Interview with Andy Foster

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Interview # 1: July 12, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Monday, July 12, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here on the telephone today with Andy Foster. How are you, Andy?

Foster: I'm good, Mark. How are you?

DePue: I'm doing great. This is a very rare occasion for me. I don't do telephonic interviews too much because it's usually a lot better to do it face to face, but you're in Colorado, and I'm in Illinois. Right now, the state of Illinois has a 13.5 billion–dollar budget deficit, so I don't think it's going to happen except on the telephone.

Foster: Well, that's right. I'm going to correct you slightly. I'm in California, but you're close—it's a C, and I'm out west.

DePue: That's because I was mixed up. Governor Edgar currently is in Colorado.

Foster: Yes, that's right. That's the mix-up. So yeah, I'm in the Bay Area right now. It would be preferable to be face to face with you, but since you and I have had an opportunity to talk before, this is a good way to get our goals accomplished here.

DePue: The subject we want to talk about today is the election of 1994, because you served as Edgar's campaign manager that year. Is that right?

Foster: That's correct.

DePue: We always start with a little bit of background, and in your case, I think it's very important to get the background, so why don't you tell us when and where you were born?

Foster: I was actually born in Logansport, Indiana, but then my family moved to Wheaton, Illinois, when I was very young—I think I was about two or three years old. So I grew up in Wheaton, out in DuPage County, went through public schools there, and then graduated from Wheaton Central High School in 1983. Then I went to Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where I studied political science and had a minor in speech. I graduated from Marquette having had the opportunity to intern and work on a couple of political organizations, and started working for then–Vice President George H.W. Bush.

DePue: I'm going to slow you down a little bit here.

Foster: Okay.

DePue: You said you grew up in Wheaton, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. What did your father do for a living?

Foster: My father was the general sales manager for a small steel tubing company that had its headquarters in Warrenville. It had manufacturing facilities around the country, but their corporate headquarters was in Warrenville. So Dad was pretty much in the steel business his whole life.

DePue: And your mom?

Foster: Mom was a homemaker. She occasionally took some part-time work outside the home when I got a little bit older. I am the youngest of five children, so when I got into elementary school, full-time, Mom did a little part-time work outside of the house just to keep herself busy. My dad was in sales, so he was traveling a lot; so Mom was really the (laughs) force at home during the week, and Dad would be home on the weekends. So that's kind of how it was set up.

DePue: Did you catch the tail end of the Baby Boom generation, or are you too late for that?

Foster: No, I think I'm a year or two late. I'm sort of in that in-between, before we get to Generation X and the end of the Baby Boom. I don't know what 1965 gets you, but I don't know that we've ever been given a label.

DePue: What would you like to use as your label?

Foster: It's interesting. I've thought about that, and I don't know. I don't consider myself Generation X, I think because there's been a lot of pejoratives put on it. (laughter) I don't think I'm really a Baby Boomer either, because 1965 obviously was twenty years after the end of World War II. I'm sort of right smack dab in the middle of the sixties. The year I was born, 1965, interestingly enough, is when Johnson escalated the Vietnam War, so there was a lot going on. The Beatles were obviously big. Culturally, socially,

politically, there was a lot of really interesting things going on, and then obviously throughout the remainder of the 1960s.

DePue: You're still very young when Watergate occurs and all of the turmoil of the mid-seventies.

Foster: That's right. I remember all of it because I grew up in a family that discussed current events quite a bit. Certainly sports was big. We have four boys, and I have one sister. But current affairs were always a big topic in my family, so I was very aware of all the things that were going on at the time.

DePue: Was the family religious as well?

Foster: Yeah, we are Roman Catholic, and practicing. The public schools in Wheaton were outstanding, so we ended up going through public schools but attended church every Sunday. So yeah, I would say we were religious.

DePue: When you were in high school, then, what were the things that really caught your attention, that kept you busy?

Foster: Well, I'm going to take you back, from a political perspective, just a little earlier than that. When I was in grade school—in fact, sixth grade was the 1976 presidential election between President Ford and Jimmy Carter—I had a teacher at Whittier Elementary School who really got our class involved in that election as part of a project. It sort of took on a life of its own in terms of my interest in politics. It was also the year that Governor Thompson was elected to his first term. So there was a lot going on politically. Illinois was a real key battleground state. President Ford had the opportunity to come to Wheaton College, so I begged and pleaded with my mom to have her take me out of school so we could go see President Ford. We didn't see the speech, but we were standing on the street when he pulled up. For a small town like Wheaton, to have the president come is kind of a big deal. That really made a big impression on me.[1]

DePue: Did your friends understand your fascination with all things political?

Foster: At the time, our class was so involved in it, I don't think it was unusual. I think it was a little unusual that I kept up that interest. (laughs) Some of them shared it a little bit, but that was just something where I really sort of was bitten by the bug and obviously was a big supporter of President Ford. I was heartbroken when he lost that election, even though he carried Illinois by a very small margin.

DePue: Where were you at four years later, when Reagan and Carter were running against each other?

[1] Ford visited Wheaton College on Friday, March 12, 1976. "Ford Grilled By Students at Wheaton," *Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 1976.

Foster: I was in high school. I remember that night distinctly. President Reagan, as you know, made a run in the primary against President Ford; there was just a real interesting convention in 1976. So Reagan was very much on the scene and very well known. I was actually coming out of school; I think someone's mom was picking us up from school to drive us home, and she commented how President Reagan had won. I thought, Wow, it's pretty early for that. But then President Carter conceded the election before the polls actually closed in California.

DePue: Yeah. In that primary race in 1980, of course, George Bush was his main opponent. At that time, would you have considered yourself a Bush guy or a Reagan guy?

Foster: I was probably a Reagan guy. I certainly was aware of Bush a little bit. John Anderson, being an Illinois guy, was in the mix for that at some point, so that was kind of an interesting local story. But I would say at that point, I was a Reagan supporter.[2]

DePue: Just a couple more questions on your early years. Who would you consider, growing up, the most important influence on you?

Foster: On me? Probably my family. We were a very close-knit family, so I would say that my family was the largest driving influence in terms of cultivating a lot of my interests. I was the youngest, so my interest in current events really was a little bit ahead of some of my peers, from the perspective of being involved in politics and that sort of thing. It fit with some of my siblings, who were older and obviously more attuned to that. My brother Mike went to Georgetown, and he was very much in the mix of the political beast right around that time. He graduated from high school in '77. So I would say that my family was by far the largest influence on me.

DePue: Equal influence from both your mom and your dad?

Foster: Probably a stronger influence from Mom, just because my dad, as I mentioned, was in sales, and he traveled a lot. He certainly had a large influence on our family, but Mom was kind of the day-to-day person who really raised the kids. So I would say she probably had a larger influence.

DePue: Were either one of them involved in politics at the local level?

Foster: Not at all. In fact, it's interesting. My mom grew up in the Boston area; her family was actually very involved in Democratic politics, as everyone in Boston would be. She grew up—really was a contemporary with the

[2] For Governor Edgar's perspective on the Republican presidential candidates' courtship of Illinois in the 1980 primary, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2009, 90-98. Also see Mike McCormick, interview by Mark DePue, July 8, 2010, 57-61. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

Kennedys. She used to spend her summers at Cape Cod. There was a lot of overlap there, so she was familiar with the Kennedys, and in fact had gone to dance school as a child with Teddy Kennedy. She was very aware of politics, sort of grew up around it. In fact, she didn't like it at all, because I think she saw the other side of it as a kid and saw that whole Democratic machine (laughs) in Boston. So when I first got involved and interested in politics, she was like, why do you want to do that?

DePue: (laughs) Well, not only seeing the Boston Democratic machine, but I would assume you guys are close enough to see the Chicago Democratic machine.

Foster: Yeah. I used to watch the evening news. At the time, Bill Kurtis and Walter Jacobson were the guys on WBBM, Channel 2, and I used to love to watch the political coverage. John Drummond was the guy who covered city hall a lot. I was very plugged into that. I just remember my dad was not a big fan of Mayor [Richard J.] Daley and used to complain about him all the time. (laughs)

DePue: He probably wasn't alone in that respect.

Foster: No. Chicago was a much different place then than it is now; it had really gone through some difficult times in the late sixties and early seventies, so I think he was a vocal critic of the elder Mayor Daley. I just remember that. I don't know if that's as much because Dad was kind of a rock-ribbed Republican. He grew up in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, so I think he came from a pretty Republican household.

DePue: Tell me what you wanted to do, then, going out of high school, in terms of a career.

Foster: I initially started out at Marquette as a journalism major because I was so interested in politics and in the coverage of politics. I really was a big consumer of information in media at the time. At the time, it was the three networks and the print media. There were some real legendary folks still involved in the networks. Walter Cronkite was still on; Dan Rather sort of took over the chair when I was in high school. I really enjoyed the idea of getting into journalism to cover politics. So when I first went to Marquette, I enrolled in the College of Speech with the intention of being a journalism major; for the first year, year and a half, that's what I was pursuing.

DePue: Was it more on the print side or the broadcast?

Foster: Broadcast. I was a broadcast journalism major at Marquette; Marquette's got a great program in that. That's really where I started off, and it coincided with President Reagan's reelection. I found myself being more interested in being in the activist role than the journalist role. That was really when there was this sort of nascent complaining about the liberal media; that's really where that started to become very much a part of the public debate. I jumped in on that

and thought, I could never be a Republican journalist because there aren't any of those, (laughs) so I took a few political science classes and decided that I'd be more interested in being an active participant in the political side of it than as a journalist.

DePue: Did you feel there was a leaning or a bias at the university as well?

Foster: Yeah. Marquette is a Jesuit university, so I would say by and large most of my professors were pretty liberal. So yeah, I felt that pretty much every class I was in, most of the professors didn't like Ronald Reagan.

DePue: They expressed that in the classes?

Foster: Oh, sure. I had a number of professors who were Jesuit priests, and particularly, I would say, in philosophy classes. I had one priest who was a political science professor, and I'll talk about him in a bit; he ended up being my mentor. But most of the faculty at Marquette were, I would say, Democrats and fairly vocal at the time. One of the other things that was going on was all the political activity and military activity that was taking place in Central America. There was a big concern about communism spreading throughout Central America; that was a big part of President Reagan's first-term agenda in Nicaragua and El Salvador and some of those places. A big part of that whole push was the whole idea around liberation theology and philosophy, so there were a lot of priests who were actively involved in human rights issues and things like that. So it took on a little bit of a different tone when it came to some of the courses I was taking. Some of the priests were very outspoken about human rights abuses that were going on in various places, so that also sort of intensified their feelings of being anti-Reagan, if you will.

DePue: Tell us a little bit more, then, about your political philosophy at the time. How would you have described yourself in the mid-eighties when you were at Marquette?

Foster: I think it largely grew out of where I grew up. DuPage County—not so much anymore—at the time was the rock-ribbed Republican county in Illinois, and delivered very solid margins for Republican presidents and governors. I sort of just grew up and absorbed all that. I would say I was probably a conservative, but not really understanding what that meant much beyond the popular culture and the media. I think as I progressed through politics, my positions tended to track more toward the moderate side of things. But at the time, I think when I was in high school I was just sort of a down-the-line Reagan Republican conservative.

DePue: Well, you mentioned liberation theology. Was there something in particular that you reacted to in that?

Foster: As a principle, I look back at it now and it makes total sense to me because of what we've learned. I don't think I really had enough information going into it to understand it. I think what happens is when you're sitting in a class, you're a freshman or sophomore in college, you don't really know as much about the subject as you probably ought to, and a professor gets up and gives a harangue about how evil President Reagan is—I think it's a reflexive instinct to just say, "That guy doesn't know what he's talking about" or "They're naïve," et cetera. I think the more I've learned about it, I have a better understanding of it. But some of my professors were very passionate—very, very passionate—about the human rights abuses that were happening. I sort of grew up in this Cold War era where a lot of people looked at it as more of a black and white issue. I think as time has marched on, my philosophy has certainly become more, I'd say, mainstream, middle-of-the-road. At the time, I was just kind of parroting back what I would hear.

DePue: Why don't you talk a little bit about this mentor that you said you had?

Foster: When I changed my major over to political science, one of the first classes you have is just a basic American politics introductory class. There was a priest, Father Tim O'Brien, who taught the class. He is not a Jesuit priest; he was a diocesan priest who happened to be an adjunct professor at Marquette—very dynamic guy, great sense of humor, really presented the subject matter in a way that I think was interesting and relevant to college freshmen and sophomores who were taking the class, and really sort of brought it into current events. Father Tim was very good at getting speakers who were involved in politics to address the class. So he had a congressman and some county officials from Milwaukee County, and really tried to not just talk about the textbook things, but to bring a more practical perspective in terms of what it actually meant to be in government and to run government. That was very appealing to me and I think to many of my peers who ended up becoming political science majors. Right from the very get-go, Father Tim made politics accessible, interesting, relevant, timely.

DePue: At the time you made this shift to political science, what did you envision yourself being in terms of a career?

Foster: I don't know. I sort of thought that maybe I would get involved in campaigns. But when you're eighteen, nineteen years old, I don't know that I really had a clue. When I started off in journalism, I figured I'd be a journalist. Then when I switched to political science, it was less clear, because my eldest brother was a government major at Georgetown, and he ended up working for a bank; I wasn't exactly sure where it was going to lead me. But I knew in the interim, while I was in college, it would give me the opportunity to take an active participatory role in campaigns and sort of see what that was like. I thought, I'm just going to do internships and sort of get some hands-on practical experience and try to see if it's something I want to make a career out of. And that's what I did.

DePue: Let's fast-forward to 1987 and graduation. What was on the horizon at that time?

Foster: I think my sophomore or junior year I took an internship in a congressman's office; that was encouraged for political science majors. I think I got three hours of credit for doing it, but it wasn't a lot. I took an internship with the freshman congressman from the south side of Milwaukee, Jerry Kleczka, who is a Democrat. Father Tim had tried to place me in a couple of the Republican members' offices, but those filled up pretty quickly, so I begrudgingly said, Okay, I'll go work for this guy. Father Tim knew Jerry for years. They had known each other through politics in Milwaukee. I think I was Congressman Kleczka's first intern, so they were a little wary about hiring this kid who was a Republican out of Illinois, but they interviewed me and we all hit it off.

It was just a phenomenal experience for me. It was great, because he was a freshman, so not real high in seniority, and spent a lot of time in the district working his constituents. I got to spend a fair amount of time with the congressman. At the time, the south side of Milwaukee used to be represented by Congressman Clem Zablocki, who was on foreign affairs for years and years. He was old and had passed away, so Jerry was initially a little bit more on the conservative side as a Democrat.[3] I think that changed over time; he became more liberal. He ended up on House Ways and Means, but at the time he was a freshman and just learning the job himself. So I got to spend a fair amount of time with him around the district and working on constituent issues; it just gave me a whole different perspective about politics and the actual day-to-day operations of government. That was probably one of the real key moments for me in terms of thinking that I might want to pursue politics as a career. Didn't get me to convert to become a Democrat; they had hoped, but that didn't happen.

So I started to volunteer. Looking at the upcoming presidential election in '88, I thought, I want to see if I can maybe hitch my star and get involved in one of these campaigns.

DePue: The timing's good in that respect, isn't it?

Foster: The timing was fantastic. One of my good friends at Marquette had an internship with Sen. Bob Kasten, and I got to sort of tag along with him on a lot of things with Senator Kasten. At one point, Vice President Bush was coming in to campaign for Bob, and they needed some volunteers to help coordinate his visit. My friend—we ended up becoming roommates in Washington—called and said, "Hey, do you have some extra time to help out with the advance team or something in terms of the planning?" I did that, and

[3] Clement J. Zablocki (D-WI) served from 1949 until his death December 3, 1983. Gerald D. Kleczka (D-WI) succeeded him, serving from April 1984 to 2005. *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774-Present*, http://bioguide.congress.gov.

at the end of the visit, I got to meet Vice President Bush. It was in a rope line; it wasn't any big private meeting or anything.

