Interview with Robert W. "Bob" Kustra

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Interviewer: Mike Czaplicki

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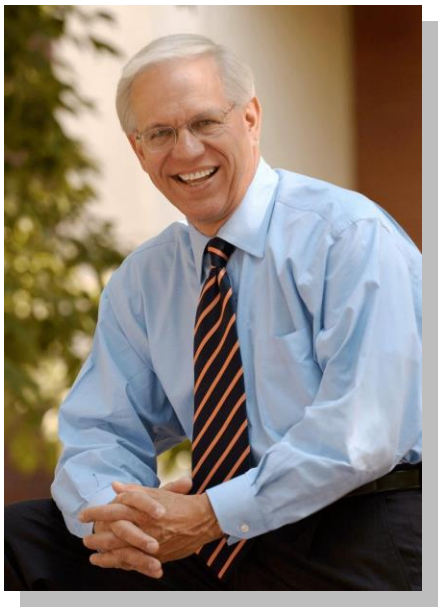
Czaplicki: Today is Friday, January 28, 2011. My name's Mike Czaplicki. I'm on the staff at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois, and it's my privilege to be on the phone today with Bob Kustra. How are you doing today, Bob?

Kustra: Just fine, Mike.

Czaplicki: Bob Kustra, as some of our listeners may know, was Governor Jim Edgar's lieutenant governor for his entire tenure in office. He's speaking to us now from Boise, Idaho, where he is the president of Boise State University. He's had a very rich and varied career, but he's also incredibly pressed for time, so instead our usual long trip through one's upbringing and background before entering the administration, that's going to be a bit briefer today. Then we're going to jump right in. I will still begin at the beginning, as we usually do, and I'll ask you, Bob, when and where were you born?



Bob Kustra, Illinois Lieutenant Governor, January 14, 1991 to July 1, 1998

Kustra: I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in March of 1943.

Czaplicki: And was your family from that area or recent migrants?

Kustra: They were. I was born and raised by my parents, who were born and raised in St. Louis, on the north side of the city. They come from Irish and Polish stock, and their parents or grandparents were immigrants of one kind or another that came over and found their way to St. Louis.

Czaplicki: Oh, interesting. What were your mom and dad's names?

Kustra: It was Walter and Loretto.

Czaplicki: Loretta?

Kustra: Yeah, actually it has an "o" on it, strangely enough. Most Lorettas have an "a" on the end, but hers was an "o".

Czaplicki: Oh, Loretto.

Kustra: Uh-huh.

Czaplicki: And what did they do for a living?

Kustra: My dad spent his entire life with McDonnell Douglas. My mother actually worked there too, but she also worked for Famous Barr, which at the time was a very prominent department store in the St. Louis area. In fact, there was one in Springfield for a while. She was also, of course, home raising my sister and me. But they both spent the majority of their careers at a company that is still out there at the airport. McDonnell Douglas, of course, has grown into a very large international operation. My dad's badge number was forty; he was the fortieth person that Mr. McDonnell hired, back in the early 1940s, I guess it was.

Czaplicki: Wow, do you know what he did there?

Kustra: Yeah, he was in receiving. He was responsible for taking in a lot of the scrap that was left over from the manufacture of airplanes. He would sell that scrap to various folks around the country who were interested in using it for various purposes. He supervised an office of people who handled the transactions between McDonnell Douglas and these folks who would buy up whatever was left over from airplane manufacturing.

Czaplicki: Well, I'd love to spend more time on this, but (laughs) we must continue onwards. Did you attend public schools in St. Louis?

Kustra: I went to a Catholic high school called Laboure High School. It doesn't exist anymore; it was on the north side of the city.

Czaplicki: How do you spell that?

Kustra: L-a-b-o-u-r-e. A French name, named after a saint by the name of Saint Catherine Labouré. People usually remember the flying nun, [who] had the winged habit, headdress. That was the order of nuns that ran the high school; Daughters of Charity, they're called. They were founded in France and found their way over to America and over to St. Louis, where they had a mother house. The rest is history. (laughs)

Czaplicki: And then, from there you went off to Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas?

Kustra: That's right. Spent four years there getting an undergraduate degree in political science.

Czaplicki: And when did you graduate, '65?

Kustra: Sixty-five, right.

Czaplicki: What attracted you to political science?

Kustra: Well, John Kennedy did. We're just celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the New Frontiers speech in his inauguration. I was a kid in high school, getting ready to prepare a valedictory address for my high school graduating class when Kennedy gave that speech, a few months before. I was truly inspired by "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." From that moment on, I just felt like the public service was calling me. I ended up majoring in political science for three different degrees, the one at Benedictine, and then, of course, the one at SIU [Southern Illinois University] and eventually the doctorate at the U of I. [University of Illinois]

Czaplicki: So, did you come from a Democratic tradition, or was it Kennedy's Catholicism? What was it that really drew you to him?

Kustra: The Kennedy mystique in my neighborhood, in my family, was strong, both for reasons having to do with, first of all, the Irish. My entire family on one side was Irish, and that was a very proud moment for my family, (laughs) that an Irishman got that far along.

Secondly, Catholicism played a role. We were all acutely aware that he would be the first Catholic elected president of the United States. Probably more than anything else, it was the glamour of it all, for my family anyway. Here was this young man, with this beautiful wife, and after looking at Dwight David Eisenhower for eight years, (Czaplicki laughs) Kennedy was just this unbelievably attractive guy. I can still remember my aunts and my mother kind of swooning over him and his brother Bobby. There were pictures of John and Bobby Kennedy in my house and the house of every one of my cousins, in the neighborhood. They just idolized the Kennedy family.

Again, I was a little bit more narrowly focused on the call to public service, (Czaplicki laughs) but there's no question that the whole family was engaged. It wasn't, of course, just our family; it was this very ethnic, working-class neighborhood, where people were aspiring to be someone better, someone else, and they looked at Kennedy as someone who had achieved this.

Czaplicki: I know you had some jobs. It was unclear to me when you did various things. If I understand correctly, you were an assistant city manager for Carbondale. Now, did you do that when you were at SIU, or did that come later?

Kustra: No, that was at SIU. That was an internship I did. At that time I really thought that the city manager program was for me. I was really interested in becoming a city manager.

One day, the chairman of the political science department called me in and said, "You really need to think about doing an internship. There's a competition among a few of the graduate students, and I'd like you to be one of those that considers going into the internship." As it turns out, I got the internship, and I worked in it.

Those were some pretty rough days down in Carbondale. The students were protesting quite a bit; the police weren't handling it very well, and there was a complete breakdown. At one time, Walter Cronkite[1] actually reported on the evening news that Carbondale was falling apart. They had film footage from the riots in the streets of Carbondale, and here I am sitting in the city manager's office watching all of this.

I must say that I wasn't particularly impressed with this particular city manager, who I was asked to work for. He was a nice guy, but he was an engineer. He didn't really seem to have much human relations training, and he didn't really seem to understand how to deal with difficult, complex settings, where you really have to apply a set of social skills that help bring people together. He was just too black-and-white. He could read an engineering drawing, but he had a tough time figuring out how to get people to calm down and bring them together. At one point, I just said, "You know, I think this was a great idea, to be a city manager, but I've got to get out of here. (both laugh) I've got to go find another way to make a living, so to speak."

About that time, David Kenney, who was the chair of the department of government, would go on to serve in government. David was a great guy and invited me into his office one day and said, "They're hiring new legislative assistants up in Springfield. Why don't you apply for one of those, and go up and work in Springfield?"

I went off to Alton, Illinois, and interviewed with the then–Speaker of the House. His name was Ralph Smith. He went on to be a U.S. senator for a

[1]Walter Cronkite was the nation's most prominent television news anchor at that time.

brief period, succeeding Everett Dirksen, I believe, when Dirksen died in office. Then Smith would run and lose against Adlai Stevenson.[2]

Czaplicki: So what year would this have been?

Kustra: That would have been 1968, that I started working in state government. I got my degree in '68, my master's degree in government and then went directly on the Republican side of the Illinois House, working for Ralph Smith.

The one interesting story about that is that, on the drive up to Carbondale, I got to thinking, You know, I didn't ask Dr. Kenney what the political affiliation of this Speaker was, who I was supposed to interview. That must make a difference, because I knew they were doing partisan hiring. The Democrats were going to hire their people, and the Republicans were going to hire their people.

So when I got to Alton, I ran into the drugstore, hoping to find a newspaper that could at least tell me what Ralph Smith was, because I didn't have a clue. I was this Missouri kid that came over to SIU to go to school. I couldn't find a paper that morning that had Ralph's name in it. There was no R or D [for Republican or Democrat] that I could find, associated with his name. So I marched into Ralph Smith's office totally clueless, not having any idea of his partisan affiliation.

We went through the whole interview, which was all based on my experience, my career interests, his explaining the nature of the job. I would be assigned to the Committee on Municipalities and the Committee on Counties and Township Affairs, and I would do bill analysis. Finally, at the very end, he said, "By the way, I didn't ask you, but do you have a partisan affiliation?" I just kind of froze. I could just feel my heart drop like, What do I say now? I said, "Well, to be honest about it, I grew up in St. Louis, right across the river here, and my family's all Democrat. I come from a working-class neighborhood, where there weren't many Republicans around, that's for sure." And then I added, somewhat gratuitously, "But, you know, I'm not too fond of the Democrats these days. Lyndon Johnson's not doing a very good job of prosecuting this war, and I certainly am willing to work for an alternative."

He cut me off at that point and said, "Well, you know, we don't really need to have this conversation, because I don't care. Here's the important question, can you be loyal to me, as the Speaker of the House?" And I said, (laughs) needless to say, "Well, of course." He said, "Okay, you got the job," and that was that.

[2] Ralph Tyler Smith (R-Alton) served in the Illinois House from 1955 until his appointment to Dirksen's U.S. senate seat in 1969. During that period, he was elected majority whip in 1965 and Speaker in 1967 and 1969. *Chicago Tribune*, March 10, 1971.

He also, over the course of the next few years, shielded me and the entire staff from any form of solicitation from the local Republican Party in Sangamon County, which I'm sure the local Sangamon County Republicans didn't appreciate. But we were considered professional staff, and we were **not** to be intruded upon by solicitations from the Sangamon County Republican Party. I don't think I ever wrote a check to the Republican Party of Sangamon County the whole time I worked up there, first as a legislative staff assistant, and I eventually became the administrative assistant to the Speaker, Jack Walker, at that time, who followed Smith.

Czaplicki: When you say "solicitation," are you speaking of the old traditions, like the assessment system, where party workers would have to pay a little bit of—

Kustra: Not really that so much. They probably were doing that too, but I was just thinking about the times when they come around with tickets to events. They come to your office; they lay a couple of tickets on your desk, and they say, "Now, you'll be going to this, right?" You're supposed to write the check. In the state government—I would get to know later—there was a lot of that going on, where employees were not only expected to buy their own tickets but to sell other tickets to their friends. The implication was that, if you did that, you held onto your job. If you didn't, you might not.

Czaplicki: How about the experience of the protests? Did that influence your political shift at all, away from the Democrats?

