

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Abner Mikva

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

Interview # ISL-A-L-2014-029

Abner Mikva, an independent Democrat and Illinois legislator in the 1960s, who also served as a U.S. Congressman in the 1970s and President Clinton's legal advisor for one year, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Illinois Statecraft* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: Aug 25, 26 & 27, 2014; Sep 29, Oct 22, 2014

Location: Mikva residence in Chicago, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio/Digital video

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Interview being
processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 2:13 + 2:07 + 2:20 + 2:28 + 2:07 + 2:22 + 2:17 +
2:11 / 2:22 + 2:12 + 2:33 + 2:47 + 2:12 + 2:37 + 2:28 + 2:18 = 18.09 hrs

Session 1: Early life, military tour and legal training

Session 2: Mikva's entrance into Illinois politics and early years in legislature

Session 3: Mikva's legislative career and Illinois politics in the 1960s

Session 4: Mikva's loss in the 1966 Congressional race and more on IL politics

Session 5: 1968 Congressional election, '68 Convention and early time in Congress

Session 6: Defeat in 1972 election, and return and service in Congress until 1979

Session 7: Mikva's year as Pres. Bill Clinton's White House counsel, 1994-95

Session 8: Service as Pres. Clinton's WH counsel and association with Barack Obama

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on December 4, 2014.

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

© 2014 Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

Abstract

Abner Mikva, *Illinois Statecraft*, ISL-A-L-2014-029

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Abner Mikva was born in June 1926 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and grew up in Milwaukee. After a brief tour in the Army Air Force during World War II, he attended college at the University of Wisconsin, and eventually earned a law degree from the University of Chicago in 1951. By that time Mikva had already developed a keen interest in politics. Following a year as a clerk for Supreme Court Justice Sherman Minton, Mikva began working for a Chicago law firm, while also becoming active in politics as an ‘independent’ democrat, meaning that he was not tied to the Chicago area Democratic machine. He was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives in 1956, representing the Hyde Park area of Chicago. In 1966 he ran for the U.S. House and lost. He won the seat in 1968 and served for four years until redistricting forced him to relocate north to the Evanston, Illinois and the 10th Congressional District. He returned to Congress in 1975.

In 1979 Mikva accepted a judicial appointment from President Jimmy Carter and served until 1994 on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, with his last four years as Chief Judge. In September 1994 President Bill Clinton asked him to serve as White House Council, replacing Lloyd Cutler. While there, Judge Mikva dealt with a variety of issues, including Waco, the Paula Jones lawsuit and the ongoing Whitewater investigation. (President Clinton hired private lawyers to formally represent him on the Jones lawsuit.) Mikva resigned from the Clinton administration in November 1995 due to health reasons, and moved back to Chicago. He has remained active in a variety of civic and political activities since that time. While a justice on the D.C. Court, he attempted to hire Barack Obama, recently graduated from Harvard Law School, as a clerk, but Obama declined. Mikva next encountered Obama while they both taught at the University of Chicago Law School, and the two struck up a close association. President Obama refers to Judge Mikva as one of his political mentors. In 2014 Mikva was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Judge Mikva passed away on July 4, 2016.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Independent Democrats of Illinois; Adlai Stevenson II; Pres. Bill Clinton; Mayor Richard J. Daley; Chicago Democratic Party machine; IL House of Representatives; Pres. Barack Obama; War Powers Resolution of 1973; gun control; Gov. Otto Kerner; Gov. Richard Ogilvie; Hillary Clinton; Gov. Dan Walker; Whitewater; Paula Jones; Cutback Amendment; Gov. Jim Thompson; President Richard Nixon; 1968 Democratic Convention; Ken Starr; Waco siege; State Senator Emil Jones; U.S. Court of Appeals for D.C.;

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

COPYRIGHT

The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. “Fair use” criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories, nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955