It was a real memorable thing for me; he made a very positive impression on me, so I decided I was going to work for his campaign. Any time he came back to the state, I would volunteer to just help on logistics, that sort of thing. As I was inching closer and closer to graduation, my parents, particularly my dad, was sort of saying, You've had (laughs) four years of a nice, private university, and you've got to start thinking about what you're going to do with your career. So I started reaching out to the Bush campaign. At that time, they didn't have a full-time state campaign in Wisconsin—it was really still early for that——I called the national headquarters and figured out who was in charge of the Midwestern states. So I wrote a letter indicating my interest, saying I was graduating, and if there was an opportunity to help on the campaign in Wisconsin or Illinois or anywhere—really anywhere—I would be interested. And the person I wrote to was the regional political coordinator for the Great Lakes states; her name was Mary Matalin.[4]

DePue: (laughs) Yes.

Foster: I got a call from her assistant to say, "Hey, we got your letter, thanks very much. It just so happens that the Wisconsin Republican convention is coming up this summer; would you be willing to volunteer and help do activities for Vice President Bush?" I said, "Of course I would." I drove up—I think Oshkosh is where the convention was that year—and had the opportunity to meet Mary Matalin for the first time, really sort of followed her around for two days. The surrogate that came in to represent the Bush campaign at that convention was Neil Bush, who is the vice president's son. I got to drive Neil around and help get him from place to place. It just really solidified my interest in George Bush, and I got to meet a member of his family. Neil's a terrific guy, very nice guy. It also gave me a chance to get to know Mary a little bit. I just kept bugging her weekly (laughs) because I was graduating, and I knew that there was some expectation that I'd find a job.

This was all happening in the fall of 1987. I graduated a semester late. I didn't graduate in May of '87; I graduated in December because I had taken an internship that required me to take some time off, so I was a semester behind. As you remember, that's when the big stock market crash happened, in October 1987, and the economy was a little iffy at the time. I was starting to

[4] Mary Matalin, a native of Calumet City, Illinois, is a Republican political consultant who served as chief of staff to Republican National Committee chairman Lee Atwater from 1988 until his death in 1991; as a political director on both of George H.W. Bush's presidential campaigns; and as an assistant to George W. Bush and counselor to Dick Cheney from 2000 to 2002. She is also noted for marrying her Democratic rival, James Carville, in 1993. "Mary Matalin," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Matalin. Matalin's mentor, Burton Southard, encouraged one of Edgar's future aides, Kirk Dillard, to apply to the Illinois Legislative Staff Internship Program. Kirk Dillard, interview by Mark DePue, September 29, 2009, 22.

get nervous about a job, so I just kept pestering them. Finally I got a call right before I graduated basically saying that they had identified a field coordinator position in Wisconsin for the primary campaign, and would I be interested? Of course I jumped and said yes, I would love to take that and have the opportunity to work for the vice president. I was feeling very important, and it was a very exciting moment. I hung up the phone and proceeded to call my parents and say, "You need not worry, I found a job. I'm going to be working, when I graduate, for the vice president." They were both very pleased. My dad said, "What are they going to pay you?" I had to admit to them that I was a little embarrassed to say I had forgotten to ask that question.

DePue: (laughs) Would that have been the first position? Everything else before this had been volunteer work?

Foster: Yes, everything else up to that point, including my time on the Bush campaign. In my final semester of college, I only had a few courses to take. They had opened up a small office on Wisconsin Avenue, not far from campus; I was spending most of my day there, just answering the phone or doing whatever was necessary. So yeah, that was my first paying job, and I think it was a thousand dollars a month. (laughs)

DePue: Were you a legal resident of Wisconsin or still in Illinois?

Foster: I was still a legal resident of Illinois, but I had stopped voting in Illinois because Wisconsin had very liberal voting laws. I don't know if they've changed them, but basically you could walk in with a utility bill on the day of an election and vote in Wisconsin. Starting with the '84 campaign, when President Reagan was running for reelection, I helped organize the Marquette campus for Reagan. So from that point on, I was voting in Wisconsin.

DePue: Andy, I apologize ahead of time on this question, but you don't suppose there were people who voted in Wisconsin and then went back to their home state of Illinois and voted, do you?

Foster: I'm sure of it. I was not one of them, but I'm sure that some did.

DePue: Now that we've cleared that up—

Foster: That trend continued all the way through to (laughs) the 2000 election—as you well remember, Bush versus Gore—when Wisconsin was one of the states that was highly controversial because of some questionable voting in the city of Milwaukee. I'm not sure, but I think Wisconsin might have tightened up their residency requirements a little bit.

DePue: In college, you were a supporter of Ronald Reagan, then Bush came along, and you were impressed by the man. What impressed you?

Foster: He was very personable. It's funny, because at the time, George Bush was largely being characterized as a wimp. I'll never forget this, because I had been volunteering for a while on Vice President Bush's activities when *Newsweek* came out with that cover story entitled "The Wimp Factor."[5] I think that was in the fall of '87, and I was in the middle of preparing for one of his visits to Wisconsin. John MacIver was the guy who was the chairman of the Bush campaign in Wisconsin; he was a very prominent attorney in Milwaukee. I think I was in his office when that issue came out, and he was really rather annoyed by the whole thing. But I had met him [Bush] a couple of times, and I was shocked at the disconnect between what I had seen portrayed in the media versus my own personal interaction with him. It further drove home the point that maybe the media isn't entirely fair in the way they cover Republican candidates. I've since learned that that's how they cover candidates.

But these things take on a little bit larger life. The knock on Bush was that he was Reagan's lapdog—in fact, I think George Will referred to him that way—so he was getting a fair amount of negative press. Guys like Al Haig and Bob Dole, who were in the primary campaign against him, were feeding that as well. When I had met him, I just thought it couldn't be any further from the truth. I was very impressed with him, and I was impressed with his family. I met Neil, then I got to meet George W. Bush, who had come into Wisconsin to campaign for him, and just thought they were a very, very nice family. And he was a very nice man. I really had just personally grown to like him a lot.

DePue: At that point in time, then, would you have considered yourself a Bush Republican more than a Reagan Republican?

Foster: At the time, I don't think you could have slipped a piece of paper between the two, because George Bush, as you know, was a very loyal vice president; he would never take a position that would have been opposed to President Reagan. I think if you were to ask someone in 1984, '85, or '86 the difference, they would have said, "No, there really isn't a difference." Now, in the time that I had first heard of George Bush, in that'87 timeframe, I had come to understand his record a little bit better; in that, when he first ran in 1980, I think he identified himself as being pro-choice, or at least led some to believe that. So I had come to understand that he was a little bit more moderate than President Reagan. But I think if you go back and look at it, I don't know that anyone would have said there was a whole lot of difference there. I think where the difference emerged for me was in style and personality.

[5] *Newsweek*, October 19, 1987.

DePue: He also wasn't quite the fiscal warrior that Reagan was; he started off in 1980—"voodoo economics" was one of his charges.[6]

Foster: (laughs) Yeah, that was his mantra. He was opposed to a lot of the deficits that were being amassed, particularly around the whole defense buildup. I think he was the beneficiary of that when he became president, though, in terms of the Cold War. So his view on that changed a little bit, although his 1990 tax package was really more to those roots.

DePue: So 1987, '88, you've got a full-time job. It had to be, for a young kid right out of college, one of the most fascinating jobs anybody could find themselves in.

Foster: Yeah, it really was. It was a lot of fun. There was only one other person on the payroll in Wisconsin; it was a lady who was really our office coordinator. So I was the person that hit the road and covered all of the various Lincoln Day dinner events that happened in all the various counties around the state of Wisconsin. I served as, really, the day-to-day contact with the national campaign. As I mentioned, John MacIver was our statewide chairman, but John was a very busy attorney, so he primarily dealt with fundraising issues. He would deal with Vice President Bush and Lee Atwater and some of the senior people from the campaign. I probably talked to Mary Matalin two, three times a week, and the folks that worked for her, and had an opportunity to meet Rich Bond.[7] I didn't really know it at the time, but I was starting to meet some of the people that would become pretty important, from a career perspective, for me.

DePue: How does somebody as young as you were at the time deal with all of the political heavyweights in the Republican Party in Wisconsin?

Foster: It was interesting. John MacIver gave me a lot of political cover. What I mean by that is John was really seen as George Bush's guy in Wisconsin, so people didn't think of me as anything other than the young college guy who was doing the Lincoln Day dinner circuit. John was really the guy that the media went to or elected officials and that sort of thing, and I was doing the grunt work on the ground. It was fine; I wasn't prepared to deal with that other stuff. I learned an awful lot from John. He was a very significant person in my early years in politics. He's just a terrific man, and a lot of integrity—and very gruff. It taught me that when I called John, I better have my thoughts organized and be prepared to defend a position if I needed to take one. So from an early career perspective, I would say John was very important in helping me put together a skill set in politics.

[6] During the 1980 primary campaign, George H.W. Bush coined this term to criticize Ronald Reagan's economic policies.

[7] Rich Bond was an important Republican political operative who served as chairman of the Republican National Committee in 1992.

Literally every county has a Lincoln Day dinner; from late January to March they had these dinners. I probably gained ten pounds driving around from dinner to dinner, eating chicken and mashed potatoes. I'd stand up and give the standard stump speech for Bush, someone would speak for Dole, and someone would speak for the other candidate. Someone was always there for Kemp and some of the other folks. We all got to know each other and ended up carpooling together. It was just a great learning experience.

DePue: You got any particular stories you'd like to tell from that time of your life?

Foster: The gentleman who was the chairman for Bob Dole's campaign was Mike Grebe; Mike was also a very prominent attorney in Wisconsin. Mike now runs the Bradley Foundation up in Milwaukee. But Mike was a very, very well thought-of guy and was close to Bob Dole. A lot of times I'd go to these events, and I'd get up to speak, then Mike Grebe was the other speaker; so the difference was day and night. Who is this college kid, versus this very well-known, well-seasoned guy? But Mike was always really nice and taught me a few things along the way.

I remember in particular—I think it was over in La Crosse—a Lincoln Day dinner. It was right after the Iowa caucus where Dole had come in and beat Bush, and it was just before the New Hampshire primary where Bush came off the ropes to sort of reclaim the momentum in that campaign. So for about ten days it was pretty dark. Everybody thought, Here's the frontrunner, he's the sitting vice president, and he just got upset in Iowa. When you get over to La Crosse, that's right on the border there, so it was pretty depressing at the time. I just remember Mike kind of putting his arm around me and saying, "You know, this campaign's got a long way to go. Keep your chin up; you're doing a good job." I thought that was awful nice of him because everybody else in the room was saying, "Oh, Bob Dole's going to win," and "George Bush, he's toast." It just goes to show you how fast things in politics can change. It was a great experience because ten days later, Bush won New Hampshire, then went on to win South Carolina and sweep Super Tuesday, and that was that.

DePue: Let's move ahead again. What happened to you personally after Bush won the election? Are you out of a job?

Foster: Yeah, interestingly enough, I had no concept of how any of this worked, so I figured we were going to do such a wonderful job of delivering Wisconsin that I'd of course be promoted on to some big position in Washington. Reality started to set in, because what happened was George Bush closed the deal a little too quickly. By the time they got to Wisconsin, the nomination had already been sewn up. In fact, it was sewn up the week before. Statistically he was over the top, from a delegate count perspective, in Illinois, which was the week before the Wisconsin primary.

So I started asking, "What happens now?" The folks in Washington all said, "We're going to close down the office until after the convention." Essentially everybody'd run out of money and took the summer to raise money for the victory fund and get ready for the convention. So I was thinking, Uh-oh, (laughter) I'm going to be out of work. There were a number of folks locally who said, "We could probably find a way to get you involved in a state legislative race or something like that," but I had had a taste of the big time, and I wasn't interested in that. I kept pestering poor Mary Matalin and her assistant Carla. They kept saying, "Look, we're out of money and we don't have any positions back here, so just hang tight in Wisconsin and then we'll figure something out after the convention." I think the primary in Wisconsin was in April, so I was thinking that's a long time away.

I had met a couple of folks on the campaign who were based in Washington, and they encouraged me to just move out there and sleep on somebody's couch until something worked out. I decided that that's what I was going to do. My parents were, I'm sure, a little baffled by the whole idea, but they were supportive because they saw that I was interested and I had been really involved and motivated. I ended up packing up my car and driving off to Washington, DC, and ended up moving in with someone, literally sleeping on their couch for about a month and a half until I figured something out.

DePue: He obviously won the election in November. What happens after that for you job-wise?

Foster: I had ended up getting a job at the Republican National Committee for the summer, then went back over to the campaign full time after the convention and worked on the political staff of the George Bush for President campaign—I guess it was Bush–Quayle by then. The guy who was the national political director ended up being named as the political director at the White House, so he was my boss at the time. They were looking to staff up the political office. The way the campaign was organized was around regions; that's how they were going to organize the political office of the White House, around regions. I called them up and said, "I'd love to come work for you." Of course, me and about ten thousand other people. It's one of those situations where I knew Jim—Jim Wray was his name; he was the guy who was named political director at the White House—had worked for Jim, and I think had proven myself to him. The opportunity availed itself that he needed someone to coordinate the plains states—Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Oklahoma—but I did get Texas in there, too. So about a week before the inaugural, I went over and had an interview with Jim and ended up getting a job working in the political affairs office at the White House.

DePue: This is like a dream job for you, then, isn't it?

Foster: It really is, and it all happened so fast. I'm forty-five; at the time I think I was about twenty-two or twenty-three years old, and I don't think I had any real

comprehension of what was about to happen. (laughs) I remember calling my parents, and my dad was like, "You mean **the** White House?" (DePue laughs) "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm going to work at the White House." I just said it as though that happens to people every day. I think there's something to be said for being young and dumb. So yeah, it was very much a dream of anybody who majors in political science and gets active in campaigns. I think of watching the Obama campaign and have to believe, based on what I've read, there were a lot of people like me who were young and just got involved and are now sitting at the White House.

So it does happen. Years later, when I working for Governor Edgar, I would go and speak at high schools around the state, and talk to people about how I got involved in politics. I think people find it hard to believe that you can get a job at the White House if your parents aren't big donors or somehow connected politically. In fact, really in my experience, that was more the norm than the folks who have parents who are big donors. People who grind it out are the ones that get the jobs.

DePue: What did you do for the administration specifically? You said you were regional coordinator. Can you flesh that out a little bit more for us?

Foster: Sure. The political office at the White House was established under President Reagan. I think it was an outgrowth of what had happened at Watergate, where everybody knows that politics is very much a part of the fabric of the White House. But after Nixon, there was a question as to how to keep it aboveboard and do it in a way that people felt comfortable it wasn't some sort of backroom dealing. The Reagan administration started an office that was largely paid for by the Republican National Committee in terms of all the expenses of the office. The salaries were paid by the government because we did a lot of other things—advocacy of the president's agenda, that sort of thing—I would call it more public liaison work. But the primary purpose of that office is to really drive the president's agenda politically, as well as the party's agenda. Typically what that office does is coordinate all the president's activities when it comes to Republican Party events and candidate-specific events.

So as we got in there, we started to look toward the midterm election as being the first test of President Bush, as it is for every incumbent when they get to their first midterm election. And so laying a lot of the groundwork for that. President Bush had just come off a long and grueling campaign, so he wasn't exactly interested in going out and doing a bunch of politics. That first year or so, it was more just getting to know people, letting people out in the states know who they could contact, the key political folks. Then as we got further into it, it was really preparing for the midterm elections and coordinating the president's travel schedule. If the president were going to do a fundraising direct mail piece, we would be the office that would vet that

with the RNC. It took on a variety of roles as well as pushing the president's domestic policy agenda.

DePue: Was there a lot of travel involved with the job?

Foster: There was, and I loved it. I thought it was great. I was a young guy, not married, not involved in a relationship at the time, so I had the opportunity to get out and fly around in the states that I was covering. Initially I covered more of the plains states—the Dakotas down to Texas. I would travel out to those states for the various Republican conventions and get to know folks, and people who were either incumbents or going to be candidates. Just spent a lot of time in those states getting to know people. I'd met a lot of them during the campaign, so solidifying things. Then in 1990, it was full-on campaign mode, and I spent, I would say, at least half of that year on the road.

