

Interview with James Thompson
IST-A-L-2013-054.20
Volume V

Interview # 20: September 10, 2015
Interviewer: Mark DePue

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

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.

DePue: Today is Thursday, September 10, 2015. My name is Mark DePue, director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. And by this time, Governor, you've got that memorized, I would expect.

Thompson: I have that memorized.

DePue: I'm with Governor Jim Thompson in Chicago for our twentieth session.

Thompson: (laughs) Twentieth!

DePue: Well, I predicted that we had a lot to talk about.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: It's been a whole lot of fun for me.

Thompson: Good!

DePue: And hopefully for you as well.

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: Another trip down memory lane. This time, the focus is going to be on 1987 and '88, probably, seeing how far we go. But I wanted to start with the time following your election in 1986, that interesting, amazing year in Illinois politics when the LaRouchies upset the applecart for the Democrats that year. You had a pretty easy time getting reelected, which you said yesterday you would have predicted anyway, regardless of how that process had turned out. Now that you've been reelected, you've got another inauguration, but do you also have another look at reorganizing your administration?¹

Thompson: I think the attitude in the administration—shared by me, and by my staff and my agency directors—was that if government can do something in a better way, you shouldn't shrink from doing it. And the legislature, by my recollection, was always pretty amenable to anything I wanted to do, in terms of reorganizing the executive branch. They rarely interfered with that, just as I would not interfere with a legislative functional change.

DePue: This is the era of Ronald Reagan, and conservatives today hearken back to that as the golden era for conservatism in the United States. Reagan was famous for saying that government is not the solution; government is the problem.²

Thompson: (laughs) Well, that's a nice catch phrase, and I'm sure President Reagan was able to deliver that on the stump in an absolutely inspiring way. But I think you would find that the federal government grew under President Reagan and did not retrench. You know why Reagan was, for the most part, successful as a president? He was—and I think this probably drew on his experience as governor of California—he was amenable to compromise. You would not catch Ronald Reagan doing what people like Senator Cruz [Ted Cruz, R-Texas] and the Tea Party members today in the House do, in terms of picking an issue and being willing to shut down the government over it, whether it's Planned Parenthood in this legislative session or something else in past legislative sessions.

The notion that there would be a government shutdown, over an issue, whether spending or otherwise, I think would be abhorrent to Reagan. He was a successful governor of California because he dealt with the legislature in a compromising way. I don't mean that in a pejorative sense. I mean, that's the essence of the legislative process. He's an integral part of the legislative process, as a governor and as a president. So those who cite Ronald Reagan today, I agree with them that Reagan was a successful president. I don't agree that he would act in the same way that some conservatives and Tea Party members are acting today.

¹ To develop fresh ideas, Thompson's staff conducted a review of the administration after the 1986 election, one that was just short of a full transition process. See Jeffrey Miller, interview by Mike Czaplicki, June 24, 2015.

² The line is from Reagan's first inaugural, January 20, 1981.

DePue: Reagan certainly ran big budget deficits, especially the first few years in the heights of that depression that you and I have been talking about the last couple of sessions.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: But in part, because of the significant build-up of the military. I'm wondering what you would think of an \$18.5 trillion federal deficit now?

Thompson: (laughs) What's today's federal deficit?

DePue: That's what it is.

Thompson: The item in the paper I read yesterday, I think it was, said that perhaps so many conservatives in the House would abandon Speaker Boehner [John Boehner, R-OH] on the issue of the budget and potential shutdown, that he would have to go to Nancy Pelosi [D-CA, House minority leader] and seek Democratic votes to pass budget. Of course, she has a price, and that is an agreement to reopen the sequestration of the budget in years past and agree that military spending increases had to be matched by domestic spending increases, dollar for dollar. That's going to be their negotiating position, apparently.

Since Boehner, I don't think, and the Senate can tolerate a shutdown, with the presidential race coming up, the blame certainly would accrue to the Republicans, since they're in charge of the House and Senate. They'll have to reach some kind of accommodation with the Democrats, especially since the Democrats have the power to filibuster the Senate and prevent anything of significance from passing, if it becomes a partisan issue.

DePue: Why do you say the blame would end up with the Republicans? It seems to always end up with the Republicans.

Thompson: They're in charge.

DePue: Well, they weren't in charge before, and it still ended up with them.

Thompson: Yes, but who was leading the charge to shut down the government? It wasn't the Democrats; it was the Republicans.

DePue: I think they would say they were leading the charge to balance the budget or at least to reduce the deficits.

Thompson: Yeah, well.

DePue: I'm using the wrong word. The **debt** is \$18.5 trillion.

Thompson: Right. But the threatened shutdown of the federal government, **this** time, is whether or not Planned Parenthood should be funded. It's got nothing to do with the debt and is not a reason to shut down the federal government. Ronald Reagan would not do that. I mean, look what he used to do on the issue of abortion, right? He was against abortion; that's what he said. Once a year, the anti-abortionists would come to Washington for a conference, and Reagan would address them, by phone. For the rest of the year, that was that. He didn't endorse shutting down the government over the issue of abortion. Things were pretty well settled with the Hyde Amendment.

So Reagan was a respecter of the process. Reagan knew when to compromise in the legislative process. He had a tremendous personal relationship with the Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neill, and he got his tax cut passed. He had a tremendous personal relationship with Dan Rostenkowski.³ You cannot put a lot of the Tea Party senators and representatives today in a class with Reagan. They don't belong there.

DePue: Let's get back to '87, then. What was your vision, going into that fourth term in office?

Thompson: I think, generally, to continue to use increased revenues from the post-economic downturn days, to deliver better state services, to make Illinois part of a class of states that were leaders. And it provided the services that people sought. I mean, that was the goal every year. But, as we came out of the darker economic days, that took a little sharper focus, because you could turn your attention to improvement rather than retrenchment, as you had to do during tougher economic times.

DePue: What's your definition of "better state services," more efficient delivery of the services or more services?

Thompson: It's both. The world changes. In some respects it gets simpler; in some respects it gets more complex. In good times, people expect more from government, so there are pressures to increase spending, to increase the budget, to increase state services. That's always a legislative pressure. In fact, the bad economic times are really the only times when that pressure decreases, because then you could say, "No" to everybody.

When you have a better resource base, a better economic base, it gets much harder to say, "No" to anybody. So you've got to balance that. And since the governor, in the real world, is the balancer, the person responsible for attempting to keep the state on a balanced budget, you have to take a look at what constituencies are requesting, whether its education or welfare or business or labor, and what legislators are suggesting and see how much of

³ Rostenkowski, a Chicago Democrat, was the powerful chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee from 1981 to 1994.

that you can squeeze into something you could rationally call “better state government.”

DePue: Which state services were you targeting at that time?

Thompson: Oh, I don’t think I was targeting anything. I think it was all across the board. You have to look at the state across the board. Yeah, some years you can say, I want to increase education spending by X amount, or your budget says it for you, if you don’t say it in special terms. But you can’t deliver good government services unless you look across the board, because there is a constituency group out there for everything in the state budget. They have to feel, they have to believe—if you’re going to get their support—that you value what they value, equally, with them, at least in some sense of listening to them and in trying to meet their expectations. Not that you can always do it, because they might take a singular focus, while you have to take a unified focus. After all, you’re the only person in the state who’s elected statewide and has statewide responsibilities.

Legislators are responsive to their district, as well as what they view as their statewide obligations, but they have a district demand. You don’t have that; you have a state demand. So you’re the unifier. Each year, you would look at your revenues, and each year, you can look at what you could spend and then decide in your budget document where you wanted to spend it. But you can’t single out, I don’t think, without running into issues.

DePue: I want to go back to your team. I probably have asked you this before, but this far into your administration, who was your most trusted political advisor? Who was your Karl Rove [trusted advisor of President George W. Bush] or your David Axelrod [trusted advisor of Barack Obama]?

Thompson: (laughs) I didn’t have a Karl Rove or David Axelrod; I had a multitude. I had a chorus, not a solo. Oh, there were a number of them. In terms of politics?

DePue: The guy who you could go to and say, “How does that district typically vote?” Or, “Tell me about Champaign County.” Or those kinds of issues. Was that you? Was it you that had that political calculus in your brain?

Thompson: I don’t think you could do it in that fashion. You might do it in terms of who represented that county in the legislature, what senator, what representative? You wouldn’t do it in terms of county-by-county analysis of counties’ needs. Those issues would bubble up, without my taking out the map of Illinois and looking at Champaign County and saying, “Okay, what’s the issue with Champaign County?” You’d know what it was. The chorus would be outside your door on the second floor of the Capitol.

Representatives and senators are not shy. They’d let you know. And your program staff and your budget staff and your directors would let you know, because the same chorus of requests for counties, or areas of the state

beyond counties, would be filtered through the cabinet departments as well. So it was a remarkable chorus, and you had to pick out the alto and the tenor and the bass and soprano. But that's essentially how state government works.

DePue: It sounds like, when it got down to the decision point, you trusted your own political instincts?

Thompson: Well, yeah. I had people I would bounce political questions off of. Greg Baise is an example. Greg had run a major cabinet department. He had come up through the political process in the administration. He had held staff jobs close to me. He was the first guy I hired as a bag boy, post-election. He came from an area of the state that was not my area of the state. And he's a very good political thinker. He's got a lot of talent, so I could rely on him. And there were others as well.

DePue: Going down some of the changes that I did see in the administration, Jim Reilly apparently moved from the chief of staff position to deputy governor.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: I wonder if you can give us some insight into all of these changes, as we go through them.

Thompson: Jim made an impression in the legislature, from the moment he was first elected, a very smart guy. He clearly had aspirations beyond his legislative district, I thought, and I thought that was a worthy ambition. He was a close friend of [Jim] Edgar, who at one time was my legislative director. So I was desirous of poaching him from the legislature, in the same way that I had poached Jim Edgar at an earlier time, and I was successful.

Reilly became legislative director too. Looking at the talents he displayed there, when there was an opportunity to name him as chief of staff or deputy governor, in succession, I did it. Art Quern, who had been chief of staff, had left. So I thought that was a natural progression, given Jim's talents, legislative and executive.

DePue: So the move from chief of staff to deputy governor was a promotion, as well, in your view?

Thompson: It was certainly a title promotion. I think, to people who heard it, deputy governor had a broader reach than chief of staff. It had sort of an outside dimension to it, rather than a chief of staff, who a lot of people would regard as somebody who ran the administration, inside the governor's office.

I was happy to have the deputy governor title out there. I gave it to Ilana Rovner in Chicago. It added that dimension to Jim Reilly. As people display talents, I'm happy to give them expanded responsibility or to shape

their jobs to employ those talents. I knew what I wanted. Whether he was chief of staff or deputy governor was not of great moment to me, but the title sounds better. When you have a title that sounds better, you're more able, I think, to work with people outside the governor's office.

DePue: With the chief of staff position vacant, you moved in Jeffrey Miller.

Thompson: Yep.

DePue: Tell us about Jeffrey Miller.

Thompson: He's a very smart guy, as his post-government career demonstrated, because he was one of the top administrators, later on, at Northwestern Hospital in Chicago, which demands great executive talent. Jeff was of the same description I applied to most of the people who worked with me, hard worker, smart guy, dedicated.

DePue: How did he come to your attention?

Thompson: Oh, gosh, now you're taxing my memory. (DePue laughs) Remember, I told you about the cabinet minister's wife, who marched around the mansion in support of ERA?

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: That was Mrs. Miller, (both laugh) the one to whom Samantha, three years old, said, "Go away! You're bothering my daddy!" through the fence.

DePue: Samantha was your most loyal member.

Thompson: Oh, no question about it. She was Jim Skilbeck [Thompson's advance man] trained, so whether it was a governmental issue or a political issue, she was right there.

DePue: Gene Reineke is the next name on the list, as the new personnel director. In other words, the patronage guy.

Thompson: Yep.

DePue: I've interviewed Gene, as you know. He must have been awfully young at that time.⁴

Thompson: He was. I'm trying to remember, but I think he came off of the program staff. I think that's right.

DePue: That sounds right.

⁴ Gene Reineke, interview by Mark DePue, December 7, 2009.

Thompson: So he started up the ladder in the governor's office and eventually went to the cabinet and blossomed under Governor Edgar.

DePue: But being on the program staff and being the patronage guy, that's quite a different kind of a job.

Thompson: Yeah. But think of the job of governor. Back when it was legal, patronage was important. It was an important ingredient in the legislative process. So it took an able person. It was not a slug's job; it took an able person. As Gene demonstrated, he could do that. And several years later, he could run a cabinet agency.

DePue: You mentioned yesterday that Janis Cellini was assisting him, as well, I think, by that time.

Thompson: Yeah. And at one time, Pate Philip's wife was patronage director. She was a marvel. She was smart; she was tough; she kept her constituency happy. County chairmen, I might forget to tell a county chairman I was coming to the county, but she never did. So I had some very able people in that position.

DePue: I guess the thing that intrigues me about that is there are some young people in these positions, as the patronage chief, and you're dealing with, I would imagine, some entrenched old timers down in the county chairman level.

Thompson: Absolutely, certainly. It brings out, or doesn't bring out, if it doesn't succeed, the ability to effectively work with people of all kinds. Remember, the patronage job dealt extensively with legislators and with county chairmen and with ward committeemen in Chicago. It required the ability to work effectively with people of all stripes, all parties—Republican, Democrat—all nationalities, all age groups, to be as solicitous of somebody from a tiny county as you were of the chairman of DuPage County.

It took a lot of talent. And for the most part, I got that talent in that office. You could find it in young people. All you've got to do is look at what people went on to do, after their time in government with me. I mean, Gene Reineke's run some of the biggest ad agencies in the country, a very client-demand industry.

DePue: The next position was the legislative liaison. It had been a position that Kirk Dillard was doing; now it's Zack Stamp.

Thompson: Yeah, Zack. Zack was a longtime member of the Thompson administration, probably going back to early campaigns, on the political side. Zack has a sunny personality, and Zack knows how to filter out the bullshit. Zack was a very effective legislative spokesman. You've got to have the iron pants and the big ears to work with legislators, because they want you constantly at their beck and call. That's what they expect from a legislative director. And he has to know how to filter stuff back to the governor or the program staff or the

budget office. He has to understand the different regions of the state and regional demands. Forget counties or legislative districts, for the moment, there are regional demands as well, whether it's western Illinois or southern Illinois or eastern Illinois or Chicago or Cook County or the collar counties. He's got to have a patient demeanor, and he's got to understand that Illinois is a big, diverse state. Sometimes we forget that, but he can't, because he's got this colossus in front of him called the legislature. So he's a very talented fellow.

DePue: I don't think we've had the opportunity to talk about your chief counsel, Bill Ghesquiere, who I understand came on board in 1985, but extended into this timeframe as well.

Thompson: I'm not sure how often he wore pinstripes, but he sure had the legal talent of the pinstripe patronage people. He was a smart, tough lawyer. One of his biggest talents was figuring out ways to get done what the governor wanted done. You know, if you had to pick your choice of lawyers to work with, you want the lawyer who could figure out how to say, "Yes," rather than the lawyer who says, "No." It's as simple as that.

DePue: Lawyers have a reputation of being good at saying, "No," oftentimes.

Thompson: I know. A governor can say, "No" on his own accord, especially a governor who's a lawyer, okay? That wasn't hard. But if I go to my counsel, when I'm the governor, I want to find a way to say, "Yes," if that's the answer I want. So Bill was a very smart, dedicated, creative lawyer.

DePue: Did he come from the U.S. attorney's office?

Thompson: No. I'm trying to remember where he came from. It was somewhere in state government.⁵ Was he at DOT [Department of Transportation]? I'm not sure.

I should try to recollect thirty years later, but I think he came from somewhere else in state government.

DePue: I don't know that we've talked about Gloria Evans, either—

Thompson: Gloria!

DePue: ...your personal secretary.

Thompson: What a wonderful human being. She died recently.

DePue: Was she the one who knew all of your little idiosyncrasies?

⁵ Ghesquiere had served as IDOT's chief counsel since 1974, when Thompson brought him on board. "Names," *Illinois Issues* (July 1977), 29.

Thompson: Of course. All my secretaries always know my idiosyncrasies. I think Gloria's first job at state government was up in the legislative office, working for Jim Edgar, up on two-and-a-half, that mezzanine floor that was constructed in various changes in the Capitol. And somehow, I think, she came to the attention of Jayne, who stole her away to be Jayne's secretary in the mansion. And then she was stolen away by me to be my secretary in the Capitol.

When I came into the governorship, I wasn't one of these "I'm going to fire everybody in the Walker administration" kind of guys. Going through the contretemps I did with my transportation director, held over from the Walker administration, two of them in a row... Walker's secretary was there, and I said, "Hey, if you're willing to stay, I'm willing that you stay." So she stayed as long as she wanted to stay. I trusted her implicitly, even though she worked for my predecessor, who was of a different political party.

Anyway, when she left, I had become acquainted with Gloria, in her work for Jayne. So I just called up my wife and said, "Hey Honey, I'm sorry, but I've got to steal Gloria." She came over to the office, and she was wonderful. [She] became my secretary in Springfield for the whole time I was there.

DePue: How would you describe her personality?

Thompson: A mother. She mothered me. She was an excellent baker; she'd bake cookies and bring them in. She was a fine Italian cook. Jayne and I would visit in the Evans house. We were personal friends, as well as governmental allies. Gloria just... She took care of me. I don't know how you can say it any other way, and a governor needs to be taken care of.

DePue: Loyal and protective?

Thompson: Loyal and protective, yeah, absolutely. And she adored Samantha. The two of them were thick as thieves, because when she was Jayne's secretary, that's where Samantha, as a little kid, would hide out all day, in Gloria's office. And Gloria would give her things to do and interact with her. Oh, Samantha was one of Gloria's favorites and vice versa. It was just... It was a wonderful thing.

Chuck Evans was a magistrate in Springfield. And, of course, I knew him as that. Then we all became family friends, Gloria and Chuck, Jayne and Jim and Samantha. She was one of the best things I ever had as governor.

DePue: I mentioned idiosyncrasies, and that made me start thinking, I wonder what ones you might have had, in just your office routine. Anything come to mind?

Thompson: No. But, like with all my secretaries, I'd shout out the door, "Gloria, ah, what about, um..." She was my memory, (laughs) which even at that stage was declining.

DePue: Did you have any pet peeves, as far as office routine was concerned?

Thompson: No. I'm not a pet-peeve person. I think Gloria was the person in this story. I may be wrong, but I think it's right. I think, one day, Gloria, when she was still at the mansion maybe—I'm not sure—took Samantha shopping at Famous-Barr for something. I don't know how old Samantha was, five or six years old. But Samantha, even at that age, had been to enough antique stores with her dad that she understood the concept of bargaining in an antique store. So, if I've got the story correctly, she was out there with Gloria, and she needed a pair of mittens or something like that. She picked out the mittens and brought them up to the sales clerk, and said, "What's the best you can do on these?" (both laugh) Gloria loved telling that story! I love telling that story.

DePue: The last name I've got on the list here, Governor, is one I think we've talked about before, but Dave Fields, as your press secretary.

Thompson: Ah yes, Dave. Dave succeeded Dave Gilbert when Gilbert went on to greater glory.

DePue: There were some big shoes to fill in that respect.

Thompson: Oh, yeah, absolutely. But Dave Fields was a very competent person. He was so good, he won the lottery. Therefore, with \$7 million in his pocket, he wasn't long for the office of press secretary! (laughs)

I don't know whether I told you the story or not, but when he won the lottery—I think it was \$7 million—he came into my office and said, "I just won the lottery!" I said, "Hey, congratulations!" He said, "The press corps wants to talk to me. Will you come down with me to talk to the press corps?" I said, "Are you out of your mind?" (DePue laughs) "Not me. Give me the 7 million; I'll be glad to talk to them. You go talk to them; tell them how you won the lottery." I'm not answering questions like that. Dave is a good guy.

DePue: You were, or still are to this day, known for being the master of public relations and working with the press, an excellent relationship with the press. This far into your administration, could you still say that?

Thompson: Yes, oh, I would say that.

DePue: Were your relations with the press still solid?

Thompson: I think so. Look, it doesn't take any special talent, I don't think. It's a two-way street. They want a story, or they want to cover a story. And you want your stories to be covered the best way possible, right? So it's a two-way relationship. The way you do that is to be open and honest and available. I was renowned for being available. Heck, I used to, for a time, work with my doors open to the second floor, outside. And I would go down to the press room. I didn't make them come to my office; I would go down to the press room and just talk.

DePue: You mean just small chatter?

Thompson: Yeah, sure. And they could get their questions in there. I would do call-in shows, radio shows with radio hosts. I would do television interviews. So I was constantly available to the print media, the radio media and the television media. I didn't try to hide stuff. I never said anything off the record in my entire career. If I couldn't talk about it, I'd say, "Hey, I can't talk about that." But I never went off the record, because, as far as I'm concerned, that is a dangerous proposition. You don't know when it starts; you don't know when it ends. And I like people. I mean, what can I tell you? I like people, so I liked members of the press.

DePue: But Governor, you know that there were journalists out there who were just dying to get that "got you" quote that would embarrass you.

Thompson: Yeah, but they were few and far between, really.

DePue: Any journalistic nemesis that you had out there?

Thompson: Not really. I could deal with the "got you" people. I might not like some of them, but I dealt with them. I was always professional. I didn't withhold stories from people I didn't like. But those were few and far between, really. The Springfield press corps was... First of all, it's an asset to the State of Illinois, even though they're from the private sector. They have their own press room in the Capitol. Everybody feels they have some value to the state government, right? Otherwise, they'd be out on the street.

DePue: And a lot more people in the press room then than there are now.

Thompson: Oh, yeah. No, it's a declining thing now. I could see it from the time I started in politics to the time I ended, the diminution of press resources in the State of Illinois, not just in the press room in Springfield or the press room in Chicago, but out on the trail. Where you might have, in the early days, had a reporter and a cameraman and a light man, three-man crew, it diminished to a two-man crew, a reporter and a camera guy.

In some instances, in the rural areas, it would be a one-man crew. The cameraman would conduct the interview. Or, in a couple of instances, the cameraman only was there, and he'd say, "Well, go ahead and say what you want to say." I thought, Oh, this is good! (laughs)

DePue: But you're talking about, it sounds to me, TV reporters. I thought, during that era, that the print reporters, the newspaper reporters, were the ones that had the clout.

Thompson: Well, they did. And cities had bureaus, down in Springfield. But then the bureau faded away, and it was one reporter, whereas in earlier times you might have had two reporters, or two reporters and a columnist.

The last survivors of that were probably the *Springfield Journal-Register*, which could have columnists sitting over in the *Journal* building; they didn't need to sit in the State Capitol. But the resources available to the press generally, whether it was print, radio or television, have steadily diminished from that time.

I could see it in the way they covered an election campaign. In my first race, in the latter days of the campaign, when I had a campaign bus going, it would be full of reporters, who'd travel with you everywhere. Then in subsequent campaigns, it would shrink, shrink, shrink, and then they would only cover the very last days of the campaign. Whereas in the first campaign, they might have covered me for two weeks, twenty at a time, you know? You could see the diminution of press coverage in state government in the Capitol and on the trail. They didn't ride along anymore.

DePue: One of the things that did get reported in this timeframe, early 1987, was that Jerry Huston of the *Chicago Tribune* reported in February that you had hired Jayne to a \$45,000-a-year job on your campaign staff to recruit people who would pay \$1,000 to have a chance to meet you.

Thompson: Yeah, the Governor's Club. She was in charge of the Governor's Club. Look, you don't put your wife on the state payroll, okay? That didn't happen. But your political fund is your own personal political tool, and you can employ whoever you want to. Jayne was smart.

You've got to remember, a governor's spouse has limited employment opportunities that are not subject to suspicion or criticism. Jayne was an assistant attorney general for Bill Scott when I was elected governor. Three or four months after the election, or after I took office, I think Scott became uncomfortable with that. So Jayne left, and because she was a lawyer, and a good one, she looked around for some other place to be employed.

Her opportunities were limited. First of all, she was living in Springfield, not Chicago. Secondly, she didn't want employment that somebody could say conflicted with my job. She couldn't go to a law firm that did a lot of business with state government, or that would be a story from day one. So she looked and she looked and she looked, and she finally found a law firm in Springfield that virtually did nothing with state government. It was a civil law firm. She signed on there. And then Samantha was born. It's not easy for a governor's spouse to find private sector employment that won't raise suspicions or criticism; it's just the way it is.

DePue: She was quoted in an interview about this same timeframe that she was frustrated; that here she was, a lawyer. The article stated that she had appeared before the U.S. Supreme Court?

Thompson: She had, twice. She won; I lost in my cases.

DePue: (laughs) I'm sure that never comes up in family conversation.

Thompson: No, that never comes up at all.

DePue: Now, she's frozen out. But I'm curious about the selection of the job that you had for her, because in the parlance of politics today, you could say that people are contributing \$1,000 to have a conversation with you; they're paying for access.

Thompson: Absolutely. Absolutely!

DePue: And people get nervous about that, Governor.

Thompson: Well, they shouldn't. They shouldn't. Listen, every governor that I know of has had a version of the Governor's Club, number one.

DePue: Governors in Illinois or governors across the country?

Thompson: Across the country and in Illinois. I had as much access to people I didn't know from a bale of hay, who I ran into on the street, or came into the governor's office, when I opened my doors, or who called on the radio show, or who stopped me on the street. That was a multitude 1,000 times larger than a Governor's Club, with ninety members that met once in a while.

Of course they want access. They want access; they want to be able to either say to themselves or to their friends, "I had breakfast with the governor." Now, they always forget to mention that ninety other people were there too. It's not just a question of access. Since they're contributing campaign funds, it's a question of support, not just access.

I had a lot of people who contributed to my campaigns who **never** had access, never ever. So it's not appropriate or fair or correct to say they wanted access, when they also wanted to support me. Maybe they didn't care about access, and the Governor's Club was a neat way to make a campaign contribution, whatever the reason. That's just a fact of life.

DePue: I'm wondering if these are people who contributed \$1,000 because they believed in the kinds of programs and issues you were pushing, or they contributed \$1,000 so that they could influence you to change your positions.

Thompson: A thousand dollars wasn't going to influence me. So the premise is incorrect. These were people who were happy to be associated with me. They were happy to be a member of the Governor's Club. It was just a nice way to frame a political contribution. That's all.

DePue: Let's go back to Mrs. Thompson again, then.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: We talked yesterday about the role you saw for George Ryan, and a lot of it was ceremonial. Was there an aspect of that for Jayne, as well?

Thompson: There was. But it was less at my request and more at the request of outsiders that she did that. She'd get invitations, whether it was a Republican women's club, or it was a regional women's association, or whatever it was. Sometimes it was because I couldn't do an event. So either I asked her to do the event, or the sponsors asked her to do the event. So, yeah, a ceremonial role, but not a very highly structured one.

She hated the title of "first lady," never used it, didn't conduct herself in that fashion, like she was elected to office too. And she was elected to the job of first lady. You know, people expect a lot of a governor or a governor's spouse. Sometimes they expect too much. She's a gracious person, so she would respond to invitations. She would take up causes. And hey, she continued that after my governorship.

DePue: You mention taking up causes. There's an assumption among the public that the first lady, whether it be at the presidential or the gubernatorial level, will take up some kind of a cause to champion. Did she have something specific?

Thompson: I'd have to go back and ask her on that, whether she had a more formal program. I don't think so; I think she was just helpful. Actually, she did more for subsequent governors than she did for me! (both laugh) George Ryan, she was on his transition committee. She was on George's... some kind of commission on women. I think her favorite cause was the promotion of the role of women in society and government.

Look, she worked very hard to become a lawyer. Back in her day, women were expected to become secretaries, not lawyers. And she fought against that. She went to law school. She put herself through law school, and she was in a very small class of women at the law school. That's what happened at that time. She's always been a brilliant lawyer. I mean, she acquitted herself mightily in the attorney general's office.

She started as my clerk in the attorney general's office, and then, when I went to the U.S. attorney's office and asked her to go with me as an assistant U.S. attorney, she refused. She said, "I worked for you long enough. I've got my own career to think about." She stayed with [William J.] Scott.

She was and is a staunch believer in women's rights and for the equal access for women, in every aspect of society. A very strong believer in the independence of women, not to depend on a spouse, but to establish her own base of support, to earn her own way. She's inculcated that in her daughter, (DePue laughs) to be independent. So, if I had to describe a cause in which she believed most strongly, it would be that.

DePue: You mentioned Samantha. By this time in your administration, the family was living in Chicago.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: I think I'm making a safe assumption that the two of you would prefer to keep Samantha out of the public eye entirely.

Thompson: That was impossible. (laughs) Samantha kept intruding herself into the public eye. She was a congenial sort. I remember once doing a press conference in the hallway outside of the governor's office, late in the session. Samantha, for some reason, was in my office and followed me outside. There's got to be five, six, seven TV cameras in there, and I'm walking somewhere. So they're walking backwards, with their cameras. And all of a sudden, I hear this voice say, "Dad! Three blind mice! See how they run!" pointing at the press corps. (both laugh)

Samantha was never shy in giving an interview, if the press was around. She had her opinions, [which] didn't always coincide with mine. So it was kind of hard to keep her out of the public eye. She's very bright. Your interview with her showed that, I think.⁶

DePue: At the time, did you think you had a budding politician on your hands?

Thompson: No, I didn't think that. I was hoping I'd have a budding lawyer, but she deserted me there too. She said there were enough lawyers in the family.

DePue: But she followed your lead as far as antiques and the arts is concerned.

Thompson: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. She is a very fine artist, as her fashion designs would show. She's an extremely effective writer, as her college papers would show and as her letters show. She's a very, very talented person. She's a fine public speaker. I told you the story of the Moscow circus, didn't I?

DePue: I don't think so.

Thompson: No? Well, here's an example. I go on a trade mission to Europe. And I had the bright idea, I'd love to take my daughter along. She was a youngster. She was—

DePue: I think you went to the Soviet Union in '89, somewhere around there?

Thompson: So she would be eleven? Let's say it was then.⁷ From St. Petersburg to Moscow, we took a train. It was one of those that the Russians had captured from Hitler's forces. It was a beautiful old German train, with woodwork and

⁶ Samantha Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014.

⁷ Thompson did visit the Soviet Union in 1989.

all of that great stuff. This was an overnight trip from St. Petersburg to Moscow. Earlier in the day, in St. Petersburg, Samantha went off with a group from the delegation to the Hermitage. When they got there, it was closed. They somehow roused a guard, a woman, and Samantha talked her way in to the Hermitage, because the woman had remembered seeing her on television in St. Petersburg.

That night, we went from St. Petersburg to Moscow. I was tired; I went to bed early. Samantha organized a party among the delegation, Hershey bars and vodka. That's all they had on the train. I woke up the next morning in Moscow to the compliments of the delegation about the wonderful party that Samantha gave, while I was sleeping! (DePue laughs)

We get to Moscow. We're there for a couple of days. Samantha is scheduled to go to a class of Moscow schoolchildren, which she does, makes a speech. That night, we're going to the Moscow circus. We go, and we're sitting there. After about an hour—and I was supposed to speak at the Moscow Circus, between acts—before we got to the break, where I was supposed to speak, my stomach violently attacked me. I went racing for the men's room. Even the troopers didn't know where I was going; I just bolted. They were a minute or so behind me, because I can remember being in the bathroom, underneath the Moscow circus, with the troopers' voices saying, "Governor, Governor, are you in there?" (both laugh) I'm thinking, Leave me alone! But as I got up out of my seat to run to the bathroom, I said to Samantha, "Samantha, you make the speech that I was supposed to make." And she did.

When we got to London, the next stop, I had a press conference. She's sitting next to Pate Philip, the devil, and he puts her up to asking me a question in the press conference, which went along the lines of, "Governor, you just said X, but your press release says Y. Would you explain the difference?" And I thought, I'll kill both of them! (both laugh) I will absolutely kill both of them. She wasn't shy. She was in the public eye. She had opinions. And she was a terrific, terrific campaigner. Parades, nothing fazed her.

DePue: Another, I would think, pleasant memory for you, January 12, 1987, is your fourth inauguration. Do you have any memories of that?

Thompson: Not really. You remember the first one.

DePue: Here's something that caught my eye, and I'm sure there were some people who were outraged when they saw this picture. February second, there's a photo of you that appears in the newspaper, and you're sitting in your office with your feet on the desk that was once used by Abraham Lincoln.

Thompson: Yeah, I know.

DePue: Did you hear anything about that?

Thompson: Yeah, I did hear about that. And I took my feet off the desk. It was a foolish thing to do. Let's take a break.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Governor, we're back from our break. I should have asked you before. How did Samantha's speech go over?

Thompson: At the circus?

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: Terrific! (laughs) A lot of compliments. It's interesting, people would not normally expect a child of those tender years to be, of all things, politically adept. But she was. I mean, she grew up in it. She watched her dad; she watched her mom. She took a lively interest in politics, which is not surprising at all, given where she lived and what she saw and heard. I guess you could say she was sort of classically trained to do that. You know, not overtly, but just she absorbed. She absorbs a lot. She's very smart, very intuitive. She absorbs a lot, still does to this day. So she didn't need any coaching or training; she just did it.

DePue: I'm sure you know the answer to this, since you're a big fan of Teddy Roosevelt. Some of this reminds me of Teddy's daughter.

Thompson: Which one? Alice?

DePue: Yeah, was it Alice who was such a socialite and so adept at it?

Thompson: Yeah, Alice Longworth.

DePue: You mentioned, when you came back from the break here, that you wanted to mention one more name.

Thompson: When I was talking about people that you might take political advice from or bounce a question off of. I mentioned Greg Baise, and that certainly was true. Another example, just out of a number of people that we don't need to list, would be Phil O'Connor. Phil is an exceedingly smart guy, very adept. He was, at one time, in my administration, chair of the Commerce Commission. Now he's parlayed that into a subsequent career in the utility industry. But he was sort of the co-campaign manager of the '82 campaign, the hardest campaign.

He was the one that came up with the idea to hold noon press conferences on Sunday, when you had no real competition out in the news world. Reporters and editors were anxious for stories, so you were guaranteed

to be near the top on the Monday morning news. We did that, I think, in a very useful way, and that was Phil's idea. It's subsequently been copied by a lot of politicians in Illinois, subsequent governors, subsequent candidates for governor. It's become a commonplace thing now, but it wasn't back then. So he's a very sharp person, politically.

DePue: I should have mentioned to you that Mike Czaplicki has interviewed Phil, and Phil has given us the campaign ads for '82 and '86 and, I think, perhaps even before that time.⁸

Thompson: Oh, wow.

DePue: So we're looking forward to that.

Thompson: I knew somebody had them. (laughs)

DePue: Yeah, he's the guy. Well, let's get to more on the legislative side and mention on February fourth, you signed a Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan bill. Do you remember anything about that one?

Thompson: No, not really.

DePue: And then, follow that to signing legislation for a Health Maintenance Organization Guaranty Fund. There are so many pieces of legislation you signed over the years.

Thompson: Yeah, there are literally thousands.

DePue: I wondered, though, if you do remember how you dealt with the AIDS crisis. This far into the 1980s, it was a very hot issue. The public didn't respond well. There was a lot of fear and anxiety, dealing with how you approached AIDS. Can you make any comments about your approach in that respect?

Thompson: No. I don't think so, because at that point, while this certainly was within the dominion of the state director of public health, and there were community organizations dealing with it, as well, especially in areas like Chicago, that, I think, unless I'm completely mistaken, that was more the province of the federal government and the health services of the federal government, where the efforts were made to find a cure, and now subsequently a vaccine, to deal with it and to promote the idea of safe sex, because that...

It was one thing to deal with existing AIDS cases, and that was a multi-agency approach. That had to do with the State Department of Public Health; it had to do with the federal health authorities; it had to do with

⁸ Prior to joining the Thompson administration, O'Connor had served in Governor Ogilvie's administration and as U.S. Representative George Miller's (D-CA) campaign manager in 1974, 1976 and 1978. For his work on the 1982 campaign, see Philip O'Connor's interview by Mike Czaplicki, August 27, 2015.

hospitals; it had to do with doctors; it had to do with community groups and charities. It took that kind of combined effort.⁹

But as important as attempts to cure or attempts to deal with existing AIDS patients and medicines that were available at the time, was, by far, the most important thing was prevention. That's where the greatest impact was, and that's where the greatest efforts by state, local, and federal authorities were to push the idea of what was then called "safe sex," although that was kind of a, I think, unpopular term in the public at large. But that was the most important thing that could be done. And that took a combined community effort, as well.

DePue: The main issue that I want to talk about, in 1987, is dealing with the budget and your attempt to get an income tax increase. March fourth, I know that you gave your budget address. You requested a budget of \$22.1 billion, which was a pretty significant increase from the previous year. Now, mind you, this is during a time that inflation is still fairly high. And you also asked for an increase in taxes. A \$1.6 billion tax increase is what you were seeking...

Thompson: Was that income tax?

DePue: Here is what I had for the various forms that you were approaching at that time, an increase in the gas tax—

Thompson: The last one was '83, right?

DePue: Yeah. Nine point \$.05 per gallon, over a period of five years, on top of the \$.13 per gallon that already existed. So that was significant. An increase in services, particularly—

Thompson: In the real world, I think it was pretty modest, \$.09 over five years?

DePue: It's all a matter of perspective, I guess.

Thompson: Yeah, it is. I was the one responsible for sound, safe roads.

DePue: I suspect there were people who were saying, "That's a huge increase!"

Thompson: I'm sure they did. But they were out there driving on the roads, weren't they?

DePue: An increase in taxes on services. Some things, I believe, were dry cleaning, haircuts, auto repair, et cetera, that we still don't have any taxes on, some of that.

⁹ On the state's response to AIDS, see Bernard Turnock, April 22, 2014, 80-108; Jeffrey Miller, July 7, 2015. Both interviews by Mike Czaplicki.

Thompson: But we will.

DePue: Was there any consideration, at that time, for legal fees as something that would be taxed? Your own profession!

Thompson: Oh, yeah, sure, doctors and lawyers. Whenever you mention the idea of the services tax, which sounds just extreme and foreign and un-American, and whatever you want to apply to it, even though we have increasingly become, even at that time, and certainly today, a services-based economy in this state. And someday we'll get to the idea that your tax system should reflect your economy, so that you can keep the rates as low as possible by taxing widely, wide tax, low rates.

Anyway, at that time, the idea of a services tax was, let's say, foreign. (both laugh) The minute people heard that, and the minute the press heard that, it was always, "Well, are you going to tax the lawyers; are you going to tax the doctors; are you going to tax medical care?" I mean, on and on and on. Or, "Are you going to just put it on the barbers and on the shoe repair guys?"

DePue: The little guys.

Thompson: The little guys.

DePue: Well, Governor, in the interest of beating a dead horse—

Thompson: Sure, go ahead.

DePue: ...how many of your Governor's Club members were lawyers?

Thompson: I don't think that many. These were business guys; they weren't lawyers.

DePue: Was the legal community generally Democratic?

Thompson: No. I'd say the legal community generally was Republican. Look, what would you do today? Let's take Winston.

DePue: Winston & Strawn?

Thompson: It's a worldwide firm.

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: Worldwide firm. So if we service-tax lawyers in Chicago, what will happen? You'd have to construct a tax that said, "If the matter arises in Chicago, even though you handled it out of the New York office, you have to pay the tax," because wouldn't law firms shift the work, if they've got offices everywhere in the world?

But look, mine was one of the lone voices for a services tax, back in that time; it wasn't going anywhere. And I didn't get into the doctors and lawyers argument, because I knew that was a fetcher.

DePue: This \$1.6 billion increase you were seeking also included sales tax on computer software, which I would have thought already existed. But maybe that was something so new that—

Thompson: It was.

DePue: Over-the-counter medicine and health aids?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And here's another one that a different constituency would have a problem with—like everybody who owned a car—a \$17 increase on license plate fees, up from \$48, which was what it was at the time.

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: And finally, a 20 percent temporary increase to the income tax.

Thompson: Um-hmm. If you look at a tax proposal like that, if you look at the individual constituent parts, except for the temporary income tax increase—and I signed two of them in my administration, and they both stayed temporary, and they both came off at the time we said they'd come off, and they were not renewed. Okay? So—

DePue: Well, I don't think that's true for the second one, Governor, because Edgar campaigned to keep it in place.

Thompson: Yeah, but that's not my campaign; (DePue laughs) it's Edgar's campaign. In any event, if you look at the constituent parts of that tax proposal, everything but the income tax increase and the gas tax increase is an effort to broaden the base. If you're taxing new things, you're broadening the base. Broadening the base is critical to keeping rates low. If we had the service tax in effect today, for example, covering most Illinois services, you wouldn't have 8 percent sales tax rates. They'd be significantly lower.

So, if the gas tax proposal was for, in essence, better roads—and just let me pause at this point. The gas tax argument is like a toll road increase; it happens rarely. Why? Because driving cars is something everybody does. The minute you propose a gas tax increase, you're going to get blowback. So gas tax increases—and this is true of all states—come infrequently, and there's always a lot of fuss when they do it. Even though, at the pump, the most significant factor is the up and down price of the gasoline itself, and a gas tax increase gets lost.

Last week, if you compare the prices out in Buchanan, my house in Michigan, they probably moved twenty, thirty, forty cents in a week, either up or down. They were up when a refinery was closed; they were down when the refinery was reopened. Who's going to see a nine-cent or seven-cent increase in the gas tax when the price of the gasoline, dominated by other forces and forces beyond my control, is moving up and down with that kind of rapidity or at that price level? I mean, we've gone, in the last several years, from \$4.00 gas to \$2.00 gas.

DePue: Well, Governor, I'll tell you who's going to see it, your next political opponent.

Thompson: Of course. But people aren't going to really see it at the pump, especially when it comes every ten years or so. And this is at a time when more people are driving on your roads than ever before in history. So, there's more wear and tear on the roads, and people are driving more economically, because of better mileage. So, the gasoline tax increase suffers a lot of dilution, because they're not filling up as regularly, with better mileage cars, okay? So, the road usage is greater; the gasoline tax resources are lesser, even with an increase, and how are you going to pay for your roads?

People want more roads, new roads, not just repaired roads, and you're in a freeze-thaw state. You're not Arizona, where you don't get any snow and freezing temperatures, so their highways are pristine. The last time I was in Arizona, it was just a wonder to drive Arizona highways. You think, There's no breaks; nothing's broken. It's like this road was just poured. But we're in freeze-thaw Illinois, and we take a terrific punishment on our roads. Yet people expect the best roads possible and the greatest amount of road mileage possible, but they don't want to pay for it. So you're stuck.

DePue: I want to go back to—

Thompson: I love my gas tax argument.

DePue: It was well-rehearsed, Governor! (both laugh)

Thompson: It's been given a lot of times! I guarantee you.

DePue: Here's my curiosity for 1987.

Thompson: So what happened in 1987?

DePue: Before we get to what happened, the economy is on the upswing. Things are going well. The inflation rate is down quite a bit. The unemployment rate is down a lot. There's more people who are paying taxes. There's more revenue coming in.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: So why in 1987, suddenly, is there a need for a \$1.6 billion increase in taxes, when you've got more coming in in the first place?

Thompson: Well, did you want the state of Illinois to stand still? That's the argument you're making. Do you want to confine the services to the people of Illinois to what existed then, or do you want to better your services?

DePue: Well, that's the political discussion, isn't it?

Thompson: It certainly is.

DePue: Here's what you were quoted as saying. This was in a *SJR* article. Jeff Brody is the author of the article, but he paraphrased you as saying something to the effect that, "We want to send Illinois backward at just the time it's poised to move strongly into the future?"

Thompson: There you go. That's a pretty good quote.

DePue: And that's why we started today with a discussion about what you saw for the future, in terms of your vision and services and things like that. What did you do, in terms of trying to sell this, because let's face it, Governor, this kind of tax increase was not going to be popular.

Thompson: Yeah, okay. So I probably did what I traditionally did, went around the state.

DePue: You went around the state?

Thompson: I did editorial boards en masse; I did radio interviews; I did television interviews; I did speeches to Rotary and other community organizations, where leaders of public opinion could be found. I probably endlessly harangued the legislators themselves, sent my cabinet on the road, my staff on the road. We tried selling it.

DePue: How effective was taking the message on the road and your idea of the strategy, when you really have to convince legislators?

Thompson: Yeah, I know. But, look, and I'm not alone on this; every other governor that succeeded me in Illinois...All governors fall victim to the notion that—

DePue: Well, presidents too.

Thompson: Presidents too. I mean, look at Obama. He's out there on the road for this, and he's out there on the road for that, and he's got his prop audiences behind him. We all fall victim to the notion that, by God, if everybody out there could just hear our silver tongues, they'd demand that their legislature pass all these tax increases. That's what we think, okay?

It doesn't really work. But we feel that's our obligation, to go to the people of Illinois, who are going to receive all these services that the taxes will pay for, and try and persuade them that this program is in their best interest, and then hope, in a subsidiary way, that they'll contact their legislators and say, "You know what? The governor's right. We need to do this." I think it's more hope than reality. You're right; this has all got to be negotiated in the legislature. You've got to persuade the Four Tops¹⁰ that this is something we need done. You've got to get their constituency groups... Look, if you get the road builders in there, banging on the legislature, it's a lot more important than to have the Rotary call them up.

