mansion; we were talking, and he was talking about that. I came over a couple of times to the university to talk to some of the staff about his role. I talked with maybe a vice president and then the director of the institute. I don't want to use the term "negotiate," but started talking about the terms of his deal with the university and kind of structuring what his role would be at the university if he came to work there.

So we [Edgar and McCormick] talked a little bit, and we finally got around to talking about me, and I told him I was going to interview with some folks. He said, "I've got an idea; here's what I'm thinking about." And he said, "You've been a state's attorney, you've been a city attorney, you've been in charge of my liaison affairs with local government officials. I've got an appointment that I can make to the Illinois Labor Relations Board that"—and I don't remember what it paid at the time, but probably as much as I was getting paid at the governor's office, maybe a little bit more. He said, "What I'd like for you to consider is if you could accept that appointment, and then I'm sure the university would allow me to have a part-time job for you at the university so you can assist with the transition and the stuff at the institute. That way you'll still have your connections with the University of Illinois; you'll still have a state job, so to speak, and those benefits and things like that. You can move to Champaign, and we can work together at the university."

DePue: His position at the university was at the Institute of Government and Public Affairs.

McCormick: Yes. So the governor ultimately nominated me to be chairman of the Illinois State Labor Relations Board. Only there was quite a big stir at that time because the governor was appointing people like me, who were his staff people, to various boards. We were getting ready for the first Senate confirmation hearings on those. There were some people that were going to raise a little bit of Cain in the sense that—I don't know if the right word is "packing"—you're packing all these four- or five-year term appointments for your people when you're leaving office, and is that the right thing to do? I don't think the governor will remember this, but I bet Boozell will.

DePue: And Joan Walters was also called from—

McCormick: Joan was later than me; this was the first round of these. I don't remember the date. I remember I read the statute on what the state Labor Relations Board did, because I was thinking—these were pretty generally pro forma things. So I called my—

DePue: Not a full-time position?

McCormick: It was not a full-time position, but it paid like a full-time position. You had to do work, you had to be there, but you could do other things on the side. Actually, it paid like a full-time position for a guy from Vienna. (laughter) For a lot of folks, it didn't, but for a guy from Vienna, I thought, Boy, that's a pretty good job. So I remember getting a call the morning of my confirmation hearing. Boozell had talked to the governor—I think Boozell was chief of staff then.

DePue: Yeah.

McCormick: Boozell calls me and says, "I just talked to the governor; he wants you to go on first. They're going to ask you, and he wants you to be the guy to go on first and kind of defuse the situation." I thought, I'm a nobody; I'm the guy that just kind of makes sure the trains and planes work right, and who cares what I do in life? Boozell was Boozell: he says, (laughs) "I don't care what you do in life, but the governor wants you to be the front man." I thought, Oh, son of a gun. I don't want... The governor wants me to do it, so I do it. The first thing I did was have my hometown senator from southern Illinois, a Democrat, posit me or introduce me to the committee and ask them to favorably look upon me. He had been a friend of my family's, even though he was a Democrat, for many years. I could get the local guy to do it, but that's my hometown guy, and he's a Democrat; that doesn't hurt. Had him introduce me to the committee and ask them to look favorably upon me.

So a Republican asked me the question, "Now, there's quite a bit of criticism, Mr. McCormick, about people like you who..." I went through some spiel about, "Well, people like me who have spent a good portion of our life in public service and governmental service—you would think that would be a qualification (laughter) for working at these types of jobs, as opposed to something that would prevent you from doing that. You would think that the governor—who probably knows us best because he's worked with us on a day-to-day basis, whether you may agree with me or whoever—would know best in his mind who should be placed in these positions, because he's seen our strengths and he's seen our weaknesses." And then Senator Howard Carroll, said, "Mr. McCormick, now, your father served in the legislature for many years. My question to you is, can you give a speech like your father could give a speech?" And I said, "Senator Carroll, if I could give a speech the way my father could give a speech, I would probably be up there asking these questions as opposed to being down here answering the questions." Everybody laughed. My nomination was approved, and nobody else got asked about it.

So everybody's coming to me, "Yeah, you did a great job." The governor—I don't know if he even knew about this. But I get home, and I got to thinking about it. I'm thinking I'm pretty smart; I'm thinking that I did a

pretty good job, and kind of bragging on myself to myself—nobody else cared. (laughter) I got to thinking about this, and I said, The governor's a genius. Those guys knew my dad. Even the Democrats aren't going to jack around with somebody that at least minimally—I'll say I'm minimally qualified, anyway. (laughs) Everybody knew C.L.; they liked C.L. They weren't going to jack around with his kid unless it was a real bad appointment.

I got to thinking, Here is the governor, right before this all is happening, saying, They're giving me crap about that—put McCormick on there first. Now, was I used? Yeah, I was used, but that's okay; I got a job. I never asked him about it, but that was the only thing that made sense, and it didn't hit me until Howard Carroll asked me that question. Of course, Jim Rae, who sponsored me, my Democrat senator, made a big deal about, Mike comes from a long line of political... You know, da-da-da-da. I get home, and I'm thinking I'm such a smart guy and I'm thinking I'm so good at getting by with all of this, and I realize the governor is pretty smart.

DePue: Mike, this might surprise you. We're right at three hours, and I don't think we can finish today.

McCormick: That's probably my fault, isn't it?

DePue: No. These things last as long as they need to last. So I would like to have you address one more thing before we wrap up today, because I believe you were involved with the book that I'm holding now: *Meeting the Challenge: The Edgar Administration, 1991–1999*. Why don't you tell us about your involvement with that, and that's a good way to finish for today.

McCormick: The governor, when leaving office, makes a report.

DePue: This is every governor?

McCormick: Yes. Every governor makes a report. So the question becomes, how do you do that? Do you make a speech? What do you do? The governor, being the book guy and also being the history guy, thinks that maybe what we should do is to write a book touting what the administration was about, talking about who was in the administration and what we had done. So the governor talks about this; we all talk about it and think it's a good idea. The governor was smart enough not to ask me to write it, but he asked me if I would be the one to make sure that all the parts got done. He asked two guys to be pretty much in charge of writing the book. The two guys mainly doing that were Tom Schafer, who was working at the Illinois Department of Public Health—I want to say he was their information officer at the time—and Dan Egler.

DePue: Dan Edgar?

McCormick: Dan Egler, E-g-l-e-r. Dan did most of the editing; I think Tom did most of the writing. I met with all the agency directors, everybody, and I said, “Here’s what I want you to do: put together a list of accomplishments, of things that you think we should tout during the Edgar administration, and what to tell folks who were no longer in the administration but were there.” So we pulled stuff together; we put a chapter together (laughs) at a time, and I would go over it with Dan and with Tom. I would usually go over it with the governor first, and then Dan and Tom would go over it with the governor. This process went on and on. The idea was that in addition to providing this to all of the legislators, we would also provide this to every public library in the state of Illinois. And so we did that.

As I recall, the state would have to pay to do it. I’m not sure about this; we can check on this—I think the governor decided to let the campaign pay for part of the costs so the state didn’t have to pay for all of it.

DePue: When you say “the campaign,” the governor still had remaining campaign funds?

McCormick: Yeah, he had a lot of campaign funds. In fact, before he left office, he gave a million dollars of his campaign fund to the Ronald McDonald charities. So the thought was to defray some of the costs, because we’re printing it and we’re sending it to libraries—I’m pretty sure we did—and there were some colored pictures in there that cost a little bit more than black-and-white. The governor was very involved in it, in the sense that he read the drafts and made suggestions; he picked the pictures. So this was our report upon leaving office. At the Champaign public library one day, I saw the *Meeting the Challenge* book on the shelf.