DePue: Let's talk specifically about your liaisons with the state of Illinois.

Foster: A colleague of mine decided to leave the White House office to go back to Kentucky to work for Senator [Mitch] McConnell; he was working on the Great Lakes states. I had asked my boss, since I was from Illinois, I'd love to see if I could pick up the Great Lakes states and trade out the plains states, which were wonderful and full of wonderful people but a little boring to me. He said, "Well, I'll give you an even better deal: you get to do both." So (DePue laughs) I doubled my coverage for the number of states I was covering.

I started to get actively involved, from the White House liaison perspective, with Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, Missouri, and Iowa. I'd known a lot of people in Wisconsin from my time there, so that was a pretty easy transition. Oddly enough, [despite] Illinois being my home state through college and after college, I really didn't deal very much politically with Illinois because it wasn't one of the states in my region. So I looked at this as a great opportunity to get to know the folks there. I started doing what you do, which is pick up the phone, call people, and tell them who I was. One of the first people that I made contact with was Carter Hendren, who was Jim Edgar's campaign manager.[8] I talked to Carter a couple times on the telephone to let him know who I was and just establish a rapport there. I also spoke with Bob Hickman, who was the finance chair or the finance director for then–Secretary of State Edgar. So I just had a nice, cordial phone relationship with those folks.

The first time I had the opportunity to really interact with them was in the summer—I would say it was around June 1990. We were planning a

[8] Hendren had worked on Edgar's first campaign for state representative in 1974 and managed Edgar's first statewide race in 1982. At Edgar's request, he returned in 1990 to manage Edgar's first gubernatorial campaign. Carter Hendren, interview by Mark DePue, April 28, 2009, 8-10 and 21-40; May 7, 2009; Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 15, 2009, 84-85; September 2, 2009, 37-38.

multi-state campaign swing for the president to go out and essentially do political fundraisers. At that time, it was too early for just pure political campaign stuff, so everybody was trying to stock up their campaign war chests. The trip involved three of my states—Wisconsin, Illinois, and Nebraska—and I had all three of those states. I had to essentially coordinate the president's activity for the candidates in all three of those states, and they were all back to back. It started in Wisconsin with a luncheon fundraiser for Governor Tommy Thompson. That was going to be followed with an evening cocktail reception dinner for Jim Edgar. We flew on from there to Omaha, Nebraska, and spent the night, and then did a breakfast for then-Gov. Kay Orr.

DePue: At that time, were Bush's poll results good enough to say that most of these people would have very much welcomed a visit from the president?

Foster: Yeah, absolutely. It was still relatively early on in his presidency. It was the beginning of the budget negotiations that ultimately, I think, ended up costing him his office. But at that time, it was June, and the whole discussion around the budget and the deficit and taxes was a few months away. So at the time, yes, everybody was very anxious to have the president come in; he was by far and away the largest draw from a fundraising perspective, so everybody was very interested. I talked to Carter a few times, and dealt a lot with Bob Hickman because it was a fundraiser.

The first time I had a real opportunity to interface with Jim Edgar was during that trip. Traditionally, when the president comes into a state to campaign for somebody, they get that person to fly in on Air Force One with him because that's usually the shot that the evening news will show, the two of them walking off Air Force One. The way we coordinated it was having Secretary of State Edgar meet us up in Milwaukee, where he would then get on the plane for the short flight down to Chicago and have the opportunity to get that wonderful photo op with the president coming off Air Force One. After the Thompson fundraiser was over, we had a little downtime for the press to file their stories, so I was able to meet up with Jim Edgar in the lobby of the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Milwaukee.

So the first time we actually met face to face was in Wisconsin; I got him to the motorcade, got him on Air Force One, and was actually sitting next to him there. We had the chance to talk, and I told him that I had been an admirer of his and pulled out my Illinois driver's license to show him his name and signature on my driver's license— (DePue laughs) which I came to learn is a pretty common thing people used to do—and talked about how I grew up in Wheaton. We had a nice chat. About halfway through the flight, which was a short flight, the president asked him to come up and sit with him in the cabin. That was really the last I saw of him until we got to the fundraiser. But we had a nice chance to chat, had a nice connection.

DePue: How did your job change after Bush's breaking the "no new taxes" pledge?[9]

Foster: As the campaign progressed, that became more and more of an issue. Nineteen ninety was a real seminal year for the Republican Party. The reason I say that is because if you look back, actually even in the midst of the budget discussions and the discussion about raising taxes, the Republican Party did pretty well in that midterm election. I think it was right in the norm in terms of the numbers of seats lost, since most incumbents do lose seats in their midterm election. It wasn't a big blowout that people had thought might happen because George Bush had been talking about breaking his tax pledge.

What had happened on the ground was interesting, because most of these states were in very close races. That year, you had Pete Wilson running for governor in California, Jim Edgar running for governor in Illinois, John Engler running for governor in Michigan, George Voinovich running for governor in Ohio, Tommy Thompson in Wisconsin—you had what would turn out to be a very, very strong group of governors all running at the same time in very, very close battleground states. As we were getting closer and closer to the election, and there was discussion of taxes and the economy was starting into a recession, it became a very dicey thing. Some of the candidates were a little concerned about bringing the president in, because they didn't want the discussion to turn to taxes. In Illinois, that was particularly true because Jim Edgar had endorsed making the temporary education surtax permanent, the position that was actually to the left, if you will, of Neil Hartigan. He had gone forward and said that he was going to make the tax—which Governor Thompson had put in as temporary—permanent if he were to become governor, which was a little controversial at the time. So the whole discussion around taxes was very sensitive.

We came back to campaign in Illinois one other time in the early fall, did a political rally out at the College of DuPage. At that rally, I saw Carter Hendren. I said, "Hey, we're figuring out the last couple weeks of the campaign before the election, and certainly if you guys want to have us back, either to raise money or to do another political event, let me know so I can make sure that it's a priority," because obviously Illinois was important. We stayed in touch, and I did the same with all those other states. California was not part of my portfolio, but the other states were. It became clear that a couple of the other guys were getting weak knees and saying, Well, you know

[9] At the 1988 Republican National Convention, George H.W. Bush's presidential nomination acceptance speech 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. Opposition to this plan by conservatives led to a Columbus Day weekend shutdown of federal spending authority. *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.

what, maybe we don't think it's such a great idea to have the president come back. We had a couple of those interesting conversations.

At the time, I talked to Carter and he was kind of going back and forth because he would love to have had the president to raise money; (laughs) at the same time, he was dealing with getting hit over the head on taxes. So we ended up kind of coming to a mutual agreement that it wouldn't necessarily be best for the president or Jim Edgar to have him come in the week before the election and have taxes be the topic. We actually passed on Illinois, but hit a couple of the other states. That whole budget deal came down shortly after the election, and the political fallout was very heavy.

DePue: Yeah, in my conversations with Governor Edgar about his 1990 campaign, he was pretty much resigned to what he thought was the reality that he was going to lose a very, very close race. Certainly in his mind, part of the reason would be because of President Bush's break in that pledge.

Foster: Yeah. I think that was the fear of Jim Edgar. I think it was the fear of George Voinovich in particular. John Engler was really kind of a long shot at the time; although he was tracking very well in the polls, people really didn't think Engler had a chance to win that race. His view was, I need all the help I can get, so I'll live with whatever the tax message is. He had Bush come in a couple more times. I think Pete Wilson took the same gamble; he needed to raise money. Carter and I had a series of very long discussions about it. He wanted to make it clear to me that Edgar was very conflicted because he personally liked Bush a lot and felt very grateful for all the work he'd done for him, but at the same time… So it was a very cordial discussion. That's what happens in politics. I don't think it ever got out publicly.

DePue: What was the first time you got to meet Edgar, then?

Foster: First time I got to meet Edgar?

DePue: Was it that trip that you were talking about earlier?

Foster: Yeah. That was the first time, on that first political trip when we came back…

DePue: What was your impression of him during that campaign, initially?

Foster: It was exactly what I had perceived him to be up to that point, growing up in Illinois. He was the secretary of state, was a very honest guy, a lot of integrity. He affirmed all of those positive impressions that I had. He was very personable when I met him. We came back one more time for that rally at the College of DuPage, and had an opportunity to spend a little bit more time with him there. He was aware of all my discussions with Carter and with Hickman. I talked to that campaign a lot, so I think we sort of became familiar, not only in person, but through Carter and Bob Hickman as well.

DePue: Would you—

Foster: After the election, he won—obviously a narrow election—as did the other guys; I was feeling pretty good about that. But then we went right from that into the Gulf War. The fallout from the tax deal was real and lasting, but it was interrupted in large part by the first Gulf War.

DePue: Well, that certainly resurrected Bush's popularity with the public.

Foster: Yeah, it really did, and I think it gave him an opportunity that most politicians don't get after they raise taxes. (laughs) And they sort of rewrite history a little bit. Unfortunately, I don't think politically they—"they," being my superiors at the White House and the president—really took full advantage of that opportunity. I think he never felt comfortable parlaying his success in the Gulf War into political capital. I think that made him very uncomfortable; I think it goes back to his time as a veteran of World War II. I think he had a particular view of how politics and the military shouldn't mix. I think he felt very uncomfortable taking personal credit for what was executed at a military troop level. So while people can look back and say, "Gee, he really blew that opportunity," I think, personally, it just never fit for him.

DePue: How much were you directly involved with President Bush during this timeframe? Did you see him and get to deal with him a lot?

Foster: Yes, I did. I wouldn't say that I was dealing with him on the level of a senior advisor—I was not briefing him or interacting with him on a day-to-day government policy perspective—but as he was traveling a lot politically, I saw him very frequently and interacted with him. But again, I don't want to portray it as something it wasn't. I wasn't advising him, I wasn't at his elbow talking about fiscal policy—it was really more on the political side.

DePue: What then for the years after the 1990 election?

Foster: The Gulf War pretty much just completely sucked the oxygen out of everything else in Washington for six months until the cessation of fighting. That summer is when a lot of the troops came home, and there were parades for [Norman] Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell and all that sort of thing. That was the opportunity I think was missed a little bit, in that the president's popularity rating was somewhere around 91 percent, and there was a feeling that he could overcome some of the damage from the tax increase by having a more aggressive legislative program for the fall of 1991 heading into the reelect in '92. Unfortunately, the best they could do was to reauthorize the Transportation Act. That was the big (laughs) political debate over—the acronym was called ISTEA, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act.[10] (laughter) That was the big one. I think everybody was kind of

[10] On the importance of ISTEA, see Kirk Brown, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 22, 2009, 105-109.

scratching their heads saying, are you kidding me? That's the best we could do here?

Unfortunately, at the time there was also a lack of leadership, in that Governor [John] Sununu, who was the White House chief of staff, was caught up in sort of a personal scandal. If you remember back then, he was accused of using government jets for a lot of his personal activity and campaign-related activity. That story took on a life of its own, and it really paralyzed the White House. It just absolutely… When the chief of staff is under attack, everything stops and turns into a wait-and-watch game, so I think we lost a lot of momentum during that particular time because of the whole situation with Governor Sununu. President Bush, wonderful man that he is, loyal to a fault, let that go on too long, and it just really slowed everything down. That's when Patrick Buchanan started making noises about running in a primary, and that's when all of the cards started to fall into place for the 1992 reelection campaign.

DePue: I know that this is about the timeframe you came back to Illinois, so tell us how you got to the decision to do that, because I think that's significant.

Foster: I had been in Washington for close to four years, and as we had discussed, I had spent a lot of time traveling and really missing a lot of family. You really get disconnected from the world when you're in that place. I felt that I was ready to make a move, to get back to the Midwest. I had to decide whether I wanted to work on the reelection campaign or not, and that didn't feel real appealing. I was at the White House, which is a pretty cool place to be working; the thought of giving that up to go sit across the street at the campaign and essentially do what I'd done four years earlier just really didn't appeal to me. And there was a real tug to get home, to get back to Illinois and closer to my parents and my siblings.

So I started thinking about getting back to Illinois; wasn't exactly sure how I was going to do it. Lo and behold, in the early part of 1992, when George Bush was doing his official campaign announcement—he actually did it I think January or February of that year—all of the Republican elected officials came out to Washington for the announcement. I got a call from Governor Edgar's office; I think either Gene Reineke or Kirk Dillard had called me. Kirk was the chief of staff at that point, and Gene was running the state party and Citizens for Edgar. Basically it said, "Would you be interested potentially in thinking about moving back to Illinois, or would you be open to a discussion with the governor?" Of course my thinking at that time was very much aligned with that.

So the governor was coming into town; we had set up lunch over at the Willard Hotel in between campaign events, and we had just a really nice discussion. It was the two of us alone. He just kind of wanted to understand what my thinking was and what my plans were. I told him that I was sort of at

this cross point and that I was kind of deciding; if it went on much longer, by default you have to stick around and go through the reelection campaign. I said that wasn't my first choice, but… He indicated that he was going to start looking at putting together a team for his eventual reelection campaign and wondered if I would be interested, open to moving back to Illinois. I told him that I was.

That was our initial discussion. A few weeks went by, and I followed up with Kirk Dillard and Gene: "Well, where is that at?" Of course, Jim Edgar was in the middle of a big budget (laughs) battle, as those first two years of his administration were. Eventually I ended up having a conversation with Gene and really talking through the logistics of what would be involved in the job. Ended up having a discussion with Al Jourdan, who was the state party chairman at the time, and decided that that's what I wanted to do. So in the late spring of 1992, I picked up and left Washington, DC, and moved to Springfield. My job was going to be sort of a split between the state party executive director and director of Citizens for Edgar.[11]

DePue: When you're telling the people back in Washington, DC, that's what you're wanting to do, I've got to believe that a certain number of them are saying, "Why would you want to go from the big leagues of presidential-level politics back to the state?"

Foster: Yeah, I think people really thought I was nuts. (laughter) Here I was on a regular basis, flying on Air Force One and traveling around the country, and had an opportunity to do some advance work in some foreign countries. Just was really in a pretty interesting, neat place. But I also knew that as the campaign changed, the nature of the president's reelect, there wasn't going to be a strong White House political office; everything was going to be running out of the campaign. I had decided that I didn't want to do that. People who were close to me knew that I was ready for a change. But yeah, I would say by and large you hit it on the head, Mark: most people were like, "Are you nuts?" because at the time, the president's approval rating was still pretty high, and it was just before Ross Perot came on the scene. I think a lot of people thought, Well, you're going to live to regret this because Bush is going to get reelected, and who knows where you'd be then? I had conversations with many of those same people in December, and they all proclaimed I was a genius (DePue laughs) and must have known something. And of course that wasn't true; I just got lucky, I think.

DePue: You mentioned that when you went out there, you were not attached, so that was one of the appeals of moving out to Washington, DC. Was that still the case when you were looking to come back to Illinois?

[11] Gene Reineke, interview by Mark DePue, April 16, 2010, 12-13.

Foster: I was just in a new relationship. I had worked with the woman for four years in the political office, and we had become good friends. She had started dating somebody else. But we remained close friends, as you do in these settings in politics; you spend probably more time with the people you work with than your own family. Through perseverance and time, I ended up having the opportunity to date her, and we actually started dating a couple of months before I moved out to Springfield. So I had waited four long years and finally got my shot—and had already accepted a job in Illinois.

DePue: What happens once you come back to Illinois, in terms of working—

Foster: Shock. (laughs)

DePue: —for the Edgar administration?

Foster: Complete shock. I had only been to Springfield one other time in my life. My senior year in high school, we had taken a trip to Springfield for some history or civics class. So I moved back to Springfield. I have to confess, that first couple of weekends while I was sitting there pretty much by myself, not knowing anybody, I was thinking, What in the world did I just do? I just left Washington, DC, and the White House for this? But it turned out to be great. It was exactly the change that I was ready for. I got thrown in the deep end of the pool pretty quickly because it was an election year. Gene had decided to change roles; the governor had asked him to move over full time to run the Bush campaign, and—

DePue: That's Gene Reineke?