DePue: You mean the Bill Cellinis of the world?

Thompson: Yeah, absolutely, every road-building company out there. They're all over the state and their subsidiary suppliers. So it's the people who supply the asphalt, that supply the concrete, the people who have the machines to build the roads; it's the contractors; it's the labor unions, who unionize those road-building employees. You could persuade them to go bang on the legislature.

And the gasoline tax, with a promise of a big road-building program that is supported by the tax, usually it's pretty effective in sending a lobbying group from that industry, down to the legislature, and they're pretty persuasive people.

DePue: When you talked before about the kinds of things you wanted to have government do better before, it included things like education.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And public welfare and DCFS and the whole litany of other different kinds of agencies that had a different constituency, as well.

Thompson: Well, they have persuasive lobbyists. If in you, in your assignment of revenues to elementary and secondary education, pick up the support of the teachers, then the IEA [Illinois Education Association] is down there, then the IFT [Illinois Federation of Teachers] is down there, then the Chicago Public Schools are down there. [It's the] same with the colleges and the university systems. They not only have union forces, but they've got a lot of alumni. So,

¹⁰ The structure and political makeup of the Illinois General Assembly led to the institution of a four-leader system that includes the majority and minority leaders of both chambers, known since the 1980s as the Four Tops.

https://books.google.com/books?id=eLJZSWMzkr8C&pg=PA102&lpg=PA102&dq=what+were+the+four+top+s+in+Illinois+legislature&source=bl&ots=5PKgzcsqg4&sig=vAy2d_1O3T_rNOSn8Xv1hEZGA44&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjM04LDqPXUAhVr6oMKHeSoB2oQ6AEIPDAF#v=onepage&q=what%20were%20the%20four%20tops%20in%20Illinois%20legislature&f=false

there is community support that can be generated for parts of a program, even for taxes.

But at the same time, governors want to believe that they can persuade everybody to see that, by God, they're right, and this is what we ought to do. So we go beyond the lobbyists and the unions and the people who can really influence legislative decisions, and we go to the Rotary, and we go to the community organizations, and we go to the press, because we think that's part of our job.

DePue: I want to bring the focus now onto the legislature. And here's the outsider's view of the way I think this should have worked for you in 1987. Let's start with this, the fact that both the House and the Senate were controlled by the Democrats, correct?

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: And a comfortable margin of control.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Not a supermajority, but a comfortable margin.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: I would think that, under the normal universe, the way the universe is supposed to be organized, Republicans would have been the ones who were resisting these tax increases, and the Democrats would have been in favor of them.

Thompson: Normally, that's true.

DePue: So now, let's take it one at a time here and start with the Senate Republicans and start in the Senate with Pate Philip.

Thompson: Well, didn't he sponsor these increases? I think he did.

DePue: I think he wanted something in return.

Thompson: Oh, I'm sure he did. But he sponsored them. A Republican governor has to have, at least in the beginning of the process, a Republican sponsor in the House and Senate, for the program. Democrats are not going to do that, right off the bat, for the governor. The Democrats are going to have to be **dragged** to the table, and the governor's going to have to pay a **terrible** price, you know, and then, in the end, they'll sponsor the bill.

DePue: So was Pate Philip eager to do that for you?

Thompson: No, he was not eager. Not at all.

DePue: Here's what I understand the conditions were for him to do that, more state funding for GOP areas, changes in workers' compensation laws—

Thompson: I don't know what that means, more state funding for GOP areas.

DePue: I imagine he wanted more money for DuPage County, probably education dollars.

Thompson: Yeah, but you couldn't give just to DuPage schools. You'd have to construct a formula that would have benefitted other schools, as well.

DePue: Here's another one that you've heard plenty in your career, a reduction in property taxes or a cap on property taxes. Those were his conditions.

Thompson: Well, okay.

DePue: At least that's what I read in the papers.

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: How about on the House side? Any resistance from the Republicans on the House side?

Thompson: Well, of course. (laughs) These were not big tax people. Who was the leader, Daniels?

DePue: Lee Daniels at the time.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And here's a little twist on this, Judy Baar Topinka, Republican senator from Chicago suburbs, was critical of your robust increase to your own governor staff, something like a 4.6 percent increase—

Thompson: Oh, of course.

DePue: ...and called it "bloated."

Thompson: Bloated, yeah. How big was the legislative staff at the time? I mean, that's to be expected. Look, that's what the Democrats are doing about the Rauner administration now. They're calling the governor's staff "bloated." Rauner brought in some of these outside experts and paid them big salaries, and there's been a lot of criticism of that. You can make that argument about any place. If you increase the budget for the Department of Transportation by 2 percent one year, somebody's going to say it's bloated; it should have stayed where it was or gone down.

DePue: The thing that occurred to me, 4.6 percent, gosh, that's not too much higher than the inflation rate.

Thompson: Right. So, it's one of those—

DePue: Which I suspect you mentioned at the time.

Thompson: ...perpetual nagging things.

DePue: Let's move to the Democrats, then, and let's start with Phil Rock in the Senate. Was he generally supportive of these tax increases?

Thompson: Yeah, but he probably didn't couch it in terms of support, right off the bat. Phil was the kind of guy who would say, even though he favored it...If he was dealing with me or any Republican governor, he'd say, "I'm willing to listen to any requests of the governor, but they're going to have to prove it to me and prove it to my caucus." There's a set piece for the other party to use when they approach a governor's proposal for a tax increase. Madigan probably said nothing. I don't know.

DePue: That was the last one to mention here, the Democrats in the House.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Mike Madigan.

Thompson: Yeah. They're the biggest spenders, so I thought they'd be favorable, in the end. In the end, because tax increases are negotiated in conjunction with the budget.

DePue: And the budget bills originate in the House?

Thompson: Oh, they can originate anywhere, but in the end, there are going to be conference reports, coming out of a House-Senate committee.

DePue: My understanding is that it was Mike Madigan, in particular, who was opposed to these tax increases in 1987.

Thompson: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

DePue: Do you know why?

Thompson: Did we get the tax increases?

DePue: No.

Thompson: None?

DePue: No.

Thompson: Tax increase didn't pass? Income tax?

DePue: No.

Thompson: You sure?

DePue: Governor, I'll show you this matrix here. Nineteen eighty-seven, I think this is fiscal year '88; we'll have to see. No tax increases at all.

Thompson: Okay. I'm confusing it with another year, then.

DePue: To make a long story short, in 1987, you proposed these tax increases, and it went down. In 1988, you did again; it went down. In 1989—calendar year 1989, dealing with the '90 budget—Madigan changed his mind, and it was approved.

Thompson: Oh, okay. So it was just delayed for two years.

DePue: Do you have any insights in why Madigan was opposed in '87?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Would you agree with this statement, that Mike Madigan was the most powerful legislator in the state?

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: Why?

Thompson: Because he had control of his caucus. If Madigan made an agreement that required the Democrats in the House to vote for it...He never made an agreement without ensuring that his caucus would support it. But increasingly, every year, Democratic legislators in the House became more and more reliant on the funds that the Speaker raised in support of them.

What started in years past, as legislators raising their election or reelection funds in their own district came in the end, for them to get quite sizeable sums from one of the PACs [Political Action Committees] that the Speaker or the president of the Senate raised—and this is true for Republicans, as well—raised...I mean, Mike Madigan probably has three or four different campaign funds going, and it's true of all the leaders.

Leaders became more and more financial supporters of their members. So they had an increase in loyalty to the leader, and it was not just money. The Speaker will send out staff to campaign for members. He'll send five, ten people into a district. That commands loyalty. Now, in the end, are they going to vote against the interest of their own constituents? No, but...And it's not just the Speaker, it's whoever is in the majority. But over the years, it's quite

clear that Madigan has a lasting power. He's been Speaker now, for what, thirty years?

DePue: He assumed the Speaker role, again, in 1983. There were those two years that Ryan was Speaker. Before that, the Democrats had control of the House, but [William] Redmond was there.

Thompson: Okay, thirty-two years. If you're the Speaker of the House for thirty-two years and you raise funds for your members, are you going to get loyalty? Yes. Can you control your caucus? Yes. Can you ask them for their votes? Yes. So yeah, [he was] the most powerful legislative leader.

DePue: From your perspective, then, was Mike Madigan motivated more by crafting policy or by maintaining his majority, in other words, political rationale?

Thompson: Maintaining his majority. I don't think anybody today would quarrel with that, and they wouldn't quarrel with that then. It's how he has gained power. And when you gain power, you're able to deliver things that you might not deliver if you don't gain power.

Look, in my fourteen years, Mike Madigan was one of the most effective leaders. He didn't agree with me on everything, but he agreed with me on a lot of things. And when he agreed with you, it got done. It was money in the bank. If Mike told you he would deliver a vote on something, he delivered the vote.

Now, Phil [Rock] was the same way, but he had a more rambunctious caucus than Mike did. Minority leaders could usually deliver their minority. Pate [Phillip] was a very effective leader, you know. Pate, who would refer to his members as "my gorillas," "Well, my gorillas aren't going to like that." I said, "Well, Pate, let's go explain it to them." But Pate could deliver. Lee Daniels a little less so, just simply because of the nature of Republican House members. They were more independent.

DePue: They had to run every two years.

Thompson: And they had to run every two years. But if you could get those four to agree with you... If you could get Pate, Lee, Mike and Phil to agree with you, it got done.

DePue: Did you have the sense that Senator Rock would normally follow the lead of Madigan?

Thompson: No. Senator Rock was his own voice, and so was his caucus. Senate Democratic caucuses are more free-spirited, let's say. You remember the horrible fight in '77 between the Crazy Eight and the rest of the Democratic caucus, over who's the leader going to be? It took, what, two months to get a

Senate leader, with me sitting up in the podium every day. That's the Democratic caucus.

DePue: That's how you started your governorship.

Thompson: That's how I started my governorship. It was the most valuable thing I ever did.¹¹

DePue: Well, you went down to defeat in 1987, and that was following the meeting with the Four Tops. We probably have mentioned before in the interview, that's the term that's long been used for the four legislative leaders.

Thompson: Yeah, it's a press term.

DePue: There are a couple of different directions I want to go with this. Let me get this question out first. Why was Madigan opposed, do you think?

Thompson: I frankly don't remember.

DePue: Is it possible he was opposed because he simply wanted to embarrass the governor or show that he had the power?

Thompson: No, I don't believe that.

DePue: Was it possible that he thought his—

Thompson: Look, Mike is a friend of mine. He's a family friend. My daughter designed the *chuppah*, which is the ceremonial tent, at Mike Madigan's daughter's wedding. They were classmates. They're still friends to this day. Shirley Madigan and Mike Madigan have been longtime friends of the Thompson family. So I don't think Mike Madigan was out to embarrass me as governor. If he was, maybe it was for a day.

DePue: Was he concerned that some of his swing districts might be hurt, if they had a Democrat who voted for the tax increase?

Thompson: Maybe. Hey, the care and feeding of his members was his primary obligation. I understand that.

DePue: Do you remember anything about that particular caucus?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Can you just kind of paint a picture for me, what it was like in those caucuses, especially when it dealt with the budget issue.

¹¹ For a similar view of the importance of this experience, reference Jim Fletcher's interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 24, 2015.

- Thompson: You know, I didn't really get invited to the House Democratic caucus.
(laughs)
- DePue: No, I'm sorry, not a caucus, the meeting with the Four Tops is what I meant.
- Thompson: Oh, yeah, the legislative leaders?
- DePue: Yeah. Typically at the mansion?
- Thompson: Maybe at the mansion, but more often in my office in the Capitol, or we did one-on-ones. I would be what I used to call myself as the "donkey," going between legislative leaders' offices; start with one and then the next one and the next one and the next one. By the time, of course, you got to the last one, they had heard by the jungle drums everything you did in the first three. And they either were pleased or they were not pleased, or they had their own program, and... There are lots of ways to deal with this, individual or in the group. But I thought, by and large, over fourteen years, it was a very effective way to get things done, especially given my understanding of where financial support for legislative members came from.
- Let's take a Madigan, the Speaker's success in getting his members elected or re-elected. If you're a member of the House, and the Speaker has helped finance your campaign and sent people into your districts and done individual favors for you, in terms of bills that you want passed, when he comes and asks for your vote, you're going to give it to him. Or he'll get your vote because he's giving you something else to take back to your district, so you can say, "Yeah, I voted for that, but here's what I got." Whether that's the leader or the governor, or it could be both... So the legislative leadership meetings were in my office, rarely in the mansion. They were rarely in the mansion, because I dragged them out of their offices; whereas in the Capitol, I just went up and down floors. It worked.
- DePue: Can you paint a picture of the dynamics, when you'd have the five of you together? You've got five very different personalities sitting in the room.
- Thompson: Oh, yeah. Well, you made it clear, first of all, that you respected them, and you respected their place in state government, and you weren't asking them to do crazy things and that you recognized that their part in the process was as important as yours. As governor of the State of Illinois, you can't lord it over the Speaker or the president of the Senate or minority leaders. They are very important. You respect their office, and you respect them as a person. And that wasn't hard to do.
- DePue: Who was doing most of the talking in these meetings?
- Thompson: Me, maybe Pate, Phil.

- DePue: Madigan has always had the reputation of being careful when he's talking to the press; he doesn't talk to the press much.
- Thompson: Except lately.
- DePue: He's been more vocal lately, yeah. (Thompson laughs) Was that the case in these meetings, as well?
- Thompson: Well sure. I would say that the vocal people were me and Phil and Pate, basically.
- DePue: The end result, and one of the things you said in the midst of all of this in your appeal to the Senate, you told them, "Okay, if you don't want to do this, come up with a bare-bones budget, or have the courage to ratify a \$1.6 billion tax increase proposal."
- Thompson: That sounds like me. (laughs)
- DePue: Which—
- Thompson: Which, of course they would never do, right? They're not going to give me a bare-bones budget. I've never gotten a bare-bones budget from the legislature, ever.
- DePue: That's what you said in May of '87.
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: And then, when the budget passes, and you didn't get the tax increase, the ball's in your court to do the cutting, right?
- Thompson: Well, the vetoes, yes. It's always in the governor's court.
- DePue: From what I understand, Dr. [William] Mandeville [budget director] found \$390 million in cuts; 5 percent cut across most of the state agencies.
- Thompson: Pretty harsh.
- DePue: I imagine you had almost all of the directors storming over to the office.
- Thompson: Terrified. No, they wouldn't storm the office, they'd just write suicide notes that they just couldn't possibly run their agencies at that level.
- DePue: Three thousand one hundred layoffs?
- Thompson: Hey!
- DePue: And again, Mandeville would have preferred to do that through attrition, but I don't know if you can get there that quick with attrition.

Thompson: You can't. When you cut the size of the state work force, you obviously aim for attrition. But state government [jobs] are good jobs, and people don't attrit easily. They might die, but they don't attrit. A hiring freeze, obviously, you let positions go unfilled.

DePue: Where were most of the state employees working?

Thompson: Probably DCFS [Department of Child and Family Services]. In terms of my agencies? I'd have to say DCFS, DOT [Department of Transportation].

DePue: Corrections?

Thompson: Corrections, yeah, big in corrections.

DePue: State police?

Thompson: Yeah, but not so much.

DePue: It just occurred to me, you have no control over what happens in the secretary of state's office, do you?

Thompson: Right. No.

DePue: Or attorney general's office?

Thompson: Right. There wasn't a single time where they ever followed any request of mine (DePue laughs) to do something with their budget, please. You [can] throw the legislature in there too.

DePue: Yeah, how about that?

Thompson: Yeah, how about that?

DePue: And then in September, you vetoed something like eighty-four bills.

Thompson: There you go.

DePue: Which you claimed were going to save \$378 million. Some of that was for elementary and secondary education.

Thompson: That's where the money is.

DePue: Although you couldn't hire or fire anybody.

Thompson: Right, but you could compel other people to hire and fire. Look, it sounds silly to say it, but you can't spend more than you have. I know the federal government is a bad example. But they decide what they're going to spend, then they decide how much they can raise, and then they borrow the difference. That's the federal government. That's why we have a deficit, eight

trillion, or whatever the hell it is. But in the state government, you first have to decide how much you'll have, how much you'll raise. And then you can decide, from that figure, what you can spend, or ask for a tax increase to cover the difference. It's simple.

DePue: We've already discussed that you went across the state; you talked to various groups; you pressed hard in the legislature; you pulled the Four Tops together; you tried a variety of different approaches to push this through. And you went down to a pretty resounding defeat.

Thompson: There you go.

DePue: And the pundits said, at the time, that this was, perhaps, your biggest defeat, politically, that you'd had in your administration. Would you agree with that?

Thompson: You could say that, in terms of what I proposed, what I didn't get was, what, 1 billion, 700 million worth? That's pretty big. But I came back the next year, and I came back the following year. You know, it's never final in state government. (laughs) There's never a final defeat or victory.

And when a governor vetoes a budget, now constituent requests, aimed at the legislature, they grow. If the governor shuts the money off, because it's not there, and that injures people in a legislative district—either vendors or local community groups or local schools, or whatever it is—then their pressure is on the legislature, not on the governor. I mean, they can't pressure me, after I vetoed a bill. So maybe that's a more effective way than all my speeches out there, huh? (DePue laughs) to get constituent support.

DePue: To bring up a subject that we've talked about a couple times before, but one that I want to introduce again, because it's so much a topic of discussion today, that's pension payments. Where were you at in pension payments for the '87 or '88 timeframe?

Thompson: I don't remember the years. But I probably skipped a couple of years.

DePue: No, I didn't see that. I had the legislative research unit put together this listing of how much the state was actually paid each year, how much they were required to pay by statute, and how much they were required to pay by actuarial standards.

Thompson: Yeah?

DePue: We talked before about '83. It was pretty low in '83. It was higher—

Thompson: You mean the payment?

DePue: The payments.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: It was higher for all five of the payments in '88, and the '87 budget would have been for the '88 fiscal year.

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: For SURS, State University Retirement [System], 30.4 percent. So not—

Thompson: That was the funding level?

DePue: That was the funding level, still very low in that respect.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Teacher retirement system, 45.6 percent, higher than the university was getting, but I'm sure the teachers, if they would hear, would say, "But we weren't in Social Security, so we were much more dependent on that."

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: So, still not nearly enough.

Thompson: And university people probably served longer than elementary and secondary.

DePue: Yeah, I think that's a very safe bet. SERS, S-E-R-S, is the system that I'm in, State Employees [Retirement System], 55.5 percent.

Thompson: Not bad.

DePue: So, quite a bit better in that respect.

Thompson: What was the General Assembly?

DePue: Governor, the General Assembly was 83 percent.

Thompson: There you go!

DePue: And the judges got 55.8 percent.

Thompson: God bless the General Assembly pension fund, of which I was a member. That's my fund. Crazy [Dan] Walker took the governor out of the General Assembly and put him in the state employee pension fund, as a populist gesture, which means that governors would have to work **thirty years**—far past my record—to get their pension. But I put them back.

DePue: That's for 1988. But I brought it in today, because you and I discussed that yesterday, and I'm afraid to say that I think that the Thompson administration does have part ownership of this problem.

Thompson: I'm sure that's right. But, you know, there are two ways to look at that. Was the failure to make, in a given year, the required pension payment, due to severe problems in the state budget— Were we in a recession? Was unemployment high? Were revenues low? Did the payments to the pension fund have to help support state government in the same way that reduced funding for everything else [that] had to support the state government?

Or was this a good year, but the legislature decided they wanted to spend a whole bunch of money? You have to look at that. I don't think my administration routinely took advantage of lower pension payments. That's my recollection anyway. It would be a one-off transaction.¹²

DePue: Who would have more fingerprints on this decision? Would it be the legislature, or would it be your budget office?

Thompson: It'd be the legislature, sure. All you have to do is look at the level of their funding.

DePue: (laughing) Next couple of questions now deal with Chicago politics. April eighth, Harold Washington is reelected mayor of Chicago. So he would have been—

Thompson: April 8, '87?

DePue: Eighty-seven. He would have been elected the first time around in '83.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: How would you describe your relationship with Mayor Washington?

Thompson: Cordial, for the most part. It was a different relationship than I had with Mayor Byrne.

DePue: More cordial?

Thompson: Well, Byrne—

DePue: You had the RTA [Roads and Traffic Authority] issue during Byrne's time, did you not?

Thompson: Yeah. And we had the Crosstown Expressway, almost \$3 billion of federal money to divide between the two of us. So that was pretty cordial. She's a different personality than Washington. Washington was the leader of a

¹² A view shared by Thompson's budget director, who thought the administration "switched from an actuarial calculation to a payout calculation" for FY1982 to preserve \$100 million in education funding. (Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 20, 2014, 238-239)

movement. Jane Byrne was not the leader of a movement; Jane Byrne was the snowstorm mayor.

DePue: But you indicated yesterday that there were definitely racial tensions in the Chicago City Council.

Thompson: There were. I don't think that played as much in my dealings with the mayor as the mayor's dealings with the aldermen.

DePue: Sure.

Thompson: Of course, that was not my problem. But as I say, Washington was an old-school politician, who was the leader of a movement. He had overcome the fierce opposition of the Chicago City Council, and he was his own man.

Byrne came from a different place. She worked for Mayor Daley, and then she ran for mayor, at a time when the city had been paralyzed by a snowstorm, and the mayor, Mayor Bilandic, went on television and said, "Things are fine. Streets are open, the L's running," when things were not fine. And it was a revolt, rare in the Democratic Party in Chicago, but a revolt. That's how she was elected. So she was not in the same category as a movement mayor like Washington. And our personalities sort of meshed; she was a dealmaker—

DePue: Washington was?

Thompson: No, no, Byrne. I was a dealmaker. Hell, there was a time when, once in a while, when I would request something in the House, and Madigan would say no, or he would get on a program that I was opposed to, I could call up Mayor Byrne, and she would call her legislative leader, as opposed to Madigan's legislative leader, and get some support for my position, as opposed to Madigan, in the Democratic House. So that was the kind of relationship I had with her. She had her needs; I had mine.

Washington was a different sort of fellow. But I got along with Washington, even though I had prosecuted him. You've got to add that into the mix. When I was U.S. attorney, he was indicted for failure to file income tax returns, for his entire life.

DePue: Tough to say you just overlooked it.

Thompson: Yeah, tough to say that. I found myself in court one day, demanding that he go to jail. And Judge J. Sam Perry, a Democrat from DuPage County, who was a real softie, said, "Oh, it's just failure to file; it's not income tax evasion. We've only charged three years." I said, "Yeah, but Judge, he's never filed, never ever." Well, Judge Perry didn't send him to jail.

Later in Washington, I got down to Springfield; Washington was in the legislature, and together with he and Doc Shapiro, the Republican Senate leader, we crafted an Illinois Human Rights Act, passed it. It was one of my successes. It was one of my Washington's successes. So, when he became mayor, we had that history. But I respected the office; I respected him. He had done a significant political achievement. So, our relations were, I would say, cordial.

I only had one disagreement with him, and it was over political patronage. I wanted to reappoint a member of the Port Authority. He objected to it. Under that statute, the mayor had to sign off. And he wouldn't do it; he wouldn't sign off. So I said, "Okay, fine. The statute also provides that the member serve until his successor is selected and sworn in. That's my selection. So, if you never approve, Mr. Mayor, it's okay with me, because he's still in the seat."

Then, the next time a vacancy occurred at the CTA in Chicago, and he made an appointment, and I had to approve it, I said, "No." He said, "What do you mean, no?" I said, "My guy, your guy." So he eventually approved of my guy, and I approved of his guy. Or I think it was his gal, whatever it was. That's the only time I had any real disagreement with him, and it was minor, because I got what I wanted anyway.

DePue: November twenty-fifth, do you remember hearing the news that Mayor Washington had died?

Thompson: Yes. It was an extraordinary event in the political life of the city, when the leader of a movement dies, and when the mayor of the city of Chicago dies in office.¹³ So...I spoke at his funeral.

DePue: You've mentioned several times that he was the leader of a movement.

Thompson: He was.

DePue: Describe the movement for me.

Thompson: The black movement in the city of Chicago, gaining political power. I mean, we had a couple of temporary black mayors, members of the City Council who took over on the death of a mayor, after Daley died in office. But—

DePue: But Daley normally had the support of the black districts, the black wards.

Thompson: Oh, yeah, yeah. That's why I say, when Daley died, there were black members of the City Council, who were elected by the Democrats in the City Council to the position of interim mayor. We had one or two blacks who were interim

¹³ On the scramble to replace Washington, see Arnold Kanter, interview by Mike Czaplicki, (December 17, 2009, 32-39).

mayors of Chicago, until the election. So Washington was the first popularly-elected black mayor of Chicago.

DePue: One other question here for 1987—I'm not sure when this would have passed during the year—but I believe there was horse racing legislation. Did you support the restructuring of horse racing?

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: What didn't occur at that time is what's been pushed, I think, for many years after that, putting slot machines in the race tracks.

Thompson: Yeah, that came after me.

DePue: Much of the critique that the horse racing industry has about what's happened in the last twenty or thirty years, to include some of your years, is that, as opportunities for gambling increased, their revenues decreased.

Thompson: Their revenues decreased, because their patrons died. If you looked at the stands at the horse racing tracks, during races, and you came out with the median age, it was much higher than at football games, baseball games or other popular entertainments. Young people didn't really go to the race tracks, and their patrons started dying.

DePue: Especially if they had the option of going to riverboats or playing the lottery.

Thompson: Well, yeah. That too, that hurt the tracks. But it was a dying industry, in terms of the median age of the patrons.

DePue: It looks like it's time to take a break.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Okay, Governor, we're back again.

Thompson: It's fair to say that I was a big fan of the horse racing industry and tried to support them with state action, where I could. I wasn't personally involved, like Jim Edgar, being a horse owner and devoted horse person.¹⁴ But one of my greatest friends in both politics and otherwise was Dick Duchossois, who owned Arlington. When Arlington burned down one year, I was right there the next day. But they had a double problem. They had a declining fan base, because of age, and they had competition from the boats; they had competition from the casinos, the land-based casino in Wisconsin, which was an Indian casino, and in Indiana, which were regular casinos.

¹⁴ See Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue (November 18, 2010, Volume V: 1013-1021).

Horse racing money, patrons of horse racing money, is a discretionary spend, and discretionary spend moves around. It can be movies; it can be baseball games; it can be gambling; it can be a lot of things, depending on the desires of the patrons who have the money. And horse racing had a lot of tough, economic competition.

DePue: Governor, believe it or not, we've been at it for over two hours already.

Thompson: Oh, boy, I'm just warming up.

DePue: Now we're into 1988. Rather than trying to rush through 1988, which should go quite a bit faster, but it also will involve one of, I think, your favorite stories or subjects, which is White Sox Stadium—

Thompson: Oh, boy!

DePue: ...I recommend we defer that whole conversation for next time.

Thompson: Yeah, that's fine.

DePue: And I can't wait to hear it!

Thompson: Oh, White Sox Stadium was one of my shining moments! (laughs) Where the Speaker was in lock-hip with me.

DePue: A different kind of story than today's, then.

Thompson: Different kind of story, indeed.

DePue: Something to look forward to. Thanks, Governor.

(end of transcript #20)

Interview with James Thompson

IST-A-L-2013-054.21

Interview # 21: October 27, 2015

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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

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.

DePue: Today is Tuesday, October 27, 2015. This is Mark DePue, director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm with Governor Thompson today for our twenty-first session.

Thompson: (laughs) Don't say that; it makes me tired.

DePue: We're over forty hours here, and we're not done with your administration yet.

Thompson: Wow.

DePue: And there's a lot I want to cover after that. We're up to 1988, which in a couple respects was a memorable year, and maybe in a couple respects, the years just kind of blurred together. In this respect, it might be a case that blurred together, but I wanted to start with a little discussion about the 1989 budget.

Your budget proposal that year came in February. You proposed a budget of \$22.2 billion, which was up only \$80 million from the 1988 budget, so this was the '89 budget, obviously, that you're talking about. But it's up \$1.5 billion from what was appropriated, so, a rare year. In the 1988 fiscal year, you recommended \$22.13 billion, and the actual appropriation was only \$20.77 billion. Most years, it was higher, and a lot of years it was significantly higher, the budget you proposed.

Thompson: So the legislature cut it down?

DePue: The legislature cut it down.

Thompson: Amazing.

DePue: And as you'll recall, the '88 budget, which you discussed in '87, was the first year you were trying to get an income tax increase.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Didn't get it, so obviously there were some major adjustments that had to occur. I suspect you used some line item vetoes.

Thompson: Yeah, probably. The problem with line items, though, is they can be overridden by majority vote. Is that right? It's not three-fifths, I don't think.

DePue: I'd have to check the constitution. You've got me on that one, Governor.

Thompson: Wait a minute. I know I've got that wrong. Line item is three-fifths; reduction vetoes are majority, overridden, which is why you rarely use the reduction. You just take it out, period, because the same majority that voted for the appropriation in the first place can override you on a reduction.

DePue: And how about amendatory vetoes?

Thompson: That takes three-fifths to override you.

DePue: That was always a bone of contention with some, that you, as governor, were abusing your powers on the amendatory veto.

Thompson: Well, not with some, with one. (laughs)

DePue: Who was the one?

Thompson: The Speaker.

DePue: Mike Madigan.

Thompson: He got tired of my amendatory vetoes, which came with a fair amount of frequency. I mean, I was, let's say, generous in my interpretation of and use of the amendatory veto. But the remarkable thing is that half the time, the amendatory veto was done in conjunction with the sponsor of the bill, who, after I would propose an amendatory veto, but before I did it, you'd talk to the sponsor and say, "Look, we think this bill can be improved by this language," and they would agree. So it was not just a forced march by the governor through the legislature, casting aside legislation with amendatory vetoes.

Now, I will say that sometimes I used the amendatory veto in a much more striking fashion. Even then, there was rarely disagreement from the legislature. But the Speaker decided one fine day that my interpretation of how far the amendatory veto went was different than his, and he decided to curb the use of it in the House. [He] didn't have the same issue in the Senate, as I recall.¹⁵

¹⁵ The Illinois Supreme Court has held that governors may not use the amendatory veto power to replace legislation with wholly new bills. But rather than mark a bright line between permissible use and unconstitutional substitution, the court has reserved the power to judge amendatory vetoes on a case-by-case basis. (See Joe R. Ourth, "The Illinois Amendatory Veto: Defining and Enforcing the Limits," *University of Illinois Law Review* (1987): 691-729 for a detailed discussion of court rulings on this power, Thompson's frequent use of it, and the unresolved constitutional issues the power raises. Also see Dawn Clark Netsch, interview by Mark DePue, July 30, 2010, Volume I: 133-138; Ann Lousin, interviews by Mark DePue, September 6, 2013, and November 22, 2013; Mary Lee Leahy, interview by Mark DePue, April 23, 2008, 51-52; Jim Reilly, interview by Mark DePue, August 10, 2009, 35-36; Richard Carlson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 9, 2015.)

DePue: A couple of follow-up questions then. Do you have any examples of when you used the amendatory veto that Madigan thought was a bit abusive?

Thompson: No, I don't remember. I don't remember the particular bills that he characterized, because some of my amendatory vetoes, which were significant...I mean, there was a tax bill that I amended to completely reverse the meaning of the statute. It was adopted by the legislature, without any controversy. I think, if truth be told, the Madigan opposition stemmed from just a general feeling on Mike's part that governors shouldn't have that much power.

He was a delegate at the Constitutional Convention which adopted the amendatory veto, and maybe his understanding of it was different than mine. He's a legislator; I'm a governor, so that wouldn't be unusual. The first thing he did was to adopt a rule, which he would use as cover for not agreeing with an amendatory veto. But oftentimes, he'd just refuse to call the bill, in which event the bill was vetoed. So no, it wasn't as injurious to me as it was to the sponsor of the bill, because his bill was gone, and he might have agreed with me, but the Speaker said otherwise.

DePue: I'm confused now, Governor.

Thompson: Yes, sir?

DePue: First of all, do you know roughly when Madigan changed the procedures? Was that early in your administration?

Thompson: No, later, much later.

DePue: And when you say he just refused to call the bill. But you wouldn't be using an amendatory veto until after a bill was passed in the House and Senate and came to you to sign.

Thompson: Right, but if I amended it, it went back to the legislature. So if he refused to call it, when it went back, with the amendment, the bill was dead.

DePue: Why wouldn't it be the case that the bill was implemented with the amendatory veto in place?

Thompson: No, no, because the legislature has to approve an amendment. They get a second chance.

DePue: So that's in conjunction with the constitution, as well?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: I know from talking to Senator Netsch and others about the use of the amendatory veto, they had the notion that it was to clean up language when there were language issues or there were grammatical issues in the bill.

Thompson: That's true. That was one of the reasons, yes.

DePue: Well, that was what they thought primarily was the reason.

Thompson: Well, in the very few instances where my amendatory veto was challenged in court, I prevailed. So my more sweeping view of the amendatory veto, contrary to the view of Senator Netsch and others, was sustained by the Illinois Supreme Court. And, as I say, 90 percent of the time, accepted by the General Assembly, when it went back, and accepted by the sponsor of the bill.

There were a number of occasions where sponsors came to me before I acted on the bill and said, "Ah, would you change this bill to do A, B or C?" And if I agreed with them, I'd say, "Okay." So it wasn't at my instigation; it was at their request.

DePue: When you say "sponsors of the bill," are you talking about legislators?

Thompson: Yeah, legislators.

DePue: How about lobbyists?

Thompson: I don't remember that many requests from lobbyists on the amendatory veto. That would have been unusual, because they're not a part of the formal process.

DePue: So the way it would work is, the lobbyists would go to a legislator to advance their agenda?

Thompson: They could.

DePue: Let's go back to 1988 and the discussion about the 1989 budget. And now, for the second year in a row, you're going to be requesting a tax increase from the legislature. That year, you wanted to raise income taxes from 2.5 to 3.5 percent and corporate tax from 4 to 5.6 percent. So, in other words, a 40 percent rise.

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: Why? What was it that was out of balance in the budget that you wanted to improve?

Thompson: Revenue.

DePue: For any particular agenda, policy issue?

- Thompson: Times were just tighter. And you've got to start with the premise, look, nobody likes a tax increase. Nobody likes to propose one. But the fact was that at, what, 2.5 percent for individuals? When I proposed an increase that year, that was one of the lowest taxes in America, in terms of a state income tax. Very, very few, if any, states had a lower income tax than that, so there was room, if you looked at the situation vis-à-vis other states. So, you were not threatening the loss of business or economic activity by somebody who says, "Well, that income tax is too high; I'll just go to another state," because it was higher in that other state.
- DePue: Well, there's certainly plenty of states at that time, as there are today, that had no income tax.
- Thompson: No, very few, very, very few, Florida, New Hampshire, a couple of others.
- DePue: Texas, Alaska.
- Thompson: Texas, yeah, Alaska. Look, the chances of Illinois businesses moving to some of those states were remote, at best.
- DePue: Normally the equation was, what's your competition in the other Midwestern states?
- Thompson: Right. And they were all higher. Our border states were higher.
- DePue: But what was it that was going on in the economy or the situation in Illinois at the time, that you needed it?
- Thompson: I don't really remember in '88, but it would have had to have been the general economy of the state, because your two drivers of state revenues are the income tax [and] sales tax.
- DePue: Was part of it a desire to improve the situation with education, since Illinois had always been paying a fairly low percentage for school districts?
- Thompson: That's probably part of it.
- DePue: Do you recall hitting the stump and going around the state trying to encourage an income tax increase?
- Thompson: Sure. (laughs) Governors are always in love with the idea that, if they just get out there and make ten more speeches to the Rotaries around the state, by God, the constituents will go hammering on their legislators to raise taxes. It doesn't work, but it's part of the job to try and educate people in your state as to what you think the state needs. But I can't ever remember an instance where I asked for something like that, and then went on the stump in support of it, where it happened. Those kinds of agreements or instances, in which

taxes are raised for a specific or general purpose, involve legislative activity, not political activity.

DePue: But you had to do it anyway, you thought?

Thompson: We had to do it anyway, yeah, sure.

DePue: How was it received, when you went out to these civic groups?

Thompson: Oh, people would nod. And the local newspaper might, in reporting the speech or in an editorial a day or two later, might be complimentary. But that's where it stopped.

DePue: Did you get any pushback, going to some of these places?

Thompson: No, not really. People were very kind to their governor.

DePue: June twenty-ninth comes, and a headline, "The Tax Hike is Dead." I want to read a little bit of this one. This is from Tim Franklin, the *Chicago Tribune*. "Governor Thompson on Tuesday pronounced his proposed \$1.3 billion income tax increase dead, a casualty that could mean higher property taxes, rising college tuitions, and little new money for the social services. Thompson blamed the tax increase demise on his chief nemesis"—

Thompson: There you go.

DePue: ... "House Speaker Michael Madigan, in what likely marked the beginning of an orchestrated effort to target the Speaker for the state's budget woes." Then way down further into the article, it says, "Madigan was the only one of the four legislative leaders who flatly opposed raising the tax," which means that Phil Rock would have been either a supporter or kind of waiting to see how things sorted out.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So what were Madigan's motives, did you think? This is the second time he's done this to you. You're a Republican governor; Republicans, especially in that era of American history, were supposed to be against taxes. You're proposing a tax increase, and the most powerful Democrat in the state is standing in your way.

Thompson: He wasn't ready for it yet. I think Mike's beliefs about the position of the legislature, the position of the Speaker's office, would sometimes lead him to say, "If I'm not ready for it, it's not going to happen." He was and is a very powerful Speaker. He's been there a long time. He has his members firmly aligned with him.

When the financing of legislative races changed significantly during his speakership so that large sums of money were raised by the leaders and given to the members for their campaigns, obviously the return favor is, you do what your leader says. That's neither bad nor good; it's just a fact of the legislative process. But, for whatever reason, he wasn't ready. On other occasions, he would initiate and pass tax increases without warning.

DePue: That's 1989. We'll get to that.

Thompson: It just shows that you have to persuade him. And if you haven't persuaded him, it doesn't happen.

DePue: But there must be more reason than just he's not ready for it. Can you articulate why he wouldn't have been ready for it?

Thompson: No, I can't.

DePue: I'm going to ask you to ascribe motives to Mike Madigan, then. I guess that's what I'm pressing here.

Thompson: I'm not sure I know.

DePue: What was his driving motive?

Thompson: To demonstrate the power of the Speaker's office in the relationships in state government, executive versus legislative.

DePue: We probably have already discussed this before, but do you think he was more motivated by politics or by policy?

Thompson: It could be a combination of both, at any given time. I don't think it was personal to me, because we did a lot of deals together in the fourteen years that I was there. He was, in many instances, a dependable ally. So I can't probe too deeply on Mike's motives on any particular piece of legislation, because he doesn't talk a lot about his motives. (both laugh)

DePue: I'll let you off the hook there, and we'll move on. You don't get the income tax increase, but the budget is passed, and you're going to get a sizeable increase. June ninth, the legislature offers up a \$1.3 billion increase, I believe. So in 1989, the budget wasn't quite that high. It was about \$700 million more in actual appropriations, versus the budget that you had requested.

Thompson: I hope they sent the money along with it.

DePue: And that will wait until we get to the 1990 discussion and '91. Here's one I think you probably will recall. June twenty-second, the legislature passes a bill, which Jim Edgar certainly would have been proposing and backing. That

was requiring motorists to have auto insurance.¹⁶ In some circles, that was a hot button topic.

Thompson: Auto insurance?

DePue: Yeah. You don't recall anything—

Thompson: No. It certainly wasn't as hot button a topic as seatbelts or helmets or things of that sort.

DePue: Or DUI percentages?

Thompson: Well, DUI percentage arguments changed with time. As more publicity was given to DUI incidents, and outside organizations—MADD—became more organized, larger, more vociferous and got more publicity, which was good.¹⁷ But I don't remember auto insurance being that much of a hot button issue.

DePue: You mentioned one that I've been curious about here recently. I think you and I have discussed the seatbelt issue, and people get upset about that.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: I believe it was last time, you talked about a woman in southern Illinois someplace?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: So why did seatbelt legislation go through, but the state of Illinois still doesn't have a helmet law for motorcycles?

Thompson: I don't know. I think probably because seatbelts have a wider application. Every car, by then, was equipped with seatbelts. So the purpose of the law was to get people to use them, whereas motorcycles didn't come equipped with helmets.

There's a little bit of [an] individual choice element on motorcycles that you didn't see as much in cars and seatbelts. In the first place, there weren't that many motorcycles, especially in comparison to cars. And it may have been an attitude of, well, if those crazy people want to go riding on a motorcycle without a helmet, the only ones who are going to get injured are them. Whereas seatbelts in autos, not only in terms of sheer numbers of automobiles and the multiplicity of passengers in an auto, including children, who really couldn't make independent judgments, I think that was probably the difference.

¹⁶ On mandatory auto insurance. (See Jim Edgar, June 22, 2009, Volume II: 426-430; Al Grosboll, June 4, 2009, 77-80; and Mark Boozell, August 18, 2009, 43-45. All interviews by Mark DePue.)

¹⁷ Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

DePue: Would you have signed a helmet law if it came to your desk?

Thompson: I would have, sure.

DePue: Were you ever advocating for legislation like that?

Thompson: Oh, we probably did, especially through IDOT. But it wasn't as big a deal as autos.

DePue: I know you can talk at some length on the next subject. That is the effort to get funding for a new White Sox stadium.

Thompson: Could talk all day about that one.

DePue: (laughs) And I believe that Jerry Reinsdorf was looking for \$200 million. I'm not sure whether or not you were looking for \$150 million in the legislation. I'll just hand it over to you on that one, Governor.

Thompson: To start, I don't think the dollars were that relevant, whether he wanted two hundred and I wanted one fifty or whatever. If we agreed on the need for a stadium, and if we had broad agreement on what we wanted the stadium to look like, the focus was not on the dollars.

DePue: Before we get back to 1988, I had read someplace that the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority had been created in 1987, in part, so that they could discuss building a new White Sox stadium.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So that was passed before you got into the discussion about the money?

Thompson: Right. There were two attempts... Well, let's go back. Jerry Reinsdorf was a year behind me at Northwestern Law School. So in a broad sense, he was a classmate. I had known him since 1957, maybe. He visited me on several occasions to press the idea of a new stadium. I can recall meeting him in Chicago. He came down to the mansion one time; I think we sat out on the patio one summer and talked about it.

DePue: Was he owner of both the Bulls and the White Sox at this time?

Thompson: He was. Both teams were owned by partnerships, but he was the general partner. So he was in charge of both teams. He, in my view, made a good case for a new stadium. I think, at one time during this time—I don't recall which year, and I don't recall particularly why—I visited the Detroit Tiger Stadium

in Detroit, which was in the same sort of poor condition as Comiskey¹⁸. Stadiums built in the era of Comiskey and Detroit, let's say—

DePue: Nineteen ten for Comiskey, the oldest park in the country at that time.

Thompson: Right. So here's what you had. You had failing infrastructure; the stadiums were sort of coming apart. You had seats behind poles. You had out-of-date, out-of-style infrastructure; let's say the width of the walkway behind the seats where you would find restaurants and stands and things, the causeway, I guess it was.

If, for example, you look at Wrigley Field today, which has got a very narrow causeway, and you look at the new White Sox stadium, which has got a very wide causeway, people can get through more easily to their seats, or they can more readily visit a stand or a restaurant without discomfort.

These teams, at one point, didn't have lights. So with the popularity of night games to boost attendance, you were sometimes missing that amenity. And they didn't have boxes; boxes were a very important part of raising revenue for stadiums. The return on a box versus the return on a single seat, or the equivalent of the number of seats in a box, versus the same number of seats in the stands, was a material difference to stadium owners, or stadium tenants, more precisely.

So a lot of the major league stadiums, at that time, were outliving their usefulness as revenue generators. You also had, at the same time, a rapidly rising cost to team owners, in terms of player salaries.

I can remember Jerry telling me that he remembered the first time they paid a player more than \$1 million for the year. He thought that was the end of baseball. They couldn't possibly survive, paying players \$1 million. Well, today, players get \$150 million contracts. So it's just a radical change in the economics of baseball.

DePue: That they could be free agents, after a period of time. I can't recall—

Thompson: That too; that drove salaries. So the argument went that it had become uneconomic for teams to play in old stadiums. They just couldn't compete with teams that were playing in new stadiums, because the revenue differences were large.

And a lot of times, it was hard for teams in what they call small-market stadiums, Kansas City, to compete with a team in New York or Los Angeles or Chicago. You had that economic factor, as well. When you were

¹⁸ Comiskey Park was a baseball park in Chicago, Illinois, located in the Bridgeport community on the near-southwest side of the city. The stadium served as the home of the Chicago White Sox of the American league from 1910 through 1990.

saddled with an inefficient stadium, the need was very apparent, and I agreed with that.

DePue: But the question, Governor, is why should the state of Illinois be spending that much money on what essentially is a private business?