DePue: We’ve covered an awful lot today, and we’ve got a little bit more to go. The next session is obviously going to be a little bit shorter, I think, but I definitely want to give you the opportunity to talk about what he’s done and what you’ve done after retirement. So ten more years to go.

McCormick: All right.

DePue: Thank you, Mike.

McCormick: Thank you.

(end of interview#2 #3 continues)

Interview with Mike McCormick

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Interview # 3: August 6, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, August 6, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This is part of the ongoing series we've been doing with people from the Jim Edgar administration. Today is session three with Mike McCormick. Good afternoon, Mike.

McCormick: Afternoon.

DePue: We've had a couple lively discussions up to this point. It's been a lot of fun and certainly educational and informative for me. We pretty much got done at the end of the last session with Governor Edgar's time in office. One of the last things you did was talk about your appointment to the Labor Relations Board and going before the committee in the legislature to get approval. Could you talk a little bit about one of the bumps right at the end of that timeframe—getting other people appointed to various boards and commissions?

McCormick: Toward the end, there were some appointments the governor made that did have a bump in the road. I wasn't intimately involved in that process. I had sat in on some of the meetings about who he was going to recommend for appointments and things like that. But as I understood it, there were these appointments, and the bump in the road—this is just my own personal memory, not really having remembered any particular conversation with the governor about that—was that Pate Philip created a roadblock.

DePue: Do you recall the reasoning behind throwing up a roadblock to appointments? This is before George Ryan is coming into office.

McCormick: Yeah. Not so much as a member of the Edgar administration but as a citizen watching state government, every now and then there were things the Senate

did that I had no explanation for or couldn't make any sense out of, and that was one of them. I don't know if the concept was that it was better to make an incoming governor happy than to concur with the recommendations of an outgoing governor; I just know that from my understanding of the situation, Pate was not comfortable with letting those appointments go through.

DePue: Do you know if Senator Philip had a better relationship with George Ryan than with Edgar?

McCormick: Don't know so much about the personal relationship. Just as an observer, I think that's probably the case. I always thought that Governor Edgar was more of a manager, a runner of an organization, as opposed to a legislator. Having worked with him and seen him in action, it always seemed to me that he was much more suited to the executive branch of government than the legislative branch of government. Pate, like my dad, was a creature of the legislature, and Governor Ryan was a creature of the legislature. I think Governor Ryan was probably more of—I guess building relationships with legislators on a personal basis. I doubt very much that Governor Edgar ever went up to Pate's office and had a cigar and a drink. I'd be shocked if George, Governor Ryan, hadn't done that.

That's not a criticism; it's a different way of doing business. I think if you look at some of the media accounts during the Edgar administration, every now and then he'd be criticized for not going down to the floor of the legislature, like his predecessor did, and patting backs and cajoling or having legislators up to the governor's office for a drink. That just wasn't the governor's style. So my sense is there probably was a more personal closeness with Governor Ryan and Senator Philip than there was with Senator Philip and Governor Edgar. But I can't really give you or would want to speculate as to motives as to whether... It was at the end of an administration, and a new governor was coming in. It may have been, from a political perspective, better for Pate to make a new governor happy than one that was walking out the door.

DePue: Do you recall any of the specific names of people that Edgar had nominated?

McCormick: The one that really stood out was Joan Walters. Joan had served the state in a variety of ways through the secretary of state's office and through a very difficult time in the governor's office as budget director—first woman budget director in the history of the state of Illinois. No doubt one of the stars of the whole Edgar administration, particularly that first term, when financially, things were turned... So that was one that stuck out in my mind, and I think probably in the governor's mind as well. In addition, nobody is owed an appointment. I don't know that you can say you earn those things, but she earned the trust of a governor who had done a good job. She had done a good job in every role she'd ever had in state government, and was qualified for any

appointment to any board, (laughs) quite frankly, that the governor has control over.

I don't believe that anybody had any qualms about Joan's qualifications for the board that she was supposed to be appointed to; in all honesty, I think it just came down to an end of a term and political considerations. There were others, but Joan is the one that sticks out in my mind. I thought she had been mistreated in that process, quite frankly; I thought it was also rude; and I thought the governor had been mistreated. But Joan's a big girl and the governor's a big boy; they've been through the rough and tumble, and you move on.

DePue: Did you have any personal relationship with either Secretary of State or Governor Ryan, personal dealings with him?

McCormick: I never had personal dealings in the sense of... I had been in meetings with Secretary Ryan; I knew Speaker Ryan, I knew Lieutenant Governor Ryan. (laughs) I mean, I knew him. We would have known each other if we'd have seen each other on the street. At one point in time, he had talked to me on a very rough basis about running for the legislature, down in southern Illinois. But as far as having a personal relationship with George Ryan, no; I was never as close to Governor Ryan as I was to Governor Edgar.

DePue: Would he have viewed you as an Edgar guy?

McCormick: I don't know. I think that his people viewed me as an Edgar guy. I don't think he paid much attention to what I was. If I said that, it would make me think somebody like George Ryan cared about what I was, (DePue laughs) and I don't think he did.

DePue: So you weren't on his radar necessarily?

McCormick: Oh, I don't know. I think Governor Ryan had plenty to do without worrying about me. As we say down in southern Illinois, we had one hitch in our giddy-up after the governor left office. The governor had appointed me to the Labor Relations Board, and he had appointed me as chairman of the board. I can't remember how long it was after that, but it wasn't very long, because the people at the board always kid me that I'm the shortest-serving chairman of the Labor Relations Board in the history of the state of Illinois. When Governor Ryan came in office, he switched chairman—I started to say he (laughs) asked me not to—he appointed someone else as chairman.

I actually found out about that by somebody who was a holdover in our administration. They called me up and said, "Hey, Mike, how you doing?" I said, "Fine." They said, "Have you heard anything?" And I said, "Have I heard anything about what?" And he said, (laughs) "Have you heard anything about you?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, I can't tell you this, but I'm going to tell you. George is going to take the chairmanship away from you and give it

to Manny Hoffman.” Manny was the Republican Cook County chairman for years, and a very good friend of Governor Ryan’s. So that happened right afterwards. Then a little bit later on, Governor Ryan apparently attempted to do some reorganization of some of the boards; there was always the issue of whether some of that reorganization was so some of the people on there would no longer be on there, and there could be appointments made by the Ryan administration. Mine was one of those boards. Ultimately they ended up not reorganizing that board. I served, and then at the end of whatever term that was, Governor Ryan chose not to reappoint me to that position.

DePue: Let’s talk a little bit, then, about Governor Edgar’s transition from being in office to civilian life. What was waiting for him? What had he arranged?

McCormick: We had been looking at a variety of options. I say “we”—he was looking at a variety of options, and I was helping out when I could. He had an opportunity, through some discussions primarily with President Stukel at the University of Illinois, of having some duties over here. The governor thought it would be a very valuable thing for him to be at an institute or at a university, and go into classrooms and speak to students—probably a little less professorial and a little more practical—about the practical aspects of politics, of the aspects of public service. So there was some communication between him, I’m sure, and President Stukel about that being a possibility. When Governor Edgar thought that would be a good way to go, and presumably President Stukel thought that would benefit the university, then I did work a little bit on helping staff over at the university start working out arrangements as to what the governor’s role would be at the university; talking with him about where he would be if actually located in the whole university system; and just some of the details that they were considering about his employment—meaning compensation, benefits, and those types of things. So I worked with the governor in terms of helping coordinate with staff over here to see if it worked for both parties.

DePue: You mentioned “over here,” and we should say we’re in your law office, but we’re in Champaign, right next to the university.

McCormick: Most of my meetings were over in Urbana, at the U of I campus.

