

Interview with Ken Zehnder

ISG-A-L-2011-025.01

Interview # 1: June 20, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

COPYRIGHT

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

A Note to the Reader

This transcript is based on an interview recorded by the ALPL Oral History Program. Readers are reminded that the interview of record is the original video or audio file, and are encouraged to listen to portions of the original recording to get a better sense of the interviewee's personality and state of mind. The interview has been transcribed in near-verbatim format, then edited for clarity and readability, and reviewed by the interviewee. For many interviews, the ALPL Oral History Program retains substantial files with further information about the interviewee and the interview itself. Please contact us for information about accessing these materials.

DePue: Today is Monday, June 20, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. We're here in the library right now, and we're going to be talking to Ken Zehnder for the first of a couple sessions, I hope. Good afternoon, Ken.

Zehnder: Good afternoon. Pleased to be here.

DePue: We're talking to Ken as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History collection. Ken, you came in with this huge box of photos, most of them from Edgar's Secretary of State years, and there were some wonderful photos of a time period for which we didn't have much photographic information. After chatting with you, I said, I think there's a lot more than just photos we can get from Ken. So we're delighted to have you today. Let's start with when and where you were born.

Zehnder: I was born in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, February 5, 1950.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about the family.

Zehnder: My dad worked for a company named Spang-Chalfant, [a division of National Supply Company] in Pennsylvania. My father's family is from outside Louisville, Kentucky.

DePue: What's his first name?

Zehnder: Frank, Frank Joseph Zehnder. As we speak, he's ninety years old. He celebrated his ninetieth birthday and got married on the same day. My mother passed away a couple years ago. Dad is an avid golfer; he still golfs three days a week. The woman that he married, Janet Waugh, was in his golfing group, and now they're both golfing out on the course three days a week.

DePue: So what do the siblings think about Dad getting married at ninety?

Zehnder: Well, I have three sisters, and they were a bit apprehensive at the prospect, but I think we all agree that it's a wonderful thing now. He's happy, and she's happy, and we're all happy for them. My mother was from the Pittsburgh area.

DePue: Her maiden name?

Zehnder: Connie Stewart. It was Agnes Constance Stewart, and she went by Connie. They lived in Crafton, just outside Pittsburgh. Her father died when she was a teenager. One of the stories I tell: my mother's mother was a Democratic precinct worker, and she worked at the elections for the Democrats in Pittsburgh. My father's side, in Kentucky, had a small farm, and in the dining room they had two of those china plates of Ike and Mamie Eisenhower on the wall. So I kind of grew up in a bipartisan atmosphere, (DePue laughs) at least extended family-wise.

So my father graduated from Purdue in chemical engineering, took a job in Pittsburgh, and met my mother. We lived there for two years after I was born and then moved to York, Pennsylvania, just south of Harrisburg, between Lancaster and Gettysburg. He took a job with a company called McKay Company that eventually was bought out by Teledyne. But he became the plant manager there. I have a twin sister, Joyce, and two older sisters, Cathy and Nancy. One's two years older, and one's three years older. So we're all scattered now. My oldest sister lives in Canada. My middle sister is in Red Lion, Pennsylvania, outside where we grew up, and then my twin is in North Carolina with her husband. We all are getting together at the end of the month for a big family vacation, a reunion, which we do once a year.

DePue: With Dad as well?

Zehnder: With Dad and his new spouse.

DePue: I assume you were at the wedding.

Zehnder: It was a great time, yes; we all enjoyed it, out in Southern Pines, North Carolina.

DePue: It sounds like you had most of your formative years in York, is that right?

Zehnder: Yes.

DePue: Are you a public school product?

Zehnder: Well, mixed. Went to St. Patrick's grade school, so it was Catholic education, and then I went to York Catholic High School for my first three years. Actually, junior year, I was thinking about maybe running for student council body president or an officer in senior class, and my sister mentioned to me on the way home from school one evening that my dad had told her that we were moving. I thought that meant to the other side of town, over closer to where Dad worked, but in reality she meant Chicago. So the middle of our junior year, actually, we moved out here. My dad moved out here and started working right after the big snowstorm of '67, and we came out in March of '67. That was a huge blizzard up in Chicago. And there were still piles of snow around when we got out here.

It was a coed parochial high school, and my choices were either going to public school, West Aurora High School—where I eventually went—or Marmion Military Academy, which didn't have any girls. (laughs) It wasn't coed. I thought, all right, military academy might be a little bit of an adjustment, but going to an all-guys school would be a real change. So I ended up going to West High.

DePue: From what little I know about Marmion Military Academy, it's not just a military academy but has that religious association as well?

Zehnder: Yes, yes. It's a Catholic school as well.

DePue: An interesting mixture.

Zehnder: Yeah. Now, my twin sister ended up marrying Scott Hartmann who was going to Marmion Military Academy.

DePue: Stewart doesn't sound like a very Catholic name. Zehnder, is that German?

Zehnder: Zehnder is Swiss, it's Swiss-German; the family was Stewart and the other family name was Quinn. So there was a little bit of English in there, Irish, kind of a mix, and on my dad's side it's basically Swiss-German.

DePue: Who would you say was your stronger influence while you were growing up?

Zehnder: Both. I think my mother probably more my emotional side and my dad kind of the structured side. Dad was very disciplined, worked a lot, was at the office a

lot, very steady. I ended up caddying for him every Saturday morning. That was his one outing every week. We went back to Pennsylvania a couple years ago and got together with another member of his old foursome from when I was a kid. We went and played the old course I used to caddy at all the time. It was a great time.

DePue: What kind of things were you interested in, in high school?

Zehnder: We lived in a little neighborhood called Greenbriar out on the northwest part of town. So we were out in the countryside, had a cow pasture behind our house; the neighborhood kids used to play a lot. We had tree forts, built our own baseball fields—just kind of a rural lifestyle, but it was a development. When I lived here in Springfield, I lived on the outskirts of town, kind of the same, out by the bluffs; moving up to Dundee, lived outside of Dundee, backed up to the forest preserve—so I think that's just in my nature. My wife and I, Lynn and I, are planning to retire over in Galena, which is kind of reminiscent of the Pennsylvania landscape.

DePue: Galena doesn't look much like the rest of the state of Illinois.

Zehnder: No, no. When I lived here, we lived out in an area with some ravines and a little creek and a very wooded area, so it's kind of like my little corner of Pennsylvania here. We found the same thing up in Galena, and we really enjoy it.

DePue: Were you interested in politics at that time, in high school?

Zehnder: I started to say, when we moved from York, I was thinking about running for maybe a class office and never had the opportunity. I think I also was very influenced by JFK. When he was elected president, I followed that as a kid. I remember the funeral when he was assassinated, and going through the funeral I was very cognizant of what was going on and followed that. I have said before that I've only seen my father cry three times, or four times now. Actually, as he gets older he tends to do that a little bit more when he gets together with family, but in his earlier years, his father's and mother's funerals and the Kennedy assassination were the only times I had seen that until more recently, when my mother died. At family get-togethers he gets a little emotional.

DePue: Was politics something that was discussed around the home, the kitchen table or anything like that?

Zehnder: I think in general conversation, but it was not a real political family. Dad was conservative. My mom's politics was mainly religious. She was very active in the Catholic faith and in the deanery. Wherever we ended up going, she ended up the president of the women's deanery. So she was very involved, and I think that was more what she considered her politics as well as activities. My dad was always political. I remember he mentioned to me when we were

living in Aurora—or living in Illinois at least—seeing Governor [Richard] Ogilvie at some event. And I remember, the way he said it, that it was an interesting social affair that he went to. Now I'm thinking of all the different receptions and events and functions that I've gone to over the years; I guess they're all in some ways special.

DePue: Well, you're coming of age at a time that's—let's say it was somewhat traumatic for the United States. Lots going on in the late sixties. If I get the timeline right, you graduated in 1968.

Zehnder: Yes.

DePue: At the time you graduated, what were your intentions? What did you think you wanted to do with your life?

Zehnder: Go to college. I knew I was going to college, but I didn't have a specific direction. My sister, my twin, after going through all of grade school and high school with her, I was thinking I was going to go to ISU.¹ Looked at it and looked at a couple other schools. I remember going over and looking at Drake. Then I thought about going back to Penn State, Pennsylvania, but I thought, I might as well get the in-state tuition rate. Planning on ISU, but my sister said she was going to ISU, so I went to Western [Illinois]. They were on the quarter system, and my first quarter you had to pick a major. I picked political science. I just wasn't interested in the coursework after that, so I switched and I ended up graduating with a BA in psychology with a minor in business.

DePue: Nobody had explained it to you: you can't do much with a BA in psychology?

Zehnder: Well, people always said you couldn't do much with a major in political science either. I found out later that Jim Edgar had a major in history, and people thought you couldn't do much there but teach, and he proved that wrong. I always thought psychology was the study of how people operated and their motivations, et cetera, and I thought, That, you could apply to almost anything. So I thought personnel was a good opportunity with that background, and that's what I went into when I graduated.² But I found that it probably was even more applicable to government and politics.

DePue: Well, 1968 is the year you graduated, and you said you weren't really sure what you wanted to do with your life. The Army knew what they wanted to do with your life at the time.

Zehnder: But you had the college exemption, if you were in college. Then when I was a sophomore in college, I remember they had the draft, and they were doing the draft numbers. I was in my dorm, and they had a fire alarm test when they

¹ Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois.

² Personnel management.

were broadcasting the numbers over the radio show. All the guys my age in the dorm, this is going to impact your life, and—

DePue: Suddenly being in college was somewhat irrelevant if your number was drawn.

Zehnder: That's right. I think you still maintained the exemption until you graduated, but as soon as you graduated—and we were sophomores—if you had a low number, you were going to Vietnam; if you had a higher number, you weren't sure, but you knew you were less likely to get called. So we're going down this fire escape, and people are taking their transistor radios and running down the back steps, calling out what numbers. Well, 214—that's all I remember as a result of that. That was my number, 214. So when I graduated, some of my good friends ended up being the last ones from their county to get drafted. One guy that I just saw over the weekend ended up going to Germany, but most of them were going directly to Vietnam. I worked for a year after graduating, and the draft numbers got up to, I think maybe 120 or something like that, I'm not really sure. But the second year, it looked like it was going to be the same thing. My number was 214, so I dropped my deferment, because I just wanted to have the thing resolved. They didn't get up that high on the numbers they called, so two years after I graduated I no longer had an obligation to serve.³ I thought about the Reserves, but even with the Reserves, there were chances you were going to go. I don't think that was my preference at that point.

DePue: Again, it was a different time and an interesting time to be in college, to be a young person in the United States. You tended not to be sitting on the fence on issues like Vietnam. Do you remember your own personal views on the subject?

Zehnder: I remember watching Cronkite, Tom Brokaw—I mean, not Brokaw—the NBC anchors, the two anchors...

DePue: [Chet] Huntley and [David] Brinkley?

Zehnder: Huntley and Brinkley. To me, that was like following sports, just watching them. I've always really enjoyed the evening news, and they kept you current on what was going on. I'm not sure where you were going with that, but...

DePue: Your own personal views on Vietnam.

Zehnder: I tended to weigh both sides. I mean, I knew what the objections were, and from the more liberal side they were saying there were a lot of objections, a

³ The draft lottery for men born from 1944 through 1950 was held December 1, 1969. From this class, all numbers through 195 were called for possible induction. Had Zehnder been born three days earlier he would have been number 144; two days later, 91. Selective Service System, "Results from Lottery Drawing—Vietnam Era, 1970," *History and Records*, <http://www.sss.gov/LOTTER8.HTM>.

lot of protests. When I was at Western—I'm trying to think what the name of the group was, but they took over the Union when I was there. I remember living in—I'm trying to think if I was in the dorm or the fraternity house at the time. I went over to the Union and mixed with everybody because it was fascinating, but I didn't feel like I was on either side. I knew the arguments for being in Vietnam and the domino effect that they were trying to stop, but I knew that there were questions about that approach. And the liberal side, I knew, had some validity to their arguments, but you see a lot of things over the years, and there's always two sides to the story. An interested observer, but never felt like I was aligned with the liberals, even though I knew a lot of friends, and my senior year I let my hair grow and was kind of a long-hair; never an advocate or an extremist on either side. I wasn't very conservative, and not liberal.

I've always thought you can do a lot from a moderate position. I think later on when I ended up volunteering to help George Bush, George H.W., his first presidential campaign, I liked his moderate positions on a lot of the issues. And Edgar, I think, was very much in that same vein: moderate in the positions, conservative fiscally, but not right-wing or left-wing. You could work a compromise. I think those philosophies, that approach, has the best opportunity for a successful conclusion. It doesn't always work, but there's potential there.

DePue: Western Illinois today has a reputation as being a bit more conservative than many campuses. They've got a pretty sizeable ROTC program.⁴ Did they at that time?

Zehnder: Actually, I got into the ROTC program while I was there, I guess my freshman year. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the military theory; I enjoyed marching. For me, it was always great because you have a whole room full of guys, and when the first guy steps off, everybody moves. Anybody who's sat through traffic jams, you think, That car way at the front's moving, (DePue laughs) why isn't everybody?

DePue: Spoken like a true Chicago kid, huh?

Zehnder: And in marching, the discipline and the organization is impressive. So I did that, but if you stayed past the first year in ROTC, then you had to make a big commitment, and at that point I wasn't ready to do that. So I didn't stay in it.

DePue: Was there any response on the campus to Kent State, 1970?⁵

Zehnder: It was just following Kent State when they ended up—the Merry Pranksters was the name of the group at Western—they ended up taking over the Union.

⁴ Reserve Officer Training Corps.

⁵ On May 4, 1970 members of the Ohio National Guard shot and killed four students at Kent State University who were part of a large group actively protesting the Vietnam war.

DePue: The Merry Pranksters?

Zehnder: The Merry Pranksters. I think they also took over or sat in an area over at Sherman Hall. I'm not sure what room it was, but I remember going over there and just observing. I was sitting in. If I looked like a participant, I felt more like an observer and just finding it all fascinating. And I knew, they got a little carried away at times, and if they were going to do that, I didn't want to be there. I didn't want to get into any turmoil, but I wanted to be engaged in what was going on and just be aware and involved.

DePue: Certainly you are paying attention to the news; you know what's going on at campuses like University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana and down in Carbondale where they torched one of the campus buildings about this time. What was your thought about that?

Zehnder: Back then, I think... College is college, and I think you get so involved in just what you're doing, that there's so many events that have such an impression on you... I mean, that's the great thing about college, I think: it opens up all these new horizons for you. My first year in college, I really liked it. It was great, and it was a whole new freedom for you. A lot of friends that I made that year, I still have to this day. But, you can focus on—there's schoolwork, which should be a primary essence, but I'm not sure it was.

DePue: Should be, huh?

Zehnder: Should be. You have those state or national or worldly events that are going on, which hit you at certain times, and I think you follow them. We were all aware of them. You talk about the draft, but that was just one issue; the Kent State riots, the war, everything—you're aware of them, but you can just step out and then you go party. At Western they had the lakers [partyers] out at Lake Argyle. That's the year I first really started dating. So there's so many things that can sidetrack you. I can't remember getting engaged totally in any social issues.

DePue: Were you in a fraternity?

Zehnder: I joined a fraternity, Delta Sigma Phi—

DePue: So that's a different kind of social issue.

Zehnder: Yeah, but that was the spring of sophomore year I joined that. And that was interesting, I mean, just the dynamics of the fraternity versus the independents, the non-fraternity group. A lot of my friends were independents, and I to this day have as many or more close friends from the college era who were not fraternity brothers. But the fraternity, I thought, was a good experience to see an organization run.

Subsequent to graduating, I came back a few years later when the fraternity was really having some troubles and ended up expelling a lot of—if they had forty to sixty actives, they expelled all but eight because they were getting too rowdy; they were tearing the place apart, and they were just not paying their bills. A fellow by the name of Bill Epperly—who I was with this weekend; we were over having our alumni work weekend at that fraternity house—he and some other folks got together and said, “We’re going to clean it up, we’re going to get them out, and we’re going to start over.” The experience that I had going through that was probably a better fraternity experience than I had when I was actually an active. Having the national group come in with a few of the strong alumni members who could try to put it all back together, and seeing the eight actives that remained through that process, it was a really good experience. So I got involved in the Alumni Corporation Board, which is the governing group that owns the fraternity house. That was probably of more value and meant more to me than when I was an active.

DePue: What did you say the fraternity was, again?

Zehnder: Delta Sigma Phi. Gamma Kappa chapter was...

DePue: You’re now getting toward the end of college. What do you think you’re going to do with your life with this psychology degree?

Zehnder: I was looking around and thinking personnel, and I wasn’t really sure, but I ended up getting a job in Aurora, where my family still lived, as a personnel rep. I remember driving up back home after I graduated. I was giving a couple gals a ride back to Aurora, and I remember one was sitting in there, I think cutting my hair, as I was driving. (laughs)

DePue: She was cutting your hair?