Thompson: Well, the answer is, we didn't. Look, there are a number of ways to pay for baseball stadiums. The state legislature can pay for it. The city and the state together can pay for it. A city, state and owner can pay for it, each paying a share. There are a lot of different ways to do it.

What we chose to do for the White Sox was to sell bonds, to pay for the stadium. The bonds are retired by the state's share of hotel taxes, not the existing tax, but a new, increased tax. So, on the issue of cost and fiscal responsibility, I was able to make the argument—and I still do today—that the White Sox stadium is being paid for by out-of-towners. In fact, that was a great speech of mine, you know? “We're not paying for this stadium. Out-of-towners, tourists, visitors are paying for this stadium. So I got you a free stadium, Illinois taxpayers.” That's a pretty good deal.¹⁹

There's also a cultural part to it. Baseball teams, like football teams and hockey teams and basketball teams, in my view, enhance a state's culture and attractiveness. A lot of times teams will say, “Oh, we're going to bring X number of dollars to the state and jobs in constructing the stadium; it's a net plus.” Then the economists from the universities come out and say, “Oh, there's very little new state activity,” blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. I don't get into that, never got into that, because it's a useless argument. Nobody will ever agree on that.

But culturally, we had two baseball teams in Chicago, and I would say, “How many other cities in the United States have two baseball teams? Not very many. So, if we can keep two baseball teams, and we can get the stadium paid for by out-of-towners, that's a hell of a deal, a hell of a deal.” While I had to fight for the bill, twice, the cost of it and how the money was going to be raised, to me, wasn't a big issue. And in the end, to the legislature it wasn't a big issue, because they passed the bill.

DePue: You said you fought for it twice.

Thompson: I did.

DePue: Was the first time in '87, for the legislation that set up the authority?

Thompson: Yeah. What happened was, we passed the authority so we'd have a mechanism in place to pass the funding bill. And the first time we tried to pass

¹⁹ On the stadium legislation, including the inadequacy of the initial proposal to back the bonds with a 2 percent increase in the hotel tax. (See Julian D'Esposito, interview by Mike Czaplicki, September 29, 2014, 118-130.)

the funding bill to build the stadium, it was a new proposal and it wasn't an easy fight, because downstaters in the legislature would say, "Eh, what do we care? We're Cardinals fans." True, that's what they'd say.

DePue: So Republican or Democrat, downstaters—

Thompson: Yeah, both; they're Cardinals fans. You get south of I-80, they're Cardinals fans. So they didn't care about a White Sox stadium, and they didn't care whether we had two baseball teams in Chicago. They lived downstate Illinois, and they were Cardinals fans. They went to St. Louis for games.

DePue: Well, there is this area, this kind of purple half-Cardinals and half-Cubs—

Thompson: Yeah, sure, absolutely.

DePue: They're not White Sox fans, once you get past I-80.

Thompson: No, especially over in western Illinois, right?

DePue: You've got a lot of Cubs fans down there, but not White Sox.

Thompson: Yeah, but even in the National League, Cardinals fans outnumbered the Cubs fans [in] downstate Illinois.

DePue: Right.

Thompson: I can recall once when... I don't know whether I told you this story or not, but one year I persuaded Ernie Banks to be the grand marshal of the Illinois State Fair parade. So Ernie came down, stayed at the mansion and walked with me at the head of the parade to open the state fair. A miracle occurred! All these Cubs fans, who kept their lives hidden, in that respect, in downstate Illinois—you just had visions of these fans locking themselves in a room, with their Cubs broadcasts so that the neighbors and friends didn't know—all of a sudden were standing on the street as Ernie Banks came by, and they were wearing Cubs hats. Not a lot, but enough. I pointed that out to Ernie, I said, "See these people? They never in the world would admit that they were Cubs fans, except for you, Ernie. This is a personal tribute to you. They've come out of hiding."

So, we attempted to pass the bill the first time when Harold Washington was mayor. Harold appointed a group of his pals, political supporters, to be the negotiating team for the city of Chicago. And we negotiated and negotiated, and—

DePue: Who were they negotiating with?

Thompson: The legislature. On the last day of that legislative session, when we were trying to pass the bill in the dying hours of the General Assembly, my team

went up to the legislature. I'm looking around, and the Chicago team's not there; they're MIA [missing in action]. So we don't have the push from the city to pass the bill. To pass a bill like this, you've got to have the city on board. Of course they didn't do any work on the bill; they weren't particularly good at getting votes for the bill, but they had to be there to push the bill.

DePue: Was this fight primarily in the House or both?

Thompson: Both. Washington's team finally showed up, as members of the General Assembly were walking out of the Capitol, because the session was over. That's when they showed up. They were coming in the door as the legislature was walking out. So the bill didn't pass.

DePue: And that's obviously '87, because he [Washington] died later that year.

Thompson: Right. So now the next time, with a new mayor...[Eugene] Sawyer, was much more of a practical politician, and he understood the use of leverage. And his people were there on time.

So, we came to that final day of the session; the bill was still sitting there. I had been out in another part of the state—I don't know where it was. I don't know why I was out in another part of the state on the last day of the session. I had been somewhere probably to make a speech or do something—I came back to the Capitol about gosh, I don't know, 4:00 in the afternoon, 5:00 in the afternoon.

DePue: Are we talking '87 or '88 now?

Thompson: The year the bill passed.

DePue: Eighty-eight.

Thompson: I got out of my car in the driveway, walked up the steps of the Capitol. Coming down the steps were Tom Reynolds, who was my future law partner and the guy I had appointed as chairman of the Sports Facilities Authority, and Tim Romani, who part of the Sports Facilities Authority, on the staff. They were downcast. I said, "What's the matter?" They said, "We can't pass the bill."

And at that, after all this planning and working and cajoling, in essence, doing it by ourselves at the state level, I just got, I guess, angry. I walked right from those steps in the Capitol, right up to Pate Philip's office, the Republican leader of the Senate.

DePue: Before you get too much farther into this, you haven't discussed what I've read repeatedly about Jerry Reinsdorf's threat or whatever you want to call it.

Thompson: Oh, sorry, I left that out. It wasn't a threat; it was a fact. He had two teams. St. Pete in Florida had a stadium, already, and a great offer for the White Sox to go there, on great terms. They really wanted the team. Reinsdorf didn't want to go to Florida, for a very simple reason. He was a baseball guy, more than a basketball guy.

If he had to go to Florida with the team, he would have had to sell the Bulls, because he was moving to Florida. He can't run the Chicago Bulls from Florida. If that had happened, we wouldn't have had the six championships with Michael Jordan at all, at least under Reinsdorf's ownership. And who knows who would have bought the team and what they would have done with them? So, while he didn't want to go to Florida, if he couldn't stay in Chicago with a new stadium, he had to go to Florida. And he would have had to sell the Bulls.

So, I told him; I said, "Look, you don't know what's going to happen at this stage. But the Florida offer is a legitimate offer, and you've got to talk about it." It was just part of the mix in selling the legislature on the necessity to do this stadium in Chicago, because there is a competitor in Florida, ready, willing, and able to take the team. So it wasn't any kind of phony threat; it was a real threat. He and I made sure that that was widely known. It was important that the public understood that, the press understood that and the legislature understood that.

So up I go to Pate. Now, Pate didn't really care about the White Sox. At one time, some of the DuPage politicians had talked about moving the White Sox to DuPage County. Pate was never a fan of that. But when I went into his office, I made it personal. I said, "Pate, this is my plan. This is important to me, as it is to the city and the state, in my opinion. You've got to do it for me. You're my leader." And that's an argument that Pate responds to. He's an old-time politician. He knows how to get things done when he's for it; he knows how to make deals. He was a very good legislative leader, because, as he used to say, "I keep my gorillas under control." (both laugh) That was his affectionate term for his caucus, his "gorillas." And they heard it, and they knew it, and they didn't object to that. In fact, I think it made them feel more important, Look at the gorillas sitting there; you've got to get past them.

DePue: Governor, he had just about as colorful a personality as you did.

Thompson: Oh, yeah, no question about it, no question about it. So he said, "All right. I'll help you." What he did was start calling individual senators to his office. He called them off the floor, into his office. He was the leader of the Senate at that time. One by one, he made it clear to the individual senators that the governor wants this, and I'm with the governor. Whatever we had to do—I don't remember much about negotiations with individual senators on what they needed for their district, the typical horse-trading. I don't remember that

much at all in the Senate. It was just more a question of Pate telling these guys.

These are downstate senators who could care less about the White Sox, and the only question was, if they wanted to help the governor, and they wanted to help Pate, would a vote for the White Sox hurt them in their district? They had to make that calculation. We were able to persuade enough Republican senators from downstate to support the bill. It passed in the Senate, with thirty votes, right on the money.

DePue: Just one very minor correction here—I just checked—Phil Rock was still president of the Senate at that time.

Thompson: Was he? But the caucus that needed to be persuaded was the Republican caucus.

DePue: Right.

Thompson: Okay. So it passed with thirty votes, and I think it was about twenty minutes to midnight.

DePue: On the last day of June.

Thompson: On the last day of June. And I had, earlier in the evening, sent my legislative guys to the floor of the House. I said, “Don’t worry about the Senate, Pate and I got that covered. You go to the House, and you start talking to guys in the House from downstate. When I get over to the House, I don’t know what time it’ll be, but I want to see you standing on the floor of the House and pointing to people that I needed to talk to.”

They went over there; [the bill] passed the Senate, and I think this is right; it was twenty minutes to midnight. We were hand-carrying the bill, not the regular legislative process, the bureaucracy of the Senate, you know. Pate grabbed the bill, gave it to me; we went over to the House, gave it to the Speaker, and it was ready to go. My team **was** over there; they **were** stationed on the floor of the House. When I hit the floor, they started pointing to guys they were standing over, saying, “You have to talk to him.” That was a really interesting session. (laughs)

The House members were a little more forward than the Senate members, in what they needed for their vote. Madigan was on the floor. He was working the Democratic side hard, and I was working the Republican side hard. So, it wasn’t the Republican leader over there on the floor; it was me. Both of us, Mike and I, scurried around, grabbing people, cajoling people, arguing with people, promising people. And there were some interesting requests.

The majority leader, Jim McPike, was in the chair. And the later controversy about whether we had gone past midnight or not erupted. McPike

was going by his wristwatch, he said. So when the bill finally passed, he announced that it had passed in time, with sixty votes, right at the bare minimum. The St. Petersburg television cameras were in the balcony. They had flown up all these TV stations from Florida to record this debate and vote on the bill, because they were convinced the bill was dead, like it had been the last time.

DePue: Because they had a different watch.

Thompson: No, they... Well, maybe so. Maybe part of it was the watch, and maybe part of it was the fact that Madigan and I were buzzing around the floor, and that built up the suspense. They just had a belief that their proposal from Florida was the one that was going to carry, right? That's why they were there, to record the defeat of the bill. Otherwise, they wouldn't have bothered.

But between Madigan and I, we got the sixty votes. And after I finished working the Republican side, I went over to the Democratic side to work that too, with Madigan. So that was a quite an unusual site for the legislature, to see the governor and the Democratic Speaker working the Democratic members on that side of the House. It was a wild night.

DePue: What were some of the deals that you had to make?

Thompson: Oh, (laughs) they weren't that heavy. I can remember one, a representative from Peoria, who said he needed a roof for the Veterans Home, because it was leaking. I said, "A roof for the Veterans Home? You mean the rain is falling on the veterans whom we're supposed to be taking care of?" "Yes, Governor, that's right." I said, "Done! Can't leave the veterans out in the rain; that's terrible!" So he changed his vote to aye. [I] went over to another legislator from the western suburbs of Chicago... I think there's a picture of me kneeling by his desk. He said, "I want your support to run for secretary of state." And I said, "Secretary of state? No. Baise is going to be secretary of state." Baise was my candidate for secretary of state.

DePue: Greg Baise?

Thompson: Greg Baise. "Oh," he says, "Oh, well, okay." So he changed to green. There was voting on the bill while we were doing this, so the lights would change as we were successful in changing people's minds.

DePue: So we've got this big board, and the—

Thompson: The big board up there, yeah. That's what the television cameras in the balcony were focusing on too; they were photographing the board and seeing red lights change to green lights.

DePue: Was there a clock on or near the board, as well?

Thompson: Oh, sure.

DePue: They could keep track of the time, as well?

Thompson: Certainly, absolutely. But who knows what kind of shape that clock was in, right? (DePue laughs) And it wasn't up to me; it was up to the presiding officer.

So on the Democratic side, I'm walking up the aisle, and Wyvetter Younge from East St. Louis was sitting at her desk, and her light was red. I said, "Wyvetter, why are you voting red on this bill?" She said, "Oh, Governor, did you want me to vote green?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Okay," and she pressed the green button. So we got a vote out of East St. Louis. She came to my office the next day, and she said, "I forgot to ask you for anything last night." (both laugh) I said, "Well, we'll talk about it, Wyvetter."

DePue: I'm assuming that she was a staunch Democrat.

Thompson: Oh, yeah. Sure, Wyvetter?

DePue: And you can't get much more Cardinals country than from where she came from.

Thompson: Yeah, across the river. Another Madison County Democrat down there, he said, "You know what I need, Governor? I need a arts and crafts center at one of the state parks down there." Now, this was music to my ears! I'd build an arts and crafts center anywhere you'd ask for it. So, I said, "Ah, well, gosh, I don't know; that sounds kind of expensive to me, but you know, maybe so. Maybe we can do that." He changed his vote to green. So, one by one, we got to sixty votes, Mike and I, passed the bill. Florida was despondent!

DePue: I'm curious. With all of this negotiating going on by both Madigan and yourself...and I'm assuming Madigan is making promises as well.

Thompson: I hope so.

DePue: Doesn't all that stuff have to get into the piece of legislation?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Why not?

Thompson: You wouldn't have a new roof for the Veterans Home in Peoria as part of the baseball legislation. That would simply be a section of the annual Capital Bill.

DePue: But doesn't that have to get into the Budget Bill?

Thompson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Which, again, has to be passed before the end of the year, or else you go into the supermajority.

Thompson: I'm trying to remember how we did it. Maybe it was already in the bill, and he wanted my agreement to sign it. That's probably what happened. He got it in the bill, the Capital Bill, and he wanted to make sure that when it came to my desk, I would sign it. That had to be the way it worked.

DePue: It wouldn't be something you deleted as a line-item veto?

Thompson: I could have. And in fact, I did. (laughs)

DePue: But you're not saying that you welched on some of the deals you made on the floor that morning?

Thompson: Yeah! No, just that one.

DePue: Just on which one, now?

Thompson: The roof on the Veterans Home. This is crazy. When the capital bill came to my desk, my legislative staff and budget staff said, "You've got to veto that one." I said, "I can't veto that one. I promised that one on the floor of the House for the White Sox bill." "No, you've got to veto it." I said, "We have the money." They said, "That's not the reason you have to veto it." I said, "What's the reason?" They said, "Because he needs something to ask for next year." I said, "What? You want me to veto this Veterans Home roof that I promised on the floor of the House, so that this legislator will have something to ask for next year for the benefit of his district?" "Yes." I said, "Okay." (laughs) I vetoed it. He was back next year with the request, and I signed it. So it was just a delay. I know it sounds wacky, but that's exactly what happened.

DePue: He didn't come storming into your office?

Thompson: No. No, no, no, no. He had passed something successfully. The governor vetoed it, but by God, he was going to get it next year.

DePue: And in the meantime, the poor veterans are getting wet!

Thompson: They're getting wet, yeah. So, what was promised, at least by me, wasn't that much at all. And I suspect that what Madigan was saying when he came around to his legislators' desks was, "I want this bill." And he didn't have to make any promises.

DePue: Would his promise be, when it comes time for the next election, I'll be able to support you?

- Thompson: He wouldn't even have to say that.
- DePue: That was just understood?
- Thompson: It was understood. All they had to know was that Mike was for this bill. They just wanted to make sure of that, because they saw the governor running around being for the bill. They wanted to make sure the Speaker was for the bill, and that's all he had to say.
- DePue: Why couldn't Lee Daniels do the same kind of thing?
- Thompson: Because Lee Daniels didn't have it within his power to promise these things.
- DePue: He could promise support for the next election, though, from his coffers.
- Thompson: That was understood. Lee Daniels was not going to go threaten legislators with lack of support to vote for the White Sox bill.
- DePue: Because that wasn't his style, or because he didn't have the power to do that?
- Thompson: Why would he do it? It was not a DuPage thing or a downstate thing. It was a Chicago thing. He didn't have any legislators in Chicago.
- DePue: Were there any big pieces that were part of this proposal, as well?
- Thompson: No. This was all personal, on my part and on Madigan's part.
- DePue: So the Arlington Park race course wasn't part of this?
- Thompson: No.
- DePue: That was a separate issue?
- Thompson: It was separate.²⁰
- DePue: Do you recall when that was pushed through, and how much money was involved with that?
- Thompson: No, but horse racing wouldn't have had anything to do with baseball.
- DePue: But was it the same kind of dynamics? You've got the state stepping up to support a race track?

²⁰ For a different recollection that holds that the Sox stadium and Arlington bills were linked politically, a pairing that enabled them to pass the General Assembly. (See Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 27, 2015.)

Thompson: Not the same kind of dynamics, because the horse racing interests in the state were much more powerful than the baseball interests.

DePue: Really?

Thompson: Oh, yeah. Just think about it. You had horse racing throughout the state. You didn't have baseball teams throughout the state. You had a very, very wealthy owner in Chicago, Duchossois, who was extremely connected with the Republican legislators and their leaders, financially, personally. Horse racing had subsidiary businesses attached to it that baseball doesn't have. Feed for the horses is going to come from some farm somewhere in the state, the building and maintenance of race tracks, I mean, it's just a different thing. I didn't have to really push for that.

DePue: This is an aside here, Governor, but I had the opportunity last week to interview Mr. Duchossois about his World War II experiences.²¹

Thompson: Oh, great!

DePue: And he sends his regards.

Thompson: Great! He's a great man. Let me take a break for a second. Hold your thought.

(pause in interview)

DePue: Right after we took a break, I heard the clock chime in the next room over here. I looked at my watch, and it said 11:08.

Thompson: Uh-huh?

DePue: Which brings me to—

Thompson: Uh-huh, there you go!

DePue: ...the issue of the stopped clock. Now, every report I've ever read about this, there seems to be no question that the session extended past midnight. And yet, you were very coy about that.

Thompson: First, because that was not within my power or ability, and it was not part of my function as governor, to decide what time it was in the House of Representatives. I didn't have anything to do with that, nothing I could do about it. It was up to the presiding officer. He announced that, by his watch, it was still before midnight. If he had no faith in the electric clock, that was not my issue.

²¹ Richard Duchossois. (Interview by Mark DePue, October 19 & 20, 2015, Veterans Remember Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.)

- DePue: Do you recall the last vote? The last person who was swayed?
- Thompson: No. All I know is the minute that light changed to green, the presiding officer said, "Take the record!" [He] didn't even do the, "Have all voted who wished? Have all voted who wished? Mr. Clerk, take the record." That took time. So he just said, "Take the record!" Boom!
- DePue: I'm trying to figure out how to phrase my next question—
- Thompson: Go ahead!
- DePue: ...or critique, perhaps.
- Thompson: Go ahead.
- DePue: It was common knowledge, afterwards, the assumption was the clock was stopped so that you and Madigan could work the floor until you got the votes that were needed.
- Thompson: Well, wait a minute. If it was stopped, it certainly wasn't stopped for that period of time.
- DePue: For a couple of minutes, five minutes?
- Thompson: I don't know. I have no idea.
- DePue: My question, though, is that this is the kind of thing I would think would feed the general public's cynicism about politics and the legislative process.
- Thompson: Nothing I could do about that.
- DePue: How much, if any, pushback or grief did you get, because of what happened?
- Thompson: Me?
- DePue: Yeah, you personally.
- Thompson: None. Why would they blame me?
- DePue: Again, there were a lot of reports in the media about that. Was there anything that was really negative or especially critical because of you or the process?
- Thompson: Of me?
- DePue: Of you or the process.
- Thompson: I don't know, maybe there was stuff that was critical of the process, from people who were asked their opinion, if they were bystanders, but certainly not of me, because I didn't control the clock.

DePue: A happier topic for you, Governor—

Thompson: I mean, that was happy. (DePue laughs) In the old days, when they wanted to stop the clock, they just climbed up there and moved the hands back. (laughs)

DePue: So, certainly not the first time it happened?

Thompson: No, not the first time, God, no.

DePue: There is a postscript to this story that happened a couple of decades later, I believe, and I'm going to allow you the opportunity to tell it now.

Thompson: What's that?

DePue: When the White Sox won the World Series.

Thompson: Oh, the World Series. That was really exciting. I don't remember the how or the why, in relationship to the other teams in the league or in baseball for the World Series in 2005, but the White Sox won the American League and then played in the World Series. I'm trying to remember the team we played against. It was—

DePue: Houston Astros.

Thompson: Houston, yeah, Texas. I didn't see any of the games in Texas. I only saw the games in Chicago.

DePue: In the stands?

Thompson: In the stands. In my seats, because I had four season tickets for the White Sox. Still have them. I bought them before the stadium started. I can remember walking around with young Tim Romani, who, as the assistant director of the Sports Facilities Authority, really was primarily responsible for building the stadium.²² He and I walked around the stadium before it opened. He said, "Well, pick out your seats." I said, "Oh, boy! Okay, I want those two seats in the first row." Apparently the rest of the row was taken, so I got the two seats behind my seats, best tickets in baseball; they just are. The people sitting next to me, in that first row, were all Daleys. So you've got the governor and the mayor sitting together in the new White Sox Park.

DePue: Did you know that at the time you selected those seats?

Thompson: No. No, wait a minute; I take it back. I did, because I guess the Daleys had already selected their seats, which is why I couldn't get four on the front row. So the mayor and I were out there watching the game. I think the final game was the one with a lot of rain and cold. We were sitting there, enveloped in

²² Tim Romani (Interview by Mark DePue, August 24, 2015.)

these plastic ponchos that they handed out. But it was just a great thrill to watch that World Series.

To me, personally, it was what my fight to get the stadium approved was, at least in part, all about. Not only had I kept the White Sox in Chicago, I had given them a stadium that would let them economically compete with other teams for the good players. I had brought good tax revenues to the state. The players pay significant income tax in the state of Illinois; the members of the team do. Then the additional taxes, amusement taxes for the city, sales taxes on the items that are sold to the park, food, beverage, t-shirts, all of that stuff. And we had built the stadium on the wallets of visitors to Chicago. That's almost perfect, isn't it? It was very satisfying, very emotional.

Now, years later, when the Wrigley deal happened, with the owners putting their own money in, because the mayor wasn't going to provide any money for the stadium, and the governor wasn't going to provide any money for the stadium. I tried to buy Wrigley Field for the Sports Facilities Authority, but I couldn't get it done. *Tribune* had other plans.

DePue: You say, "I tried to." You mean you had a group of investors who were willing to—

Thompson: No, no. I wanted the Sports Facilities Authority—which at the time I was chairman of, under Governor Blagojevich—to issue bonds to buy Wrigley. Then we would have restored it. But I couldn't get that done. In any event, the Cubs this year went as far as the National League playoffs, and it was very exciting.

DePue: Where they got trounced by the Mets.

Thompson: Yeah. It was pretty clear, since they were swept, that the Mets had the superior pitching, the superior hitting and the superior fielding. We had four or five great rookies. They'll be heard from in years to come. We'll be back, competing at the top of the National League. But the Mets were just overwhelming.

For example, Jake Arrieta, for the Cubs in the postseason, was not the Jake Arrieta of the last half of the regular season, when he just accomplished great things. He was, I guess, worn out. (laughs) He had pitched longer in the regular season than he had ever pitched before, by like 156 innings, I think. And the Mets' rookie pitchers were just merciless, had great stuff on the ball. And the Mets' hitting, oh my god, Murphy? He's now had seven straight home runs in the postseason,²³ god!

DePue: And they play the first game of the World Series tonight against?

²³ Second baseman, Daniel Murphy, who was named MVP of the National League Championship Series.

Thompson: Tonight against Kansas City.

DePue: Against the Royals.

Thompson: I don't know that much about the Royals team. I guess I'll find out tonight. But the Mets are a very impressive team. But to see baseball like that in Chicago, and to see Wrigley on the way to restoration... And the youngster who helped me build U.S. Cellular, Tim Romani, is working on the restoration of Wrigley.

DePue: And he got his start as a bag boy?

Thompson: He did.

DePue: I've had a chance to interview him, as well.

Thompson: Have you?

DePue: Yes.

Thompson: Oh, great!

DePue: That was a fun interview to do.

Thompson: Good, good, good.

DePue: A couple more questions before we leave the White Sox behind. Was part of the thought that that wasn't the best neighborhood, that that would help sustain a struggling neighborhood?

Thompson: Well, that's part of baseball lore, just like the arguments about what a stadium brings to a city. If you look at the White Sox's neighborhood, it's neighborhood around the stadium, it's much different than the neighborhood around Wrigley.

Wrigley has always had a commercial infrastructure around the stadium. People live across the street from the stadium; that's how the boxes on top of people's houses developed. Very, very close, very, very close, both commerce and home ownership.

There's none of that at the White Sox. Too much is far away, so it couldn't develop commercially in the same way. And it couldn't help the neighborhood in the same way, because the neighborhood wasn't there. The neighborhood was back.

DePue: And didn't you have public housing just on the other side of the interstate, as well?

Thompson: Yeah, right. And there was a school close to the park, and a church close to the park, and no opportunity for a commercial development. Now, when I was chair of the Sports Facilities Authority, later, I had visions of building across the street from the park, on 35th Street, that whole block. But I couldn't get Reinsdorf to do it. He just didn't see the utility of that or its relevance to him and the White Sox organization and the ballpark. But I'm a dreamer and a builder—as we've already determined—so I wanted to see commercial activity right across the street. I was thinking of apartments and a hotel and a retail complex.

I finally got Reinsdorf to build or to agree to a sports store across the street that was going to be the equivalent of Sportsmart or one of the stores that sold all kinds of athletic equipment. He built that, and he built the restaurant. But that's as far as it went. It's just not the same neighborhood; it's just not encouraging of the kind of commerce that's around Wrigley; housing is too far away.

So the Cubs have been good for Wrigleyville, in terms of commercial development, but they had commercial development before. It's just a question of how much you're going to put in there and what kind of impact the stadium was going to have.

DePue: I assume Cellular Field has parking?

Thompson: Oh, yeah, great parking.

DePue: Which Wrigleyville doesn't.

Thompson: Which Wrigley does not, yeah. So people come to Wrigley on the bus or the L, easily. And now there's a railroad station near White Sox Park, so you can get there by Metra. And, of course, there's the L, which is very popular. And there's lots of parking. So it's different in that respect.

The other difference is, Wrigley gets a lot of ancillary revenue from concerts that U.S. Cellular doesn't get, even though U.S. Cellular is a better facility for concerts, in terms of amenities and seats, than Wrigley is. But Wrigley's got the mystique that entertainers go for. So they'll say, "Yeah, I'll do your show at Chicago, but I want Wrigley," plain and simple.

When I was chairman of the Sports Facilities, I couldn't sell Sox stadium; it didn't have the atmosphere or the history or the mystique of Wrigley. So, White Sox don't get the ancillary...or the state, the Authority, doesn't get the ancillary revenue that Wrigley can get.

DePue: One other question about this. I recall you telling me a story quite a while ago dealing with winning the World Series, that you got a phone call, not too long after that, from Reinsdorf or from somebody, thanking you for what you did.

Thompson: I'm sure that's right, because Jerry and I would talk frequently. We've known each other for over fifty years. If you talk to Reinsdorf today, that's what he'll say. And it's quite clear.

DePue: We're going to change gears now and go back to 1988 and politics, and—

Thompson: Oh, the baseball's better.

DePue: (laughs) Well, for political junkies, maybe a nice presidential election year would be a good topic to take up too. That is a presidential election year; Reagan has had his eight years, and now the heir apparent is George Bush. But I think Robert Dole was running in that campaign, as well, and I'm sure there were a couple of other candidates.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Your opinion about George H.W. Bush?

Thompson: I loved him. He was a great man, is a great man. He's not a "was" yet; he is a great man, smart, widely experienced. The man's biography is really impressive, fighter pilot at, what, eighteen years old, World War II; head of the CIA; head of the Republican National Committee; ambassador to China; vice president...It goes on and on. So, when the time came, I supported, like all of my fellow governors, supported George Bush for president.

DePue: You and I have taken up the discussion many times, about your own presidential aspirations. And many times you have said it just wasn't in the cards in 1988 for you, and that it was obvious, from several years before that.

Thompson: You've got a sitting vice president that we all supported as vice president. How in the world are you going to run against him?

DePue: Were you more in tune with George Bush's politics than Reagan's?

Thompson: No, I wouldn't say that. They were completely different personalities, no question about that. But I was a staunch Reagan supporter. I might not have been as conservative as Reagan. I might have been personally, in terms of ideology, closer to Bush. But he was conservative too, don't forget. But my differences with either one of them were at the margin; I mean, it didn't make any difference at all, in terms of my support. I campaigned very hard for Reagan in the first election. I didn't run his campaign. He had his campaign manager already, Don Totten, who was an Illinois state senator.

But I ran the second campaign. And I spent a lot of time at the White House; I spent a lot of time with Reagan. We were personally close, I think. I spent a lot of time with Mrs. Reagan. The president was very kind to me and my family. Samantha has letters from Ronald Reagan, written at the dais and dinners.

Then George Bush did the same thing. I got a lot of letters from George Bush. He was an incredible letter writer. He didn't get off the plane after he'd left your city before he had written thank you letters. He was old school. But I enjoyed both of them; I was close to both of them.

I can recall one weekend that Jayne and I spent at Kennebunkport, with a bunch of other people, leading up to the '88 campaign. We were late arriving, knocked on the door, and people were already at dinner. It was George that jumped up and opened the door and got us chairs. We went for a walk after dinner; it was George who jumped up and got coats for everybody. He's just that kind of person, very warm. So there was no question; I was going to support Bush.

DePue: What was your impression of Barbara Bush?

Thompson: I liked her. She could occasionally be sharp. She was very direct. She had a much different personality than George. She was more in charge. (laughs) But I got along fine with both of them.

DePue: Who ran his campaign in '88 in Illinois?

Thompson: I did.

DePue: I read that you actually went to Iowa to help campaign for him.

Thompson: I did.

DePue: Why did you do that?

Thompson: Oh, either I wanted to or they asked me or both. I don't know.

DePue: How much did you do in Iowa?

Thompson: Not a lot.

DePue: Were you well-received over there?

Thompson: Certainly. (laughs) All those Iowans listen to the Illinois television stations.

DePue: For some reason I had visions that you went to the Quad Cities area, and that would have been a neighborhood that would have known your name well anyway.

Thompson: Yeah, exactly. I spent a lot of time in the Quad Cities. It was a vibrant section of the Illinois economy.

DePue: That leads us into the inevitable discussion about what's going to happen, once Bush becomes president, if he wins the election.

Thompson: The campaign was interesting, because we all liked Bob Dole. And he ran against Bush. I can remember one time I was campaigning with Bush and went by Dole, as it turned out. Both candidates had arranged to speak at a university—I forget which one—out somewhere in either central or western Illinois; I forget where. Bush got to speak first, and our cars passed on the highway.

We were coming out of the university, and Dole's car and tail cars were coming in. And when Dole got there and was ready to speak—I guess it was a television thing—the electricity went off. Of course, there's a lot of conspiracy theories abounding that Thompson had not only taken care of George Bush, but turned off the electricity for Bob Dole, which, of course, we didn't. It was a spirited campaign in Illinois, without question. But we were all friends.

DePue: How soon did talk about you as a potential vice presidential candidate come up?

Thompson: Oh, it was floating around when Bush announced his candidacy. I was with him, down in Houston, when he announced his candidacy in his home city.

DePue: Why were you there?

Thompson: He invited me.

DePue: Did he have a lot of other governors there as well?

Thompson: No, not that I remember. But I was there. And then he and I flew to Illinois on Air Force Two, because he was going to do his first press conference of the campaign in Illinois, in Chicago.

So he and I flew to Chicago, and they set up the press conference. This was at the same time that the *Time Magazine* cover... What cover was it, *Time* or *Newsweek*, one of the two? *Newsweek* put him on the cover and then had the headline, "The Wimp Factor." That created a **lot** of controversy. He was very upset, because one thing George Bush was not, was a wimp. I forget where that started. But to be on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine on the day of your presidential announcement, with that kind of headline, is just... You might suspect how he felt about that.

DePue: The irony is that [same word] played a role on your '82 campaign and '86 as well.²⁴

²⁴ Reference to the controversy during the 1982 gubernatorial race, when Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson III made the unforced error of suggesting Thompson viewed him as a "wimp." The press ran with the term, much to Thompson's delight. (James Thompson, interview by Mark DePue, December 18, 2014.)

Thompson: Yeah, that is true. No, just in one campaign.

DePue: Eighty-two.

Thompson: But there is this great picture from the press conference of Bush standing at the lectern and me standing behind him. I'm about this much taller, and I'm standing behind Bush like this—

DePue: Arms crossed.

Thompson: ...arms crossed, sort of towering over him, like I'm judging him or something. When I saw the picture, I thought, Goodbye VP! (laughs) Nobody picks a vice presidential candidate who looks like that. But it was never a serious thing to begin with.

DePue: I'm curious though, Governor; he invites you down to Houston to make the announcement, and then he comes up to Illinois, as his first stop after he's announced his campaign.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Everything you do at that time it's calculated; there's a reason. Why did he invite you?

Thompson: It wasn't calculated. He invited me because his campaign had already booked Chicago for their first national press conference.

DePue: Why Chicago?

Thompson: I don't know. Because it was the center of the country, I guess.

DePue: Was it a contested state? He thought Dole would do well in Illinois?

Thompson: No, I don't think that played into it.

DePue: Was he checking you out as a VP candidate?

Thompson: No. No, no, no. He didn't have to do that to check me out. We had been friends for eight years. So if he was going to make Chicago his second stop, after his announcement in Houston, it was just a courtesy to me to invite me down to Houston for the announcement, then fly back with me to Chicago. [There's] nothing calculated about that.

DePue: How seriously were you thinking about potentially being a candidate for vice president?

Thompson: Not at all. I knew that wasn't going to happen.

DePue: Seriously?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: But the campaign didn't know it wasn't going to happen.

Thompson: Well, I couldn't control that.

DePue: I'm going to read an article headline here. This is August 7, 1988. It's a UPI [United Press International] article in the *Sunday Argus*, a Rock Island paper, "Thompson Dreams of Living in the White House."

Thompson: (laughs) Really? Do they quote me to that effect?

DePue: No, but I did want to read—

Thompson: No. (laughs)

DePue: ...something here. And this is pure speculation now. This is more of a columnist, not hard news reporting.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: "But while he"—Thompson—"may provide some tarnish resistance for the GOP armor, Thompson bears the stigma of Reagan sacrilege. He stumped the state this spring"—as we talked about earlier today—"trying to drum up support for a big increase of the state's income tax. And conservatives inspecting his record are likely to point accusing fingers at a few blots. Thompson vetoed legislation to ban welfare-paid abortions, a veto overturned by the legislature. He also angered some business interests by his friendliness with labor"—something you and I have talked about quite a bit—"highlighted by his 1981 beer blast for rallying union members on the executive mansion lawn."

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: Another one of your favorite stories there, Governor.

Thompson: (laughs) It's a great story.

DePue: So certainly this pundit didn't think that you matched well with Bush, who might want to have some better conservative credentials going into it.

Thompson: See, you know what happens with newspaper columnists like that? They posit a premise—Thompson for vice president—so they can knock it down. That's exactly what that column was. I never told that columnist I wanted to be vice president. I don't know who told him that, if anybody. So he starts with the premise that I'm a potential candidate for vice president, then he spends the rest of the column knocking it down.

DePue: But Governor, all he's got—

Thompson: That's not uncommon among the press, at all.

DePue: But all I have to do is read your high school yearbook.

Thompson: Well, certainly! (both laugh)

DePue: And they had been talking about it since day one that you were in office.

Thompson: Yeah. But president, not vice president. But that's exactly what it was. And that's only one of a number of columnists who did that. I mean, that's how they do this stuff.

DePue: Were you actually interviewed by the Bush team as a vice presidential candidate?

Thompson: Never. Never. Bush didn't know who to pick. Quayle was a last-minute pick. Didn't announce it until the convention.

DePue: That's standard practice, in politics anyway.

Thompson: Yeah, but you might have had a potential list of VP candidates. Quayle came out of nowhere. Most people didn't know who he was. I didn't know who he was.

DePue: This kid from Indiana.

Thompson: Yeah, that stumped everybody. I recall landing, wherever the convention was that year, hearing about the pick of Quayle and telling my staff, "Quick, quick, find out who this guy is, and what he's done, because I'm going to get asked about him."

DePue: If you had been asked, would you have taken the job?

Thompson: Certainly.

DePue: Had you and Jayne talked about the potential of being asked?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Do you know what her view would have been on the subject?

Thompson: I have no idea.

DePue: How about Samantha?

Thompson: Oh, she'd have been all for it (both laugh). Living in the Naval Observatory, yeah; visiting the White House, yeah. But she got to the White House by herself, with Reagan. She was a Reagan favorite.

DePue: Now, I read an article someplace that you actually took your name out of consideration, about August thirteenth. You don't think that happened?

Thompson: I don't think that happened. Can't take your name out of consideration, unless there's some very serious asking going on, right?

DePue: Once you learned about Dan Quayle, did you think Bush had made the right choice?

Thompson: Who would know? But you remember what happened?

DePue: That was my next question, Governor. Did you know how to spell tomato? Or was it potato?

Thompson: It was potato. But no, it wasn't the spelling of potato. I forget exactly what he said or did, but he got into trouble early on as a vice presidential candidate. So he was sent to reeducation camp, like Mao used to do in China.²⁵ Didn't Mao have reeducation camps?

DePue: Right.

Thompson: Well, so they sent Quayle to reeducation camp, which happened to be the inside of a bus in Illinois. Did I ever tell you that story?

DePue: No.

Thompson: Oh, it's a great story. So, he says or does something that caused some kind of controversy that sort of indicated he wasn't ready yet for the big time. So what did they decide to do? They decided to give him to me, with instructions to put him on a bus in Illinois and keep him there until whatever it was he had said or done died down. So, for at least a week, maybe into the second week, I had a campaign bus in Illinois, and the vice president and I rode the highways. We'd pull into a small town, and they'd be lined up along the road, people waving. He'd wave back, and then we'd go on to the next town and do the same thing.

We finally let him off the bus. And I got him a speaking role at...I think it was the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] convention.²⁶ I called the

²⁵ Reference to Quayle visiting an elementary school spelling bee and misspelling potato "p-o-t-a-t-o-e."

²⁶ Thompson might be joining two unrelated events. Quayle accepted the vice presidential nomination August 18, 1988, but flew from Washington to speak at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in Chicago only four days later. He used this appearance, which Thompson did broker, to push back against an allegation that he dodged the draft during the Vietnam War by pulling strings to join the Indiana National Guard in 1969. Later, in October, Quayle undertook a bus tour of eastern Illinois. (Henry Weinstein and Thomas Rosenstiel, "No Favors

commander of the VFW and said, "Listen, would you like to have vice presidential candidate Dan Quayle address your convention?" And they said, "Oh, sure, absolutely! Can you do that?" I said, "Not only can I do that, I can deliver him to your door. He's in the bus." (laughs)

DePue: This was the national convention?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: In Illinois?

Thompson: Yeah, in Chicago. So I got him a speaking role, and he did a great job. They all loved him, and that's how he was finally released to the national campaign trail.

DePue: Were you serving something as a mentor to young Dan Quayle?

Thompson: Well, I don't think I was mentor; it was more like warden (both laugh). But it worked.

DePue: So here's the master campaigner teaching the young candidate how to actually campaign?

Thompson: Oh, Dan knew how to campaign. But he just needed some settling down, I think, before he faced the onslaught of the national media.

DePue: And he understood what this was all about?

Thompson: Oh, absolutely. But we had a great time.

DePue: Any other memorable stories about him?

Thompson: People in small towns just love this stuff. To bring a candidate for vice president to their small town, even if you didn't let him off the bus, was pretty good. But he and I became good friends, because we spent that time together.

DePue: What did you think about Bush's opponent that year, Michael Dukakis?

Thompson: I served with Mike, because we were fellow governors. I liked all the governors I served with. That was just my style. And I like Mike and Kitty. But he suffered two blows in that campaign, one, he let his picture be taken in that tank, which looked really crazy. It looked like he was really crazy.

You know, I was very careful on pictures. The only time I really was foolish enough to do something where there were photographers around that

Asked, Quayle Tells VFW," *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1988; Cathleen Decker, "Quayle, in Illinois, Says He's 'The Future,'" *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1988).

made me look crazy, was that horse in the Capitol.²⁷ But I didn't do that very often. I had a slogan, "Don't wear no funny hats; don't ride no funny animals."

DePue: But you wore plenty of t-shirts in your campaign.

Thompson: Well, that's okay. T-shirts are okay, because people wear t-shirts themselves. That's all right.

DePue: Here's another irony, Governor. We talked about that famous 1982 race, and one of the digs against you is that Stevenson kept emphasizing that he was a tank commander in Korea right after the war.

Thompson: Yeah. But he didn't look like a tank commander, so where did that get him? But Dukakis fell into that picture. Then there was the debate, where he was asked about the death penalty. He was asked whether, if Kitty Dukakis was raped and murdered, whether his opposition to the death penalty would change, and he said, "No." I was sitting with a group of ward committeemen, township committeemen, and county chairmen, watching that debate. When he said that, the air went out of the room. Everybody was just (gasps) and I think, in a great respect, that cooked his goose.

And you had Willie Horton, right? And he [Dukakis] had vetoed the Pledge of Allegiance for schools. Bush and I made that a campaign issue, because I had signed a bill for the Pledge of Allegiance in schools in Illinois, and it was never challenged by the ACLU. I signed it deliberately, just so we'd get another test of whether that was still okay to do, because there was a Supreme Court of the United States decision that said no. When the legislature passed our bill in Illinois, my staff wanted me to veto it. They wrote a big veto message, talking about the Supreme Court of the United States' decision that went that way.

I was playing racquetball that day in Chicago, on Michigan Avenue, and my lawyers, who had written the veto message, were there. We talked about it, and I said, "I'm going to go for a run. I'll tell you when I get back." I went for a run up Michigan Avenue and came back and said, "You know what? I'm going to sign it. Let the Supreme Court of the United States tell me we can't have the Pledge of Allegiance." I said the Pledge of Allegiance when I was a school kid in Chicago, and they did all over the state. It's part of America. So I signed it; they never challenged it. In fact, I was surprised; I wanted them to, but they didn't.

So, we were sitting in Kennebunkport that weekend, and we were going over issues. I think Bush or one of Bush's advisors, at that point, had a list of issues about Dukakis, and he said, "He vetoed this Pledge of Allegiance

²⁷ James Thompson (Interview by Mark DePue, August 28, 2014.)

bill. Of course, that's not an issue because of the Supreme Court." I said, "Yes, it is. I signed a Pledge of Allegiance bill in Illinois, and it wasn't challenged." So, they got all excited about that, and they made that an issue in the campaign.

Between the tank picture, Willie Horton, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the debate on capital punishment, that was enough to beat Dukakis.

DePue: You generally steered clear of negative campaign ads.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Do you think the Willie Horton ad was fair? And can you give us a little bit of background on the Willie Horton case?

Thompson: I don't really have that much background on the Willie Horton thing.

DePue: I think he was a criminal who was released—

Thompson: Released by order of the governor [Dukakis].

DePue: And then he committed murder.

Thompson: Yeah, right. And he was just a horrific looking man. So all they do is put his picture—

DePue: And he was African American.

Thompson: Yeah, he was black. All you had to do was put his picture up there and tell the story, "The governor released this guy, and he went out and committed murder." Case closed. You don't have to do much more than that.

DePue: So that was a legitimate ad?

Thompson: It was true. It was true. I had never run, in any of my campaigns, a negative ad, ever. So it's not something that was in my armory of campaign tactics. But Bush had some pretty clever guys advising him. Who was the young guy advising him, who died later of cancer, from South Carolina.²⁸ I spent a lot of time with him. And he said, publicly, that I was one of the best campaigners in America. That kind of praise, coming from him, was high praise, indeed; let me tell you. Oh, what was his name? Jayne will remember.

DePue: Backing up just a little bit, did you have any role at the Republican National Convention? Were you one of the people making a speech?

²⁸ Lee Atwater, an American political consultant and strategist to the Republican Party. He was an adviser to U.S. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush and chairman of the Republican National Committee.

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: Do you remember the theme of the speech?

Thompson: No. And it was not prime time.

DePue: Oh.

Thompson: (laughs) It was earlier in the day, not prime time. But there are some great pictures of me, up at the rostrum, with the big banners behind me, and I'm speaking, terrific.

DePue: We'll have to find some of these pictures and pictures of you standing behind Bush with your arms crossed. We've got to find that picture too.