DePue: We know that he ended up at the Institute of Government and Public Affairs. He already had a pretty long relationship with Sam Gove, was that not right?

McCormick: Yes. In the governor’s office, which he probably noted to you, is the telegram letting him know that he had been appointed as an intern under the intern program, and Sam was the head of that program. Of course, Sam Gove has been involved in some form in a lot of various changes, as far as Illinois government is concerned, and is a scholar in that regard. But yeah, he goes back to the days when the governor was appointed as a legislative intern by Sam.

DePue: What were the specific arrangements that the governor got when he became part of that institute?

McCormick: We wanted to try to make sure that everybody was on the same page as to what they felt like the governor's responsibilities were. The governor wanted to be in the classroom—not necessarily teaching a class every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday—talking to students about government and public affairs. I think with an institution like the University of Illinois, there's always this—I don't think it's a strain, but in politics, production is getting more votes than your opponent. In the law office, billable hours is production. And the university—

DePue: And won cases.

McCormick: And won cases. In the university, it is not as clear. That's not a criticism; it's the nature of a university. I think the governor felt that his strong point was not in terms of publishing books or articles about state government or philosophical things about how life should someday be, but more in terms of actually speaking in the classroom with students to give them a sense of government and to encourage them to be involved in government—not necessarily by running for office, not even necessarily by doing a thing in government that paid, but just being involved in their community, being aware. That was part of the discussion; what would the governor do? Yes, you can write some articles and get published, but that was not his theory in life; that was not one of his goals.

So we sat down and said, "Look, we're going to be housed at the Institute of Government and Public Affairs. The governor will be available to speak to students." We literally sent out mass e-mails and told professors and departments that the governor was available to speak to their classes. So that was the main thing. The main thing in the governor's mind—and the university was fine with this—was to get him in the classroom. He said, "I don't want to just go and talk to graduate students." I think the first class he spoke to at the University of Illinois was a Poli Sci 100 [political science] class or something like that. I think I walked over with him to Greg Hall, and he spoke to a hundred kids.

At the three campuses of the university, he goes to the various campuses and speaks to classes about whatever subject they're talking about. He speaks to journalism classes, economics classes, political science classes, and social studies classes. He speaks to law classes; there is a class that the director of the institute teaches, I think in health care law, and he speaks to that group. He also speaks to a variety of groups on campus. When he's at the office, we'll have students make appointments to come in and interview him or to talk to him about a variety of things. So that was one aspect of it.

The other aspect of it was the governor thought, Maybe we can bring people that are practitioners into the institute so that they can have some kind of dealings with students. One of the things I think brought that about was his dealings, when he left office, at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He went over there for a semester and lived at Harvard, lived in the community. He was like a visiting person that they have every semester, I believe; they teach a class every Thursday afternoon, and they interact with the students. So he thought, What about bringing some of that into the Institute of Government and Public Affairs? What he also did and has been doing is having box lunches and bringing in people that are involved in state government. We have an Edgar lecture series where they come in. The whole thing was to bring in people, once again, to give folks a sense of how politics and government are in the real world as opposed to a more theoretical world.

He oftentimes consults with folks at the university about various projects that the institute might be working on. He was involved in a seminar we did on the Cutback Amendment. He is currently involved in a program that the institute is looking at in terms of ethics in government. So he has a wide variety of roles that he does.

DePue: I assume that he's not writing tests, grading tests, grading papers?

McCormick: No. This is probably not a highfalutin' term, but he's kind of a roaming lecturer. What we do is send out these e-mails; we talk with people, and they say, "Hey, we really would like the governor to speak to a class." That's what he does. So he's not doing any grading.

DePue: Is there anybody in the institute or the university that he answers to, then?

McCormick: Yes, he answers to the director of the institute, who is Bob Rich. Bob is housed at the institute as well. He may not be anymore, but at the time, he was under the president's office.

DePue: This is a little bit different kind of a role, but I've got to believe that anybody who has questions about politics, in Illinois especially—the news media, other people—seek him out for comment. Does that happen a lot?

McCormick: Yeah, we get that a lot. Weekly we get that. Times like now, when the Blagojevich trial is going on, people are already trying to set up times; they want to get to him right when the Blagojevich verdict, whenever that is, comes out. So yes, we do a lot of media calls through the institute. To be very honest with you, that's a good thing. From the university standpoint, I think, it gives the institute a lot of publicity that it wouldn't otherwise have. The governor also, when he left office, that first year or so—I don't want to be held to this exactly—spoke at almost every community college in the state of

Illinois. He went around speaking to students and faculty. But yes, we get a lot of media calls.

DePue: Has that declined over the years?

McCormick: The community college [appearances] have declined over the years, but we are asked to speak at chambers of commerce, Rotary Clubs—a variety of community groups all over the state—and he does that. He's also asked to attend a variety of university alumni association events and things like that, where he'll attend and speak to the alumni of the university.

DePue: Let's shift gears now and talk about your role, as far as Governor Edgar is concerned.

McCormick: When Governor Edgar left office, in addition to appointing me to the Labor Relations Board, part of his arrangement with the university was that he would have a secretary, paid by the university, and an assistant, paid by the university. The secretary would be full-time; I would be a part-time assistant to him. They gave me a title—I can't remember exactly what it is. I think it's Assistant to the Distinguished Fellow or something like that. (DePue laughs) So I help coordinate his schedule. Sue does most of that—his secretary—but what I do is help make sure that he has the right material he needs for classes that he's going to teach. We work with getting information updated in that regard. And we get a few inquiries at the office that I need to deal with rather than Sue, and I do that and go through some of the mail; so just assist him in his projects at the university.

DePue: Was Sue somebody who was working with him before? This is Sue Grace Rominger.

McCormick: Sue Grace, yes; Sue Grace Rominger. No, when we first came over, Stan Ikenberry, the former president of the university, had an office at the Institute of Government and Public Affairs, but he wasn't using it so much because he was out in Washington at the time. So we took President Ikenberry's office, (laughs) and when we took his office, we also took his assistant, Marcella Nance. Marcella was our assistant until she retired, and then Sue was hired.

DePue: Has that been a good match for the governor?

McCormick: Both have been good matches. Marcella, of course, having worked for the president of the university, knew the university very well—backwards and forwards—and we did not. I was shocked when we came over here. I could make some phone calls and get a lot of stuff done over in Springfield, but you get over here and there's whole new players, a whole new bureaucracy—a whole new thing. Who do you call to get this done; who do you call to get that done? We were out of our element in some regards as it related to just the mechanics of how things worked—what forms you had to prepare, what things... Marcella, having worked with the president of the university, knew

everybody and was very instrumental—I'm sure we drove her crazy, because she's a very organized professional, as is Sue, and we came over and were not as organized. So I always said I hope we didn't force her retirement early, (laughs) and she assures me that we didn't. She was very critical in terms of helping in that transition period, because she knew the players at the university, and she knew who to call if you needed something done. We really didn't know that, and it wasn't like we were going to pick up the phone and call the president's office and say, "Hey, what form do we need to fill out here? What do we need to do?" So she was critical in that regard.

DePue: You were talking about when you first came over, that the governor and yourself weren't that well organized. Now, this is a guy who's coming out of an office, and my belief is he had prided himself on being organized and structured and disciplined. Had something changed?

McCormick: No, except—let me tell you what change was. When he left George's inauguration, we met the governor at the Springfield airport; he stepped on a plane and went to Arizona for the first few months—gone. So they have a house in the Champaign area that is filled to the ceiling with boxes from the mansion. We have the governor out of state, trying to just kind of wind down—quite frankly, I think he didn't want to be hearing all the stuff about new governor and all of that—just decompressing and going through that transition of not being governor anymore. I think I remember telling you about when I first started working for the governor, and I didn't know exactly what I was supposed to do. Well, we didn't fill somebody's position here; we were creating a position and a role for the governor in the scheme of things, and that's what I mean by disorganized.