Zehnder: Yeah, I think they were just throwing locks out the window. That one year, I had let it grow, so it was pretty long, and I thought, Well, I got to shape up. So I go to my interview after what I considered a major change in my appearance. I’m talking to the guy—this is a fairly conservative, industrial setting—and I get along with the guy. We have a great interview and everything, but toward the end of the interview he wants to bring up the business office atmosphere. Essentially what he was telling me was, You might want to think about getting your hair cut. (laughter) So I said, “Oh, yeah, I was thinking about that,” and I did; I went and got it cut even more. So college years were fun years. In that era, ’68 to ’72, a lot of change, philosophy, everything that was going on.

Going back to Aurora in ’72, and the Fox Valley industrial setting, was pretty much of a big change. I worked there for about a year. It was a good experience, but I was by five to ten years the youngest on the management

level. I said, I'm going to make it through a year, but I was ready for a change. So after a year I said, That's about it, and I got to figure out what I want to do. I was thinking about graduate school, thinking about going into physical therapy because I've always enjoyed that. It ends up I'm kind of the family masseur. I give backrubs to my sisters and my father and everybody else. But I decided I really didn't want to do that, and I didn't know what I wanted to do. My parents had since moved to Peoria. So I took the winter off and went to Florida and worked at Disney World as a bartender and a waiter for the winter.

That was a good getaway. Everybody that was down there doing that was kind of in my same boat, trying to figure where they were going to go, what they were going to do. I did that from like October through April, spent the winter, and that was enough. It was a good experience, it was fun, but it was also—talk about organizational, they really run their organization tight. It was interesting to observe. The crew had a good time, but management—the reason Disney is successful, is they really do run a good operation and a tight operation.

DePue: Did you guys live anywhere close to the facility?

Zehnder: I lived in Orlando with four guys. There was a DJ; an artist who had previously worked at Disney, but he was doing t-shirt designs and that kind of stuff; he guy who played Goofy; (laughter) and myself. So it was an interesting crew.

DePue: What did your parents think about your excursion down to Disney World?

Zehnder: I said my dad was the structured one. He never really pushed. I think the expectation there was we were going to go to college, and I did. He always would be ready to give guidance, but I don't think my dad ever pushed. I think he led by example. And I said my mother was more my emotional side. She would get wrapped up in what was going on with the kids, and she'd agonize over all this stuff, and we'd give her a hard time. But Dad was always just the model of what—leading the family. Working hard, doing what he always does. And this is one of the premises, if I have an example—I mean, I've kind of gone a little crazy here and there, but the three people who really have qualities which I admire and are very similar would be my dad, George H.W. Bush, and Jim Edgar. I think they all have very common traits. That's probably why, to some extent, I was attracted to them as candidates.

DePue: You've been talking about it anyway, but let me ask you to be a little bit more explicit and specific in what those traits are.

Zehnder: A serious but comfortable attitude toward themselves. I think they were all confident but not overconfident. I always looked at George Bush, and I thought—other than his sometimes giving political speeches and his “read my

lips” statement, which I thought was very out of character for him—he was self-assured, and he had a **terrific** work ethic and background: ambassador, CIA director, congressman, party executive.⁶ He really had structured his education and work history to know what he was doing. Jim Edgar: intern in the legislature, and working for NCSL in their early stages; then working in the legislative office for Thompson, having been a legislator; then working his way into the secretary of state’s office—he built his career. I think he always had that confidence in himself, but not overconfidence. I think President Bush, Jim Edgar, and my dad always had enough leeway to acknowledge other people’s viewpoints.

My dad, I never really gave advice to. You kind of observe and push back a little bit when you’re a teenager, but I never really gave him advice. Bush, I wasn’t around long enough; I just worked on his campaign. When I first started working on his campaign, he would come to Springfield. I’d pick him up at the airport. He didn’t have Secret Service; he didn’t have anything. He had like one aide that was with him when he would come in. So I would spend a little time around him, close enough to observe what he was like, but I didn’t give him any advice either; (DePue laughs) I was just kind of going with whatever the campaign asked of me.

But with Edgar, with Jim, I was around for eighteen years as an employee. When I started with him, I was traveling with him and observing him all the time, because I was out on the road the first year with him. I think I spent more time with him than his wife did probably, the first year after he was appointed secretary of state. I listened to Brenda’s interview that you recorded the other day, and that’s what she was saying: he was just gone all the time.⁷ We were going around the state. We were in Chicago; we hit all the media markets on a regular basis, you know, Rockford, Peoria, Quincy, Carbondale-Marion area, and then every place in between when there was a county fair or whatever. So I spent a lot of time with him and I could observe. But the thing that impressed me was, every now and then I’d say, “Here’s my feedback on that speech you gave.” And he wouldn’t really acknowledge it then, but later on you’d see subtle changes in how he would deliver remarks, or even if it was a suggestion on something else, style or substance or whatever. He’s not gregarious, he’s not going to overreact, and he’s not going

⁶ George H.W. Bush served as UN ambassador from 1971 to 1973. “Read my lips” refers to Bush’s 1988 presidential nomination acceptance speech, which contained the line: “And the Congress will push me to raise taxes, and I’ll say no, and they’ll push, and I’ll say no, and they’ll push again, and I’ll say, to them, ‘Read my lips: no new taxes.’” On June 26, 1990, in the midst of deadlocked budget negotiations, President Bush issued a statement calling for a mixture of policies, including “tax revenue increases,” to reduce the federal budget deficit. On September 30, 1990, the Bush administration reached a budget agreement with Congressional leaders, an agreement that included increased taxes. *Washington Post*, June 27, 1990; October 1, 1990; and October 9, 1990. John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project*, Santa Barbara, CA, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25955>.

⁷ Brenda Edgar, August 17, 2010. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted by Mark DePue as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

to backslap you, but I always thought he listened; he acknowledged people's thoughts. And I think that's important. When you get overly consumed with your sense of self and what **you** can do and ignore everybody else's opinion, you get in trouble. I think our past governor [Rod Blagojevich] maybe is a prime example of this. I think Jim had a very good sense of that, and I think Bush and my dad did too; it helps guide you.

DePue: Here's what I hear you saying, and I'll try to put it in a thumbnail here: all three of these were organizational men but also very comfortable in their own skin. Would that be a fair way of summing it up?

Zehnder: I think so, I think so. And justifiably confident. I mean, they had worked hard. Bush came from a wealthy family, but Edgar and my dad didn't come from wealth, and [all three] had to work their way into what they achieved. I think they did that incrementally, gradually, but conservatively.

DePue: You were in Disney World, and then you came back to Illinois.

Zehnder: Yeah. I was down there and I thought, Okay, what am I going to do? Where am I going to go? A friend of mine, Tom Pape—we roomed together for a short period at Western, he's a native of Springfield—was in law school. We kind of kept in touch, and we were saying, I'm ready to make a change. He had just dropped out of law school, so he decided not to finish up. We were talking, and he said, "Let's go out to California. Let's just go out to San Diego. We hear great things about San Diego. Let's head out there together." So I said, "Good, okay, let's meet in Springfield." I had traded my car for a van with somebody that I worked with down in Florida.

DePue: It wasn't a Volkswagen van, was it?

Zehnder: No, no, no, it was a Dodge Tradesman 200. Packed up all my stuff, came back to Springfield. Traveled around a little bit on my way here, but I got here, and Tom had just received an offer from the secretary of state's office. Alan Dixon was secretary of state. So he thought he wanted to do that. I think that's how the story went. But anyhow, he said, "Maybe you ought to look around here." By the time I got to Springfield I was just about out of money, and I thought, Okay. So I actually started waiting tables here in Springfield while I was looking around. Tom's family—he has a great family—kind of took me in as one of their own for the few weeks that I was here.

We were hearing people coming back from San Diego or California that couldn't get jobs, and maybe it wasn't the nirvana that we had thought it might be if we were going to go out there. So I started looking around. Some people that I knew from Western were working for Horace Mann insurance company, so I interviewed over there for a personnel position and got it and decided to stay in Springfield. Tom and I rented a house from another fellow who was involved in politics here in Springfield, Tony Leone, who ended up

later being the clerk of the House and very active in Republican politics. Tom was my roommate, and was very involved in Democratic politics. We rented this house, we lived together, and I started working at Horace Mann. I worked there for four years in personnel and then a management training program, and then as a supervisor.

I just started getting involved in politics. Tony Leone ran for county clerk, and I said, “Hey, you know, if I can help you out...” and he said, “Good, you’re my campaign manager. (DePue laughs) But he also had a guy who was **very** involved in politics as his strategist—Todd Domke. I don’t know if that rings a bell. Todd ran some aggressive campaigns, but he ended up going out to Massachusetts and I think ran two campaigns against Ted Kennedy. But it was a whirlwind. These guys were very creative and coming up with all these ideas, and we ended up running kind of a wild campaign. I was like, **Wow**. But I was doing what I could. Tony’s mother was very active in the local party, and Tony said, “Why don’t you sit in on the meetings when they have something, to represent me? Go to the meetings?” So I’d be sitting in on these things in Sangamon County Republican politics, and I just found it all fascinating. Tony lost the race, but I thought, Boy, I kind of enjoyed that.

That was ’78, and in ’79 I said, I’m looking for a candidate, just to help out, just to stay involved, because I enjoy that process. I read an article by Al Manning, who was the political writer for the *State Journal-Register*. He had this little column about this guy who was an ambassador who had worked at the CIA and had some interesting background and characteristics. It was George [H. W.] Bush. And it was just that column. I couldn’t find anything else about Bush. Ended up going to the library and just looking up periodical information about him. He was apparently running for president, but he wasn’t anywhere on the screen. I had met Janis Cellini when she was working at the Lawrence Adult Center, social services. I was on the board for the Youth Service Bureau, and that’s how I got to know Janis, through non-political connections; it was kind of social service efforts.

DePue: And this is the sister of Bill Cellini.

Zehnder: This is the sister of Bill. And I said to Janis, “I read this thing about Bush, and I don’t know anybody who’s doing anything. Could you see if you could find out who was doing something?” So Janis talked to Bill. Bill found out that the Lake County chairman, George Kangas, was organizing the Illinois campaign for George Bush. I said, “I’d be interested in talking to him.” I can’t remember if I called them or asked them to call me. Right about that time, I changed jobs. I had interviewed for a position at the Capital Development Board. When I was a supervisor at Horace Mann, I just was ready to make a change, and so I was looking around, and this thing at CDB was mentioned.

Actually, I think the guy who mentioned it to me was Jerry Curl, who was a professor out at SSU, and I was taking some coursework out there.⁸

DePue: In what?

Zehnder: Counseling, kind of expanding my background in psychology. I thought maybe I wanted to do something with that. I took some gerontology courses, then I took some counseling courses. Actually I was thinking about getting into the—they had the independent study, so you could make your own curriculum. I didn't finish it up; once I got involved in the politics side of things, I kind of lost the amount of time that I had to do those things. But I went over and interviewed, got a job at CDB, right about the time I was talking to the Bush people about volunteering. So I started at CDB, spent two weeks meeting the people and learning what they did; then I had two weeks looking at the projects I was going to be overseeing.

Meantime, the Bush people came down, went to the Stratton Building, went down to the Rathskeller in the capitol to talk to these folks. I figured they must have thought I was connected because I was working in the capitol complex and I had some campaign background. They said, Okay, why don't you just come work for us, and we'll give you half of what you're making for a lot more hours that you're going to have to work for an effort that probably has a good chance of lasting until March, when the primary was. And I said, Boy, that's an opportunity I couldn't give up. (DePue laughs)

So at that point I gave my two-week notice at CDB. I keep saying I was probably the shortest-term person leaving on good terms, because everybody thought, Well, if you're going to go do a presidential campaign, that can't be—

DePue: He'll be back.

Zehnder: And I hadn't gotten in too deep at CDB to disrupt anything.

DePue: I want to ask you a question here, Ken, before we get too much farther. It sounds to me that if you had read an article about a moderate Democrat who had impeccable credentials to be running for president, you might have been equally intrigued?

Zehnder: Yes. Yeah, that is true. That's like I said, from my grandparents, one family was Republican and one family was Democrat. I never considered myself a partisan person. I was a player and active in the Republican Party for years, but I never felt that I was that partisan. Frankly, I never voted a straight general ticket, but I've always voted in the Republican primary.

⁸ Sangamon State University, now the University of Illinois at Springfield. Curl was Director of Advising and Counseling.

DePue: But certainly you're hanging around these people—and this is jumping ahead a little bit—many of whom, I'm sure, were intensely partisan.

Zehnder: Yes.

DePue: Did that bother you to see that?

Zehnder: No. You know that's there, and if you follow the General Assembly in Illinois, it's readily apparent. But you'll also hear the stories of how much camaraderie there can be, has been, and is, but these days, somewhat more limited. At least that's the impression, it's more limited.

DePue: Let's take it back to joining as a brand new member of the George H.W. Bush campaign team.

Zehnder: A guy who came down to help—he spent a couple weeks here—named Ron Kaufman ended up being the political director for the White House, I think in Bush's last two years as president. Ron came in, and he had these little pins made up; it looked like a 3 percent sign on this little lapel pin, but it was actually a 3G/B. It was for those people who had joined the payroll for George Bush before he was 3 percent in the national polls. I had that little pin, and that's one of my all-time favorites. I've got a lot of political pins, but that little 3G/B percentage is one of my favorites.

So the Bush folks, Kangas and his folks, kind of said, You've got central Illinois. Just go out and do what you can. Get a coordinator in each county; talk to the local officials. If we're going to have events, you got to plan them; try to get us represented in parades; get signs out when they get you signs. Trying to get signs from a national campaign for local distribution is always a tough effort, especially when they're only 3 or 5 percent in the polls. But I loved it. I just went out and met people. On one of those campaign swings—because I had basically from Quincy to Danville—I headed over to Charleston, and there was this dinner for a woman named Hazel Watson, who, as you know by now from doing these interviews, was a mentor of Jim Edgar's.⁹ I go in there, and I put a brochure at all the dinner places, trying to meet some people but basically handing out brochures. There's a little fuss up in the front of the room and stuff, and I talked to somebody, and they said, "Oh, that's Jim Edgar. He's the legislative director for Jim Thompson." I could just tell, the way people reacted and watching him come into the room—observation, again, the psychology of people—people react to him very well. Again, I saw him as confident, but also the way he interacted with people. And I got to say hello. I said hello and got acquainted a little bit. But it made an impression. It definitely made an impression. So I remember that distinctly.

⁹ On Watson, see Brenda Edgar, August 17, 2010, and Jim Edgar, May 21, 2009 and May 28, 2009.

Then later that year, Bush campaign is over; he loses. I start hanging around the Findley folks, volunteering. Well, after the March primary, I went out and worked as a volunteer in Pennsylvania for Bush, stayed with my sister who was still living out there.

DePue: You mean a non-paid position?

Zehnder: Non-paid position, yeah. I covered the expenses myself. Financially it was a **disastrous** year, but it propelled my career, basically, because I came back from that and started hanging around the Findley campaign, helping out there. They said finally, "We'll pay you; you're around here so much we're going to pay you." So they put me on the payroll. That was the last winning congressional campaign for Paul Findley.

DePue: That was what, 1980 still?

Zehnder: That would have been '80. Finished up there. He won, but he didn't have any local jobs available. He said there was a possibility of something out in DC, but for what they were going to pay me, I didn't think I could live in DC. So I'm looking around again for a job, and it's post-election, December. At that point, my parents had moved to Tokyo with Caterpillar. He was transferred by Caterpillar over to Caterpillar Mitsubishi.

So I was trying to figure out what to do. There were rumors that Jim Edgar might get appointed secretary of state. He was one of a number of candidates for the secretary of state's position, including George Ryan. I remember going to see Jim. I'm trying to think of the timing of this; it was before anything was official with the secretary of state position. They set up the appointment. I went in to see him, and he said, "Come on in and talk." I walked into his office, and as soon as I saw him, he said, "I've just been called down to see Governor Thompson, but is this about a job?" And I said, "Well, I wasn't going to be that blunt, but yes." It struck me that he wasn't abrasive, and it wasn't an affront, he was just getting down to business real quick. And he said, "Okay, we'll set up another time and we'll talk about it." So it impressed me that he was brass tacks, right down to it, short, but in my sense, it was approachable. I mean, he was very approachable and I just liked the way he responded. We came back about a week or several days later, and sat down and probably talked for forty-five minutes about politics and what I had been doing and what my interests were and everything else, and just a good political conversation. But that first two-minute encounter, probably I remember that more distinctly than the rest of the conversation.

So I'm lined up to go visit my parents in Tokyo in December.

DePue: I would imagine by this time, your dad's saying—

Zehnder: You need a job. (laughter)

DePue: When are you going to figure out what you're going to do with your life?

Zehnder: He knew I was excited and having fun. I think at that time I had borrowed some money when I put my down payment on a house I had bought. He was very generous in giving me some leeway on my repayments on the loan. But I'm going to fly over to Tokyo. The morning that I'm heading out to the airport, I open the newspaper. Headline: Jim Edgar selected as secretary of state. So I'm on the plane. I'm writing letters to everybody I know, trying to do the résumé thing, get everything set up, and I'm sending them to everybody that I know that knows Jim Edgar. We have a layover in San Francisco; I put them in the mail in San Francisco, go to Tokyo. I'm there for two weeks not knowing what's going on. I didn't hear from anybody, talk to anybody.