Kustra: No, not really. I don't think it did. I was also, in those days, not enamored with Mayor Daley, not just because of the 1968 riots, although that certainly didn't sit well with me, I was just concerned over how closed the Chicago system was at that time and how difficult it was for people to operate within it, unless, of course, it was based on clout and influence and money. So, one of the reasons why I think I became such a good Republican in those early days is that I could not understand and did not agree with the principles or the practices that seemed to drive the Democratic Party in those days. Therefore, it was a pretty easy launch for me to move over to the Republican side

It became a lot more difficult when I got into Springfield and became a part of that legislative staff team and got into leadership meetings with some of these Republicans who were really, in those days, very racist in the way they talked about their legislative colleagues, who were black from Chicago, for example. [They were] very narrow-minded in their thinking. They'd sit around and make jokes in front of interns, who were young, idealistic students, who thought there was a better world out there. That was probably the rude awakening for me. I could agree with them on the need to open up and make more democratic, the Chicago machine, if you will, and all that the machine touched in those days, but I certainly didn't have much truck for their views in other ways.

Czaplicki: Was any of that a factor in your eventually leaving the legislature and going to get your PhD?

Kustra: Not really. First of all, I didn't leave the legislature voluntarily; I was fired. It's a great story that you can find in the archives of the local paper. Basically, in those days, because we were all hired by the Speaker, when another Speaker came in, at least in the case of this transition from Jack Walker, who I was working for after Smith, to Bob Blair, who was a very volatile and controversial speaker. Henry Hyde and Bob Blair collided in one of the great all-time famous fights of the day.[3]

But, Blair fired everybody who had worked for Jack Walker. So I found myself out on the street, so to speak, and without work, with one small child and one on the way. Finally [I] found a way to go to work for a criminal justice commission, over in Champaign County, on kind of a consulting basis. I did that for a while and eventually decided to finish my degree. So, in a sense, I was forced into my doctorate by the fact that I'd lost my job, and it just seemed like a good idea, since I was really struggling, financially anyway, to continue my schooling. And that, as it turned out, was the best decision I ever made, or I wouldn't be talking to you from the president's office of Boise State. (laughs)

Czaplicki: Yeah, that's a very impressive mix you have there. Now, does that mean that Jim Edgar took your job, because didn't he go to work for Bob Blair, about the same time that you were let go?

Kustra: You know, he did. He didn't take my job. Actually, Jim was working for Arrington, for Senator [W. Russell] Arrington, during the time I was working on the House side. So, Jim was on one side, and I was on the other.[4] But now that you mention it, there was a moment there, I think, where Jim did go to work for Blair. I don't remember what he did.

Czaplicki: It would have been 1971. He worked for Arrington from '68 to '71, which—

Kustra: Okay, the yeah, that's exactly what happened, because I was fired in January of '71. That's when Blair reassembled a new staff. He brought in a guy named Doug Donenfeld. Doug and I later became friends. We didn't know each other from Adam in those days.

Czaplicki: Do you know how to spell his name?

[3] For Governor Edgar's perspective on the fight, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 28, 2009, pages 66-70, conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

[4] For Edgar's service as an assistant to Arrington, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 22, 2009, pages 61-90 and May 28, 2009, pages 1-28.

Kustra: Donenfeld is D-o-n-e-n-f-e-l-d, I believe, something like that. Doug's an attorney. He lobbied for many years, represented clients in Springfield, really a great guy. But initially, he was the guy, who I think, was announced to take my place. Then Jim was brought onto the staff at that time, I guess. Again, if you hadn't said that, I wouldn't have remembered the fact (laughs) that he actually took one of the slots of the fired crew, (both laugh) of which I was a part.

Czaplicki: I guess that might be a good moment to jump ahead, then, to the Edgar years. We're skipping over all kinds of interesting things you did. But for the Edgar Project, we'll leap ahead. Did you talk to Edgar much in those days? When did you really first get to know him?

Kustra: Jim and I knew each other from those early, early days, when we were…He was first an intern. I was never part of the legislative intern program. I came in as a full-time staffer. But he was a legislative intern on the Senate side, about the same time I was arriving in Springfield, in '68, as a staff assistant. Come to think of it, since he's three years younger than I am, he was probably arriving a couple of years after I was there. So, I knew Jim through those years. I followed him and what he was doing. I greatly admired Senator Arrington.

Then, of course, when I was elected[5], Jim was also in the public service. By that time, he was interested in running for statewide office. We would occasionally have reason to bump into each other, but it's not like we really collaborated in any way. Through my entire ten years in the legislature, I came to know Jim better, but I don't think that you could say that we worked together on anything. He had a strong program for drunk driving, needless to say—I should say "needless to say," because you don't know my career—but I ended up being very strong in that area, as well. I, of course, supported all of his efforts along those lines, when he was secretary of state.

It wasn't really until the late '80s that I got to know Jim better. Then, of course, when the talk started up about his running for governor, people started putting lists together, and oftentimes I'd see my name on this list or that list. Then, finally in 1989, or whenever it was, around then, he invited me into his office, and asked me if I would be interested in serving as his running mate.

Czaplicki: He seemed to remember a particular speech you gave, when you were both out on the campaign trail. He said you were thinking about comptroller and that you—

Kustra: That's right, yeah. I had actually announced for treasurer, I thought it was, and made a few speeches at Lincoln Day dinners.

[5] Kustra won election to the Illinois House in 1980 and to the Senate in 1982.

Czaplicki: Right, that's it.

Kustra: I was this suburban legislator who really didn't quite understand the downstate Lincoln Day dinner, hadn't had much experience hanging around downstate Lincoln Day dinners. They would, later on in my career, become a mainstay (laughs) of my existence. I'd probably knock off twenty or thirty of those things a season. (Czaplicki laughs) But back at the very beginning, here I am this suburban legislator, somewhat buried among so many other suburban legislators, where you really don't get the individual attention that you can get downstate.

So I went out and made a few of these speeches. I read Jim's commentary about that.[6] I don't remember that speech. (both laugh) I'm glad he does, but I don't remember any one speech, where he was there. I'm sure he didn't come up to me afterwards and say, "Gee, that was so impressive, I want you to be my lieutenant governor candidate," because obviously everybody was playing their cards close to the vest at that time.

But articles did start running about, "Well, I don't know what Kustra's doing messing around with the treasurer's job. He probably should just think about pairing up with Jim Edgar." Eventually, of course, that's what would happen.

Czaplicki: When you had those discussions with him, when he asked you into his office to kind of give you the formal pitch, what were his reasons then that he gave to you, if you remember?

Kustra: Yeah, that's really a great conversation, and I hope he remembers it the way I do. He hit upon all of the most appropriate things that you'd want to consider, like, "Bob, you've established quite a career for yourself in the suburbs. I need somebody to balance the ticket. Since I'm a downstater, and you're from the suburbs, that really works well. You've carved out this education priority, which you're known for, as the education senator, so you're perfect for my education agenda. I'd like to stress education, as well." He probably did three or four of these things. I don't remember all of them. Then, at one point toward the end of the conversation, he said, "That name, Kustra"…I don't know whether he said "What is it?" or "Is that Polish?" but he said something to engage in a conversation about my Polish heritage. (Czaplicki laughs) I think then…My recollection is he may have said something like, "Would you mind using that advantage or appearing before Polish American groups?"

Again, I was in the suburbs, and in the suburbs where I was living, whether I was Polish or whatever I was, was not a big factor. But what I didn't understand, and he did, because he had taken the state of Illinois apart, precinct by precinct, from one end to the other, is that, in the city of Chicago,

[6] Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, September 2, 2009, pages 42-44.

were large numbers of Polish Americans who had traditionally voted Democrat their entire lives.

This was at that moment in the Nixon years, when a lot of Democrats were beginning to make the switch over to the Republican Party. In some cases, anyway, they were doing it along ethnic lines. What he was really saying was, "Hey, you can be the lightning rod for Polish Americans moving over."

So, in that first campaign, I spent just all kinds of time in the Polish American community in Chicago, sometimes in the suburbs. Wherever they gathered, you could find Kustra. The only embarrassing thing about that was that my Irish mother didn't think it was such a great deal for me to be running around speaking Polish, and she strongly discouraged me from learning the language, or discouraged my father from teaching me the language, I guess I should say.

So the first thing they wanted to know, when I wound up at these meetings is, "I guess you know Polish," and I'd have to apologize for the fact that I didn't know Polish. The only trump card I had is that my father taught me how to do the polka, (Czaplicki laughs) and doing the polka in Polish American communities is as important as learning the language, I found. (laughs) So my wife and I would dazzle them with the polka, even though I knew nothing but "*Jak się masz*" and "*dobrze*," which is, "How are you? I'm fine."

Czaplicki: *Dziękuję*. (laughs)

Kustra: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, *dziękuję*. "Thank you."

Czaplicki: I'm the same way, so I sympathize.

Kustra: (laughs) I figured that last name, you had to relate to that.

Czaplicki: Yeah, your office didn't have any trouble with it; it was interesting. (both laugh) Of course, it's a successful campaign, a hard-fought campaign. Carter Hendren, actually, spoke very highly of your role. The quote he gave is that you are aggressive. "He went right after Hartigan, and he was a bulldog." Now, is that your memory of the role you played? Would that be a fair assessment?

Kustra: Oh, yeah. That's what they wanted me to do, and I loved doing it. (Czaplicki laughs) I just love getting into the middle of the fracas and the fight, and I thoroughly enjoyed that. I mean, I had a lot of respect for Neil Hartigan. He was the attorney general. He was a good guy. After the fight was over, we went on as…I don't know whether "friends" is the word, but certainly acquaintances, that knew how to get together and laugh at ourselves.

But in the midst of that campaign, both in '90 and '94, the lieutenant governor's job was to try to take a few of the hits that you're trying to keep away from the governor. If there was some kind of major attack, if there was a disclosure of some kind, if there was some major criticism that we wanted to level, they didn't want the governor dirtying his hands over that stuff; so the idea was, give it to the lieutenant governor. I loved to be in the middle of the fight and the debate and enjoyed going around with these folks. So I was oftentimes used in that way.

I think Carter was a genius in putting that campaign together. He and I worked very closely, not only in Jim Edgar's campaigns, but in [Charles] Chuck Percy's campaign, the year that he lost to Paul Simon. I worked a couple of Percy's campaigns, but one of them, Carter actually ran. I think it was the one that unfortunately Percy lost.[7]

Czaplicki: Right. We'll put that in the transcript.

Kustra: I was very impressed, over the years, with Carter's tactical abilities. He was a great strategizer and a great campaign manager.

Czaplicki: So, was he the primary person you were developing that role in the campaign with, or did you have these talks with Edgar? Edgar made it sound like he wasn't very comfortable being on the offensive. In fact, his family was constantly urging him to go after Hartigan, and his son Brad was telling him, "Take the gloves off." (Kustra laughs) Did Edgar himself ever tell you that that was kind of the division of labor he visualized?

Kustra: I don't think Jim and I ever talked about that. Carter and I had similar personalities and approaches and would probably agree with Brad. We were just the kind of people that wanted to go out there and uncover the inconsistencies in a candidate's record. In the case of Neil Hartigan, there were some of those. Our job was to get out there and make sure people saw them. Jim was more reticent, and I think as a gubernatorial candidate, when you have other people around you who can do that; you can afford to be that way. But Carter and I were simpatico in so many ways when it comes to that.

Of course, Carter was also—either at the same time or shortly thereafter; I guess it was thereafter. He wound up being the top aide for [James] Pate Philip. I was in the Senate at that time, or that would have been right before that. So, Carter and I had worked together in somewhat the same capacity, during his years as the top aide to the Senate minority leader and my years as an assistant Senate minority leader.

[7] Carter Hendren ran Charles Percy's 1984 U.S. Senate race, when he was defeated by Paul Simon. Carter Hendren, interview by Mark DePue, April 28, 2009, pages 41-51. Kustra was head of Percy's Chicago office staff from 1978 to 1980.