Here's a guy who since 1981, for all practical purposes, didn't drive himself anywhere. He did once in a while, but I mean for all practical purposes. Since 1991 he had meals at the mansion; there are cooks and all of that. So there was a bigger transition here than leaving one office and going to another office. There's a life transition here, I think, that nobody really realizes. One minute, you have state troopers sitting at your door, with a warm car waiting—after you get done eating the meal that the chef at the mansion prepared for you—to take you to the meeting that your staff has prepared and briefed for you, of the sixty-six thousand employees that you have under you. You walk out the door and you have **me**, (laughter) which is not a good trade, I might add.

I think one of the interesting things that I saw in this whole process was the transition. Here's a guy that's in his early fifties, in the prime of his life—at least I hope so, now that I'm getting there (DePue laughs)—leaving what you could argue is one of the great jobs in America, the governor of a major state; leaving office with a higher approval rating than when you go in, and having doors opened for you. All of a sudden, you're a private citizen. When you have to go to Chicago for a meeting, you don't call your scheduler

and say, “Have the state plane ready for me; we’ve got to go to Chicago”; you get in your car and you drive yourself (laughs) to Chicago. So that is quite a transition.

It’s also a different way of life—I would call it a less hectic pace of life—which was not always a positive thing, in my mind, for Governor Edgar. He was used to having things hitting at him all the time; this pace became a little bit slower, which I think he needed for a while. My perspective is, you got a guy like Governor Edgar, who probably knew he wanted to be governor since he was born or a couple days right after that. He achieves his goal—not only achieves it, but with distinction. I’m biased, but I think that’s the general feeling, and he’s fifty-three or whatever he was.

DePue: He was about fifty-three years old or somewhere in there. Forty-six is when he was born.⁴⁵

McCormick: And here we are. It’s a change in pace; it’s a change in outlook. I felt that he was stepping into a whole different world, so there was a period of adjustment.

DePue: Did you see a change in his personality?

McCormick: In some regard, no, because the governor’s a driven guy. Everything with the governor is a task. If it’s driving across town, how’s the quickest way to get there, how’s the most efficient way to get there, which section of the town has the lights that are the best coordinated? If you’re lucky enough to be riding with him, you’re better off than if you’re driving him; because if you’re driving him, he wants to tell you how to get there, which is the best way: “No, no, turn down this street. This is the way to go.” This is his personality. That hasn’t changed; it’s just that instead of deciding whether the Department of Corrections gets a matter(??) of money, it may be something a little less important in the scheme of most people’s life. But he’s a very driven person. He likes to see things moving; he likes to see things get done.

DePue: Impatient?

McCormick: He is. He is very impatient, yes. I am as well, but I get mad, and I get all... The governor is impatient, and you know if he’s upset, but it’s a difference. It isn’t an angry impatience, (laughs) but it’s impatience, there is no doubt.

DePue: Let’s return to politics, because he still has a passion for politics, it seems. Nineteen ninety-eight, there was some thought about running for the U.S. Senate; that was the race between Carol Moseley Braun and Sen. Peter Fitzgerald. Of course, he makes that decision you talked about last time, where he doesn’t run for the Senate. I wonder if you can talk a little bit about

⁴⁵ Edgar was fifty-two years old when he left office.

aspirations or thoughts about running for governor again, either in 2002 or 2006.

McCormick: In both of those cases, of course, there was quite a bit of pressure; there was quite a bit of inquiry on the part of others for the governor to run again in both of those circumstances.

DePue: You backed away from “pressure.”

McCormick: I’m sorry?

DePue: You backed away from using the word “pressure.”

McCormick: Well, when we were going through this, I didn’t really feel like the governor felt it so much as pressure as, Is this another opportunity that I should deal with? But as I think about it, maybe it was more pressure to him than I thought it was at the time. During all these times, I never thought he was a very serious Senate contender, even after the Braun—

DePue: The 2004 election.

McCormick: We looked at it. We did a lot of checking. We looked at a variety of avenues on the Senate side. But he is not a sit down in a committee meeting and listen to a lot of people read questions that their staff has written—and they read them right off, “Witness, don’t you believe...”— make a speech in the question, and then not listen to the answer. That’s not his thing. I think he looked at it seriously. If he didn’t, I’m going to be mad at him because I spent a lot of time (laughs) looking at it. But the governor races—I think he did seriously consider those.

DePue: I need to back off a little bit, because I think it’s important for you to tell us what his reaction was, from your perspective, to the trouble that George Ryan got himself into. Many people will say Ryan destroyed the Republican Party in Illinois for a while.

McCormick: As I was an old hack politician down in southern Illinois working with Jim Edgar, I would oftentimes get the—not from George Ryan, but from his people—saying, “George takes care of us. He gives us jobs, he gives us this—he cares about the party. Jim Edgar doesn’t do that as good as George does.” I would always make the argument that the governor did take care of the party people, and one of the best things he could do when taking care of the party would be doing as good a job at whatever office (laughs) he was in at the time. (pause) I kind of lost where we were going with the question.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ This was Edgar’s attitude toward legitimating Republican rule in what had been the Democratic-controlled secretary of state’s office. See Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 15, 2009, 1-32 and June 22, 2009, 83-88; Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, April 1, 2009, 57. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews

DePue: His reaction to Ryan's problems.

McCormick: Actually, where I was going is about destroying the Republican Party. Being a Republican while these problems were going on, I would oftentimes think to those days when people would get onto me because they didn't think the governor was being quite as good for the party as George Ryan was. The governor worried about the financial condition of the state; he worried when he saw huge government programs, where money was being spent and not really showing a way to pay for those things.

You got to understand—starting in 1991, that first term, the governor had tough decisions. The pressure was on every day. He was having to say no to everybody. He was having to make cuts. He leaves office with the state in good shape, and he sees the next governor come in and backtrack somewhat on a more fiscally conservative approach to government. I think he always was concerned, and I think it hurt him a little bit to see the state's finances start heading the wrong direction, and the way the budget process was being handled—in his mind, going in the wrong direction—because if you served as governor and have taken it seriously, you're a little paternalistic about the whole thing. But particularly if you go through what he went through in the early nineties, and the hell he went through: people mad at him, protests out in front of the mansion, going somewhere and getting yelled at because somebody's something got cut, or getting beaten alive in the paper by somebody because of cuts here and cuts there. To see all that hard work start getting fizzled away was not pleasant to him.

He worried about it. He would say things like, "I really worry about where the state's going. It really bothers me." But I must tell you, I've never heard him say anything personally negative about Governor Ryan. Most of the conversations I've had with him, I've done most of the talking about that. I always said that I thought Governor Ryan was just never able to not be a legislator. I always thought that it was the old legislative mentality about, I'll vote for your bridge if you vote for my mile of road (laughs) or whatever it is. But I never heard the governor say bad things about Governor Ryan, other than I do know that he had been critical of his approach to state finances. It actually was something that he worried about.

DePue: So we've got the 2002 election. That's really right at the time period when Ryan finds himself in the headlines all the time, and it's always about will he be indicted, when will he be indicted, and will he end up going to jail. It was a tough year for the Republicans to run a candidate. Was there an effort at that time to get him [Edgar] on the ballot?

McCormick: Yes, there was. And he seriously considered it—this is not him, this is my perception—primarily because he was concerned about the state. In my mind, there was also a factor that he just wasn't yet satisfied that he was making the kind of difference at what he was doing at the university that he could do as governor. Not that you don't make a difference, but it's different, and here's another opportunity to do that. So I think part of it was that. Then a large part of it—he kept saying throughout this whole process, “If I don't run again, I'm going to be disappointing so many people.”