Thompson: Yeah, that's a good one.

DePue: Even earlier in the year, nothing to do with the election, I understand that Princess Christina of Sweden came to Illinois. Does that ring a bell? You two opened a new museum at Bishop Hill.

Thompson: Yeah, I remember that. At one time, I guess, either before or after that, the king of Sweden came to Illinois, and I was able to introduce my mother, the daughter of two Swedish immigrants, to the king of Sweden. That was pretty neat.

DePue: Your mom was impressed by that.

Thompson: My mom was impressed by that, yes, indeed.

DePue: Were your parents still living at the time you got towards the end of your administration?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: How closely did they follow your career?

Thompson: Oh, pretty closely. And my aunt Genevieve, who was a schoolteacher in Chicago Heights, followed it, as you know, really closely. There are, like, eight volumes.²⁹

DePue: Which have been very, very helpful in preparing for this.

Thompson: Oh, good.

²⁹ She compiled thirteen newspaper scrapbooks, which traced Thompson's career from the 1950s through his gubernatorial administration.

DePue: A lot of these quotes that I'm reading to you represent her work.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Any final comments, then, about the end of the election and the way that presidential election turned out?

Thompson: No, not really. We were victorious, nationally, and we were victorious in Illinois.

DePue: During any of this, was there any discussion with you about a position in the new administration?

Thompson: No. I used whatever influence I had to get Sam Skinner a position. And he got it. I quoted back to Bush one day what he had said at a rally in Chicago, when he was thanking the crowd, after the speech, and pointing out people in the crowd. Sam and I were there, and Bush said, "And we're going to have fine people in this administration, like young Skinner there." Of course, Sam went, "Ah!"

So, when Bush was elected and was picking his cabinet, I reminded Bush of what he had said. I said, "You know, you said in Chicago that you were going to have people in your administration like young Sam Skinner. So you've got to put **him**, not like him, **him**, in your administration." And he did. He made him secretary of transportation. Sam was, of course, thrilled and was a great secretary. He had airplanes, which was his first love, more than the law, even. And he had a computer in the corner of his office in Washington that could tell you where every plane in the United States that was flying was at the time.³⁰

DePue: Okay, Governor, I think we've pretty much taken care of 1988, not a big legislative year, but—

Thompson: No.

DePue: ... hey, there were a lot of interesting things to talk about for that year.

Thompson: Oh yeah.

(end of transcript #21)

³⁰ Bush elevated Skinner to serve as his chief of staff in December 1991.

Interview with James Thompson

IST-A-L-2013-054.22

Interview # 22: October 28, 2015

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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

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.

DePue: Today is Wednesday, October 28, 2015. This is Mark DePue, director of oral history at Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and today I'm sitting in Governor Jim Thompson's home in Chicago. Good morning, Governor.

Thompson: Good morning.

DePue: Our twenty-second session.

Thompson: Wow!

DePue: We had a great session yesterday about 1988, (Thompson laughs) and you got to talk about White Sox Stadium, which I think you enjoyed.

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: One wouldn't think we have that much to talk about for 1989, but I think I've dredged up quite a bit here. My goal is to finish up with 1989 today. We finished yesterday with talking about the Bush campaign and the significant addition to the Bush administration, with Sam Skinner being appointed secretary of the Department of Transportation. Let's start with this, having nothing to do with 1989. Tell me a little bit about your Thanksgiving plans.

Thompson: We're going to London for Thanksgiving. We did it last year, since our daughter is living in London now, at least for a while. Last year, we stayed at

Claridge's, and they were giving a Thanksgiving dinner for Americans who were in London at the time. So it was a traditional American Thanksgiving dinner. It was really nice to be able to do that and to share Thanksgiving with my daughter and her husband and with some of her friends, as well. It was like a family party.

We enjoyed it so much, we're doing it this year. But this year we're staying in a hotel closer to our daughter's house, and she is giving the dinner. So we'll all go to her house for Thanksgiving dinner. She and my wife will do some cooking, I guess, and we're really looking forward to it. And then they come home for Christmas, so that's nice.

DePue: Has she cooked for you before, a big meal like that?

Thompson: Yeah. She's a very good cook. She's accomplished, and her husband's a very good cook as well. So between those two and my wife, I think it will be a really nice dinner.

DePue: I know he has a Greek background. Will there be anything unique that's not typically American?

Thompson: Well, I don't know. (laughs) There's always surprises in that house. She's learned to cook Greek meals.

DePue: Oh!

Thompson: Yeah, because she and my wife went to Greece a couple of years ago for cooking school for a week, and they learned how to do that. But, Samantha's a very fine cook.

DePue: Does she know how to make baklava?

Thompson: I don't know. I haven't had any of her Greek recipes. I keep asking my wife, when am I going to get the recipes, in return for sending those two to cooking school! (both laugh) My son-in-law has gotten the results of it, but I have not.

DePue: Let's dive into some more academic concerns here in 1989 and begin with—as we have quite a few years—a little bit of discussion about the budget that year. You proposed a budget of \$21.8 billion. This would be for the 1990 fiscal year. It's actually a decrease from what you had in the proposal for fiscal year 1989, at \$22.2 billion, and a considerable decrease from what was actually spent in that particular fiscal year. Your comment at the time, "This budget is a far better budget than any in recent years. It is a muscular budget, neither malnourished nor bloated with fat. It has the strength to lead us into the '90s."

Thompson: Is that what I said?

DePue: That's what you said.

Thompson: It does sound like me. (laughs)

DePue: So how can it be "muscular," even though you're decreasing the amount that you're recommending?

Thompson: You got me.

DePue: And I should say that the state ended up spending \$24.375 billion.

Thompson: Where'd we get the money?

DePue: Well, that's part of the discussion for 1989. (Thompson laughs) You didn't request—and maybe this is part of the strategy—an income tax increase. In '89, you requested that somewhere later in the budgetary process.

Thompson: Having proposed it twice before and having lost that battle and having seen the Speaker in opposition, I presume my strategy was to wait and see what the legislature proposed, after I made my budget proposal, to see what they decided they wanted to spend and see where they were going to get the money to pay for it. I wasn't going to propose something for the third time. It's an interesting proposition, and we're seeing it today with the Rauner-Democratic dispute.

DePue: We should say that, this far into the budget year, there's still no budget for the fiscal year.

Thompson: Yeah, that's never happened before in Illinois. Although I did read the other day that that's exactly what's happening in Pennsylvania. So we're not alone. There, a Democratic governor is fighting a Republican legislature, and we have the opposite here.

But the point is that even though the governor has the obligation to propose a budget every year, final responsibility rests with the General Assembly. First, because the constitution compels them to propose a balanced budget and because the governor cannot wave his hand and produce revenue. Only the legislature can do that, as a matter of first choice. And even if the governor were to agree to higher revenues, the legislature would have to take the lead in passing a tax increase or some other form of revenue. And even if the governor didn't agree with that, the legislature has the final word, because whatever the governor does in the budget—whether he signs it, vetoes it, vetoes it in part—it goes back to the legislature.

So they have a two-pronged responsibility, a constitutional demand to propose a balanced budget and the final word on the budget, no matter what the governor does. It's a very serious, very serious responsibility for the General Assembly. So, having proposed, twice, a tax increase to produce the

revenues to match what my budget requested, I thought, Two times is enough. I'm going to propose a budget that's balanced. If they want to spend more, then they have to tax more. And there are lessons for that in today's quarrel between the legislature and the governor. It's not solely the responsibility of the governor; it's not solely the responsibility of the General Assembly, but they do have the last word. So it's more their responsibility than the governor's.

DePue: At the end of 2014, both before and after the general election, where Rauner wins, you still had a Democratic governor; you had a supermajority in both the House and the Senate, and yet the House and the Senate chose not to extend the income tax increase.

Thompson: We had a Democratic governor, up until January, but he was sort of out of the picture after the election. He wouldn't have any sway or power to affect things. It was up to the General Assembly. As you note, they do have a supermajority, still, and they chose not to exercise their power to continue the income tax as it was, prior to January first. So that's a deliberate decision on their part.

My guess is they did not, in the light of the election, want to have the political responsibility of maintaining a higher income tax; that is, blocking what the current law said, that come January first, it would expire, since it was temporary. They didn't want the political consequences, I believe, of blocking the expiration of the tax.

We have a history in Illinois, at least in my administration, of having two income tax proposals that I said would be temporary, and they were. When they expired, they expired. I think, given the election results in which the budget was a big deal, spending was a big deal, I think the Democrats were, I guess, not willing to take the responsibility for what would have been, at that time, a tax increase, by blocking the expiration of the temporary tax.

DePue: This all sounds very politically motivated—

Thompson: Well, it is.

DePue: ...and not fiscally motivated.

Thompson: Absolutely, because, as their subsequent budget presented to Governor Rauner shows, they were about \$4 billion out of balance. So they had the political will for spending, but not the political will for providing the revenue to support their spending. And listen, there's nothing new about that, (both laugh) nothing new about that at all.

Look, the legislature's accountability is diffuse. There's no such thing facing the voter as "the legislature." There certainly is a governor, elected by the whole state, but legislators are elected in districts. So, there's no chance

for the voters of Illinois to say, “We want to throw out the legislature.” They have to do it district by district. It’s really hard to impose a responsibility on the legislature, as a body, given that electoral system, as opposed to focusing responsibility on a single office-holder statewide, like the governor.

So the political considerations are different. A legislator from one district may be able to support a tax increase, and a legislator from another district—maybe it’s a conservative district that occasionally goes to the other party—would be more reticent to support a tax increase. That’s not surprising.

DePue: I wanted to take a look back at what your initial budget request was for 1977, having just been elected for the first time. The request was \$9.9 billion, (Thompson laughs) and what was actually appropriated that year was \$10.25 billion. The question here is, what happened? What was going on that there’s such a dramatic increase? Now, certainly a big part of that is inflation.³¹

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And some of those years, in the early ‘80s especially, it was a deep recession that you had to deal with.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: But by the late eighties, the economy was in pretty good shape.

Thompson: It was.

DePue: Do you recall what was really driving it? I’ve got a couple figures here.

Thompson: If you take my first budget of \$9 billion or the legislators’ budget of \$10 billion, you get to the end of my administration, the request was...\$22 billion?

DePue: Twenty-one point eight billion for the 1990 fiscal year.

Thompson: I used to say, near the end of my term, that I was proud of the fact that we had, in essence, tripled services to the people of Illinois, through their government, but we took less from their pocketbook in taxes, revenue.

DePue: Percentage-wise of their income?

Thompson: Of their income. Now, I think that’s a pretty good accomplishment. If you can nearly triple the services that government provides and have people spend

³¹ Since the state fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30, the fiscal year 1977 budget was Governor Dan Walker’s final budget. Adjusted to 2012 dollars, Walker recommended \$38.4 billion for FY1977 and Thompson recommended \$39.2 billion for FY1990. Thompson’s first budget, fiscal year 1978, recommended \$10.05 billion, or \$36.5 billion in 2012 dollars. See Appendix for executive budget recommendations under Thompson and for Illinois CPI-U calculated for fiscal years 1969–2013.

less, as a percentage of their income, than they did when I started the administration, I always thought that was a remarkable achievement.

So, if you look at just the figures, \$9 billion versus \$22 billion, you say, Oh my gosh, what's happened during that period of time? The answer is, the services that the people of Illinois were provided. And then the political question is, at what cost? If the answer is, the cost was less as a percentage of what people made, than it was in 1977, I think that's pretty significant.

DePue: There are a couple of things that I wanted you to respond to, in terms of the growth that you're seeing in the budgets, year after year, the doubling of Medicaid payments, so that by 1990, it's \$2.16 billion. How much control did the state have over Medicaid and the growth of Medicaid?

Thompson: Very little. Once you sign up, as a state, for Medicaid, you're bound by the federal mandates, in terms of who is entitled to relief. Now, the state has some peripheral responsibility. The state can act to prevent fraud or duplication or things like that, but they can't take people off the rolls without a reason, and they can't refuse to take people on the rolls without a reason.

So I suspect that the Medicaid budget for the state administration today is about \$4 billion something. It just keeps growing. It keeps growing because the state and the whole government of the United States may be in recession, and people don't have the income to pay for their medical expenses, so they go on Medicaid. You have dips in employment in states, another reason which drives people to Medicaid. You may have an increase in what I'll call the "poor population" that drives people to Medicaid.

You're seeing this, for example, in Illinois today, if the Medicaid budget is, as I suspect, around \$4 billion. You're seeing this despite the fact that we now have in place healthcare through the federal government, Obamacare, that extends what people would describe as reasonably priced health insurance to people with lesser incomes. But if the Medicaid population increases, then you're going to have an increase in Medicaid cost, despite Obamacare.

DePue: I believe a factor of Obamacare was that it increased those that were covered by Medicaid. That was one way that they did that.

Thompson: Absolutely. You'll recall, when Obamacare was passed, and then it was tested in the Supreme Court of the United States, the promise to the states was, sign up; take this Medicaid program as a state program, and we'll make it free for you—the state—for two years, three years, whatever it was, and then you'll pick up your state costs.

Well, the offer of a free Medicaid program is certainly exciting, I think, to state government, but only a very few states today are sitting there

saying, Wait a minute, wait a minute, what happens when the free years disappear and we assume the total cost of a greatly expanded Medicaid program, then what? What's our state budget going to look like then?

That's why you have some of the states, particularly the southern states today, not going along with the provisions of Medicaid, under Obamacare.

DePue: Were you a supporter of Obamacare, the Affordable Care Act?

Thompson: You mean as a retired governor? (both laugh)

DePue: Where you can't possibly suffer any political damage?

Thompson: Republicans generally hate the idea of Obamacare. Most people who hate Obamacare have no idea what Obamacare is, because they're not on Obamacare. It's become a Republican war cry in the Congress and out among the states. I think that it is appropriate to have the federal government involved in a program to make sure that everybody can get medical care, free if you're poor, or at a reasonable cost if you're not poor, but on a reduced budget.

The elements of that, whether another program could be written that would be better than Obamacare in the eyes of some critics, I haven't seen one. All the congressional critics of Obamacare have not really put forward alternative plans, if they were successful in overturning it. And I think overturning Obamacare without an acceptable substitute would be a great injury to the country.

Look at the Medicare population; people are living longer today; they're entitled to Medicare benefits at sixty-five; the costs of Medicare keep going up, and the number of people in the Medicare program keeps going up. The people who oppose Obamacare certainly would not suggest tampering with Medicare, or they would risk defeat at the polls, because the Medicare population votes at a greater percentage than the Medicaid or Obamacare population.

If it's the responsibility of the federal government to care for the medical needs of the Medicare population, why isn't [it] an equal responsibility to care for the medical needs of other people who don't have the benefit of private health insurance? I mean, a significant part of the nation does have the benefit of private health insurance; that's good. But there is a gap out there. And it's, I think, a federal responsibility to take care of it.

Different people suggest different ways. Some people suggest a program where the federal government's responsible for everybody's health care. What do they call that, a single payer program, which Canada has, which Great Britain has. I don't know whether that's better or worse than Obamacare

or Medicare. If I had the political responsibility today, I might have one view. I'm just voicing an opinion as a private [citizen], that you can't do away with Obamacare without replacing it. People have gotten used to it, particularly the provision that lets you be insured, despite pre-existing conditions.

DePue: Let's go back to your administration and ask you this question, then. With the growth in Medicaid and the payments going out and the amount of strain that was putting on the Illinois budget, were you stepping up efforts to seek out fraud of Medicaid? And who would be responsible for that?

Thompson: You would always do that. The Department of Public Aid, as it was known then, would be responsible for that.³² There are today private programs to uncover Medicaid fraud. I mean, I sit on the board of a company who does have a program like that, and there are others. But back then, it was primarily the responsibility of the Department of Public Aid, in-house, to avoid Medicaid fraud.

DePue: Another significant growth in the budget was for public aid, from \$2.1 billion in 1978 to roughly \$4 billion by 1990. So in the neighborhood of doubling it.

Thompson: Yes. That's the equivalent of a mandated program. I guess it is a mandated program, once you pass the legislation. It's simply a reflection of the economy and a reflection of cultural changes in the population, single-parent families, single parents working part-time jobs instead of full-time jobs, the growth in the number of children who are in those families, particularly in urban areas.

DePue: What was driving that trend, the single-parent families?

Thompson: Divorce or failure to enter into a marriage relationship before having children. If you look at what happens in the urban area, take Chicago. You have a number of single-parent families. Well, sometimes it's a mistake to call them single-parent, because you'll find families in the city of Chicago which consist of a mother, who might have had four different boyfriends which produced four different children, and they're being cared for by the grandmother. Now, that family's going to be on public aid; there's no way around it. That kind of thing is increasing, and it's not just the urban area.

If you look at the statistics in 2015, Illinois, you will see that a significant percentage of childbirth is to non-married people. And it's not just urban areas; it's other areas. We've undergone a cultural shift, in terms of family relationships, since that time. So you can see, by 1990, it's doubled from what it was in 1977.

³² On welfare fraud, both as a political issue and as an actual problem that Thompson's administration policed, see Jeffrey Miller, May 28, 2015, and Tyrone Fahner, April 29, 2015. Also see Robert Mandeville, February 11, 2014, 159-162. All interviews by Mike Czaplicki.

DePue: The out-of-wedlock child birthrate—I'm not saying that quite right—

Thompson: No, that's right.

DePue: ...has exploded since the 1950s.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Is that a bad thing?

Thompson: And since the 1970s. Yeah, I think it's a bad thing.

DePue: What caused that?

Thompson: I mean, look what the results are. If you have—I'm not even going to call them a "family"—a household of a single parent, the mother, with three or four or five children by different fathers, usually none of whom are around, you're going to have costs associated with that, from the state's perspective, and you're going to have dangers. It's one of the reasons why kids join gangs in Chicago. They don't have parental influence to keep them away from the gang culture. There's no father; there's no male influence in the household, or if there is, it's sometimes a dangerous male influence of the boyfriend. We've had any number of cases in Chicago where boyfriends kill infant children that they're supposed to be caring for.

It's a double cost to society, the cost of the state doing the support of children and the danger of kids, when they get to the teen years, entering criminal activity, instead of education or a job.

DePue: I want to quote you from your State of the State speech in 1989, very much along the same thing here. This is what you said in that speech, "At this very moment, somewhere in Illinois, a baby is being born to an addicted mother, and that child, too, is now addicted. The number of cocaine babies has jumped 79 percent in just the last year in Illinois. Somewhere in Illinois, a child is being beaten by a father whose temper is fueled by addiction to drugs or alcohol." Then you continue along the same vein and talked about the impact that drug and alcohol abuse was having, even in the workplace.

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: And it all comes back to this growth in public services that Illinois was experiencing at the time.

Thompson: Isn't it ironic that, at that time and today, our society tolerated or paid no attention to, in terms of attempts to prevent those situations, if that could ever happen. But, for years we maintained that we could not allow two males or two females to be married and have a supportive family for children? It was okay, at least in terms of what society would allow or go along with, the kind of thing I just described in that speech. It's just a piece of irony, I think.

DePue: What was driving that trend upward for single-parent families?

Thompson: Addiction was one, and just the culture of it was another. There was a significant group, population, in Illinois, and in other states; we're not alone—

DePue: Yeah, this is certainly a nationwide trend.

Thompson: ...that did not have structures in place to encourage what we would have called a "traditional family," a married couple who raised their children, with a goal in mind of improving their lives. That just went away. If you look at the statistics today, it's not just a problem in the black community in urban areas; it's becoming a problem in Hispanic neighborhoods, where we never thought Hispanics, who were very family-oriented, would have that happen. And it's in white populations in rural areas or even in city areas. So it's what I would call an affliction that's impacting our population.

DePue: What structures, or what institutions, were not as influential?

Thompson: I think just public acceptance, let's say, of out-of-wedlock childbirth. You can't approve of or accept out-of-wedlock childbirth in families of a sufficient income to make it, without having it be mimicked in other parts of society, where they don't have the resources to do something about it.

DePue: In the olden days, if I can use that trite phrase, women who had children out of wedlock were stigmatized.

Thompson: Right. In the nineteenth century.

DePue: Quite a bit of the twentieth century too. And certainly, people who were coming from a religious background, there was an element of that. Was that a good thing, that public sentiment was changing in that respect?

Thompson: Well, yes. But while you might say it was healthy not to stigmatize a woman who had a child out of wedlock, that's different from saying we can accept the consequences of births outside the normal or historical family structure, without risking crime and domestic abuse and all the other things that go with a household today that is run either by a mother or by older people, a grandparent, for example, falling victim to abuse, crime, gangs.

The other problem is addiction. I think people would be shocked if they knew of the addiction problems in a state like Illinois—and it's replicated elsewhere—outside of the urban areas, which traditionally carry the stigma of addiction. Rural areas in Illinois have a heroin problem or worse.

Chemistry has played a part here. You've got drugs from furtive manufacturing companies that are the equivalent of the traditional narcotic agents or worse. They can be tinkered with easily, so if one drug is added to the list of banned substances, they'll tweak the formula and put another drug

out. It's easily available; it's cheap to begin with, just as traditional narcotic addiction is cheap to begin with.

You'd be astounded, I think, to see the addiction issues in small towns in downstate Illinois. In some places it's an epidemic, and it's not the traditional narcotics; it's formulated narcotics. It sweeps a rural area. So it's not a problem that's confined to the urban areas of the state; it's now taking root in downstate as well.

DePue: While we're still on the subject here, Governor, I want you to respond to what I'll characterize as the "conservative critique" that explains what happened to parenting and the family structure in the United States. There are two parts to this. The first one is that this is all a result of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program, that we've rewarded people to have kids out of wedlock.

Thompson: I think that's wrong. If you have a mother, a single-parent family, sitting in Chicago in a gang-infested neighborhood, she's not making any money on having children. Somebody's got to support those kids; somebody's got to feed them and cloth them and house them. I don't think that's a money-making proposition. And I don't think it's a practice that's engaged in with the hope of fiscal reward.

I think the practice is engaged in just as a desire to have children, whether they have a parent or not. In some areas in Chicago, having a child is a status in a community. And it doesn't make any difference whether there's a father, whether there's a marriage, whether there's the ability to care for the child or not; it's a status symbol. It's part of growing up in the unfortunate areas of the state, in the urban areas. So it's a cultural thing, not a fiscal thing.

DePue: But again, that takes you back to the question, what had caused the change in the culture?

Thompson: I don't know. There's a lot of change in the American culture that is different in 1990 or 2015 than it was twenty or thirty years ago.

DePue: Part two of the conservative critique on this was the role that the feminist movement had (Thompson laughs) in de-emphasizing the role of the mother, giving them opportunities to work outside the home and claims by some of the more radical feminists that children would be holding women back from achieving their potential, things like that.

Thompson: I think that's nonsense. If anything, what you've just explained as part of the feminist movement would be a positive influence on the family unit or a mother. It certainly would have nothing to do with whether a person has a stream of out-of-wedlock children. I suspect that the vast majority of women who are doing this, engaging in out-of-wedlock childbirth, have no idea of what the feminist movement is and probably have never heard of it.

DePue: Everything we've been talking about up to this point are things that you really had no control over, these cultural trends.

Thompson: Right. Or the budget that these trends produced.

DePue: But it was certainly putting pressure on the Illinois budget, and that's what this is really addressing here. The other thing is the constitutional requirement, and yet the significant challenges, for the state to properly fund education. Were you feeling in a bind, or was the state in a bind, by the time you got to the late eighties, in doing that, as well?

Thompson: Of course. Look, when there are fiscal pressures in a state because of a national economic malaise or situation, and you have over here a group of mandated programs—whether it's Medicaid or public aid, or any other mandated program, mandated by the federal government and/or state government—and then you have, over here, education, where there is no enforcement of a constitutional provision, saying that education should be fully-funded, it's merely, as the Supreme Court has called it, a “hortatory command.”

DePue: A hortatory command?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: That's a legal term I'm not familiar with.

Thompson: No, it's not a legal term.

DePue: I'm showing my ignorance then, I guess.

Thompson: It's like an advisory command. Sitting over here, with the education folks, you've got a great big pot of money, which you can raise or lower through your budget, nothing mandated there, except maybe peripheral programs, peripheral in an economic sense, of federal provisions on special needs children, for example.

But the greatest part of the educational programs, from kindergarten through university, has a source of money that governors and legislators can deal with, without restraint. So if you need money, and your other parts of the budget are providing this squeeze, you look to areas of the budget where the money is. You don't look to tiny code departments. If you're rational, you don't look to the Department of Natural Resources to find money there—although one governor did—you go to education, because, as Dillinger or Billy the Kid or somebody said, “That's where the money is.”³³ That's why they robbed banks, because that's where the money is.

³³ The phrase is attributed to bank robber Willie Sutton.

- DePue: Following along the same theme, in 1988, the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] files a lawsuit against the Department of Children and Family Services to address the failures of the agency to properly care for children, high caseloads, not enough DCFS workers.
- Thompson: Yeah?
- DePue: How much do you remember about that?
- Thompson: I suspect that's true today. Maybe the lawsuit's not true today, but those same pressures in the budget are true today, the incidences of improper child care coming to the attention through the press, and then there's an outcry for more help for DCFS. You've got human beings involved, and if a drunken boyfriend beats a child while the mother's off somewhere, it's not the responsibility of DCFS, usually, especially when the family's never been introduced to DCFS. This is an original matter. This kind of behavior happens in a society where normal, cultural observances have disappeared, where addiction has flourished and all the safeguards of traditional homes are not there.
- DePue: Do you recall who your director of DCFS was?
- Thompson: No.
- DePue: Gordon Johnson.
- Thompson: Yeah, and he was a very fine director. If I'm recalling correctly, when my administration ended, Gordon went on to do the same kind of work in the private sector. He was the director of ... Oh, what's that organization in Chicago? Jane Addams... It's one of those organizations.
- DePue: The Hull House?
- Thompson: No, but one of them.³⁴ So he's a very influential, very recognized person in this area. And he successfully went from my administration to the private sector.³⁵
- DePue: Do you think there was any mismanagement going on during this time period?

³⁴ It was the Hull House, a settlement house in the United States that was co-founded in 1889 by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr. Located in the Near West Side of Chicago, Illinois, Hull House (named for the home's first owner) opened its doors to recently arrived European immigrants. By 1911, Hull House had grown to 13 buildings. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hull_House)

³⁵ Because of his innovation in the practice of foster care, Daytona Beach asked Johnson to bring his model to the city in 1998. He moved there and formed a nonprofit child welfare agency, Neighbor to Family, which was operating in three states at the time of this interview. Johnson died a month after this interview. (Katie Kustura, "Pioneer of Daytona-based Program that Changed Foster Care Dies," *The Daytona Beach News-Journal*, November 27, 2015.)

Thompson: No, I don't think so.

DePue: So was there any foundation in the ACLU's case?

Thompson: If the case was simply depending on incidents of child welfare issues...I don't believe the ACLU—and here my memory is more than faulty—Did they ever prove their case? Did the court ever take action in response to the suit?

DePue: I believe that by the time it got to the Edgar administration, there was a mandate to—I could be off here—decrease the caseloads for the DCFS workers. That was one of the main things that was being addressed.

Thompson: And who issued that mandate? Was it a court?

DePue: It would have been a Supreme Court case, yeah, a court case.

Thompson: I don't recall it.

DePue: Let me move on here pretty quickly. I wanted to read a couple of quotes of my interview with Jess McDonald, who was Jim Edgar's DCFS director.³⁶ He's credited with making quite a few reforms, once he got on board. This is after a few years of the Edgar administration.

“The allegations”—of the ACLU case—“were about kids who were abused while in care. The claim was, because you took physical custody of these kids and had legal guardianship, you had the legal responsibility as a parent to keep them safe from abuse and neglect. That was your obligation, because you were the child protection agency and, under federal law, they had some of these same protections. They were both constitutional and federal law issues that were alleged in that. It all had to do pretty much with safety, kids that were abused while in foster care. Actually, all of the lawsuits in the country are pretty much about that.” So apparently, Illinois was by no means the only state.

Thompson: Right. Oh, absolutely.

DePue: “One set of the facts in every jurisdiction, kids that were put in foster homes and the foster parents, for whatever reasons, do not care for them well or abuse them and worse. And the state agency was neglectful in managing their side of the responsibilities.” Then he also talked about a couple of specific cases. This is the kind of thing that newspapers love to highlight, when they find a nice juicy case to discuss.

Thompson: Well, sure.

³⁶ The quotes that follow are from Jess McDonald's Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library oral history interview by Mark DePue, September 3, 2010, 63-64.

DePue: I don't know if you remembered the Johnny Lindquist case?

Thompson: No.

DePue: This was a child in the Catholic Charities foster home. That is in Illinois, in Chicago, and Margaret Kennedy, I believe, was the director at the time.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: "He was beaten to death by the foster parent. It was like a ten-year-old child. So everyone asked the question, "Why? How? How could this happen?" Move ahead a little bit, and in the mid-1980s," he says in 1985, "you've got the...I think it was Charlie Madden, a five-year-old boy who'd moved from Galesburg to Quincy and was severely beaten and tortured, in ways I don't even want to describe, by a paramour, mother's boyfriend." Do you remember that case, Governor?

Thompson: No.

DePue: "He [the child] went to SIU Family Practice Clinic in Quincy with two black eyes, nothing wrong with his nose. The mother says he fell on a monkey bar. Any physician in the world would know you don't get two black eyes and not have damage on the bridge of your nose with that kind of description. They accepted it. The kid goes home, and later that day, he's essentially killed."

Thompson: I'll say a couple of things, I think. That happens today. It's human behavior gone wrong, the abusive boyfriend, the abusive foster parent. If a kid is in the custody of a foster parent, placed there by DCFS, and DCFS has no reason to suspect that a foster parent will abuse a child, and they do, it's hardly fair to say DCFS was wrong, when they had no notice.

In the second case you quoted, it seems to me the thing is also true, if there was no prior contact. But there should have been some responsibility on the part of the school that the kid went to and showed up with two black eyes. I suspect today, if that happened, the school authorities would have some responsibility to inquire and to find out and to notify authorities.

So if you have a foster care situation in which you have no notice, no suspicion, no prior conduct that something's going to go wrong in a foster home, it's really hard to say that that's the fault of the DCFS care. There are people in our society who are either mentally ill, and we don't know it, or who are addicted, and we don't know it, or who are just abusive tyrants, and we don't know it.

The same thing happens in a family that's not part of the DCFS system. It could be a neighbor upstairs, here—you just don't know—or in a house down the street. That's been true of human nature for a millennium, I suspect.

DePue: Probably more than one millennium.

Thompson: Probably more than one.

DePue: One of the things that did result was the reduction of the caseload that each one of the workers had. One way that, as Jess McDonald explains it, that he was able to accomplish that was not just increasing the number of case workers, but also streamlining the adoption process. Any comments you'd want to make about the challenges of adoption during your administration?

Thompson: That's all to the good. Adoption processes have probably been further streamlined since that time, not just in Illinois, but in other states. Obviously, if things are working right, children who are adopted are less likely to be endangered than kids who are in foster homes or in the original homes of negligent or abusive parents, before foster care even enters the picture.

Whenever you're dealing with humans...and you can cite cases where adopting parents did bad things to children. Adoption is not a process where you have 100 percent guarantee of child safety; that doesn't appear anyplace. But you assume—and probably the figures will bear this out—that children who are adopted into a stable, or what you believe is a stable family, have a greater chance of avoiding injuries and harm than those who are still in foster care or in abusive homes.

DePue: Some of what we have been talking about here addresses the issue of mental health with some of the people who are doing the abusing or drug and alcohol abuse, as well.

Thompson: Or both.

DePue: Yeah, they usually go together; don't they?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: I wanted to change the discussion, then, to mental health issues. Your administration was right in the middle of this dramatic shift in how the nation was addressing mental health and dealing with it.

Thompson: Yeah. That was an era where you hoped that the shift of responsibility for patients with mental health issues, the shift from institutions to community-based treatment, would be a good thing.

DePue: And an increased reliance on drug programs?

Thompson: Well, sure. In terms of dealing with a lot of issues, what was available to doctors or mental health professionals in 1980 or 1990 was far superior to what doctors and professionals had available in 1970 or '60 or '50.

But this was also a significant political challenge as well. I took a lot of abuse for supporting the trend to go to community-based treatment for mental health people. Communities in the state of Illinois, in downstate, had long-relied on state hospitals or state homes to provide jobs and economic security to the community.

If you have an institution in a rural area with 1,200 jobs, caring for mental health patients, and all of a sudden you're saying to them, Hey, we're going to close this institution, which has existed in this community for a hundred years, and all these people will be cared for by community-based agencies, which are probably private, charitable enterprises, there's going to be a great deal of opposition, anguish for that to happen.

DePue: Just to put some numbers to that, twenty-eight mental health institutions at the beginning of your administration, twenty-one at the end, and that's going to decrease over the next decade or two.

Thompson: Right. Gee, one of them we closed. I forget where it was. Manteno, I guess, was in the area where George Ryan came from. He was my lieutenant governor, and I'm closing the institution very close to his hometown. What you have to do, the governor has to go there, inspect the 100 year-old facility, without any real knowledge of how those are supposed to run; that's not within the personal purview of the governor. But you have to do it. Then you have to sit and meet with the protesters, who are saying, "Why are you closing my institution?" Then you explain to them what the new program is, and they think you're insane.

DePue: (laughs) Maybe you need to be institutionalized.

Thompson: Yeah, maybe so. But protests continue. It's a very ugly, messy process for an administration or a governor, just personalized it.

DePue: It looked like in a couple of cases, you converted them from mental health institutes to Veterans homes.

Thompson: Yeah. If you could find a new use for a facility, even of great age, and if that new use kept a significant number of the jobs available in the community, then the pressure was lessened. But first you had to go through the closing or the change, even if you had eventually a new program to put in the facility that the community would accept. It's not overnight; it's not push a button. It involves people's lives and emotions. It's a very difficult thing.

DePue: Again, this was something that was very much a nationwide trend.

Thompson: It was.

DePue: The deinstitutionalization.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Did you believe that it was the right approach to be taken?

Thompson: I did, or I wouldn't have closed the institutions. You rely on the advice of professionals in many of your decisions as the governor. The response of the academic and medical community was the same, that people would get better care closer to home with new programs and be a member of society and perhaps be able to hold a job or support a family, if they had their issues treated in a community setting. Everybody believed that was appropriate.

DePue: Now, fast forwarding to the last few years in the United States, the trend to deinstitutionalize has only continued over that timeframe.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Now you've got a flurry of mass shootings. And almost inevitably, you find out that these people are mentally deranged, and why hadn't they been institutionalized? I wonder if you could just kind of reflect on that from a contemporary point of view.

Thompson: Well, that's easy to say, "Why weren't they in institutions? Why weren't they being treated?" But I suspect in most of those cases—certainly not all—but in most of those cases, people didn't know; the community didn't know, the law enforcement agencies didn't know, and all of a sudden one of these guys went crazy in a public way, shooting or some other unlawful conduct. It's easy to say, "Why wasn't he locked up?" But there was no evidence or reason, at the time, to do that.

DePue: The inevitable, liberal critique on that always is the same, that we need to tighten gun control.

Thompson: Look, I'm a gun owner. I have handguns and rifles and shotguns. I don't abuse them. I'm a rational, sane person. For some of these people, gun control wouldn't work, because the community does not know they have mental issues, ahead of time. I'm also personally, and as a governor, a very strong believer in the Second Amendment, which the Supreme Court has now said entitles citizens to bear arms.

DePue: Even in the city of Chicago.

Thompson: Even in the city of Chicago. Because the reasons why people are entitled to bear arms to protect themselves and their family—and this is what the Supreme Court has said—applies equally to a person in the city of Chicago as it does to a person in Aurora or Rockford or Pinckneyville.

DePue: Or the middle of the country.

Thompson: Yeah. I get upset, I think, when those who say, “Forget the Second Amendment, let’s just take everybody’s gun.” The press, the liberal critics, whoever you want to put in that category, are quite delighted with the First Amendment, the press is. And they have great reverence for the Fourth Amendment, no illegal searches and seizures, the Fifth Amendment, no self-incrimination, the Fourteenth Amendment³⁷.

But wait a minute, how did we pass over so quickly the Second Amendment? It must have been important to the framers. They did it right after free speech and before all these other amendments. So if you’re wanting to judge what’s important in society today, don’t be so quick to pass over the Second Amendment and the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Second Amendment.

Now, the Supreme Court may take a gun case from Illinois—I think from one of the northern suburbs, Arlington Heights, or someplace like that—over the issue of what are referred to as assault rifles. So we’ll learn, hopefully, whether the Second Amendment allows you to ban the possession or sale of assault rifles.

The Seventh Circuit, which governs Illinois, said, “Yes, you can do it; you can ban that.” Assault rifles are simply rifles with additions that make them look like guns used in warfare. So if you have the stock on the bottom of the barrel that you can hold onto with your left hand, and if you have a scope, and if you have some of the other add-ons that military weapons have, it’s easier to condemn that weapon, even though there are hundreds of thousands of them in the possession of law-abiding people, who do use them for hunting.

I’ve always thought it was a little silly to say, “Oh, we can ban that weapon,” but you couldn’t ban the rifle, if you took all that stuff off. If it makes people who want to possess that kind of gun, with all those things that the courts and the critics say make is an **assault** rifle...Any rifle’s an assault rifle, no matter what it has on it. A pistol is an assault weapon, and you can’t take that away. So it’s a little strange, it seems to me, to be litigating about a category of weapons.

Now, we’re not talking submachine guns here. Those are clearly banned, capable of being banned, no matter what the Second Amendment says. I guess what I’m saying is there’s too little attention paid to the Second Amendment in this debate. There’s just simply not an acceptance of the Second Amendment by the people who demand stricter gun laws. Look, I’m a lawyer; I can read, and I can see where that amendment is, in second place,

³⁷ The Fourteenth Amendment addresses many aspects of citizenship and the rights of citizens. The most commonly used—and frequently litigated—phrase in the amendment is "equal protection of the laws." (<https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiv>)

right after free speech and way ahead of all the other things we hold dear, you know? So don't count me in that group.

DePue: We've been talking about things at the end of your administration that are still very much a part of the political discussion today; aren't they?

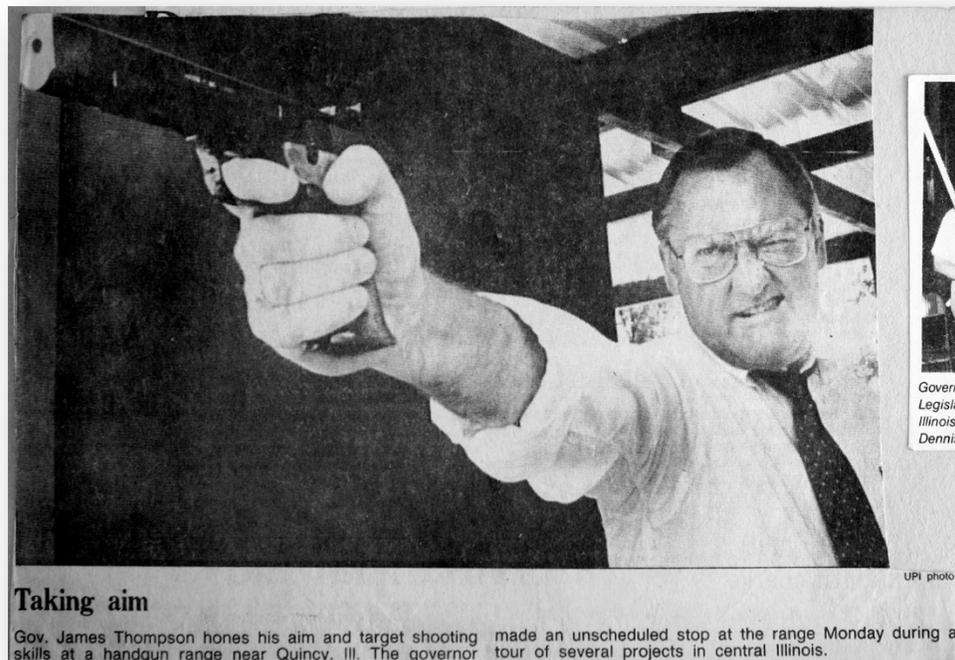
Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: Which is part of my fascination with it, and I apologize that I keep pulling you up to the modern era.

Thompson: Another piece that you could find, when I announced my candidacy for governor, and I went campaigning in downstate Illinois, one of the first things I did—I'm sure my press secretary at the time was rotating—(DePue laughs) I went to a shooting range downstate, gun range, and shot a couple of times and then had my photographer take a picture of me.

DePue: But not wearing a funny hat.

Thompson: Not wearing a funny hat, just holding a revolver like this. He took the picture from where you're sitting, so what you saw in the picture was me aiming a gun, like that.³⁸



³⁸ Thompson used this idea again in his last campaign. Although undated, this clipping was surrounded by others from July 1986. (Thompson Scrapbooks, v.12: 1/1/86–8/21/88.)

DePue: Right into the camera?

Thompson: Yeah. That picture got widespread play in downstate Illinois, and what political message did that convey? That even though Thompson is a former prosecutor from the city of Chicago, he knows and understands the gun rights of people who live in downstate Illinois. I didn't have to say a word, and I didn't say a word. I just had the picture taken and set it up.

DePue: You were the tough-on-crime candidate that was going to let gun owners keep their guns.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: Let's turn to a more pleasant topic here, Governor. (both laugh)

Thompson: You mean we're off of mental health, addiction, troubled families and budget?

DePue: (laughs) You'll question my comment about a more pleasant topic here.

Thompson: Yeah, I'm sure.

DePue: Back to the discussion about the strains on the budget. Then, towards the end of the budget discussion, the income tax issue comes up again. In this case, there are things that Mike Madigan and the Illinois House are pushing forward, to include a temporary income tax increase that would take the income tax from 2.5 to 3 percent—and you had been advocating 3.5—and the corporate income tax from 4 to 4.8. I don't recall what you had advocated, but making it two years, instead of what you were wanting, which was something more permanent. You didn't even mention it that year after having been defeated and, may I say, embarrassed the first two years around. What had changed?

Thompson: Mike Madigan.

DePue: But why?

Thompson: I don't know. I guess the pressures for spending, from his caucus and from the Democratic supporters, finally, pushed them to say, We've got to do more with the budget. And there's no revenues; we've got to raise the revenue. They came to that conclusion. Good for them.

DePue: Why 1989 and not 1988?

Thompson: I have no idea.

DePue: Would it have anything to do with '88 being an election year and '90 being an election year?

Thompson: Sure, of course. An election year always has something to do with it, for a portion of the Senate and all of the House.

DePue: Here's another good quote that you had (Thompson laughs) from that timeframe. This deals with the temporary nature of it. Here's your quote, "I think it is absolutely foolish to enact a temporary tax increase when we don't have a temporary problem."

Thompson: Okay...Makes sense to me. (DePue laughs) But I signed it, right?

DePue: You signed it.

Thompson: Well, there you go.

DePue: And here's the other interesting part of this. It passes on close to a party-line vote. A couple of Democrats bailed on it, but you got very few Republicans in either the House or the Senate.

Thompson: Right. Why should the Republicans in the legislature look a gift horse in the mouth, when they got something for nothing?

DePue: This was a gift horse, was it?

Thompson: Absolutely. Listen, that revenue's going to be spent in Republican areas as well, right? So their constituents are going to be supported, even while they're being taxed, because that's the way it works. And if I can't get a permanent tax increase, I'll take a temporary, even though I'd rather have a permanent.

As I say, the legislature has the final, final responsibility for balancing a budget. If they were going to balance it temporarily, okay. This is not a military dictatorship; this is a democratic republic.

DePue: I want to read a couple of quotes from an article that Rick Pearson wrote for *Illinois Issues*, many, many years later, in 1997,³⁹ a bit about this particular event, about the Madigan switch, and just get your reaction to that. "But perhaps the most dramatic example of Madigan's power came on a single day, May 17, 1989. After putting Thompson off for two years in the governor's push to increase the state's income tax, Madigan changed his mind and conceived, organized and led what came to be known as 'Operation Cobra.'" (Thompson laughs) Do you remember that term, Governor?

Thompson: No.

DePue: "Madigan was able to gather support from his Democratic members and keep them silent, while selectively leaking the story to the press the night before, so that in a matter of six hours, he had accomplished the introduction, committee

³⁹ Rick Pearson, "What Is Mike Madigan Up To?" (*Illinois Issues*, April 1997).

approval and House passage of a temporary 18 percent increase to the income tax, using only the votes of the House Democrats. The political tour de force stunned Thompson, who was left to read about it in the morning newspapers.”

Thompson: Right. It’s all true. It just shows the power of the Speaker, of **this** Speaker.

DePue: And that was very much the theme that Pearson was addressing is how powerful Speaker Madigan—

Thompson: It’s all true. It’s all true.

DePue: You were stunned by it?

Thompson: Well, I don’t think I’ll accept the word “stunned.” But I was taken by surprise; let’s put it that way.

DePue: In fact, you had a quote for that as well, “It is bold. It’s audacious. And it might even be diabolical.”