I was used on the floor of the Senate in the same way Carter wound up using me against Hartigan. I mean, my job was to get up there and debate either Phil Rock or Dawn Clark Netsch[8], whoever was extolling the virtues of the Chicago approach to educating children against the Republican reform proposals. We were always doing battle, and I was oftentimes called on to be the spokesperson for the Republican point of view on the floor.

So by the time Carter and I got to 1990, we were like brothers when it came to the way we thought about politics and about how we could win. Now, again, Carter was the strategizer; I wasn't. I could sit around for hours and listen to him talk about how to put a campaign together and make it work.

Czaplicki: That hasn't come up yet; that is really interesting. Another shift that you seem to undergo…Politically it seems like you're moving from how you were brought up, but also, going in this campaign, is it the case that you changed your views on abortion? Did that happen?

Kustra: Yeah. I never really ran as an anti-abortion candidate, but when asked how I felt about it, I would oftentimes respond that, in general, that I did not support an open right to abortion, and I supported a number of limits to abortion. Clearly, I had voted, during my years in the Senate, with the right-to-lifers, oftentimes. I also had great difficulty with the absolute position of the right-to-lifers and started thinking seriously about what qualifiers we could place there. I'm not talking about rape and incest. I'm talking about stronger qualifiers than that, where we really give women more of an opportunity to make this decision for themselves and not insert government.

So, by the time 1990 came along, when I was announced—that's a day I'll never forget, and not necessarily for good reasons—there was one WBBM reporter, Regine Schlesinger, who I think is still around there somewhere. She just decided to pounce on this issue, that somehow the campaign had forced me into rethinking my position on abortion and had caused me to become pro-choice, and that I had done this flip-flop.

Nothing could have been further from the truth, in terms of the reason for it. Jim Edgar never once, that I can ever remember, asked me to change, adjust, or take a position on abortion, because of where he was. That day just never happened. I think a lot of the press thought that somehow my gradually evolving position on abortion was due to the fact that I was now running on this ticket with Edgar, and I had to be there.

The interesting thing about that is what would have made a lot more sense is for me to be the stringent pro-lifer, that some thought I was at the

[8] Phil Rock (D-Oak Park) was the Illinois Senate majority leader from 1986 to 1994, when the Republicans took control of the Senate. Dawn Clark Netsch (D-Chicago) served in the Illinois Senate until her election as state comptroller in 1990.

beginning of my career, so we could have it both ways on the ticket. Jim could appeal to the pro-choicers; I could appeal to the pro-lifers.

By the late 1980s, I had just about had it with these ardent pro-lifers and did not appreciate their tactics, did not enjoy hanging out with them and found it increasingly difficult to support their logic, their positions. So, on my own, had gradually evolved.

And, as happens in real life, spouses have something to say about this. I certainly learned a lot from my wife about the issue. I consulted with many, many other women, who supported my campaigns and who I had jostled with over this issue for years and years.

But I think the reason it became such a lightning rod, in the initial days and weeks of my candidacy for lieutenant governor, running with Jim Edgar, is that they just assumed that somehow I had a gun to my head, and either Jim Edgar or Carter Hendren was going to pull the trigger, if I didn't become pro-choice. And that was just utter nonsense. They never said a word to me. And as I said, I think Jim or Carter would have looked at it like, stay right where you are, Bob, and don't rock the boat here; we can have it both ways. But, again, that was never said either. We just didn't talk about that.

Czaplicki: It was an easy narrative, I guess, to seize upon.

Kustra: Yeah.

Czaplicki: When you mentioned that your wife changed your views…I know you were married twice; you were married to Joyce and then Kathleen.

Kustra: Yeah.

Czaplicki: Was it conversations with both women over your lifetime, or was it one in particular?

Kustra: No. Kathy, who I was married to then, she had worked for John Porter; she had worked for Abner Mikva,[9] before she worked for John Porter. John Porter was pro-choice. She felt strongly, as a woman, that the pro-life position simply did not work, from the standpoint of a woman having control over this decision. So she and I were both trying to find a moderating position.

I don't want to go into great detail, but I actually did research on the brain and when the brain ceases to operate at the end of life and how people make decisions to end life when brain function ceases. Then I'd go back and

[9] Abner J. Mikva (D-Chicago) was a member of the U.S. House for eight years, representing the 2nd and 10th Districts. When Mikva resigned from Congress to become a federal judge, John E. Porter (R-Evanston) won the special election to replace him and remained in Congress until 2001. Porter had served in the Illinois House from 1972 to 1979. *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774-Present*, http://bioguide.congress.gov.

read brain research on the front end. And even though the pro-life position was "life begins at conception," I was trying to figure out, well, how many weeks before there's brain function, and when is there really life? I suppose this is going to be a topic that is going to be debated for many more centuries (laughs) than the ones behind us.

But we were both, as husband and wife, grappling with this issue of how do you accommodate the actual fact of life and define life, and is the brain wave or the brain function the way to do that? That was one of the things that caused me to come out with a statement—and I don't remember the specifics of it—that actually defined a number of weeks before I would protect the baby or the fetus.

That's very controversial stuff, even today, and not everybody's going to agree on that. They still don't, and, as I said, they won't for many, many years to come, if ever. But that's the genesis of my adjusted position, which really was like an ongoing ten- to fifteen-year process.

Czaplicki: That's a great story, and the research angle makes me think—going in a different direction here—if I may use this term, and understand, I mean it as a high compliment, you strike me as a true wonk, just looking at your background and the kinds of issues you got involved with. After you win the election, it seems that Edgar is populating his administration with a lot of other people who would fit this category, people like Al Grosboll and Joan Walters, and I think Paula Wolff had some influence when things were getting set up. Were you familiar with many of the people that were being brought on board as staff, or were there a lot of new faces to you?

Kustra: Some of them were new faces, but most of those people that you mentioned, I knew them. If I didn't know them then, by 1990, I would certainly get to know them, because we worked alongside each other. I think you're correct, that he did assemble people that were basically policy wonks of one kind or another.

In my particular case, I was teaching through this entire political career. So I'm showing up for class in the fall, at the University of Illinois at Chicago and then Northwestern University, and I'm teaching students, and I'm standing before a class, weighing the conservative and the liberal side of the spectrum and balancing the interest of one position off of another. My job, as an instructor, was to present a balanced view of the issue, whatever it might be.

In the meantime, you go down to the legislature, where you're supposed to fight for a cause. So I was always digging for more information to justify why I believed what I did. Lobbyists were constantly coming up to you in this business, asking you to adopt their position. Frankly, too often, they figured that if they took you to dinner the night before or bought you show

tickets the week before that, why wouldn't you agree with me, and why wouldn't you understand this is where you've got to be on this issue?

I just always felt like I needed to dig for more information. It's, I guess, the reason why I spend so much of my time on issues where I have the opportunity to become more knowledgeable and to get more involved in trying to dig down deeper into, how do you come up with the best solution to this problem?

Czaplicki: A key feature of the administration that Edgar sets up is the super-cabinet model, where six executive assistants is each responsible for functionally related areas of government policy. I was wondering where you fit within that mix. Did they parse out some policy areas that you were responsible for, tapping education and things like that, or did you do your work in addition to things that somebody on the super-cabinet was also working on?

Kustra: I think it was a combination of both. First of all, there were a few duties the lieutenant governor had that were not really very—How can I say this?—they weren't the most important issues facing state government, to say the least. I joked for years about the fact that I had responsibility for strip mines in Illinois.

Now, you know, if you're from southern Illinois and you're either in the mining business or you're looking at some of the leftovers of these strip mines, it probably is a pretty important issue, but for the rest of the state, as you move north anyway, strip mining is not exactly as important as education, criminal justice, prisons, Medicaid, whatever you want to talk about.

First, I wanted to make sure that I was attentive to the constitutional and legislative duties, the responsibilities of the office of lieutenant governor. But it didn't take me long to realize that I'd get bored stiff if that's all I was doing. So we certainly paid attention to those issues, and I provided the leadership I need to provide.

The lieutenant governor was the chair of the Rural Bond Bank. When I first heard of that, I was bored to tears. I thought, Oh my gosh, what am I going to do, (Czaplicki laughs) sitting in with a group of people talking about Rural Bond Bank and how cities float bonds to build things? It just wasn't my primary interest. But we did those things.

But from the beginning, Jim really thought that my primary contribution would be in the education area. I had spent ten years in the legislature on the Elementary and Secondary Education Committee in the Senate, for eight years, and I think I was on the House committee, as well. That was just a natural place for me to be, not so much higher ed [education]. In fact, I was very uncomfortable in higher ed. There was only one thing I did

in higher ed that turned out to be (laughs) pretty momentous, I guess, when we did the reform and gave each of the universities their own boards.

But I didn't do as much in higher ed as much as I did K-12. During those Edgar years was the years that we really focused on Chicago school reform, and in the last years of my Senate duties. During those years, I think that's where I made my primary impact when it comes to the work I did in the administration.

I also did a lot of work on drug education, and I chaired the Partnership for a Drug-Free Illinois. I took that very seriously and probably spent a lot more time on that than most people would, just because I was committed to this issue and was convinced we could make some headway.

But it wasn't until the second term, then, that I picked up economic development as a major charge. That really came when Jim asked me to drop my idea of being on the radio, because I had gone to the talk show, to WLS; I was going to be a talk show host. When he asked me to come back, I said, "I'll come back, but I want more to do. I want to lead the economic development effort in some way."

So we figured out a way, in my office, that we would coordinate and collaborate with DCCA, the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs and with the governor's office, in leading the economic development charge. That worked out to some extent. I was able to insert myself in some major deliberations about who was coming to town. I would be sent to talk to certain CEOs [chief executive officers] that were thinking about moving into Illinois, and I would pitch the case for why Illinois made sense, as opposed to Indiana or Florida or wherever else they were considering going.

I had much more fun in the Illinois State Senate than I did in the office of lieutenant governor. Having said that, I think we made out of it what we could, and Governor Edgar helped by the expansion of those duties in my second term.

Czaplicki: I guess we'll skip over some of that important stuff you did. To jump ahead to something you just mentioned, how did that radio offer even come about, to go to WLS in 1994? I guess you had those talks with Edgar in May about leaving, if that's correct?

Kustra: Yes. In 1991, right after getting elected, I was asked by Roe Conn, who is still the afternoon talk show host on WLS (laughs)—

Czaplicki: R-o-e?

Kustra: R-o-e C-o-n-n. Actually, I don't know whether I was asked by Roe or whether I was asked by the station management. But somehow, we either broached with them the idea, or they broached with us the idea of an *Ask the Lieutenant*

Governor program. Once a month on Saturdays, during my first term, I would drive down to WLS, and I would go on live and take questions from people who'd call from all over WLS' listening [area], the listeners. It was just absolutely amazing, the questions I'd get. I'd have all of about five or ten seconds to think of an answer. Sometimes we'd have to tell them we'd get back to them, because we really didn't know, you know, why utility rates went up last year. I'd get questions, complaining about everything, and sometimes we'd get into discussions.

That went on for three or four years. I really enjoyed it. Roe Conn was my co-host, I guess you could say, or my host. Roe would take the questions, and Roe was great. Roe would help me fashion the question, and I would provide the answer. But he'd give me a little bit of time, so I could at least get a thought or two together. My gosh, what do I know about the Illinois Department of Agriculture, or something, whatever the question was?

So by 1994, Roe and I were buddies, and we were working well together. It was at that moment, in say May or June of 1994, that I received a call from the station manager and the station director. They said, "Can we come over and talk with you?" Drew Hayes and Tom Tradup—those are the two guys involved here—came over, and I remember the way they put it. They said, "You can kick us out of your office if you want to, but we'd like to know if you're interested in finishing up this term as lieutenant governor and coming to work for WLS as the afternoon talk show host." They didn't tell me it was going to be Roe, but it was pretty obvious it was going to be Roe.