Every now and then somebody would come up to me, and I'm sure they did to him too, and they'd say, “He has to do this; he owes it to us to do it.” I would just go crazy when they'd say that to me. I would literally stop whoever told me that in the street, and I'd say, “When you've served the state for thirty years, when you've taken the state from bankruptcy and you've put it back in shape—when you've done all of that, then you have an opportunity to tell somebody that they have a duty to go do it again. But until then, that's not the right way to speak to me about this.” So I was a little on edge about that argument. Anybody that came to me with that argument, I shut them off immediately. I thought that was presumptuous, I thought it was wrong, and I thought it was almost rude. But the governor didn't, I think; I remember him saying periodically, “If I don't do this, I'm going to disappoint a lot of people.”

So I think if you ask him now, he might say, Boy, I really should have probably run, (laughs) knowing now what I knew then. But I almost think he would have said that in 2006 about as much as he did in 2002.

DePue: Well, 2004 is the next place I want to go to, and that's the senatorial campaign. Peter Fitzgerald decides he's not going to run for reelection. He was always very much this independent Republican in the U.S. Senate; he decides to step down. We have a lively primary campaign in the Democratic side, that obviously Barack Obama emerges from, and the Republican side is pure chaos. Judy Baar Topinka, who was the chairman of the Republican Party at that time, looks outside the state, so you have Alan Keyes coming in. How much was there pressure or interest in having Governor Edgar run for the Senate?

McCormick: A great deal of interest. A great deal of interest. The governor looked at it seriously.

DePue: As seriously as two years before?

McCormick: You mean as seriously as the governor's race? My gut always told me that he was never as serious about the Senate as both opportunities to go back and run for governor, because I think that there were issues about what his role would be in the Senate. Again, I go back to this: he's not a good meetings guy. He's not good at sitting around and listening to people just spout because they think

they have something important to say. Even when he'd talk about cabinet positions and things like that, you'd say, You've been a governor of a state, and now you're going to have a twenty-five-year-old kid from the White House telling you what you got to do. This whole Washington thing I **never** thought was as seriously considered by the governor.

But when I say it wasn't as seriously considered, I should probably say he was, I always thought, much less inclined to run for the Senate. Because it was seriously considered. I spent a lot of staff hours on it. We met with George Allen, from Virginia. The former football coach's son was the head of the Senate reelection committee. They appoint a Senator to do that. I know the governor talked to—who was a former colleague of his—Governor Allen—about it. Then the governor talked to Governor—I started to say Blagojevich—Voinovich from Ohio. Ultimately the president of the United States asked him to run. So there was a lot of pressure, if you will, in that regard.

I always remember the call to talk to the president. We were in Chicago, and the governor was getting ready. He was trying to get across town to make it in time. As they were making time, the White House called, and I thought, Well, it'd be pretty neat. I'll answer the phone, and then I'll say something like, "Hello, Mr. President," just to say I had spoken to the president. His secretary got on the line, and she said, "Mr. McCormick, I have the president for the governor." I said, "The governor's walking up the stairs. If you put the president on, he'll be with him in just a second." And she said, "No, we'll wait." (laughter) The governor told the president that he just didn't feel like he could do that. So that's a lot of pressure. And, you know, there were issues about was that a good fit for the governor? Their housing out there is terrible. He wasn't a rich man when he entered office, and he wasn't a rich man when he left office. It's not an easy thing to live in Washington. There's traveling, there's grandkids that are halfway across the country in Colorado—there were personal considerations as well.

DePue: Let's move two years forward, then, in 2006, and Blagojevich is up for reelection. By that time, there were already things in the media and things in the general public about what was going on in the Blagojevich administration, and a real sense of urgency on the Republican side, and yet they still didn't have many options that year.

McCormick: It is odd to me that after as many years as the Republicans had been in office, there has been really no one—I don't know if the word "groomed" is the right word—but there never was just this automatic, it seemed like, heir apparent. I think a lot of people thought Jim Edgar was going that direction when Thompson appointed him to be the legislative aide. You just never really felt like there was this person out there that was doing the things that Jim Edgar did when he was secretary of state to lay the groundwork for these other things. Sometimes I don't know why that was the case. But you're right.

There was, again, inquiry and a lot of people wanting the governor to run. I think if you'd ask him, he might say that he regrets not doing it that time as much as any time, because maybe we wouldn't have been going through the pain that we're going through now.

DePue: Was 2006 the one that he most seriously considered?

McCormick: No, I can't say that. I think he very seriously considered both. I felt like we went through more staffing, in terms of just talking and talking and talking, a little more in the earlier one than in the later one, but I think that was because... I don't want to say it wasn't as seriously considered, just it didn't seem to... I guess I'm looking at it from a selfish perspective: that process didn't take as much of my time.

DePue: But apparently, after he made that decision in 2006, he made it clear to everybody who would listen that it's over?

McCormick: He made a statement in Chicago that his name wouldn't be on the ballot again, or something like that.

DePue: Did you believe him at that time?

McCormick: I did. I did for a variety of reasons, but yes, I did believe him.

DePue: For both of those campaigns—Jim Ryan, who ran as a Republican in 2002; Judy Baar Topinka, who ran as the Republican candidate in 2006—did he actively support their campaigns?

McCormick: Yes, he did.

DePue: In what respect?

McCormick: He made appearances for them. I believe he did robocalls for them.

DePue: Robocall?

McCormick: The thing that I tell him not to do and he doesn't pay any attention to me. It's the thing where you're eating supper at six o'clock at night, your phone rings, and it says, "Hi, I'm Jim Edgar. I really want you to vote for Mark DePue for state representative."

DePue: Recorded calls.

McCormick: Recorded calls, yeah.

DePue: Tens of thousands of people get them.

McCormick: Right. I hate those things. But he did them, and one of the reasons he did them was there was some kind of study they did or something; Carter Hendren said

that when he's on there, they listen to the whole thing.⁴⁷ I don't know whether that's true or not, but the long and the short of it—we did robocalls. Did a little bit of finances for Jim Ryan, helped him on finances a little bit in terms of donations, but I also think we did a fundraiser and a fundraising letter or two for him. For Judy, we did all of those things, plus we gave her—"we" meaning the governor, through his campaign committee—I don't know how much, but it was over fifty thousand dollars. And in both cases made television—cut statewide ads for them as well.

DePue: Let's get into some of the other activities that kept him busy after he retired. The first one I wanted to ask you about is his involvement, which extends back to the time he was governor, with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I don't know how much you can talk to the specifics of that.

McCormick: Not a lot. As you know, the initial planning, the initial impetus for that was through Governor Edgar. His efforts, with Senator Durbin actually being very prominent in those efforts, helped make sure that the presidential library and museum ended up being viable and ultimately being constructed. He served as chairman or president of the foundation and assisted in all of that process. He was involved in getting Richard Norton Smith—

DePue: Who was the first director.

McCormick: Who was the first director. And, of course, lent his name to fundraising efforts and things like that. I know that Governor Ryan's name is on that little cornerstone somewhere. I don't know that people will remember that, but I really think that the Abraham Lincoln [Presidential] Library and Museum is one of those things that you would put on the resume of Governor Edgar. You can't say if it wasn't for Governor Edgar, it would never happen, but I think it happened because of him and Senator Durbin, who was instrumental in helping out with things. That sounds very arrogant—others were involved—but I really think that Jim Edgar does deserve a lot of credit for that being a reality in Illinois.

DePue: He's also got the Jim Edgar lecture series that happens generally every year.