When I fly back, there's a letter in the mailbox from Jim Reilly, who was on the transition team, saying, Come on in, we want to talk to you. I did. When I first came in I talked to Joan—Schilf at the time, later Joan Walters—and Joan said, "Well, we need somebody to travel, to go on the road and travel with him, kind of be his aide." Frankly, I couldn't think of a better opportunity for somebody—you know, since I really didn't know him. When I got the letter, I thought, Well, maybe they want me to run the driver's license facility or something. I didn't have any idea what I might be able to do for them, but when they said, "We want you to go out and travel with Jim," I said, Oh. I thought that was a great opportunity, and that was the start of an eighteen-year career.

DePue: I'm going to pull you back just a little bit because I want to ask you a couple more questions about Paul Findley: who Paul Findley is at that time and what drew you to him.

Zehnder: He was a local congressman.

DePue: And can you describe the district at that time? I mean, these lines keep moving.

Zehnder: Yeah, it really has moved, and then in subsequent years they've dropped a couple of the congressional districts. At that time I think it was the twentieth congressional district. It ran from the Alton area to Springfield to Quincy. That was kind of the area that it covered. Because I had been working all central Illinois that year, I got to know Don Norton, who was his chief Springfield guy, and a few other folks. When I came back and the Bush primaries were over, I just... I knew of Paul and his great constituency service. I'm trying to think. I think he was running against Dave Robinson at the time. It was a tough campaign. The Palestinian–Jewish issue was a predominant issue in the campaign and ultimately, I think, impacted Paul's reputation enough that the subsequent campaign he had an even more difficult time and ended up losing the next race. But I always thought Paul was a solid

guy, been around a long time. I didn't see him that much. I mean, he was at the events and around the office, but mainly I was working field work, and it was just probably from July till the election, till November. Don was a good old guy and a hard worker, and it was more campaign work—let's put up signs, let's do parades, let's do all this stuff you need to do.

But it was interesting in watching how the Palestinian issue—and Paul was a very strong advocate for the Palestinian cause in a way very controversial, I guess, to people who were involved or interested in that issue or aware of it. I think overall there was some balance to his approach, but it didn't appear that way. Talk about a lightning rod, divisive issue—that was, and remains to this day, as one of those. So observing it was an education. I said earlier, when I go back to Western and the radicals versus the conservatives back then and how some of those issues aren't resolved, I always felt like it was an education. I was watching, I was observing, but I was never a partisan in that issue either. On the Palestinian and Jewish issue, I think you can make arguments both ways, and people do, and there are strong differences of opinion. The **right** course, I think, is to find resolution, hopefully bring those issues down to a simmer. People could be much better off and not have the divisiveness that was going on. But I don't know where or how you were going to get there, because it's tough.

DePue: That seems to be a peculiar issue to kind of hook your reputation to if you're a Republican from central Illinois, when you've got practically no Jewish constituency at all.

Zehnder: But Paul was very involved in foreign affairs and the foreign affairs committee. I'm not sure what his position on the committee was at that time. But I know that he had been over there, he had followed it closely, he thought there were injustices. I'll give that to Paul, he was **very strong** in his standing up against what he felt was the injustice and for the rights of the Palestinians. And just knowing him for his service in the constituency and the way he ran his office and what he did locally, I had a lot of respect for him.

DePue: Put you on the spot once more, since we're talking about this 1980 timeframe, and this is a crucial time period: you're going to hook your career onto Jim Edgar shortly after this. You were a supporter of George Bush. Ronald Reagan ends up getting the nomination and winning the election in a landslide, but it wasn't known to be a landslide until maybe just a few days before. Your opinion of Ronald Reagan's political positions?

Zehnder: That campaign was interesting, and Illinois, or at least central Illinois, was not the easiest place to be running a guy from Houston's campaign. I never felt like I was running the campaign; I was doing what I could. But you had Howard Baker, who was from Illinois; you had John Anderson, who was from Illinois—or, no, I guess Howard Baker's wife was from Illinois.

DePue: Yeah, he's from Tennessee.

Zehnder: Yeah, his wife was from Illinois. John Anderson was from Illinois; he was in that race. Reagan had Illinois roots. And here I am working for George Bush. So I knew it was a tough campaign, but I was never enamored with Reagan. When Bush ended up on the ticket, I didn't really give any thought to trying to stay with the campaign for the general election. That's probably why I looked around and ended up working for Findley. I admire Reagan for what he accomplished, but I was never... He was probably unique, though—I think he started out as a Democrat—he always seemed more partisan Republican to me than was my... Anyway, I just didn't get involved.

DePue: So let's get into actually becoming the travel aide for the secretary of state at the time. What does that job entail, and did you have a good sense of what that job meant when you first started?

Zehnder: I guess, yeah. When they told me what I was going to do, I said, Oh. I thought, great, because I had been on the road enough and doing enough of the being around politics and seeing how things worked and just meeting with enough public officials that I had a sense of what I would do. He interviewed me on a Tuesday, I think it was. It was the day that he got sworn in as secretary of state. I came into the office for the final interview and sat with him in his office before he went up to get sworn in. He said, "Okay, here's what we're going to do, and I'll call you later on and tell you what we're going to pay you." I think what I asked was pretty ridiculously low, so I think to meet the personnel requirements, he paid me a little more than I actually asked for. But I started two days later, and we went on the road.

The first thing I did, I think, when I came into the office, they said, "You've got to go over and write your job description." And I did. I went over to personnel; I had a personnel background, so I kind of knew how to put it together and what I thought I was going to do. I knew you're going to be out on the road. It's going to be a lot of logistics, a lot of planning, scheduling, and carrying messages. Or at least I think that's what I thought at the time. We went on the road, and I think I felt that he probably knew more of what he was getting into than I knew what I was getting into, because he had been around it for a much longer time. Yeah.

DePue: A quick aside here. At that point in time—it's early 1981—did you have a sense of his ambitions, what he wanted to do with his career?

Zehnder: He mentioned at times—and I don't know how much later or when we were talking about this—but Jim mentioned that he had talked to Thompson much earlier, when he had left his House seat to go work as legislative director; he had a conversation with Thompson about opportunities and what his ambitions were. So I think somebody who gets that appointment, you know that he's going somewhere, and you know he wouldn't be in that position if

there wasn't development, ambition, kind of direction. You just don't get those opportunities. They're so rare that you don't... Maybe at times people pick somebody out of the blue, but you could tell with Jim that that wasn't the case, that he had really geared himself. At some point later on we had that conversation, so I knew he had kind of expressed his interest in something like that.

But for me, I think at that time it was like, Hey, I get to stay in this arena that I've really enjoyed. I don't care what it is they want me to do; I'm going to do it. The fact that I could be with him on the road and knew how politics operated a little bit and felt like I admired this guy—I mean, didn't maybe know him well enough to admire him—but I knew there was opportunity there. I was happy to do whatever it was. So we went on the road, and it was... Logistics and scheduling and traveling are not all that fun. It's exciting at first because you're going to strange places, you're going to a lot of events. But I had been going to events now during that whole previous year. You're just trying to get a sense of the layout of Illinois.

I could tell, especially after a couple months, what Jim's process was. He knew he had an election coming up in a couple years, so he had a window to get exposure, and he made it pretty clear the things that he wanted to have done: he wanted to hit the media markets on a regular basis; he liked to methodically work a room when he went to an event and shake everybody's hand, say hello, and he did that throughout his career, especially secretary of state; and he wanted follow-up notes. We'd get back in the car or in the plane after being somewhere, and he'd sit down and say, "Okay, get ready a thank-you note to so-and-so, a thank-you note to so-and-so." Early on, either he would write it—we had little cards that he could hand-write a note to them—or he'd have me type something up or have a whole list of things that could be typed up, and he can just sign them or put a little P.S. or something on them. He was very good at that. I always tell people he was not easy to work for, because he wanted things a certain way. He wanted his briefings detailed, he wanted to know what he was going into, wanted some background work, and he wanted follow-up after the event. He wanted to make sure those people were thanked, acknowledged, and anybody that asked for anything got some feedback. That was me. I was trying to plan ahead what we were going into, and I was trying to clean up afterwards, making sure that all the notes got out and everything else.

The other part of the job was, he's out there speaking to groups, he's out meeting folks. The staff's calling me, and he's giving me directions when we're together. So I'm the liaison between everybody back in Springfield—and you've talked to those folks, so you know how much was going on back there. They were getting settled into the whole office structure and the responsibilities and the planning and everything else, and I'm the guy out on the road, so it's kind of that funnel. It wasn't the easiest thing to do. I sometimes got into heated discussions a little bit with them. I think people

took issue sometimes with me because I might have been a little rushed, which they took as being a little curt, when I would call to the office and I'd say, "He wants this, this, this, and this."

DePue: That was exactly the way it was expressed to you, I would imagine.

Zehnder: Well, yeah. I mean, I was getting it thrown to me, and then I knew they were trying to get messages through to him. You know, we didn't have cell phones, so it was all when I could get to a pay phone and go through all this stuff. And we were on the road; I mean, we were just moving all the time. There were some people who took a little issue with me. I remember after several months I could tell that I was in the middle, and I went to him and said, "Listen, if you want me to resign," you know. He said, "No, not now." He said, "They're okay. I just"—and I think he acknowledged that maybe he needed to address some of their issues more than having them just go through, trying to be the in between here.

DePue: Who is the "he" you're referring to?

Zehnder: Jim. Jim would say, "Okay, I need to talk to the staff back in Springfield." I think he acknowledged that maybe I was having to pass messages too much, and when people took issue, it was because they weren't getting the attention from the principal, being Jim.

DePue: This is the classic kill the messenger?

Zehnder: It was not so much "kill the messenger" as that the messenger's not getting me what I want to get through. But he was very good. I think he acknowledged that he needed to make some changes and that things would work out. That was, I think, within the first six months that that was going on, so.

DePue: Was he telling you that you were doing a good job? Were you getting positive feedback in that way?

Zehnder: Jim never really—occasionally he would acknowledge that, but I've heard this said on other interviews, and it's exactly true: he would use the line, "If I didn't want you here, you wouldn't be here." That was kind of the recognition. They talked about his sense of humor, and it wasn't humor. He has two stories that he always told that I wanted to weave in this exchange sometime, two stories that he told forever during the secretary of state years, and that was his humor. But he entertained himself (laughs) by pushing a little bit, little slight jabs, just kind of getting on you a little bit. That was his entertainment. Since he wasn't naturally gregarious and he wasn't a backslapper, he also wasn't going to say, "Hey, what a wonderful job you're doing." You knew it when you did a good job, and you also knew it when you did a bad job. But on the flip side of that, he would get angry, but he never was demonstratively angry. In the years that I worked for him, there was one time I can remember when he slammed the door. We were up in the Chicago

office and scheduling had screwed up; he was mad, and he really slammed the door. That's the only time I can think of. In eighteen years, I heard him maybe use three hells or damns or something that was out of character for him. But he wasn't overly complimentary verbally, nor was he abusive or angry demonstratively, he just wanted things a certain way, and he appreciated good work. And I guess that's not a bad way to be.

DePue: Do you have a sense of the condition of the secretary of state's office when he got to the position? He had been appointed, as you mentioned, by Governor Thompson. It's normally an elective office, and it's one of the prestigious elective offices in the state. But Alan Dixon gets a chance to be a senator and vacates that office, so Thompson has this plum appointment that he can make. What condition did Alan Dixon leave the secretary of state's office in?¹⁰

Zehnder: I think there were things going on. I remember we hadn't been in that office for less than a month or so, and the folks from the facilities side came walking in and said, "Okay, now here's the plans." The secretary of state's office itself, his personal office, Jim always said he thought it was the largest single office in the free world. You could almost play tennis in there. It's a big office. But they came in with these plans that were going to move him down to the other end of the complex, and the chief of staff's office was going to be the new office for the secretary of state. They were going to divide this whole thing up. And it was very ornate; it's just a great space. They were going to divide it up into I don't know how many different spaces, and they were going to spend several hundred thousand dollars to tear it apart and redo it. I think his line was, "It may be ridiculous to have this big an office, but it's obscene to spend that kind of money to tear it apart."

He used it very functionally. He had a conference table in there, which remains there today, that can seat twenty people, I think. It had this nice seating area where he could entertain people that were coming in to see him. He had a lot of interest groups come in and visit with him. In my later years at secretary of state, I was doing some intergovernmental things, and I used to bring a lot of groups in that he would want to meet with. It was just a great office to really work out of. I think that was one of the changes that they had. There were things in operation that Jim just had to alter somewhat. I think Dixon's office had a pretty good reputation of getting things done and operating.

Some of the changes in that office that Edgar ended up making were significant, but I can't tell you how good or bad they were under the previous administration. I think Jim tended to emphasize his functions as state librarian. He took that to heart because he had a very sincere interest in reading, and

¹⁰ Upon taking office as secretary of state, Edgar was almost immediately informed of a federal investigation that was then underway. For the actions he and his administrators took in response, see Jim Edgar, June 15, 2009, 335-336 and 341-345; Joan Walters, July 16, 2009, 64-71; and Al Grosboll, May 20, 2009, 25-30.

history, and being a historian. The index department, he paid some attention to. But also architecture—between not tearing apart his office, he also took a great interest in the new state library and its design when that eventually got built. I think that was mentioned in one of the earlier interviews. The license plate division, they ended up changing, and I think Al Grosboll was very instrumental in this part. When we went to making plates at the Rehabilitation Services in Decatur, that was a major change, because they had always been made in the prisons.¹¹ So there were certain things that he did differently than Dixon's office, but I can't tell you how well-run it was previously. I think Dixon had a good reputation.

DePue: What you're describing so far, though, doesn't sound like one of the plum jobs in Illinois politics, one of the most powerful positions in the state. What is it about Illinois's secretary of state that made it such an important position?

Zehnder: It was a good political platform because it's a unique combination. Most states, the secretary of state's office handles elections. That's probably their number-one task. A few of them also have state libraries, and then they're the recorder of the documents. So being the recorder of documents and having the state seal is an important function but one of the smaller functions. In Illinois, since you had license plates and driver's licenses, you also had facilities in every county and employees in every county. You had the state library, which was statewide, interactive; you supported the local libraries, you interacted with them. It adds a whole different element that Jim really was active in. They got to know him, and they were very supportive politically, I think. They just supported him, and that helped him governmentally and politically. So the size of it—I mean, we used to go to secretary of state meetings, and I always staffed those meetings as they were held each year. A lot of secretaries of state went on to become lieutenant governors, governors, senators—people that Jim got well-acquainted with. But we'd walk in with troopers. Nobody else had troopers. It was always like, This is a big deal.

DePue: Were they state troopers or were they secretary of state police?

Zehnder: State troopers. His personal detail was state troopers. That's another function of the secretary of state's office: you had your own investigations, because of the license plates, driver's licenses issue. You had the capitol complex, which in Sangamon County was huge because of the number of jobs. That's another area Jim always took pride in. George Fleischli did a great job in making sure the grounds were spotless. There was a lot of renovation going on during the years that Jim was secretary of state, but he took particular pride in making sure the capitol and the grounds and the other capitol complex buildings were well taken care of, and I think that was a source of pride.

¹¹ Edgar, June 15, 2009, 90-91, and Al Grosboll, June 4, 2009.

DePue: One of the things you have already suggested is it's a wonderful place if you are interested in greasing the skids of a political career with patronage, and it has gotten a reputation over the years for—

Zehnder: Well, it had; it had that reputation. I mean, before, they used to wholesale move people out and bring new crew in. You had exempt positions, but because of *Rutan* and other court decisions, you had lost the ability to make wholesale change. And I'll credit Jim: he retained a lot of the top personnel and management personnel that Dixon had in place.¹² It was like, if you do your job... I think Jim acknowledged those folks could do as much good as bringing in somebody new, because they knew the position, they knew what the work is. I have talked before about bipartisanship, and if you treat those people well, they're going to be as loyal to you and influence a lot of people not of your party because of the way you treated them. And I think he did that very well. People who weren't doing the job, he was more than happy to try to get rid of them. People who were doing their job, he wanted to acknowledge, regardless of their background. But you're always trying to bring your people in.

The thing about being a political platform—he could go out to a fair or an event or whatever, but he always had a facility in practically every county, and multiple [facilities] in other counties like Cook; he could go around and visit those folks, kind of check on things. It gives you an opportunity to be in that area. He could go anywhere in the state and have that reason to be there, folks to meet, and encourage them. When I later on became director of revenue, that's one of the things that I tried to do. Okay, we have offices; I'm going to try to get out and meet those people. A lot of secretary of state personnel had not seen a secretary of state for a lot of years. When I became director of revenue, I kind of got the same feedback. You go out to those offices that are not Springfield, and they're really pleased to see you because they don't get that acknowledgement. There's always things you pick up; you learn from those. And Jim, wherever he went, he was always talking to local officials, the people that came in to meet him, the facility managers, and he would get good feedback.

DePue: I think during one of the trips that you took, there was an incident with an airplane you need to tell us about.