I thought, Wow, this is an interesting situation. My immediate response was, "No way." (Czaplicki laughs) [I] went home, talked it over with my wife, talked it over with a couple of staffers. They knew that I wasn't as challenged in the office of lieutenant governor as I was during my ten years in the legislature. While I was doing a lot of things, I didn't feel that I was intellectually engaged enough. The WLS folks pitched this as kind of a policy show, where I would have a chance to explore the issues facing America, not only in Chicago, but they were going to syndicate it. They put a great package together that was very rewarding financially, way, way more rewarding (laughs) than anything you could make in the office of lieutenant governor.

Czaplicki: Would you be willing to offer a range on that, without a specific number?

Kustra: Oh, I think it was like between $200,000 $300,000, once the rankings and ratings were taken into account. In other words, it wasn't a flat salary. There was a flat salary, but the flat salary was just a base. Then your rankings and ratings got you up to the big money.

Czaplicki: I see.

Kustra: I think by the time you got into rankings and ratings, I could have made up to $300,000 or something. That is my vague recollection. And in those days, I was making $70,000 as lieutenant governor. My base at WLS, just for showing up, was definitely a lot more than I was making as lieutenant governor. So when you put the money together, with the idea of being able to reach out across at least a half or one third of Illinois, not to mention all the surrounding states, where you can get WLS—they don't call it the world's largest radio station for nothing (Czaplicki laughs)—it was clearly a great opportunity to engage. So, I signed up. This was all done privately. I didn't share it with anybody. They asked me not even to talk to the governor, and—

Czaplicki: Oh, really?

Kustra: Oh, yeah. Jim didn't know anything about this. He didn't know anything about this until the night before or the day before the press conference. I called him up and I said that I…That's my recollection. You could actually check the date of the press conference, I guess. It was sometime in June or July. I said, "I've made a decision that I need to leave." It was imperative to WLS that this not be something that leaked out day-by-day in rumor fashion but was announced in a press conference.

I held a live press conference in a Chicago hotel on one afternoon, and it was fed to outlets all over the place. The announcement was, "The lieutenant governor's leaving to go onto the WLS radio show." Then there were a few weeks that went by, before ABC Disney actually came up with the actual contract that I was to sign.

The guy—his name was Carl Schrutt (??), out of Atlanta—came to town, and we met somewhere with my attorney, who is Todd Musburger. Todd is Brent's brother.[10] Todd, he did a lot of agent work in those days, and I used him to do this whole thing. We met, signed the contract. Kathy and I went home.

That night, that night, Brenda Edgar called me at home. She was in tears, and she was at the hospital. She said that Jim had just been diagnosed with some kind of blockage, and they were going to go in and do a bypass.

Czaplicki: The date was July 7, when he went under, and it went into the early morning hours of July 8. I was wondering when you found out, and who told you. So it was Brenda who called you.

Kustra: Brenda called. I guess this would have been the night before, because I think he went under the next day. I turned to Kathy at that moment and I said, "This is a case of incredibly bad timing," because I knew what was going to happen next. Sure enough, he has his surgery, and a couple of days later, I get a call. He wants to see me in the hospital.

[10] Brent Musburger is a television sportscaster for ESPN and ABC.

I could just picture him walking around the hospital bed until they say "Kustra's coming," and then he runs for the bed and looks like he's near death, so he can convince me that I have to come back. (laughs) We joked about this for years. I mean, I just knew what the setup was. He's got me in the room, and he was very honest about it. He said, "You know, I've got a campaign to run, and I've got eight or nine people standing in line, trying to get your job. No matter who I pick, there's going to be eight people or constituencies left who aren't going to like the decision." It was kind of a combination of racial and ethnic and political candidates who just were from all over the spectrum, not one of whom had any statewide campaigning experience. That was probably his biggest concern. So, he said, "Is there any way you could reconsider and come back?"

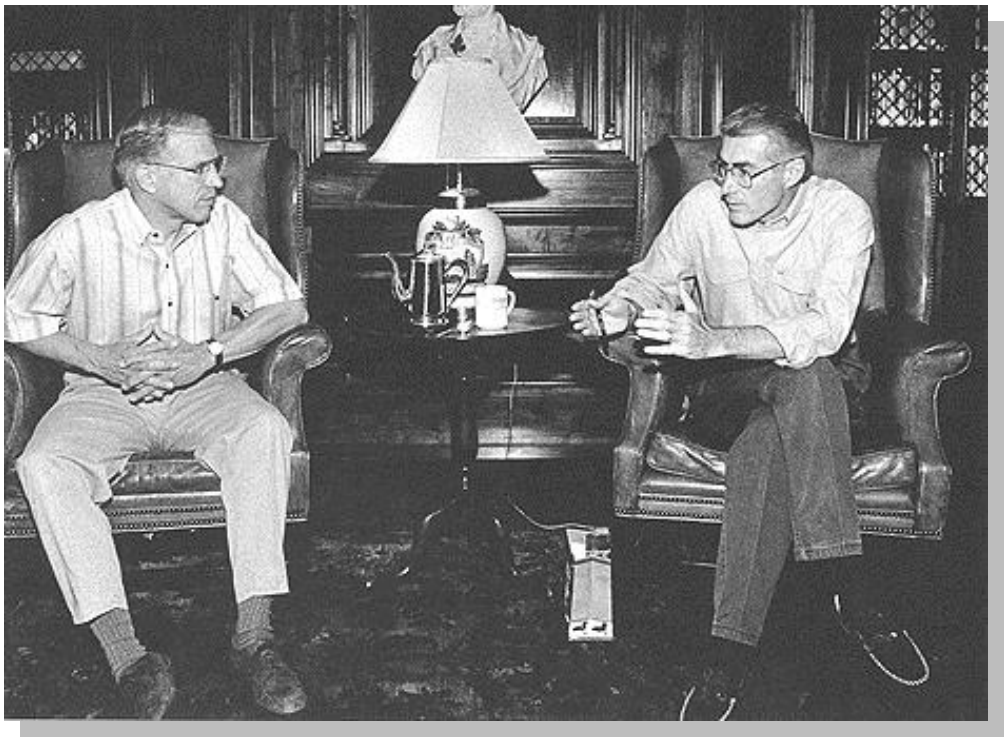
I can still remember; I called my wife, who was working at Oak Brook at the time, and I said, "Hey, Kath, we've got to meet. Can you meet me over at Oak Brook at the hotel? Let's have a drink and talk this through." We talked it through, and it just seemed like, for a guy who spent his entire life in front of the classroom telling students to get engaged in the public service, it wasn't the time to walk away from the public service. And it wasn't time to walk away from a friend who had been good to me and who gave me this opportunity, and now he was somewhat in political peril.

He was going to make it fine with his bypass, but then he was going to have to recuperate. In the meantime, his opponent, Dawn Clark Netsch, is out there campaigning every day. We gave it a lot of thought and just realized that it was only the right thing to do. So I told him; I said, "Hey, the only thing is, Jim, I just signed the contract the night before you had the surgery." (Czaplicki laughs) And I said, "That's a real contract; you don't walk away from those things. As far as I know, there's only one guy who can get me out of it. If you feel so strongly about this, you're going to have to pick up the phone."

The next day, he called Carl Schrutt and asked him to relieve me of the contract. I don't know the details of that conversation, but I do know that when they got off the phone, the ABC guy, Schrutt, called the mansion back and said, "Is it possible your governor called me to talk about getting the lieutenant governor off the ticket?" He was checking to see if it had been a crank call. (both laugh) And the mansion said, "Yeah, yeah, that's our governor. He's recovering from quadruple bypass, and yeah, he did put in that call." Then, they announced that they were going to let me out of the contract. Or I guess the first thing I did is announce that I had reconsidered, and Jim and I gathered. In fact, I think you sent the photo of Jim and me in the office.

Czaplicki: That's from *Meeting the Challenge*.[11]

[11] Meeting the challenge: the Edgar administration, 1991-1999, written by Tom Schafer.



Kustra: That was our first get-together after the decision had been made. The press conference was held, and it worked out fine. The interesting thing is that one of the political charges that the Democrats leveled is that, "Well, here's the classic case of a guy who can't make up his mind." (laughs) Of course that was weighed against the guy who came back for a friend, the guy who came back for public service, or however you want to look at it. In the end, by September, when I was out there campaigning for Jim, everybody had forgotten it. I don't think it was raised very often after that, and we were, obviously, successfully reelected.

Czaplicki: When you told Governor Edgar that you planned on leaving, the night before, how did he react to that news initially? Was he angry?

Kustra: Oh, no, he wasn't angry at all. I think Jim Edgar, more than anybody on his staff, for sure, understood the frustrations of being a lieutenant governor in a strong, executive-centered governor's office where staff, especially through the years of Thompson, had grown and grown and grown to the point where the office of lieutenant governor was really struggling. I'm not talking just about me. The office of lieutenant governor in the second half of the twentieth century was really struggling with definition.

I think it was Paul Simon who proposed taking the…or maybe he didn't; maybe they just did it to him. But the 1970 constitution took the lieutenant governor out of presiding over the state Senate, which is the case in about half the states at least, I guess. I don't know, maybe it's not that many anymore. Here in Idaho, for example, our lieutenant governor presides over

the state Senate and votes in case of a tie. That puts the lieutenant governor in the mainstream of legislative activity every day that legislature's in session. That's, of course, the role that the vice president plays in Congress, although that's probably not a very good comparison, because I'm not so sure that that's a real role in the Congress, the way it is in many legislatures.

So, without that…When that change happened in 1970, I think, from that moment on, lieutenant governors were struggling with, okay, so how do you fill the job of lieutenant governor? Now add the fact that the governor's office is growing exponentially over these years. You mentioned that super-cabinet. Well, that super-cabinet covers just about anything a lieutenant governor would want to do.

So, by the end of my first term, I'm telling him this. He was reading this like, "Yeah, I can understand where you're coming from." He has a lot of strong-willed staff people around him. They don't particularly have any interest in engaging the lieutenant governor, until they need me for something specific. For example, I had a very good relationship with Pate Philip and the Senate Republican leadership. Those were all guys I served with. So, when there'd be some crisis there, or when it came to meeting with the leaders, I would always be there for that. They needed me for that, but on day-to-day policy matters, whatever it was, it's not as though I was drawn into the day-to-day decision-making of state government.

Consequently, Jim was like, "Yeah, I hear you; I know where you're coming from." I'm sure he must have expressed some concern about the rest of the year and the fact that he'd have lots of people standing in line, and he'd lose the experience of someone who was a statewide campaigner, knows the Lincoln Day dinners, knows the county chairmen, knows the local media in all these cities across the state. That's what I'm sure he had to make up for and probably did feel like, Oh man, I've got to train somebody to do that all over again? But no, he also was very understanding and supportive.

There was also—if a quadruple bypass hadn't come along—plenty of time to work this out, because this was still the early summer. So, the campaign really wasn't going to gear up again. Of course you did some summer things, but it really wasn't until September when it [the campaign] got hot again. So, there was still plenty of time to figure all this out, and he figured it out in stride.

Czaplicki: Just very quickly, assuming you had just taken that contract and left government, was there anyone that you thought would have been a particularly well-suited replacement for your spot?

Kustra: You know what? I don't even remember all the people who were on the list, so I really couldn't comment on that. I remember a couple of them, but I wouldn't remember the rest. Unless I had all of them laid out in front of me, I

wouldn't even want to speculate on who at that time I might have thought would do the job.