McCormick: We have a lot of those. We have one at the presidential library that has had some just excellent, excellent speakers.

DePue: David McCullough, David Brooks, David Broder—the three Davids.

McCormick: The three Davids.

DePue: And the last one was Cole C. Kingseed. This next one is going to be Doris Kearns Goodwin.

⁴⁷ Hendren is a long-time associate of Edgar's and managed his 1982 campaign for secretary of state and his first gubernatorial campaign in 1990. Carter Hendren, interviews by Mark DePue, April 28 and May 7, 2009.

McCormick: Doris Kearns Goodwin. Sure, sure. We also have a lecture series we do every year at Eastern Illinois University, and the governor has an ongoing lecture series at the institute, where he brings in people to speak to students and faculty. But yes, the presidential library series has been excellent in the quality of folks they've had.

DePue: You've talked a little bit about this in the past, but does he have a passion for history?

McCormick: Yes. He is a passionate historian. He's an avid reader. He keeps me in books on tape because he travels so much. The last book on tape he gave me was about Augustus, because he was starting to read and study a little bit about Roman history; he had listened to the CD of the biography of Augustus and gave it to me, and I finished it the other day. So yes. But for the most part, I think he'll tell you he's a big World War II guy—that era. He doesn't necessarily study which troops went where, but he's a big Churchill fan, so that era interests him. He's also very interested in the history of the Middle East. One day we were talking, and I said, "What are you reading now, Governor?" He said, "I'm reading this book on the history of Romania," or Bulgaria or something like that, and I thought, Oh, gosh, I hope you don't loan that one to me. (DePue laughs)

One of the first books he ever bought me—we were roaming around in Minnesota somewhere, and he said, "Here, I bought you a book." It was a book about Indian history, the country of India. It was the *Midnight*—something about midnight, but I can't remember. Read the book, excellent book. So he's a very avid reader. He reads mysteries, but he's a very avid historian.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about one of his other passions, then: the horses. Because that flies against the general conception of the governor.

McCormick: There were always two things that everybody was surprised at when they would talk about Jim Edgar: one, that he was pro-choice, and second, that he liked horse-racing. Because both of those, if you think about them, and just the [perspective of the] general guy from Vienna, Illinois: Jim Edgar, who's a Baptist, non-drinking, non-smoking, clean-cut guy—what's he doing at Sportsman Park, putting two dollars down on his horse?

One of the most fun things to do was watch the governor now and then, when he would go to the racetrack. He would go to the races when he was the governor. His father-in-law owned horses, and he [Edgar] was a very avid horseman; he loved these things.⁴⁸ You'd go, and here's the governor with me, a travel aide running around with him, two state troopers walking around, and these people that had been there all day long, smoking cigars,

⁴⁸ Edgar was interested in horses from an early age, beginning with a trip to visit relatives in Oklahoma. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 21, 2009, 70-72.

doing the little programs. They'd all run up to him and say, "Jim, I see you got a horse. Your father-in-law has a horse on the thing." They don't say "Governor Edgar" often—they go, "Hey, Jim, I put two dollars down on your horse." And they talk about horse races. Or they'll all gather around him while he's watching a replay of his horse that had just won or lost. That was always something kind of fun for me, because we'd go to downtown Chicago, to an OTB, [Off-Track Betting parlor] and I'd be staying close to the troopers myself, and these folks would be just coming up to the governor. And it wasn't like this was the governor; it was like, "Hey, Jim, how's that horse going to do?" He would talk to them and tell them about it. So it was a fun thing to watch in one regard.

He's very watchful, he's thinking. He can tell you about whose mother's father's brother... Like you might be able to do your family—

DePue: The sires and the dams.

McCormick: You might be able to do as well on your family as he can do on some of his horses, but I wouldn't bet on it. That is a passion of his. He loves it. The other thing that always impresses me most is when a horse gets in trouble and will never race again, he'll spend thousands and thousands of dollars to make sure that horse doesn't go down if it doesn't have to, and donate it to a place where it can... I've never been a big fan of horse racing. I don't understand trifectas.⁴⁹ He would never let me run a bet for him, because he knows I don't understand. When I say run a bet for the governor, I'm talking two dollars. Most of the times he didn't, but he might run a two-dollar bet on a horse, and sometimes not his own.

After he left office, a bunch of old staff and families got together in St. Louis and went to an Illini football game.⁵⁰ After the Illini football game, he got word that one of his horses had to be put down. This is not really fair to say; I'm overreacting a little bit—but you would have thought something had happened to a member of the family. Everybody came in thinking, What's wrong with the governor? What's wrong with the governor? So he's an avid animal lover, too. His dog now, and his dogs before, are members of the family.

DePue: It strikes me that here is a guy who spent his entire political career, his life, analyzing politics. Oftentimes you use the analogy of the horse race in politics as well, (McCormick laughs) and he's carried down that passion to the actual horse races.

McCormick: He has, and I don't understand it. I think Mrs. Edgar doesn't understand it—probably more so than I don't understand it—but it is a passion of his. He

⁴⁹ A trifecta is a type of bet in jai alai, horse racing, and dog racing. The bettor must correctly predict the first, second, and third-place finishers, in their exact order.

⁵⁰ The University of Illinois football team.

loves it; he enjoys it. I think I told you that everything is a task to him, whether it's going down the street to make sure you hit the lights right. He has that same intensity about his **hobbies**. He called me up and said, "I just lost five thousand dollars today on that horse race." I said, "What do you mean, governor?" He said, "My horse ran second. If I had won first, I would have gotten five thousand dollars more, so I lost five thousand dollars." And I said, "Governor, that's kind of the glass-half-empty look at that thing, because you won second place. That meant you won some money. I wouldn't look at it like I lost five thousand because I didn't come in second." But that's the intensity that he deals with this stuff.

DePue: How about traveling? I know that was something else that he...

McCormick: He loves to travel. He's a roamer. I don't go as much with him as I used to, but when we would go somewhere—we'd go to a governor's conference somewhere or something like that—he'd get in the hotel, and oftentimes the phone call I'd get would be, "Hey, you want to go for a walk?" And we'd just roam all over the place. In 1999, we went to Europe. We went to five or six countries over a two-week period. He would do just the meetings that he had to do, that wouldn't make anybody mad if he didn't go, and the next thing he's doing is out roaming, looking—historical sites and things like that.

DePue: Was that while he was still in office, then?

McCormick: Yeah. That was in 1999. But the long and the short of it—he loves to travel. He's been everywhere, I always say. But just so you know—and when you interview Mrs. Edgar, she'll confirm this with you—it is a task; it is something to get done. That means the fastest line through the gate at the airport. He's got a mission to accomplish; he wants to see this, and he wants to see this. If he's driving to Colorado, we need to get here by a certain time.

Even in his hobbies, even in his leisure, there is a drive there, which I think probably tells you something about how a poor kid—(laughs) this sounds kind of bad—but a poor, fatherless kid from Charleston becomes governor of Illinois. He probably didn't get that much better education than anybody else. He had a lot less opportunities than most because of his finances at the time and his family situation, with the loss of a father and mother having to work. So what is it out there? What is it? And I think there's something in people like that. I think the good news is it gets them where they want to be. The bad news is that even when you come in second at a horse race, (DePue laughs) you still think you lost five thousand dollars because you didn't come in first. So I think there's a give and take.

DePue: You already mentioned that he has a love for the animals.

McCormick: Love.

DePue: His dogs, the horses.