Thompson: (laughs) All compliments to the Speaker.

DePue: See, isn’t this more fun, Governor?

Thompson: This is more fun. But I got my revenge.

DePue: And that was?

Thompson: Build Illinois.

DePue: That had happened beforehand, though, but that was a continuing pleasure?

Thompson: I know. But that was bold and audacious (laughs) and readily accepted by the Speaker and the Democrats. You remember the Speaker’s comment when I proposed Build Illinois? “The greatest public works program since FDR.” Now, that was high praise from the Speaker. And I took it and ran.

DePue: Did he say that begrudgingly?

Thompson: No, he said that admirably. That was high praise from Mike.

DePue: I can’t avoid this one either. (Thompson laughs) I apologize for this—

Thompson: You’re having fun this morning!

DePue: Yeah, well, why not, Governor?

Thompson: Yeah, why not?

DePue: I'm only going to have one chance to sit down and ask you these things. Reflection on the two Republican leaders in the House and the Senate. I'll just start by reading a quote from a Thomas Hardy article that he wrote, in retrospect, in 1994. But still, there was that relationship between Madigan, who was still the Speaker, and the same two people that you had representing the Republicans, Pate Philip and Lee Daniels.

This is a comment specifically about Lee Daniels. "House Republican leader, Lee Daniels, who had been rolled by Madigan's caucus so many times over the years that his nickname could be 'Pancake.'"⁴⁰ (both laugh) Was Lee Daniels an effective leader for the House Republicans?

Thompson: He was. He was, because there were instances that I can remember where my requests for a tax increase needed the support of Lee Daniels, because it wasn't going to be passed by Rock or Madigan, without Republican votes.

I can remember, Lee Daniels lived in a house in Springfield, just off Washington Park, where I used to go running in the morning. So I conceived a campaign to show up at Lee's house at an early hour in the morning, to knock on his door and take him by surprise and say, "Can I come in and have a cup of coffee, and we can talk?" And he'd say, "What about?" I'd say, "Tax increase." You know, he was just thrilled by that. (DePue laughs) The next time I showed up, I showed up with a coffeepot and coffee, and kept doing it, until he agreed to support some kind of tax increase. It might not have been what I was proposing, but it was a tax increase, and he delivered. So yeah, there were instances in which House Republican votes were needed, and you needed the leader's support to get the votes.⁴¹ The White Sox bill was another instance.

I think Hardy's criticism is a little harsh there. I wouldn't agree with the phrase that the Democrats rolled the House Republicans so often the leader might be known as a pancake. I think that's too harsh, and it's not true. There's no doubt that the Democrats, when they controlled the House, did pretty much what they pleased. But that didn't mean that the House Republicans were always opposed.

DePue: Perhaps Lee Daniels got a little bit of revenge, because in 1995 and '96, he had a thin majority; he became the Speaker those two years.

Thompson: Right. And it's the same thing when George [Ryan] became the Speaker. He came from minority to Speaker.

DePue: Of course, 1994 was as huge year for Republicans across the country.

⁴⁰ Thomas Hardy, "In the Twilight of His Springfield Years, Madigan Sees a Shrinking Empire," *Chicago Tribune*, July 4, 1993.

⁴¹ For Lee Daniels' telling of this story, see Lee Daniels' transcript, pp. 105-106, Feb. 8, 2012.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And at that time, you were just an interested observer to the political—

Thompson: Just a citizen, thank God.

DePue: Nineteen eighty-nine, though, there were several other tax increases. And I'll just get your reaction to each one of these. Sales tax from 5 to 6.25 percent, which would go into effect on January 1, 1990.

Thompson: It was always easier to sell the Republicans on a sales tax than an income tax.

DePue: Because?

Thompson: It was just easier politically, because a lot of times you don't pay attention to the sales tax when you're buying. Your focus is on what you're buying; your focus is on the price. You go to the register; you pay for it. The sales tax just sort of slips by, in the same way a gas tax slips by when you're pumping gas. But an income tax requires you to sit down, usually, and fill out a form and see how much tax you're paying. That's much more of a deliberative process than the commercial process involving a sales tax or a gas tax.

DePue: Well, gas tax, from sixteen cents to nineteen cents per gallon for gas, and for diesel, from nineteen to twenty-two cents per gallon.

Thompson: Yeah. When was the last time the gas tax was raised before that?

DePue: And the question beyond that, then, is was that sufficient to do what the gas tax was supposed to be for, which is to maintain the roads?

Thompson: Probably not.

DePue: So you still had to dip into the state budget to do that?

Thompson: Yeah. Loo, the gas tax, as a source of revenue for the administration, is almost anachronistic. It's outdated; there's such a long time between the legislature's willingness to increase the gas tax after a governor asks for it; it can go years without being increased. And what's happening in the meantime is, you've got a lot more cars, driving a lot more miles, wearing out the roads. You live in a state that has freeze-thaw, freeze-thaw, freeze-thaw, as opposed to, say, Arizona, which has terrific highways that appear like they were poured yesterday.

DePue: With miles per gallon going—

Thompson: Miles per gallon is meaningless today. Look, a gallonage tax depends on how many gallons you're buying. Every year, the efficiency of cars is increased. Now it's mandated by the federal government. So if you're driving more

miles on fewer gallons of gas, your tax diminishes. Never mind the legislature's refusal to increase it.

Even at its current level, it decreases every year, because your cars are more efficient. The clunkers are off the road, by and large. The federal government is mandating a car that can go more miles with less gas. It's a pollution issue too. So yeah, you've got to dip into the general budget to support your road program. We need a different system that doesn't rely on a miles per gallon predicate for deriving revenue from the driving public.

DePue: How much did Build Illinois help on these kind of issues, roads and bridges?

Thompson: Oh, it helped. Anytime you can push transportation infrastructure into a general infrastructure program, it's helpful, because you're not presenting a transportation budget; you're presenting a "Let's make this whole state better."

So if it's transportation plus hospitals or state institutions or whatever else the Build Illinois programs were, it gets subsumed into a politically attractive program, instead of one that focuses just on transportation needs.

DePue: Another one that was increased at the time, cigarette tax, from twenty cents to thirty cents per pack.

Thompson: That's easy, because you have a declining smoking population. So you can go to a cigarette tax and do, in terms of a cigarette tax, a major increase, because there's really no political retribution for legislators to vote for that. If you increase the alcohol tax, you might get a little more heat, but not the cigarette tax. (DePue laughs)

DePue: Speaking of heat, this was one that was passed in 1987. Apparently, before this, there wasn't a license registration fee, but now it was going to be forty-eight dollars per vehicle.

Thompson: What do you mean, license registration? You mean the license fee?

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: Didn't have one before '87?

DePue: That's what I saw on one of the charts.

Thompson: I can't believe that. The practice of paying for license plates goes much further back than that, I would assume.⁴²

⁴² Thompson was correct. The plate fee for passenger vehicles in 1987 was \$48, and Thompson unsuccessfully proposed raising it to \$65.

DePue: We can check that out. So that was a non-issue in '87, then?

Thompson: Yeah. And the legislature since that time has returned to that as a source of revenue and as a source of support for programs, like you want what they call a vanity plate; you pay more. If you want a plate supporting your college, you pay more. I mean, the legislature has added so many programs onto license plates. There have got to be...and so many different license plates.

We went from numbers to letters to the zero plates; it's remarkable, then plates for environmental causes and on and on and on. I don't know how the police keep up with the license plates in this state. You've got to be really sharp-eyed to determine who you're chasing, if the plate departs from the standard numbers or letters. But the legislature loves special plates, and [they] raise money.

Today—and I worked on this as a private citizen—there's a tag on the license plates for cars for the state police, because the state police were just frozen out of new autos in the last several administrations. State police were driving cars which might have a 100,000 or 200,000 miles on it. [That's] not safe in the activities in which they're engaged. We finally got the legislature to pass a bill that put an increased cost on the license plate to fund new cars for the state police.

DePue: Now that license fee is a \$101 per year, giving citizens of the state of Illinois an opportunity to swear at the state every time they write that check for every vehicle they got.

Thompson: Well, I don't think there's that much pushback, really. If you can afford a car, you can afford a plate.

DePue: Let's talk about some of the travel, because 1989 was still a very busy travel year for you. Apparently in February, you're in Washington D.C. for a governor's conference. Do you remember that one at all?

Thompson: No, because that was every year.

DePue: What kinds of things were addressed in the Governor's Conference? This would have been the first one that President Bush would have had the opportunity to address. I'm assuming he had the opportunity to talk to the governors.

Thompson: Yeah, they do. It's traditional. The governors meet in February in Washington. They're invited to the White House in a group. There's a dinner for the governors. And the president, the next day at the business session, comes over and speaks. It's particularly useful when there is a new president, because in many cases, it's the first opportunity that the governors have had to meet the new president, just as he's preparing to take over the reins in the federal government.

DePue: Here is a picture. Obviously it's the Bush years, a group of governors, with President Bush right in the middle.

Thompson: Um-hmm. Where am I? Oh, there am I. I'm over there.

DePue: You're circled in there. Let me ask you this; which of the fellow governors were you impressed with, or did you think had a future beyond just being governor?

Thompson: You had to be impressed by Cuomo as a governor, even though he was the worst attendant at the Governor's Conference. Mario, whom I really liked, was a fellow Lincoln scholar with me, and he came to Illinois at my invitation to speak to the Abraham Lincoln Association on the anniversary of the president's birth or death, either one.⁴³ He was a good, strong governor, and you respected him. But he would show up at the Governor's Conferences, and he didn't go to any affairs. He'd show up at a committee meeting, and he'd be trailed by five or six reporters and photographers, right into the meeting. He'd request permission to speak, and he spoke, then he departed. That was Mario's attendance at the convention. And all of these governors sitting on the committee are saying, "What the hell? Who are we, trained seals? What's going on here?" That was Mario. Clinton, obviously.

DePue: He impressed you?

Thompson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: What about him impressed you?

Thompson: In essence, he was my seatmate. And he was the newest governor and the youngest governor, the new, young governor. I had been the new, young governor in '77. Seating in the Governor's Conferences goes by the order of admission of the state. So it was Indiana, then me in Illinois, then Maine for some reason and then Arkansas. So whenever the governor of Maine was out of his seat, Bill would jump over (both laugh) into his empty seat and talk to me in my left ear, which almost turned to stone.

Bill is one of the most accomplished politicians in America. I mean, to go from what happened to him in parts of his administration, to today, being a commanding national figure, influential once again in his party and well-received by the rest of the country...If he could have run for a third term, he'd have been elected, in spite all of his mishaps in earlier times.

He's not only an engaging politician, but in circumstances like a Governor's Conference, he was one of these guys who just worked the room continuously. Whenever he had a program to present—Bush had an educational program to present that the rest of the Democratic governors were

⁴³ Cuomo spoke to the group on February 12, 1986, President Lincoln's birthday.

eyeing suspiciously, that Bill really sold to the governor's conference, to support Bush's education program. He's just relentless. He doesn't leave a room until he thinks he's persuaded everybody in it. He's a very affectionate, physical politician, arm around the shoulder, you know, all the gestures that convey meaning, as well as words. So he was one. Governor of Indiana, Governor Bayh.

DePue: Was that Evan Bayh?

Thompson: Evan. There were others. Governors don't achieve what they achieve without being, for the most part, very impressive people. They come from very important states, and they're always looked upon as future political candidates, so they're special.

DePue: Did you have an opportunity to meet Hillary Clinton during any of these?

Thompson: Oh yeah, sure.

DePue: And your impressions of Hillary?

Thompson: I liked Hillary, because Bill and Hillary and Jayne and I were friends, in the Governor's Conference, because we were the only ones with young children. They had their daughter, and we had Samantha. And the kids would play together, because most of the other governors had adult children who were long gone out of the household, so they [the children] didn't come to the Governor's Conference. But Samantha did and Chelsea did. Sometimes my state troopers, who were responsible for Samantha's safety, would end up with both Samantha and Chelsea. And we traded babysitting with the Clintons. So Bill and I were always friends, still are today. I've always regarded Hillary, and still do today, as a very able, smart, effective political person.

DePue: Do you have opportunities to send letters or emails or things with the Clintons?

Thompson: No, not that, but opportunities to meet in person. You know, when Bill comes to Chicago to make a speech of some kind, I'll go. And he always makes a special point of saying things about me to his audience.

DePue: For the good old days when you were both governors.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: The next trip, did you go back to Tokyo that year, March timeframe?

Thompson: I might have.

DePue: You don't remember anything specific about that?

Thompson: No.

DePue: I know you remember this next one, in April, going to the Soviet Union.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And I don't think that was your only stop on that trip.

Thompson: Probably not. If I took a trade mission to Europe, I would try to make it as encompassing as possible. One of them—I forget what year it was, so it might have been this one—I included... Well, there were a couple that I remember, where we were in Hungary and the Soviet Union and other countries. Then there was one where Samantha was with me.

DePue: And you told a great story last time about Samantha in the Soviet Union. So you've talked about this one a little bit.

Thompson: And Samantha in London, where she and Pate conspired to—

DePue: Oh, yeah. You did mention that too.

Thompson: Yeah. Samantha is a very effective political person, small p. She just is. I mean, she is today. She has more friends than you can shake a stick at, and they're all over the world. And she keeps up with them. When she has the opportunity, she visits them, or they visit her.

Current circumstances, where she's living in London, people are showing up all the time, from around the world, from the U.S., from India, from Switzerland. This is a kid who still has her childhood friends, her kindergarten friends. They're now married with children. She's married, going to have a child. She's a remarkable person.

DePue: Are you saying that Samantha's pregnant now?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Oh, I didn't know that.

Thompson: Oh, yeah, March.

DePue: Well, that's not that far off.

Thompson: Not far off at all.

DePue: Do you know the sex?

Thompson: I just went and bought baby clothes the other day.

DePue: You did?

Thompson: Yeah, it's a little girl, yeah.

DePue: Very good!

Thompson: Oh, I'm a good picker of baby clothes; let me tell you.

DePue: I wonder if her husband knew that was going to be part of the equation in being married to Samantha.

Thompson: They went together for, like, five years. So he should have known. (laughs)

DePue: Very good. Why the Soviet Union in 1989?

Thompson: I assume that's the trip where it wasn't the Soviet Union anymore; it was Russia.

DePue: No, it still was.

Thompson: Was it?

DePue: It still was, yes. Mikhail Gorbachev would have still been there. The thing imploded in 1990–91.

Thompson: Russia was a trade partner, and I left no stones unturned when I went abroad on trade trips. And I got invited to dinner in the Kremlin. It was an exciting thing to have Gorbachev invite you to dinner, along with other people, and sit in those very impressive halls.

DePue: Do you remember meeting him? Any impressions of him?

Thompson: Yeah. I think I have a talent for spotting leaders, and given my experience and background, it's not surprising. There are people who you know right away are going to be strong, effective leaders. They just have that presence, that poise; it's a part of them, and you can sense it. That was my impression of Gorbachev. That was my impression of Margaret Thatcher, right off the bat, my impression of Reagan. And a number of notable people that I had the opportunity to meet, where I knew the moment we stopped shaking hands that they were something special.

DePue: Any other memories about Margaret Thatcher?

Thompson: I first met Margaret Thatcher in New York. She was the opposition leader at the time. I was on an environmental panel of the Governor's Association, I think I chaired it. And she was doing things in an environmental area. We met in New York at the United Nations. I had that impression of her then.

Then I met her again in London. She was still the opposition leader. We had tea in the House of Commons. So I met her twice. I met her again

when she had just stepped down as prime minister, and Tony Blair had just assumed the office. So I met both of them at the same time. There's another one, Blair, that I would count in that impressive category. You just knew they were going to be top flight.

By then, I was on a board with an international advisory committee that held dinners to which world leaders were invited. I had two of those in my corporate experience. I was on a board with Henry Kissinger, who I'd known for a long time, since he was of assistance to me when I was governor, in terms of fundraising. We had a deal, Kissinger and I, that when I went to New York, I could use his club. I'm down there in the old athletic club, where they had these boxes that you sat in, with just your head showing, back to the twenties, and there were columns and a pool. That was Henry's club. I think it was the University Club in New York.

When he came to Chicago, I would meet his plane, with the helicopter. He'd come down the stairs of the plane, walk over to my helicopter and boom, into the Loop. A couple of times, he attended a fundraiser for me, where he was the speaker. So we've been friends for a long time. And, you know, meeting Kissinger, that he's one of those people, remarkable.

DePue: That's one of the great benefits of being governor for all those years, then, meeting all of these amazing people.

Thompson: Oh, absolutely.

DePue: What was your impression of the Soviet Union when you got there? The reason I ask is, it was in serious economic straits by that time.

Thompson: Yeah, it was. But, when you visited the Soviet Union, you weren't able to see a lot of the things that were going the wrong way. It's still a very beautiful place. And when I went back to Russia—When the Soviet Union imploded and you were dealing with Russia and Gorbachev—it had a different atmosphere. You could sense more freedom on the streets. You could sense that something was happening in Russia, for the better. There was more freedom for people.

I'd been in the Soviet Union before...FMC, a company whose board I later served on when I left the governorship, had an office in Moscow, because they did a lot of trade with the Soviet Union. So I asked FMC if they would share one of their offices, so I could have an Illinois office in Moscow. Modest as it was, we had that presence at that time. So I guess I'd been in the Soviet Union or Russia at least four or five times.

DePue: Were you surprised when the whole thing collapsed? The Warsaw Pact spun away and the Soviet Union collapsed?

Thompson: Yeah, I think everybody was surprised. You know, the wall came down, and—

DePue: That was '89.

Thompson: Yeah. And different people were in charge of Russia or the Soviet Union, however it was designated then. Relations were better between the United States and them. You didn't have the sense of, the guns are pointed at us, as you did during the Cold War. It was a different atmosphere.

DePue: Back to the United States, April fourth, Richard M. Daley is elected mayor of Chicago. As we were discussing yesterday, he replaces Eugene Sawyer. Any comments about your relationship with Sawyer? Did you have many issues that you had to deal with?

Thompson: No, not really.

DePue: What was your impression of Daley?

Thompson: I thought he was smart. I had served with him in state government. He was a state senator. He introduced the legislation, which I opposed, to lift the sales tax from food and drugs. It was a huge revenue loss for the State of Illinois. His bill would have ended it all immediately. After negotiation with some of the Democrats in the Senate—Sam Vadalabene, for one—I got it changed to at least take off a penny a year, instead of the whole thing, because taking off the sales tax on food and drugs all at once would have left a serious hole in the budget. To be able to change it to a penny a year, until it's gone, was much healthier, I thought. That was my only experience with him in the State Senate.

DePue: That issue would have been right in the middle of very tough economic times, too.

Thompson: Right. That's why he proposed it.

DePue: Was there any tension because, when you were U.S. attorney, you went after a lot of his father's colleagues in Chicago politics?

Thompson: No. I always had a good relationship with Rich when I was governor.

DePue: How would you characterize the similarities or differences?

Thompson: I always had a good relationship with every mayor in the city of Chicago. My relationship with Harold Washington was a little more tenuous than the others. But look, I was the governor of the state, it included Chicago; they had needs. They expected me to attend to them.

DePue: Compare and contrast Richard M. and Richard J.

Thompson: Starting out, Richard J. had a longer public career when he became mayor than Richard M. Richard J. was a very powerful person. But the politics at that time were different. They were very much ethnic politics. The mayor of Chicago, when Richard J. Daley was mayor, acquired and kept political power by satisfying strong, viable, visible, ethnic communities.

So, there would be a Pole on the ticket; there would be projects in the Polish neighborhood; there would be jobs in the Polish neighborhood. And the same thing for the Italian neighborhood and the German neighborhood and the black community. Not so much the Hispanic community, because there were fewer Hispanics then. That's how politics worked. There were strong, viable, ethnic leaders, with whom Richard J. Daley had to contend and satisfy.

A lot of that had disappeared by the time that Richard M. came into office, Italian or German—not so much the Polish, but some—had moved from the city to the suburbs. So they were no longer part of the city political process. Or if they were, they were in the political process in greatly diminished terms. So where Richard J. was powerful because he got all these ethnic groups allied with him and distributed power and favors, the move to the suburbs had greatly increased by the time Richard M. came in.

In the end, he amassed more political power than his father, without the necessity to share it. That's, I guess, how I can describe it. That was true. So he would gather onto himself, not just the city of Chicago, but the Chicago Park District and various other agencies of city government that were outside the mayoral area, at least on paper. So he had it all, under very different political circumstances.

DePue: This is getting beyond your time as governor, but when you talked about Henry Kissinger coming into town, I had this image that he was landing at Meigs Field.

Thompson: No, O'Hare.

DePue: O'Hare? Well, the reason I brought up Meigs Field is because of the mayor's issue with Meigs Field. Do you care to comment on... Well, first of all, let's start with the whole issue of a third airport.

Thompson: It's sort of like what Madigan did in doing the midnight tax increase, right? Daley did the midnight, hey, I told you this airport was going to be closed, and now I've closed it, period. There's no more runway.

DePue: Did it make sense to you why he was doing that?

Thompson: No. But look, in truth, Meigs did not have the kind of traffic that an airport normally has. It was nice for business executives who had access to their own planes to fly in and out on that.

DePue: Or state people flying back and forth between Springfield and Chicago?

Thompson: Right, that's true. But those people were simply diverted to Midway. Now there's a new use of the land that Meigs Airport was on. There's a great public park and entertainment area there. And [it serves] the needs of Chicago, which included a greater part of the Chicago population—in terms of use and enjoyment of that area—than was available to the citizens of Chicago when it was an airport.

DePue: How much did you deal with the ongoing discussion about a third airport for Chicago? Was that more of an issue during the Edgar administration and beyond?

Thompson: Yeah. I dealt more with supporting the Chicago Bears (laughs) than the third airport. (DePue laughs)

DePue: November 10, 1988, a Mitsubishi plant opens in Bloomington. May 1989, Governor Jim Thompson takes delivery of a Mitsubishi Eclipse.

Thompson: Yeah, great car.

DePue: Did you have a chance to drive it much?

Thompson: No. (laughs) First of all, I was lucky to save my life driving it out of the factory, because it was a stick shift, and I hadn't driven a stick shift in years. When the Mitsubishi plant was built, it was a Chrysler-Mitsubishi plant.

I had told Lee Iacocca, [CEO and Chairman of Chrysler Corporation] at the ground breaking, that I wanted to buy the first car for my wife. And I did. I gave them fifteen bucks of a down payment, which I never saw again, (laughs) and I purchased the first car off the line. It was a Chrysler product, and that was Jayne's car. It bore the earliest engine number.

So after a couple of years, the Japanese side of the house came to me, and they said, "We want to give you a Japanese car." I said, "Well, you can't." I said, "Unfortunately, and much as I'd like to have this car, you can't give it to me." I said, "Now, you can give it to the people of the state of Illinois, and we'll have it at the mansion." "Okay, what do you want?" I ordered the top of the line, raciest, red car with the biggest engine, and on and on and on, right?

DePue: This is a challenge to the state policemen out there on the interstate.

Thompson: No kidding, no kidding. So it's ready. We go to pick it up, and the state police were driving my car. Instead of having the state trooper drive it back to the mansion, I said I would do it. Now, I hadn't driven a car since becoming governor, except in, let's say, Wisconsin on vacation. But even then, it was mostly in the trooper's car, because they were with me.

So I get into this red, charged up sort of sports car and drive it out of the Mitsubishi factory, although “drive” is a kind description, because at the beginning, at least, it was in fits and starts, because I wasn’t coordinating the clutch with the accelerator very well. Then, as I got out the gates to the factory, out on the state highway, I said, “Whoa, this is a great car; let’s see how fast it can go!” And off I went.

The body guy, who was sitting next to me in the front seat, kept saying, “Ah, ah, ah, ah... we’re losing the tail car.” I said, “Well, they’ll have to keep up; won’t they?” Finally, I felt the body guy was in real distress. So I pulled off the highway and let the troopers drive it the rest of the way to the mansion, where it was on display as a proud, Illinois-manufactured car by UAW workers. I had it on display at the mansion.

There’s apparently a controversy I have with one of the Springfield reporters today, who says that it wasn’t on display when the 20,000 beer drinkers came to the mansion.

DePue: Yeah, that would be Bernie Schoenburg, who was somewhat embarrassed because you had mixed those two events together.

Thompson: Yeah. But there was an event where there were a lot of labor guys at the mansion on the lawn, and some of them at first challenged me for having a Japanese car. And I said, “It’s not a Japanese car; it’s a car with a Japanese name that was manufactured in Bloomington-Normal by UAW workers.” Well, then they loved the car and wanted their pictures taken with it. I can’t think of what a separate event would have been.

DePue: But that beer bust, as it sometimes is called, I think, was 1981. So this clearly wasn’t parked out in 1981 on the lawn.

Thompson: Then there must have been a sort of identical event. I don’t know what it was, because I remember specifically walking across the mansion lawn...because I had called over to the mansion, “Put that car out for display on the lawn.” And they did.

I was walking with labor guys over there, and they did a double take, because there was a Mitsubishi on my lawn. They’re saying, “What the hell?” I said, “Well, you’ll be pleased to know it was manufactured by your brothers in Bloomington-Normal.” Then they loved it. They wanted their pictures taken with it.

DePue: Moving along, June 27, Sears is offered a large retention incentive to convince them to stay in the Chicago area.

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: Were you involved in those negotiations?

Thompson: I was. You know, economic incentives for businesses in your state or ones that you hoped to have come to your state, are very difficult for a governor. They've changed a lot since my time. I did a lot of work in encouraging people to come to the state, Diamond-Star or others, not so much on maintenance of jobs you already had. Then the economy changed, and the economic incentive practices changed. Then you were dealing more and more with keeping what you had and not letting it go to another state. Sears was one of those.

Sears had a lot of jobs, just thousands. And Chrysler had a Chrysler plant up near Rockford [the Belvidere Assembly Plant]. When Chrysler became a sort of economic basket case, nationally, and the Congress and the governors responded with fiscal assistance to keep Chrysler going, I was the last governor to sign up, persuade my legislature to give money to Chrysler to keep their plant running up there. I remember dealing with Iacocca on that issue. But I got the legislation passed, and we did give them assistance, and they did stay and increase. It's running fine today up there.

So the programs changed, given economic times. They moved from bringing new in, to keeping what you had. But the mechanics of keeping what you had are very difficult. It's sometimes very hard to justify economic assistance to existing organizations. Sometimes their threat to move out of the state is hollow, and it's really hard to say, "Okay, we'll help Company A." So Companies B, C, D, E, F, out there, maybe competitors, are saying, "What the hell?" That's the kind of thing that, say, Governor Rauner or Mayor Emanuel face today.

Emanuel these days is doing a lot of either keeping what he has or encouraging moves from the suburbs to Chicago. It's not adding to the job stock in the state, because they're simply moving locations from one part of the state to the other, oftentimes with no promises of additional jobs. But the mayor decides, Well, if I can move them to Chicago, I've accomplished something. The mayor of ABCville may not feel the same way. (laughs) So economic development programs today are much harder. There are fewer resources. It's harder to persuade the legislature to support them.

DePue: Did IH, International Harvester, close during your watch? I believe it did.

Thompson: Yeah, I think it did, early on.

DePue: Was there any effort to try to help them out, or that was just a sign of the times?

Thompson: No. It was a sign of the times.

DePue: A change in subject here for you, Governor, and one that we're going to finish up with.

Thompson: Is this a fun one?

DePue: I think you'll enjoy this one.

Thompson: Okay.

DePue: You were quoted in the *Rockford Register*, in March of 1989, and it's addressing doing a lot of traveling. (reading quote) "I try to get to as many places as I can. It's my job, and I owe it to the people of the state of Illinois. But I tell you, I was forty when I started in this, and sometimes now my fifty-two-year-old body says, 'Wait a minute, Jim, you've got to stop this!'"

Thompson: (both laugh) Yeah.

DePue: Now, moving a couple months ahead—

Thompson: I wish I was fifty-two today; that would be great. I wouldn't complain. I'll even take seventy! (both laugh)

DePue: Are you eighty now, seventy-nine?

Thompson: Next May. Unbelievable! I'd never have conceived of myself as an eighty-year-old person. I just—

DePue: But see, you just persevere from one day to the next, and you get there.

Thompson: God! I guess so.

DePue: July 13, 1989, you announced your retirement.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: What led to that decision?

Thompson: Two things, and I said them at the time. One, I really believed that after fourteen years, Illinois was entitled to new leadership. Even though I was a wonderful governor, even though I believed I could have been reelected to a fifth term, without any problem, I just thought, I've led this state for fourteen years, but there are other people who are capable of leading this state. And the people of Illinois are entitled to have the chance to put them in office.

The other thing was, I had spent almost all my working career in public office or in teaching, and I didn't have any personal wealth. I was how old, fifty-two?

DePue: You would have been fifty-three at the time of this announcement.

Thompson: I had a family. You know, I left office with debts that I had to pay, and I needed to provide a future for my family. I needed to find private employment

that paid, so I could do that before I got too old. So two very simple reasons, personal economics, and my very strong feeling that, after fourteen years, new leadership would be important for the state. And I said both of those things at the time.

DePue: Had you discussed this at any length with Jayne before you made that decision?

Thompson: Yeah, I did. This was not one of those things I surprised her with, like running for reelection. (both laugh) “What!” “Well, I heard it on the radio,” said the wife of a cabinet member. “Hmm, okay!”

DePue: What was she telling you?

Thompson: She said it was up to me, as she had on most things. My daughter wanted to stay. She didn’t want to leave the governor’s mansion.

DePue: I’ve got to show you a picture from the *Tribune*, after you had announced, a picture of the three of you, Jayne, Samantha and Governor Thompson.

Thompson: Well, I don’t know what she was laughing at.

DePue: Governor, she looks downright thrilled that you were making that announcement.

Thompson: I know, she does. She does; she does. And Samantha, I don’t know, there must have been a joke in there somewhere. But Samantha, as a child, just thought living in the governor’s mansion was the cat’s pajamas and really would have encouraged a fifth term. And I think Jayne said, “It’s up to you.” She might have been privately relieved, because our life would change, and she wouldn’t face all the issues of a public life.

DePue: In fact, I read someplace else that, not too long after this, she started back to work with... Was it Matthias Lydon and Farrell Griffin?

Thompson: Yeah, Lydon and Farrell Griffin and Webb.⁴⁴

DePue: Being a politician for most of your life, by that time, were you concerned about trying to set the stage for a replacement?

Thompson: No, because Jim Edgar had been waiting patiently, and apparently he had overcome his wife’s aversion to the idea of his becoming governor. Listen, I

⁴⁴ Lydon, Griffin, and Dan Webb had all served as assistant U.S. attorneys under Thompson. The “theft of honest services” theory Thompson successfully used in his prosecution of Otto Kerner developed out of strategy discussions for one of Lydon’s cases. (See Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library oral history interview of Tyrone Fahner by Mike Czaplicki, April 13, 2015.)

hired Jim Edgar in the first place, with the idea that he would someday replace me as governor.

DePue: And that was all the way back in '79, I believe.

Thompson: That's exactly right.

DePue: So should I get your version of the telephone call first or Governor Edgar's version?

Thompson: Let's start with Governor Edgar's, because I simply don't remember it.

DePue: Well, he does.

Thompson: Oh, I'm sure he does.

DePue: So here's Edgar's version. He was out in Colorado at some kind of a conference, maybe a secretary of state's conference, I would guess, because that's the job he had at the time.

Thompson: Yeah, right.

DePue: (reading) "I just remember I got to the airport, and one of my state troopers says, 'You've got a call. You've got to call your secretary.' Penny Clifford is my secretary at the time. 'You've got to call Penny.' So I call Penny, and Penny says, 'The governor needs to talk to you.' I thought, Oh, this must be it, (Thompson laughs) because he doesn't really search out for me. And Penny said, 'He's got to talk to you **now**.' So I said, 'Okay.' So we make contact, and I get him, and he said, 'It's yours.' I said, 'What's mine?' He said, 'The office. I'm not going to run again. It's yours.' And I said, 'When are you going to announce it?' He says, 'I'm going to announce it in about an hour.'"⁴⁵

Thompson: (laughs) That's enough notice.

DePue: (continues reading) "And I said, 'Okay,' and that's all. And he hung up, and I get on the plane and go to Colorado."

Thompson: There you go. I'll take Edgar's version. That's about it.

DePue: Had you considered anybody else? This has been ten years removed from when you first tapped him on the shoulder. Still clear in your mind he was the obvious choice?

Thompson: Absolutely.

⁴⁵ Jim Edgar, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library oral history interview by Mark DePue, June 22, 2009, Volume II: 444.

DePue: Why?

Thompson: First of all, he had shown the ability to be elected statewide. Secretary of state's not exactly a little bitty office; it's a wide office, very politically important and one dealing with the public at large every day. So, thinking about why I had originally hired Jim Edgar and what I told him when I hired him, the reason why I did, and [that I'd] told him then that he would governor someday, which absolutely floored him, nothing had happened in the meantime to dissuade me from that idea. But at the end, it wasn't anything to do with me; I didn't have any ability to hand him the office.

DePue: Was anybody else talking to you about the desire to assume that role after you stepped down?

Thompson: No.

DePue: George Ryan wasn't talking to you?

Thompson: No. Because I didn't say ahead of time [that] I was going.

DePue: Was George Ryan an effective lieutenant governor for you?

Thompson: I thought he was.

DePue: Could you see him in that role as governor?

Thompson: As opposed to Jim, at the time? No. I would have said Jim was clearly the leading candidate. But I think, if George Ryan's record as governor of the state were fairly examined, you would have to conclude that George was an effective governor. His mishaps came from when he was secretary.

DePue: We'll have more opportunity to talk about Governor Ryan later.

Thompson: Yeah, but it was my idea that Edgar would be governor, and I hired him for that reason and brought him along. That was my choice.

DePue: What was your notion of what you were going to be doing after you got out of office?

Thompson: Join a law firm. I was a lawyer, and near the end of my time, I interviewed ten law firms, and all of them made me offers. One of them offered to change the name of the law firm to include mine. All of them offered me more money than Winston did, but the money that Winston offered was a big multiple of my current salary as governor. (laughs)

DePue: What were you making as governor at the time?

Thompson: Oh gosh, I don't know, it was probably, what, \$60,000 or \$70,000, maybe?

DePue: Is it inappropriate for me to ask what Winston & Strawn was offering?

Thompson: I don't remember clearly, but it was, like, a multiple of ten. But that's not why I went to Winston. And the fact that Dan Webb was there; Tom Reynolds was there, and all of my pals were there; that's not why I went.⁴⁶

I went because Winston offered me the quickest, clearest chance to leadership of that law firm. That was important to me. I mean, all the money the private law firms pay, compared to a governor's salary, was, as I say, a multiple of ten at least. So I wanted to be able to be a leader. The deal I made with Tom Reynolds, who was then the chairman, was that he would retire in two years, and I would be the chairman.

For a chairman to come from outside a law firm is very rare. Usually it's people who've been there twenty, thirty years and have worked themselves up to leadership in the firm. To have an outsider come in and immediately be a leader is just unheard of. But they offered to do that, and it came true. So I started off as chairman of the executive committee and an equity partner in the firm. And in two years, when Reynolds retired, I became chairman. I served as chairman for thirteen years, almost as many years as I served as governor.

DePue: But you announced in July of '89 that you were stepping down from being the governor. You've still got a year and a half to go.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So here's the last question for the day, Governor. What did you still want to accomplish in that last year and a half?

Thompson: I'm not sure. I'll have to try and refresh my memory. But I do remember we did a goodbye tour. I spent a year touring the state of Illinois to say goodbye to the people in Illinois that I had governed and who had supported me. And that was a wonderful trip. That was one of the best trips, maybe the best trip, I ever took, to go around my own state and say goodbye to people and bask in their approval.

DePue: I can certainly see why you'd enjoy that trip.

Thompson: Yeah. And the same is true today. It's been twenty-five years since I've been governor, and I have the same public appreciation from people I meet, not only in Illinois, but out in Michigan where Illinoisans occasionally go. If they see me, they come right over. The nicest thing that they'll say is, "I just want

⁴⁶ Shortly after joining Winston & Strawn, Thompson, his first campaign manager and deputy governor, Jim Fletcher, and one of his assistant U.S. attorney protégés, Dan Webb, occupied three of the four corner offices on the firm's top floor.

to thank you for the work that you did as governor.” Or, “Thank you for serving as governor.”

I’m sitting in a restaurant, and this person comes up to me, total stranger, and says that—oh boy, I’m good for the rest of the day. I really am. (DePue laughs) And it happens a lot. Now, eventually those people will die, and kids who have never heard of me will come in. (laughs) You know, when I call a restaurant today for a reservation, and I hear the voice of the receptionist, I’m thinking, “Uh-oh, she’s about twenty. She has no idea who Governor Thompson is.” So I’ll make the reservation, and then she’ll say, “And what was your first name again?” And I think, It’s okay.

DePue: But Governor, fifty years from now they’ll be able to listen to some of this.

Thompson: That’s exactly right. I think this should be mandatory listening in the schools of Illinois.

DePue: There you go! I’d be in favor of that. (Thompson laughs) Well, Governor, thank you for another very enjoyable session!

Thompson: My pleasure. That was fun.

(end of transcript #22)

Interview with James Thompson

IST-A-L-2013-054.23

Interview # 23: February 16, 2016

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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

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.

DePue: Today is Tuesday, February sixteenth. This is Mark DePue. I am once again with Governor Jim Thompson in his apartment. Good afternoon, Governor.

Thompson: Good afternoon, Mark. It's been a while.

DePue: Yeah, I think this is our twenty-third session, but twenty-two was back in October, I believe.

Thompson: Oh, gosh. No wonder I'm tired. (both laugh)

DePue: Tired? You haven't been exercising your thoughts on this here lately.

Thompson: Yeah, I know. I haven't been exercising either, so I got to do both.

DePue: I sometimes like to start with what's in the news. There's a lot in the news right now. You just mentioned, before we started, two people who recently passed away. Let's start with Phil Rock. You've talked about Senator Rock quite a bit before, but any final thoughts since he just passed away about a week or so ago?⁴⁷

Thompson: I think, if you looked at the turnout for his funeral... Old St. Pat's Church was full, the balcony was full. They were going to have a post-funeral lunch at Plumber's Hall, which meant it was going to be a big one. He was, I think, one of the finest guys in Illinois legislative history, as far as I'm concerned.

We were close. In fact, there was a joke they were telling at the funeral that his friends and his enemies—enemies is too strong a word—his friends and his detractors referred to Rock as Thompson's floor leader in the Senate. (laughs) It was sort of recognition that he and I were often on the same side on legislation. I thought he was a great man. I still do, and we won't see his kind again for a while, I don't think, especially with the polarization and the bitter disagreements going on in Illinois politics now that were not present when I was governor. It's a sad thing, but Phil Rock was one of the best.

DePue: On the same theme, but now at a national level, Antonin Scalia passed away, I think, Saturday night. I heard about it on Sunday.⁴⁸

Thompson: Right. They said today that he had had a history of heart trouble and hadn't been feeling well for a couple of days before he went to Texas. He needed an operation on his shoulder, and they'd refused to do it, because of his heart trouble. So it was a little startling to me that he would go down to Texas by himself after not feeling well that week. But, if that was going to happen to him, he probably was just as happy in a bed in Texas, ready to go hunting, you know? He picked what they call a good death. But his passing has sure loosened a storm on the judicial and political scene.

⁴⁷ Senator Phil Rock died on January 28, 2016.

⁴⁸ Supreme Court Judge Antonin Scalia died on February 13, 2016.

He was a very interesting guy. I had met him a couple of times when I was governor, and a couple of years ago—it can't be more than two years now, I don't think—I had dinner with him in Chicago. He came to Chicago with some regularity, because his son works here in the Department of Labor. He and his son and John Nicolay, who used to work for me, and I and Jayne had dinner at Chicago Cut. It was just a delightful experience. He was funny and profound.

I didn't always agree with his opinions... I might have agreed with his opinions, but I didn't always agree with his dissents; let's put it that way. (laughs) But there was no doubt that he was an extraordinary influence on the court, and for all the words that have been written about him since Saturday, it's just amazing. I've never seen that much written about any former justice. They didn't write as many articles when Rehnquist⁴⁹ died. So both his admirers and his detractors recognized his enormous influence in American law, whether at the court or writing or speaking. He was really something.

DePue: The question now, that I'm sure you've been hearing discussed, is whether or not President Obama should appoint a new Supreme Court justice or at least attempt—

Thompson: I think he should certainly appoint a new Supreme Court justice, nominate a new Supreme Court justice. He has the constitutional duty to do that, just as the Senate has the constitutional duty to advise and consent, whether in the negative or the positive. I'm not sure how that will play out. Depending on the nominee, the Republicans might decide to give the nominee a hearing later on this year and vote up or down. But I find it hard to believe that people could seriously hold the view that Obama shouldn't nominate. He has a duty to nominate.

DePue: How about the Senate to confirm? Does the Senate have a duty to confirm?

Thompson: No, they don't have a duty to confirm. The advise and consent contains both a positive and negative connotation. They can either advise the president that they don't consent, or they can consent.

Nothing in the Constitution says that the Senate has to confirm a nominee. In fact, in the past, nominees have not been confirmed, whether for the Supreme Court or for the cabinet or for other federal posts, district court judges or appellate court judges. Each has their own constitutional duty.

DePue: If the president were to nominate somebody with the same judicial views as Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor?

⁴⁹ William Hubbs Rehnquist was an American lawyer and jurist who served on the Supreme Court of the United States for 33 years, first as an Associate Justice from 1972 to 1986, and then as the 16th Chief Justice of the United States from 1986 until his death in 2005. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Rehnquist)

Thompson: I don't think they'd be confirmed. The political opposition is just too strong in the context of an election, but who knows?

DePue: If you were sitting in the Senate, would you vote to confirm somebody like that?

Thompson: I don't know. I'd have to hear what they said. Look, they've both been confirmed twice already, Sotomayor and Kagan, so it's—

DePue: You mean at the federal district level and the Supreme Court level?

Thompson: Yeah, I mean they're both confirmed Supreme Court justices. When you say somebody "like them," you'd have to know who the "like" was and what they had to say under examination by the Senate. I don't think a nominee is going to be confirmed. I think the political opposition in the Republican Party is just too intense, but we'll see.⁵⁰

DePue: The last time we talked—three months ago—we talked a little bit about the fact that Illinois, at that time, still didn't have a budget.

Thompson: Nothing has changed.

DePue: Seven and a half months later, Illinois still doesn't have a budget, and the governor's going to give his annual, required budget address in a week or so.

Thompson: Tomorrow, I thought.

DePue: Yeah, probably so.

Thompson: Isn't that strange. Even Pennsylvania, I think, now has a budget. They were our competitors for length of time without a budget. I don't think this has ever happened before in the history of the state. The inability to agree on a budget is causing, I think, grave damage in Illinois. A lot of our institutions are being threatened; social service programs are being derailed; the government is being run by federal judges and union agreements or lawsuits.

It really bothers me that Illinois, which for so long was known for great institutions of higher learning, are seeing colleges and universities threatened with closure or seeing their staffs laid off, the grants for students not there, facilities facing closure.

When I was governor, even though higher institution[s] didn't always agree with my budget allocations—which is not surprising; once in a while, nobody agrees with your budget allocations—I always really tried to do the best I could for our colleges and universities. I was a strong supporter of the

⁵⁰ Although Thompson accurately read the Senate Republicans' opposition to confirming another Obama-nominated justice, he did not anticipate their refusal to act at all on the nomination.

community college program, and my (clears throat) generosity to the University of Illinois was unparalleled, I think.

A Democratic senator, one time, down south, said that I had probably paved over most of southern Illinois, and that's kind of close to the truth. (laughs) But I made sure that the University of Illinois had their labs and their library and their programs and kept their scholars. It was the state's land grant institution, one of the finest in the nation. When you come close to hurting that, something's very wrong.

DePue: If you were governor—obviously with fourteen years you have plenty of experience to answer the question—what would you do?

Thompson: I would do what I did for fourteen years, which was to try and find agreement between the legislative branch and the governor's office. I think anybody who looks at my record of those fourteen years would say, "That's exactly what he did," remembering that for all but, I think, two years, the Senate and the House were in Democratic hands. Even the times when the House was Republican and the Senate was Republican, I don't believe it was ever the same year. But whatever, for the vast majority of my time as governor, I had a Democratic legislature, and yet we got an enormous number of things done, by agreement. So Governor Rauner and the legislative leaders will just have to work it out. It's their duty.

DePue: Which side of the argument would you be on, in reference to term limits?

Thompson: I'm not a big fan of term limits. I think that cuts away from the people's right to choose their leaders. So that's not a big deal with me. I have never been a supporter of term limits, no matter who proposed it.

DePue: How about legislative redistricting, which is another one of his turnaround agenda?⁵¹

Thompson: I think that ought to be redone. I mean, you look at a legislative map these days, and it's just crazy. You could go blind looking at it.

DePue: And the other issue that Governor Rauner has really pushed hard is, let's say, labor related issues. Currently there is a very public war between the Rauner administration and AFSCME over their lack of a contract.