Czaplicki: So there wasn't any one individual that really stuck out in your mind as sort of the main person?

Kustra: No, I don't think so. More importantly, since I wasn't going to be the one making the choice, I don't think there was anyone that Jim Edgar saw on that list that he felt completely comfortable with. I think that was his dilemma. Frankly, if he did, he wouldn't have come back to me. It would have been like, Well, I can adjust. After all, Kustra's leaving, but look who I'm getting.

I don't think this is a case of my adding so many immeasurable talents and skills to this; it's just a question of somebody who did it for four years and somebody who campaigned in 1990. Whether I did it well or whether I did it moderately or poorly, at least I did it, and we got along.

I think that may be the other factor. There would have been any number of ways to handle how I just described the challenge of being a lieutenant governor in those years. It really wasn't about Jim Edgar, necessarily; it was the way the whole system was set up. It was a way the staffing worked. I didn't see any reason to complicate Jim Edgar's life as governor by standing up every other day and complaining, about the fact that I should have been there, or I should have been given that responsibility.

I went off and continued my major interest in education issues, and I did them on my own. At that time, by the way, I picked up the Illinois River campaign and spent many, many hours and weeks and months working over in Peoria and up and down the Illinois River on the cleanup project, to the point where the governor finally got interested in it and could see that we were making a big difference.

So, my approach to the job was not to sit and argue with the governor over how his staff is stepping on the lieutenant governor's interests, but to just go out and…This is a large state, all kinds of challenges facing us. His office wasn't going to cover every last one of them, and the Illinois River was the perfect example. So why not go out and make a difference where you can and where no one else is?

Czaplicki: I just had two more questions about the events around Governor Edgar's heart surgery. The first is a story that came up in our interviews. There was a staff meeting after the surgery, George Fleischli, lightening up the mood, telling the story that the first thing he did when he heard Edgar had gone under was call you to find out if he still had a spot. (both laugh) It is a funny joke, but it did point to a serious issue, which is that you're one unfortunate event away from the governorship. So I wanted to know, did you temporarily assume duties of governorship while Governor Edgar was in surgery?

Kustra: No, no. First of all, there's no…Here in Idaho, for example, and in a number of other states, when the governor leaves the state, the lieutenant governor is governor, no doubt about it; it's in the constitution of the state. That is not the case in Illinois, and it wasn't the case, either in the constitution, or it's not the way the governor and his staff viewed it.

I think for media purposes, they did what they had to do to convince the media that everything's okay. So, if they had to make a statement about me being there or being wherever I was—in Chicago, at the telephone, in case there was anything that came up—they would do it. But practically speaking, there was no role for the lieutenant governor to play during the time he was actually in surgery or recuperating. His staff was in full control of that office. I was available if anybody needed me, but again, the constitution didn't require it, and his office staff certainly wasn't about to insert me in what they thought was their rightful duties here.

Czaplicki: At that point, who on staff did you get the impression was really controlling events? Was it Mike Lawrence and chief of staff? Would that have been Reilly at the time?

Kustra: Mike had a lot to do with it. Yeah, Mike clearly was the guy who was talking to the media, and he was the one, he and I don't remember. Who was his chief of staff at that time?

Czaplicki: I think Jim Reilly was chief of staff, but Riley, the way he told the story, it almost seemed to imply that you knew about the surgery before Reilly did, which I thought was interesting.[12]

Kustra: Well, that may be; I don't remember that. It's hard for me to believe Brenda called…Brenda could have called Reilly before she called me, but I told you how I found out. I've never checked, and I've never had any conversation with anybody over where that went.

Hey, I tell you what. Here's the problem I have, Mike. I've got a guy waiting outside here, who I've got to talk to, because this is a day the legislature's in session, and we have some stuff at stake. I'll do this. I will continue this discussion with you—How's that? —if we pick it up at another time, maybe next week sometime?

Czaplicki: Next week anytime, I'm free. Just let me know.

Kustra: Great. Let me give you a ring. I'll have Sandy call and set something up. We'll finish this up, and I'll give you the time you need. Thank you so much. Appreciate it.

[12] Reilly remembered finding out about Edgar's heart surgery from Kustra, who called to check on Edgar's status. Jim Reilly, interview by Mark DePue, August 11, 2009, page 44.

Czaplicki: All right, that will be great. I appreciate it.

Kustra: Great. Thank you so much; appreciate it.

(end of interview #1)

Interview with Robert W. "Bob" Kustra

ISG-A-L-2011-006.02

Interview # 2: February 1, 2011

Interviewer: Mike Czaplicki

Czaplicki: Today is Tuesday, February 1, 2011, and this is session number two with former Lieutenant Governor Bob Kustra. How are you this morning, Bob?

Kustra: Just fine, Mike. How you doing?

Czaplicki: I'm doing well, thanks. I'm calling in from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, and Bob is at Boise State University in Boise, Idaho. When we last left off, we were discussing Governor Edgar's heart surgery. You were telling us how power never actually changed hands. Part of that's a quirk of Illinois, I believe. What I wanted to go into next is, I think a day after he recovered, I understand there was a meeting he called about the budget, which you presided over. I was wondering if you had any recollections about that meeting.

Kustra: No, I don't have any recollection about a **budget** meeting. I have a recollection of a couple of meetings that took place in the aftermath of his heart surgery and during the recovery period. He and I met in his hospital room. We met later, down in Springfield, when he was still in the recovery

mode. I met with his staff, in preparation for the announcement that would be made that I had decided to come back on the ticket and serve as his lieutenant governor.

That was a very important meeting, because when he invited me back, I told him that, if I came back, I would come back only if I had added responsibilities in the office of lieutenant governor. I guess you could put it this way; I asked to serve as the point person for economic development strategies, for working with out-of-state businesses interested in coming into Illinois. After some consideration, he agreed to that. My recollection is that his staff was clearly not wild about **that** idea and didn't want the lieutenant governor that close to the inner sanctum of the governor's office.

So, at one point, in a meeting that I do remember every minute of, in my duplex in Springfield, as we were literally putting the finishing touches on the press release, his staff tried to minimize the role that I would be playing on economic development and simply wanted to describe it in a much less influential or meaningful responsibility than I thought I had [in] an agreement with the governor. He was not in the meeting.

My chief of staff was in the meeting, as was…I think my wife was in the room. I don't think she was participating, but all these ears heard this. We've talked about this infamous meeting many times in my post career in Illinois. At one point I just got up and said, "You know what, guys? Deal's off. I'm just going back to radio. I don't need this grief. I came back with an understanding I would have enhanced responsibilities in economic development. If you don't want to write the press release that way, then go find yourself another candidate," and I walked out of the room.

Well, I didn't get very far out of the room before they all came to their senses, I guess, or whatever you want to call it. "Oh, no, no, we don't want to upset the apple cart. Come on back in here. Let's talk." We wound up with a press release, worded the way I had wanted it worded and the way I understood Jim Edgar and I had agreed to the set of responsibilities.

Long story short, by the time I left the lieutenant governor's office, I'm not so sure his staff gave up much. They were still their usual, jealous selves when it came to protecting the integrity of the governor's office and the responsibilities the governor has. I never talked much with Jim about it. As I said, I never wanted to pick a fight with the governor. He and I were good friends. But I think his staff clearly were, in their own mode of thinking, How can we keep this guy back over in his own office and away from economic development?

I did a few things during those last four years in office that were enhanced responsibilities. I met with some out-of-state business people, who were thinking about coming in, worked some deals with them, did some

traveling for the state. So there was clearly something that came out of my decision to return and the governor's and my understanding of what that would be. I just would argue it's probably not what I had originally thought it would be, but no surprises there, because I knew all along his staff would be protecting the office.

Czaplicki: Was that the primary issue, protecting his office? Or did you get the sense that there was a certain set of people who felt that they were actually losing some policy responsibilities?

Kustra: I guess when I say, "protecting his office," that's what I mean. They were protecting what they thought were their rightful responsibilities and accountability functions over the code agencies. Basically, they had somebody in the office who was responsible for keeping an eye on DCCA, the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs. By the way, when I went to the governor with this proposal, I reminded him, as he knew, that right over the state line in Indiana, the lieutenant governor had statutory responsibility for the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs. And there were many lieutenant governors at that time—and I think there still are—that have responsibility for economic development.

The key issue for me was, if we couldn't do this statutorily or constitutionally—of course, we couldn't change the constitution, and I knew he wouldn't want to change the statutes either—then at least let's have an understanding that I would be a point person, that I would be front and center, that I would be working in economic development and enhancing the role of the lieutenant governor in Illinois State government.

That's something I don't think the staff wanted to have anything to do with. No, I think they wanted to keep right on moving; they wanted their own prerogatives; they wanted the control over economic development.

I will never know…I've never asked Jim, "Come on, Jim, tell me, how'd you really feel? What'd you really tell them?" (laughs) For all I know, this was a gubernatorial priority. "Talk to Bob; pat him on the back; tell him he can have a few things, but don't give away the store." That wouldn't even surprise me if he felt that way. That's what governors are supposed to do, I guess.

I do think there's a model for governors treating lieutenant governors as COOs, as chief operating officers, who may one day assume the office. I was treated like that in some ways, and in other ways I was not. For the ways that I was, I'm very grateful, and the ways I'm not, I just write off to staff who were bureaucrats and entrenched in their own powers and responsibilities and not anxious to share them.

Czaplicki: And who was your chief of staff?

Kustra: Jim Bray. He's still in Springfield. He's right near town. Jim has been doing consulting for a number of people, including that Chicago project, 2020, I think it's called. [He] worked for the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club;[13] He's been working with them.

Jim was a longtime reporter before I brought him aboard my office in 1990 to serve as my chief of staff. He had been Governor Jim Thompson's press secretary at one point, before that. Jim and I remain close friends, and it would be interesting to see what his recollection is on this. He and I haven't talked about this in years.

Czaplicki: It would be. Is it B-r-a-e or B-r-a-y?

Kustra: B-r-a-y.

Czaplicki: Do you want to tell us who you were meeting with from the governor's office for these things?

Kustra: I remember Mike Lawrence was there for sure, because he was the guy responsible for actually crafting the press release. I don't think I remember the substantive people. I would assume that maybe [Allen] Grosboll was in the room, but I wouldn't say that for sure. I don't have any real recollection. Jim may remember who the other players were. I'm trying to remember; was Kirk Dillard there at that time? Was he with the governor in 1994, as his chief of staff?

Czaplicki: There was some point where a transition happened, because I think he brought Reilly in.

Kustra: Yeah, so he could have been there, if he was there by then. I honestly don't remember Kirk's career trajectory that well to remember—

Czaplicki: I think Jim Reilly came in after Dillard, in order to help with the campaign.

Kustra: Yeah, I know Reilly was in there. I would have known if Jim was there. I think Andy…what was Andy—

Czaplicki: Andy Foster?

Kustra: Andy Foster, I think, could have been in the room. Anyway, that's my recollection.

Czaplicki: The meeting that I was referring to when I opened is, there's a story that has come up in a couple other interviews that the day after his surgery, Edgar

[13] In 1999, the Commercial Club of Chicago created Chicago Metropolis 2020, a group that promotes regional planning and investment to ensure northeast Illinois remains economically competitive. In March 2011, the group renamed itself Metropolis Strategies. http://www.chicagometropolis2020.org.

wanted to have a meeting at his Chicago office with the leaders, I think, to talk about—

Kustra: A day after his surgery?

