Interview with James Thompson

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Friday, August 29, 2014. My name is Mark DePue, director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Governor, this is our tenth session. And we've got quite a few more to go, I'm sure.

Thompson: Is that a threat or a promise? (laughs)

DePue: A promise. I'm looking forward to it. You might see it as a threat. We're again at your summer home in Buchanan, just north of Buchanan, Michigan. We don't have much sun today, but it's otherwise a very pleasant day.

Thompson: It is.

DePue: And your reference was to the lawnmower outside.

Thompson: Yeah, the lawn gets mowed once a week. Lawn is a misnomer. The fields get mowed once a week. (laughs) It takes about a couple of hours and three or four guys to do it. When they get up by the house it can get a little noisy, but maybe, as you say, they've done that already.

DePue: Yesterday we finished off with the 1978 election, the second election, and you won by a very large majority, 60 percent. But in the midst of that election, May 19 actually, you promised that you would not sign any government pay raise, that you would veto any attempt for a government pay raise. You and I had talked

about this before, and my memory says that you were generally sympathetic to the need for a pay raise.

Thompson: This is an issue where you can't win. You just can't win, politically or any other way. The plain fact is that the public is not sympathetic to increases in salary for public employees, and more specifically for high-ranking public employees: constitutional officers, cabinet members, legislators, legislative leaders. And it's a dilemma. If the legislature votes to increase public salaries, including their own, people get mad. The press doesn't like it, and the press jumps on it and stirs up opposition to it. We've tried moving the responsibility for pay raises from the legislature to a commission, but in the end, even if a commission makes a recommendation for an increase, the legislature still has to fund it. So in the end, it's the legislature doing the final act, which opens the legislature and the constitutional officers to criticism. It's something that the press likes to make a big deal of, and the press will stir up sentiments like, the legislators and constitutional officers are fat cats, they're making a lot of money while people generally aren't making that kind of money. You can't win. So you have to do the best you can and just take the political abuse until it dies down.

By "public employees" I mean the salaries of the constitutional officers and the legislature, because nobody criticizes raising the salary of the bureaucracy; they don't even see it. The public doesn't see that. But I happen to think that Illinois does not over-compensate its high-ranking public officials. I just shake my head every time one of these things comes up. And in this instance, I kept my promise, I vetoed the pay raise. But I did it in such a fashion that allowed the legislature to override me.

DePue: Before you get that far, there's a couple more questions I want to ask, or some clarification here. Through the late 1960s, and I would imagine through the 1970s, my impression is that the Illinois legislature was becoming more of a professional body. It was moving away from the old standard of a citizen legislator who was expected to have another job someplace else, because the legislature only met every other year or wasn't in session most of the time, towards a model were they were becoming more professional; the staffs were growing, and they were spending the bulk of their time now being legislators.

Thompson: That's certainly true. And Illinois doesn't stand alone in that regard; that's happened in most of the other states of the union. There's only a couple of states—Texas, the legislature meets only once every two years in a short session. And one of the northeastern states, maybe New Hampshire, has sort of a citizen legislature where they meet for a short time and their pay is very low, because they don't want to encourage the professional legislator. But for the rest of the states of the union, including Illinois, we've moved away from what was a nineteenth-century tradition into virtually full-time legislators who are expected to devote most of their time to legislative tasks and be compensated accordingly. And as you say, the staffs have increased and become more professional. There's no possibility of going back.

DePue: And Jim Edgar would be a good example of that; pretty much his entire income was based on him being a legislator, until you made him a legislative liaison.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: The other thing that was putting pressure on legislative and executive pay at the time, and we've talked about this before as well, was the inflation rate. President Carter, by this time, asked that businesses and institutions control price and wage increases. Alfred Kahn was his inflation fighter and needed to approve things like legislative and executive pay increases. At least they thought they did.

Thompson: For the federal government. He couldn't control them for state officials.

DePue: But they would have opinions about such things?