Thompson: That's a negotiation. I negotiated with AFSCME. I didn't always agree with their views on what they ought to get in the contract. That's what negotiation

⁵¹ After his inauguration in January 2015, Governor Rauner developed a sweeping "Turnaround Agenda" of forty-four initiatives he believed would reform Illinois government, provide relief to taxpayers, and promote economic growth.

is for. I never had it go so far as to be referred to the State Labor Board for resolution, whether there was an impasse or not. We never had any impasses.

Look, I was always a strong supporter of collective bargaining when I was governor.⁵² I certainly was a strong supporter as a Republican; that's for sure. I mean, I gave the teachers the right to strike, and the result has been fewer strikes than existed when there was no right to strike. I'm proud of that. There's no doubt that I had friendly relations with almost every union in this state. Some of them became very strong supporters of mine, both in the legislature and as far as financial support. In my last election I had the COPE [Committee on Political Education] endorsement of the AFL-CIO [the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations], which is unheard of for a Republican governor. The only Republican governors in modern history who have had it were the governor of New Jersey—I'm blanking on his name—

DePue: Chris Christie?

Thompson: No, not Chris Christie.

DePue: The former governor.

Thompson: Former governor, who was the chair of the 9-11 Commission⁵³. In any event, he got the COPE Endorsement, and I got the COPE Endorsement. We're the only Republican governors in the nation to ever get that.

DePue: Did you say COE or COPE Endorsement?

Thompson: COPE, I guess it's the Committee on Political Education. It's the mechanism by which the national AFL-CIO gives political endorsements. So I don't think in Illinois in 2016 you can successfully argue against unions as unions.

Unions have a very strong and very appropriate place in our nation's history. They've done a lot of good for the working men and women of the United States and of Illinois through the years. [They] were instrumental in giving millions of people a middle-class economic base, whether they worked in coal mines or in auto factories, no matter where they worked.

This great growth of public employee unions, all at the same time as this diminution of private sector unions that we've been seeing in the nation for the last thirty, forty years, has given these issues a different context. There are issues on which you can bargain with labor, and even with Democrats and

⁵² On Thompson's support for collective bargaining and his pursuit of the labor vote more generally, see James Thompson, interview by Mark DePue, August 28, 2014; Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 24, 2015; Gregory Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 7, 2013; and David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, April 22, 2014.

⁵³ Former New Jersey governor, Thomas Kean, Sr.

Democratic leadership, that have to do with the cost of doing business, whether it's the appropriate definition of the rules of workers' compensation or unemployment compensation. That's a different sort of issue than saying, "I'm against unions."

And the problem with campaigning against unions, or expecting the legislature to forsake unions, is [that] in any negotiation, in any agreement, in any bargaining, you can't ask the other side for something they can't give, or you'll have no result. Madigan and Cullerton can't give legislation which would weaken unions as unions. They can't do it. Unions have been a huge part of their base of political support.

Illinois is not Wisconsin. The conditions in Wisconsin, where you had a conservative Republican governor and a conservative Republican legislature, are far different from Illinois.⁵⁴ We elected a Republican governor; that's right. I voted for him, and he won. I think he won primarily because people rejected his opponent.

At the same time, the voters of Illinois elected a legislature which was not only Democratic but was overwhelmingly Democratic, to the point where they could override a governor's veto, if they all hung together. Now, you might say that the people of Illinois were being a little schizophrenic at the time, but they weren't. They were looking at their legislative candidates; they were looking at their gubernatorial candidates, and that's what they chose. They had every right to choose that kind of mix in the result. That has to be taken into account when you try to resolve issues between the governor and the legislature, between Republicans and Democrats, between Chicagoans and downstaters, far downstaters, between big cities and downstate cities and towns and villages and rural farm country.

Wisconsin doesn't stretch from Chicago to near Mississippi; Illinois does. We're a far different state than Wisconsin, in far different political circumstances. So there are some lessons to be learned from that, I think.

DePue: I'll put you more on the spot here, Governor, before we get to the fun stuff. Who is at fault then? Which of the two sides is at fault?

Thompson: I can't assign fault, because they each have things in their favor, it seems to me. And they are both elected and required by the constitution to work it out.

DePue: Who's going to blink first?

Thompson: I have no idea.

DePue: We've been waiting for seven and a half months for that.

⁵⁴ Reference to the anti-union legislation Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker signed into law in 2011 and 2012.

Thompson: Well, you may wait a year. Look, the federal courts have stepped in, in a number of cases, and said, “You will pay this.” (sighs) Here’s the problem though, the longer this goes on, the more money will go out for programs that are being paid now, without the revenue to support it. So if this goes on much longer, you’re going to find an enormous debt that the state owes to its vendors and its institutions, like colleges and universities.

Even if there’s a tax increase as part of a deal—which I guess there has to be, because even Rauner is for it, under the right conditions—how much of that tax increase is going to have to be used to pay this old debt, this...what is it, \$7 billion, something like that? And how much is going to be used for programs to make Illinois a great state? That’s a real, yawning pit in front of both the legislature and the governor.

DePue: You’ve got that, plus about a \$111—maybe \$112 and growing—billion deficit or hole for the pension funds.⁵⁵

Thompson: Right. That’s a lot of money. That’s an awful lot of money.

DePue: That gives us plenty to watch, and we haven’t even talked about the national ledger.

Thompson: And everybody knows there will have to be budget cuts, right? And not easy ones, not little ones. So if you’ve got the prospect of tough budget cuts and a tax increase and \$7 billion in debt and new programs to pay for, wow! I thought I had tough times when I was governor. Wow!

DePue: Speaking of when you were governor...finally, we’ll move on to that. I appreciate your allowing me to dabble in kind of a philosophical look at governance today.

We left off in late 1989; we’ll get to 1990 real soon. As you’re looking at that last year as governor, what did you still want to accomplish as governor?

Thompson: I think I had accomplished about all I wanted to or could accomplish as governor. If you can’t get it done in thirteen years, you’re not going to get it done. I spent a lot of time that year on what we called “the good-bye tour.” I was all over the state of Illinois, saying good-bye to people, as governor, thanking people for their hard work and their support, whether they were state employees or they were citizens of the state of Illinois, from every section of the state of Illinois. [I] covered the state pretty thoroughly.

⁵⁵ DePue’s figure is the total unfunded liabilities of the five state pension systems, as of June 30, 2014. By the end of FY 2016, unfunded liabilities had grown to \$126.5 billion. (Commission on Government Forecasting & Accountability, “Table 3: Summary of Financial Condition FY2016,” *Illinois State Retirement Systems Financial Condition as of June 30, 2016*, March 2017, 24.)

DePue: You're talking about 1990?

Thompson: Um-hmm. Look, the people of Illinois had given me an enormous opportunity, through four terms, four elections, to be their governor, and I felt I owed them an additional debt of gratitude, beyond what I had tried to do for them as governor. I wanted to let them know that, directly and personally, to the extent that I could, by touring the state religiously for a year, because, in the end, to be successful, you've got to make government personal to a lot of people. They have to know that you understand their problems and care about them and are trying to do your best to solve the problems.

It's one thing to make speeches, and it's one thing to issue policy papers or support legislation, but the personal side of politics in government is just as important, I always thought. The people you met on the street, the people you met while you were bouncing in and out of storefronts in small towns, and the people you met in parades... It's like no other job in the world, I think. I was very grateful for the opportunity that I had been given, and I wanted to make sure people knew that. So I said, "Hey, get the RV out; we're going downstate; we're going everywhere, and tell people good-bye and tell people thank you."

DePue: I'm going to go through a few things that happened in late 1989 and then some of the more substantial stuff for 1990. I'm not sure that you remember a lot of this, but in 1989, a \$120 million, multiyear parks program, to include Cahokia Mounds opening up their Interpretive Center.

Thompson: I was very proud of what we did at Cahokia. How often do you get to build a museum? Not often. I had built baseball stadiums and Navy Pier and McCormick Place Halls and refurbished historic sites across the state, but you don't often get the opportunity to build a museum. And this museum, as you say, an Interpretive Center, was very different from the kind of museums I grew up in Chicago with.

I can remember touring that after we opened it and watching children pull out the drawers in the cases and actually get the chance to pick up and handle exhibits. When I was a kid, it was no touch, and your parents pulled you away from any attempt to do that. And here we built this museum that let people mix it up with the guts of the place. I thought that was great. I was really happy to have been able to do that and to add that to our state's treasures.

DePue: It seems to me it's still, though, one of the great unknown gems of Illinois.

Thompson: Oh, it is. I mean, it's in an area that a lot of people don't get to, just like the museum that George built, the Abraham Lincoln [Presidential] Museum.

DePue: George Ryan.

Thompson: Yeah, you got to go to Springfield to do it, and how many people from Chicago ever get to Springfield in their lives? But it's an **extraordinary** place.* You could walk into the Abraham Lincoln Museum, knowing absolutely nothing about Abraham Lincoln, and walk out just star struck, I mean, in your own mind, a Lincoln scholar. It's just an incredible place. It's something Illinois did on its own. It wasn't political, because Abe's been dead a long time. The president didn't have to hustle for fundraising, like all the modern presidents have done.

Those are treasures we have—like the Dana-Thomas House—another treasure we have that people don't know that much about. It's the most complete Frank Lloyd Wright house in the world. There are places like that all over the state of Illinois that make us unique.

DePue: August 15, 1989, you signed the Taxpayers' Bill of Rights. Do you remember that?

Thompson: Um, not with any detail.

DePue: It's certainly something that sounds good, the right to call the Illinois Department of Revenue for help; the right to privacy; the right to respond with specific time periods when you get notified, things like that.

Thompson: Great.

DePue: August 23, this is something that has been in the news here recently. You signed a pension bill that allowed for the compounding of pension retiree payments at 3 percent per year.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Which at that time, based on the annual inflation rate, didn't sound like too much.

Thompson: It wasn't. In fact—I don't know whether we've discussed this before or not—I discussed it with somebody recently, probably a reporter. Every bill that goes through the legislature has to have a fiscal note on it that tells you what it's going to cost, in the best estimate of the Legislative Reference Bureau. That had a fiscal note on it, and as you say, it wasn't very large. It's something that the legislature wanted to do. So I signed it, simple as that.

The legislature has its areas of concern. Members of the legislature work very closely with state employees. State employees are the backbone of state government, and the legislature decided that they wanted to do this. At the time, both the legislature and I were told that it was not an expensive proposition, in the context of the state budget at that time.

- DePue: You had been coming out of a time period when you first became governor where inflation rates were...Let's see, in '78 it was 7.6; in '79, it was 11.3; in 1980, it was 13.5; by the time you get to 1989, it's 4.8.
- Thompson: Over the years that's kind of a whack on people's pensions, it seems to me.
- DePue: If you don't keep up with the inflation rate?
- Thompson: Yeah. Now, whether the 3 percent compounding was the ideal vehicle for that or whether it could have been staged in another way, I don't know. But that's what the legislature came up with.
- DePue: In roughly that same timeframe, you vetoed a family leave bill, which would allow eight weeks of unpaid leave for the birth of a child. Do you remember that?
- Thompson: No, I don't, but I wouldn't do it today. (both laugh)
- DePue: Well, before we started, we were talking about waiting for the birth of your first grandchild.
- Thompson: Right, and I think my son-in-law plans to take paternal family leave. (laughs) {They're} much more modern than we were back then.
- DePue: And do you remember in 1989 vetoing a mental health bill?
- Thompson: No.
- DePue: We talked quite a bit about mental health last time. This is one you probably do remember. In November of 1989, you and state historian, Tom Schwartz, attended the commissioning of the *USS Abraham Lincoln*.
- Thompson: I do remember that. Boy, was that cold. Oh!
- DePue: Where was it?
- Thompson: It was freezing. It was in Virginia, on the ocean. The ship was christened by Jim Webb's wife. Jim Webb was the secretary of the navy. And Jayne was there as part of the christening party. I remember standing on that dock, and I thought, We'll never come out of this alive. It is freezing! And Mrs. Webb swung that bottle of champagne at least three times before it broke. Then they took her off; the extreme cold got to her, so they took her right off the pier to someplace else, whether it was a hospital or inside. I don't know; I don't remember. But I do remember that day. Then, the really neat thing, the next day the *USS Abraham Lincoln* set sail on the shakedown cruise, and I was aboard for three days.
- DePue: Wow!

Thompson: In an admiral's stateroom. I had members of my staff with me, and we got to learn how an aircraft carrier ran. It was extraordinary, like eight decks. Now, I took the elevator up and down these eight decks, but the young sailors, they ran up and down the stairs of these eight decks. Then you watched them eat, and I'd think, My god, who could eat that much? But that's what they needed, because the work on the ship was extraordinary.

We got to go out on the deck and watch the jets take off and land. When you went out there at night, it was really extraordinary. Somewhere in my files, I've got a short video that one of my young guys shot of the nighttime landings and takeoffs. You read about planes being catapulted off decks, but you never really understand what that's like until you see it, especially at night, with the flames and the smoke. Then you're out there in rough seas and you think, How in the world could they ever land on a pitching deck?

So, after three days, they put me in a plane and catapulted me off, back to land. (laughs) But it was fascinating, really fascinating.

DePue: Does that make you a plank holder for the *USS Abraham Lincoln*?

Thompson: I don't know, but somewhere I've got a book of the first year of the *Abraham Lincoln* and the cruises they took and where they went.

DePue: That gets us into 1990, a gubernatorial election year—and we'll get to that a little bit later—but January 10, you deliver your final state of the state address. Do you recall anything about that?

Thompson: No.

DePue: I mean, you only gave fourteen of these things. (Thompson laughs) Do you remember any particular initiatives? You knew you were probably going into a fairly tough budget year.

Thompson: I really don't. My memory can probably be refreshed, but you're talking about twenty-six years ago, right?

DePue: Yep, a long time ago.

Thompson: I can't remember yesterday.

DePue: February, an ice storm hits east-central Illinois, with major power outages, the kind of thing that typically the governor has to make decisions about, in reference to the National Guard and national emergencies, things like that.

Thompson: Yeah, we had a lot of that going on once in a while, ice storms, floods.

DePue: While we're in the neighborhood, let's go ahead and talk about a massive tornado that year. August 28, quite a bit later in the year, I guess, a massive tornado hits Plainfield and Joliet; twenty-eight died.

Thompson: Yeah, I remember that.

DePue: Remember much about that one?

Thompson: Oh yeah. Tornadoes are probably the most wicked thing that nature can do. It is so arbitrary. I've walked down streets after a tornado and seen absolute devastation on the left hand side of the street and nothing out of place on the right hand side of the same street, a matter of maybe, what, 100 feet apart? That arbitrariness of Mother Nature, together with the destruction that a tornado sets loose, where people's houses are just flattened, it's different than a flood. A flood can damage your house, but it survives. A tornado, nothing survives. Your life's possessions are all out on the lawn for everybody to see, and people are standing outside of their houses in just absolute despair.

The thing that always impressed me was, a lot of times people would want me to come and look in their basements to see the devastation. It was not so much that their house was ruined; it was that their personal lives were on display. That's the real killer of a tornado; that's where the victimization of people takes place, to have your family's photographs and clothes and children's toys and everything else just laid out on the ground.

People, I always thought, wanted to be comforted that somebody else was sharing their devastation, that their governor knew what had been done to them and was comforting them and understood the absolute horror of it all. You can deal with floods, and you can deal with other kinds of disasters, but dealing with a tornado was something separate and apart.

DePue: Is all of that the reason that it's very important for you, as the governor, to get out there?

Thompson: Oh, absolutely, and not just in the tornado context, but in floods. I've ridden boats in floods, rode once down the Kankakee River with George. You can see, on the one hand, people being taken out of their homes, rescued from the flood, and on the other, you can see people sitting on their roof, drinking beer, celebrating the flood, what you would call the "river rats." They've been living next to a river all their lives, and by god, no matter what happened, they weren't moving. (laughs) It's just an incredible sight.

But no, you have to be out there, whether it's with the people filling sandbags and piling them up against the Mississippi River or the Illinois River or a tornado or a flood on a smaller river, like the Kankakee. No matter what the danger is, people want to know that their governor understands it and that he's doing everything within his power to ameliorate it, whether it's making

sure that FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] is out there or the guard is out there or that the governor has invoked an emergency and declared disaster areas and has been in touch with the president, to declare federal disaster areas, so that they can get monetary relief. It's really important.

DePue: Different subject entirely. February 7, you signed a bill authorizing gambling boats, gambling casinos.

Thompson: Oh yeah.

DePue: Initially four, on the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. The state had had a lotto since 1974, so it wasn't entirely new to gambling, but this is quite different.

Thompson: Yeah, they even went up and down the river. (laughs) Yes, I don't really remember what spurred it, but I guess I eventually was persuaded of the notion that we could recreate, in the twentieth century in Illinois, what had been done in the nineteenth century in other states, with boats going up and down the river, entertaining people and with the gambling onboard.

And you see what that led to. It led to, later, how many different casinos? Instead of going up and down the river, they later became barges. Now they're structures, buildings, like any other. I signed the bill on a riverboat, which hadn't yet been set up for gambling, and I've never been to a riverboat since.

DePue: Well, there was gambling in Illinois prior to this time, a long tradition of racetracks.

Thompson: Yeah, racetracks.

DePue: And I'm not sure the racetrack owners were too excited about riverboat gambling.

Thompson: Oh, they weren't. Racetrack owners don't like competition of any sort, of any sort. Their interests always have to be accommodated, if you're going to pass a bill giving other groups access to gambling.

DePue: Which you well understood, having taken Otto Kerner to trial, I guess.

Thompson: Right. Look, racetracks, I don't know how long they'll continue to exist. Most of the patrons of racetracks are older people, or at least that's what I observed when I went to racetracks. Now a lot of them bet from stationary places, where they watch the races on television.

DePue: Off-track betting?

Thompson: Off-track, yeah. So it's all changing. I mean, we had illegal gambling in Illinois for a long time before either the lottery or the riverboats or the off-

tracks. Slot machines were a big deal, not only around Chicago, but particularly in the suburbs and in downstate in Illinois. In fact, some people say that one of the reasons that Dick Ogilvie lost the election was because he had sent the state police on slot machine raids. That and banning leaf burning were supposedly the two things that did Ogilvie in, right?

DePue: Not the income tax?

Thompson: Not the income tax and not Dan Walker walking the state, slot machines and leaf burning. People downstate will tell you that. They are just as dead certain as they are of anything.

When I was a young prosecutor, I went on raids against places in Chicago that had slot machines. I stood there while my police busted them up, hauled everybody away. So it existed. In fact, Chicago was the slot machine manufacturing capital of the world. All the slot machines were made in Chicago.

DePue: I didn't know that.

Thompson: Oh yeah. We outfitted Vegas and every other place that had slot machines.

DePue: What was your philosophical view about gambling?

Thompson: I wouldn't want to see it take over the entire state. I wouldn't want to see us become Vegas, although where you draw the line is very difficult. I, fortunately, didn't have to draw it. But I guess I looked on it as a voluntary tax.

DePue: Why not Chicago?

Thompson: Hey, I'm for gambling in Chicago. I tried to get slot machines at O'Hare, as part of a deal. The best I could do was get the lottery at O'Hare.

DePue: So who was it that was preventing gambling from coming in to Chicago?

Thompson: Oh, there were a bunch of people, the same people that complain about gambling now. I don't think the mayors, before Daley, were all that enthusiastic about it. But, given the convention industry in Chicago, and the given that Chicago is a day's drive for 50 million people and that we have a huge tourist industry in this state—in fact, tourism is the state's largest business, bigger than manufacturing, bigger than the service industry—I always thought that would be a good source of revenue. It took advantage of what people wanted to do voluntarily.

Yet it's never been able to get done. The legislature occasionally passed a bill. Governor Quinn would veto it but never offer a bill of his own to replace it. I don't know. It just was a failure on the part of the legislature

and the governor and the mayor to come together. It still should be done. It's foolish.

DePue: With as much gambling as there is in the state now, with restaurants and taverns and every place you go with slot machines and lots more casinos?

Thompson: The restaurants don't have slot machines, just the so-called riverboats and the stationary casino, up in the northern suburbs. The kind of gambling that you would have in a casino is different from tavern gambling. Casinos have entertainment, and they have vast spaces; they have hundreds of machines. People go there as destination entertainment, not as an adjunct to a meal.

But it's been, I think, a failure on the part of governments, state and local, to do this. We have near-bankrupt schools in the city of Chicago, but we haven't been able to successfully open a revenue source. I don't get it.

DePue: June 20, the dedication of the new Illinois State Library, which was right across the street from the new State Capitol and the Supreme Court Building. We've talked about it a little bit, in reference to the style of architecture.

Thompson: That was Jim Edgar's project, and he did a great job. It's a beautiful library. If Chicago is the architectural capital of the world—or at least we used to be—Illinois should get part of that glory, as well, it seems to me. Our Capitol buildings in Springfield are beautiful. The Dana-Thomas House is beautiful. The Abraham Lincoln Museum is beautiful. And even though the State of Illinois Building in Chicago was a very modern affair, the library that Jim did is beautiful. And you need all kinds in this state.

DePue: We've talked about the State of Illinois Building, the Thompson Center, a couple of times before. Since we've talked, it's gotten into the news again, because Governor Rauner has talked about selling it. That's not the first time. I think Governor Blagojevich, or was it Quinn, one of those—

Thompson: Quinn, Quinn.

DePue: ...did the same thing, putting it up on the sales block.

Thompson: They never quite did it, but they talked about it. Look, I'm emotionally invested in that building, so I don't understand the motive. My guess is Governor Rauner just doesn't like the building. It means nothing to him, and he's not invested in it the same way I am.

And it's been run down; there's no doubt about it. Blagojevich and Quinn let it run down. Rauner says it'll take a \$100 million to fix it up. I don't argue with that; maybe it will. But the thing, in my view, is an architectural triumph; it is an extraordinary building, and if it were maintained and run right, it would be one of the most impressive places in the city.

All of the problems that arose, right after its being built—like those that arise in every new building that's being built, until they're corrected—are gone. The complaints about the air conditioning system, which you'll still find in the architectural books, all these years later—although the building's in the books, they recognize it, but they want to add that little carping in there—that was fixed.

The building later became an official cooling center for the city of Chicago, where people could go for relief on extraordinarily hot days. It's a matter of taste, I guess. I like the building. I built the building. I thought Helmut Jahn did an extraordinary job. The building has won awards, but if the governor doesn't like it, he doesn't like it.

DePue: Is it an expensive building to maintain, more so than others with the same kind of floor space?

Thompson: I never thought so.

DePue: The next subject I want to spend some time on is the *Rutan* decision that came down on June 21, 1990. The official title of this case was *Rutan v. Republican Party of Illinois*, and as in all Supreme Court cases, it took a long time to get to the Supreme Court. So it really started in the early 1980s. Let's start with something you have talked to me about a little bit before, patronage is what this is about.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And patronage had been part of the American political system, even long before Andrew Jackson. So what was your view, what is your view, about patronage?

Thompson: I think patronage is one of those things that is essential to the effective (coughs) administration of government. Look, are you going to elect a governor of the state of Illinois and give him the responsibility for making sure that the government runs right, yet tell him who he can hire and who he can fire? Or who he can't hire and who he can't fire? How do you fix responsibility? The governor's one person. This vast army of state employees and bureaucrats are the ones who make government function, and you would think that if people elected a governor, they wanted him to succeed. And if he has no say over employees of the state, except through civil service firings for crimes or all the serious offenses that would warrant discharge under civil service rules, it's hard to say how you can hold somebody, like a governor, responsible.

Maybe there's a difference, as the two cases, *Rutan* and the other cases say, between hiring and firing. Maybe once a person is employed, you can't or shouldn't fire him, except under civil service rules. I don't know. I'm willing to talk about that.

But hiring? Why wouldn't you expect a governor to be able to bring with him to state government people who supported him in his election and who you presume are there to do the will of the governor that the same people elected? There aren't many people who are willing to stand up and say that these days, but it's the God's honest truth.

DePue: The argument is generally, where you draw the line between appointees that ought to be politically oriented, versus—

Thompson: Oh, they draw that line now. They say, "Oh, a governor can have these policymaking people, subject to his ability to hire and fire, without any rules, his top policy making aides." Well, yeah, but (laughs) what about the other 40,000 people? [Are] you going to have the ability of a recalcitrant bureaucrat to say, "No, I'm not going to do that. I don't agree with the governor"? It's just crazy.

What happens in corporations, where you bring in a new CEO? [Are] you going to tell him he can't have any say over the people he hires? No.

DePue: The argument is usually framed as, you want to have a merit based system, so the people who are best qualified for these positions get the job.

Thompson: Oh yeah, okay. So, take away the patronage power from the governor. But there's still patronage in state government. It's just administered by different people. It's administered by unions; it's administered by the bureaucrats themselves. You tell me you don't think people in state government, [who have] been there for years, have not found a way to hire their friends, that unions have not found a way to hire their friends?

There's patronage in state government today; it's just not being run by the governor that the people elected. Nobody elected these bureaucrats; nobody elected these union leaders. I mean, who are we kidding?

DePue: Let's go back to the earliest days of your administration, and I'll confess that, living in Springfield, I know people who had been personnel directors. I got this from a friend, who was a personnel director back in those days, pretty young at the time. But he was telling me a story—and I'll let you see if this sounds familiar at all—that there was a personnel director of the department—it would now be somebody working at CMS, not at that time—who was a professional bureaucrat, the term you would use, a personnel man.

After the first two years, '77, '78, you were getting so much heat from all of the county chairmen, who weren't able to get their kind of people into the jobs they thought they needed to get their kind of people in—and therefore had a lot less power in their own positions—that that position was changed, that a new person came in, who was more politically oriented. And I believe one of the first things that you did also was establish a hiring freeze, which would centralize most hiring at the state at the governor's office level.

Thompson: Absolutely. I'll be right back.

(pause in recording)

Thompson: Hiring freezes, personnel directors...I got to tell you a story. I got a call one day from a downstate, Republican senator who, if you didn't stroke him twice a week, always was unhappy. He called me up one day, and he said he had recommended to the director of one of my code departments a guy from his county for state employment. So the notion that you cannot grease a deal with a legislator, in return for support of some of your programs, with favors—like a project in his district or the repair of a road in his district or a visit to his home town or the hiring of one of his supporters—is crazy. That's not how government works.

You have to have an agreement with the legislature that they're important in the process too. So I said, "Well, what's the matter, why isn't the director hiring your person?" "He won't do it." So I said to one of my staff members, whoever was in charge of what was left of patronage, to get this done. [It's] not a big deal to me; just get it done, so the senator's happy.

They went out to do that at my direction, came back and reported to me that the director refused to do it. Now I'm getting a little irritated, right? Because I appointed him director, and I asked him to do something, and he's not doing it. (sighs) And I rarely did this; I rarely got angry—in fact, people will tell you that they've never seen me angry—but I was angry.

So I picked up the phone and called the director. His secretary said he was out, and I said, "Where is he out?" "He's out playing golf." I said, "What club?" She gave me the name of the club. I called the club. I said, "You go out on the course, and you find director ABC and bring him to the phone." So they did.

I said, "Director, how are you?" "Fine." I said, "It's a really nice day; you're lucky to be able to be playing golf out there." "Yes, I am. I've been having a great time," he said. I said, "Director, Senator So-and-so tells me that you have refused to hire his friend in your department." "Yes, that's right." I said, "Why have you refused to hire his friend?" "Well, I just don't think he'd be a good employee." I said, "Director, listen, here's the deal. You either get off the golf course, and hire this guy before the end of the day, or tomorrow morning, when you come in to your department, this guy that you won't hire is going to be your secretary. Got it?" So he hired him.

Now, in fourteen years how many times did I do that? Never. How many times did I get defied at a direct request by a cabinet member on something as petty as that? Never. So I was mad, and I got it done, and the senator was grateful and continued to support me. That was patronage, in that context.

DePue: If you don't mind, I'll lay out the specifics of the *Rutan* case.

Thompson: Go ahead.

DePue: (laughs) You're probably anxious to move on from this subject.

Thompson: No, no, no.

DePue: According to the petitioners, one being Cynthia Rutan, but there were several, quite a few of these people had approached Mary Lee Leahy, who was a lawyer in Springfield, who worked on a lot of these kind of issues.

Thompson: Oh yeah.

DePue: "The governor had been using his office to operate a political patronage system to limit state employment and beneficial employment-related decisions to those who were supported by the Republican Party. In reviewing an agency's request that a particular applicant be approved for a particular position, the governor's office looked at whether the applicant voted in Republican primaries in the past election years, whether the applicant had provided financial or other support to the Republican Party and its candidates, whether the applicant had promised to join and work for the Republican Party in the future, and whether the applicant has supported the Republican Party officials at state or local levels."

One of the earlier interviews that I did was with Mary Lee Leahy, and that was one of the subjects that we had discussed at length.⁵⁶ And here are a couple of the comments that Mary Lee made, that "Cynthia Rutan was an extremely good employee in the Department of Rehabilitation Services. She had applied for a supervisor position, in other words, to move up. She did not get it. She made an inquiry and was told, 'Well, we really wanted to select you, but the governor's office checked your voting records.'" And a little bit farther in the interview she said, "Cynthia, when she found out that she didn't get the job and found out they checked her voting records, went to the Republican headquarters, here in Springfield and got a form to fill out. It asked what job she had, what job she wanted. Was she willing to contribute? Was she willing to work for the party? And then the question that really got me," again this is Mary Lee Leahy, "The question that really got me was, 'How did you vote in the primary of 1978, 1980, 1982 and 1984?'"

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: So that's essentially how it worked?

Thompson: Yeah.

⁵⁶ On *Rutan*, see Mary Lee Leahy, interview by Mark DePue, May 27, 2008, 80-100.

- DePue: The Supreme Court got it, and I guess, in the 1989-1990 timeframe. They cited *Elrod v. Burns*; that was a case you alluded to before, which dealt with firing, the old patronage system—
- Thompson: No. There was a Supreme Court case on firing. I guess that was a Supreme Court case.
- DePue: ...and that that was a violation of an individual employee's First and Fourteenth Amendment rights. So that's part of it. In a 5-4 decision, "The court asserted the government could not constitutionally base employment decisions on the individual's party affiliation, that it unquestionably inhibits protected belief and association and that this was tantamount to coerced belief. Promotions, transfers, recalls after layoffs, based on political affiliations or support, are an immeasurable infringement on the First Amendment rights of public employees."
- Thompson: So, up until that time it had been legal, right?
- DePue: Yeah, I guess so.
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: It had been constitutional, and this isn't just the case for Illinois, is it?
- Thompson: No, this is nationwide. And this was decided by a vote of five to four.
- DePue: The dissenters were Antonin Scalia, William Rehnquist, Anthony Kennedy, and Sandra Day O'Connor.
- Thompson: Yeah.
- DePue: I'm pretty sure that it was Antonin Scalia that wrote the minority report on it.
- Thompson: And what'd they say?
- DePue: I don't have anything quoted here.
- Thompson: Oh.
- DePue: Do you recall?
- Thompson: No, but I'm sure they probably said things like I've just said, that when you elect somebody to public office, you are expected to have him be an effective person and to bring with him to public office the people who supported him and will support him as governor, so that you can get things done.
- DePue: I believe Scalia also made the point that it had been around since the foundation of the country.

Thompson: Absolutely, yeah. And so, if one justice had flipped, right, it'd have been five to four the other way, hmm? And who wrote the majority opinion?

DePue: Well, I couldn't find the majority—

Thompson: William Brennan.

DePue: William Brennan.

Thompson: Yeah, and where was he from? New Jersey. And what kind of politics do they have in New Jersey? Oh, boy! And how'd William Brennan get on the Supreme Court of New Jersey, before he came to the Supreme Court of the United States? Well, it wasn't by an exam.

DePue: But that's a Supreme Court or a federal court position; it's not the guy who's a security guard at a local prison or the woman who's a cook in a prison or positions like that.

Thompson: Um-hmm. Of course, to believe the majority in that case, to believe what Mary Lee Leahy believed, you'd have to believe that people had a constitutional right to public employment.

DePue: And that was part of the argument as well; I'm sure.

Thompson: Yeah. Look, I know my views on patronage are not politically correct or appropriate. I don't see any other politicians or ex-politicians talking about patronage, except me. I just keep babbling on on this issue, but I'm telling you, I was in office for fourteen years and saw the good effects of an efficient patronage system and how it made government work better. And I'll always believe it.

DePue: Following the decision then, the state is required to make some changes, in terms of its hiring practices, and one of them is to identify which positions are exempt from *Rutan*.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Were you or people in your administration involved with that, because this happened right at the end of your administration?

Thompson: No, that came case by case from the courts. We were not allowed to say who was a policy person and who was not a policy person.

DePue: In discussions with Mary Lee, she did discuss the process. I can't remember if it was your people or if it was Edgar's people, sitting down and making some determinations about what are policy positions, and what aren't policy positions. Any final comments on patronage? (laughs)

- Thompson: No. (sighs) I could probably be persuaded of at least the arguability of the decision that said you can't fire people because of politics, but you'll never persuade me that you can't hire people because of politics.
- DePue: Maybe a more refreshing topic for us to discuss here for you, the summer of 1990—
- Thompson: Oh, I always thought patronage was refreshing. (both laugh)
- DePue: Well, you were refreshingly candid, Governor. Summer of 1990, you made a thirteen day trip to London and Eastern Europe. I believe you probably have alluded to this before, because you had a couple of great stories about Samantha.
- Thompson: Yeah, Samantha was on the trip.
- DePue: Why'd you start off with a stop in London?
- Thompson: No, I think we ended in London. We were in some Eastern European countries; I forget exactly which ones.
- DePue: I know that you had to stop in Poland, because you opened up a trade mission there and in Hungary.
- Thompson: And in Hungary.
- DePue: Why? Because this isn't something that all governors are doing at that time.
- Thompson: That's too bad for them. I thought it was important. We had had success with our trade offices, that I believe I inherited from Governor Kerner's administration, in Brussels and in Brazil, not so much in Brazil, but Brussels certainly. We were trying to run all of Europe out of Brussels, which was, to my mind, inefficient. I also gave consideration to the fact that Chicago had, at least in the case of Poland, a large Polish population, second largest in the world, after Warsaw. And I thought it was appropriate, if we were going to go on to expand the trade offices, which we were... I inherited two, and I ended up with thirteen. It was a nod to Poland and the Polish people of Chicago, and it was a nod to Hungary. My staff didn't want me to do it, and I defied them.
- DePue: Why?
- Thompson: Because I thought I was right, and they were wrong.
- DePue: No, why did they not want you to do it?
- Thompson: I don't know whether they thought that Poland and Hungary were not worthy of trade offices, or we had too many, or I don't remember the reason, or

because they weren't as far thinking as I was. I wasn't persuaded by what they said.

We were celebrating part of our cultural heritage, in Chicago, I think at the Thompson Center. In my speeches, I just got up and announced it, and there were all these gasps from my staff, sitting behind me. So we opened them up. They couldn't stop me after I had publicly announced them, right? It was the same way we got the Du Quoin State Fair. I just went to a press conference and announced it. I didn't have any legislative authorization. I didn't have \$25 million. I didn't have any of that stuff, but—

DePue: Did you have to get that eventually?

Thompson: Yeah. Oh, yeah. But to announce a second state fair for southern Illinois and save them from ruin and all this other stuff that they were worried about, who was going to oppose me after that? I did announce it.

DePue: This is the summer of 1990. In November of 1989, the Berlin Wall comes down.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Do you remember that?

Thompson: I do. I do, and I got to go to Germany on one of the anniversaries. I believe it was of the end of World War II. I was in Berlin, and it was my chance to visit what was left of the wall. It was an extraordinary trip, first to be there firsthand when they celebrated the end of something that I experienced only as a child.

I was nine years old when World War II ended, and I remembered it. I remembered all the things we did during World War II, you know, victory gardens and saving scrap metal and saving newspapers and having rationing and all that, blackout exercises. So, to go to Berlin to celebrate the end of it was an extraordinary thing.

It was one of the highlights of what I was able to see when I was governor. The governor's position gives you an extraordinary seat of the world, not only in your own state, but anywhere in the world that you have relationships or projects. I worked with Margaret Thatcher at the U.N. (United Nations) on environmental reform. It was really something.

DePue: You went to Europe the summer of '90, so the Warsaw Pact would have been unraveling during the timeframe you were there.

Thompson: It was.

DePue: The Soviet Union was still the Soviet Union, but that was going to be just a few more months before it's done—

Thompson: No, I think actually my last trip there, as governor, I was still governor. My last trip there, the Soviet Union had ended, because I was the guest of Russia. There was no more Soviet Union by that time.

DePue: Were you surprised by how fast all of that unraveled?

Thompson: Oh, sure. I grew up under the Cold War and the U.S.-Soviet relationships. And I'd been through it with Reagan, so it was an incredible thing to see and hear the wall come down like that and to see the abrupt switch and to see Russian leaders like Gorbachev negotiating with the West and with President Reagan.

I thought Gorbachev was one of these men who were born for their times, who was one of those leaders that, when you met him for the first time, you could tell he was "it," whether it was Gorbachev or Thatcher or Reagan or any of the other people I had the chance to meet

DePue: August, the groundbreaking for a new Sears headquarters at Hoffman Estates.

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: And August 16, you determined that the Native American burial ground at Dickson Mounds should remain open for viewing.

Thompson: Oh, god. (laughs) You know, I flip-flopped on that so many times I lost count. (DePue laughs) That's true. It was not one of my finest hours.

DePue: That issue extended well into the Governor Edgar period; did it not?

Thompson: Yeah. The native peoples were coming into their own, after a period of being brutally suppressed by the nation. The culture was changing, and the American acceptance of the Indian culture was changing. I went back and forth on it. You had this private museum of Indian remains, down there in central Illinois, much beloved by the local community, much supported by the local community. And I thought, It's not my place to go in there and tell a private entrepreneur he can't have this museum.

Then I went to the other side, and I said, I can't tell the Indian peoples that their ancestors' bones can be commercially displayed. So, as I say, it was not one of my finest hours. I really screwed up on that. It eventually got settled. But I did draw the line at Chief Illiniwek.

DePue: Let's talk about Chief Illiniwek. (Thompson laughs) I don't think it's come up yet. One of Edgar's bag boys was Chief Illiniwek, Livingston.⁵⁷

Thompson: Yeah, right. I knew them all, when I was governor. I spent a lot of time on the football field of the University of Illinois. I thought Chief Illiniwek was a proud tradition of the university. It was a celebration of the Indian's place in American culture and history. Yeah, it wasn't being danced by a native Indian; it was danced by white kids. But I just thought that was a piece too far, and it was such a part of the tradition of the University of Illinois. I even had my statues for Build Illinois built in the form of Chief Illiniwek. So I'm not sure I would have given in, but maybe the university would have taken it out of my hands anyway.

DePue: Going back to Dickson Mounds for just a second, part of this ongoing struggle with the state budget right now is that the governor decided to close the state museum and with it, a couple of the other sites, to include Dickson Mounds. Any comments on that?

Thompson: I wouldn't have done it. I was a fierce champion of Illinois museums and of the Illinois Museum. I wouldn't have done that. But I'm not the governor.

DePue: Here's another thing that you are a fierce champion of, and we've talked about this quite a bit, especially purchasing all of the antiques that had escaped the Dana-Thomas House.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: September 7, 1990, it reopens after a three-year, \$5 million renovation. Were you there for that reopening?

Thompson: Oh, I'm sure I was. I spent a lot of time with and at the Dana-Thomas House, from the moment we purchased it. It was not an easy thing to do to purchase the Dana-Thomas House; we were in the middle of a recession, severe recession, and people chose, some of them, to equate purchasing the Dana-Thomas House with taking away food from senior citizens and little children, quite apart from the fact that we used capital funds. If they hadn't been used for the Dana-Thomas House, they would have been used for some other capital purpose. But I did it. I persevered.

Pate Phillip was an **enormous** help. He later donated a billiard table or a pool table to the Dana-Thomas House. He was its champion always. But as good a care as the Thomas Publishing Company, who were the then occupants of the house, gave to the house—and they did; they were wonderful owners—some of the pieces from the house had escaped, over the years, some before the Thomas people came in, and they were coming up at auction.

⁵⁷ Tom Livingston, interview by Mark DePue, February 16, 2011.

DePue: You and I have talked about it extensively already.

Thompson: I mean, they were going to auction off all the windows of the house. That's how I bought it to begin with, to prevent that. And then I became enormously interested in it. There's Mrs. Dana's coffee pot.

DePue: Oh, wow.

Thompson: Which, if they go ahead with their plans to hold a fundraiser for the Dana-Thomas House foundation, I've said I would be there, and I would give that to the mansion. I got that from an antique dealer friend of mine in Springfield, who was at the original auction when Mrs. Dana was taken across the tracks and put in that little cottage. She had physical and mental problems, and they dragged all the stuff from the house out on the lawn to sell it. People wouldn't buy most of it, because it was strange, modern. The chairs were fifty cents; can you imagine that?

DePue: Wow! There's been a bit of inflation on the cost of those chairs now.

Thompson: They dragged the chairs out, and they had to drag them back in, because nobody would buy them. Anyway, they did sell Mrs. Dana's coffee pot to this antique dealer friend of mine, when he was just a youngster. And he later gave it to me. I've kept it all these years, because it's my link to the Dana-Thomas House. But I'm willing to give it back to the house, if they have this party.

DePue: Would you be comfortable living in a house like the Dana-Thomas House?

Thompson: For a while probably. (laughs) I don't know how long I'd want to stay there. It's a great house. Samantha wanted me to buy it, so we could own it. And I said, "Ah, no."

DePue: Here's another thing. You talked already about your statewide tour, your farewell tour, so to speak. In August, one of the places you always went was the state fair, and this was the last state fair. One of the papers described you, in reference to going to the state fair, as the state's biggest kid.

Thompson: (laughs) That's probably pretty right.

DePue: What drew you back to the state fair?

Thompson: Every year. This was a celebration of rural Illinois that had been going on for over a century, and it was something that, as the governor of the state, you couldn't just walk by. So I went into it full charge. I had a governor's tent, and I was out at the tent every day, sitting there, listening to people, who came in to the tent and talked to me. I toured the fair every day. I went on the rides, went to all the eating booths, ethnic village, went to the labor tent. I went to the Democratic tent, everywhere.

- DePue: So much for your diet, when you go to the fair.
- Thompson: Oh, I know. Yeah, I made... who was it? I made either Reagan or George Bush, the first one—I think it was George Bush—tour the ethnic village and eat all that food. (laughs)
- DePue: Now a completely different kind of subject. September 12, the first state execution in your tenure. It had been outlawed for a long time, and shortly before you got to office—
- Thompson: Is that right?
- DePue: This was Charles Walker.
- Thompson: I thought I didn't have any executions when I was governor.
- DePue: Okay, you don't recall this one.
- Thompson: No.
- DePue: You would have had to approve the execution.
- Thompson: No.
- DePue: No?
- Thompson: No, the court set the date for the execution. I would have only had to intervene, if I was asked to stop it.
- DePue: And you don't recall being asked to stop it.
- Thompson: No, and I've always said I didn't have any executions under my time.
- DePue: I can show you an article on that. Just reading from the article, "Convicted of the murders of Kevin Paul, 21, and fiancé Sharon Winkler, of Mascoutah, Illinois. While Walker was looking for beer money, he robbed them of \$40 and shot them to death, while the couple fished in St. Clair County, Illinois, in June of 1983. He was executed in Stateville Prison in 1990 by lethal injection, at the age of fifty." It was considered to be a botched execution, because the lethal injection machine wasn't able to make drugs go through the kinked lines.
- Thompson: Boy, I'm surprised, because I've been saying the contrary for the last thirty years, (laughs) or forty years.
- DePue: Maybe it didn't ever come up for your review then.

- Thompson: That may be it. That may be it, because I had death penalty cases come to me when I was a young, assistant state's attorney, but never as a governor, I thought. But I may be wrong.
- DePue: Then you don't have much to say about that one.
- Thompson: And I'll stop telling that story. (laughs)
- DePue: The state opens its first military style boot camp to 700 young felons at Dixon Springs, a work camp.
- Thompson: Um-hmm, I remember that.
- DePue: You probably did a whole series of prison dedications and openings, over your career.
- Thompson: I did. I probably built more than any other governor.
- DePue: I think that's fair to say. It kind of has a couple of components. One is, tough on crime, but also economic opportunity for some of the more depressed areas of the state. Would that be a fair statement?
- Thompson: That's a fair statement.
- DePue: Any more comments on that?
- Thompson: You weren't going to abolish prisons. I thought you had to increase the number we had, because of overcrowding, which could lead to really bad issues. So we built prisons, and I tried to site them where they would do some good, in terms of depressed places in downstate Illinois.
- DePue: This is a subject now in the current presidential debate and has been for the last couple of years, always hearing citings about the percentage of blacks that are in prisons and how the criminal system is biased against African Americans. That's very much a part of the political debate right now, and how we need to reform our criminal system, because we've got way too many people incarcerated.
- Thompson: I think that's a mouthful. Look, I think what you really need to do is reform the drug laws, because that's responsible for a huge part of the prison population. Since the drug laws are changing in America... You've got legalization in states like Colorado and other places, and you've got medical marijuana laws now in Illinois and the whole notion of how you deal with drugs—at least marijuana and small amounts of other drugs that don't involve drug sales—is changing and is responsible for a lot of the overcrowding in prisons. And I agree; do something about that.