McCormick: During his [years in the] governor's office, and when we left, he had two dogs, Emy and Daisy. Daisy had cancer and passed away; the governor had the dog cremated, and it's at the house. After that happened, months after that happened, he'd talk about that, and there'd be tears in his eyes. Emy was a white dog that got down so bad, he couldn't get up the steps. Governor Edgar carried the dog up the steps every night so Emy could sleep in the bedroom with the governor and Mrs. Edgar. Mrs. Edgar used to kid me; she'd say, "Now, Mike, when I get down like that, I want you to make sure that Jim carries me up the steps every night." (laughter) I said, "I don't know that I can guarantee that, but..."⁵¹

DePue: That's the perfect transition to what I wanted to ask about next, the family. You already talked about 2002, 2004, 2006—those are all years of decision for him. How much did family considerations factor into that?

McCormick: I think they factored in, but I don't think in the way that a lot of people think they did. People still come up to me, and they tell me there's two reasons why Jim Edgar didn't run for governor every time he had an opportunity to run: one is Mrs. Edgar, and one is his bad heart. I tell them that I think all of those things are not true. I had a **lot** of conversations personally with Mrs. Edgar during all those periods of time, personal conversations with the governor during every one of those periods of time. No one knows what two people talk about in the privacy of their own home, but I am confident that Mrs. Edgar's response to him on every one of these things is, "If we look through this whole thing and you believe it's the right thing to do, I'll support you."⁵² She might have said something different to him in private, but if she did, he never in any way insinuated that to me, nor did she. There was no reason for them to spin me, because I wasn't going to talk to anybody.

So yes, I think he considered her, because she'd been through life without a husband, in some regards, always on the campaign trail, raising two kids. I always think that was the way my mother was, and then you add running statewide office. I think he **thought** about all those things in connection with her—I'm not saying that Mrs. Edgar wasn't a consideration—but a lot of people have it in their mind that Mrs. Edgar was like, "Now, Jim, this isn't going to happen this time." The only person who would ever make me believe that—if Mrs. Edgar came to me and said, "That's what I told him," and I don't believe she did.

I think that was a consideration in the sense that this will be extra stress, and what does that do to your health in general, but I never thought that was the linchpin. For the Senate thing, I think the grandkids being out in Colorado and him having to be in Washington was a factor, and I think there

⁵¹ On Edgar's love for animals, and his dogs in particular, see Jim Edgar, interviews by Mark DePue, November 17, 2009, 47-48 and April 23, 2010, 29-30; Sherry Struck, interview by Mark DePue, November 3, 2010, 70-73.

⁵² Brenda Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, September 14, 2010, 75-78.

was also a factor of spending time with the grandkids out there if you're governor.

DePue: Are both of the kids out there?

McCormick: Both are in Colorado, and all the grandkids are out there. Yes.

DePue: Both Elizabeth and Brad, then, have kids?

McCormick: Yes, they do. I think Brad has three and Elizabeth has two. So family certainly played into it in the sense that what would this do to their free time, their time to spend together, other things that they want to do? The answer is, yes, it had a role, but I don't think it had... If you asked somebody on the street, "Did family play a role," a lot of people might attribute the family part to Mrs. Edgar not wanting him to run, and I think that's an unfair perception that some people have.

DePue: By now, we should be getting the impression he keeps a pretty busy schedule even though he's "retired." Are there other activities that help fill it up as well?

McCormick: There's one activity right after he left office that I know you will talk about. I think he had a very positive experience in that, and that's his time at Harvard, at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. I went to visit him while I was out there. I think he had a blast. He loved that. And I'm not saying that because I know much about it; I'm really saying that more, Mark, for your benefit, because I think that's an important thing he did when he was out of office, which influenced him in some of the things that he does at the institute and things like that.⁵³

DePue: Was that to get a measure of the kind of things he could and should be doing?

McCormick: I don't think it was intended for that, but I think it gave him some ideas about having a lecture series at the institute and bringing more students into the institute as opposed to just a bunch of professors kind of staring at each other.

DePue: I know that he left office having a decent amount of campaign funds still available. Tell us about what the specific laws and regulations are, how you can use those campaign funds, and what he's done with them.

McCormick: When we left office, you could take them and you could use them to buy yourself a villa in Spain if you wanted to, but you needed to pay taxes on those if you did that. The first thing he did before he left office was give a million dollars (laughs) to Ronald McDonald charities.

DePue: Can you tell me how much he had when he left office?

⁵³ Edgar was a fellow at the Kennedy School from 1999-2000.

McCormick: No, just because I don't remember. My sense would be it would be in the neighborhood around a million dollars, maybe just a little over that. Since then, the largest chunks of money have been either as charitable contributions or campaign contributions. We still do have money where we reimburse the governor for some trips, if the Republican Party or something asked him to speak somewhere or meet with the candidates or something like that. We also used part of it to maintain storage facilities for some of his campaign and gubernatorial records. That's a little bit expensive.

DePue: Where are his papers going to end up?

McCormick: Of course, the official papers are at the...

DePue: State archive?

McCormick: State archives. But other documents related to the governor have been donated to Eastern Illinois University; at the Booth Library, they have an Edgar room, if you will, and they have a large portion of the governor's stuff. (laughter) For lack of a better word. They're working through that.

DePue: I think we're at the point now where I'd like to go ahead and wrap up. You've been with the governor for a long time. You've kind of grown up in the business of politics—you got to learn sitting on your daddy's knee, sounds like, to a certain extent.

McCormick: Yeah, that's true.

DePue: What do you think Governor Edgar's reputation is in the state of Illinois today?

McCormick: I think he is the closest thing to an elder statesman that I have seen in Illinois politics. I guess it's just perception, but I'm trying to think of any governor that is as well thought of twenty years after his election to office in troubled times. What Illinois politician, being gone that long from office and having served as long as he had, would have ever had any higher reputation? I would say Paul Simon would be ranking up there.

DePue: Jim Thompson?

McCormick: I don't think so. If you would do a poll today as to the most respected former governors—I'm not saying that he's not respected—I think the public perception would not be a close race. Now, you're talking to a pretty biased individual here, but I do believe that. Let me just say this: the year that Jim Thompson did not run for office, if you look at his approval ratings—I haven't done it—and look at the year Jim Edgar left office and his approval ratings, my sense would tell you that folks were ready to move on when Governor Thompson retired, and that folks would have been willing to reelect Governor Edgar. Don't let Governor Thompson (laughs) listen to this, okay? That's my

perception. I don't have poll numbers to back that up. I do want to cover myself in one respect. You asked me who might be **more** respected. I do think Governor Thompson is well respected by the people of Illinois, but I must tell you, I think Jim Edgar is a level above that in respect.

DePue: I want to read you a quote that appeared in the Peoria newspaper right at the end of his administration. I'm sorry I can't tell you who the author of this is, but here's the quote: "At the end of his administration, Edgar takes stock: how is he being remembered? Competent, steady, a good caretaker. It's not the stuff of legend. With his stiff manner and even stiffer hair, Edgar has never inspired gushing sentimentality. 'As governor, he was not someone who seemed to have large plans,' said House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie. 'We couldn't be this vision kind of person that everybody talks about. We had to manage,' was the way Edgar responded to that."

McCormick: My dad used to have this theory, and I have a tendency to believe him. He said that no matter what you think about a certain leader—and my dad was kind of a religious guy. He was a Southern Baptist. He'd say, "No matter what, when you look back at history, for some reason, when it is important, God has a way of putting people in leadership positions that are needed at the time. Now, every now and then you might think he kind of took a blink and looked away, and there are some anomalies there." And he would have said one of those anomalies was Dan Walker, (DePue laughs) but that was just him.