¹² *Rutan v. Republican Party of Illinois*, 497 U.S. 62 (1990). By a 5-4 vote, the decision extended the rule of *Elrod v. Burns*, 427 U.S. 347 (1976) and *Branti v. Finkel*, 445 U.S. 507 (1980), determining “that promotions, transfers, and recalls after layoffs based on political affiliation or support are an impermissible infringement on the First Amendment rights of public employees.” Justice Brennan wrote the majority opinion. On *Rutan*, see Mike Lawrence, April 1, 2009; Gene Reineke, December 7, 2009; Al Grosboll, July 23, 2009; and Kirk Brown, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 22, 2009. For Edgar's philosophy on managing his personnel as secretary of state, his expectations for their performance, and his attitude toward the holdovers he inherited, see Edgar, June 15, 2009, 334-336 and 339-344.

Zehnder: Yeah. That was a campaign trip, actually. It was a non-state plane. We were taking off from Springfield and we were going over to the Quad Cities. Going to do an event. It was Jim and Brenda and myself, and I think two troopers. I think Lou Blackbee was on the plane. I don't know if it was Bill McFarland or Jim O'Donnell—a couple of the troopers were on it, and I'm not sure who the last person was. But takeoff, we're flying a little bit. I remember looking down out of the window. We've been flying for about five minutes, and I see an airport. And I'm thinking, Hmm, I wonder—does Jacksonville have an airport that big? It wasn't. We had been circling Springfield airport because they couldn't get the landing gear to come up.

So the pilot circled around a little bit more, and they talked to the tower, and the pilot came back and said, "We're having a little difficulty here. We're going to do a touch-and-go, and just try to hit the landing gear, just touch it, and that should jar it a little bit, and we think that will enable us to bring it up. So we're just going to do a touch-and-go." They came in for their touch, and they touched heavy; the landing gear on the one side of the plane just collapsed, and then the other landing gear collapsed, and you could see the sparks flying over the windshield because the propellers were hitting the runway, and then we slid off into a field. As this was all going on, we were saying, "Okay, we got to get out of here real quick." As I recall, the troopers jumped to the front of the plane. The door is right behind the pilots, and I think the troopers opened the door, and we were kind of getting everybody. Brenda went first, and then everybody else followed out. We got out on the tarmac, on the field, and then went over to the runway, because we didn't know what was going to happen with the plane. But it happened so quick, you really didn't have time to get frightened. I think we were a little bit apprehensive about doing the touch-and-go, but no expectations that was going to happen.

So we're all on the runway, safe, and the plane is sitting there with these blades, the propellers that are just curved forward. As they hit, they just bent around. They looked like hooks instead of propellers. And I thought to myself, This maybe is some publicity. I went over to the hanger, and I called Mike Walters, who was the press secretary. I said, "Mike, here's what's going on. Here's the story." They had the emergency crews come out from the airport right away, but the press wasn't far behind. So they got some pictures and got it in the papers and stuff. I'm here to help out wherever I can, and publicity is publicity.

DePue: (laughs) And this would be good publicity?

Zehnder: It wasn't going to hurt you. It was exposure, and at that point, you wanted to get any exposure you could.

DePue: I take it this is the 1984 campaign.

Zehnder: Yeah. Well, that whole period from when he got appointed until the election in... '84 or '82?

DePue: Excuse me, you're right, 1982.

Zehnder: It would have been in November '82, so you had a short window there, and that was all trying to get as much coverage and enough exposure to offset being what some considered a new guy in politics.¹³

DePue: So he basically gets to office and already has to be in campaign mode to make his name known.

Zehnder: He was, yes.

DePue: Were you still, by 1982, the travel aide, or had you moved?

Zehnder: During those years and in the early period, I think everybody was doing a little bit of everything. Even when I was traveling, I was helping to do some of the scheduling, and when he was in Springfield, I was working with a couple folks. Ann Duvall—or at that time Ann Stake—was doing the scheduling and some advance work. We were all pitching in. Mike Walters was doing some of the speechwriting, but we were all trying to help write things for different events that he was going to—do notes, do advance. So mostly I was on the road. I ended up transitioning into scheduling more over the years, and that was something that I stayed in off and on through the entire secretary of state years.

Steve Schnorf was doing the senior citizens' division of the secretary of state's office. I had an interest in gerontology and had taken some coursework there, and I said, "That's something I'd be interested in." So after the campaign I think Jim finally said, "I'm going to give you something else to do." I went over and succeeded Steve in the secretary of state's division. I did that for, I don't think it was quite a year, I think maybe eight months or something, and eventually Jim wanted me back to do more of the scheduling and those activities. Ben Polk, who was a retired legislator—I think he was retired at that point; maybe he was still just leaving the legislature—then succeeded me in handling the senior citizens' division.

So I came back and picked up more scheduling. I moved my office from the capitol over to the Howlett Building, which was then the Centennial Building, and coordinated scheduling for a few more years.

¹³ On August 16, 1981, Edgar and his wife Brenda were traveling with Zehnder to a fundraiser in Moline for State Rep. Ben Polk (R-Moline). When the plane's landing gear would not retract shortly after takeoff from Springfield, controllers ordered the plane to return. It did so, and the still-stuck gear collapsed on touchdown, sending the plane skidding off the runway. *Chicago Tribune*, August 17, 1981.

DePue: This is the timeframe also that the ERA battle, the ever-ongoing battle in Illinois on ERA, was finally culminating, and 1982 was the last year for that. One of the battlegrounds was that capitol building. Here's Secretary of State Edgar; he's responsible for it, and it sounds like your office was in that building.

Zehnder: It was. I'm not sure when they had the—

DePue: It was spring of 1982 when the final battle occurred.

Zehnder: I'm not sure exactly if I was still there or over in the Centennial Building. Because I wasn't around—I mean, I was well aware that there was stuff going on and that the women had chained themselves, and then the pig's-blood-splattering thing that they did to stain some of the Capitol. But I wasn't involved in that at all, just aware of it.

DePue: Tell us about the job of scheduler. One of the things I'm interested in is, does the scheduler control access to the boss?

Zehnder: In certain environments. Scheduling primarily was looking at the schedule, making phone calls to areas that he either wanted to get into or that wanted him to come. What were the events, what was the program or what was the need, where had he been before; then establishing the context or responding to the invitations, doing the correspondence, plotting it out. I think to this day his schedule stays busy, but back then it was crazy, and there were a lot of demands. He tried to cover everything. So you had to coordinate all that and then make sure you do briefings: Who are the public officials? Who are the political people in that area that you might run into when you go there? What secretary of state office things are you going to do? Breakfast, lunch, dinner—how's that going to line up? Do we need to fill in some gaps? Because he wanted to stay busy; he wasn't just out touring. Then putting all that together so that he could be prepared before he went there. It's a lot of detail, and I don't know another public official that kept the kind of schedule he did around the state. Maybe internally, but I don't think anybody traveled the state into his facilities as much as he did, especially those first couple years.

He did Lincoln Day dinners. There were two stories. One was the last hanging in Johnson County and the other one was the two runners and the bear. I think I heard each of those stories about a thousand times.

DePue: This is your opportunity to tell them.

Zehnder: Well, okay. And he should tell them because he tells them better than anybody. But the first story was the last hanging in Johnson County. I'll really shorten it; I'll just hit the punch lines.

DePue: Before you get into it, these are told at political events?

Zehnder: He tells them everywhere. Yeah. He tells them at chamber lunches... Jim would always think like, Okay, where was I? This is something from observation: I think he's great on faces and places; names, not so much, but faces and places. He could run into somebody somewhere and he'd say, "Oh yeah, I saw you at the Lincoln County thing," or "I saw you at that chamber lunch over in Paxton, Illinois." He was just really good at remembering places and faces that he saw. He'd try to figure out where he was that he had told these jokes so he wouldn't be repeating himself. Again, that was kind of one of the things, when we'd go out—and this is after a couple years on the road—he's repeating enough places, going in for a second or third time, that he didn't want to repeat the same joke.

The last guy hanging story basically was about they had outlawed capital punishment by hanging. The last time they were going to be able to do this in Johnson County, the sheriff's thinking about running for mayor. So the condemned criminal gets up on the platform. Huge crowd in Vienna, downtown Vienna. The sheriff looks at the criminal and he looks out at the crowd, and he thinks, Man, what an opportunity. And he says to the criminal, "You have the right to say a few last words." The criminal says, "No, I don't have anything to say." And the sheriff says, "Well, if you're not going to use your time to say anything to this crowd out here, do you mind if I say something?" The condemned man looks at him and says, "Okay, but could you hang me first?" (DePue laughs)

So Jim turned that into an art form, that story, and told it forever. I heard it a long time. And it kept getting longer because he would add things in. He was very good at responding to the crowd, or the crowd reaction he would pick up on, so he'd enhance it a little bit. I think it started out with a relatively short story and ended up being a real long story. But he always got a great crowd reaction. He'd either use it to open up his remarks or to close his remarks.

In later years he told the one about the two hikers and the bear. That one ended up getting a lot of different pieces added to it, but the essence of the story—I've heard other people use this one—was two guys out hiking and they see a bear, and one guy pulls off his knapsack and sits down and starts pulling out his running shoes. The other guy says, "Hey, you're not going to outrun that bear." And the guy says, "Yeah, I don't have to; I just have to outrun you." So those were very capsulized versions of stories that he enhanced.

DePue: But we are talking about the same Jim Edgar who doesn't have a great reputation for public speaking, does he?

Zehnder: Here's where I think his strengths are in public speaking: a natural rapport with an audience in the sense that they felt what he was saying was real. He always wanted to have something to say. If he was trying to do a stem-winder,

political rah-rah, maybe he struggled with that because he wasn't that kind of person. But if he wanted to talk about something that was important to him—especially in the secretary of state years, DUI, or talking to librarian groups about the importance of the state library and reading, and he had a whole reading campaign—when he was talking about things that he was interested in and that meant something, he had good rapport with an audience. If he got up in front of a group of attorneys, there was an attorney convention or a professional group, CPAs, where he felt that he needed to talk about their issue that he didn't know about, or strictly political, and he could talk politics, he wasn't a stem-winder kind of guy. He liked issues.

Where I thought he was always the best was talking to media, because he actually interacted with them, and he liked that give and take. When you saw him meet with the press—I watch so many people on TV now, the politicians, and it's, Who can I talk over, or how can I avoid or evade? Jim never did that. I think Jim knew his issues and was solid enough on his points that he enjoyed the give-and-take with the media. In that context with an audience he did very well. Some people, I'm sure, consider secretary of state news not too exciting, or librarian issues and stuff. But he was real, and I think people appreciated that. I think his career and his reception and his reelection record demonstrates it.

DePue: Some of what we've been talking about here is Jim Edgar the politician. Tell me a little bit more about Jim Edgar the leader or manager of this big organization.

Zehnder: Organizationally I think his key talent was picking the right people for the right positions. He always said—and if you view his record, it was proven—that he knew how to balance who he had in what positions; where there were more political skills needed or more governmental skills needed, he had the right people. He had people that leaned both ways. I'd say Mike Lawrence, who had been a reporter and a policy person, and Joan Walters—I was fascinated by her interview that you conducted—she was a policy person. Then you had other people who had come from the more political background and had that kind of interest—Carter, with his legislative background, running campaigns.

DePue: Carter Hendren.

Zehnder: Carter Hendren, and other folks who have worked on a lot of campaigns that were in the office. And Janis, who had come from a political family and a political background. You had to have that balance, and Jim knew that you had to maintain the balance; that if you had all political folks and you let them do their own thing, that was going to upset the cart. If you strictly let the governmental folks run everything and you didn't take care of politics, you wouldn't be around in office long enough to do what your agenda was. So his key was picking those people and keeping the balance and getting those

people to interact enough to maintain. He would work through those people to get done what he wanted to. He would come into senior staff meetings—sometimes they ran themselves, but Jim would show up. He wouldn't always be in charge. You'd have the chief of staff sitting at the end of the table. Jim would come in and sit off—

DePue: And that was Joan Walters to begin with?

Zehnder: It was Joan initially. When she left to go out to the state of Washington, then Al Grosboll was the chief of staff. I think in one of the earlier interviews, they had that wrong: I think Al was chief of staff during the later part of the secretary of state's office. So they'd conduct the meetings, but Jim would come in, and he'd kind of sit off to the edge. He would observe, and he'd pitch in his observations, which everybody took to heart, but he wasn't one for actively playing the supervisor role. He would let his people do that. I think if he needed to take care of something, he'd tell somebody to take care of it, or **take care of it** [if he wanted to be emphatic], whoever else needed to be taken care of in terms of either disciplinary or change of direction or maybe adjustments. That's the way he managed. He wasn't a supervisor himself. He had the ultimate say, he made the final decision and made sure that those things got done, but frankly—again, talking about leading by example—he was out there doing what he needed to do, and nobody did it better. This has been repeated with everybody that you've talked to that's been close to him—he always seemed to know a little bit more about what was going on than you did, and he knew how to use that. He'd ask the question that you didn't have the answer for, and even if you had done everything else right, you knew that was going to happen, and it kept you on your toes.

DePue: How could you tell if he was a little upset about something?

Zehnder: (laughs) You'd never see the steam rising. He wasn't usually loud about it, but he was intense. I think maybe we both have had stress issues a time or two. I think he'd internalize it, and you could just feel, and he'd kind of do a little bit of a burn, maybe, but he'd want it corrected. He wanted things done right. So he'd bring it to your attention. He'd want this and he'd want that. I think the thing is, if you didn't do it or adjust to what he wanted and the way things should be done, you weren't in that position long-term. He'd ultimately move or make changes so that you were into something you could do appropriately. I think, again, he had a knack for picking the right people for the right positions, and for the most part, got it right. There were some things that had to be adjusted or changed, but overall I think that was a strong talent that he had.

DePue: Are there any particular stories that come to mind when you think about who he was, the kind of person to work for? Again, we're talking about the secretary of state years still.

Zehnder: I guess there's a lot; I'm just trying to think, coming up with them. The times that I really enjoyed doing the advance work, traveling with him around the state—it was all exciting and it was happening. But the secretary of state meetings: we'd go out of state and you'd get with his peers, the other secretaries of state, who I think he got well acquainted with and enjoyed that part, enjoyed the other secretaries, a lot of them. But it was also out of character. I mean, he was away from the attention and the focus. They were held all over the United States, I think two or three a year; they'd have a summer annual meeting and the winter meeting, which was the off meeting. When we'd go to those meetings, he'd unwind a little bit. Seeing him with his peers, I think that was something that he enjoyed, because he could relax somewhat, have a good exchange without having to be on stage. And when I was with him at those meetings, we were together so much people thought we were friends or buddies. While I respected him and I always enjoyed—well, I didn't always enjoy being with him. There were times. (laughter) I think when we were away at those meetings, he relaxed, and then we'd just go walking or we'd be with the troopers and we'd go... It's just a different situation and he's more relaxed. He was just a good person to be around. You could tell he enjoyed especially going out—we'd be out in the mountains or something, and he wanted to go hiking or biking or just go to see things. He was always interested in the areas that you were in. Usually the meetings were in state capitals or in scenic areas where they try to bring a pretty good crowd in, percentage of the secretaries, so they have nice meeting locations.

And that part of it, I just remember it being... I was on a panel once with him, representing the staff, and Jim and Brenda were talking to the other secretaries about family relationships and how you interact with staff. We were doing this presentation before other secretaries and their spouses. It was such a different—I mean, I never had anything like that, I think, in Springfield, just having that... I felt like maybe a part of the family, like, we're talking about how these interactions are and how you relate to each other, and it felt like family. It felt like you were talking to the other secretaries of state, a lot of whom we had gotten to know very well, and you were just sharing stories. I enjoyed that. Over eighteen years, there's a lot of events, and to just pick out a few is awfully tough to ask.

DePue: You described him, and practically everybody else I talked with described him as intense. That's one of the characteristics of Jim Edgar. So how did Jim Edgar relax?

Zehnder: We would go on different trips. In later years, I think more in the governor's years, he had developed an interest in horses, and I think that was one of his hobbies. Well, early on, I think the way that developed—it started out he was a standardbred fan. He'd go to the fairs, the county fairs.

DePue: Talking harness racing now.

Zehnder: Talking harness racing, standardbreds. He always really enjoyed that. He had told me stories about watching Secretariat the year that Secretariat won the Triple Crown and how he really got into that. We went to Lexington [Kentucky]. The Council of State Governments was based in Lexington. I was a staff person who worked with the Council of State Governments. We would go down there, and they ordinarily would have an event; sometimes they would have it at the horse park. There's a horse park in Lexington. They'd have it on the grounds of the University of Kentucky. That's where their headquarters was. My uncle lived in Lexington. They had a couple horses. But my cousins worked at one of the breeding farms. They had actually worked at a couple different breeding farms. So we were going down there, and I arranged for us to go out and visit the breeding farm. We visited several on different trips while we were down there, but one we went to was Secretariat's. And Jim may even have arranged for that one. But we went out to see Secretariat, and it was kind of a highlight. They bring Secretariat out, and he's heading over to the breeding barn. I had my camera with me, so I got a picture of Jim and Secretariat. The whole way through the secretary of state years and the governor's office, he had that picture sitting on his desk, or in his office, anyway. That was something I think he really liked and appreciated.

Then he got into, with his father-in-law, owning some horses and got into the more thoroughbred end of it. He now has horses. I think that was his relaxation. So he'd do that to get away from it; he just was one of the crowd. He liked to get out and just watch the horses. He didn't want to be bothered when we went to a horse race.