But I really have never been persuaded about this notion that the criminal justice system is prejudiced against blacks. In the first place, a lot of the crimes that are committed by black people, who've gone to the penitentiary, were committed against other black people. The notion that we have a criminal justice system in the state of Illinois that is deliberately designed to put black people in the penitentiary, without regard to the Constitution or the laws, is one I don't buy.

With rare exception, I think that people who are in the penitentiary are people who are there because they committed crimes. It doesn't have a lot to do with their race or their ethnicity. If people are in the penitentiary for crimes, like rape or robbery or burglary or murder, it's hard to say that they shouldn't be there, because there are a lot of black people in the penitentiary.

Look, the black community is afflicted with crime, without any question, absolutely afflicted with crime. The gangs that are terrorizing the city of Chicago are largely and almost without exception black or Hispanic gangs. They're the ones with the guns, and they're the ones who commit murder on a daily or weekly basis, in the city of Chicago and who sell the narcotics and who extort people and who rule by fear. And their victims are black and Hispanic people. So I think sometimes people paint with too broad a brush in dealing with this. I don't agree with a lot of that argument.

DePue: Nineteen-ninety was an interesting year in a couple of respects. The world was changing a lot. You witnessed yourself the unraveling of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries. This was also the year that, in August of 1990, Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait. Suddenly the United States finds itself taking a stand. And although there's no vote in the Congress, the country's at war. This time around, they're calling up National Guard units.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: I wondered if you could address the mobilization of the Illinois National Guard units for that war.

Thompson: I saw it firsthand, without question. I would go to the armories in Illinois and say good-bye to the troops that were being called up and sent overseas to fight. I thought that was part of my duty, since I was the commander in chief of the Illinois National Guard, and I didn't want the soldiers to leave our state and go off to fight in a war without recognizing them. I wasn't responsible for calling them up to serve, but I was their commander, in the state of Illinois. They had been federalized by the president, and they were going off. So, I would go to say good-bye.

DePue: A big reason why the National Guard reserve units were being called out was because there was a conscious decision, after the Vietnam War, to restructure the military and make it much more likely, in a major combat situation like

that, that you'd be required to call out the guard reserve, or otherwise you wouldn't have enough forces.

Thompson: All because you didn't have the draft.

DePue: You didn't have the draft. And they put a lot more combat units into the guard, especially. Did you go to reserve departures, as well or primarily guard?

Thompson: Once in a while, [but] primarily the guard. About the only thing you can say about that is that, when people joined the guard, voluntarily, this was one of the conditions that was attached to the job, the possibility that you might be called into service like that. That's the same kind of condition that attaches to the work of policemen and firemen and other people in dangerous occupations, that one day you may be called to the scene of a holdup with shootings or called to a fire that's beyond control. I mean, that's part of the job.

DePue: Do you think the public in Illinois was generally supportive of those units being mobilized?

Thompson: I think so.

DePue: Let's finish off with this subject today, Governor, and that's the gubernatorial election. I'm pretty sure the last time you and I met, you talked about that eventful day when, I believe, Secretary of State Edgar was in Colorado, when you called him up and told him your decision.

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: So that's obviously in 1989, 1990. Were you actively supportive of Edgar's election campaign?

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: Did you go out and campaign for him?

Thompson: I did. And I contributed a lot of money. (DePue laughs) I did. I had a campaign fund that, at that point, was probably over \$1 million, and I put a lot of it into Jim's campaign. Every time Neil Hartigan attacked me, instead of Jim—"The Governor put a rose garden in the mansion, rarrhh"—I contributed more. Every time he campaigned against me, rather than against Edgar, I would call up Kim Fox and say, "Send another \$25,000 to Jim Edgar."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Fox ran Thompson's campaign fund, Citizens for Thompson. Kim Blackwell Fox, interview by Mike Czaplicki, July 14, 2014.

I got the chance to tell Hartigan that. I said, "You know, if you don't get straight who your opponent is, Edgar's going to be **very** well financed."

DePue: (laughs) It's like the old drinking games, huh? Every time somebody says something, you have another shot, and in this case—

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: When you mentioned that to Hartigan, was that in the midst of the campaign?

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: And did he stop?

Thompson: Eventually. He was trying to tell me how well he would treat me, if he was elected governor. And I said, "Oh, yeah, right."

DePue: At the same time you were making your farewell tour, were you also pitching for Edgar's campaign?

Thompson: Not in those appearances, no, [but] in separate appearances that Jim would ask me to do. But on the other hand, you had to be careful because Jim Edgar needed to be seen as his own man, not as Thompson's protégé or the guy that Thompson stuck in there. I tried to do it in a very discreet way.

DePue: Let me ask you this then, Governor, how would you compare and contrast Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar?

Thompson: (laughs) Night and day! No, we were just different personalities; that's all. I didn't have that many disagreements with Jim, but he was his own man, and I wanted him to be his own man.

DePue: Describe his personality.

Thompson: You remember that I told him, on the very day I hired him. I sat him down in my office, took him right out of the legislature and made him my legislative liaison, and I said, "And one day, you're going to be the governor of Illinois," which shocked him. He went home and told Brenda about it. [It] shocked her for sure. (laughs) For a couple of elections after that, when I said I was running again, she'd say, "Oh, thank God."

DePue: Did you ever have that conversation with George Ryan, who certainly had ambitions to that extent?

Thompson: No. No, I did not.

DePue: What was it about Edgar, versus Ryan, that you saw as having potential for the job?

Thompson: I thought Edgar was more electable. He was more electable than Pate, more electable than George, more electable than a bunch of people. It was just something I saw in him.

DePue: More about his personality or that he was in sync with your policies?

Thompson: No, not really either. He certainly had the personality to be the governor. He was a very successful state rep, once he got elected. He didn't get elected the first time. But once he got elected, and when he served as secretary of state, where he did an extraordinary job, he certainly had the personality.

He was a different personality than I am, but all governors in the state of Illinois have been different personalities; that's for sure. I don't have the same personality as George or as Blago [Blagojevich] or Quinn or Rauner or Ogilvie, you name them. I just thought that he could carry on the tradition, and he did.

Look, we had Republican governors twenty-six years in a row. Nobody else in the country had that. That's a pretty good pick, I think.

DePue: Maybe a superficial difference, but people loved to point out that Governor Edgar was something of a teetotaler. There was going to be no alcohol in the mansion. That wasn't said about the Governor Thompson years.

Thompson: No, it wasn't.

DePue: Didn't matter to you though?

Thompson: Hey, I'm not going to tell him how to run the mansion or how to run his administration or how to run his private life. That's his business.

DePue: Were you having your close friends and associates come in and talk to you about how reserved and distant Edgar was?

Thompson: Oh, people in politics love to gossip.

DePue: Any second thoughts about your backing of Edgar?

Thompson: Not at all.

DePue: Let's talk about Hartigan then. What were your thoughts about Neil Hartigan as a candidate?

Thompson: I didn't have any thoughts about him as a candidate, because he was the Democratic candidate. I had nothing to do with that. We had had our disagreements, when the legislature passed the bill that, at the height of the recession, '82, '83, gave me the power unilaterally to make cuts in the budget. He didn't support me. He sued to have that declared unconstitutional.

DePue: Hartigan did?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: As the state attorney general.

Thompson: As the attorney general, and we went up to the Supreme Court of Illinois, where they—I believe unanimously—said, “No, it’s constitutional. The governor can do that under the legislation.” We just had different views about state government.⁵⁹

DePue: We had talked about this before. One of the things that you were able to push through was a temporary income tax increase.

Thompson: Um-hmm, twice.

DePue: And it’s now going to be due to expire in the first year of the new governor’s term. So this is the main issue of that particular campaign.

Thompson: Um-hmm. But I promised it would be temporary, and it was temporary.

DePue: Do you think Edgar’s position to retain that income tax surcharge was the right position to take?

Thompson: Probably so. I mean, he faced different times.

DePue: And what did you think about Hartigan’s statement, which he made over and over again, that we will not retain that income tax surcharge; we’ll cut state government by 2 percent across the board?⁶⁰

Thompson: I thought it was right up there with his fight with the teachers’ unions, big mistake. I did what I did on the temporary income taxes, during my administration, to fit what was going on then. What subsequent governors or candidates for governor thought or did was not my concern.

DePue: Anybody looking at this particular election from the outside would say, wait a minute now; the Republican is voting to retain that surcharge; the Democrat is voting to get rid of it. Isn’t that just the opposite of what we would expect?

Thompson: See, you can’t apply stereotypes in politics. That’s the reason Hartigan lost the election. He threatened the cause of education in Illinois by his stance, and the teachers’ unions supported Edgar, both of them I think. It was a political mistake on Hartigan’s part.

⁵⁹ For another example of Hartigan’s conflict with the Thompson administration, this time over the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, see Richard Carlson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 23, 2015.

⁶⁰ On the 1990 campaign’s issues and debates, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, September 2, 2009, Volume II: 453-515.

DePue: Was it a surprise to you, the outcome of the election?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Were you surprised that it was as close as it was?

Thompson: No. The history of gubernatorial elections in Illinois was that they were close.

DePue: Well, you have the distinction, which you've pointed out to me on a couple of occasions, of having the widest margin of victory and the thinnest.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Do you think Hartigan was a more effective campaigner and Democratic candidate than you had faced?

Thompson: Say that again?

DePue: Was Hartigan a better candidate for the Democrat Party than Stevenson?

Thompson: No, no. Part of the reason for Stevenson's losses were his personality and his approach to politics and his record or non-record of accomplishment in the Senate.

Hartigan did, in some respects, what subsequent gubernatorial candidates, from the Democrats did, he abandoned one of the bases of the party. Just like—oh, what was his name—the president of Southern Illinois University, who ran for governor, Glenn Poshard (laughs) really abandoned the bases of his party. He, on three or four issues, was just contrary to what people expected from the Democratic candidate for governor. And he lost to George Ryan, who you could say a lot of people thought of as an old warhorse from different times in the Republican Party. But George was smarter as a candidate than Poshard, and he beat him, because George was at pains to go offer his hand to the base that Poshard abandoned. (laughs)

DePue: To what extent were you involved with the transition for the new Edgar administration?

Thompson: I wasn't.

DePue: How about your team?

Thompson: Oh, I'm sure they were. They would have had to have been. You always cooperate in the transition. I think Jayne was active in at least part of the transition on women's issues.

DePue: So you weren't directly involved with the transition team?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Would that be typical, that the former governor wouldn't be involved?

Thompson: Yeah. Not personally, no. His staff would be.

DePue: And do you remember inauguration day for Edgar?

Thompson: I do.

DePue: Was it a bittersweet moment for you to be handing over the reins?

Thompson: Not really, no, no, no. Remember what I said, when I announced I wasn't going to run? It was time for a new governor. I voluntarily stepped away, or I'd still be running. (both laugh) I might be running a little slower, but I'd still be running.

DePue: And I recall that was Samantha's advice, to run again, right?

Thompson: Yeah, she wanted me to run again. Gosh, she didn't want to abandon that mansion, (laughs) even though she had abandoned it partially by the time we got there.

I was really sincere in the reasons behind my decision not to run again. I could have run for a fifth term. I think I would have won a fifth term. But it was time for somebody else, and it was time for me to explore other parts of my life in the private sector, which I had never really had the chance to do then. It was just, you know.

DePue: Governor, this is probably a pretty good place to end for the day.

Thompson: I would guess.

DePue: Next time we'll not quite leave the administration. I want to have you respond to a lot of the retrospectives that came flooding out from the news media, especially about your fourteen years as governor, during that last year you were in office and right afterwards. Then we'll move into your post-gubernatorial years. Thank you again, Governor.

Thompson: My pleasure.

(end of transcript #23)

Interview with James Thompson

IST-A-L-2013-054.24

Interview # 24: February 17, 2016

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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

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.

DePue: Today is Wednesday, February 17, 2016. This is Mark DePue, and I am once again with Gov. Jim Thompson. I think this is session 24, Governor.

Thompson: Boy, I'm feeling it. (laughs)

DePue: And we're in your condo apartment. How do you refer to it?

Thompson: What's that?

DePue: Your residence here. Is it an apartment?

Thompson: Yeah, it's an apartment, condo.

DePue: The sun is streaming in this morning. It's a beautiful crisp day. Yesterday was a little bit of snow.

Thompson: And the rest of the week is going to be warm, fifties.

DePue: I understand you're heading over to Michigan.

Thompson: We are. I've got some time off, and we haven't been there for a couple of weeks, so we should go over there and take advantage of it.

DePue: You said you had some time off. Isn't all of your time, time off now?

Thompson: Well, not entirely. I'm still on three boards, so I have board meetings throughout the year. They don't take a lot of time, but they don't give me 100 percent time off.

DePue: What are the three boards?

Thompson: A company out of Virginia called Maximus, which is a government outsourcing company, and a company in Chicago called Navigant, which is a consulting company, and then I'm on the board of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union, the Public Review Board, which enforces good conduct in the union. It makes sure that union members and officers comply with the law and with the union's own constitution.

DePue: Are those paid positions?

Thompson: They are.

DePue: I understand you're also on other boards, maybe not receiving pay. Are you on the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation Board?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Are you on the mansion board, still?

Thompson: Yes, and I'm also—

DePue: The Supreme Court Historical Commission Board?

Thompson: I'm the chairman of the Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission. So there are two non-paid boards that are associated with institutions in Illinois.

DePue: Before we began, you said you wanted to make a couple of comments, in reference to the topics that we discussed yesterday.

Thompson: Yeah, I just want to make sure that you understand, and that people who read this transcript or hear this recording understand that I am not taking sides in the current argument between the governor and the legislature. I wouldn't do that.

DePue: Well, I tried.

Thompson: I know you tried very well, and you got a little bit out of me. But what I said yesterday, with reference to the role of unions in Illinois, reflects a personal belief about the importance of unions and a respect for the history of how unions had fortified the middle class in both the United States and Illinois, giving people the opportunity for good paying jobs that contributed to the

prosperity of their families, as well as to the good work that can be found in Illinois in manufacturing and public employment and in services.

I wouldn't take sides in the current argument between the governor and the legislature, because when I was governor, I would have resented any former governor coming out and debating on the ongoing processes of state government. I think that once you cease being the governor of the state of Illinois, you're just a citizen, and you should let the current officeholders work out their agreements or disagreements, without a critic's voice from the sidelines. I would have resented it when I was governor, and I don't want to engage in conduct that I would have decried when I was governor. Governor Rauner and the legislative leaders are perfectly capable of coming to an agreement.

I just tried to make the point, which is not limited to our discussions of the current stalemate in Illinois state government, that in negotiating, whether it's in politics or government or the private sector, you can't expect the other side to give you something that they're not able to give, for any reason not able to give. That's just a generality that I think needs to be understood.

On the other hand, the notion that a governor is without weapons to gain positions that he thinks are important is wrong too. The governor has been criticized for insisting on substantive demands in the context of budget negotiations. He's been criticized for doing that. His opponents say, "Oh, the budget's a separate matter." Well, the budget is not a separate matter. First of all, the budget is the process by which substantive positions are carried out. Secondly, you can go back in Illinois history and find plenty of examples of where both the governor and the legislative leaders have inserted substantive issues in the midst of budget debates. It's as old as the state of Illinois. So, with those parameters, I'll leave the governor and the legislature to do the job they were elected to do.

DePue: Early in your administration you were supportive of granting collective bargaining rights, in essence extending what Governor Walker had already done. But I'm sure you're also aware that now Governor Rauner and, historically, people have made the case that public sector unions are a different kind of an animal than private sector unions and aren't appropriate.

Thompson: (sighs) I might agree with the premise of that question, that public sector unions are different, in some respects, from private sector unions, but I wouldn't agree with the conclusion that they're not appropriate. Having, for example, given collective bargaining rights to teachers in the state of Illinois and having seen what I think was a good result, there were fewer labor disputes, fewer strikes, fewer closed schools, it would be hard for me to conclude that people who say that public employees cannot be unionized are right. Now there are some exceptions. We allow police and fire to collectively bargain, but we don't give them the ultimate tool, the strike.

Public employees in Illinois have collectively bargained for a long time. Whether you agree with all of the agreements that were reached or not, they've never been on strike. Think about that for a moment. State employees have never struck. They've collectively bargained; they have demonstrated; they've raised their voices from time to time, but they've never been on a strike. There's a reason for that. They could easily be replaced by an administrator or governor who wouldn't tolerate a strike of state employees.

So, look, there are sometimes difficulties involved with public employee negotiations. I, having been the recipient of contributions from public employee unions when I was governor, have a little bit of an uneasy feeling now about political contributions going from state employees to the people with whom they're bargaining. This question really never occurred to me while I was the recipient, but it occurs to me now, thirty some years later. I haven't done any conclusion on that. I'm not saying I would bar political contributions from state employees or other public employee unions, but at least the question is out there.

If you were doing that in the private sector, you'd go to jail, and so would the people with whom you were bargaining. Federal law prohibits things of value passing from one side or another in a private-industry union negotiation. Would we apply the same law to public employee unions? We haven't. We've made them an exception. Should we? I don't know. It's a question to think about.

The judicial attitudes towards public employee unions have been changing too. Except for Justice Scalia's death, I think the Supreme Court of the United States was about to rule that public workers don't have to pay public employee unions for negotiating on their behalf. They can be free riders. They can be public employees who don't have to join a union, who don't have to support a union in any way, as a violation of free speech. With Justice Scalia's death, that's not going to happen, at least from the Supreme Court. So that question is still hanging around, but it's not going to be decided one way or the other.

DePue: Is that another issue that you're undecided about right now?

Thompson: No, I mean it's—

DePue: I think in the past you've made the statement that you supported the notion that Illinois not be a right-to-work state.

Thompson: I agree with that; Illinois should not be a right-to-work state. I led the fight against right to work, when I was governor, and some Republicans tried to install it in the state of Illinois. It didn't go very far in the legislature. But that's a different question, it seems to me, than whether you can be a free rider, and because of that, you're protecting the public employee's right to

free speech. The Supreme Court had ruled otherwise, not too long ago. So that's a question that's, as I say, hanging around out there and will probably not be decided until we have Justice Scalia's vacancy filled, either by President Obama or by the next president. Who knows where that's going to go?

DePue: It will be fun to watch the political process, the jockeying back and forth.

Thompson: Yeah, no kidding, right.

DePue: Yesterday, we finished with a discussion about Secretary of State Edgar's run for governor. You had some very interesting comments to make about Hartigan and his attempts to tie Edgar directly to you. And every time that happened, what, \$25,000 went to Edgar's campaign?

Thompson: I like Neil Hartigan, and I have a lot of respect for everybody in state government, either in my time or since. It's not an easy job. But at the same time, I'm human. I don't like uncalled-for criticism; let's put it that way. It was fair of Hartigan to attack positions of mine. I didn't expect that Jim Edgar, as a candidate for governor, would agree with everything I had done for fourteen years. That would have been not only foolish on his part, politically, but it would go against my support of him as a person, different and independent from me. We don't have the politics in Illinois that demands allegiance to prior officials. I just objected when sometimes Hartigan would go beyond policy differences and do more personal criticism.

DePue: My question, in that regard is, where was the money coming from, the \$25,000 each time? You mentioned Kim Fox in that relation, as well.

Thompson: I still had a campaign fund of well over \$1 million when I left the governor's office, and I said I would use it to support candidates that I believed in.

DePue: What did the law say about how a former governor could use campaign funds?

Thompson: As long as you used it for political purposes, you could do it. If you used it for personal purposes, you had to pay tax.

DePue: So you could use it for that?

Thompson: I could, absolutely.

DePue: What was your own view, in terms of how you wanted to use your remaining political funds?

Thompson: I wanted to use it to support my party and to support candidates I believed in, and I thought that people who had contributed to me understood that that was part of the process. I mean, I did it while I was the governor and campaigning

for reelection, certainly supported other Republicans out of that fund. So, people giving to me understood that.

DePue: Who else were recipients of your support?

Thompson: Oh, a variety of people. The fund went down from over \$1 million to zero. (both laugh)

DePue: Pretty quickly?

Thompson: I don't know; it maybe took a year or something like that.

DePue: Primarily state-level politicians?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: Anybody at the federal level?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Let's turn to a retrospective of your fourteen years as governor, the longest any Illinois governor had served, and certainly a part of Hartigan's campaign was, it's long enough; it's time for a Democrat.

Thompson: It's time for a change, yeah.

DePue: And that's always appealing to the public.

Thompson: I had said, when I announced I wouldn't run again for a fifth term, that it was time for a change. I just didn't think Hartigan was the change I wanted, (DePue laughs) when Edgar was out there.

DePue: The papers were pointing out that you managed to get through fourteen years without any kind of significant scandal attached to the administration.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: What about your leadership and your management of Illinois politics do you think led to that result?

Thompson: I think first of all, my reputation as a prosecutor, the jobs I had before I ran for governor helped. Secondly, the appointments I made to state government positions, with that in mind, helped. Governor Kerner's administration had seen scandal—with which I was acquainted firsthand as a prosecutor—on the issue of horse racing, so I appointed a former assistant U.S. attorney to the chairmanship of the racing board.⁶¹ My appointments in other areas, as well, and my consistent public speeches supported that effort. In picking cabinet

⁶¹ Thompson is talking about Farrel "Tex" Griffin.

officers and people appointed to boards and commissions, I kept that in mind. So I think, A., the people I picked to help me administer state government were people who understood that there was no room for scandal. And I think my public efforts and my background might have persuaded other people that I didn't control—or didn't control very directly—that this was not the place for it. That's as close as I can come, I guess.

DePue: Much of this conversation that I wanted to have with you, in terms of a retrospective of your career, is going to be coming from a series of articles that the *Chicago Sun-Times* published in October of 1990, in the last months of your administration. I'm going to start with this comment; they quoted you as saying that, when you came into office, "There will be no tactics of confrontation. There will be no politics of division." And then they said, "And after almost fourteen years in office, it has been one that, with but rare exception, has been honored."

Thompson: Yeah, I agree with that. You shouldn't confuse honest differences of opinion with others in state government, and you're attempting to enforce your own beliefs or to get your programs passed, even if others disagreed with them. That's what government is all about. That's not the politics of confrontation.

Politics of confrontation are—in my mind anyway—political tactics that aren't done for reaching an agreement on a subject in state government, but done to intimidate others and done to provoke public cynicism and distrust of government, with no legitimate end. There's a difference.

DePue: There's been an assertion that you were a compromiser.

Thompson: Yes. You have to be. If I'm a Republican governor, and the people at the same time are electing a Democratic legislature, what other result would you expect?

DePue: In terms of budgets, the *Chicago Times* editorial board made the statement that you were a budget maker, "In every budget message, Thompson invites lawmakers to rearrange his plan's specific details, insisting only that they hew to his bottom-line estimate of how much the state can spend." Then it made the case that in almost every year, the budget you were presented with was higher than the budget that you had requested and that you used line item veto and, in some cases, amendatory veto, but you would sign the budget bill.

Thompson: Yeah. Look, legislatures find it very difficult to hew to the balanced budget requirement. Why? Because they have so many voices in their process. All the members of the House and all the members of the Senate—multiple voices, multiple ideas, multiple backgrounds and diversity, multiple allegiances—on the one hand, versus a governor, a single person, whose ideas and principles and allegiances are more easily understood.

So it's easier for a governor to attempt to come to the right conclusion on the budget, in terms of its requirement that it be balanced and in terms of what the governor thinks the budget ought to contain. It's easier for the governor than it is for the legislature, a mass of voices in two different houses, and insisting on their legislative powers granted by the constitution, which are intermixed with the governor's powers, to promote balance. That's the requirement of the constitution; that's the idea behind the constitution.

It's not unusual that the legislature would send me a budget higher than I thought appropriate and that I would use the powers given to me by the constitution—the power of veto, the power of amendatory veto, the power of line item veto—to reach a result that I thought was appropriate.

DePue: I would have to say the *Sun-Times* article, that particular portion of your administration, they were complimentary; they were supportive of your ability to make those budgets.

The only thing that they, and certainly critics during your tenure, would point to is that you played the role of super legislator. In other words, that you were using the amendatory veto in ways that the founders of the Illinois State Constitution did not intend.

Thompson: Yeah, some people said that. I had a different view, and whenever the matter went to the courts, they upheld my view. It wasn't until the Speaker decided that he would treat my amendatory vetoes in a different way that the issue even arose. Remember, sometimes the amendatory veto was requested by the legislator who had passed the bill in the first place and then discovered some flaw and came to me and said, "Would you please change the bill I passed? And I'll support your amendatory veto."

So, these were not like royal powers. This was not one-man rule, in terms of the amendatory veto. The legislature always had the right and the power to reject my amendatory veto. Then it became an absolute veto, and they had the right to overturn that, if they could. I always thought the amendatory veto was a nice compromise between the legislature and the governor.

Now, did I carry the amendatory veto further than any of my predecessors? Absolutely. Was I ever rebuked by the courts? No. And I think I carried it out in a way that was good for the state of Illinois. But look, we're talking about whether it's the amendatory veto or the line item veto or the other veto powers that the governor has in Illinois; we're talking about things that were given to him by the constitution, not something he assumed.

DePue: And in that regard, the U.S. Constitution doesn't include either of those.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Not a line item veto and certainly not an amendatory veto. Do you think the Illinois Constitution got that mix right?

Thompson: Absolutely. The only disagreement I ever had with one of those veto powers was that the line item veto could be restored by the legislature, by the same vote that they used to pass it in the first place. In other words, the line item veto could be overturned by a majority of the legislature, not by a supermajority. So, oftentimes I wouldn't use it, simply because I thought it was not a useful tool.

DePue: The next thing here is the measure of your popularity. The news media love to take polls, and in this case they wanted to take a snapshot of your popularity at the end of your term. This is the *Sun-Times* article again—approval, 48 percent. That doesn't sound good, until you go deeper into the numbers; disapprove, 33 percent; no opinion, 18 percent. Your assessment of that, after fourteen years?

Thompson: After fourteen years, there's enough of an accretive effect of disaffection with any public official (laughs), and I understand that. But I'll borrow a line that my friends in the Democratic Party use all the time. "The only poll that counts is the poll on election day."

So, if you're elected four times in a state as diverse as Illinois, to me that's the ultimate poll. But I'm not surprised that public opinion polls go up and down. It's not an exact science, after all. It relies on people that you phone—oftentimes at night when they're doing other things—and you're asking them to give you a quick snapshot opinion. I don't worry about it that much.

DePue: From my perspective, those are pretty darn good numbers—

Thompson: They are.

DePue: ...and yesterday you made the statement that you were confident that you could have gotten reelected, and, in fact, a Republican did get elected.

Thompson: Right, and a Republican after that got elected.

DePue: Then they had the same kind of a poll—I'm sure at the same time—asking people to rate your job performance, outstanding, above average, average, below average, poor, and the ubiquitous no opinion. So 7 percent said that you had done an outstanding job and 36 percent, an above-average job and 34 percent, an average job. Only 10 percent, below average; 6 percent, poor, and 7 percent didn't have an opinion.

Thompson: That's a pretty good poll.

DePue: Was that a poll result that would make you smile in the day?

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: Based on your own statements, your success as governor, what—

Thompson: And remember, those polls, in a state like Illinois, included a large number of Democrats. If you look at my four elections, the Democratic candidates got a lot of votes. Now, I was lucky and pleased that a lot of Democrats voted for me, four times. You look at my first race, with the overwhelming majority, there were a lot of Democrats in that majority. But there always will be some Democrats that are just Democrats, and they're not going to say anything good about any Republican candidate or any Republican governor. I think that's reflected in the opinion polls. So I say, the ultimate poll is the one you believe in, and that's your vote on Election Day.

DePue: I started the conversation this morning talking about you being the compromiser, finding ways to reach across the aisle, that you really had no choice with a Democratic legislature. Governor, is it fair to say that that wasn't your nature in the first place, to be confrontational?

Thompson: Right, it wasn't. Look, I had a pet phrase I used from time to time. You can always compromise your ideas, but you can't compromise your ideals. While that sounds like a pat statement, it really reflects the nature of the political and legislative process.

DePue: Then what do you think about the state of American politics? Certainly what's going on in Illinois right now is no different, much more confrontational, much more divisive and much more polar.

Thompson: It is, without question. When I go to Springfield from time to time and talk with members of the legislature or state government, a lot of them will say, "Boy, it's not like the old days. We got things done, didn't we, Jim?" These are Democrats and Republicans. I think, without question, anybody would tell you that Illinois politics are much more polarized than they were thirty years ago.

The same is true of American politics, as well. But what's going on in the American political scene now is embarrassing. I mean, the notion that Trump could be the president of the United States is one that's just frightening. And you look at the Democratic side, you've got Hillary saying, "I'll give you four more years of Obama." You've got Bernie Sanders saying, "Let's tear up the country," and offering solutions which are impossible or unaffordable.

So the American presidential contest this time is, I think, disconcerting and embarrassing to a lot of people. I hope [to] enough.

DePue: The question for you then, why did American politics become so much more polarized over the timeframe after you left office?

Thompson: There's probably a number of reasons. One, the growth of conservatism in the Republican Party, the growth of the Tea Party, the growth of some on the right, who insisted that the whole election was about abortion rights or other social issues, and they didn't care about the rest of it. That's part of it.

The appearance on the scene of cable television, which to a much greater degree than network television or even newspapers, would pick up a theme and run with it, over and over and over again. Cable news is not your morning newspaper. It's a twenty-four hour repetitive cycle. You turn on CNN, or you turn on FOX or any of the cable news programs, despite their philosophical bent, whether it's NBC or FOX or CNN, and you'll find a story that's repeated over and over and over again. Well, that wasn't how the news was presented thirty, forty years ago. And it solidified people's opinions on one or two issues, to the abandonment of the rest of the issues in a political campaign.

You also have the diminution of power in organized, political parties. In the nineteenth century the parties stood for something. Their platforms contained ideas, and candidates were tied to the mast on those ideas. It was the parties who carried the candidates forward.

Today, the platform of political parties is a grab bag of 100 different ideas or issues, none of them compelling it seems, pieces thrown in to satisfy every last single voice in the party, and it's the candidates who drag their parties along, rather than the other way around. That leads to, it seems to me, a more polarized politics.

DePue: Picking up on that theme and what we had talked about yesterday, how does the reduced power of patronage for either party play in to that equation?

Thompson: I think, without question, the reduced power of patronage, or the elimination of patronage, not reduced power—there's no patronage left—severely weakened political parties and gave political parties less of a reason to exist. We're in America today, carrying along the scraps of political parties, it seems to me, rather than the vigorous, powerful institutions we inherited from the nineteenth century. Again, the loss of that discipline leads to more polarization in politics, as candidates seek to win the approval of every single voice in the country.

DePue: Is it possible to be a moderate Republican nowadays, something you were proud to be?

Thompson: It's difficult, very difficult. To be a successful, moderate Republican, you have to win a majority of the support of your own party, or you won't get nominated.

DePue: Is it possible to be a moderate Democrat in today's politics?

Thompson: I think it might be a little easier for Democrats than Republicans but not by much.

DePue: Which party do you think has evolved, changing its positions more?

Thompson: Ah, the Republican Party. We're much more conservative. I, from the beginning, have admired the work and the influence and the voices of conservative people in the Republican Party. I've said it during election campaigns; I've said it when I was governor, and I'll say it again. If the conservatives are the people who get out in the snows of winter to take part in the political process—whether it's a caucus or a primary election—and other voices in the party don't bother to do that, well, what do you expect the result to be? If people don't like the way a political party is being operated, then they ought to get in there and change it. But some people are too lazy to do that.

Look, Americans, as voters, are lazy. They're just lazy or uninterested or ignorant. You look at the photos of poor Africans, standing in line for hours in the sun to vote, as if their life depended on it, and I guess in some respects it did. Then you look at America, where half the eligible voters don't register, and even when they register, half of them don't vote. And you get elections decided by a percentage of voters of 25, 30 percent, from time to time, especially in primaries.

Is it any wonder that a group, whether it's conservatives in the Republican Party or liberals or progressives—if you want to call them that—in the Democratic Party, take control? (laughs) They fought for the right. They did what they're supposed to do. They didn't sit home and complain. They didn't find themselves awake on a November Election Day and say, "Oh, gee, there's not any candidates I can vote for. Oh, I don't like the people who are running." Well, it's a little late for that.

DePue: Another criticism of American politics today is that there's just too much money in politics. A lot of the Democrats point to the *Citizens United* case, the Supreme Court case.⁶²

Thompson: Yeah. I don't agree with that criticism; I really don't. There's as much money on the Democratic side as there is on the Republican side. Who are they kidding? It just comes from different sources; that's all. But the Democratic and Republican Parties are roughly equal, if you look at the numbers in the amount of dollars they have to support both the primary and general elections. Who are we kidding? Some Democrats like to complain about the [*Citizens United*] decision, but they get their money from other sources.

⁶² *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* 558 U.S. 310 (2010).

Look, as long as we have disclosure, then people can make their own minds up, in an election, about whether a candidate has too much money from this source, therefore I'm not going to vote for them. If the money supports speech and the money supports the proliferation of ideas that you'd like to see in a political campaign, what's the harm?

DePue: Let's go back to the assessment of your fourteen years' administration. October 8, the *Chicago Sun-Times*—this is fairly early in their series—made this statement, in terms of your business climate relationship, “During his fourteen years in office, Governor Thompson was a friend of business and a pal to labor. Ultimately he forged an uneasy alliance between those adversaries, with the force of his own personality.”

Thompson: Yeah, that's exactly right. (DePue laughs) It was a good thing too. Excuse me one moment.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Back after a very quick break, Governor.

Thompson: I agree with every word of that quote. I'm not sure I would endorse fully the description of an “uneasy” relationship between business and labor. On issues where they came together, I don't think it was uneasy at all. But I'm not going to quibble over that. I agree fully with that quotation and the notion that you forge relationships by the force of your personality. That's what a leader does; that's exactly what a leader does.

Now, I say also that you try to forge relationships by the strength of your ideas, but personality and politics plays a very important part and rightfully so.

DePue: And you were happy to take advantage of the personality you had, which people still remember and marvel over.

Thompson: Well, yeah, sure. (laughs)

DePue: Can't argue with that, huh?

Thompson: Look, the same thing is true in the business world. The same thing is true in the world of the arts or the world of movies. You pick anything in the American experience and you will find a lot of success coming to people who have the personalities that can forge relationships.

DePue: Not to make this too painful a point, Governor, but couldn't you say that's part of the explanation for Trump's success right now?

Thompson: Um, yeah...Oh gosh, I hate to credit anything he says, but sure. Look, we have a country today in which a lot of people feel aggrieved. I think that's the

word I'll use, aggrieved. When a guy comes along and says, "Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it. I'll make it all better. It'll be wonderful. I'll build a wall. I'll get the Mexicans to pay for it. I'm going to bring all the jobs back from China." I'm not sure he'll send ships to do that, but we didn't send laborers to China to bring them back.

Jobs left America, in part, because we became a greater and greater part of the world commerce. When we were a country that manufactured everything Americans needed, of course, we didn't lose any jobs to China or anyplace else. But look at our trading that was done then. It's nothing like the trading we do now with the rest of the world, and the rest of the world were insignificant economic powers, compared to the U.S.

But that's not true now. China has the largest economy in the world now. We have factories in Vietnam, whom we fought in a war. We want to trade with the world. That was always our rallying cry. We want to send our surplus agricultural products to China. Well, trade is not a one-way street. If somebody else can do it better, that's where the commerce will go. You're not sending jobs overseas; you're participating in world commerce, and if they can do it better than we can...

It's the same thing as what happened when America was half frontier. The people on the frontier traded with the established America of the eastern states. They sought an economic arrangement where, I'll do this for you if you do this for me. I'll send my raw materials to the East, and you manufacture with them, and then I'll buy your finished goods. So, this is nothing new; this has been going on since America emerged as a country.

DePue: Certainly, part of your reputation is that you worked hard on establishing those kinds of trade relationships with other countries, establishing quite a few trade missions. We talked some about that yesterday and certainly in previous sessions, about Asia and places like that. Did it concern you that Governor Edgar had a different approach, was kind of backing away from some of those trade missions?⁶³

Thompson: No. What was I going to do, dictate the policies of the Edgar administration? That's ridiculous. If he disagreed with me on a policy of state government, he disagreed with me. That was his right, and it's something I expected he would do if he was elected governor. And I was all for electing him as governor. I told him on his first day of working for me, "You are going to be a future governor of the state of Illinois," period.

So, look, I thought our trade offices were useful. They didn't start with me; they started with Governor Kerner. I expanded them, but the reason I

⁶³ For his view of the foreign trade offices, see Jim Edgar's interview by Mark DePue, April 23, 2010, Volume III: 656-659.

expanded them was that the commerce of the world was expanding, and the United States and Illinois were a part of it. If we were going to be part of it, we needed to do it in the best way and the most effective way possible.

I had trade offices in foreign countries like China and Japan, then I'm looking at the map one day, and I thought, Who are some of our biggest trading partners? Our neighbors, Canada, Mexico. Why don't we have an office there? That makes no sense. So I put offices there, and not only were they useful, in terms of Canadian and Mexican trade with the United States, but they—unlike some of the European or Asian offices—offered U.S. companies, especially small companies who were just starting out, a place to get established, that was easier in terms of cost and transportation—and in the case of Canada, a common language—than more difficult offices in Asia and Europe. And that took hold.

People who had never participated much, American companies in Illinois, who had never participated much in global trade, once they mastered the ability to go to Canada and Mexico, felt that now they had the background, the training and the equipment to go overseas. That's what we were looking for, so that's why I did it.

DePue: October 10, the *Sun-Times* turned its attention to education. In 1985, they cited the major accomplishment in your administration as the Educational Reform Act, saying that it “Created twenty-one specific programs, including teacher and school accountability measures, a pre-school program for children considered likely to have trouble in school, full-day kindergarten and full-day classes for the handicapped.” It also established the Illinois Science and Math Academy. Were you proud of your accomplishments in education?

Thompson: Yes. I should start by saying that you will never get unanimous agreement from everybody on what you can accomplish in education, simply because there are some people involved in education for whom enough is never enough.

DePue: I'll give you an example. Michael Bakalis was cited in this article as saying that you were much more of a follower than a leader in education and really didn't accomplish that much.

Thompson: I don't agree with that, obviously, but the point I'm trying to make is that a state budget has finite dollars, not infinite dollars. It has to be divided in many different ways. Education is a very important part of it, maybe the single most important part of it, but it's not the only part of it. And there are people in the educational process, and in the legislature, who believe that I should have given more money to education. They don't know at all where that money was going to come from. They would never find themselves saying that they wanted to take it away from somebody else in the budget process, from senior

citizens or from law enforcement or any of the other important issues of state government. They just would say, "Oh, it's not enough; it's not enough."

DePue: Is that in terms of the percentage that the state was paying for local school districts, that it should have been higher?

Thompson: That, plus the notion of total dollars. But I think I did very well by education, and particularly higher education, for whom I was a strong advocate, except in extreme budget times, where they had to take their fair share of cuts.

I wanted to build institutions that would represent the best that American education could offer, because it's a very important part of keeping businesses in Illinois and bringing businesses to Illinois and persuading other people in the world to invest in Illinois. You can't persuade a Japanese manufacturer to set up operations in Illinois if your educational forces, whether at the university level or at the community college level, are not first rate, because that money is coming from a country where education is prized.

So, whether it's Japanese manufacturers or Ohio manufacturers, education, along with transportation and utilities and land availability and decent communities, are all things that people in business take into account, whether they're coming from another country, from another state, or they're starting up in Illinois, as opposed to starting up in some other state. The importance of education can't be overestimated. The only check, of course, is whatever you can afford at the time.

DePue: October 14, the *Sun Times* turned its attention to, let's call it protecting the public, and among the things that were discussed obviously were Class X, which was a very early initiative, and leading out of Class X was the need to build more prisons. They quoted you, and I think you probably stated this, "I have built more prisons than all the other Illinois governors in history put together."

Thompson: I think that's right, and it was appropriate for the time. Look, you can't do halfway things when you're talking about law enforcement and effective law enforcement and talking about the protection of the people of Illinois from crime. That is the very first obligation of government, to protect our citizens. It's more important than anything else, because if you don't have that, you can't have anything else. I've always believed that; I believe it still, and I tried to respond to what Illinois law enforcement and the criminal justice system needed.

DePue: Not to mention that was the roots of your earlier success and probably what propelled you in to a political career afterwards.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Here's one I know you'll enjoy talking about, it's infrastructure improvements. What would you like to say in reference to the accomplishments that you had in that regard?

Thompson: I built things. No question about it; I was a builder. It's part of my makeup. I believed that the projects I supported and saw brought to completion were important for the state of Illinois, whether it was another convention hall at McCormick Place or Comiskey Park—now U.S. Cellular—keeping the White Sox in Chicago and making us one of the few American cities to have two baseball teams, which, of course, resulted in a World Series victory for Chicago just a few years after I built the stadium.

You can go around the state, Navy Pier. I worked hard to win agreement in the legislature to undertake a restoration of Navy Pier. Not a restoration; I take that back, an extraordinary... We used the pier as the foundation for an extraordinary tourist venue. More people visit Navy Pier than any other place in Illinois. They come from miles around, from other states. It's such a diverse entertainment area, and I'm proud of what I did there in persuading the legislature to come up with the dollars to do it. That was a derelict pier, sinking into Lake Michigan. Now it's a vibrant spot. It just got its second Ferris wheel, bigger than the first Ferris wheel.

DePue: When I am not looking at you, I'm seeing that Ferris wheel out there.

Thompson: Right, you can see it better than you could just a couple of weeks ago with the old Ferris wheel, because this is much higher. And I didn't confine that kind of building to Chicago. I built community college and university buildings, spent a lot of money on educational capital all around the state, to support programs that would make Illinois a leader in the country and a leader in the world.

I supported the restoration of historic sites throughout the state, whether it was the Dana-Thomas House in Springfield or places in southern Illinois, along the river; Bloomington, with the David Davis House; supported the museum's capital request. You've got to be fair to all parts of Illinois and to all parts of the Illinois business and cultural world.

And I tried to put important things inside those structures. We had an arts and crafts marketplace for Illinois artists in the Thompson Center in Chicago, in the buildings in downstate, southern Illinois, so people could display their handiwork, their folk art, their crafts. So it goes all along the spectrum, from big spectacle places to quiet places which celebrated the best of Illinois.

And Build Illinois, of course, was a wonderful example of that.

DePue: October 12 edition of this series, the *Chicago Sun-Times* turned its attention to Mental Health and DCFS. In this respect, they probably had their harshest

criticism in the series. For Mental Health they quoted the ACLU, who stated that, “The director’s job”—I assume the director of Mental Health—“is to rein over a massive political patronage system and to keep scandal out of the press. Only secondary do they care about the mentally ill. State institutions are understaffed, overcrowded. There are numerous incidents of abuse and neglect.” I can have the same kind of comments in terms of DCFS. Do you want to deal with those one by one or together?

Thompson: Well, look, it’s very easy for a critic, especially for an unelected critic, to heap abuse on people who are running institutions like mental health institutions or DCFS. It would be very interesting to see what they would do if they were in charge, but of course they were never in charge. They were free to criticize from the sidelines. The notion that our mental health hospitals were cesspools of corruption and patronage is crazy. First of all, *Rutan* told me I couldn’t do patronage in state institutions.

DePue: But that was—

Thompson: And an earlier decision told me I couldn’t fire people in public institutions, for political reasons.

DePue: Of course, *Rutan* came about in 1990 at the very end. I did see a quote of yours that, prior to the *Rutan* decision, you were making decisions based on a person’s political affiliation, but also had the expectation that, when they did the testing, they would rate at the highest level of testing.

Thompson: They had to get an A; they had to get an A. I’ll bet you, in prior administrations, there was not always the requirement that they get an A, in addition to their political affiliation. Dealing with mental health institutions is an extraordinary task. Think about it. Why are people in those institutions not out in a free society? Because they can’t deal with a free society. Because their conduct might be dangerous to a free society.

So, you think it’s an easy task to run institutions in which all these people are congregated together? I don’t think so. And DCFS, I can pick up the paper today and find the same criticisms of DCFS. You’re talking about people who abuse children, who are thugs, criminals, murderers, who...It’s unthinkable.

DePue: Having just said that, here’s a quote of yours, “If you wanted to criticize the governor and the director of DCFS every day, every hour for something, you could find ways to do it.” In fact, when you handed over the reins of governance, there were thirteen class-action suits and fifty-six individual cases pending and an October thirty-first lawsuit that asked the federal judge to name a receiver to take control of the agency.

Now, you’ve been addressing some of these. Let me ask you this question and take it from a different approach. What had changed about the

way the country was dealing with mental health? What had changed about American society that caused these issues to be coming to the forefront much more than they had in previous decades?