Czaplicki: July 8 is when I have it, because he wanted to take advantage—this is what I sort of gathered—of this condition that he was in.[14] It was supposedly [Mike] Madigan, Emil Jones, and the other leaders and that. You were presiding over this meeting. At some point, Madigan asked to talk privately with [Senate] President Jones, and they went to an adjoining room. Apparently you overheard some discussion; we'll put it that way. Do you have any memory of that?

Kustra: No, no, I don't. I do know that there was a budget meeting. It wouldn't have been the day after his surgery, of course. He was in the hospital, out in suburban DuPage [County], for at least four or five days. His surgery was Thursday morning, I guess. I met with him the following Tuesday, and he was still in the hospital. He didn't go anywhere between the time he had the surgery and the time I met with him in the hospital. Then he was released sometime after that. Boy, I'd be shocked, if when he was released, he didn't go right to Springfield and home to the mansion.

If there was a budget meeting, it would have been a little after that. I guess it's not a big deal when the budget meeting was. But I don't remember any of the specifics of that. I do remember vaguely that we were all interested in using this moment, when he was, you might say, incapacitated, to stall and to get some time here and get a little bit better treatment by the folks who we always had to work with in these budget meetings—the Madigans and the Jones—but the specifics of that, I don't remember.

Czaplicki: I'll have to track this down. I have a note here that says, "July tenth, Edgar signs the budget in his hospital bed."

Kustra: That's very possible. Yeah, in his bed he could have easily done that. I'm just saying he didn't go down to any meeting outside the hospital.

Czaplicki: Oh, no, certainly. This was a remote…He was back at the hospital, and you were supposedly presiding over a meeting that he wasn't at.

Kustra: Oh, I see.

Czaplicki: He came in via phone, and you were chairing this meeting with the leaders.

Kustra: Oh. You know, I don't really have any recollection of that.

[14] Edgar definitely did want to use the situation to his advantage. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 18, 2010, pages 55-61; Mark Boozell, interview by Mark DePue, September 9, 2009, pages 36-40.

Czaplicki: So, as this campaign unfolds, there's another issue that I understand you had a lot of involvement in. Ultimately it's going to be school reform, correct?

Kustra: Right.

Czaplicki: And there are many components of that. There's Chicago ed reform. There's also Illinois school funding reform. Then there's higher education reform. I was curious to know if you were involved with all of the parts of that or just particular elements.

Kustra: I was involved in Chicago school reform, when I was in the Senate. I passed a bill out of the Senate that broke up the Chicago School District into twenty independently elected school boards and school districts. That bill did not pass the House, but it caused Speaker Madigan to convene a major reform agenda and a countless cast of characters assembled from all over. Chicago schools [politicians], and downstaters attended. We crafted what became known as Chicago school reform, where every school had its own local school board, although it wasn't called a board. They appointed the principal. I think most of that is still in place in Chicago. It's probably been refined many times over, and—

Czaplicki: That was 1988, the measure that you're talking about, right?

Kustra: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, and then when I came into the office, I continued working with Chicago reform groups. But, in the office of lieutenant governor, no longer serving in the Senate, those responsibilities changed, and I think I was probably better at aiding, abetting the cause.

I did set up a program called Project Success, which the governor's office eventually took over, which was a program that provided social services in the schools. We chose six sites originally. Later the governor's office would take it over and expand it with fairly significant funding. I don't know whether Project Success is alive and well today or not[15]. So I did some of that.

As far as the funding is concerned, the funding formula, I don't remember. When I was in the legislature, I was always involved with the funding formula, but I don't remember playing a huge role in that in the office of lieutenant governor.

But to your point about higher ed, I certainly was the guy who crafted the language that was eventually passed by both houses and signed by the governor. That is known as Higher Ed Reform in the '90s. That all stemmed from a speech I gave in Macomb one night at a Chamber of Commerce meeting, where I had been talking with some of these presidents who felt like the Board of Regents and the Board of Governors had really gotten too

[15] Jim Edgar regards Project Success as one his administration's most important programs in education. Jim Edgar, April 23, 2010, pages 31-36; November 8, 2010, page 81. Both interviews by Mark DePue.

arrogant and too powerful and were no longer acting in the best interest of the campuses. Some of these presidents were very, very confidentially whispering in my ear. Of course, they could lose their jobs or at least get called onto the carpet by these chancellors if they were ever caught dead or alive, talking to somebody like a lieutenant governor.

So, I spoke at this Chamber of Commerce dinner in Macomb—of course, it's the home of Western Illinois University—and in the middle of the speech decided to launch off on a critique of the current system of governance in higher ed and suggest that we'd all be better off with individual boards for the universities. I didn't really think about the (laughs) media implications of this. (Czaplicki laughs)

Sure enough, the next morning, it's all over the papers that Kustra has proposed breaking down the system, abolishing the Board of Regents and the Board of Governors. By then I had become an ardent critic of the two chancellors who were running the system of the Board of Governors and the Board of Regents. So I went very meekly into the governor's office the next morning with my tail in between my legs and said, "Jim, I kind of got out there on a limb last night and gave this speech in Macomb, calling for an overhaul and a reorg of higher ed and governance, and we ought to give each university its board. I just really wasn't thinking of checking in with you or your office first, because I didn't plan the speech very well." (Czaplicki laughs)

He kind of looked at me. My recollection is he looks and basically says, "Well, you know, the time's probably come." Then, of course, one of the reasons for that is that he had his favorite president, Stan Rives, at the time, over at Eastern Illinois University, where, of course, Jim went to school. Jim felt that Stan Rives was being treated most unfairly by the Board of Governors, so he's looking at this like, Hey, I think I just found the solution of how to get at these guys and get them off the backs of these presidents who are trying to do their jobs. So Jim said, "Why don't you just take a crack at putting something together, and let's see what it looks like?"

So, I wrote the bill—we wrote it out of my office—that gave the universities their own boards, number one. Number two, we at the same time…This was my interest; I served as a faculty member at Sangamon State, never could understand why you'd want to name a university after some relatively unknown Indian tribe of thousands of years ago and the name of a county that nobody knew outside of the county around Springfield.

So, I said, "It's time to link up Sangamon State University with the U of I. Let's make it the University of Illinois at Springfield." So I put that in the bill and took it back to the governor. He looked at it and said, "That's pretty good. I like this idea."

Well, then he ran it by Stan Ikenberry, the then-president of the University of Illinois. Stan Ikenberry went ballistic over the fact that he would have to inherit this university in Springfield that had a wild faculty union that was clearly out of tune with the more conservative faculty senate in Urbana. And who knows what they had at the University of Illinois Circle. [U of I Circle Campus in Chicago] Stan didn't think it was a good idea at all and urged Edgar to take that out of the bill.

Jim came back to me and said, "Boy, Stan feels pretty strongly about this." And I really dug in on this one. I said, "Jim, that is absolutely no excuse not to make this campus the University of Illinois at Springfield, just because Stan Ikenberry doesn't want to deal with a handful of faculty at what will be the smallest university campus of the system." I said, "You just need to stay firm on this one, and don't cave in."

Well, then, my next recollection is that Stan wanted some kind of protection, that somehow in the bill we blow up the faculty senate. Somebody would have to go back and look, but I believe there was something in that bill that actually did reduce the power of the faculty senate or the faculty union at Sangamon State. I don't remember how we did it, but somebody threw in language, somewhere along the way in the process, that was really Stan Ikenberry language. It was designed to keep the faculty union at bay, which was pretty powerful.

Coincidentally, I was a member of that union, (laughs) back in my young, politically active days on the Sangamon State faculty. That was an AFT [American Federation of Teachers]-affiliated union. It was a union that made a lot of noise and had a lot of characters in it, left over from the Vietnam War protesting era. It drove the president of Sangamon State and the administration **nuts**, no question about it. Ikenberry's just thinking, And I'm going to have to deal with this now? Uh-uh. (both laugh)

So, in the last analysis, the bill passed, and, of course, the University of Illinois at Springfield is what it is today. It may still be having some growing pains, but I don't think anyone would argue it wasn't a good idea. I haven't a clue what's happened to the faculty union (laughs) in the meantime. Anyway, that was clearly my contribution to policy, I guess, in the second term of my office.

By the way, that bill didn't pass the first time. My recollection is that we ran that bill, and initially the Board of Governors, which was the board that oversaw the universities that had the most union control, they went straight to Madigan and said to Madigan, "You've got to kill this. This is an assault on union power and authority on the campus." And Madigan did just that.

By then, I got to know Mike Madigan, and my vague recollection is that we sat down with him and with his staff and tried to help them understand that this wasn't about unions, and it wasn't going to affect unions. There was a guy who was then the representative of the unions in the Board of Governors system. I had a good relationship with him. He thought a bit differently than I did about all this. But in the end, my recollection is that we were able to convince the Democratic leadership that this new law would not wreck the ability of teacher unions, the AFT, to continue organizing, to continue representing faculty. They would be doing it differently, in that they wouldn't have control over the whole system; they'd be doing it from the campus level.

Of course, that was their problem. They liked the idea of being able to shut down the whole board, all five universities, instead of having to deal with five separate boards. But again, my goal or objective had nothing to do with trying to attack or minimize the union influence. I just felt that those individual boards, appointed by a governor, were in a better position to oversee and hold accountable the university presidents and their staffs. That was the intention.

In the end, it passed, and I think it passed with a pretty healthy margin. I honestly don't remember that, but I think by the time we were able to convince people of the merits of the bill, we did so, I believe, with Mike Madigan's support.

Czaplicki: Had you long cultivated a relationship with these university presidents, or is it a matter of they just trusted you because you had a Ph.D.? What was the basis of their trust to actually come to you and talk to you about these concerns that they were having?

Kustra: First of all, they knew I was an academic. They knew I taught at Loyola; they knew I was teaching at the UIC during my days at the University of Illinois—that's the Circle—and during my days in the Senate. While I was lieutenant governor, I was teaching at Northwestern. So I had a fairly significant teaching background, never full-time in those years. At Loyola I was full-time, and at Roosevelt University I was full-time, but at Northwestern and UIC, I taught as an adjunct, as I balanced my legislative career and then my career in the lieutenant governor's office.

And, of course, I always had this interest in higher education and got to know all these presidents and thought that most of them who had expressed these issues…There were also some things going on. If you were to go into the morgue of the newspaper, you'd find references to the Board of Regents in Springfield, for example, getting caught with outlandish purchases for furniture. There were a number of mini scandals around the way this Board of Regents and this Board of Governors operated. They were not very smart, politically, in the way they handled themselves.

They caught themselves, as a result, in the newspapers too often, and legislators started picking up on it. Once the legislators started picking up on it, and I started asking questions, as long as it was behind closed doors, these presidents were more than willing to share with me their frustrations over the bureaucracies that had grown up around these two boards.

As a matter of fact that's one of the things I argued, is that we created these bureaucracies that we really didn't need. If you go into any of the universities today, the board is probably serviced out of the president's office. There's no vast bureaucracy of people the board hires. The board is seven appointed people by the governor; they preside over board meetings and hold the president accountable and pass the budget in the university, like it works in every other state in the union.

But in those days, you had significant staffing piling up in the Board of Governors and the Board of Regents. The legislators were watching this; they didn't like it. And, of course, the staff, in order to keep itself busy, was finding all kinds of ways…in some cases, holding the presidents responsible, in other cases, just harassing them. It was the harassment, I think, that finally caused the whole thing to break down.

By the way, in the middle of that second term of mine, I was appointed by the governor to be the chair of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. Obviously, that was a move that placed me in even more direct contact with these presidents. That appointment came out of the tragic loss of Art Quern in a corporate plane accident, who was then chairing the Illinois Board of Higher Education. I went to the governor and asked if I could have that appointment.