One of the other things that he was very interested in was he was a stamp collector. We'd be up in Chicago, and he'd slip away—a couple times he invited me to go with him—to stamp shows. There was a particular genre of stamps that he followed and he collected, and he'd go and go through stamps. It kind of related to his background in history and how the stamps of particular countries and particular eras relate. I hadn't been around the philatelist arena before, and it was kind of fascinating. But those are the things that he would do. Sometimes we'd have a few minutes in between events somewhere and we'd stop in a mall and just stroll through the mall. Those times I remember as just taking a breath and relaxing, but most of the time he was always at it; there was always something going on.

DePue: Since he was intense, you had to be on your game, it sounds like.

Zehnder: Yeah. Every day in scheduling was a deadline. You were putting all this stuff together. It's good because you're really involved and you know what's going on. You're not making the decisions other than responding to invitations and trying to set things up, but you're not really directing things. He would always want to see every invitation and go through them and decide which ones he was going to. But you're kind of key. So you know all the people that are

involved and you know where he's going and what he's doing, and in that sense, you're not involved, but it's detailed.

I got out of it occasionally, but even back in the last year I got involved a little bit again. I finally said when he was elected governor, "Mr. Secretary"—when I was with him, it was always Secretary; when we were walking in a mall or out at a conference or something and walking in the hills, it was Jim—"I've had enough scheduling. I've got to do something else."

DePue: Is this a nice way to say you didn't have much of a personal life while you were working for him, then?

Zehnder: No, I did. I did. I made sure I had a personal life. But the politics and in that office... I used to watch the show *West Wing*, and for me, when we were in the secretary of state's office is what it was about. If you watch that show, your social life and your personal life and your governmental life all kind of get intertwined. I maintained a social life outside of the office, but it was all kind of tied in. But when we got to the end of the secretary of state's years, I just said, "I've got to do something else." So that's when he asked me to represent him doing the boards and commissions, which I kind of knew what I was getting into. But I had a background in personnel, I knew the people he had dealt with over the preceding ten years, and so I said I would do that. But I knew it was more detail coming; that four years was even more detail work than scheduling was.

DePue: I know you got married later in life.

Zehnder: I did.

DePue: Were you dating at the time?

Zehnder: Through the secretary of state's years, yes, I was dating several different women over the period. I was serious on occasion, but it never worked out one way or the other.

DePue: So were you one of the secretary of state's office eligible bachelors, then?

Zehnder: I was a bachelor, yes, I was. Social life and relationships are very important, and they were a key part of my life, but it didn't work out, and I didn't get married until the end of when I was in the governor's office. I'd actually gone over to Revenue, and I had met my wife Lynn on a couple of occasions. First time, somebody tried to set us up, and it just didn't work. Then a couple years later we ended up just running into each other again and we started dating, but it was a campaign year, and that was a tough year to try to keep things going.

DePue: Would that have been '94?

Zehnder: No, it was before then. When we first got together, it was like '90. We dated off and on—as much off as on—for about five years, and then we got married in '95. I actually had met her outside the office, but she was running the state benefit program. She had worked at Central Management Services doing budget under Thompson, and then when Edgar came into office, Steve Schnorf—who was the director of CMS—asked her to do the benefit program for CMS. She didn't realize it at the time, but he was asking her to take on a whole new career, which has done very well. So she managed the state benefit program until Edgar left office. Then when he left office, we both left state government. She went up and did benefits for Sears Corporation and then left there and went to U.S. Foodservice. That's where she is today.

DePue: I want to go back to one more question about Jim Edgar as secretary of state. You had mentioned to me before that one of the things where you really saw Edgar kind of step out of his persona was when he went to some kind of a roast.

Zehnder: Oh, the Gridiron.

DePue: The Gridiron, yes.

Zehnder: The Gridiron. I think it was 1986. The Gridiron was always a tradition that the media would put on a roast of the politicians. They held it over at the Hilton [in Springfield], if I recall, most of the years. It was always the political highlight of the year because they would tear apart the politicians and really put on the skits. It was good fun—pointed sometimes. Then they'd have a rebuttal. They'd always pick one of the statewide politicians to give the rebuttal, and they'd have back at the media. I think I saw Roland Burris do it one year and Pate Philip do it one year. But Jim Edgar was doing the rebuttal this one year, and if there was anything during the secretary of state's office that I think pulled staff together and we had fun with, just a **blast**, it was putting together this rebuttal to the press. In terms of writing the script, we did a slideshow making fun of all the media. I remember in particular Mike Lawrence, we had one slide of him—

DePue: And Lawrence was his press secretary.

Zehnder: No, no, no, Mike Lawrence was still a reporter. And we did caricatures, basically, through photographs, of all the media, all the reporters. So we had this slideshow going on making fun of these guys, and before that, the setup was the crowd was waiting for the speaker to come out, and here comes Jim Edgar. Nobody knew it was Jim Edgar. He had gone back into his old clothes, back somewhere in his closet, and he had some plaid pants on and a paisley shirt and a checkered jacket and big black-rimmed glasses on, and he mussed up his hair. He walked out on stage. Three quarters of the crowd didn't know who he was. He just kind of stood there, and as the crowd figured it out, it was just a roar. I mean, it was just a success for... Then he did the slideshow and a

prepared speech and everything. It was just great fun. It was so out of character for him. He was always regarded by the legislators and by a lot of folks, even in the media, as—he wasn't flamboyant, he wasn't... He was just kind of the staff guy who had been appointed secretary of state.

DePue: Something of a stuffed shirt?

Zehnder: Maybe a touch of that. This kind of opened their eyes. It was just great fun. I think he had as much fun doing it and proving them wrong, and he really got into it. I just remember that as a highlight.

DePue: I want to finish today and our talk about his years as secretary of state with some of the policy issues that he pursued during those years. From what you've described up to this point, it sounds like most of the time you're not really on the policy side. Would that be a fair assessment?

Zehnder: That's a fair assessment, yeah.

DePue: But you're in the mix of all of this anyway, so I'm sure you're very much involved in a lot of the things. DUI initiative. From especially Al Grosboll's interview, he was taking on this issue of DUI and fighting that campaign when it wasn't necessarily the thing that some people thought he should be doing as secretary of state.¹⁴

Zehnder: Right. I remember the discussions internally about, is this the right issue to be on. Secretary Edgar never had a doubt that it was where he was going to go. He just felt strongly about it. We had some weak laws that bogged down the process more than affected a change in behavior. He said, "What we need to do is get laws that are effective." I think 0.1 was the tolerance level, instead of 0.08, and I don't think he was ever pushing hard to get it reduced, make it tougher in that respect. He thought the abuse by those people who get arrested, it's egregious the levels that they're at. What we need to do is make sure that those folks are caught and hit with effective punishment—having their licenses taken away, and if they do it again, not give them back at all—and make sure that you enforce those laws and make them stick. So that was his whole thrust. I heard some of the other interviews about some people saying, "That's the good ole boys and that's the way they always did things in terms of drunk drivers," and he was like, "No. This is the right thing to do. We need to change the laws to make them effective and really change the punishment so that we get the driver's license taken away quickly from those who run afoul of the law." And he did. He made that the focal point of his efforts and made the changes. It wasn't until George Ryan came in that they actually lowered the threshold, but what Jim did was make sure that if someone was arrested for DUI, they were going to lose their license, and none of this six months later or a year later and going to have people appeal. If you

¹⁴ Grosboll, June 4, 2009.

got caught drunk driving, you had to win your case and then get your license back; you were going to lose it right away. So he was for effective enforcement and deterrent.

DePue: I know one of the things you talked about earlier is maybe a peculiarity in the state of Illinois: he's in charge of the state library. And literacy was one of the issues that he took up as well.

Zehnder: Yes, yes. I remember I have these bookmarks that he had made. On the front, it was Abraham Lincoln reading to Todd, his son. It was a bookmark, and on the back it had "Jim Edgar, Secretary of State, State Librarian." It was just something that he wanted to promote. Like I said about a lot of the policies in the secretary of state's office, he took a lot of pride and had a lot of interest in being the state librarian. He'd go out and meet with the librarians. Bridget Lamont—there was another state librarian before Bridget, during the first year or so, but Bridget became an integral part of his administration, and she was effective in running the state library. Jim gave her a lot of support and supported the system.

When it coincided with building the new state library, not only did he take pride in the building and the functions of the building, but he took pride in the architecture of the building and said, "We're going to have something that fits in with the capitol complex and move away from any modern, mystic trends."¹⁵ I think it's a wonderful building, and for people who haven't been to Springfield to see it or to visit it, I think it's modern on the inside, but it sure fits in the traditional capitol complex atmosphere.

DePue: How about his initiatives on auto insurance and the push to mandate auto insurance for people who are actually going to have driver's licenses.

Zehnder: Yeah. That one was also controversy. I think if he ever had to justify having troopers, drunk driving and auto insurance were a couple of the issues where you get controversial on some of this stuff and people take issue with you. When that stuff came in, if they had people who took issue, when he had some personal heat, as opposed to policy or governmental issues that he was handling, I think it went to the troopers, went to the secretary of state police and those type of things. I didn't really get involved in that one. He just did some things that I think were common sense and were good government, and that was one of those.

DePue: Was he doing these things because he saw political advantage in doing them or because he thought it was the right thing to do?

Zehnder: I think he thought it was the right thing to do. I know on the DUI he did. I remember the discussions, people were saying, "Well, that's one of those

¹⁵ For Edgar's thoughts on the way he distinguished himself from Jim Thompson through architectural taste, see Edgar, June 22, 2009, 433-435.

things that can play different ways, and it may be an advantage in some areas but it's going to be a disadvantage in other areas politically," but he knew it was the right thing to do. I think it was just because he felt strongly that drunk drivers need to be off the road, need to be punished. However the politics lay out on that one, he was going to do it anyway.

DePue: Let's end it with this question. I'm assuming that you had an opportunity to know Brenda as well.

Zehnder: Yes.

DePue: Tell me a little about your impressions of Brenda.

Zehnder: Wonderful person. There were, I think, essentially three women in Jim's life, and that was his mother—and that always impressed me, because we'd be traveling and on a regular basis he just called his mom to check in. Now, we did have a phone in the car, and it was just a nice conversation that he always had. But it was his mom, Brenda, and his daughter Elizabeth. I think those are kind of the jewels in his life. She's a great person. Two different people. I think in the secretary of state years, she would do things but her focus was the kids.

I think I saw a different persona when they were in the governor's office and Brenda wanted to promote certain issues. She got more active, she got more visible, but the kids were older and she could do that. She's quiet, but she's a strong person. I have one picture—I think this may have been over at the Quad Cities—and the picture looks like she's lecturing me, but I think she was exasperated. We had gone over the Quad Cities on the Fourth of July. We were heading over for a parade, and it was a hot day. The crowd, let's say, was not receptive.¹⁶ Maybe it was the DUI thing, maybe it was... But they had a lot of folks sitting on the curbs drinking beer, and it was just miserably hot. We had been through a lot that day, but (laughs) it just didn't go very well. I think that's where this picture was from, and I think we were both exasperated. But she could take it and keep on going. That just was one capsule in a lot of...

She was a very, very gracious person, and I just loved her. I loved the family. Brad and Elizabeth were great kids. They had a terrific family. They had a nice little dog. (laughs) I mean, it really was. I just think the world of them. I think they're a great family, and too bad we don't have a few more like that.

¹⁶ The Edgars also recalled an especially difficult Fourth of July parade Brenda experienced in Rantoul, Illinois, following the ERA battles of 1982; see Brenda Edgar, September 14, 2010, and Jim Edgar, June 15, 2009, 371-372.

DePue: That's probably a great way to finish for the day. Thank you very much, Ken. We'll pick it up and talk about his years as governor and the many different tasks that you took on during those years.

Zehnder: Okay. Thank you.

(end of interview #1)

Interview with Ken Zehnder

ISG-A-L-2011-025.02

Interview # 2: July 12, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

COPYRIGHT

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

A Note to the Reader

This transcript is based on an interview recorded by the ALPL Oral History Program. Readers are reminded that the interview of record is the original video or audio file, and are encouraged to listen to portions of the original recording to get a better sense of the interviewee's personality and state of mind. The interview has been transcribed in near-verbatim format, then edited for clarity and readability, and reviewed by the interviewee. For many interviews, the ALPL Oral History Program retains substantial files with further information about the interviewee and the interview itself. Please contact us for information about accessing these materials.

DePue: Today is Tuesday, July 12, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm having my second session with Ken Zehnder. Good morning, Ken.

Zehnder: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: Ken, why don't you tell us where we are and why we're here.

Zehnder: (laughs) We're sitting in the Anvil Club in East Dundee, Illinois, which is a dining club that was formed out of an old blacksmith's shop, and it's been around forever. It's kind of an institution in the Fox Valley, up here in Kane County, with a membership, I think, that spreads well beyond Kane County. It's a nice place, and they fortunately accommodated us this morning because they have power and I didn't at home, where we were going to do the interview. A big storm came through yesterday, and ComEd estimated the number of people without power at eight hundred and sixty thousand, I think, as of the peak. I think they're down to about five hundred thousand now, but Lynn and I are two of those five hundred thousand without power.

DePue: Five hundred thousand—that's a lot of people.

Zehnder: They got a ways to go, and they said it may be a couple days.

DePue: So my showing up with my recorder and not having good batteries to last for a couple hours puts you in the role like you going back to the days of being a traveling aide.

Zehnder: Yes, contingency planning, which, thinking that we were actually recording on batteries, I hadn't planned it out as well as I should have. But when the library was full and I couldn't get through to the golf course, this was a good option.

DePue: Well, I'm glad you went to the trouble. We had a lot of fun the first time—this is our second—and I'm sure we'll be able to finish up with the interview today. We finished off last time pretty much with your time working for Edgar while he was secretary of state. I believe we got into a little bit of the experience in 1989 and 1990 in intergovernmental relations, which was a bit different kind of an experience for you. I want to ask you a little bit about that role and if there was any involvement with his election campaign in 1990.

Zehnder: Not too much. I had been involved in the earlier campaigns, but that year I had really transitioned out. Of the things that I was doing, one was he was president of the secretaries of state association that year, and we were planning for the annual meeting. He worked with the secretary of state in Colorado to host it out there. He really likes Colorado and thought that would be an ideal location, and it was. It was a great event. But I worked with the secretary of Colorado, her staff and herself, to plan, raise money for, and put together the agenda. So that consumed a lot of time.

In the office, I was also working with the different associations and groups that were coming in. As I mentioned earlier, I kept getting brought back into scheduling and things related to that. So that year I also was involved in working with the different groups that wanted to come in to see him. I would kind of set it up and sometimes sit in with them or get appropriate staff to sit in the meetings. We'd have anywhere from five to

fifteen or so people come in and meet within the secretary's office. I mentioned earlier that it's a great office—it's big, it accommodates a lot of folks—a great place to have a good exchange and get what's on their minds. That was a very good forum for Secretary Edgar; he liked to do that. So I was doing that, which I think was good government but also good politics.

DePue: That year, the election between Edgar and [Neil] Hartigan—Hartigan coming from the attorney general's office, and Edgar, of course, secretary of state—both very well known, very prominent, and right down to the wire. That race was certainly grueling for Secretary of State Edgar, and I know it was for Hartigan as well. It was a toss-up. Going into the election night, nobody really knew. In fact, I think the governor many times thought, I'm not going to pull this out, because depending on what polls you looked at, it was either up or down for him. Were you following it closely? Do you remember your emotions during that time?

Zehnder: Yeah. I had been through enough campaigns that I knew you never really know. You can watch and you can estimate, but there are certain factors that are going to weigh in that you can't really predict well. I remember going down to southern Illinois on a flight to an event. I was probably on the flight to do scheduling and other things, but we ended up going down, and we were at Southern Illinois. Carter Hendren calls. I get the call, get Secretary Edgar on the phone, and he has a conversation with Carter and then we get back on the plane. This is the week before the election. Jim gets back on the plane and says, "I don't think we're going to do it." The numbers weren't looking right; things were just not... I mean, it wasn't sad, it was just serious and very matter-of-fact. He was a little bit discouraged, but I think it was better going in the election that way than being overly confident. Obviously that election night—I don't know that it was a surprise, but it was relief and joy at the outcome.

DePue: Before that time, here you are, a guy who had always worked the contingencies. That was kind of your job when you were in those early secretary of state years. So what contingencies were you working in the event that Edgar lost?

Zehnder: That's not my best trait. I was just doing what I could. We had a lot of things going on; it's busy. In terms of looking at other possibilities or trying to play your cards... My dad—his philosophy was, "Whatever you're doing, try to do it as best you can, do it well; you'll have options."

DePue: Did you know what you would be doing if he won?

Zehnder: I knew what I **wasn't** going to be doing. I had been doing scheduling. Even after he won, he brought me back into scheduling. A lot of transition things were going on. I think Tom Livingston was easing into the scheduling area, and I was still doing some of that, and they were bringing some other new

aides on. But I had had a conversation with Jim and just said, “Okay, I need to leave scheduling behind, the day-to-day detail.” It wasn’t that I was doing it full-time or doing so much of it, but I think I had been doing it for so long, it was time to move on to something else. So he told me that he wanted to do the boards and commissions. At the time, I think Matt Davidson had been doing that for Governor Thompson. He was the last person who was doing that for Governor Thompson. That’s the kind of impression I have, but maybe it wasn’t Matt. I knew what the job entailed, and I have to admit I wasn’t overly thrilled about it because I knew it was going to be more detailed. Four years later, I really knew that it was a lot more detail. It was names, faces, places, and entities which you didn’t know a whole lot about.