Foster: Gene Reineke. So he and I were both housed out of the Illinois Republican Party office over downtown, just a few blocks from the capitol. It was great. It was a very exciting time for me, being back in Illinois and having grown up there and seen a lot of these political figures. I was actually now in a position to start interacting with them, and that was exciting.

DePue: The thing that always impresses me, talking about people like yourself—Carter Hendren certainly had the same impression—you guys are awfully young when you're doing these things.

Foster: Yeah. I think that has been traditionally the way it's been in politics. I think in some respects, the way it will always be is that you have sort of two different types of people: you've got young people who are right out of college, who are energetic and idealistic and are willing to work for nothing—frankly, the pay is not particularly good; then you've got folks who are a little bit more seasoned, who go off and get a career and then come back into politics in more senior positions later on in life. Then I guess there's folks who just kind of muddle through.

I was very young. I didn't know anything about Illinois politics other than what I had just watched on TV and read in the newspaper and the *Tribune* growing up. So I probably came in and a lot of people were like, Who the hell is this guy? You know, He's from Washington; he hasn't lived in Illinois in years. There was some of that. I would confess, there was some of that. But there were some folks on the governor's staff—Kirk; and I'd gotten to know Dave Bender, who worked for Lieutenant Governor [Bob] Kustra; Steve Schnorf, who was over at CMS; and some of the key political guys for Governor Edgar. Obviously, Gene was a tremendous help in terms of introducing me around to people. Within a few months, I started to make my way.

DePue: What was it specifically, then, that you were doing for the administration, again?

Foster: Well, at the time, I was not in the administration; I was the executive director of the Illinois Republican Party, and I also held the title of executive director of Citizens for Edgar, which at that point was really just the governor's political campaign committee. For the most part, at that time it was just a fundraising committee; Lori Montana and Jeanne Polydoris were the two staff people there, and they were doing most of the work there. CFE was just kind of a fundraising outlet for the governor's eventual reelection campaign, so most of my activity at the time was focused on the state party in the 1992 election.

DePue: In other words, your paycheck is coming from the Republican Party.

Foster: Half of it came from the Republican Party and half of it came from the governor's campaign. That was the deal he cut with the state party so that they wouldn't have to absorb all of my big, fat salary of—I don't know what it was, fifty thousand dollars or something.

DePue: I would assume there aren't that many paid positions in the structure.

Foster: No. I think there were a handful of us, two or three people, on the state party payroll at the time. The finances were very bleak, (laughs) very. We really didn't have a whole lot to do much of anything with. As you know, during presidential years, they set up these victory committees that raise dollars for coordinated campaign activities. In additional to the president's reelection, that year, Rich Williamson was running for the Senate. Those were the two big races in Illinois.

DePue: Since Edgar himself was not up for reelection that year, did most of your efforts then get focused on the senatorial race and on the presidential race?

Foster: Yeah, it was primarily on the presidential race. As you know, the governor was the chairman of President Bush's reelection campaign in Illinois, a task he took very seriously. Gene and I were very much put on point for doing

whatever we could to have a good showing for the president in Illinois. It became pretty obvious to us early on that Bush could not carry Illinois; the economic downturn of 1990 was just starting to turn around, but the economy was still very soft in Illinois. Illinois had evolved to be a much more moderate state politically. I think Bill Clinton—the fact that he based his primary campaign out of Chicago, it really almost became a second home for the Clinton campaign. So we saw some polling in the summer of 1992 that had Bush down fifteen, sixteen points.

DePue: How would the math have changed if Ross Perot was not part of that campaign?

Foster: I think Bush would have won. I don't know that he would have won Illinois, but I think he would have been reelected president. I'm almost certain of that.

DePue: What was your personal feeling about that third-party candidate? That's fairly rare in American politics, and usually affects the total outcome of the election.

Foster: Yeah. I was bitter about it. I thought Ross Perot was a complete kook—not a kook in the sense—I mean, obviously he'd been a very successful businessperson. But he was running a campaign that was largely driven by his ego as much as it was any particular set of issues. I had the unique opportunity—just as I was leaving the White House, that's when the whole Perot thing started to come up—one of the few times I had a chance to be in the Oval Office.

We had a group of Texans come in to visit the White House. I brought them over to the Oval Office. The president wanted to see them. There were about fifteen or twenty of them; they were all sort of the high-end donor types, guys like Boone Pickens and folks like that. So we brought them over to the Oval Office and ran them through to say hi to the president and get a picture with him. I was at the end of the line, ushering people through. The Oval Office has two doors: one that goes out to the hallway by the Roosevelt room, and the other one goes into where the president's private secretary sits. A Secret Service guy closed the door behind me, so I couldn't really turn around and walk out; I had to cross through the room and go out through where the president's secretary sat. Just as I was finishing up this photo op, Secretary Jim Baker, the secretary of state, walked in. The door was blocked; I couldn't really get out. Then part of me was also thinking, This is pretty cool; I'm not really going to try to get out of this room too fast. (DePue laughs)

So the president, Secretary Baker, Boone Pickens, and a guy by the name of Fred Meyer, who was the Republican Party chairman from Texas, were all just kind of talking and chatting. These guys had all known each other for years and years and years. Somebody says, "Hey, what the hell's wrong with Ross Perot?" Bush is just exasperated, and he says, "You know, I don't know what I ever did to this guy, but this is very personal for him."

Some of the other gentlemen in the room let a few expletives fly about their opinions about Ross Perot. Bush talked about how Perot was actively doing the rescue mission and getting guys out of I think it was Vietnam.

DePue: Iran.

Foster: Iran, sorry. President Reagan and his foreign policy team became pretty concerned about it and felt like he had to be told to essentially back off a little bit. President Reagan was sitting—I'm hearing this story firsthand from Bush, and I don't think I'm violating any confidence because I've heard him tell the story later—they're sitting around in the National Security Council meeting. Everyone said, "Well, who can talk to Perot," and he said everyone kind of looked at him and said, "Well, you're the Texan." (laughter) He drew the short straw and had to go deliver the message to Perot. He said from his view, Perot never forgave him for that and personalized it. He said, "That's the only thing I can ever think of that made him mad at me. You know, our families have always been very friendly toward one another."

But back to your question. I'm giving you that because I had a little bit of extra insight that Perot really had an axe to grind with Bush. And I don't know that the advisers to Perot ever thought he could win—he may have thought he could win—but I think it was a spoiler thing. I don't like spoiler things, because you either get in with the idea that you can win it or not. So it was frustrating. Again, in Illinois, I don't think it made much of a difference; nationally, it made much more of a difference. I was obviously still fresh enough from being at the White House, and had just a lot of affinity for the Bush family and President Bush, that it was a sore subject for me.

DePue: How did it feel to be on the losing side of the political equation this time instead of on the winning side?

Foster: It was **terrible.** It was **heartbreaking**. I had really grown to love the Bush family and President Bush, and just had so much respect and admiration for them. Certainly not thinking he's perfect; there are a lot of things, as I mentioned, politically that I think could have been done better, but in terms of the kind of person you want to see occupy that office, I just thought we really had a great man. It was very personal. It was a very personal loss for me. The governor knew that. He knew I was pretty upset about it.

DePue: I know as far as Governor Edgar was concerned, he very much saw himself as in the same political philosophical camp as President Bush.

Foster: Yeah, I think they were both the kind of guys that went in government when they got through the campaigns, which were their least favorite part of politics; I would say that about Edgar as well as Bush. The funny thing about both of those guys, having had an opportunity to work for them, is they are truly political animals—in the sense that they consume huge amounts of

information, synthesize it, have incredibly good instincts—but as campaigners and as political beings, they like to govern more than they like the politics. I saw a lot of similarities between the two.[12]

DePue: What happens after that campaign, for you?

Foster: The day after the campaign, after the 1992 election, the governor asked to see me and Gene Reineke over in his Chicago office. It was a cold and dreary (laughs) November day. Gene and I were both feeling pretty dejected by what had happened, both in Illinois, but certainly, I was pretty stunned with the president's loss. We went over to see the governor, and he was very upbeat in the sense that he was complimentary of the efforts we made in a very difficult state, very difficult situation, and told us that he was proud of the work we'd done and appreciated it.[13]

But the conversation very quickly turned toward his reelection campaign. He said, "The reason I wanted to meet with you guys today is because I want you to have this fresh in your mind. I think that the president was very poorly served by some of his people and that they didn't run a very good campaign. I want to have this conversation while that's still fresh in your minds, because I don't want to repeat that same mistake. So you two guys, I don't know what your role is going to be for me down the road in terms of my reelection campaign, but I want you to essentially take this experience and turn it into a positive when it comes to thinking about how we do a better job on my campaign." I was very impressed by that. It was uplifting for me in the sense that I needed something else to think about. I was extremely impressed that he was able to, within less than twenty-four hours, synthesize that all down and say, "Guys, we just lived through a terribly-run campaign with a bad outcome, so let's not let that happen to us. Channel your bad feelings toward a positive resolution."

DePue: Do you then end up with a new job specifically once this is over?

Foster: Yeah, I did. I went back to the state party. We'd gotten through the end of the year. Gene and I retreated, (laughs) licked our wounds. It was almost impossible for Bush to win that race in Illinois. We still got beat up pretty bad by some of the party faithful and in the newspapers, and so we were both ready for a break. Around Christmastime, the governor hosted a series of holiday parties at the mansion. One of them had all of the county Republican

[12] The relationship between political success and principled governance is an important theme in the Edgar Project interviews. For examples, see Jim Edgar, interviews by Mark DePue, May 28, 2009, 26-28, and June 15, 2009, 23-30 and 58-63; Mark Boozell, interview by Mark DePue, August 18, 2009, 28-29; Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, April 1, 2009, 54, 59-63; George Fleischli, interview by Mark DePue, January 27, 2010, 51-52; Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, July 23, 2009, 49-51 and 53-55; and Kirk Brown, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 22, 2009, 134-139, 143, and 146-148.

[13] According to one of Edgar's aides, Edgar's direct praise for his chief lieutenants was rare. Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, June 4, 2009, 49-50.

chairmen come down with their families for a party at the mansion. Sherry Struck, who was the governor's secretary, called me up and said, "Can you come over? The governor would like to see you." I kind of figured that he wanted to talk about the county chairmen's reception that night, sort of who was doing what, various things going on.

I walked over and sat down with the governor in his study off of his main office in the capitol. He said, "I've been thinking about our discussion after the election and what I'd like you to be doing going forward. I think eventually I'd like you to get over to the campaign, but we still have a little bit of time for that. In the meantime, I think you and I need to get to know each other a little bit better, and I think you need to get to know Illinois a little bit better." I said, "Oh, okay." And he said, "What I'd like to propose is to have you move over from the state party, to actually come over here on my staff in the governor's office and coordinate my travel and political activity and scheduling and that sort of thing and be exposed to me more on a daily basis—as well as get around the state, get to know people, and see various parts of the state." He did a tremendous sales job on me, because at the time, it didn't sound like he was asking me to be his travel aide, but that's exactly what he was asking me to be. He made it sound more important than that.

So I said, "Sure, I'd love to do that." Eventually, after a few days on the job, it sort of sunk in that I was the bag-carrying travel aide, (laughs) and my ego got the best of me. I remember one afternoon sitting there in a little bit of a grumpy mood, and the governor looked over, and said, "Wow, what's wrong with you?" I said, "Well, you know, this isn't exactly what I had moved back from the White House—you remember, I worked at the White House." And he said, "I do remember that. At some point, you may have an important position with me, but in the meantime, I suspect you didn't spend much time below I-80, and the entire time you've lived in Illinois was as a kid growing up." I admitted that was true. So he explained his methodology to me, and it was fine. We both got kind of a laugh out of it. I said, "You're a pretty good salesman." He chuckled. So I settled into that job, really as the travel aide. I worked with Tom Livingston, the scheduler; Sherry Struck in the governor's office, his secretary; and various folks on staff. I spent close to eight months full-time doing that with the governor.

DePue: When you first got that offer—and you realized shortly thereafter, Man, this is not a very good offer—the Illinois economy was basically rock bottom in 1993. I'm thinking that the folks that breathe politics were thinking, Edgar's definitely not going to be a shoo-in in '94 if he wants to run again.

Foster: Yeah, although my upset over that whole thing was about one day in length. Things were starting to turn around. It wasn't necessarily obvious, but you could get a sense that Jim Edgar was definitely more comfortable as governor and had control of the process. I think we expected a competitive reelection, and I think anyone in Illinois should. It's a very competitive state. I think it

tends to lean more Democrat than Republican, although if Republicans are more moderate, I think they can win there. But no, I think we fully expected a very competitive race; I don't think anyone would have suggested otherwise.

DePue: So, Andy, how beneficial was it for you to get to travel the entire state of Illinois basically as Edgar's travel aide?

Foster: It was great. Again, I look back at these moments, and the governor knew exactly what he was doing. I'm grateful for the experience. It was fun to spend time with him—and sometimes not so fun, but most of the time, fun. It was great to see Illinois in a way that I had never seen it before. I honestly had never been to southern Illinois before, had never been to many places in the state. At that period of time, the governor was out and about multiple times a week, and so I really got a crash course in… He's such a historian that any time we'd go to a place he knew that I hadn't been, he would tell me a little bit of history or correct my pronunciation of the town we were going to.

DePue: You mean KER-o instead of KAI-ro and VIE-enna instead of VEE-enna?

Foster: I made the big mistake of calling MAT-toon Muh-TOON. (laughter) If you're going to pick one town not to do that with this governor—don't talk about MAT-toon. He would talk about who the local legislators were and give me history about them and various things. So it was really a gift for me to have the opportunity, not just to see the state, but to see it with him through his eyes and the experience that he had and the knowledge of Illinois's history.

DePue: Tell us your impressions. You got to spend an awful lot of time with Edgar during this timeframe. Tell us about his personality.

Foster: He's a really interesting guy. It started to become clear to me that it was a lot like my impression of Bush. There's a caricature that the media will make of somebody, so if at that time—'91, '92, early '93—if all you had read was the Sneed column or various other sources of information, you would have thought that Jim Edgar was this downstate hick who was more concerned about his hair.[14] I mean, there were all these caricatures of him. Get to know somebody, and extremely engaging; very, very, very smart; very bright; funny; hot temper at times; could be very demanding. But overall, I just found him to be a fascinating person to be around. Every time I was with him, I learned something new. He was somebody who did not necessarily take information at face value; he really questioned and probed—a very curious mind. Was very much in love with his wife and his children, so that whole aspect of it… I would argue I spent more time with him in that period of time

[14] Foster is referring to Chicago Tribune columnist Michelle Sneed, as well as cartoons that emphasized Edgar's hair, the most famous of which was drawn by *State Journal Register* cartoonist Mike Thompson. For Edgar's attitude toward press representations and criticism of him. Thompson explains why he created the price tag, in Mike Cramer, "Poison Pen Pals," *Illinois Issues* (August 1994). For Edgar's attitude toward press criticism, see Edgar, June 15, 2009, 104-106; Mark Boozell, interview by Mark DePue, September 9, 2009, 28-29.

than Brenda or the kids, (laughter) just because we were together twelve, fourteen hours a day for months and months and months. It was a great experience. I got to know him very personally in that respect.

DePue: You mention that he did have a temper. I've heard from others that he didn't suffer fools too well. How did he manifest that, when he was mad?

Foster: He would get agitated. Occasionally he would raise his voice. The thing I've learned over time was that he had a way of blowing off steam in a way that… If he's about to go out and give a big speech, usually what would happen is right before the speech, he would bite the head off of somebody on the staff for not having the right note card, or something like that. I think for people who didn't interact with him a lot, it was pretty shocking; they'd be like, "Holy cow, I've never seen that side of Jim Edgar before." For those of us that were around him all the time, I think what most of us came to understand was that was just his way of working through getting ready for something, whether it was blowing off nerves or something. So it took me a few times to really process that and not take it personally or Geez, he doesn't like me.