Thompson: Take mental health. It was during the course of my administration that a lot of people were transferred from mental health institutions—which I closed, despite a lot of political opposition—and sent to community-based organizations. That was what the same critics were demanding, and I did it.

The assumption was that our pharmacology had advanced to the point where you could, with proper medicines, take a number of people from mental health institutions, which had existed since the nineteenth century, put them in community-based treatment, with the hope that they could reintegrate into society and hold jobs, and through pharmacology, keep their minds clear enough so that they could be accommodated there.

DePue: A positive trend?

Thompson: Yeah, I think so. There were strong forces for it. There were strong political forces to keep it just as it was with the mental health institutions, because they provided employment in downstate areas, where there sometimes was not other employment. You're buffeted by those two forces, community-based treatment versus don't tamper with the local institution. I made the decision that I thought was right, despite political opposition from my own party (laughter) because that's where the institutions were, for historical reasons, already established.

DePue: You mean, like prisons, they were important for local employment?

Thompson: They were, but the mental health institutions were created before I got there. Their roots ran back to the nineteenth century. That was not true of prisons, and you weren't building more mental health institutions, like you were building prisons. So, the community impact was different in that respect. Communities were trying to keep what they had, not asking for new.

DePue: How about the issue for DCFS and societal changes and demographic changes in Illinois at the time? Were they driving more need for those services?

Thompson: They were. When you have the institution of marriage disintegrating, as it has in the United States; when you have childbirth to unmarried mothers increasing, so today it is almost the norm, you're going to get more problems of abuse. I couldn't put a DCFS person in every home in Chicago to stand there to prevent the boyfriend, who may or may not be the father of the child, from getting drunk or jealous and abusing both the mother and the child. That's what DCFS has to deal with it. And they're not there; they're not there until afterwards.

That's been true of every administration, not just mine. It's an awful problem. It's a reflection, in part, because of the disintegration or the disappearance of norms from earlier times that kept those kind of cases from happening.

DePue: We've been talking about this area, and it was certainly one for which you got plenty of criticism. But I thought it was appropriate to show you this chart, also from the *Sun-Times*, of funding levels during your administration, and how they changed over time.

Thompson: Children and Family Services, up 219 percent; Public Health, up 350 percent; Rehabilitation Services, up 319 percent; Aging up 517 percent. Those are pretty healthy numbers. They were possible, in part, because we paid attention to those areas. They were possible, in part, because I tried to provide the revenue to support that. If you'll go back to one of my favorite quotations, which is **my** quotation.

In fourteen years, we essentially tripled the size of state government, not just to have a larger state government, but to have a better state government to provide services like those on the chart, which you just showed me. Yet, at the end of the fourteen years, we took less of a percentage of taxpayers' income than existed at the time I became governor. That's a mighty feat; it seems to me.

DePue: Let me give some specifics to that. This is 1977, versus 1990, so it's going to be '77-'90 and then percentage change. For government spending, State of Illinois spending, '77, \$11.5 billion. In 1990 that was now at \$24.5 billion, a 113 percent increase. I think it's fair to mention here, these are years, especially early in your administration, where there was high inflation, as well, so that accounts for some of these increases. Personal income in '77 it was \$90.2 billion. By 1990 it was \$226.5 billion. So, personal income had gone up 151 percent during that timeframe.

Thompson: I really can't take much credit for that. Governors, like presidents, try, on the micro level, to influence the well-being of their citizens through supporting efforts for income growth. But in the real world, you can't affect much at the macro level, because so much of the factors operating there are beyond your control, of either a president or a governor.

DePue: I don't think the Reagan acolytes would agree with that statement at all, Governor.

Thompson: Really. But, you see, what they're talking about is at the margins; it's at the margins. Go back to the argument about losing jobs. Today, Illinois' participation in a world economy affects us in ways that a governor or a president could not impact, either by legislation or programs or anything else that was within your control. You try to deal with economic forces that you're

confronted with. You can't create economic forces in any great sense. Yes, you can be for tax cuts, in an effort to stimulate the economy, and they'll make that argument. And there's some truth in it. If you're not paying taxes to the government, you have more money to do with what you want, including investment to create jobs, obviously, or spending, which will create jobs.

But the notion that a president could significantly change the impact of China, for example, in a world economy, or a governor could singlehandedly defeat all the forces from the efforts of other states in the union, who are trying to do the same thing for their people, is not true.

DePue: So you think the impact of Reagan, taking the maximum tax rate from 70 percent to 28 percent and his emphasis on deregulation only had a marginal impact on growth in the economy?

Thompson: Yeah, it was an important impact to be sure. Hey, who was standing next to Ronald Reagan on a platform in Illinois, as he stood there with his axe in his hand, waving it around to persuade Tip O'Neill to let the taxes come down? Jim Thompson. Who introduced Reagan at those speeches? Jim Thompson. Of course I supported him; of course I wanted to see taxes cut, yeah. All I'm saying is, don't give those kinds of effort more credit than they're due, because we live in a complex world economy.

DePue: I want to make sure I understand one thing. Which one of the two of you had the axe in your hand?

Thompson: The president.

DePue: That's what I thought.

Thompson: And I've got the pictures.

DePue: (laughs) I need to get that picture. I haven't seen that picture. (Thompson laughs) Governor, you've got to get me that picture.

Thompson: IIS [Illinois Information Services] could have that picture.

DePue: This one, I think, is a point that you made, as well. State of Illinois spending per dollar earned, in 1977 it was 12.8 cents; in 1990 it was 10.8 cents.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Down 15.2 percent.

Thompson: So, if after fourteen years of Jim Thompson as governor, you've got better state government, because in beneficial ways it impacted more people, and yet it cost you, as a taxpayer, less than you were paying before Thompson became governor. How much better can you do?

It's like U.S. Cellular, White Sox Park, okay? You get all this razzmatazz from economists who say, "Well, that doesn't create jobs. Government spending for stadiums, it's all bullshit." What happened? We built White Sox Park, through the Sports Facilities Authority; we kept two baseball teams in Chicago, an important cultural thing to do, and something that very few other cities could boast of; we got Chicago baseball fans a World Series, and who paid for it? Out-of-towners.

The stadium was supported by the hotel-motel tax. Out-of-towners paid for our baseball stadium; they still do, and we got benefits out of it. I can't get you a better deal than that.

DePue: Are you saying that, if not for Jim Thompson, the White Sox would not have won the World Series?

Thompson: If not for me, they would have left Chicago and gone to Florida. Reinsdorf was deadly serious about that. That was not a ploy that we dreamed up. Look, Reinsdorf is, at heart, a baseball fan. I know he owns a baseball team... He doesn't own it by himself, but he's a majority owner and general partner of a baseball team and a basketball team. Look how many basketball championships—Michael Jordan and that crew—he's given us. Something extraordinary for Chicago that will never be duplicated, I don't think, unless the Golden State Warriors do it, and they might. And he's given us a World Series baseball team. But he is at heart a baseball man, and if he had to choose between basketball and baseball, I believe he would have chosen baseball. He would have sold the Bulls, gone to Florida with the White Sox. Did we want that to happen? No.

DePue: Another issue that came out, October 11, the *Sun-Times* went after pinstripe patronage. (Thompson scoffs) "For annual campaign donations of \$1,000 supporters of Governor Thompson can join the Governor's Club"—I think you and I have talked about that—"entitling them to rub shoulders every couple of months with Illinois' chief executive. The club's 520 current members compose an elite roster of prominent lawyers, backers, developers, and other captains of commerce or industry."

Thompson: So what? I mean, that's just nonsense. First of all, it didn't cost \$1,000 for the people of Illinois to rub shoulders with me at the Illinois State Fair, for two weeks in the governor's tent. It doesn't cost any money at all for people on the streets of Illinois to rub shoulders with me. It didn't cost any money for the Rotaries and the Chambers of Commerce I addressed and dined with to rub shoulders with me. I was a governor who worked in the Springfield office with my door open to the hallway, and oftentimes I would go to that door and talk to people and rub shoulders with them.

The notion that this was some nefarious scheme or place where people could come together for deals is just crazy. The Governor's Club was a thank-

you to my political and financial supporters. Pinstripe patronage is the same bullshit that's been created by political enemies, picked up by the press, because they haven't got the time or the wherewithal to really understand what that meant. It doesn't mean anything.

You go to the roots of political patronage, or pinstripe patronage, and what they're complaining about are the lawyers I hired for the State of Illinois. They forget the fact that I was hiring the **best** lawyers that I could find for the State of Illinois, not some slugs with a law degree. Give me a break. How does the *Sun-Times* or the *Tribune* hire lawyers for themselves? They put it out to public bid? I don't think so.

DePue: Well, you had definite feelings about that topic. (laughs)

Thompson: Such nonsense, absolute nonsense.

DePue: How did you feel at the end of fourteen years? How would you rate your own success as a governor?

Thompson: I was proud of it. I thought in many ways I had changed, with the help and support of a lot of people, including the legislature and the press and the public, changed Illinois for the better.

Now, for one man to be able to conclude that that happened, in part, because of him is extraordinary. I was very proud of what I achieved as governor, and that pride allowed me to leave on my own terms and give the people of Illinois a chance to elect somebody else.

DePue: I think it's appropriate now... The *Sun-Times* also, on October fourteenth, listed what you considered "Big Jim's Greatest Hits, His Own List." (Thompson laughs) And right at the top of it is this discussion we just had; the budget doubled under Thompson, but income went up too, and you're obviously proud of that.

Thompson: I'm not proud of the fact that the budget doubled; I'm proud of the fact that we provided so many more and different services than were provided by state government at the beginning of my administration. If you look, for example, at the chart you showed me about the increases in spending for the Department of Aging, why was that? It was because people were living longer, and they had needs that needed to be addressed. Whereas in earlier times, they just died, and we didn't have to spend that kind of money.

DePue: Right underneath there are these bullet points, strengthening the criminal justice system.

Thompson: True.

DePue: Would you rate that at the very top of the things you are proud of?

Thompson: I wouldn't rate it at the top. I did say it was the first obligation of government, but it's not the only obligation of government. I think I did what circumstances in Illinois called for at the time, and I'm proud of that.

DePue: What would you put at the top?

Thompson: Hmmm, I'd probably put education at the top. But I don't know how you rank these. Would you put education at the top, or would you put economic development at the top, or would you put criminal justice systems at the top? It's impossible.

DePue: The next bullet point, Build Illinois.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: We've talked extensively about Build Illinois.

Thompson: Great program. Still going on today.

DePue: The next bullet we talked about today, getting business and labor to sit down together. They were at each other's throats in 1977.

Thompson: That's true.

DePue: Some of this doesn't necessarily fit into Build Illinois, but it certainly fits into the infrastructure development and your identification as being a builder, expanding McCormick Place, putting \$150 million into the Navy Pier project. You could say the same thing with the Illinois Center here or the new state library or a lot of those other things that we've talked about before.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: Here's one that didn't come up, in today's conversation at least, promoting the arts and historic preservation.

Thompson: Yeah, every governor, I think, tries to champion programs and policies and institutions that happen to coincide with his personal interests. I viewed myself as not only a promoter of cultural institutions and historic preservation programs, but as an advocate for them. So it was defend and promote.

When I was a kid in Chicago and visited the Field Museum or the other museum properties in Chicago and when I was governor and got the chance to see instruments of our past that needed restoration to continually remind us of where we had come from, as a frontier state, I got a specific enjoyment out of doing that. A, I thought it was important for the state of Illinois; B, I thought it was of low priority on the lists of a lot of other people in government. It needed a champion, and I became its champion, whether it was the Arts Council, which was chaired by a dear friend of mine, Shirley

Madigan, all the years of my administration, which helped protect it in the legislature, which was important to me.⁶⁴ She did a magnificent job.

Illinois had had a glorious architectural and artistic past. The great families of Chicago, in early nineteenth century days, who built the museums and who funded the arts, who amassed the extraordinary collections, which now find their place in the Art Institute, government can be a partner in that. It couldn't take the place of the private institutions or the private collectors or the philanthropic donors, but it could be a partner in it. I tried to do that every day of my time as governor, and I think the state was better off for it. It was really a celebration of who we were and what we had done. It's something I enjoyed doing.

DePue: This one, I think, is directly related, promoting tourism.

Thompson: Yeah. Once you recognize that tourism is our biggest industry in the state of Illinois, bigger than manufacturing or services or agriculture, then you damn well better promote it. It would lay waste to all of our other economic development efforts if we didn't pay attention to our biggest industry. You had to do that because most Illinoisians don't realize that tourism **is** our biggest industry, and you have constant competition from the Sun Belt states, from Nevada, California. It snows in Illinois. There are other places where it doesn't snow, and they can do these things year around.

DePue: Does that mean that when you went to places like London and Japan and maybe even China and the former Soviet Bloc countries, you were promoting them to come to Illinois; check us out?

Thompson: Absolutely, absolutely. I very much believe in the theory of the Third Coast.⁶⁵

DePue: Instead of being fly-over country.

Thompson: Absolutely.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Governor, we had a little bit of a break there. It was good conversation though, a chance to talk to Mrs. Thompson a bit. We're picking up on Big Jim's Greatest Hits. (Thompson laughs) The next one you had on the list was

⁶⁴ Shirley Madigan is House Speaker Michael Madigan's wife.

⁶⁵ The Gulf coast. Originally used to refer to the Texas coast and sometimes Texas in general, it has expanded to generally mean the entire American region bordering the Gulf of Mexico. (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=third%20coast>)

pushing efforts to clean up our environment. That's something we haven't really talked about much.⁶⁶

Thompson: Illinois, at its beginning, was blessed with a wonderful environment, our fields, our prairies, our rivers, our lake, situated in the center of the nation; a long state, which had a lot of natural treasures. Any governor would be derelict in his duty if he didn't seek to preserve and enhance that.

When I was governor, I was chair of the Governor's Association Task Force on Global Warming, long ago. I remember meeting with Margaret Thatcher, who was interested in the same thing. We met at the United Nations, and held a committee meeting at the United Nations. So the environment was always important to me.

I spent a lot of time out in agricultural areas, when I was a kid on summer vacation. And I've always been a resident of Chicago, where we're blessed with Lake Michigan; we don't have the issues that California and the desert states have. So any governor has got to try and preserve the abundance that God gave us when we created a state out here.

DePue: Well, one of the natural resources that Illinois had was lots of coal.

Thompson: Um-hmm.

DePue: It was high sulfur coal, but there were always issues related to the environment with coal mining, as well.

Thompson: Yeah, it was a balance and still is a balance today. Some people are trying to close the coal industry in America. That's the president's program, and Hillary Clinton's program as well, because she's talking about closing the coal mines in the Appalachian states and instituting programs to give miners other jobs.

Everything we do in society involves a balancing of risk and opportunity. Illinois, for a long time, had been a coal producing state. It's diminishing now, as mines close, and perhaps someday there won't be any coal mines in Illinois, which is remarkable, because we have more energy, in terms of coal buried under our state, than Saudi Arabia has in terms of oil. But they produce a light, sweet crude and we produce sulfur coal. It seems that science hasn't advanced enough to take the risk out of coal, to de-sulfur it, and to make it economically competitive.

Now that we've gotten into the age of natural gas as a fuel for our electric utilities, and we have this abundance of natural gas from the states—not only out west, which are the traditional homes, but fracking in both

⁶⁶ For environmental policy under Thompson, see Richard J. Carlson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 14 & 23, 2015. Carlson served as director of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency from 1981 to 1988.

eastern and western states, has produced so much natural gas that it makes economic sense to switch to that fuel. That's probably going to be true for the immediate future.

We have wind energy in Illinois, but it's still subsidized. We'll never be a state that harnesses the sun like some of the western states. So it's going to be a balance of fuel for our homes and utilities and factories. Some of it will have to come from other states to Illinois, if we get the infrastructure to carry electricity further than it's carried now.

DePue: I think Illinois still has the distinction of having more nuclear power plants than any other state.

Thompson: It does. It's one of the great advantages of our state. It's the cleanest power we have.

DePue: Are you still a promoter, still enthusiastic about nuclear power—

Thompson: I am.

DePue: ...because the societal trends have gone the other direction on that.

Thompson: Yeah, I know. I understand that. But the advantages of nuclear power are really extraordinary. But the industry is not building new these days. Other countries are, but we're not.

So we're lucky in Illinois to have a good mix of energy sources, and some go up and some go down.

DePue: The next one you had in line kind of surprised me. It's something we haven't talked much about. You said, "Ending a century of conflict between farm and non-farm use of land, with balanced development."

Thompson: That's a good one. (laughs)

DePue: It looks like you kind of surprised yourself on that.

Thompson: We haven't talked about that at all. (laughs)

DePue: No.

Thompson: Let's begin by acknowledging the limitations of the governor's power there. Governors don't have zoning powers, and the development of land for commercial and manufacturing purposes is an issue primarily for local government, through their use of zoning and for the state and the American government, through the use of air permits and other things that impact on the national level.

The state government can enter the fray most conveniently by using its resources to acquire land and dedicating it to non-business or non-manufacturing purposes, nature preserves, areas for hunting, fishing, parks and recreation. That's where state government can really impact the area, where zoning and land use is mostly at the local level and some at the federal level, where emissions are concerned. But state government can promote the effort to preserve land directly by acquiring it and dedicating it.

DePue: The next one is one we've talked about quite a bit, supervising the change in the state mental health system from giant warehouses to community-based treatment. Is there anything else you want to say on that?

Thompson: No, I'll repeat what I said before; it wasn't easy. I had to close the mental health facility in the community where my lieutenant governor lived. Imagine that? And I did it. I went to that community and walked the halls of the institution, and I walked the streets of the community and met with people who were angry about that decision. So, I didn't do it from the confines of a hideaway office.

DePue: I assume you're talking about Kankakee.

Thompson: Yeah. There were others as well.

DePue: And the last thing on the list, in this article at least, prodding the state towards a more progressive tax structure.

Thompson: Well, we still haven't got there, but we're close.

DePue: That's what I was thinking, yeah.

Thompson: We're closer; we're closer, because Governor Rauner has talked about expanding the tax base by trying to figure out some way to tax some services, still undecided, undisclosed and undefined.

DePue: But almost always includes your profession, the legal profession.

Thompson: Well, as still an active partner in a law firm, I'm not going to comment on that, (DePue laughs) other than I'm sure that, along with doctors and others, there will be resistance.

Look, if you're honest about it, the best tax system is one that has a broad base and low rates. If you rely too much on any one tax source or sources and put off-limits the growing part of your economy, you'll end up with high rates and an unfair system. The growing part of our economy in Illinois is the provision of services, yet it remains untaxed, and we continue to tax smaller and smaller portions of our economy.

Obviously, the income tax is a big lever, and hopefully your income in Illinois is growing. We've had, it's fair to say, very reasonable, by any measure, rates on Illinois income tax. We have a constitutional protection that helps keep rates flat and low. In fact, we may still be... I can't say this with certainty, but at one time we were probably the lowest income-taxed state among those states which had an income tax. It's probably largely true today, although some other states have been cutting their rates, so I can't say that with any certainty today. But Illinois has always enjoyed a low income tax rate. But we've been growing the sales tax. Sales tax in Chicago is almost 10 percent, between the city and the state and the county.

DePue: And most people wouldn't describe that as being a progressive tax.

Thompson: It certainly is not a progressive tax. But it's an important tax, so long as the rates are regarded as fair. There's an entertainment district in Chicago where the sales tax is even higher, to capture the tourists at McCormick Place and Navy Pier. But the taxing district extends out to the restaurants that border those locations, so we're a very high tax area, here in Chicago, as far as the sales tax is concerned. And there's always demands to add to it.

The amusement tax in Chicago is high. The hotel tax in Chicago is getting higher, probably is higher today than the hotel tax in Nevada or in Florida, and that has its limits. We've been building more and more hotels in the city of Chicago, but at some point, people who plan conventions, who control the destination of conventions and the venue of conventions, are going to say, "Wait a second. This is becoming a burden on the cost of this convention or meeting, and we'll take it elsewhere." And there are plenty of other "elsewheres" in the country today.

So, I guess the bottom line is what I opened with; you've got to have a fair tax system, which means you don't unnecessarily burden any part of your economy, and you've got to have a broad base and lower rates.

DePue: One of the taxes that you didn't include was property tax, and Illinois has a reputation of having some of the highest property tax rates. Would you consider that a progressive tax?

Thompson: I think it has progressive elements. The more people are able to spend for property, the more they're going to get taxed. Taxes on this apartment are much greater than the taxes on a bungalow on the south side of Chicago.

DePue: And in your own conclusion in your book, *Illinois State of the State*, I think you did have a comment that you would be in favor of an income tax increase,

but only if there were some kind of a correlating diminution of property taxes.⁶⁷

Thompson: Which is hard to achieve, I'll have to say, because you've got wealthy areas of the state; you've got poor areas of the state, and you've got areas of the state in between. I don't know how much room there is for the state to deal in property tax issues.

DePue: We're just about done with this reassessment. Any regrets that you have, things that you didn't get accomplished?

Thompson: Yeah. (sighs) We didn't get a World's Fair in Chicago. We had the chance to have the World's Fair in 1992, and I asked the legislature to do it, and they didn't. The Speaker was opposed, for his own reasons, and that opportunity passed us by. Now, maybe it would have been too hard. Maybe it wouldn't have been successful. But we had had two successful World's Fairs in Chicago, in times of economic stress. The 1892-1893 fair and the 1932-33 fair were successful, and we did those fairs at a time of high economic distress.

I thought there was no reason why we couldn't do it again, and you could imagine what the benefits to, not only tourism, would be but the benefits for people employed in the jobs that created the fair. Perhaps those times are passing, you know, the great spectacle, and perhaps other things are more important. But we missed it.

DePue: In a related issue, a few decades later, during the Obama administration, the attempt to bring the Olympics here, which failed miserably.

Thompson: Yeah, but that's... I don't know whether our efforts were sufficient, whether we didn't offer the right kind of inducements. I don't know; I wasn't really involved in that. I think the Olympics are a different sort of animal. They involve other countries in the world to send their athletes to athletic competition, so you have to be more in sync with those countries. When you hold a fair, it's largely something of your own creation, and other states, other countries, maybe will line up to be part of it. It's different.

DePue: I'd like to close your gubernatorial years with asking you to read how you closed your book, *Illinois State of the State, 1977-1991: The Thompson Administration*. I should say that this is one of the requirements that all governors are expected to do at the end of their administrations, correct?

Thompson: Right, that's correct. Although they don't necessarily have to do a book. They can make another speech.

⁶⁷ James R. Thompson, *Illinois State of the State, 1977-1991: The Thompson Administration* (Springfield: State of Illinois, 1991).

DePue: I don't know if the Walker administration has a version of this. The Edgar administration certainly did.

Thompson: Why certainly.

DePue: I doubt that the Blagojevich administration had it. (laughs)

Thompson: Oh no.

DePue: There are books about the Blagojevich administration.

Thompson: Yes, there are.

DePue: I'd like to have you read, if you're willing to do this, the closing of this, which is entitled "Leadership" and maybe ask that you exclude the last small paragraph on there.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: And to read it aloud, if you're willing to do that.

Thompson: Why would I want to exclude the last paragraph?

DePue: Well, it's up to you, Governor.

Thompson: (laughs) I'll follow your wishes. (reading) "The last recommendation I wish to make has much less to do with the challenges facing Illinois than with the manner in which those challenges should be met. As at the start and throughout most of my administration, the next governor is a Republican who will contend with a legislature controlled by Democrats. He will also have to contend with a political reapportionment map, drawn up by a Democratic majority. What is different, however, is the higher level of trust and cooperation, not only between the governor and the General Assembly, but among political parties, Chicago and downstate business, and labor and other groups.

"A governor's role is not only to lead, but also to listen and to bring opposing factions together. It has been my experience that legislative leaders and representatives of business, labor, education, environmentalists and human service advocates are honest brokers, with good ideas and reasonable demands. They are also willing to be flexible and to find solutions beneficial to all." Good advice.

DePue: A fitting way to end a long discussion on your administration?

Thompson: Yeah, I think so. I think that characterizes what I tried to do, and I think it characterizes much of what I accomplished as governor. We'll see whether that same ideal can be found today.

DePue: We've already talked quite a bit about how that seems to be just the opposite trend here recently.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Would you agree that Governor Edgar was able to maintain that kind of relationship during his administration?

Thompson: I think so. He did it in a different way, but I think basically he did it.

DePue: Let's steer into a little bit more about the early years of the Edgar administration. I'm not going to dwell on this too much, but there is one topic I do want to address. Edgar goes into the administration, much like you did fourteen years before, but the economic winds are not blowing in his favor. We're beginning a recession, nothing as deep as the recession that you had to face, but it is a recession. And Dr. Robert Mandeville is his budget director.

Thompson: A great man.

DePue: Early on, you take a look at the budget that you inherit and the balances that you've got to deal with. He quickly discovers that there is something close to a billion dollar shortfall.

Thompson: Okay.

DePue: Well, Mandeville was yours. I'm mixing this up a little bit. Edgar's new budget director is going to be Joan Walters.

Thompson: Right. Who was also part of my administration, wasn't she?

DePue: She was, yes. She worked for Edgar for many years in the secretary of state's office.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So somebody you knew very well, and he certainly did. Is that your memory, you recollection that that was the depths of the budget hole that Edgar had inherited?

Thompson: It's not my recollection, no.

DePue: Any elaboration on that?

Thompson: No, times change. As you say, he was looking into the eyes of another recession, and that has different demands. Plus he was a more conservative governor, in many ways, than I was. I don't say that with any opprobrium; that was just his nature. That's how he came to the legislature; that's how he came to the office of governor. He was just a different person.

DePue: I wanted to quote from my interview with Governor Edgar on this issue, and certainly you're willing to respond to some of this. It's kind of a lengthy quote, (reading) "I remember sitting down with Joan, and I said, 'Joan, I want you to do something for me.' She kind of knew that I'd probably offer. I said, 'I want you to head up the Bureau of the Budget.' She looked at me, 'Bureau of the Budget? I don't know anything about that.' I said, 'Yes, you do; you know enough; you're tough enough.' And I said, 'You don't want to be a bean counter. I want somebody that will do what has got to be done, that I trust, but in the end, is not going to let somebody die.' By that point, we knew we were in trouble. About a month into the transition, Art Quern"... That was one of your people?

Thompson: Yeah, he was my deputy governor.

DePue: "And Pete Peters came to me and said, 'We need to talk to you.' I said, 'Fine, you're talking to me.' He said, 'We looked at the books and the budget and everything. We estimate that we have at least a billion dollar deficit, walking in.' I said, 'A billion dollar deficit?' I said, 'We're not going to have much new revenue; the economy's not doing well.' The recession hasn't gotten that bad yet, but I knew that it was coming. I just remember saying, 'Is it too late to ask for a recount?' And they said, 'You're certified. You've been certified in.'"

So it goes on in that vein, and further into this is, "A billion dollars. Nobody had ever dealt with that kind of a hole. Maybe \$200 million, \$300 million dollars, you'd be in the hole, but a billion dollars? And then you knew you really weren't going to get any new revenue, because, as I said, to make the surtax permanent, I wasn't going to raise other taxes. I'd pushed my limit on taxes, and that money from the surtax went to schools and to local government." That's something we haven't talked much about, but that was specified in that regard.⁶⁸

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Any comments on that?

Thompson: If you listen closely to the words of both Quern and Edgar, they were talking, I think, about a deficit coming as a result of a recession that was coming. Budgets are always a forecast of the year ahead, not the year behind and not the current numbers. When you present a budget to the legislature, you're telling the legislature what you think is going to occur in the next year.⁶⁹ So, I

⁶⁸ Peters was a Republican state representative from Chicago who had served on the Appropriations Committee. On the discovery of the budget hole, (See Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, November 17, 2009, Volume III: 528-530 & 552-554; and Joan Walters, interview by Mark DePue, July 29, 2009, 65-76.) On leaving Edgar with a problem to solve, (See Robert Mandeville, December 6, 2013, 32, and February 20, 2014, 257-259; both interviews by Mike Czaplicki.)

⁶⁹ In 1990, Thompson's Bureau of the Budget projected \$13.77 billion in general revenue for FY1991. In reality, the state received \$13.26 billion in general revenue during FY1991, a \$509 million shortfall. The 3.84

don't think that's any different than what might have faced, had I run for a fifth term.

DePue: No reflection on you and your administration of being a little bit too free in spending in those last few years?

Thompson: Hmm, I don't think so.

DePue: Now Governor, we've already been at it for a couple of hours today. It's been a fun conversation today. (laughs)

Thompson: Yeah, it has been, free-wheeling.

DePue: I wonder if we can take just a little bit of time and get you transitioned into a private life.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: Nineteen ninety-one. What political ambitions did you have in 1991?

Thompson: None.

DePue: None?

Thompson: None.

DePue: No interest in perhaps running for the Senate later on?

Thompson: No, I never wanted to run for the Senate. Why would I want to, after being governor for fourteen years, a unique office, where you can achieve, with the cooperation of others, singular accomplishments? Go be a freshman senator, where you aren't even supposed to **speak** for the first year and where everything is governed by seniority, until they made rules changes, just a few years ago. Oh, no. No, no, no.⁷⁰

DePue: Let's speculate. Let's say that President George H. W. Bush had won his run for reelection in 1992. Would you have been interested in any kind of a proposal that President Bush would have offered?

Thompson: Oh, I don't know. It's hard to speculate, but I doubt it. One of the reasons that I retired as governor, declined to run for a fifth term, was because, had I done so, I would have forfeited any chance to participate in the private sector, which I had never done.

percent error was in line with the Bureau's average of 3.59 during the Thompson administration. (See Appendix for Illinois general revenue estimates, 1978–1994.)

⁷⁰ Governor Edgar had a similar view. On his decision not to run for the Senate. (See Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, November 8, 2010, Volume V: 960-973.)

From my first day as a lawyer, I devoted my entire career to education and public service. I'd never been part of a private economy, except one year while I was supported by my law firm, while I was running for governor. Otherwise I had no income. (laughs) And my wife was working to provide some of that income. It was not an easy task. I thought, in fairness to myself and my family, I ought to be able to participate in the private sector, to build some kind of economic security for my family.

I came out of the governorship in debt, because I maintained a residence in Chicago, that I wouldn't have had to maintain; I could have lived in the mansion the whole time. And I didn't have anything. I didn't have any assets. I owed money, which I had borrowed to support our living in Chicago. I thought, This is no way to raise a family and to provide for their economic security. And I thought, all those years of public service and education were enough of an economic sacrifice, as important as they were. I wouldn't trade them for anything, and I'd go back and do it all over again.

But if I'd gone four more years, I would have been too old to really go to a law firm or do anything else in the business world, and that was important to me.

DePue: And if you'll permit me to say this, by that time you had an expensive hobby as well. Something that you really loved to do.

Thompson: What's that?

DePue: Antiques.

Thompson: Oh, they're not that expensive. They're not that expensive.

DePue: Well, from my perspective it sounds pretty expensive. (laughs) Let me ask you about two particular positions—

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: ...if you would have been enticed by either of these positions—I don't even know if it was a matter of discussion at the national level—attorney general?

Thompson: I certainly would have considered it, out of deference to the president, first of all. Earlier in my career, when I was U.S. attorney, President Nixon wanted me to become the director of drug fighting efforts in the United States.

DePue: The drug czar?

Thompson: No, not the czar, the director of the DEA, the Drug Enforcement Administration. You know, to be the top drug agent in America, to have the police force to deal with drugs. I didn't want to do that. And I got called to the White House. They were insistent; they said, "The president wants you to do

this,” and, “Why don’t you go out to California and talk to the president at San Clemente?” I thought, Oh no, no, no, no, no. I understand that. If I go to San Clemente, and I’m walking on the beach with the president and he says, “Jim, I want you to be the director of drug enforcement,” I would have to say yes.

So I said, “No, I’ll tell you what, I’ll go to Washington and talk to people there. I’ll visit the DEA and others.” I went to Washington, and I turned it down. I got a lot of static from the general, Haig,⁷¹ who was running the White House for Nixon. He was the chief of staff, I think, at that time. He just pounded on me to do this. He said, “The president wants you to do this. You’ve got to do this.” That’s when I said, “I tell you what, I’ll come to Washington and discuss it with everybody.” And at the end of that trip, I said, “No, I don’t want to do this.” But I wasn’t going to go out and talk to the president; that was a trap. I think I said at the time, though, “But if they make me director of the FBI, I’ll do it.” (both laugh)

DePue: Would you have done it in 1990 though? I would think you’d shoot for something higher than that.

Thompson: Yeah, I don’t think I would have been director of the FBI in 1990.

DePue: Here’s the other position, and I have no idea if this was ever in the cards on either side, a Supreme Court justice.

Thompson: Nobody ever mentioned that. I’m a lawyer, and it’s the top of our profession; it’s the ultimate place in our profession. I certainly would have had to consider that, just because I’m in love with the law. But it was never in the cards.

DePue: Let’s talk about the personal side of this transition. You’re living in the mansion, but you’ve got a home in Chicago, as well.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Where did you want to live after you moved out of the mansion?

Thompson: Chicago.

DePue: No questions about that?

Thompson: No questions about that.

DePue: Did you move into a different residence in Chicago?

⁷¹ Gen. Alexander Haig served as Nixon’s chief of staff from May 1973 to August 9, 1974, when Nixon resigned.

Thompson: Oh, I've done that repeatedly. (laughs) I'm a real estate hopper. [It] drives my wife crazy, because I always disappear when the moving day comes. She's got it all by herself. Eventually she decided that was a good idea, that I was more interference than help. So I was sent on trips when we moved. (both laugh)

DePue: Was the residence, after you got out of office, in Chicago?

Thompson: Yes. I've never lived anywhere but Chicago, after leaving my parents' house early in my career.

DePue: Part of this equation is where Samantha's going to go to school. Was that private school or public?

Thompson: No, she was already going to school in Chicago, and that was a public school. So, like me, she had a public school elementary education, a private school high school and then a private college, Georgetown. I had a public elementary education, a private high school, North Park Academy; a public college beginning, University of Illinois–Navy Pier, and a year at a private college, Washington University in St. Louis. So I had both; she's had both, and I think that was good for both of us.

DePue: Tell me again, once Samantha got to the high school level, was it still public at that time?

Thompson: No, she went to Latin, so it was private.

DePue: Why the shift to a private school for her for high school?

Thompson: (sighs) That's what we eventually decided. I don't think there was any significant thing. It appeared to us, I think, that Latin offered the opportunity for a better education than what her neighborhood high school would be. I don't even remember now what that was.

DePue: These are tough years, the mid-nineties or late-nineties, for Chicago public schools, are they not?

Thompson: They've always been tough years. I have to say that the closest high school to us now is Walter Payton Academy, which is one of the finest high schools in the state of Illinois. But it was one of those selective academies; if you could get in there, you got a wonderful education. If you were in a neighborhood high school, maybe not.

DePue: What were Samantha's interests, once she got to high school, her academic interests?

Thompson: I think they were varied. She had a lot of talent in writing; she's an excellent writer; in participation in school activities, she's an excellent speaker. But I

don't think she had any discernible notion of what she was going to do, post-high school. I think that more matured in college.

DePue: Did not being in the public limelight give you more opportunity to go to school events and to participate in her activities?

Thompson: Sure, absolutely. And if our wives were busy, Mike Madigan and I sat in the bleachers at Latin and attended parent-teacher conferences. (laughs)

DePue: Now, when you do that kind of thing, especially in your case, because there's nobody more visible, nobody more known to the public than you were at that time, and Madigan would probably be pretty close behind that, weren't you always—

Thompson: No, not necessarily. Madigan is a very private personality.

DePue: Yeah, I knew that, but weren't you always inundated by people coming up and wanting to talk to you?

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: Didn't bother you?

Thompson: No. It still happens, and I haven't been governor for twenty-six years. It still happens. People will stop me on the street. People will come up to me in restaurants or at public events. Yeah, it's going to happen for the rest of my life, or until Illinois has a population that just doesn't remember me.

And, of course, I did things after governor that put me back in the public spotlight, like the 9/11 Commission and other things. So, even the younger generation kept remembering me, let's say.

DePue: Do you like that aspect of being a public figure?

Thompson: Well, it's unavoidable, so you better like it.

DePue: So, you do like it?

Thompson: Yeah, why not? People say nice things to me. Nobody's said a bad thing to me in twenty-six years. What the hell? That's pretty good.

DePue: How many times have you heard this question or this plea, "Governor, you got to run again; help us!"

Thompson: A lot, during the course of the last twenty-six years, but—

DePue: How many times have you seriously considered it?

Thompson: Never. When you're done, you're done.

- DePue: Let's talk a little bit about Jayne now, because this is an important transition for her, as well. It's always difficult to have a job and be the governor's wife at the same time, although I know she did that some. What did she move into, once you were out of public office?
- Thompson: I may get my times wrong, but she had a varied career. It just shows you how talented she is. She practiced law, but she also had a growing child. When Samantha was ready for high school, Jayne stopped practicing law, because she wanted to be close to her during those formative years, because they're sometimes difficult years. She did... Oh, what do you call it, where you're picking out people for jobs, when you're in an agency that goes out and finds people for jobs.
- DePue: The unattractive phrase is a headhunting firm.
- Thompson: Yeah, a headhunter. She entered the world of headhunter, in which she had no experience, none, zero, zip, and she did very well at it, because she's really good with people and she works hard. Then she was lured into a public relations job, with a New York-based firm that had a Chicago office. She did very well there and eventually became the head of the Chicago office.
- DePue: What was the name of the firm?
- Thompson: Oh, god. You have to contend with a failing memory. It'll come to me. It's still here in Chicago. Then, at one point she decided, "I can do this myself." She started her own public relations agency, at the kitchen table and grew it into a very successful business. She had staff; she had an office downtown, and she just finally gave that up at the end of last year.
- DePue: Wow, so had a long run with it, as well.
- Thompson: Had a long run with it.
- DePue: Would you know any of her clients by name?
- Thompson: Yeah, Commonwealth Edison, Chrysler, Phillip Morris... I think you'd get a better list from her.
- DePue: I'm certainly looking forward to having the chance to talk to her about that, as well.
- Thompson: Syngenta was one of her first clients and was a client until the end. Syngenta is a huge, Swiss-based company that manufactured herbicides and insecticides—a huge part of agriculture—world-wide, but also in Illinois. She became expert in that. She can discuss the worlds of herbicide and insecticide with you, and its impact on the environment. She's very smart, and she is prodigiously hard working.

- DePue: And you're coming up to your fortieth anniversary this year.
- Thompson: Yeah, boy, it seems like yesterday. (laughs) Forty years, jeez!
- DePue: Would I be prying too hard or getting into secrets if I asked what you got planned for the fortieth?
- Thompson: I don't know. I haven't been told yet (DePue laughs) what is planned for the fortieth. I don't think it's going to be a big celebration. You know, it's going to be difficult this year, because with the grandchild born in the middle of March and with our being there for the birth in London, there's going to be tugs on us to go back at the age of two months, three months. I've already bought the clothes and given them to the mother. (both laugh)
- DePue: So was Samantha happy to get your gifts?
- Thompson: Oh, certainly. But, of course, she's bought a ton herself, and she's had three showers, Chicago, New York and London.
- DePue: What's her husband's name?
- Thompson: Tommy, Tommy Tomazos.
- DePue: How does Tommy deal with all this love and affection being heaped on Samantha and their future child?
- Thompson: Well, because it's heaped on him too. He is absolutely my wife's favorite. Honest to God, the two of them are very much alike in terms of personality and ideas, versus me and Samantha, who are very much alike in terms of personality and ideas and interests.
- DePue: You've mentioned this before, but she looks at it as an ally then? Tommy?
- Thompson: Who, Jayne? Oh, absolutely. Plus he's fallen in love with her martinis. (DePue laughs) Tommy would buy the apartment next door to us and be over here at 5:00 every night. No, he's a wonderful man, absolutely wonderful man.
- DePue: Since we're on the subject of Samantha, tell me again where she went to college?
- Thompson: Georgetown.
- DePue: Why Georgetown?
- Thompson: She picked it. We did the parent tour. I took the southern states. Jayne took the northeastern states, Midwest states, and Samantha picked Georgetown.
- DePue: Was she drawn more to D.C. or to Georgetown University?

- Thompson: Oh, I think it was both. I mean, here's a kid who understands politics and government pretty well.
- DePue: Not too many of the incoming class could claim that they had spoken in the Soviet Union on behalf of their governor father, right?
- Thompson: None at all. Georgetown is a beautiful campus, and I think that played a part. And her campus interview was with the president of the university, which was somewhat different. (laughs)
- DePue: How did that happen?
- Thompson: Because my partner and predecessor chairman at the firm, Tommy Reynolds, was on the board of Georgetown. He said, I guess, "You're interested in Georgetown?" I said, "Well, she is." "I'll set it up with the president." I thought, This is rather a strange campus interview. Usually you're taken on a tour of the campus and you're speaking with members of the staff, and off the sudden we're going to get the president. I think we might get in. (both laugh)
- DePue: Once she got there, did she live on campus?
- Thompson: She lived on campus the first year, maybe both years, and then like a lot of the students, moved off campus.
- DePue: She wasn't in a sorority then?
- Thompson: No.
- DePue: I can't imagine she lacked a social life while she was there.
- Thompson: Oh, god no. No, she's never lacked for a social life. This kid has more connections than anybody I know. First of all, she's maintained her relationships with people that she started with in kindergarten, through elementary and secondary, through high school, now through Georgetown. She is an incredible networker. Georgetown is famous for students who not only network, but keep their relationships from Georgetown for the rest of their life, and they promote that at Georgetown. Now she lives in London, so a lot of her friends from Georgetown, or from later years, are regularly coming through London, and voila, you know, out to dinner, out to lunch, sitting talking, going to a theatre or movie or whatever. She's very good about that.
- DePue: Thus three baby showers already.
- Thompson: Three baby showers.
- DePue: The obvious question is, what career goals did she develop when she got to Georgetown?

Thompson: She kept up her appreciation for politics and government, but she started the roots of her decision to go for a fashion career.⁷² It started there, and then she built on it by going to Italy and working in the fashion industry there. [She] worked for Gucci in their factory, outside of Milan, I believe, and worked for another fashion company for a summer in Rome. [She] took business Italian while she was in Italy, came back and went to New York to get a graduate degree in fashion at the Fashion Institute of Technology, FIT.

Eventually [she] started her own company, manufacturing women's wear, but she was the company. She did the designing; she did the sourcing of materials; she found the manufacturer—first in New York and then in California—she oversaw the manufacturing process; she sold the goods. It was an incredible experience, but it was also too much for one person. She eventually stopped manufacturing and became a consultant.

(pause in recording)

DePue: That was another very quick break. Let me finish our conversation for today with this one. How would you describe Samantha's fashion style?

Thompson: Useful. She manufactured, basically, women's separates, that is, a blouse or shirt and pants. I would describe them as not only well designed and well made, but useful for people. They weren't flamboyant. They were things you could wear every day. She had a leisure line.

When she stopped manufacturing, she ended up with a whole bunch of clothes. And when she sold her apartment in New York and moved to London, she answered the request of a woman that had bought some of her things in earlier times, to whether she had any more, because it was her [the woman's] favorite outfit. Samantha did have some more and sent them to her. She also took a lot out to a charity outside of New York City, run by the Sisters of...I forget which Catholic order it was. She donated a number of things to the Fashion Institute of Technology for students and to other charities around New York City. They were all useful things that people could wear every day and wear to work.

So she had a great education in fashion, based on her studies in Italy and New York and London—she spent a summer there—and in the fashion houses where she worked in Italy and in Rome and in the United States. Now, because of her family responsibilities, having gotten married and now expecting a child, she still does consulting work. She's a bridal buyer for a department store chain in Kuwait, which used to buy a lot of her garments that she manufactured. So she's buying for them. She's also a fashion consultant;

⁷² Samantha's interest had even earlier roots, and she credits her father's creativity as an important influence. (Samantha Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014.)

she has clients in London. So she's kept a little bit of the fashion business with her, as now she moves on to being a wife and mother.

DePue: You and Mrs. Thompson are obviously very excited about being grandparents.

Thompson: Yeah, I guess I was sort of a nuisance at the beginning. (DePue laughs) My wife would keep saying, "Don't ask about that. Don't be pushing people. Be quiet!"

DePue: Were you getting a little bit anxious about whether or not she'd settle down? I mean, you waited a long time yourself.

Thompson: No, I wasn't anxious about her settling down. Well, I was a little anxious, on the question of marriage and then on the question of children, like all potential grandfathers and fathers. But it all came out all right. In the end, I kept quiet, and it just happened.

We gained a wonderful son-in-law, whom we both love very much. She gained a wonderful husband. And now we're going to have a grandchild. I'm sure we'll spoil—I will—spoil that child rotten. I can't wait. It's very exciting. Hey look, I'm an old guy! How much time do I have left? This is wonderful, and it comes at a time when I can devote the time to it.

DePue: I think this is a fitting way to end for today, Governor.

Thompson: I think so.

DePue: Thank you very much.

(end of interview #24)

(end of volume V)