DePue: The position then is assistant to the governor for boards and commissions, that’s what you said?

Zehnder: Yes, that was it.

DePue: What does that mean?

Zehnder: I’m not sure exactly how many boards and commissions there are now, but there were hundreds of boards and commissions. Some are paid, full-time, boards, and some pay per diem for people to attend the meetings. They cover the gamut of state services. Almost every interest group and every profession, interest, activity, has a board that kind of relates to those things. Going in, I thought it would be interesting because it’s a whole different side of state government that most folks don’t know about. They aren’t aware of it. People that get involved on the service on the boards get to know their niche, but few see the broadness of that whole activity.

Going in, Thompson’s people had left, so we had the files in a somewhat electronic system, but not much of one. I think they only had half the system. They couldn’t track the applicants, but they could track those who had been put on, something like that. We ended up scrapping the whole system and making our own. I had an intern, a Dunn fellow, who was real good and helped put that together.¹⁷ But you go into this thing, and there’s a thousand people out there who are on these boards that you got to get a handle on. You don’t know what they do, you don’t know who the people are that are on them. You know you have a lot of people who have been helpful to the newly-elected governor, and you would like to involve them to accommodate their interests in government. Trying to match that all up, it was tough.

Initially you just start going through, and there’s some high-profile ones. There’s the Pollution Control Board, the Tollway Board, the lottery.

¹⁷ The Governor’s Yearlong Fellowship Program was created in 1979 to give talented recent college graduates the opportunity to gain experience in public administration through executive branch service. In 1981, Governor Thompson issued an executive order renaming the program as the James H. Dunn Memorial Fellowship Program.

There's a lot of high-profile ones. The more they pay, the higher the profile. Then there's also the university boards, there's the State Board of Education. I have a list here of some of the other ones that we worked with: Board of Credit Union Advisors, the Board of Currency Exchange Advisors, the Governor's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Council, the Illinois Electronic Data Processing Advisory Council, the Endangered Species Protection Board, Havana Regional Port District Board... And this goes on and on. Some were not active at all; they just had the members who had initially been appointed and kind of faded away. I don't think they had reappointed people or put new people in, so they just were out there as an entity but nothing was happening. Other ones were very active: the Health Facilities Planning Board, and the full-time board, the Pollution Control Board—those were very active. Some of those were full-time; some were not. They not only had a lot of interest from people who wanted to get on them; people who were currently on them had a vested interest and wanted to stay. There were a lot of people that related to those boards who also had an interest. So you started out trying to quickly find out from calls and people stopping in which ones are the higher profile.

DePue: Does the governor start with a clean slate, where he's got to appoint—

Zehnder: No, no. The terms are staggered. A lot of the boards statutorily require a bipartisan—you can have no more than a simple majority of one party, so you can have Republicans, Democrats, and independents or others that comprise the makeup. I think the first month the governor came into office, a number of terms expired, but not by any means the majority. So it gives you a gradual hill to climb in terms of trying to get those up to being filled and learning what they are as you go along. I don't know that we put enough resources into it initially. By the end of the four years, we had caught up, and one of the reasons was we had some continuity. I stayed there for four years, and the first couple years tried to do it and work directly with the governor, because he wanted to see everything.

Then we got the executive assistants in. I have a memo that I looked at, which I worked on with Mike Belletire. We said, Okay, we've been working at these piecemeal, trying to catch up, trying to review it, but let's make it a good effort to each of the executive assistants: take the boards that fall in their jurisdiction, review, and get recommendations back. Let's move this out. I think that was the second year we were in office, in that first term. That helped. So you got other people involved. But from my perspective, sitting in that office, it was just all these résumés and trying to figure out who the people were and what the functions were, what a good mix would be, and deflect all the incoming from everybody out there who either wanted to be on or wanted to know what we were going to do with their board.

DePue: Is this one of those jobs where the phone is constantly ringing because somebody wants something from you?

Zehnder: Yes. And then, shortly after you're in office, you get your priorities set—and I've watched it in successive administrations, and Jim Edgar always said this—The press would set the agenda. You'd read stories, something would pop that wasn't getting action or wasn't being done because the board either didn't have a majority, a quorum, to take action, or there was an issue that affected it that was popping, and it became very obvious that it wasn't current. So you try to move those things along.

Then you find that there are times where you think you get everything done, you get it all right... I recall one instance distinctly because we had just got a whole load of appointments done. This is the first year, and it had been a long year. But we get all these appointments going out, send them over to the Senate, and I'm going to go on vacation because I hadn't had a vacation for a long time. So I go out to North Carolina to visit my parents. One of the boards that we had done was the State Board of Elections. For the bipartisan split on that board, the top Democratic officeholder gets to make recommendations to the governor of three individuals for the appointment.

DePue: Is that [Mike] Madigan at the time?

Zehnder: I think it may have been [Phil] Rock. No, that doesn't sound right either. Well, whoever it was...

DePue: Whoever was in charge of the Central Committee at the time, perhaps?

Zehnder: No, I don't think so. It was a legislator. I'm trying to think who the top Senator was. But we sent them over, and in our conversations we're doing everything by the book, what you had to do; they sent us the names and we went through it. I think they sent us an indication of the three who their preference might be, but we took a look at the three individuals and we thought, gee, one of the other ones would be much more to our liking than the other two, so that's the one that we put forward. So I'm out on my vacation, walking down the fairway, on the eighth hole where my parents had their house, and my mom comes running out with the phone in her hand: "Ken, it's the governor's office." (laughter) And the governor's office basically was telling me over the phone that that appointment wasn't going to work. The Senate had threatened to shut down everything, and there was going to be no legislative action, **period**, until that appointment was changed. So that appointment, I think, ended up getting revisited.

But most of it was just trying to stay up with it and trying to talk to people, keep things current. It was a struggle, but it was also a grind. It wasn't a fun job. Every job has a lot of detail or effort to it, but I thought, boy, you'd get to meet the individuals on these boards and find out more about what they do and visit them and see the action. I mean, I rarely got out of the office. Between figuring out who the people were, what the boards did, then receiving the paperwork, and you had all these background checks that you

had to do, and you had to get letters of interest and then put things together to submit to the Senate for their review for those that required Senate approval—it was a long, hard four years.

DePue: The word “patronage” comes to my mind. Of course in Illinois there is a storied history about patronage and its roles, both Chicago and at the state level as well. Janis Cellini is the personnel director/patronage chief—that’s the unofficial title for her. Did you work with her quite a bit?

Zehnder: I worked with Janis on a lot of things because she knew more people probably than I did, and I had been around a long time, so I knew a lot of the folks. My review of the boards would always be, whatever the entity is, you need some people who really knew that subject, and then maybe you needed constituents, who would be the recipients of whatever the board would be doing, and then perhaps you needed a neutral person. So the neutral could be anyone who had an interest in serving the government. Patronage I always thought was something different. Yeah, you wanted to include people who were favorable to you, because you wanted to have somebody that was reliable—in the sense of having your voice in that entity who can not only help you if there’s an issue, you can work with them on it, but also get some reliable feedback to what was going on.

In the lower boards, it was kind of difficult sometimes to—somebody would say, “I’d like to get involved.” Well, here’s the board where we need somebody, just as a citizen, to fill a spot that’s kind of a neutral spot. I couldn’t tell them a whole lot about what the board did in detail, but I’d maybe have them talk to the people that were on it. I was surprised. People would get into these things, and they’d really enjoy the service. Now, some people would say, “But it’s not mine, and I have no interest.” I mean, after they went on it, they said they don’t do anything or, “That’s not what I want to do,” and you took them off. But other people would really get involved, because a lot of these boards had narrow scope but were very intense about what it was that they were doing. I think people who just liked the governmental process found that fascinating, and we got some good people to serve.

There were the public administrators. For the most part there’s one from each county. For a long time, I knew they were out there, and they were low on the profile. It took me a while to get to those. Essentially they would be working with estates that had no place to go. People that had passed away, there was an estate, and it had to be reconciled or something, but it took me a while to figure out what the public administrators were doing; I don’t know if I ever got it completely right. That was an appointment that the governor had to make. In some counties, the county had a set-up so that they would take care of those, or if there were attorneys around who were involved that could handle those cases. But other times you didn’t, and public administrators could fill that need. It was amazing how some people really got into that [and

were] productive. They could establish a fee based on what the value of the estate was, so they could actually reimburse themselves. There was, I think, a formula for that. But trying to go out and find somebody in the county who actually could be that ombudsman for those... I mean, that's just one of thousands of appointments that had to be made.

DePue: So would you go to the county Republican chairman, for example?

Zehnder: That's one person you could go to. I know people are always hesitant to talk about doing the partisan thing, but the county chairman in a lot of counties was an active businessman, a professional. He knew a lot of folks, and he knew who might have an interest, who might be a prospect for that certain board. But more often than not, they were good sounding-boards.

A lot of the boards would come to you. You'd talk either to whoever was the administrator for the board or some of the board members to get a sense of—you know, in this business, as I kept saying, you have to learn who you can rely on. That's the key thing, I think, in government—and who's good at doing different things. You try to get a sense on the board: who knows what they're doing, who can give you a straight story, and what they're doing and what their needs are. You could take that, and then you bounce it off: if it's a regional entity that performs a service within a county, the county chairman or a county administrator that you know in that area is probably as good as anybody that you can go to, just to get a good read.

DePue: I notice I asked you a question about patronage and Janis Cellini, who was the governor's personnel director/patronage chief, and you answered the question. Let me ask you a different question here. *Rutan* was a decision that was passed down by the Supreme Court, which dealt with Illinois patronage and drastically changed the rules about who could be appointed under a patronage system and who couldn't. They ended up with a system where there were exempt positions; where it was understood that yes, the governor does want to appoint somebody who has a similar philosophy, who has a similar outlook, somebody they know; where it was perfectly appropriate that that would be what we would now consider to be a patronage position. But the vast majority of positions in most of these agencies and directorates were not patronage positions, and now had to go through this *Rutan* screening process where politics didn't play a role at all. I'm assuming that for all these boards and commissions, all of that was outside the purview of *Rutan*. Is that correct?

Zehnder: Some of the board appointments were full-time positions—Pollution Control. I'd actually have to go back and look at it, but almost all the boards were on term appointments, so when the term was up, the governor had total discretion—other than following the statutory split, so you couldn't name all Republicans or you couldn't name all Democrats. But when the term was up, you could name who you wanted. Matter of fact, you had to consider partisan

politics because of the statutory requirement of the split. You had to know who was Republican, who was Democrat.

Then we always got into a discussion: Well, what does that mean? And I've talked to different administrations over the years because I've always tried to get to know the people that were doing the boards, just because I had done it for so long. My interpretation was, if you have a consistent voting record in the primaries or had held an office, that would pretty much establish what your party was, not that you had just voted in the last election or had made contributions to a party. I always felt that establishment of a party affiliation was a consistent voting record in the primaries. Since I was doing it, I think there have been other court decisions which have kind of given that some more direction, but I always thought that was a fair interpretation, and that's kind of how we looked at it. If somebody had voted Republican, Democrat, Republican, Democrat, in successive years or didn't vote at all, they could call themselves independent if they wanted. I know people had argued in the past, and even in the last election there were some issues about people who they bounced from positions because they had voted the prior election as a partisan, a Democrat or Republican, and the political parties argued that because of that, they couldn't run on a certain ticket because of the one vote prior. I didn't see it that way, and I don't know how the courts ruled on those things, but I think my view has been upheld to some extent.

DePue: Were there occasions, then, when Janis was contacting you directly because she knew you were considering some applicants for a particular board or commission, and she would be recommending names?

Zehnder: Everybody—the executive assistants, Janis—and Janis ended up eventually taking over board and commissions. She was responsible for boards and commissions during the second term, when I left to go to Revenue. I referred to the memo that I worked on with Mike Belletire that we sent out. We were asking **all** the executive assistants to supply names or to review incumbents on the boards to get a sense and make recommendations. I'm sure Janis, as an assistant to the governor, was also a part of that. I know, matter of fact, she was copied on that memo. So yeah, we were all involved. And the more help I could get, the better.

DePue: I guess I'm dwelling on this a lot, but I'm very curious about this process. In the old school, you want to get a position, you go to the governor's patronage boss and then it goes from there, and that's why I would think that Janis especially is one that would be providing some of those names on the Republican side.

Zehnder: I did boards and commissions for four years, and it didn't really work that way. Some of the higher-profile boards are going to be treated as jobs, so maybe they would fall into that category. But most of them, you were just

trying to go through it. It was like pulling teeth to get... The reason we did the memo to the executive assistants and said, Hey, let's get your attention here and let's focus on this because we've got to get this stuff current, was because they had their hands full. They had floods and crisis and children's issues and everything else going on. They weren't thinking about the councils and boards and commissions. I was over there trying to put that together. Those were advisory groups, for the most part, so they weren't high-profile. I was looking for any suggestions that I could get. Whoever gave me names, for the most part, I tried to take a look at it and say, Does this make sense? I'd get names of people where the people didn't know that they were being recommended and didn't have any interest. So you'd have to go through that and decipher how this mix worked, who you got it from. But a lot of times you just didn't have the names, and some of the boards were crying for quorums, so you had to try to get the—

DePue: I would think the board members themselves oftentimes would bring forward suggestions for that.

Zehnder: And they would. That's a dual-edged sword, too. You figure they're there, they're going to know the process, but what's their interest? It's a balancing act.

DePue: How about on the Democratic side? Who would you approach if you needed to get that partisan split taken care of? Maybe the other name you're looking for—Phil Rock was there for just the first two years of the Edgar administration, and then it was Emil Jones after that.¹⁸

Zehnder: Yeah, yeah, I think it was Emil. And I think Emil said, Yeah, okay. (laughter) Yeah, we'll see how this game's going to play.

DePue: But that, I would think, would be the logical place to go to get the Democratic input, that you'd go either to the Senate leader or the House—and that would be Mike Madigan of course, who most people considered at that time to be the most powerful Democrat at the state level.

Zehnder: Yes. And you would. I think I would get recommendations from a number of legislators. It's hard. After four years of doing it, I think I would get a sense if I got a lot of names from Madigan or a lot of names from Emil. You'd get some, but more often than not, particularly on the Senate side, since a lot of these boards required Senate confirmation that's where their review would come into play. But you're getting names kind of thrown at you from everywhere. You're getting some résumés in. I remember different legislators suggesting folks, both Republican and Democrat. The office was in the Stratton Building, so the legislators were there and they could always just

¹⁸ Phil Rock (D-Oak Park) was president of the Illinois Senate from 1979 to 1993, when the Republicans gained control and he was succeeded by James 'Pate' Philip (R-Wood Dale). The Democrats regained control of the Senate in 2003, and Emil Jones (D-Chicago) succeeded Philip as president.

drop in and put some names forward. But for the most part, you'd have a lot of incumbents that were listed as Democrats, so you'd go to the Democratic chairmen or the Democratic legislators and say, "I just wanted your sense on these things."

DePue: How about the geographical nature of this thing?

Zehnder: Statewide.

DePue: I mean, Chicago is a big factor, and I would think you would have to balance that as well.

Zehnder: The things we always looked at were geography; race, to try to get the balance, make sure you had minority representation on a lot of these boards; male–female. I always felt that you tried to make it well-rounded and get a good mix. It did vary depending on the board, but in general—and here's the other issue that I think you dealt with: from what we came into, it's a male-dominated arena, or it had been. I think the governor made some very good strides in his mix on his cabinet and his administrators in terms of bringing balance in both ethnicity and gender. I don't think the boards were that well-balanced, at least initially, and I'm not even sure they were when we left, but we tried to make some inroads there.

DePue: Can you think of any boards in particular where that diversity factor was especially important?

Zehnder: There are some boards that deal with minority business enterprises. There are the boards related to the criminal justice system. I guess you could make that argument for all of them, but there were probably some that were more appropriate or more essential.

DePue: This is the kind of subject that I suspect a lot of people would think, Okay, boards and commissions; it doesn't really get too high on the interesting meter. But it was the kind of thing that Governor Edgar especially wanted to get to: here's how government works; it's not all the politics, it's not all the stuff that ends up in the headlines. This is the behind-the-scenes stuff that actually makes government work. It's obvious to me that this is a crucial position, and if it doesn't happen right, then it **does** end up in the newspaper. So your job is to keep it **out** of the newspaper to a certain extent. Is that right?

Zehnder: It is. Even if you have a full complement on all of the boards, you are going to have newspaper headlines because of some of the actions that they will take. But I don't think Governor Quinn, and Governor Blagojevich particularly, paid attention to this. They were so far behind, and Governor Quinn faced a real challenge trying to make up for the lack of attention under Governor Blagojevich.