DePue: Right now we're in the midst of paying attention to the Rod Blagojevich trial, where we get to hear the tapes and the expletives that Blagojevich has used all the time. Was that Edgar's style at all?

Foster: In terms of what?

DePue: The kind of language that he would use.

Foster: Oh, never. No. He would say things like, "Gosh darn it!" (laughter) In fact, it became kind of a source of kidding. Not necessarily in front of his face, but behind his back; we used to joke about his attempt at trying to get upset and use dirty language, and he could never pull it off. I think I can count on two fingers or three fingers the times I've heard him actually use a cuss word in all the time I've known him. I mean, (laughs) he's just not capable, not comfortable—not his style. Not to say he didn't raise his voice or get upset with people, but he never used profane language, and he didn't belittle people in the sense of picking on them personally. Never did that, that I saw.

DePue: Was he the type who would come back and apologize later if he thought he'd said something that was a little bit out of line?

Foster: He did with me a couple of times. As I told him, "You don't have to apologize to me, because I'm sure I probably said something stupid along the line that got me in the deserving camp." But there's a huge amount of pressure on that job, on that person, and what I came to realize was everyone has to have their way of working it out. Jim Edgar was not the kind of guy who, after the day was done, was going to knock back a bunch of cocktails or do those kind of things that might be the way other people would work off stress. He was a very introspective guy, very much of a thinker; sometimes I think he'd have a

little flare of temper, but that was just his way of working off the pressure of the job. And at the time, there was a lot of pressure. The state finances were a disaster. Every budget dollar counted. There was a lot of pressure; he was getting a lot of criticism. I think at the time, everybody around him understood that was just a pressure cooker job, and that anyone in that job was going to be human occasionally; that happened.

But I don't want to make it sound like that's how he acted all the time—it really wasn't. In the office, he was very serious. As I said, if you were a staff person and you went in there, you'd better be prepared, because he had been around state government for so long that even someone who would come in from some remote agency and have a discussion—whether it was about why they should get more budget or something—Edgar had been around the legislative process for so long, he knew (laughs) about every one of these agencies and their budgets. It would absolutely astound people. With directors who knew less about their own budgets than Jim Edgar, Jim Edgar would come in and take somebody up one side and down another if they tried to tell him something about their budget that wasn't true. I think it really surprised people how knowledgeable he was about state government, particularly in the budget process.

DePue: After doing this job for a few months, did you start to think, This is pretty obvious; I'm being groomed to take over the campaign?

Foster: No, I didn't think that way. I knew I would work on the campaign. I think that he was pretty clear he wanted me to work on the campaign, but it was not obvious at all to me that I was going to be the campaign manager. At that point, I had settled into a place where I was very comfortable with whatever role he was going to decide to have me in.

DePue: Were you thinking that Carter Hendren was still the number-one pick?

Foster: Yeah. That was very much conventional wisdom. The governor and Carter had an up-and-down relationship; I don't think there was any big falling out. The conventional wisdom was that Carter was always Edgar's political guy, he was the smartest political guy in the state, and that he would run the campaign. So I thought, Hey, I've worked with Carter from the White House, and since moving back to Illinois, I'd had a chance to work with Carter while he was Pate's chief of staff. I thought, That would be great. I would love to work with him and work for him and learn from him. I was totally comfortable if that was the way it was going to go. Or if Gene was going to be the campaign manager, and there was some discussion of that. Gene and I had become close professional colleagues but good friends as well, so I was pretty comfortable with whatever he was going to decide to do.

DePue: When did you find out that you were the guy? Or maybe the sequence of events. When did Edgar first announce that he was going to officially run for reelection?

Foster: Just before the state fair in the summer of '93, he and I were traveling somewhere. I don't remember where it was, but we started to have a discussion about the campaign. He said, "I've been thinking about that, and I'm thinking maybe we need to get the ball rolling a little bit there in terms of maybe opening an office and getting a little bit of infrastructure in place." I said, "All right. Let me know if there's anything you want me to do or someone you want me to call." He thought about it a little more, and came back and basically said, "Why don't you move over to the campaign payroll full time. Let's find an office in Springfield and start thinking about the reelection announcement that we'd make sometime in the fall." I said, "All right, fine." So I moved off the government payroll and moved over to Citizens for Edgar full-time.

At that time, we'd had a small office up in Chicago that Lori Montana and Jeanne worked out of from a fundraising perspective. We didn't have any presence in Springfield. So the governor asked me to talk to a couple of local folks who knew real estate; we ended up finding an old bank that had been closed, out on the west side of town, and signed a lease with those guys.

Then I was basically the only political campaign person on the payroll. My job was to start thinking about how the governor would announce his reelection campaign and what would happen there. I spent the next month or so kind of coming up with some ideas and bounced them off the governor and Mike Lawrence, his press secretary; Gary Mack, who was up in the Chicago press office; Don Sipple, who was the governor's media guy—just some people that the governor had asked me to consult with—and Carter and a few other people. I came to the conclusion that we ought to do something about a year out from the election. At the time, it was very conventional to do a multi-city fly-around. So really spent the next four or more months working on putting the logistics of that together and working with a lot of the guys from the '90 campaign, who mostly ended up somewhere in state government. People were coming in basically after work to help volunteer to coordinate that. So that's what we did for the remainder of that year, put together the announcement fly-around, which happened in November. Early, the first week of November 1993 is when he announced.

DePue: At what time did he say, You're my man; you're the guy who's going to run this campaign?

Foster: Interestingly, I was sitting in the campaign office the weekend before we had the announcement fly-around. The governor had called. It was an eight-city stop. We had rented a 727 from United. It was a fairly major undertaking. It ended up turning out to be a pretty big production. So I had talked to Sherry

Struck and said, "It probably would make sense for the governor and Mrs. Edgar to stop by the office sometime over the weekend, or I can come to the mansion, just to get their head around the travel schedule, because it's pretty intense." So she called and said, "They'll be over on Sunday to the campaign office."

Saturday, I was in the office. Again, this is pre-internet, so the newspapers in Illinois were really the big medium for how people found out about what was going on in politics. Steve Neal was still the columnist for the *Sun-Times*, and Tom Hardy had a political column for the *Tribune.* All the political junkies in Springfield would run out on Saturday afternoon to get the first edition, the bulldog edition, of the Chicago newspapers, to read the columns and see what was going on. For whatever reason, that Saturday I was busy and didn't do that. I was at the office, and I started getting phone calls from people saying, "Hey, did you read Tom Hardy's column today?" And I said, "No, I've been at the office, and I haven't had a chance to look at that." Someone actually read this paragraph. The governor had been doing the rounds with Mike Lawrence that week, talking with various reporters. He had had lunch with Tom Hardy and in the course of the lunch told Tom that I was going to be campaign manager. So in Tom's column that Sunday, it said that Andy Foster was going to be named Edgar's campaign manager, a former White House aide, et cetera. I kind of chuckled. Got a few phone calls and people were congratulating me, and I said, "Well, that's interesting, because I haven't talked to Edgar about that."

The next day, he came by the office, came in, and closed the door. He said, "I suppose you've seen Hardy's column, huh?" (DePue laughs) I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, sorry I didn't get to you before that, but I'd like you to be the campaign manager." We had a nice discussion about his expectations; he wanted me very much to work with Carter and some of the other people that had been with him for so many years. He said he'd talked to Carter and Carter was supportive of me being the manager. That was it. That's how we got to that point. It was kind of a chuckle, though, because, as I told Tom Hardy, I got to hear it from him first.

DePue: (laughs) Who were some of the other key players on the campaign team?

Foster: I had Dave Bender. Dave had worked for Lieutenant Governor Kustra. He had been one of Carter's field guys during the '90 campaign. Dave was essentially the political director for downstate, so he was responsible for putting together the whole field operations for me downstate. Up in Chicago I had Doug O'Brien, Patrick Brady, and a couple of guys up there who helped me replicate that in the northern part of the state. Lori Montana obviously was the fundraiser; she had Jeanne Polydoris working for her. Don Sipple did all the media. Fred Steeper was our pollster. Mike Lawrence handled all the press. Gary Mack was up in the Chicago office. Eric Robinson was brought on to the campaign. Eric had been a reporter over in Champaign, and Mike hired him to

be on the campaign; Mike came over to the campaign full time for the last few months. It was a great team, it really was. Phil O'Connor was our chairman; Phil was a guy who had been around every Republican statewide election for twenty or more years, had worked for Governor Thompson in two cabinet positions, and essentially ran his reelection campaign in '86 against Stevenson. So it was a very, very strong team—a lot of people that I not only enjoyed working with but learned a lot from.

DePue: It still sounds to me, though, Andy, that you're just about the youngest guy in that group.

Foster: I am. I definitely am. The governor took a big chance putting me in that position. I think he felt comfortable that there was enough infrastructure around me that if I had been a complete screw-up, they would have recovered. I recognized at the time and still recognize today that it was a bit of a leap of faith for him.

DePue: Was there any tension within the campaign staff, between yourself and the other members, because you were so young—people who were reluctant to pay attention to you?

Foster: No. No, there really wasn't. I think there was a natural tension between myself and I would say the governor's office in general and Jim Reilly in particular—not in a bad way, just when you have a campaign and you have government running at the same time, sometimes the things don't necessarily always—there's just going to be some natural conflicts.

DePue: I don't think we've mentioned Jim Reilly's name before. He was the chief of staff, brought in just to do the transition for the election, right?

Foster: Right, right. Jim, again, like Phil and like Gene and others, had been around state government for a long time, had been deputy governor for Jim Thompson, and was just a very highly respected guy. Edgar had known him back to his days in legislature and had a lot of regard for Jim. He really said, "Jim, you run the government, and Andy, you run the politics."[15] That's really the way he had set the system up, and 99 percent of the time, that worked out great. Sometimes there were some conflicting ideas about things. But it was not an ongoing, persistent thing. That's just strong personalities—I'm a strong personality, Jim is a strong personality—and guys like Phil O'Connor were there to bridge the gap. So the governor had really thought through exactly how he wanted us and assembled the right team of people. It worked out very well. There really were not any times where there was internal conflict or division among the troops.

DePue: A year and some months after you first started working for Edgar, things were looking much better for the governor. The economy was definitely on the

[15] Jim Reilly, interview by Mark DePue, August 11, 2009, 35-39.

upswing. He had the flood of '93, where he did well; he proved he could be a strong executive. So what's the strategy, then, going into the major election year of '94?

Foster: I think the first thing we wanted to make sure of was that we weren't going to do a repeat of what happened to George Bush, so we were going to be very aggressive right from the very beginning. We had a nominal Republican primary challenge, a guy by the name of Jack Roeser, who had been sort of a political gadfly conservative around Illinois politics. It didn't amount to anything, but it gave me a perfect excuse to mobilize our infrastructure sooner than was probably otherwise anticipated. So, "Governor, we have to take this seriously, we're going to take this seriously, and I need to hire some campaign staff"—because he did not want me to spend any money. (laughs) Having been through the '90 campaign and ending up a million dollars in debt, he was very sensitive to that subject. I was able to finagle a few people like Dave Bender over to the campaign. We made a conscious decision, the governor's sort of senior advisor team, which included myself, Gene, Jim Reilly, Jim Montana occasionally, Mike Lawrence, and then obviously our paid advisors, Sipple and Steeper. We had all talked about this and said we're not going to take anything for granted.

The Democrat primary started to heat up. We thought it would be a good opportunity for us to come in and get a message out while playing above their rhetoric. So we actually went up right before the primary with an ad that made fun of the Democrats and said you've got all these folks making this noise on the Democratic side, but above it all, over here in this corner, is the serious guy who's actually running government. It was a positive piece for Edgar that just reinforced the fact that he had helped steer the state through a very difficult financial situation, that he had held the line on taxes, and that he had cut state spending and cut the number of state employees. It gave us a chance to put his positives out there. Toward the end of the Democratic campaign, they were all beating up on Edgar, and we felt like we had to become a part of that dialogue.

DePue: Can you tell us who the people were on the Democratic side running?

Foster: The main candidates were Dawn Clark Netsch, Roland Burris, and Dick Phelan.

DePue: What was the smart money, in terms of which one of those three was going to emerge?

Foster: Early on, we all thought that Dick Phelan was going to be the nominee based on the fact that he, I think, had the largest war chest; he was the Cook County board president. Good-looking Irish guy, had good resources—personal resources as well as very hooked in with the legal community. A very telegenic guy. So we all thought that Phelan was the odds-on favorite, and I

think most people did. I think people in the Democratic primary, the Democratic Party apparatus as well as the media—everybody sort of thought he was the odds-on favorite, really.

DePue: Which was the one you wanted to be running against?

Foster: Looking at it, we thought, Boy, Netsch and Burris are probably the weakest candidates, so we had kind of looked at everybody. But to be honest with you, the governor was pretty clear about this: Let's stay focused on us and not worry about the other side. We don't get to control what happens there, so we're going to end up getting whoever we get. I wouldn't say we spent a lot of time. Like anything else, we watched it, and we listened to the political gossip and all the rest of that stuff, but we weren't doing anything different in anticipation of a particular candidate; we were just getting ourselves ready for what we expected to be a competitive race.

DePue: Did you think those election ads that you ran during the primary were effective, then?

Foster: I think they were effective in that at a time when the Democrats were all out there piling on—certainly they were attacking each other, but they were all piling on Edgar—it reinforced his positives. I think it minimized any potential chipping away at his approval rating. That's really what the intention was. We weren't looking at that as something that was going to run up the score; it was just mainly you want to be part of the dialogue if they're beating you up every day.

DePue: Well, explain how, of the three candidates on the Democratic side, Dawn Clark Netsch emerges as the winner.

Foster: I think interestingly enough, Phelan was a terrible candidate; he turned out to be a lot of hype ahead of the actual campaign, and it turned out he wasn't a very good campaigner. He really didn't connect. Roland Burris—Roland's been around Illinois politics forever, so he was a familiar face. Nobody really emerged early on. Netsch took advantage of that; she really ran as what she is. She's a lakefront liberal; I think she saw an opening there to go after issues like education funding. There's a core constituency in the Democratic primary like there is in the Republican primary, that's the diehards; she had appeal to them, and she came across as a little bit different.

You also have to remember that in 1992, Carol Moseley Braun was elected to the Senate. It was the year of the woman, and I think they played a little bit on that. I don't think they overplayed it, but it was clear she was trying to differentiate herself as the non–white guy, meaning Phelan, and that she had always walked a little bit to her own tune. So Netsch started to emerge as an interesting alternative; that's the way I would say it. It's sort of like, Wow, this is interesting, because Phelan sort of fits the prototype Cook

County Democratic politician; Roland is the prototype, now, years and years later, of the typical career African-American guy who's run for just about every office in Illinois, so everybody knew Roland. Netsch was somebody who most Democrats outside of Cook County really didn't know.

DePue: The conventional wisdom for that primary race, though, is that it all ended up being turned on that one campaign ad Netsch ran.

Foster: Yeah, she ran the pool ad, which was a very clever ad. Give her and her staff credit. Now, it's funny. I've read the book that was just recently published about that campaign. It's not surprising that she really detested having to do something like that, because she hated gimmicky sort of things; ideas should stand on their own weight, and I shouldn't have to get involved in these gimmicky (laughs) political campaign commercials.[16] The truth is, it did separate her from the pack. Hey, Mark, can I ask you to take just about a two-minute break here if that's possible?

DePue: Absolutely.

(pause in recording)

DePue: I'm going to start this and turn it right back over to you.

Foster: We had just talked about Dawn Clark Netsch's campaign commercial with her being a straight shooter, playing pool.

DePue: Yeah, so now that she is the winner of the primary election, what are the issues? Boil down the issues for us.