That's another interesting story, because his staff, again, was very reticent about that. Oh my God, we couldn't put Kustra in there; he's a lieutenant governor. This is a job that's supposed to go to the folks in the private sector. Art Quern was an insurance executive with Aon. If we put a lieutenant governor in there, these higher-ed folks are going to go nuts, and it's not going to work.

I, frankly, went to the governor and said, "Jim, you know, I think you owe me one. I mean, I did come back for you, and I've asked for an enhanced set of responsibilities as lieutenant governor. No one can quibble with my background in higher education. This is just a natural place for me to be, especially if I decide to make this the career for the rest of my life. I'd like the opportunity to get closer to Illinois higher education." I think, over the objection of his staff, he appointed me.

I still remember, there was one Bloomington–Normal editorial about my appointment that really shut the door on all of the staff's concern over how I would be received in the higher education community, because it was a very complimentary article of the governor's appointing me, someone steeped in

higher ed, someone who knew the system, someone who did this and that and the other thing in higher ed. That was the end of that.

So, for the next two years I chaired the Illinois Board of Higher Education, worked with Dick Wagner [the board's executive director]. He then announced he was leaving. I chaired the search to find his replacement, Keith Sanders. I really, really had a great time in that position. It felt like, in the brief two years I chaired it, we, if anything else, managed to put in place the leadership of the Board of Higher Ed for the next few years.

Czaplicki: What would your responsibilities be as the director of that?

Kustra: To work with the executive director and his staff on the budget for higher education, for one thing, and nine public universities. It's one of the largest systems in the country. So, again, there was a significant professional staff to do this. But the executive director works with the chair of the board in assembling that budget, formulating that budget every year. It's also a position of oversight and accountability.

I chaired the meetings of the Illinois Board of Education. My recollection is we met about eight times a year. In those meetings, of course, we had an agenda that was focused on initiatives of one kind or another that were all aimed at improving the quality of higher education, dealing with the various accountability aspects, tuition. We had to approve the tuition requests. It was a very interesting way to get a heavy dose of how higher education budgets are assembled and the relationship between the universities and state government.

Czaplicki: There's something else that I wanted to talk about, in terms of ed reform. In that 1994 campaign, Dawn Clark Netsch had a plan for reforming school funding, and the Edgar campaign went pretty hard at her, as I understand, on her plan. But then, some critics down the road and in late '94, the Illinois State Board of Ed Chairman, Joseph Spagnolo, he comes out with a plan that a lot of people think looks a lot like Netsch's plan. So I was curious to get your thoughts as to how fair you thought your criticism was of Netsch's plan, and what the differences were between what the Edgar administration ultimately pushed through for funding reform and Netsch's plan.

Kustra: You know, Mike, I have to just beg ignorance on this one. Having put together a dozen different budgets or more since that time, trying to piece together what happened in 1994, in an election, I start talking more like Reagan than Kustra. (laughs) I really don't have the slightest idea.

I remember, of course, that I was the point person in '94, as I was in '90, to debate Dawn Clark Netsch. Maybe "debate" is the wrong word, because I'm not so sure it was that, as much as be the person to come back with critiques of her proposals, one of which was school funding. Vaguely I

remember that one of the points I think we were trying to make with her proposal is that it would be very costly for property tax payers. But I don't really remember the details.

Czaplicki: To go back earlier in the first term, I wanted to ask you if you recalled a meeting with Arnie Kanter and some others, where he explained the hospital assessment program that he developed to get out of that first-year budget crisis.[16]

Kustra: I remember Arnie Kanter, and I remember that meeting, when he came forth with it. I had no responsibility in that area. So I don't know whether I can comment about the specifics of it. At my kitchen table, my wife was the one with the Medicaid and the healthcare experience. (Czaplicki laughs) She ran the Department of Public Aid for Thompson, had to give it up when I became Jim's lieutenant governor. Then she went into the private Medicaid practice. But I don't personally have any recollection or even knowledge of those issues surrounding state government, because it just wasn't my purview.

Czaplicki: The two things I was wondering are just if you remembered the reception of the plan, what the atmosphere and mood was. Was it something people grasped immediately, or did they find it controversial internally?

Kustra: I don't remember.

Czaplicki: The other one was…Arnie had remembered that you, Belletire, and Edgar were there, and I was wondering if that would be a common grouping for policy issues like that.

Kustra: Yeah. Oh, yeah. When Mike or somebody like Mike…Mike was a policy wonk of the highest order. He was always thinking ahead, as to how we could create a better solution to a challenge we faced. Oftentimes I would be in the room with Mike and others. Al Grosboll's another one who was oftentimes coming in with new approaches to old issues that we were grappling with.

I remember being with those guys; it's just that I couldn't pick out any one encounter, unless it was an issue where I was directly and personally involved. These would be ones where I might have been listening and offering advice and counsel then, but it's not as though it was my chosen career path.

Czaplicki: Another issue to get in…Do I understand correctly that you would go fishing with Brent Manning?[17]

Kustra: Yeah, yeah, I did.

[16] See also Arnold Kanter, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 29, 2009, page 34-38.
[17] Manning was the director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources during the Edgar administration. Brent Manning, interview by Mark DePue, February 18, 2010, page 83.

Czaplicki: So, first, to put your political skills on the line here, where's the fishing better, Illinois or Idaho?

Kustra: Well, you know, it's interesting. In Idaho, I came here, bought a fishing license, and never used it, and I've only had a license that one year. I think it's fair to say, it's certainly a different kind of fishing. It's probably more productive out here, in these trout streams in the mountains, than you could find it almost anywhere. It's not a lot of lakes, the way Illinois had. Of course, I fished all over Illinois with Brent and others. But I just don't have the time in this job to get away as I did.

In Illinois, when I was lieutenant governor, oftentimes I used to go down and fish Rend Lake. In some ways, it was directly connected to what I was doing in the region or in the area, and it was about meeting conservation officials and working with them on plans. With Brent Manning, of course, I worked closely, both through the state fair and other ways, always promoting…The Illinois River, obviously, is where I really had an opportunity to work with Brent.

Czaplicki: Right. I had a note here to myself about the Illinois River Strategy Team and some other efforts that you did to promote revitalization, which ultimately, down the line, involved some pretty significant federal and state money.

Kustra: Yeah, it was interesting. It's one of those interesting examples where we… I got invited to a meeting over there one time by a group of local officials from Fish and Game and various local agencies in and around the Peoria area. They just started explaining to me what was going on in the Illinois, the sludge that was really filling up the river and limiting navigation, and the pollution and the runoff from agriculture. There were quite a few people at the table; they represented all interests, including agriculture. They were just all fretting over whether or not there was going to be anything left of this river, if we didn't step in and do some things.

I was just fascinated by it. I grew up as a kid, fishing Missouri rivers with my dad. I loved the river more than I think I even loved the lake or large bodies of water. So, whether it was the Illinois River or some little stream I had in my brain from growing up fishing in Missouri, I was all over it. I wanted to get involved. They were looking for somebody who would be able to go back to Springfield and get some news about this, somebody that could walk into the legislature and talk to former colleagues about the importance of this. So, from their vantage point, I suppose, they were looking for, to some extent, the media exposure, but to another extent, the connection to the governor's office, to the agencies that would care.

So we dove in. We dove in, no pun intended, (Czaplicki laughs) with both feet. I spent more time in Peoria, Illinois, than any other town in the entire state of Illinois, something, by the way that the *Journal-Star* [Peoria's

major daily newspaper] noted when I left the state. (both laugh) They wrote an editorial about what a familiar face I was in that town, given the fact that I was always over there doing something on this river.

For the first year or so, this was like the exclusive preserve of the office of lieutenant governor. We'd have press conferences; we'd do river tours; we would do samplings; we would just do everything you could possibly do to call attention to it. While I guess I was calling attention to it, it's not like there were a raft of other public officials who were getting involved. Again, Jim Bray can speak to this probably better than I can.

But, all of the sudden there was a day when we got this call from the governor's office. It was about some press conference that was going on over in Peoria. Again, I'm doing my own thing, figuring this governor has so many things on his plate, the last thing he's going to worry about is what I'm doing on the Illinois River. We get a phone call, and he says, "I'd like to fly over with you to the press conference" we were going to be having on some aspect, I think it was one of those announcements of a federal grant. His office by then had become involved and had done something.

That was the moment where we yelled, "Victory at last!" because here we had the governor himself now realizing that this issue had achieved such prominence, apparently, in local media, in and around central Illinois anyway, that he was going to take time out of his schedule to bask in the sunlight of this announcement.

So he and I flew over on his plane. [It was] one of the few times I did that, because I wasn't wild about those small planes he was always running around the state in. But in that case, I was anxious to get over there and let him see what we had done and attach some gubernatorial significance to this effort.

By the way, just last year, I guess it was, I was invited back to Peoria. (laughs) I couldn't pass the chance up, so I went back and gave a speech to the assembled faithful, many of whom were the same people I worked with. We talked about the good old days of setting this thing up and how far they'd come and yet how far they had to go.

Czaplicki: So this group, the "them" that you talk about, would this be the River Strategy Team?

Kustra: Yeah, that's it. In fact, the lieutenant governors after me picked it right up. I know Corinne Wood did, and Pat Quinn did, because when I went down there just last year, it was Quinn's office that either had invited me or helped make the accommodations and the reservations and everything. It was really a nice gesture on Governor Quinn's part, or his staff anyway, to think of bringing me back. I had a chance to see Peoria again and meet a lot of old friends.

Czaplicki: I was curious if the flood of '93 helped motivate some of the attention to rivers and the river basins and what was happening to them, because, of course, the Illinois River was also greatly impacted by that flood.

Kustra: Yeah, yeah. It probably had something to do with it. My recollection of the flood of '93 is spending way more time over on the Mississippi. We set up camp over there on the Mississippi, and Jim and I both spent a lot of time. I remember touring the whole flooded area by air, with the National Guard…I think it was the National Guard. I don't remember the flood itself precipitating this Illinois River Strategy Team.

Frankly, I think it was led more by conservationists and environmentalists who were really concerned about the quality of the water, about the silt that had moved into the river. Then that brought along the navigation people; that brought along the companies that were making their livelihood running the barges up and down that river. It wasn't long before ag [agriculture] became involved, when we could prove to them that, in the long run, this isn't going to enhance the price competition for Illinois grain if, in fact, costs are more expensive to get stuff up and down that river. But, again, I wouldn't be the one to say whether the flooding itself had anything to do with it.

Czaplicki: In March 1998, apparently, you help get through a fifteen-year agreement between state and federal agencies that provides $459 million to restore and preserve Illinois river basins, so I'm not sure if that was the press conference you were thinking about.

Kustra: That might have been it, yeah. I don't remember.

Czaplicki: Because that's pretty significant.

Kustra: Yeah. At that point, we were all involved. At that point, Brent Manning was involved; at that point, Al Grosboll…As I remember it, Al Grosboll was the guy in the governor's office who had Natural Resources. When I say Brent Manning, I shouldn't use his name without George Fleischli, although those were a little different. Fleischli was really overseeing the conservation areas and working with Manning as a director. So, by then, all of the governor's cabinet [members] that were in any way related to this issue were doing a lot of heavy lifting on it.

Czaplicki: Did you have much pushback from any interests?