When I first was working for the university in 2001, I got to know the woman who was doing the board appointments for Blagojevich, who used to be a Dunn fellow under Edgar administration. Since I had done it, you have a kind of rapport and I got to know them and gave them whatever I could in terms of, Here's what you might expect, and if I can give you any help or anything, let me know. It was a good exchange for the first year or so, but I could just tell that door was closing after the first year. The more I heard about the Blagojevich administration, the stronger sense I got that it was just tougher to approach them; whereas when I was there, kind of an open-door policy. There was much less of that, almost to the point where it was nonexistent toward the end of the Blagojevich administration. Quinn's administration has been totally different. They have been wide open and very accommodating, receptive to suggestions, willing to work with you. They're back on track, where it should be.

DePue: Did you have an office in the Capitol building?

Zehnder: When it started out I had an office on two and a half, which is where Jim Edgar's first office under Thompson was, that half-level floor. I kept that for a little bit, but the files and everything else were over in the Stratton Building, and I'd be running back and forth. I didn't want to give up the office in two and a half because of proximity—you're more involved, you're over there where the action is—but once we got some staff to help me with that position, and they were all over in the Stratton Building, it just didn't make any sense. So I eventually gave up two and a half, and we were over in Room 100 in the Stratton Building.

DePue: Did you have some staff to help you with this?

Zehnder: I had a couple assistants and a Dunn fellow, and (laughs) probably could have used more.

DePue: A Dunn fellow being an intern.

Zehnder: Intern, yeah.

DePue: That was fascinating for me to get some insight into how that whole process works, because again, it's not what most people were paying attention to. You weren't seeing Edgar nearly as much as you were when he was secretary of state, but what are your reflections on the man who was the governor, in terms of his management and leadership skills and how he responded to the challenges he had in this job.

Zehnder: I've used the word "intense" with him before. As many people that you've interviewed have reflected, he seems to know more about what everybody else is doing than anybody else, and he knows how to ask the questions that you might not have the answers to. But in the sense of the boards, he wanted to review everything, everybody, and make all the decisions. Frankly, it did slow

the process down. I think we eventually had to encourage him, “Okay, we’re going to have to farm some of this out so that we can at least put recommendations together in total for each board, which we can just have you sign off on.” He was reluctant to give that up and never did on the high-profile boards, which he shouldn’t have, but I think he did on the lower-profile ones. I mean, I’m looking at this list again. The Advisory Board on Necropsy Services to Coroners—I don’t think he’s going to have a good sense on exactly who’s going to be appropriate to that particular function. So we got to the point where, on a number of boards, we could just give him recommendations. I’d run everything by him, and that’s when I saw him. I’d go to the cabinet meetings, which were not frequent. I’d hop on a plane or stop in his office just to run things by him, go through the boards. And I think I grouped the boards in different spheres so that if I was going to go through the recommendations with him, you’d have the executive assistant or other people sit in to kind of hash that through with you. He liked to hear different opinions. I didn’t mind having somebody with me, because he was going to ask the questions where I wasn’t going to have some answers, and other people could help out.

DePue: Was he accessible?

Zehnder: When I needed to see him, yes, he would fit me in. It was a busy time. I guess I knew, having worked with him for the prior ten years, how to get it to him and when I could get to him. Maybe somebody else coming in new would have had a different experience trying to do that, but I knew I could hop on a plane; that was an easy way to travel, and he didn’t mind me doing that.

DePue: Was there a gatekeeper for him?

Zehnder: Sherry was; you had to go to her to get on—or if it was a substantive matter, you would probably go through the chief of staff or the appropriate executive assistant.

DePue: Sherry Struck being his personal assistant.

Zehnder: But if I wanted to get to him, I’d go to Sherry or the scheduler. I think if Tom Livingston was doing scheduling at that time, I’d go to Tom and say, “What’s a good day? Where’s a good possibility if I was going to do some traveling?” Or with Sherry just to get into the office.

DePue: Let’s talk about a couple of the personalities, just your reflections on them. His initial chief of staff is Kirk Dillard.

Zehnder: Very bright guy. Kirk and I actually were fraternity brothers. I think I got to know him a little bit working on the alumni association for the fraternity. Kirk’s about four years younger, so I didn’t know him in college; I just knew him afterwards. Bright guy, directed. He’s done well for himself and came close in a couple efforts for higher office himself, but not quite there.

DePue: This last election, the 2010 election, he ran in the Republican primary and came within a few hundred votes of getting the Republican primary. Some people say if he'd won that election, he would have been governor right now. Do you agree with that?

Zehnder: He would have had a good opportunity. I think he might have. People assess Illinois as being a state that in a primary will nominate a more conservative person, but that person has a harder time in the general. And I think Kirk fits the mold of the moderate. I think he probably would have had a broader base in a general election.

DePue: The second chief of staff—this is during that crucial 1994 election year—was Jim Reilly, because Dillard had moved on to run for the Senate by that time.

Zehnder: Yeah, and Jim—very no-nonsense, matter-of-fact guy. I had met Jim early on. When I was working the Bush campaign and then the Findley campaigns, Jim was state representative from Jacksonville, that area. That was always in my territory during those campaigns, so I was on the stump; I was out representing the candidates in a lot of Jim's area, and that's when I first got to know him. Good guy, very direct, knows what he's doing, very bright individual.

DePue: Different personality from Dillard as chief of staff?

Zehnder: Yes, yes. I mean, their personalities were different. Jim had done it before.

DePue: For Thompson.

Zehnder: For Thompson, and had been around longer. Kirk was a good chief of staff; I think he settled in and assessed what was going on. Jim kind of came in (snaps) knowing; having done it before, he had his style pretty well set. I think Kirk had a style, but he had to manipulate it a little bit or assess it as he went.

DePue: Would you agree with some who said that Reilly had a few more sharp edges to him?

Zehnder: I think he probably does. I can't say I ever encountered those, because I don't think I ever went head-to-head with Jim. I don't think I ever did with Kirk either. But I think from reputation and what people thought, Reilly was probably more direct.

DePue: The next name I've got on the list here is Mike Lawrence, Edgar's press secretary. I don't think we talked about him the first session.

Zehnder: I remember talking about Mike coming on. I think we talked about the Gridiron; we had done a skit, and I remember portraying Mike Lawrence in some of these slides that we had. Incognito—incognito I did that. But Mike always had a good reputation. I used to read his columns, and he always had a

good perspective. They had built a fire escape outside the secretary's office, and when Mike came in, and they were reconfiguring the office space. They had this office that Jim had kind of said was going to be mine, and it was in close proximity. Mike's coming in, and I'm thinking, If he's going to be one of the senior advisors, maybe he ought to be there and I could be down further, which I ended up doing.

But Mike—I don't know that he has an ego in the sense that you would normally think of somebody having an ego. He has an ego, but it's a little different sense of it. I think he's just solid good government, no nonsense. He came in, and he could be good-natured and good to be around in the sense that if you want to hear stories, you want to hear government, you want to find out stuff, I think Mike really knows that stuff. But if he sensed something funny was going on, some issues that shouldn't be going on, man, you talk about no-nonsense and direct—that was Mike. And Jim always said part of his job was to make sure Mike was calm, because if Mike was calm, things were going all right. Lawrence was, I think in some ways, the conscience of the office. I said before, you had your more political players and you had more government folks, and Mike was in that middle. No nonsense, do it right, don't screw up, and if he smelled anything going on, he was in to see the governor. And he came in before Jim took office as governor, so he was around during that period.

DePue: So much more than a press secretary.

Zehnder: Oh yes, yeah.

DePue: I think we might have talked about Joan Walters a bit during the secretary of state years, but she now had the unenviable position of being the budget director in the midst of a budget crisis, trying to fill a one-billion-dollar hole.

Zehnder: When she was in the secretary of state's office, she was the chief of staff early on. In that role, we butted heads a couple times. I was out on the road and trying to just send messages back from being on the road, but it wasn't always as graceful as it needed to be, and I thought she was more directive. When she became head of the Bureau of the Budget, at least in my relationships with her, I never saw that hard edge. Now, to be the head of the Bureau during those periods, you had to be pretty hard-nosed. She's an extremely bright woman and handled it very well. But by that time, because I had lasted the whole ten, eleven years to that point with the Edgar administration and Joan had come back, I think our relationship was different. I was still doing what I could do to help the administration. We didn't have any issues that we would have to negotiate on, really. I mean, I didn't get into that arena as much.

DePue: I would imagine a couple people on the governor's staff who are especially important to you are the legislative liaisons, because a lot of these things that

you're doing have to go to the Senate to be approved. So Steve Selcke and Mark Boozell?

Zehnder: I've known both of them for a long time. Both good persons. Steve, I knew when he was working with the Thompson administration—

DePue: And he had that same role in Thompson's administration.

Zehnder: Right, yeah. I had worked with Mark because he was the legislative person during the secretary of state years, too. Mark's funny. He's got a wit and an edge to him that can be really humorous. But when he wants to be, he can be a no-nonsense kind of guy. I had worked with him for a long time, so we could exchange views, and I think I got his sense on some of the appointments. He was helpful. Pate was always one—"Call me Pate," you know.

DePue: James "Pate" Philip.

Zehnder: Yeah. "Call me Pate." It was always, "Hello, Senator." "Call me Pate." (DePue laughs) I would try to work through the legislative office, but when they call you directly you deal with them. I always appreciated Mark because he was the go-between. Anytime I had somebody who could help out, I tried to use them, and Mark was good.

DePue: Who else haven't I mentioned who was especially important, who you worked with a lot during those four years, that you want to bring up here,

Zehnder: I think I worked with everybody. The executive assistants were important; you had Belletire and Felicia—you mentioned earlier that you were interviewing her.¹⁹ All the executive assistants were helpful in their arena, once we got that established. There was no way I could do it on my own. I think Bernice Bloom was in the education area; Felicia, George Fleischli, Al Grosboll, Gene Reineke, who then also later was chief of staff—I think they're all good folks. Al, I had worked with and knew personally. I was closer to Al than a lot of the other folks. I think Jim Edgar had a good knack for picking people who could do what needed to be done, and I think all his folks were well-qualified.

DePue: Did you still stay in the trenches of boards and commissions during that '94 election year?

Zehnder: Yes, to the end. But again, after doing four years of that, I thought, Okay. I served way longer than most folks would have in that position, and the advice that I've given to people in subsequent administrations was, "Do it for a

¹⁹ During Edgar's first term as governor, he assigned broadly related policy areas to "executive assistants" who constituted a "supercabinet." The first six executive assistants were Michael Belletire, George Fleischli, Felicia Norwood, Allen Grosboll, Erhard Chorle, and Mary Ann Louderback. In his second term, Edgar scrapped this system in favor of two deputy chiefs of staff.

couple of years and then find a successor. That's the best advice I can give you."

DePue: I did want to ask you about one bump on the road during that '94 election year, and that was the news in July when the governor had his heart problem and had bypass surgery.²⁰

Zehnder: Yes. I remember I was at home and I got a phone call. It was Belletire that called me and told me that he [Edgar] was in the hospital and he had a bypass. It was like, Whoa. It was a surprise, and we were all concerned. I had a little bit of an issue last year myself, and it was good to talk to an expert. (laughter) So I went to Jim and just kind of consulted. He was very reassuring and helpful, and I appreciated the conversation we had before I had a small procedure. But back then, yeah, it got your attention. You asked me about transitions, had I prepared for anything else. Well, when that happened, you started thinking, Geez, things can change, and they can change dramatically. I thought the way he handled it—maybe he tried to get back into it too quickly, into running the shop, but that's Jim. That's his life: get up and get at it.

DePue: One of the most memorable photos from the administration is him standing at the window of his hospital room with the budget that he'd just gotten signed from Madigan.

Zehnder: Yeah, yeah. I think he handled it well. I guess what surprised me about that [his heart procedure] was I just knew how active he was. When we'd go to these conferences and you traveled with him a lot like I did, "Come on, kid, let's go out. We're going to play tennis. Come on, let's go for a hike." You wouldn't be sitting around. At a lot of conferences, people go, sit around in the bars in their off time; they just kind of hang around and chit-chat. That wasn't him. He liked to get out and walk or hike, play some tennis, do something. He was always active. Even if we'd get into a hotel late at night after some activity or something, if it's a new place, he'd just want to walk around just to get out and do something.

DePue: Tell us about making the move to Department of Revenue. Was this a job that you'd scoped out yourself?

Zehnder: Yes. I thought, I can't do boards and commissions for another four years. The detail was going to drown me. After having done scheduling and doing the boards and commissions, I really wanted a different experience. I looked at the different agencies. I talked to Jim and I said, "I'd really like to do something else." And he said, "Well, look at the various departments, talk to

²⁰ On July 7-8, 1994, Edgar, then 47, had emergency quadruple-bypass surgery at Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove, Illinois. *Chicago Tribune*, July 8, 1994. For Edgar's description of his surgery and recovery, especially the influence it had on the course of his political career, see Jim Edgar, June 18, 2010, 749-761. Also see, Andy Foster, interview by Mark DePue, July 12, 2010, 79-85; Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, July 2, 2009, 24-27; Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, October 22, 2009, 41-43.

some of the executive assistants, and talk to the chief of staff and see what might be an option.” So I looked around. One interest that I had—I’d taken some coursework in public administration—was local government. I also had a background in the private sector, in personnel, before I got into doing boards and commissions. I looked at Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, I looked at a couple other agencies, but Department of Revenue handled local government. Sam McGaw was over there; he was doing some of the personnel functions at Revenue, and he was leaving. I don’t think it was announced at the time, but he was transitioning out to go to Capital Development Board. So I knew that was going to be an option. I went and I said, “That’s something that would interest me.” It was a deputy director position, handled personnel and local government, and I thought I could really bring something to that mix, but it would also broaden my experience. So I asked to be considered for that, and they put me over there.

I went over, and Ray Wagner was the director. Ray and I got along great. He was in some ways a mentor. He encouraged me and got me involved in things. I wasn’t a revenue expert, I wasn’t a tax attorney, I wasn’t a CPA—but I really enjoyed this niche for about two or three months, doing what I was doing and getting to know the agency and getting to know the personnel and working with Ray.

DePue: And the reputation at most of these agencies is, “Uh-oh, we’ve got a new guy from the governor’s office who’s here to check up on things,” and there’s all kinds of speculation about what your involvement’s going to be.

Zehnder: I was hearing that. That stuff was echoing back to me. I was like, No, no, no. Local government has an interest. I really want to get out. So I was trying to meet with the people out in local government and learn the agency. In personnel matters, just doing what I could do to help out there. I was hearing that, but I wasn’t sensing that until Ray indicated that he was leaving. He was going back to St. Louis where he had come from, and that position was open. I had been there—I’m thinking it was three or four months at that point—enough to know who’s who and just get a sense of the agency and kind of the functions. Those echoes that I was hearing, I think to that extent they were true because I was well-acquainted with the governor, had worked with him for a long time. There weren’t that many people over at the agency who were anywhere near as close to the governor. But I was reluctant when Ray said, “I’m leaving. You might want to consider this.” I’m like, “Well, no, I don’t have the background.” I wasn’t sure that I would have sufficient experience or expertise to do the job. Ray convinced me.

One of the things I noticed, only having been there a few months, was it’s compartmentalized. People in the sales tax area are experts in that area; people in the income tax area are experts in that area; people in IT know the IT functions; people in the service departments know how to deal with taxpayers. But nobody was really an expert in all facets. Yes, the director

needed to deal with policy, but there's a lot of legal counsel, there's a lot of people on board who know policy. I thought, once I became serious about considering the option, having some management background, if you dealt with it as a management function and not specifically a tax function, you could do it. Ray encouraged me, and I appreciated that.

I went to the governor and he said, "Let's put you in as acting director; we'll see how it goes." So he left me in there for about five months or so, maybe longer than I would have liked, but I was okay with it, because once I made the transition and became the director, I started gradually getting into it. There was a whole new language you had to learn in terms of tax phrases and acronyms and everything else. But I also had become comfortable with several people in the department who I thought I could really rely on. They were very good to work with. Mike Klemens in particular was one person who I worked very closely with. There were a lot of good folks in the agency, and some unique personalities. Ben Zemaitis was the internal auditor who had been around for a long time, and he was kind of regarded as the crusty old soul. But he was great as a good-cop bad-cop combination—he was the bad cop, I was the good cop; you can kind of put things together. Having a sense of who I could rely on, I felt comfortable in the position.

I tried to emulate some of the things that Edgar had done, watching his management style. Part of that was getting out among the agency [staff] so you get to know them and interact. Visit the various offices. Edgar had been to state libraries and driver's license facilities and the things that secretaries hadn't been to forever when he was secretary of state. I made a conscious effort to do that as the acting director and later on as the director. And I started working with the advisory groups. There was an outside group of practitioners who would give you the business side of the issues, which I think had been in existence prior to Ray Wagner being the director. So I started working with them. It was a good group, very upfront exchanges they would have.

They would always be lobbying their causes, but... A lot of the business groups are always complaining about the complex tax structure in Illinois, but they're also a major cause of the complex tax structure in Illinois, because they're always arguing for their cut at the process or the pie, and they build these things into the tax system that make it unwieldy. Just like state law. You get a lot of stuff in there that complicates the process.

DePue: And it seems to get only more complicated over time.