Foster: She was talking mainly about education funding and taxes, and there was discussion about state government. But it didn't seem like there was a strong issues matrix that had been defined out there, so it looked to us like if we were able to get out there early and define things, it was an open field. In other words, a lot of what you would consider traditional Democratic constituency discussions going on for them, but it didn't seem like there was a clear public agenda being pushed that we were going to have to contend with during the campaign, per se. Netsch's biggest issue was around education funding, so we knew we'd have to talk about that. But other than that, I think we had the general feeling that we would be able to talk about the governor's positions in a way that weren't being predetermined in the primary.

DePue: I think we need to put some specifics out there, as far as the dialogue about educational funding.

[16] Edgar also did not like some of the gimmicks common in campaigning. Hendren, his discussion of the series of Professor Cory ads his campaign produced. Hendren, May 7, 2009, 53; Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, September 2, 2009, 19-20.

Foster: Netsch was talking about raising taxes to more adequately fund Illinois schools. Her proposal essentially had [what] we fairly or unfairly (laughs) came to determine as a 42 percent increase in the state income tax to raise education funding.

DePue: When you say a 42 percent increase, you're talking about personal income tax and corporate income tax—raising it from 3 percent to something that was 4.5, perhaps?

Foster: Yeah, it was 3 percent to 4.2 percent, but it was a significant increase. Illinois had a flat 3 percent income tax since Governor Ogilvie had put it in. I think the governor's view was that he was not opposed to the idea of raising taxes for schools. I think his point was we have to see reforms before we put more money in; that's really where the argument boiled down to.

DePue: We're going to have to get the specific percentages here. I know early on in Edgar's first administration, they made permanent the surcharge that Thompson had passed at the end of his administration.[17]

Foster: Yeah. Off the top of my head, it's been so long I've got to claim a little bit of forgetfulness or old age, but we'll find that out. It's not hard to find out.

DePue: The other part, though—I don't want to mischaracterize Netsch's position—did she not also talk about this would be a tax swap so we can reduce the property taxes, for some of the collar counties especially?

Foster: The governor's point was we had put in property tax caps at the suburban Cook County and collar county level—that had already been done; he had signed that into law—and he had made the education surcharge permanent. His view was, I've already taken two of those steps. What we haven't talked about, though, is reform and actually having more accountability in education systems. So I think his argument was a legitimate argument to say, "Look, we can talk about more money; I actually took a huge political risk" because Neil Hartigan was not for extending that education surcharge. Jim Edgar caught a lot of flak—in fact, got a primary opponent in Steve Baer because of that. So his view was, "Hey, I took the flak in 1990 to make that education surcharge permanent. I did it. I campaigned for property tax caps in Cook and collar counties, and I did it. What we need to look at now is having more accountability before going out and saying we want more money." That's really what the dividing line became. Netsch said, "No, we still need to go further." I think the governor felt like it was time to take a breather on the funding piece of that and look for a more comprehensive approach.

DePue: You described Netsch earlier as being a lakefront liberal. What does that entail?

[17] The surtax raised the personal income tax from 2.5 to 3 percent, while the corporate increased from 4 to 4.8 percent. For the role of the surtax issue in the 1990 campaign, see Edgar, September 2, 2009.

Foster: It takes you back to the more progressive part of the Democratic Party, the kind of anti-machine folks who at times clashed with Mayor Daley and were a little bit more independent-minded and more liberal than the mayor or some of the other Chicago Democrats.

DePue: Let's take some of the hot-button issues. The death penalty.

Foster: Dawn Clark Netsch had been a Northwestern law professor—very, very, very smart legal mind—and had been very involved in opposing the death penalty for essentially her entire career in public service. At the time, crime was very much of a big issue. As we were polling, crime was an issue with the public, and we felt that was a position that was very much out of step with mainstream Illinois.

DePue: This is one that maybe Netsch and Edgar didn't differ on too much, but abortion issues?

Foster: Yeah, I think the difference there would be Netsch essentially supported abortions in pretty much any case, where the governor had a little bit more of a nuanced position in that he did feel that parental notification was something that he was willing to work for. But essentially, from a voter's perspective, they were both pro-choice, so that issue was fairly neutralized.

DePue: How about gun control issues?

Foster: I think the governor was more in favor of putting in a check system, which he did. I don't think he was looking at the idea of banning guns or banning handguns. I think Netsch probably was to the left of him on that issue. The governor was the one who put in the Insta-Check system in Illinois; he actually caught a lot of grief from the NRA and some of that crowd because they look at it as a slippery slope any time you try to go there. What's happened is it turned out to be exactly what he said it would be: "Look, we're using this as a safeguard to keep guns out of the hands of the wrong people," and that's by and large what the system has done.

DePue: Any political campaign is going to want to paint their opponent in their own colors, if you will. How did you want to portray Dawn Clark Netsch?

Foster: We wanted to portray her as somebody who was really out of step with mainstream Illinois in terms of where she stood on the issues and where her values were.

DePue: Was that a stretch for Governor Edgar to do that, do you think?

Foster: No, I don't think so, based on her positions. I think he liked her personally, and I think he respected her a lot—her intellect and her service. I think they always got along okay. I do think that it was not unfair to characterize her as someone who was very much on the liberal spectrum, and let people decide

whether that's a good or bad thing. You look at someone's record over a period of time, and you say, "Consistently, this is where they've been and this is where he's been." Edgar was always much more in the middle, mainstream, on almost all of the issues, and Netsch was definitely to the left of that. Campaigns are about defining people, defining issues, and defining the individuals running. If you're successful, you get the opportunity to define not only your candidate but your opponent.

DePue: What's the initial strategy once you get past the primary season?

Foster: We did a poll about five weeks after the primary, came back, and the governor was beating Netsch by about eight to ten points. So had a good lead, but it was closer than we would like to have seen it. Again, our experience was, two years prior, the whole Carol Moseley Braun year-of-the-woman thing—we weren't sure if that still had legs to become part of the story and give her a boost from a national perspective, or how this campaign was going to turn out. So we conducted some focus groups where we put her positions out there, whether it was increasing taxes for education or being opposed to the death penalty. We put that in front of focus groups; we saw that what we anticipated actually registered a lot stronger than we had anticipated with the voter groups that we had polled, that people found those positions to be outside of the mainstream. It became less and less of a gut instinct saying, Wow, she voted this way, or she looked at that, and boy, I think X, Y, and Z. The answer is, you don't want to guess; you want to actually get data, and you want to look at it. So we conducted a series of focus groups all over the state of Illinois.

The conclusions were pretty solid that if we were successful in defining the governor as someone who had seen the state through a very difficult financial situation and had come out the other side—the state was now adding jobs, the economy was picking up, he had reduced the size of government, and he had cut a lot of wasteful spending and had ended some entitlement programs—and talk about all of the positive things. At the same time, you've got someone who believes in higher taxes and who is really not in the mainstream in most of her approach to government. Draw the comparison. It became pretty clear to us that if we were successful in doing that, we were going to win.

DePue: In other words, take her out early in the campaign?

Foster: Again, I go back and I give the governor credit for this because he really burned into my brain, as well as Gene's and others, that a big part of what really blew the campaign for Bush was his inability to really take control of the agenda and drive the agenda and drive the issues. In other words, all of a sudden you're playing defense all the time, and it's too hard. So his view was, Let's get out there. I don't think he had any idea what we were going to propose to him, because it hadn't—to my knowledge or to anyone's knowledge—been done before. But we came back after looking through that

poll. We had a meeting with him in Chicago, and we sat down with our pollster and our media guy and went through the poll and said, "Here's the horse race. It's eight points now, and if you introduce these issues, it is a twenty-point race." We said we think this is the strategy. Fred Steeper, our pollster, said, "Governor, you can have an early election night or you can have a late election night. Which do you choose?" (laughs) Jim Edgar's an early-to-bed kind of guy; he said, (laughter) "I'll go with the early strategy." So what we did was very unconventional. We decided to go up on TV in June with a million dollars' worth of campaign commercials to really try to define the race early.

DePue: What kind of ads were you running then?

Foster: The ad was pretty simple. It said that Netsch was for increasing taxes and was opposed to the death penalty. Put it out there that way, and we ran about three weeks of that. I think we spent a little bit less than a million dollars. This would have been in the June timeframe, which was kind of an interesting choice because typically people don't do political advertising at that time of the year. Kids are getting out of school, people are going on vacation, so you figure it's just not exactly the time of year when most people are plugged into political campaigns. But we felt pretty strongly that the distinction between the two candidates was so strong when voters were pushed on the issues, that if we got an early lead, it'd be pretty hard for her to come back. We figured if we got an early lead like that—being the incumbent, you have an advantage anyway—it would really hurt her fundraising. That's exactly what happened.

DePue: So what were the results for the polls after that campaign ad?

Foster: I think we got a poll back right at the end of June or the beginning of July that showed the race had gone from an eight-point Jim Edgar lead to a twenty-eight-point Jim Edgar lead.

DePue: I'm going to go through a litany of other things that are going on during this same time period and just get your quick reaction to whether or not that had any impact on the campaign. The first one I've got listed here—I don't know that these are in special order—Bob Hickman resigns in April, and not necessarily the best news: there's a tint of corruption going on in the Chicago transit system.

Foster: Yeah, the story had been evolving about the tollway and how the contracts were being let out there. Bob had worked with Jim Edgar since his days way back, both coming from Charleston; they'd gone back many years together, and the governor had a very strong relationship with Bob. It became clear that the governor was losing his confidence in Bob and his ability to run the organization. Jim Edgar is very good about making the distinction of saying, "I'm not going to judge whether this story or that story is right because I don't know the facts; we're going to have to wait and see how it comes out." That

said, if he feels like you're in a position where you are no longer able to successfully provide leadership for an agency, then there's a crisis of confidence.

So he had a number of talks with Bob and eventually came to the conclusion that Bob was not in a position to strongly lead the tollway. The tollway's a big part of Illinois's infrastructure. So Bob stepped aside, and there was an investigation going on. The governor and his administration were cooperative. We said, "We'll be happy with whatever happens in that. We're going to step aside and let the authorities investigate it." In the meantime, Bob resigned from his position and the governor put in a career guy, Ralph Wehner—who had been an engineer, non-political appointee—in charge of the tollway.[18] By and large, that story went away. We knew any hint of corruption against the squeaky-clean Jim Edgar was going to get attention, so we knew that was a subject that was going to raise its head at some point in the campaign.

DePue: But apparently when the June polls came out, it didn't have any impact; you were able to get past that.

Foster: Yeah. What happened was the Netsch campaign had planned to put on a negative campaign commercial about that specifically, about the tollway being corrupt. It happened the day that the governor went in for quadruple bypass surgery was the day they were going to launch that ad. Some of this is great planning and some of it just happens to be luck; on this one, it was luck in the sense that they had to pull their campaign commercial for a couple of weeks while the governor recuperated. Now, at the end of the day do I think that would have been enough to really change the score there? I don't. But one never knows what would have happened. By the time they were able to introduce that subject, it was the end of the summer, and we were able to say, Look, the guy resigned in April. What are we talking about here?

DePue: Can you suggest that Edgar was lucky (laughs) to have a quadruple bypass surgery? (laughter)

Foster: I don't think he would appreciate me saying that. That's a purely political calculation. He and I have had that joke many times before. He won't be shocked if he hears that I've brought it up again., (laughs) but—

DePue: Well, he mentioned that—

Foster: —certainly if given the choice, I would prefer to have had dealt with the political commercial rather than his heart surgery, if you're asking that question. I would take the political over the heart surgery any day.

[18] See Kirk Brown, 133-135, for his role in these events.

DePue: Well, he mentioned the benefits of having the bypass surgery himself, so I guess that's open season. How about the next one here? Just list a name: John Wayne Gacy.

Foster: Yeah. It just so happened that after many, many, many years on death row, John Wayne Gacy's execution date came up. Now, I know that there will be people on the Netsch campaign who will never believe when I tell you this, that we had already decided that the strategy was in place and we were going to go with it. We actually put off our ads until after the execution because we did not want to put up a political campaign ad that talked about the death penalty while that was going on.

DePue: He was the first execution in many years, right?

Foster: It was, and it was obviously a very high-profile case that everybody in Illinois—in fact, it got national news. I'm sure Geraldo Rivera was there. So it was a national news story that was playing out at the very time we wanted to talk about the death penalty. So we gave it an appropriate rest after that had happened and then went up with our commercial. Was there a benefit? Undoubtedly.

DePue: Well, here's another on. This one is also something that's very emotional for the public at that time: the Baby Richard case, which was playing out most of the spring and the summer of that year.

Foster: Yes. Very, very hard case, hard situation to watch for everybody. I think most of the people in Illinois saw that as just an absolutely horrendous decision by the judiciary. I think most people looked at it and said, this is how adoption is supposed to work. When you have a loving family that is raising a child, and this legal system comes and snatches the child back in full view of the cameras… It was terrible. It was a heart-wrenching thing. Jim and Brenda Edgar were deeply touched by the whole thing. They were very, very upset by it and proceeded to get right in the middle of it from an opinion perspective. There was nothing he could do as governor, but he certainly wasn't shy about expressing his feelings on the situation.

DePue: Did that play well politically?

Foster: You know, I guess looking at it from today's perspective, I would say sure, I would think most people would agree with him. Let me make two points here. The first one is, we never had a discussion about it politically. I knew him well enough to know there were certain subjects you just didn't talk about in terms of politics, and that would have been one of them. That was something that we knew was a very personal thing with he and Brenda, so we just didn't talk about it. It was whatever you're going to do there. To answer your question about the politics, I think it provided a snapshot of where Jim Edgar was and where Dawn Clark Netsch was. If I remember correctly, her general

take on the whole thing when asked about it tended to be more of a lawyerly kind of answer, like, "I sort of understand where the decision was made. While it's hard to watch," et cetera, et cetera. I mean, she gave what you would expect from a Northwestern law professor. I'm not criticizing her, and I'm not saying she didn't care or she didn't have compassion, but she answered the question like you would expect a Northwestern law professor to answer the question. Jim Edgar answered the question with anger, with hurt, with resentment, like most people would feel. So when I talked earlier about how we viewed this in terms of the mainstream versus left or liberal politics and the values that go with some of those positions, I think that's really, without doing anything, what we were trying to capture.

DePue: Okay. Here's the next one: Bob Kustra. The lieutenant governor decides in the midst of this campaign that he wants to resign and be a radio DJ.

Foster: I call him President Kustra now. (DePue laughs) He is now the president of Boise State. "Mr. President," I call him. It was a really interesting week, because Bob's decision to do that came the same day that we got the poll back showing us with the twenty-eight–point lead.

DePue: I've got that as June twenty-eighth. I think that's the date.

Foster: Yeah. (laughs) That was my birthday, in fact. It all happened on the same day. I got the call from the governor to let me know that Bob was going to announce this that day, that he had had a couple conversations with Bob and that Bob had decided this was the way to go. The governor was fine with it. He liked Bob personally, I think he really enjoyed having Bob as his partner as lieutenant governor, but he understood where Bob was coming from and there was an opportunity for Bob to get out and make some money and do something. I think the governor had a pretty good feeling that the campaign was going to be okay. I think if it had been a neck-and-neck Hartigan-type race, I think it would have been a different scene; I don't know that he would have been as willing (laughs) to let Bob go.

It was kind of a bizarre twist, followed a week later by the governor's heart surgery, so it was kind of a highs and lows ten days of extreme emotions in those ten days, of extremely happy because we got this wonderful poll, a little bit puzzled at the Kustra announcement, but generally everybody was fine with it, and then the governor's, obviously his health setback, which was scary and sad, then ultimately his strong recovery. I would say that summer was a pretty good emotional test for everybody.

DePue: Well, in fact, the end of June was really busy for the governor because I know his son Brad got married right at the end of June, and of course—

Foster: I forgot about that. That's right.

DePue: —Brenda was a bit concerned that maybe the governor would be a little bit distracted over that important event. Also it was in the midst of the World Cup games going on in Chicago at the time.