Thompson: Well, sure. But that's close to being up there with the 68 degree temperature, I think. Carter or any other president can use the bully pulpit of the presidency to try and influence public policy, even at the state or local level. But that's all it is, is the bully pulpit of the presidency; those guidelines and Alfred Kahn and his crew couldn't possibly interfere with the constitutional authority of the states to set their own legislative policies. Here's an example: What would you pay a person who is responsible for administering a $12 billion budget, and superintending a hundred thousand employees, and being responsible for the public policy of an entire state of eleven million people? What would you pay them? What would you think a reasonable salary for that would be?

DePue: In what year are you talking about, today?

Thompson: No, in the 1980s.

DePue: I don't know that I'd have a good sense of it, because I'd have to factor in inflation rates and everything else that would—

Thompson: The salary was $50,000.

DePue: For the governor?

Thompson: For the governor.

DePue: For the legislators it was $20,000.[1]

Thompson: Yeah. I'm not saying that governors should be paid the equivalent of private sector CEOs who, having that kind of responsibility, would be paid in the millions. But at some point it becomes out of line, let's say. The other problem with it is that like other areas of government, people are so afraid of making a

[1] The governor's salary in 1978 was equivalent to $181,500 in 2014; legislators' pay was equivalent to $72,600 in 2014. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl.

change that they let it go for years. I'll give you another example. The people responsible for the toll road don't want to raise the tolls because people get upset. Well, what's the result of that? The result of that is that toll road maintenance declines because the revenue is not there to keep the roads in good repair; toll road expansion declines because the revenues aren't there to finance expansion. And after they go ten or twelve or fifteen years without raising the tolls despite increased inflation over that period of time, they have to raise the tolls high enough to make up, which makes people doubly mad. So there is a fear among policymakers to alienate the public by raising taxes, raising tolls, raising fees, raising salaries. And you have to try and ameliorate that, or you have to be courageous and take a stand and say, "We've got to do this. This is crazy." Most of the time, politicians, including myself, fall down on that job.

DePue: If you'll allow me, I'd like to lay out the facts that occurred shortly after the election as I can recall them, and then you can tell me how I got them all wrong, perhaps.

Thompson: Your memory is probably better than mine.

DePue: Well, memory isn't the case, just doing the research and reading about this. November 29, the state legislature, and I assume that would be in their veto session, meets and approves an $8,000 pay raise for themselves, the governor, department officers, constitutional officers, and state judges. For themselves, with their salary at $20,000, that represented a 40 percent increase. For you, it went from $50,000 to $58,000.

Thompson: Which is like, what, a 12 percent increase, or something like that?

DePue: Yeah, something like that. My understanding is that you were on vacation in South Carolina at the time.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: The legislature passed that bill, both House and Senate, so it went to you on the same day, on November 29. And on the same day, you directed somebody to use your autopen and veto the legislation, just as you had promised in the campaign.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: On the same day, the legislature, which was still in session, overrode the veto.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And the outcry against that series of events was almost immediate.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: The allegations immediately came out that you were in collusion with some of the legislators; that this was all planned well beforehand.

Thompson: Right. The Republicans controlled the House; George was Speaker, as I recall. And they came to me and they said, "Hey, we don't care what you said during the campaign. We're going to pass a pay raise." I said, "I'm not going to sign it. I made that promise, and I'm going to keep that promise." They said, "At least give us a chance to override you before we adjourn." And I said, "I'm not going to let the bill sit on my desk. I'm going to do what I said I would, and I'm going to veto it. If you override me, you override me."

DePue: One correction here. I think William Redmond was still the Speaker of the House.

Thompson: Oh yeah, that's right.

DePue: Ryan would have been a minority leader at that time. He became majority leader after the 1980 election.

Thompson: Yeah, okay.

DePue: But it was Ryan who approached you?

Thompson: Yeah. It was Ryan and two of his top Republican legislative assistants, Art Telcser and Pete Peters, who were leaders later when Ryan took over the House. Look, they were good legislators. Ryan helped me in my legislative dealings. Even though the House was Democratic, we had a bulwark against overriding a governor's veto if the Democrats wanted to do that. So I had some protection. Art Telcser and Pete Peters were legislators from Chicago who were still elected in the three-member districts, which meant they were elected in Chicago with two or three hundred votes. So they could be independent and progressive, and they were. I owed a lot to those guys, and my relationship with them was even more important when Ryan became Speaker in the later sessions.