Part of creating a legacy in politics and in offices like the governor and the presidency, it seems to me, is not the vision thing, because vision things are for campaigns. Keeping hope alive and hope and change are alive, or whatever that is, is nice, but those vision things don't help when there's oil spitting out of a tube in the gulf, or when a hurricane hits New Orleans, or when a flood hits the Mississippi River, or when a state is near bankruptcy. A governor or a leader oftentimes is measured not on those vision things, but how he responded to what was happening while he was in office and used the resources that he had at the time. I would say that if that is the measure of a leader, then Jim Edgar will not have to take second place to any other governor in this state.

DePue: In the entire history.

McCormick: In the history, he won't have to take second place. Although I am biased, and I look to people like Governor Ogilvie; I look to people like Bill Stratton. Historically, I look at people like Henry Horner, who served at a very difficult—we think we have it bad. Certainly those are, to me, the top echelon of governors, and I don't really think I look at any of those because of the vision thing. They came into the office and they led, and they did what they had to do to get the state through their period of time. So when you look at it, it seems to me you say, "Did I leave the place better than I found it?" I'm

trying to think under what measure you would find that you couldn't say Jim Edgar left it better than he found it.

DePue: Are there any really significant accomplishments that you're especially proud of?

McCormick: I have pride in being associated with him. I can't be proud of anything because I didn't help accomp—I mean, I might have made sure the mustard was on the sandwich or something like that, which might have made life a little easier for him. I look at it, and what he might think, which I would probably agree with—a major accomplishment is directing the ship through... Unfortunately—not unfortunately, but the financial situation is so bad now, we're almost looking to be just a billion dollars in debt as, "Well, that ain't no thing." (laughs) But it was a thing. So steering the state through that mess and doing it in accordance with what he told people he would do, and taking the heat that he did it. And by being reelected by such a wide margin, I think the public realized that. So that has to be a big thing.

The other thing I think one would look to is the work that both he and Mrs. Edgar did for children in Illinois. I can't remember the exact numbers, but the long and the short of it is they were instrumental in increasing the number of adoptions of children that were in state care—I think "foster care" is the word for it. In fact, it was so good that even Bill Clinton honored them at the White House for the work that was done.⁵⁴ Are those the kind of things that you get a lot of stories about? I don't know. But they're also the kind of things that you think about; there are thousands and thousands of children that have had and have a life now as a result of some of the hurdles that were broken down as a result of Governor Edgar and Mrs. Edgar's dealing there. So I think that is a thing he should be very, very proud of, in addition to steering the state through troubled waters financially. The way he handled the flood was a significant event and a challenge; you don't hear very many people criticize how that was handled.

And finally—which is going against what I said about the vision thing (laughs)—Jim Edgar did everything he could to maintain the dignity of the office, which is maybe not something that historians write so much about anymore, because you seem to be able to get by with having an affair with an intern in the Oval Office—you can get by with that, and a variety of things like that. You can talk like we've heard some of the tapes and recent governors speak. Throughout his career in government, and particularly in the governor's office, he always had a sense of the governor; when you called him "Governor Edgar," it was more than Gov. Jim Edgar. The governor was a

⁵⁴ November 24, 1998, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded separate Adoption 2002 Excellence Awards to Governor Edgar, Brenda Edgar, and Illinois DCFS director Jess McDonald. The three were also honored at the White House. Illinois DCFS, "Governor & Mrs. Edgar, DCFS Receive National Adoption Award," http://www.state.il.us/dcfslibrary/com_communications_pr_nov241998.shtml.

bigger thing than the man, and he always had the sense of that, and he handled himself with the type of dignity that you look back on and can be proud of.

Why is that important? It is as important that he did that as it is important, maybe, to make an example out of some who did not. It is easy to look to our kids and say, “Boy, you wouldn’t want to be a governor like George Ryan.” (laughs) It seems to me, if my dad said, “Boy, you wouldn’t want to be a lawyer like that shyster lawyer down the street,” I’m much better served by pointing out and saying, “There’s the kind of lawyer that you ought to pattern yourself after.” I think if you look at the governors recently in Illinois, and you had a son that was going to be governor, you’d say, “Who’s the guy I want you to talk to about this?” You could bring anybody back from history—I bet you Jim Edgar would be one of the five people you would ask him to talk to. How’s that for a long, drawn-out answer to that question? (laughter)

DePue: Maybe this one will be a little shorter. (McCormick laughs) What regrets, if any, do you have about what the administration was not able to accomplish or what occurred during the administration?

McCormick: I want to point to one other accomplishment that I didn’t point to [before]. I’m sorry to do this to you. (DePue laughs) Chicago school reform, about which everybody for some reason gives much credit to Mayor Daley—who came to the table fighting and screaming, not wanting Chicago school reform. Jim Edgar was the reason for Chicago school reform. So let me do that.

Now, on the negative side of things... If you could wipe away the disappointment with some folks—the scandal at the Tollway—you’d want to do away with that, even though it was never connected to the governor. There was disappointment with some people around the administration, I guess. I think that the governor would say he would have loved to have seen the way we fund education get handled differently. So those would be a couple of things, I guess I would say, that are regrettable. I was trying to think of other things that...

For the most part, we can all look back and say, “Well, we might have done this differently,” but if you had done that differently, maybe something else (laughs) would have come up that you wouldn’t have been able to do. I just think that one of the things that has to be realized in terms of the Edgar administration is, for half of it, there was no money to do anything except just keep the state out of bankruptcy.

Personally, when I look back at the Edgar administration, I have days when I say, I wish Jim Edgar would be a lot more personable in terms of these Republican county chairmen and all that kind of stuff. But as I look back in the whole scheme of things, the accomplishments are many; in my mind, the regrets are few, and even fewer in terms of impact. So very few regrets.

DePue: Well, we've been at this for a while.

McCormick: It's been a while, yes.

DePue: We've talked about a lot of things, not just Governor Edgar, that are important to make a matter of the historical record. I'll just give you an opportunity here to kind of reflect on things and close up whatever we haven't addressed.

McCormick: I think you've been pretty thorough in my relationship. I was very lucky because I guess I had all the benefits and very little of the burdens of a job. I got the benefit of being around the governor and hanging around and seeing a lot of things, and I wasn't having to make the decisions (laughs) to cut this or cut that. As a kid growing up in Vienna, Illinois, when my dad would take me to the floor of the House, I was in awe of those folks. For the governor of the state of Illinois, Governor Ogilvie, to reach down and say, "Mike, how are you doing?" If Elvis would have done that to me, I would have said, "Who the heck is that" or "Yeah, he sings good." These people were big deals to me. That was a big thing. If I got to ride in the car with one of the other local legislators somewhere with my dad, I thought I was riding with royalty. Not my dad—he was just my dad—but the other guy.

So what I take away—and I told a group of people this—the thing I'm proudest of from the governor's perspective is that as close as I was to him personally, he never did anything to make me not feel the same way. I don't know that I would say that, if I had been part of the next administration or the one after that. I call him "Governor" to this day, even though he says, (laughs) "Why don't you call me Jim?" I call Mrs. Edgar "Mrs. Edgar" to this day, even though she says, "You should call me Brenda." One of the things that I'm impressed with in all this time is they—both of them—didn't add to my cynicism, and being this close, they should have. When I met Governor Ogilvie or Governor Thompson, it was at one event, and I didn't know when they got mad or who they liked or who they yelled at; I didn't know what they liked for dinner, and I didn't know how difficult it was to do this or that for them. But I was able to know those things about this man and still come away with the same awe for the office as I had when I was ten or eleven years old, when I can remember shaking that soft hand of Governor Ogilvie and saying, "How come his hands are so soft?" (laughter)

DePue: I appreciate your taking the time that you have to share your memories. They've been a lively experience for me and a lot of fun to listen to. Again, it's been important to get the history as well. So thank you, Mike.

McCormick: Sure. Thank you.

(end of interviews)