Zehnder: Over time, it does, because then you could try for a wholesale change, and that's too much to do all at once. So I don't know what the answer is. But there's a lot of other things going on at the department. We were trying to do online tax payments. That was the first venture into online tax payments. We were trying to do an integrated tax system. There were a lot of things other than tax policy going on.

DePue: Your discussion about boards and commissions, it sounds like that was kind of an all-consuming job. Were you able to have more of a life outside the office during this time?

Zehnder: I've always had a life outside the office. I bought a house when I was in the private sector, a small house. Right after Edgar got elected in '86, I had designed and built a house, which can be an all-consuming process. So I timed it right. I timed it after the election, and I signed the contract, I think, the day after the results were known.

DePue: You were your own contractor for this?

Zehnder: No, I hired a contractor. I worked with an architect, and I was out there almost every evening, to see what was going on. Building the house was a big experience. But I've always had a social life, and I think that continued. I thought about this because you had brought it up earlier, there was always time for that. I didn't get totally obsessed. But boards and commissions, I needed an escape. Revenue, I guess I had just patterned in my social life, and my private life was going on, but Revenue was a totally different experience than boards and commissions or scheduling. I felt it was a management experience, an opportunity. It was well-rounded. I did emulate Governor Edgar, or Secretary Edgar, the way he handled his management style. I'm sure I had my own differences, but I watched him for so long, knew what he did, saw what I thought paid results, and then I tried to incorporate some of that into Revenue.

The one thing that they told me at Revenue when I went over there early on and I sat down with the legal counsel, some of the top folks, and the internal auditor: the line of demarcation between what goes on in the department and politics was established very clearly. And that was fine by me. I understood it, the need for it, and I think having come from the political environment that I did, I knew where the lines were and could deflect them. And when the governor finally put me in, he said, "If I don't hear from you for four years and you handle the business, that's a good thing." It was a whole separate environment, and it was more like being in the private sector, running a business, although it was in the governmental arena. And I was pleased with the ability that I had. I told the staff that my job was to get them the resources and let them do their jobs, and work with them to get our goals done, and that was it. And I think we made some progress.

DePue: When you went to that job, I'm assuming you were still a bachelor.

Zehnder: I was.

DePue: Maybe one of Springfield's most eligible bachelors, huh?

Zehnder: Well, I don't know about that, but I had been around for a long time. (laughter) But yeah, it was maybe the second year I was at Revenue—Lynn

and I had dated a few years earlier and then off and on for a few years, and back and forth, and we ended up getting engaged on the Fourth of July. Then later that year, in October, got married, and I had the rehearsal dinner at the governor's mansion. The governor and Brenda were gracious enough to open that up to me. It had been closed for renovation, and they were going to be over in Europe on the date that the wedding was, but they graciously agreed to let us use it for the rehearsal dinner. So it was great. My family loved being there and using it. I have to admit, we did go across to the Mansion View for a cocktail before we went over for the rehearsal dinner.

DePue: Church wedding?

Zehnder: Yes. I was teaching a class at Springfield College, so actually it was right in the middle when I became the director of revenue.²¹ The timing wasn't great, because it's a lot of work teaching a class, but I really enjoyed that. On the campus at Springfield College, they have the Brinkerhoff Home, which is a nice facility. We ended up having our reception there. They have a Catholic chapel where we had the wedding.

DePue: What's your wife's maiden name?

Zehnder: Calame, C-a-l-a-m-e.

DePue: What was she doing?

Zehnder: She was running the benefit program for the state. She had been a fellow in the legislative program and then had worked as a Senate staffer for a couple years, went out to the private sector for a little bit, came back, and joined CMS doing the budget for CMS during the Thompson years. When Edgar became governor and Steve Schnorf went over as the director of CMS—and this is before I knew her—Steve asked her to run the benefit program. She did that, and that began a career for her, which she's continued. When Edgar left the governor's office, we both left state government, and she went on to do benefits for Sears and since has moved on to U.S. Foods, based in Rosemont.

DePue: What were you able to accomplish while you were in the Department of Revenue? I mean, this is a period of time when the Internet is exploding, when computer technology is really making a huge difference. Was that part of what you were dealing with?

Zehnder: That was part of it, because we were trying to open that up. When I started there, we were not doing online payments, but by the time I left, we were. At that time, a very minimal amount of the processing was done through online payments, but it was an opening of that arena, and now it's a major part of the way they do business. We were also trying to do an integrated tax system, which a lot of departments had done over a lot of years. A lot of the different

²¹ Now Benedictine University at Springfield.

states—I went to different states both for conferences and to review the way they processed their business—were trying to integrate all their systems to have a common database. It is a monumental task to get that done. A lot of states had brought in contractors to run the process, basically to take over the process and then hand it back to the state.

DePue: Not being a revenue guy, “integrated tax system”—what is it that you’re integrating? What are the different pieces coming together on it?

Zehnder: The different platforms. It’s sales tax, income tax, the payment cycles, when you get your refunds. Getting all the records throughout the department to operate on a common basis. If I could explain it to you accurately in five minutes, I’d probably go into that business as a consultant. (DePue laughs) I can’t.

DePue: Was it part of your job to keep track of things like the gas tax that goes to maintaining roads and all these other different ways the government collects money?

Zehnder: The Department of Revenue is the recipient of the taxes, so yes, it all comes in, then you have to funnel it back out. It goes to different funds; it goes to the other constitutional officers for distribution—treasurer, comptroller. Just looking at the integrated tax system: they had dealt with that for a long time, and they knew where the hitches were and what they really could do and the chunks of the processing that they felt they could integrate. The one decision that I think we made was—in a lot of cases, states that we looked at, you bring in some high-priced consultants, they build a platform, they give it back to you, and then they’re gone; it’s very expensive. I felt that if we worked **with** the consultants, essentially not only built the process, but built the expertise into the employees’ backgrounds, then we would be able to carry on with it. So we made some strides in doing that. When I left, ultimately I think they reverted back. That is one of the issues with the change in administrations: you get headed down one road, and that can change tremendously with a change in administration. So I think there were some gains made. Just getting the online processing for income tax was a major accomplishment, but we did other things which benefited the department.

DePue: Does the director of revenue have an opinion about the way the Illinois state constitution divides up power between the constitutional officers of treasurer and comptroller, and then you’ve got working for the governor, the Department of Revenue?

Zehnder: I’m sure some directors do. (laughter) I’m not sure I do. Back then I understood the split, which occurred decades ago, as a review of—there was some abuse. When they split the offices it was kind of a check and balance system. Right now they say it’s redundant and it would be more efficient to have it combined. I think both the incumbents now agree to that philosophy,

and apparently they would like to combine the offices. I'm sure there are efficiencies there, and I'm sure in a few more decades they'll be revisiting that again.

DePue: Did you ever have any thoughts during this entire twenty-something years that you're with Governor Edgar of pursuing your own political career?

Zehnder: Yeah. You're around the environment, and I think everybody gets an interest in it. And you talk to incumbent legislators, and all the legislators also think about moving up to higher office. I think it's just innate in the people that are involved. So I considered it, but I always said several things needed to happen. One—Jim Edgar always said this—timing is key. There aren't that many opportunities where the window opens that you can get involved and succeed. I thought you needed a constituency; you needed a base. And you needed either an issue or an opponent that motivated you to do it.

Springfield was so intense. I got involved with United Way and other activities and organizations, the Lions Club, and I had worked in the private sector and the government, so I felt I knew a lot of folks down there. But I always thought Springfield was such heavily intense politics that it'd be a difficult place to run for the legislature. Since I graduated from high school in Kane County, I thought, Well, if we ended up back north, I'd like to be in Kane County. That was in the back of my mind, maybe a thought that that might present an opportunity later on. It's funny. Now that I've lived back up here for eleven years, twelve years, I don't know that I have that sense of community, having worked in DeKalb at NIU [Northern Illinois University] for all those years, and Lynn working over in Rosemont and over in Hoffman Estates. We were commuting so much and spending so much time—I back in Springfield and in DeKalb—that I never really involved myself or got as involved as I thought I would need to consider running for office. I don't know that that base would be there. So over the years I guess I've thought about it a time or two, but I also know what you give up and what you get into when you run.

DePue: Nineteen ninety-seven, then, Governor Edgar makes the announcement that he will not be running for reelection. What are your thoughts at that time?

Zehnder: Personally I thought it was the right decision for him. He always said, "What you couldn't accomplish in two terms as governor, you probably aren't going to get done." I know he had had a long run, a successful run, he did a lot of good for the state, and he deserved to do what he wanted to do. For me, I was disappointed. After four years at Revenue, I felt that I knew it. I was really enjoying the process and the management, and I thought we were getting somewhere. If four years is your baccalaureate, then the second four years I could really do some things. I knew I was getting more involved in policy. So for myself personally, I was disappointed. I did make some overtures to the Ryan folks to see if they might be interested in reappointing me, but they were

not receptive to that, and had someone who had been the assistant director who was very close to George and ended up succeeding me as the director. And I understood that. That's the way that works.

But at that point I wasn't sure what I was going to do. I knew it was going to impact me directly. Lynn and I were both talking about, "It's a bigger world out there; let's see what opportunities present themselves." She got the offer from Sears, and that's something she wanted to do; she wanted to go into the private sector. And I said, "Well, that's fine. That's up in my old stomping grounds, and we can go up there." I started working with a firm based out of Kansas that was doing some revenue consulting—economic development issues is what it was, but a lot of it was reviewing tax positioning—and worked with them for a couple years. But I did miss government when I was doing that. I missed the interaction, the camaraderie, the public policy. So then the position for state relations at Northern Illinois University came up, and I welcomed that opportunity.

DePue: Where were you living at that time, in DeKalb?

Zehnder: No, we were in Dundee, West Dundee.

DePue: It's a little bit of a commute, then.

Zehnder: And that was not a fun part. Having been used to Springfield, where your long-distance commute is ten minutes, (DePue laughs) short is five, to go almost an hour each way each day was the tough part of the job. I just retired from the university a month ago. I really enjoyed the opportunity there and the interaction and getting to know the legislative process better than I had throughout all the years I worked for Edgar, because I was never the legislative point person, but I was for the university. I knew a lot of the legislators and I knew the process, but actually getting involved in that in detail—and the university community is a different environment—I enjoyed that. But the commute, I gave up easily.

DePue: (laughs) I would think it's an easier commute than heading into the city, though.

Zehnder: Yeah, I think I would agree. Lynn doesn't do the whole way into the city—she only goes as far as Rosemont—but I think between the two of us I probably had the better commute.

DePue: Let's close up with some reflections here. I'll give you a chance to weave in some things that maybe we haven't talked about. You had a long time working for Governor Edgar. Now, admittedly the last eight years were not nearly as close as the first few years. But his greatest strengths.

Zehnder: Being a decent, honest person and an intelligent, astute student of government.

DePue: Weaknesses or shortcomings?

Zehnder: Well, (pause) I don't know. I think he was right for the times. People contrasted him with Governor Thompson. Governor Thompson was more the big-picture guy, you know, let's do great things, let's build, let's move out. Jim was not in a position to do that, either budgetarily or the time period that he served, so I think he was very appropriate for what he did. The one big management style difference I saw between him and Thompson—but as years went on, maybe not as great a difference as I initially thought—Edgar seemed to keep a core of people very close to him throughout his whole tenure. Thompson would kind of move 'em in, move 'em out, and expand his reach in a lot of areas that way. But I guess in both of their own rights, they were effective. Then you looked at succeeding governors and other public officials, and you could compare those subsequent styles to Edgar and Thompson and say, Yeah, but it's not always the style that makes the success. I think it's adapting your style to the environment and the need, and I think Jim did that extremely well.

DePue: Now, looking back over your personal memory, how would you rank Edgar as governor?

Zehnder: Rank him?

DePue: Yeah. It's an interesting collection, the last forty, fifty years.

Zehnder: Yeah. To me, he was the best that I've known in both what he had to do to adjust to the needs of the state and in being a moderate person and a moderate style in a state that's well-balanced politically—or it was; it seems to have gotten more Democratic lately. I think Jim adapted to the needs of most of the people and was very appropriate for Illinois at that time.

DePue: Any reflections on either George Ryan or Rod Blagojevich as governor? I guess you've given us some in terms of their board and commission positions.

Zehnder: I've always described George more as the grandfatherly type. He was a bit gruff at times, very gracious to those who knew him well—maybe overly gracious in some cases, and I think that ultimately got him in trouble.

DePue: You mean the loyalty issue?

Zehnder: The loyalty issue and allowing—Edgar was never easy on his people. He tried to keep everything in check. I think George was very gracious to his people and very tolerant to those who were close to him, apparently too tolerant. I think some of his staff took advantage of it and exploited it, and George let them. That's apparently what put him into the position that got him incarcerated, convicted.

Blagojevich, never really—I was at functions with him, and never really met the man. It surprised me how a number of people who worked for him—I mean, some I thought you couldn't get close to. They were hard to get to know, they were difficult, but there were a few that I thought were decent people that were personable. Talking about Jim's strengths versus Blagojevich's weaknesses—the loyalty factor. Some people who I thought were good people seemed to defend what to me was indefensible in the Blagojevich administration. You've just got to wonder how getting into those positions, you could continue to do that and still maintain your self-respect.

DePue: Is it painful for you to watch what's happened in the last couple of governors, having worked for Edgar?

Zehnder: I think it's the example for the whole state. George, I always wondered why; it didn't have to go that way. Blagojevich, it seemed like it was unavoidable; I mean, that was just his personality. I didn't recognize until the end that it was actually Blagojevich, because at times he'd seem kind of like the puppet out there, that maybe there were people directly reporting to him who were doing all the stuff that was going on—because it was pretty obvious that there was stuff going on. I thought maybe he was somewhat oblivious to it. Then when you hear the tapes and hear the testimony, you know that he was pushing it as hard as anybody.

DePue: As we sit here now, it's been just a couple weeks since he was convicted on seventeen counts, I believe.

Zehnder: Yeah.

DePue: Now he's waiting for sentencing.

Zehnder: My only comment is, it should be a lesson to all of us.

DePue: This is kind of an off-the-wall question, but I had written down in my notes previously: talk to you about a snowstorm, a trip in a snowstorm. That might take you back quite a few years.

Zehnder: Talk about Jim being intense. (laughs) We were going down to a function in LaSalle–Peru. We were in the Chicago office, Thompson Center, and it began snowing. It was an evening affair that we were going to go to, and we were going to drive down there. I think we were going to drive all along. But we knew the prediction was a heavy snowstorm, so we had to get an early start. We ended up starting hours before we ordinarily would have had to leave. The snow was just coming down, and traffic got to be a mess. We were on the road for, I think it was two hours, or an hour and a half at least, before we passed Comiskey Park, and we knew that was going to be bad news. We ended up going the whole way, just slip-sliding along, over to the dinner in Peru.

They had finished eating. The whole dinner was over, the program was over, everything, when we finally got there. The crowd had stuck around, at least a good portion of them, and Jim got up and gave his remarks. But that was only half the trip; we still had to get back to Springfield. The snow was pretty much in the northern part of the state. But the troopers ended up driving, meeting down somewhere—Peoria, perhaps—switching cars, and then driving back to Springfield. But that was ten hours, it seemed like, in the car that day through snowstorms, sitting in the backseat with Jim. (laughs) It would have been tough enough to be there by myself, but he was... He had a hard time just sitting back and saying, Oh, this is the way it is. He was intense. He always wanted to get things done.

The other thing he was very intense about was being on time, and he'd get a little antsy when we weren't there. It was a good trait for him to have. He had seen politicians show up late for a lot of events, and he didn't want to be one of those.

DePue: I can vouch that now that he's in the retirement stage of his life, he's not as concerned about being on time for events.

Zehnder: Well, I think he tried. I think he still tries. It's in his nature.

DePue: Of all these different positions you had, and you had quite a variety of them during these twenty years, the highlight for you?

Zehnder: Two. Two different distinct highlights in general terms. The secretary of state years were so... When I walked into that arena and it was such a change from what I had been doing, working in personnel and management positions in the private sector, it was so exciting. That was, as I described before, the *West Wing* of my life. That was the show. That was the excitement, the interaction, the politics, the campaigns. It was just really a highlight. Department of Revenue was a great management experience, and that was a totally different sphere or environment. I just enjoyed that experience, enjoyed the change but also the opportunity, and the process. So those two during that whole tenure were really unique opportunities that I had. And how'd you get there, you always wonder, but I was glad I did.

DePue: We've been at this for quite a while even today. I really appreciate your taking some time and putting up with my questions about things like boards and commissions and how it really works and the Department of Revenue. Any final comments you'd like to make?

Zehnder: Part of this project that you're doing is a reflection on the Edgars, and I was thinking after we talked last time about them as a couple and as acquaintances and friends. They're just wonderful people. I mentioned earlier today that Brenda and Jim not only accommodated us when Lynn and I had our rehearsal dinner, but I remember her going out of her way to host my sisters at the

governor's mansion for a tour one day when I had them all in town. Just delightful people. It was a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to work with them, for him, and for the people of Illinois. He always ended his speeches "make this a good place to call our home," and I think he did that.

DePue: Thank you very much, Ken. It's been a pleasure to interview you.

Zehnder: Thank you.

DePue: Enjoyed all of it.

Zehnder: Appreciate it.

(end of interview #2)