Foster: Yeah, I was sort of oblivious to the World Cup; I was not to Brad and Stacey's wedding, just because I was friends with them—not close friends. I knew that was a big part of what was going on. I think it was really more in Brenda's wheelhouse. Certainly the governor was involved in it, but that was really more Brenda. The wedding actually was held at the mansion, so that was kind of a big deal for her.

DePue: Well, let's get to the important events; you've already talked about it several times here. July seventh, he's feeling a little bit of pain. He had a couple stents a couple years before that time, or maybe one year before, but he goes in and quickly finds himself getting a quadruple bypass surgery—up in the Chicago area, was it not?

Foster: Yes, it was. It was at Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove.

DePue: How did you find out about that?

Foster: I was in Chicago coincidentally. Nobody really knew anything about his chest pain or subsequent visit to the doctor. The only two people on staff that knew about it were Sherry Struck, his secretary, and Tom Livingston, our scheduler, and they were sworn to absolute secrecy. (laughs) I happened to be in Chicago that day. That evening I was having dinner in Chicago with some people from the Republican National Committee who had come out to talk about the campaign; I was probably hitting them up for money. My pager went off, and when I looked, I could tell the number was the governor's mansion. I called, and they connected me to Mrs. Edgar; she said that she was at the hospital and that the governor was about to go in for surgery. She said, "Jim wanted me to call and let you know that this was going on."

Needless to say, I was pretty shocked. Hadn't had any awareness that he was feeling any discomfort in his chest. In fact, on the Fourth of July, I want to say, he did something in the order of six or seven different Fourth of July parades. So, in my mind, this was a guy who was extremely healthy, who was fastidious about his diet—I mean, just absolutely really, really rigid on his diet—in terms of not eating fatty foods and all the rest. I know he exercised every day. So I was surprised. It really threw me for a loop.

DePue: What was the spin control surrounding this event?

Foster: Well, I think people outside of politics, particularly now, I think things unfortunately have become so cynical that it's hard for people to believe what I'm about to say. But when you're in a situation like that— I had tremendous affection and respect for the governor and his family, and my initial reaction was much as though it would be a family member. I was scared. I really felt

anxious about what was happening. I did not think about politics; I thought about his personal safety, his health, his family, how they were doing. I told Brenda that I would be happy to come to the hospital if it was appropriate. I said, "I don't want to intrude; this is a family thing." She said, "Oh, no, no, it's too far away." She thought I was in Springfield. I told her, "No, I'm in Chicago," so she said, "Okay, well, then yeah."

So I went out to the hospital. It was just before midnight, and the governor had been in surgery. She was there with Brad and Stacey and Elizabeth and a couple of state troopers, and that was it. Then Gary Mack came; Gary is the governor's Chicago press secretary. We sat down with the doctor and talked through the procedure. He was very matter-of-fact. He said, "You know, we do one or two of these a day. Not a big deal. Jim was showing some pain, looked at an angiogram; it was clear he had to have surgery, and he didn't disagree." So we sort of got the lay of the land.

We got on the phone with Jim Reilly, the chief of staff. We called Mike Lawrence down in Springfield; his father-in-law was literally on his deathbed, so Mike had been out of the office for a couple of days. We just thought about how best to put the news out; we wanted to buy ourselves as much time as possible, not to be deceptive about it, but just frankly to be able to think through how to communicate this. Mike and Gary fashioned a press release. Mike really determined very early on that this was not going to be a political spin job, this was going to be very much the facts, and we're going to the let the doctors do the talking, no one from the campaign or the governor's office, frankly, was really entitled to speak about anything, that this was going to be the doctors. So that actually from a political perspective made it pretty easy for me. I just stepped back and let Mike and Gary work on a press release. Jim Reilly consulted throughout the evening and came to the hospital, I don't know, 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning.

The governor came through the surgery with no problem. The amazing thing about that story was no one knew. It had not leaked. We assumed it would leak to the press, that someone in the hospital would see the governor or his family or something. Here we were, he'd gone into surgery, come out of surgery, it's five or six hours later, and nobody knew. So Gary Mack actually came up with the idea that we'd call up Bob Collins to let him know what had happened. Bob was, as you know, the number-one rated radio drive-time talk show guy on WGN. Good friend of the governor's. So Gary called up Bob and told him what had happened; Bob Collins broke the story on WGN radio at about six o'clock in the morning or 5:30 in the morning. We subsequently called all the rest of the press corps. They came out to the hospital, and there was a press conference later that morning with the governor's doctors.

There really wasn't a political discussion; it was, Okay, the campaign essentially is suspended here. We're going to keep building our infrastructure and our field organization, but we're not going to run commercials, we're not

going to do any overt political things,. As far as I knew, boy, the governor was kind of out of pocket for a while.

DePue: Do you remember at all how it played on Bob Collins's show?

Foster: You know, I don't think it could have gone any better than it did. Again, I want to give Gary Mack the credit for it; it was his instinct. Because really, we could have tipped off anybody, or we could have just put out a press release. I guess if you're going to claim a little bit of political spin or craftsmanship, that was it. (laughs) The way Bob played it was very straight. He read it as a news story, then he started taking calls. He said, "Hey, the governor's resting comfortably, and he's doing well. I know he's a guy that is in good physical condition." That was really all he said about it, and then the callers did the rest. People called in and said, "Oh, I went through that surgery a year ago and I feel terrific." People just talked about it as a human interest story. That was how it got put out there in the press, and it just stayed that way.

DePue: Okay, this can go one of two directions as far as the campaign's concerned. It can be, Wow, gallbladder surgery, stents, and now quadruple bypass surgery—is this guy healthy enough to be our governor?, or it can play on the sympathy side of things. So how did it play out?

Foster: Yeah. I think what happened is we braced ourselves for the whole question about health because he had had that. I don't think the gallbladder thing was as much of a—I mean, it was there, but I don't think that was—I think most people were focused in on the heart issue. Certainly there was a round of stories where that came up as a topic. The thing is when reporters do a story like that, they call up some expert; usually the person they call is some cardiac expert. Most cardiac surgeons will tell you, Yeah, we do these surgeries, and by and large if the person lives a healthy life and is a nonsmoker and does all of these things, they're going to live a fine, normal, active life. (laughs) So the answer to that health story question was mostly knocked down by the doctors. Most of the doctors were like, Look, this guy, instead of having a stent a year ago, probably should have just had the surgery. By and large they all said, Hey, he's got an excellent chance of recovery, and it shouldn't be a problem. I think most people, that satisfied it there.

DePue: One of the stories the governor likes to tell from that experience is finishing up the budget fight (laughs) that particular year in his hospital bed.

Foster: That was truly one of his favorite moments, I think, as governor was the ability— Here he is, he's just come out of this surgery, and he's got cranky pants Pate Philip and cranky pants Mike Madigan and Lee Daniels and the whole crowd, and he picks up a phone. Within about a half an hour, the whole thing (laughs) gets done and over with. I think, in fact, he made the comment that they shouldn't get comfortable because he wasn't going to do this every year to get a budget.

DePue: (laughs) But he's going to take advantage of it while he's in that situation.

Foster: Absolutely. I think he signed the budget in a bathrobe. (laughs)

DePue: As I recall, he went to the window and waved the budget to the press outside.

Foster: Yeah, that was another Gary Mack moment. That was trying to duplicate the Ronald Reagan wave-from-the-window after his surgery.

DePue: Did he hit the campaign trail, then, immediately after that?

Foster: No, he did what his doctor told him to do. He basically took about four weeks, five weeks off. I say "off"—not entirely. He was still on the phone all the time. He was still dealing with government—he was still very engaged in the day-to-day government stuff—but he wasn't traveling, he wasn't doing political events, he wasn't fundraising. He was largely either at the mansion or at the log cabin house that he and Brenda had outside of Springfield or down in southern Illinois in the Du Quoin State Fairgrounds.

DePue: Okay. Well, take us into the August timeframe, then—this would be while he was still recovering—and later into the fall. Did you figure at that time that you pretty much had this thing won, or was there still a lot of work to be done?

Foster: The old expression is, "You learn more from losing than you do from winning." If there was starting to emerge a benefit from the Bush campaign, it was that we figured we were never going to take our foot off the gas because you just never know, particularly after going through a couple of weeks like we had just been through—you know, real big poll number, Kustra gets off the ticket, Edgar has the heart surgery, Kustra gets back on the ticket—I mean, it was a pretty wild ride there. So the view was, Hey, guys, anything can change, (laughs) and did. So we did a poll. That ad I mentioned, Netsch—eventually they got up on TV and they ran a negative ad, really focusing I think on the tollway—but it didn't seem to have a lot of staying power. They didn't have a lot of money, so they couldn't put the kind of muscle behind their buy that we did. We did a poll, I want to say the end of August, beginning of September, that showed the governor's lead had gone from twenty-eight points to twenty points, call it. So there was a little bit of erosion, but largely I think it was just simply because he had been out of circulation for the last four to five weeks. It wasn't any panic, but it was kind of a realization of, hey, we're in the final stretch here. You get to Labor Day; that's kind of the official kickoff for the fall campaign. So I worked with Jim Reilly and Tom Livingston, the scheduler. We sat down with the governor and Brenda and looked at a campaign schedule that was adequate to meet what we needed to do but also sensitive to the fact that he was still recovering from surgery.

DePue: And he cooperated with that?

Foster: Yeah. I think initially he kind of enjoyed not being on the campaign trail and being at Du Quoin at the southern Illinois state fair and seeing the people. People were all very happy to see him that he was healthy and around. He got to go and watch some horse races. So given the choice of that versus flying up to Chicago and dealing with Andy Shaw and Mike Flannery and John Kass and Rick Pearson, I think yeah, I can see where he was coming from there. (laughs)

DePue: Okay. Here's definitely an opinion question: Would you describe this as a relatively level-headed campaign, or did it get nasty?

Foster: No, I think it was level-headed. I know and I've read subsequently that Netsch is not happy with the way that the campaign went, that she thought it was too negative. To be very honest with you, I've never been on a losing side of a campaign where they didn't feel that way. I think we were fair. Everything we did in that campaign was representative of her record; that's really it. We didn't make up any stories; we didn't come up with anything that hadn't been a part of her record for thirty or more years. When you're trying to draw a contrast, that's what you do.

DePue: Do you recall any stories that especially illustrate the campaign?

Foster: I think it's a collection of things like we had just talked about. We had some highs and lows, but I think after we got through that period of time and the governor got back on the campaign trail full time, you get a sense in a campaign that you've got momentum and that things are working out. I'm always nervous up to the end, but you just get a sense that it would take something pretty major to derail that. So I would say for the fall, the general feeling was people were very upbeat about our campaign. In the last three to four weeks of the campaign, the governor's polls were still holding very strong. We started getting pressure from Lee Daniels and others to say, Hey, wait a minute. You guys are going to win, and you know you're going to win; start spreading the wealth around. You've got money in the bank, and we've got all these candidates who are very close. So the governor ended up giving out hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions to various candidates around the state, and it made a big difference. We won majorities in both chambers. The governor personally went in to campaign for some of the candidates in close districts. The effect of being aggressive early, staying with it, staying with the message, keeping our team focused, having a strong field support organization: all of that stuff paid off, and it paid off for the whole ticket.

DePue: This is a storied political career in American history because 1994 is the first year that the Republicans gained a majority in the Congress, at the national level as well. So did that play into his campaign?

Foster: No, not at all. I would argue—I've read lots of stories about the Republican revolution and being driven by Newt Gingrich and the guys in Washington—I would tell you that I think that was the result of two things. I don't think most people knew what the hell the Contract for America was until Newt Gingrich was the speaker, to be very honest with you. I think some people knew. But I think what really drove the landslide of '94 was Bill Clinton's high unfavorable rating. I think he was very unpopular at the time. I would put more of the success of '94 in the court that you had Pete Wilson, George W. Bush, Jim Edgar, John Engler, George Voinovich, Tommy Thompson, George Pataki, Tom Ridge all running, all winning big. For me, it was not a Washington-down revolution; it was a states-up revolution.

DePue: Well, I think some of—

Foster: I would argue that with any Newt Gingrich loyalist. If you asked anybody a week before the election what the Contract for America was in Illinois, they couldn't tell you, but they knew that Jim Edgar was the guy who had seen the state through tough fiscal times and he wasn't a crazy liberal and he wasn't going to raise taxes, you know, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah down the matrix. So I honestly think in '94 that tidal wave came from the states and lifted a lot of boats into Congress.

DePue: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about the debates, though the governor, when I interviewed him about it, didn't have much to say. But there were two debates. October nineteenth in Chicago, sponsored by the League of Women Voters. Remember anything about that particular night?

Foster: I remember being so nervous I thought I was going to throw up in a garbage can at Channel 7. That's just how I am. When I was in high school, I played football; I'm just a very competitive person by nature. So no matter how well I think of my candidate, I'm always nervous on those things. I remember that the governor—we had prepared him but not over-prepared. In other words, we'd put together a briefing book that touched on all the potential issues that come up. But as I was mentioning earlier, Mark, there was nobody on the governor's staff, with the exception maybe of Mike Lawrence, who could potentially give him more information than he already had. (laughs) I mean, it was kind of like, what's the point of this? He knew as much as anybody around when it came to dealing with the intricacies of the state of Illinois. So from a prep perspective, we didn't get overly concerned about it. You just worry, are you going to go in there, and he might have a flat night or something. I remember that particular debate was kind of a not much to it. Both candidates did the way you would think they would. It's always kind of a wildcard because the League of Women Voters wanted to have these kind of citizen questions; you never know if someone's going to come out with a goofball question. I don't recall that anybody did. So, yeah, I'd say all in all it was probably a draw, which was a win for us.

DePue: Just two days later, October twenty-first, the Illinois Association of Press Editors have a debate in downstate, in Champaign.

Foster: Yeah. What I remember about that campaign is that Netsch got no bump out of that first debate. Everybody was saying, You know, it's getting late in the campaign, and if you hope to rekindle something… In the statewide televised debate, I think most people said, "Nah, not really anything new here." What I do remember about the radio debate was, either during the course of the debate or afterwards, she had questioned the governor's commitment to women in government or women's rights issues, which I found particularly objectionable. If Dawn Clark Netsch thinks that we were unfair to her record, I would say that…Afterwards she held a press conference, and someone asked if she thought Jim Edgar was sexist; I think she answered in the affirmative in one way, shape, or form, which I found to be pretty disappointing because she knew better than that. That's the only thing I really remember. It wasn't a big deal, but I remember kind of shaking my head thinking, You know better than that. if you looked at his cabinet and you looked at his public policy positions, Jim Edgar was up to that point in government one of the greatest advocates of advancing women and having, strong… His budget director, Joan Walters. Half of his cabinet was minority or women. So that was one of those moments where I bet Dawn Clark Netsch would take it back. (laughs) I would hope she would.

DePue: How did she play, how did her campaign play, in southern Illinois?

Foster: Not well. I don't think she connected well with people in Chicago, either. I had a number of conversations with very well-known Chicago Democratic ward committeemen who didn't want to have anything to do with her, just kind of felt like she's part of that liberal crowd that we never connected with; they'll never return our phone calls. Just didn't feel any association there. I think downstate and out in the suburbs—I just don't sense that she really ever connected personally with people. Not to say that that's any indictment of her. I think she's very much a private person, I think she's an intellectual, so I just don't know that she was really all that concerned with being a retail politician. I don't think that was a big concern for her, and unfortunately, when you're running for statewide office, that's a connection you have to make.

DePue: Okay, we've got you into late October now. What are the polls telling you, and what does Edgar and your own gut tell you in terms of how this election is going to turn out?

Foster: Well, the polls are still strong, anywhere from fifteen to eighteen points, as I remember. The *Tribune* came out with a poll that showed us way ahead. As I mentioned, we were getting pressure from all quarters to start sharing the love down the ticket, which he did, both financially as well as his time. I think we were at the point where me as the campaign manager was telling my troops every single day, "Don't let up. No mistakes. Don't take anything for granted.

Don't look at the polls. Pretend as though we're in a dead heat and turn out voters. That's our focus. We've worked all year long to put this organization together, and now is the time to really let it show." That was our focus.