Kustra: The only pushback is that…I think the interest group that felt the most threatened at the table was agriculture. It was really difficult to get too far into this issue without pointing to agricultural practices, without pointing to how often you till the land, how much dust runs off of the land, how much soil runs off of the land. Farming practices, clearly, at least at that point, were in need of significant improvement. So, when we'd have these meetings, the

discussion sometimes got tense, because it wouldn't take very long for somebody to get out a map and start showing these small creeks that were running up from the Illinois River. These creeks and small rivers are going through all this farmland. They can show data that looks at the stream and river the way it looked fifty years ago and the way it looks today, and it's like, if it's silted in, what else causes that but runoff and why is there runoff?

Then we'd get into these discussions of farming practices and some of the new no-tilling practices that were just starting to be discussed. The Illinois Agricultural Association, I think, was very nervous about this movement. They wanted to be there, and they wanted to be recognized as good guys who were participating. But I think they also wanted to make sure that they weren't going to be rushed headlong into some mandate that was going to be very expensive for the Illinois farmer.

Czaplicki: You're certainly managing to keep very visible in the lieutenant governor's post, despite the perception by some that it's something that gets overlooked a lot. I guess that enables you…In '96 you make the decision to run for Senate, right?

Kustra: Right.

Czaplicki: You're upset, however, in the primary by Al Salvi. I was curious about your decision to run for the Senate, what it was that motivated you to go for that, and why it is you think you went down to Salvi.

Kustra: First of all, there is a little-known story behind this race for the Senate that may help put my defeat in perspective when it comes to how I felt about it then and how I feel about it now. In June of 1995, six months before the filing date for the U.S. Senate race, I walked into Jim Edgar's office one day, closed the door behind me, and said, "Jim, I don't have the fire in my belly." At that time, back to my fishing interest, I was enjoying the great outdoors. I had a small cabin in northern Wisconsin. I was fishing all of Illinois and southern Illinois and doing my job at the same time. I traveled the state a lot by van, and so I really enjoyed getting out, from Metropolis, Illinois, up to Rockford and Freeport and beyond. I just loved getting out. Whether it was because I was talking to a group of high school students or because I was going fishing with some local conservation guy in southern Illinois—I had a few of those, a few friends down there that would do so—I was just, you know…

I was living in Park Ridge. I could travel the state. I could go up to Wisconsin every now and then and catch muskies, (laughter) which was a joke, because I think I probably caught two of them the whole time I was up there. But, nonetheless, I walked in to Jim and said, "You know, getting on a plane every week to go to Washington, this sounds horrible. I don't have it, I tell you; I don't have it in me."

He reassured me; he said, "Hey, look, don't you worry. It's the way I felt when I ran the first time. It's going to get better. You're really going to get into it." He said, "Everybody has these moments of anxiety and second-guessing what you really ought to do with your life." He said, "You're on track to be in the U.S. Senate; you got to hang in there."

So I went back, like a good soldier, and prepared for the filing date. Out of nowhere comes this Al Salvi, and he beats me. He beat me on my legislative record in the state Senate. I was representing a suburban district far different from other parts of the state. He beat me on social issues; he beat me on the gun issue, and he beat me on all the same kind of issues that…I tell my friends, out here in Idaho, "Tea Party? Hey, I pioneered the Tea Party, knocking off moderate Republicans. I was beaten by the Tea Party before it knew it was the Tea Party." It was pure and simple.

We were simply beaten by moderate Republicans who didn't show up for the primary. It was in March at that time. I don't know what it is now. It was cold. People didn't think there was any problem, Oh, Kustra, he's a shoo-in. I had the endorsement of every newspaper, all county organizations, the state party. It was like we'd take this one for granted. What we've got to worry about is getting Kustra past [Richard] Durbin, because he's going to be tough. So it just didn't work.

It probably wasn't the perfectly run campaign. Of course, the day after an election, whoever loses, you're always going to be subjected to the Monday morning quarterbacking of what you should have done. But when it was all over, my wife and I looked at each other. Kathy said, "Remember that day you tried to get in to Jim to tell him you didn't want to do this? I guess it couldn't have been too great of a job, could it?" (Czaplicki laughs)

Now, in retrospect, considering what I've been able to do in higher education and moving to the West and serving as president of Boise State, one of the neatest towns in America, I think, Oh my God. I went out to Washington in the fall and thought, Get me out of here. I was there three days, and I felt trapped. Nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to serve there. (laughs)

Czaplicki: You dodged a bullet, huh?

Kustra: Yeah, right. So, as I said, I'm sure there's probably some of the folks who remember those days, who look back, especially moderate Republican types, who are still pining over, Oh, the seat could have stayed in the hands of the party. The seat would have stayed in the hands of the moderates. Poor ole Bob had his entire life focused on this U.S. Senate career, and it didn't work out. I see Durbin on the TV and think, Thank God I'm where I am, and he's where he is. He obviously likes it, but there isn't a day when I ever wish I was out there.

Czaplicki: One word you mentioned, you said that you were a good **soldier** and went back out there. Did the governor recruit you to run for this, or how is it that you came to run in the first place?

Kustra: I think it's a combination of two things. It's a combination of people realizing that, Here's Kustra, he's serving as lieutenant governor; he's a wonk; he worked for Charles Percy when he was a U.S. senator; he can campaign well, and he's talking like he wants to do it. I don't mean to suggest that I wasn't interested in doing it. I had spent months, I'm sure, working with my staff on getting my name out there as a candidate. But then the closer I got to it, it's like, Oh, but do I really?

On the other hand, the other side of it is that yes, I think the party, and I think Jim for sure, thought, when they looked around, it was like, Yeah, he's the most logical guy to do this now, and so, of course, he'd do it. I think, by the time I went to Jim in June of 1996, he's looking at it like, Hey, if this guy walks now, what am I going to do? There's not many months left until filing; you need somebody with some kind of name recognition. I mean, mine wasn't great, because the lieutenant governor doesn't really have the kind of name recognition the governor does, but it was better than a state senator by then, I guess. I'd been six years in office. I'm sure he was looking at it like, Well, we can't have this happen. So I've got to reassure him that everything's going to be okay.

By fall, I was back in the saddle and being the candidate that I was supposed to be. I don't want to make it sound like it was a total draft movement, because, hey, you know, I didn't have to be the good soldier; (Czaplicki laughs) I could have stood up and said, "You know what? I'm out. Go find somebody else. Sorry, Jim." But I didn't, and I didn't because I was, of course, interested in the idea of being a U.S. senator. I don't think I ever operationalized in my own brain what that meant to practice it day by day. The only time I really got that all together was the day I walked into his office in June of '95 and said, "I'm not so sure." So I think it's a matter of both the party or the governor wanting me to do it, but it's also the fact that I wanted to do it.

But there's degrees of interest, and there's degrees of commitment to any career or job. When I measure the degree of commitment I have to serving as president of Boise State since 2003—and I'm completing my eighth year, so it's like two terms as governor—to the degree of commitment I had going into that U.S. Senate race, it's not even close. It's not even close, in terms of how much I love what I'm doing, in terms of where I think I ought to be and the difference I could make.

The other thing that was going on at that particular time in my life, in Illinois and in politics in Illinois and the nation, is that the right wing of the Republican Party was really beginning to assert itself. Moderates like Jim

Edgar and Bob Kustra and a lot of other people were having more and more difficulty contending with the right wing of this party, to the point today, of course, where they've virtually dropped out all the moderates. But in those days, some of us were starting to see this occur.

Back to my radio show gig, I remember my wife commenting, after I signed up for the radio show, "Hey, have you heard of this guy Rush Limbaugh? They're not expecting you to be a Rush Limbaugh, are they, because you're nothing like that guy." (Czaplicki laughs) When I finally consented to come back on the ticket, I would certainly admit that there was a small piece of me that had taken a second look at the radio industry, the talk show development in the '90s, and wondered whether I was really going to have the freedom to be the freethinking, independent, moderate spokesperson for politics, or was I going to be driven into some more conservative, right-wing agenda, because that's where the listeners are. Whether it was listeners or whether it was voters, it was happening.

That's why it was so easy for me in 1998, after serving as chair of the Illinois Board of Higher Ed and thinking about staying and running for secretary of state, which was the vehicle to the office of governor, I finally looked at my wife and said, "We got to get out of this business. It's not for us anymore." That's when I decided to move to Kentucky, to be a university president down there for a while.

Czaplicki: If I could ask you two questions to wrap up, because I know you have to get going soon…One is built off of what you just said. Do you think part of that resurgence in the conservative wing of the right, is there a way that policies pursued by moderate Republicans helped them? You know, if you sort of run tough on crime and Class X[18] sentencing and things like that, law and order, does that fuel that sort of wing of the party more than more moderate type programs?

Kustra: I'm not so sure I understand—

Czaplicki: Take unions, for instance. A lot of the ed reform talk, a lot of the way that was carried out…You talk about how your intent isn't to go after unions. But out in the public realm, for many of the people who were backing reform and talking about reform, unions sort of became a flashpoint. One of the ways it could get explained to people is, Well, here's one of the ways we're going to transform things; we're going to change the union's power. You end up getting some anti-union rhetoric, very difficult to control. So, when you talk about you and Governor Edgar and other Republican moderates, at this moment, where this more conservative wing in the party is really kind of rising and getting a lot of power, I'm just wondering how much of that is

[18] In Illinois law, the Class X felony is, short of first degree murder, the most serious felony offense on the books. Upon a finding of guilt, the court cannot sentence the defendant to probation,

growing out of policy measures that moderates are backing, kind of an irony of history, I guess.

Kustra: Yeah, yeah. No, I think there must be something to that. As a matter of fact, Jim Edgar and I both had good friends in the conservative wing of the party, and we agreed on some things. Where we would agree, I'm sure it set them off; they gained confidence, and once they had a little of it, it's like, Well, why can't we have a lot of it?

Along comes an Al Salvi, who decides to give them a lot of it, at least in his primary talk. Yeah, I don't doubt that there are some things that we did that aided and abetted the cause. We were Republicans; we didn't think that the Democratic Party had all the solutions, either to Illinois or the nation, at that time. And oftentimes we found measure to agree on, but then, there were just other measures that didn't have much to do with Democrats and Republicans; they were just those obvious social issues where we were going to disagree.

Czaplicki: My last question for you is, Looking back, what are you proudest of, both in terms of your particular contribution to the Edgar administration and the Edgar administration writ large?

Kustra: I'm proud of the fact that I was able to serve for two terms and leave with a strong friendship with a guy who did a really good job as governor. I don't think anyone can possibly understand the pressures brought to bear on people in those offices, especially the guy serving number two and not number one, to disagree, to leave the ranch, to leave the reservation, to stoke the fires of dissent, to get angry about political slights that could happen three-four times a week, where you think you should have been invited to be someplace, or you think you should have been included, or you think…Staffs just pump this stuff into the officeholders, and if you're not careful, it can consume you.

I know enough about studying the relationships of governors and lieutenant governors, over history and the various states, to know that a lot of those relationships have been blown up over that. I was able to avoid that. That was tough, because in the state Senate, man, I was more independent than most Republicans. I was the fiery speaker that would stand up and rail, if I felt that we had been wronged, or if I felt that an issue was going the wrong way or a vote was going the wrong way.

So I guess you could say, containing myself to find a more productive outlet for my energies was the great accomplishment. The two that come to mind is the Illinois River and higher ed reform. I think both of those are the ones that I'm proudest of, when it comes to how I look back on those years as lieutenant governor.

Czaplicki: Thank you so much for giving us some of your time.

Kustra: You're welcome, Mike. I enjoyed it. It's a chance to reminisce about an important part of my life and also an important friendship that Jim Edgar and I still enjoy today.

Czaplicki: Take care.

Kustra: Take care, now. Good luck with this.

(end of interview #2)