From the candidate's perspective, I would say he was comfortable. He felt pretty relaxed traveling. I didn't travel with him all that much. I was really kind of stuck in the campaign headquarters, making sure that the TV buys were going and the ground organization was getting there. He and I talked a lot on the phone. But I did travel with him a few days; he was relaxed, he had reporters flying with him pretty much full-time on the plane, and there was a lot of fun give and take there. It had the feel of a winning campaign. We all knew it, but no one would say it.

DePue: Did it look like a complete sweep of the state?

Foster: You never know. That's one of those things where Illinois has always tended to be more of a Democratic state. You never know. We thought, well, we're going to win; what will the margin be? I don't ever recall having a conversation with him about margin other than, "I just want it to be an early election night." On election night, it became pretty apparent that it was going to be a blowout. We came, I don't know, five or six votes away from carrying every county.

DePue: Well, in fact, one of the stories that I've heard from a couple people about that election deals with Gallatin County. This goes back to your comment that you've made several times here about what an incredible political calculus that Jim Edgar's got in his brain, because he kind of sensed that that was one of the counties he's going to have a problem with, and he was interested in it days or weeks before that time. Does that ring a bell to you?

Foster: He actually even talked about going there. I'm sitting there saying, "I don't even know where the hell Gallatin County is." He said, "Oh, of course you wouldn't; you grew up in the suburbs." That's the kind of conversations we'd have. (laughter) I said, "There's no way. You're not going there." (laughs) Instinctively he knew if there was one place…It was in an area of high unemployment, and it hadn't really come back with the rest of the state from an economic perspective. Yeah. Now, was he serious, like, I'm going to go try to run up the score by going there? I think there was a part of him that gave it a fleeting thought, and I'm sure Mike McCormick, who was our southern Illinois coordinator, was egging him on. But we were never seriously considering it. I will tell you, on election night, he gave me and everybody else in the room an "I told you so. See, I knew it. I knew we weren't going to… We were in trouble in Gallatin County, (DePue laughs) and I told you guys two weeks ago." I'm like, Okay, you're going to win by twenty points; what's your issue? (laughs)

DePue: Because he lost Gallatin County by a handful of votes.

Foster: Yeah. Then he gets on the phone with McCormick and he wants to know what side of the county and who was reporting. At that point I think I had gone upstairs to pour a cocktail or something, I don't know. (laughs)

DePue: So he wins every county but Gallatin County, and that includes some pretty strong Democratic strongholds otherwise.

Foster: Yeah.

DePue: What's the mood at that time? Where are you at that time?

Foster: We were at the Hyatt Regency in Chicago. We had a war room set up to get all the results in, but to be honest with you, it was over before (laughs) we had the chance to use our computers. It became apparent that the story was going to get bigger. You know, we knew we were going to win, and then it was a question of me thinking more logistics: is Netsch going to call; how is this going to work; what time do we go down and give the speech and all the rest of that sort of thing. But it became just from watching the news, Holy cow, this is going to be a national blowout. What's more, people started getting in results that we're going to win the Illinois House. I think we had the Senate; we're going to win the House and we're going to win every constitutional officer. I remember Phil O'Connor looked at me and very quietly under his breath said, "We may have taken this thing a little bit too far." (laughter) Which you have to know Phil to understand; he's got a pretty good sense of humor. But it was pretty funny, like, Oh, my Lord.

DePue: Well, the official tally was Edgar, 60 percent; Netsch, 34, so there must have been a third party in there someplace.

Foster: Yeah, there's always a smattering of—and I couldn't even tell you off the top of my head. I'm sure there was some LaRouchie or someone in there.

DePue: But his plurality was nine hundred and fourteen thousand votes.

Foster: Right, just under a million votes.

DePue: What's your mood?

Foster: It's hard to explain. I was really happy for him; I was happy that we—I say "we" as collectively the campaign staff—had done our job. You're always just a little melancholy because you don't want it to be over. I mean, it was fun. It was arguably one of the funnest years of my life. All of a sudden you realize this is kind of the end of it. But we were all really happy, particularly for the kind of year that the governor health-wise and everything else had been through. I think we all felt very good. It was a happy night. It was definitely a night for celebration.

DePue: Okay. I'd like to maybe very briefly have you describe what's happened in your life after this night.

Foster: Very briefly. Well, that woman that I told you I was dating when I left the White House, she and I continued to date. Her name is Cathy—Cathy Hutchinson is her maiden name; she's now Cathy Hutchinson Foster, so it worked out. We dated long-distance through the Edgar campaign and then another election cycle, then I ended up moving to California. After the election I served as deputy chief of staff to the governor; Gene Reineke was the chief of staff. I moved from Springfield to Chicago and essentially ran the Chicago office and oversaw the agencies regarding economic development and regulation. Did that until '98, then Cathy and I got married. I moved to San Francisco, got out of politics, and have been in the private sector since that time. Worked in initially a few technology companies—some software, some hardware. For the last four years, I have been involved in a company that is producing ethanol and working on next generation biofuels, so back to my Midwestern Illinois roots. Subsequently, Cathy and I moved down to the peninsula here in the Bay Area. We live south of San Francisco, and we have four kids. So life is dramatically different from those days in Illinois.

DePue: Do you miss the political arena?

Foster: I get asked that question a lot. I miss my memories of it, but I don't think I would trade it for anything now. I look at the way things have evolved, and I don't like what I see. I think the partisanship and the personal nature of politics has escalated exponentially since the time I was there. Not to say it wasn't rough-and-tumble when I was around, but it's gotten to a point now where I'm not sure I know why anybody would want to run for office. I think the Internet has been a great tool; I also think it's become one of the reasons things have turned the way they have. So I don't miss it. I miss the relationships and the friends that I made in that time—lifelong friends that I still keep in touch with—and the camaraderie and the sense of purpose that we had, but I'm happy not to have to be in politics on a day-to-day basis today.

DePue: Well, you've known Edgar for many years, though from a distance for the last decade or so. How would you describe the man now, the one you came to know so well, traveling with him those many months, then running his campaign and then working for him for four years?

Foster: I talk to the governor probably a few times a year. I've had occasion to see him out here when he comes out here; he's been here for a few board meetings and some things. I don't think he's remarkably different than the guy I knew back then. He's still a very intellectual guy, a very curious person, a voracious reader, voracious consumer of news. I think he misses the same things that I was talking about. I think he misses the people; I think he misses the sense of purpose. He was born to be a public servant, and he did it very well. I don't think he would like being in that arena now. I would say, in my

discussions with the governor, I don't think he's changed all—he's mellowed, for sure. That happens with age in all of us, so I think he's got a little bit more of a detached view of things. I don't think he's as personally wrapped up or cares about it as much as he used to, but I think he's still very much interested in it.

I know, having talked to him—like I said, we talk at least a few times a year—he's very disappointed with Illinois and Illinois government and particularly the leaders since he's left office, starting with George Ryan and now with Blagojevich. I think it pains him to see what's happened to the state. That's hard to watch, because he put a lot of his political capital and a lot of his life into taking a situation that he inherited that was pretty tough, a billion-dollar deficit, and turning it into a billion-dollar surplus when he left, and then seeing… Now, those things are going to happen. You're going to have economic cycles—I don't think he's Pollyannaish about that—but I think what happened both with George Ryan and with Blagojevich I think has been hugely disappointing to him. I think he feels like it's demeaned the office and it's demeaned public service in Illinois. So I think that's regrettable.

DePue: How would you stack him up compared to the other governors we've had in the last, oh, let's say thirty or forty years?

Foster: I really would say he has to be at the top. I think Governor Thompson did a lot, he was in office for a long time, but I think if you look at where things were when Edgar took over—he had nothing to work with; he had a structural deficit of a billion dollars; he had to make some very, very unpopular decisions, ending general assistance being one of them. He was dealing with a very hostile legislature, in Speaker Madigan and others. He got through that and got through the first term and turned the state back into a much healthier place to do business, grow jobs, all that stuff. Was very concerned about the environment, ahead of his time on conservation issues. For all the carping you'd hear out of Mayor Daley and all the rest, Chicago did very well during Jim Edgar's term, and a lot of good things happened in the state of Illinois. So I think overall, to look at the balance of his record, I think he has to absolutely rank at the top, I really do.

Certainly I have a biased view, but I think if you look in the last forty, fifty, sixty years, I think Governor Ogilvie would rank as up there, if for no other reason, for leadership and courage. But I think you look at some of the others and it really pales in comparison. I run into people today in California and they'll ask where I'm from or what I did. If I mention I worked for the governor of Illinois and they know anything about politics—I'll say, "I worked for Jim Edgar," and they'll say, "Oh, that's the guy that didn't get indicted." (laughter) Now, that's not a very high bar, right, (DePue laughs) and that's not the bar that I would set for the governor, nor would he want that bar set. But I think when you look at the balance of the work that he did in the eight years he was governor and certainly the time he had as secretary of state,

I think it's hard to argue that anyone has had a larger impact in a positive sense than Edgar has in the last fifty years.

DePue: Well, this might be a little bit forced, but based on what you just said, would you put Edgar in the group of good Illinois governors or great Illinois governors?

Foster: Oh, I think he goes in the group of great. I really do. I think he won't win it on charisma, but I don't think that should be the yardstick. I think one of the reasons that Jim Edgar is enduringly popular with Illinois citizens is because they trust him, they think he's sincere and honest, they think that he generally has represented their views and their values and that he did what he said he was going to do. That's what people expect from their public officials, and rarely do they get it.

DePue: But some of the criticisms, especially towards the end of his administration, were that the man lacked vision, he lacked a big picture or a vision of what he wanted to accomplish.

Foster: I look at that and I think that sounds like something that's dreamed up by an editorial board or someone who's sitting in academia who's never served in government. When people have this idea of vision, what is a vision? Is a vision—when you come into office and you're essentially handcuffed, there's no money to spend, you're in a hole and you have to get out of that hole, I don't know exactly what someone else would have done differently.

John McCarron wrote a—no, I don't know if it was John McCarron—Bruce Dold, I think, actually wrote an op-ed piece in the *Tribune* the first session after George Ryan had become governor. It was one of these that we all sort of expected, right? It's going to be, Oh, look at this—people are drinking at the mansion again, and there's (DePue laughs) deals being cut, and George is going to spend all this money doing these bond programs and X, Y, and Z, and blah-blah-blah. This is how it used to feel with Thompson, and isn't it good, and we all feel great, and we're all sitting here in Springfield, and all this stuff's happening. I shot him an e-mail; I said, "You're going to live to regret that column because it's easy to think that way now when you forget about the difficult time that Illinois was in." Sure enough, when George Ryan started to experience his troubles, I reminded Bruce—and I don't even know if he'd remember this, but I reminded him—and he essentially told me that, "Yeah, you're right. It felt good at the moment, but from a long-term perspective, it wasn't the right thing for Illinois."

That's something that the critics will never give Edgar, because they don't think fiscal management and some of the things that he did as governor—reducing the state payroll—he put a very strong emphasis on conservation and things like that and the environment that were a little bit ahead of his time. So when I hear people talk about vision, the vision thing, I

think that that is probably one of the most overused and overvalued statements when it comes to politicians. I think you have to look at the context of the times and the results. I think if you do those things, you're going to come up with putting Jim Edgar right at the top of Illinois's governors.

DePue: When I asked you the question originally, I had totally forgotten that that was the hit on George Bush as well.

Foster: Yeah. Again, I think the whole vision thing, as you say—if you look at George Bush's domestic agenda—he's the guy that got through the Americans with Disabilities Act; he got through the Clean Air Act. Those were two **huge** pieces of domestic legislation. Those are massive, that we're still living with today, and nobody has ever talked about. Now, conservatives weren't particularly thrilled about that, but from a domestic policy agenda, it wasn't as though there was the Gulf War and nothing else. He actually did have an agenda; it's just unfortunate he and the people around him weren't able to really do a very good job of articulating that.

I like to think that this whole idea of the big vision thing—it's kind of like hope. Hope is not a strategy. (DePue laughs) Obama had vision and hope, and I would argue that he is completely mired in the muck right now because execution has not been their strong point. It's great to talk about vision when you're sitting outside of government, but when you get in and you're dealt with the crisis and you're dealt with the day-to-day, the kind of things that you're expected to solve, how you handle those things, I think, is really the better test of your vision.

DePue: Well, we're getting close to the end of this. I want to take you back to Illinois politics pretty briefly. I think one of the things that Dawn Clark Netsch was upset about after the campaign—because it wasn't too many months afterwards that Edgar starts looking for ways to solve Illinois's perpetual education dilemma with the funding of schools—from Netsch's perspective, he basically embraced her plan of the tax swap. So what's your reaction to that?

Foster: My reaction is, don't forget a little thing in between there called Chicago school reform. You know, Jim Edgar and the Republican legislature essentially said—because when you're talking about education reform in Illinois, you know, a big part of that exists in Cook County and in the city of Chicago. It took a Republican legislature to give Mayor [Richard M.] Daley the ability to start to effect positive change in his schools. The governor did not say at any point during the campaign, "I'm not open to increased revenues for schools." What he said was, "We've made the surcharge permanent and we've put on property tax caps in the collar counties, but before we go any further, we need to make education reform, part of that equation as well." I think Chicago, turning the schools over to the mayor of Chicago or the Chicago school—however you want to characterize it, the Chicago school

reform was singularly one of the most important things that has happened, not just in Illinois but nationwide in terms of a model of how to bring more accountability into the schools. So I would argue that what the governor did subsequent to the campaign was completely consistent with what he said.

DePue: Okay, just a couple final questions.

Foster: Dawn Clark Netsch would never, ever have pushed for the kind of reform package that the Republicans were able to get through the legislature—never would have happened.

DePue: Okay. What is the thing, looking back at all the years you worked in Illinois politics and especially for Jim Edgar, that you're most proud of?

Foster: I'm proud to have been associated with somebody who had such high personal ethics and ideals. I think all of us who served with Governor Edgar are proud of our time there, serving the state, serving the citizens, because he had a greater sense of purpose than just the politics. In fact, I'd argue that he was successful at politics; it's not his favorite part of the whole thing. I think what he really enjoyed was dealing with the problems of government and solving the problems. He left the state a whole lot better than when he found it, and I think that certainly would be the goal of anybody who serves in government. So I'd say I'm most proud of my association with Jim Edgar and the people that he brought into government and the people that I met through both government and the campaign, because he attracted really quality people who I think did a good job for their fellow citizens. It sounds corny, but that's really what I look back and say I'm most proud of. It's not a winning campaign. Anybody could have replaced me and done a good job in that. When you've got somebody like Jim Edgar as the candidate, I think it would be pretty hard to screw that up. So I would say my time serving the governor in various capacities—I'm most proud of that.

DePue: Well, this has been a lot of fun talking to you, Andy. It's been very educational. You offered an awful lot of insights. It's fascinating to hear this stuff. Do you have any closing comments for us today, then?

Foster: No, I think you've hit on a lot of the interesting points, and obviously you'll get different perspectives from other folks. Again, I look back at that period of time with a lot of fondness and a lot of pride, in that when I left the state in 1998 and left the governor's service, things in Illinois were dramatically different than when he took office. You talk about the vision thing. Without talking about it as a vision, I think that's exactly what he envisioned when he became governor, was getting in and solving some of the big problems. They aren't casinos, they're not the sexy headline-grabbing things, that at the end of the day really don't provide most citizens with any particular benefit; it's the day-to-day stuff that are huge problems—Medicaid, things like that—that have an enormous impact on the budget and the delivery of services to

citizens. So for all of the discussion around vision, I think Jim Edgar's vision of solid, ethical, strong performance is really a lasting one, and so I'm happy to have been a small part of that.

DePue: Thank you, Andy, for being a part of this series of interviews with people in the Edgar administration. I think anybody who takes the time to listen to these down the road is going to learn [not only] an awful lot about how politics works, but, as you suggest, an awful lot about how governance works.

Foster: Right. Thanks for the opportunity. This has been a lot of fun for me.

(end of interview)