I had to balance that, so the price of their continued cooperation seemed to be giving them a chance to override me. Of course, the Democrats had to be part of this plot as well, because they controlled the House and, I presume, the Senate. So I said, "All right, I'll give you the chance to override me." And I vetoed it speedily, and they overrode me, and they passed it. Of course, all the public protests fell on me; because they don't fall on individual leaders or legislators, that's too amorphous a target for the press or the public.

DePue: What were you telling the press at the time, that this was an agreement that you had made prior to the legislation?

Thompson: No, I don't think so. I don't think I said anything at the time, did I?

DePue: The impression I got was that you were denying there was any kind of agreement or collusion on this.

Thompson: I mean, it depends—I'm sounding like Clinton—(DePue laughs) it depends on what "agreement" is, right?[2] I said I would veto the bill when I got it. I could have let it sit on my desk, and it could have been vetoed after they were out of session; so to that extent, I was a part of their plans, I guess. But it was a dumb mistake. Look, you do all kinds of things during a legislative session to keep the cooperation of legislators and leaders. I mean, that's part of the legislative process, going along with things that you don't necessarily agree with. Otherwise, nothing gets done. And it was important to me to have a strong Republican leadership, especially in a House where the Republicans were not in charge.

DePue: Were you surprised by the public outcry?

Thompson: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Now, it was led, as I recall, by Quinn.

DePue: Well, initially, there was this huge public outcry, and then as you mentioned, it looked like Pat Quinn got behind trying to organize a protest.

Thompson: Right. And he did. And he was very effective. Pat was always good at those sorts of things.

DePue: Was he the one responsible for all of the tea bags that started to arrive?

Thompson: Yes. I got criticized in editorials up and down the state, tea bags arrived at the mansion, and it went on and on and on. And I finally said, "I've got to put an end to this." I guess it was in my State of the State the following January that I admitted I was wrong, and I apologized.[3]

DePue: It was in your inauguration. Prior to that time, it wasn't just a couple tea bags—

Thompson: No, it was a lot of tea bags! (laughs)

DePue: Coming directly to the governor's office.

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: And did some come to the legislators as well?

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[2] Reference to Bill Clinton's famous hairsplitting testimony before a grand jury on August 17, 1998, "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is." Clinton argued the meaning depended on whether or not "is" encompassed the past ("is and never has been") or just the present ("there is none"). Office of Independent Counsel, *A Referral to the United States House of Representatives Filed in Conformity with the Requirements of Title 28, United States Code, Section 595(c)*, September 9, 1998, 105th Cong., 2d sess., H. Doc 105-310.

[3] The pay raise and subsequent push for the Cutback Amendment are touched on in several of the *Illinois Statecraft* interviews. See David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 27, 2014; Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, March 9, 2015; Jim Edgar, June 9, 2009, Volume I: 257-262; Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, March 4, 2009, 53-54; Mike McCormick, interview by Mark DePue, July 8, 2010; Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, June 4, 2009; Kirk Dillard, interview by Mark DePue, September 29, 2009; Jim Reilly, interview by Mark DePue, August 10, 2009; Mark Boozell, interview by Mark DePue, August 18, 2009.

Thompson: No, they were not the targets. Understanding the nature of politics, you can't effectively organize a campaign like this against a group or against unknown people, which a lot of legislators are beyond their districts. And Quinn wasn't after the legislators, he was after the symbol of state government, the governor. It was easy to do the governor. It was hard to do the legislators, or the leaders. So he did what was easy.

DePue: Twenty-two thousand tea bags, is what I read.

Thompson: Yeah, oh yeah.

DePue: And when I mentioned it to you yesterday, you didn't recall corn was sent in as well, to help feed the "hogs at the trough."

Thompson: That might have been, but that's slipped from my memory. (laughs) The tea bags were much more effective as a political symbol. But see, there you go. If people regard their legislators and their governor as hogs feeding at the trough, you really don't start from an objective basis to form public policy on things like pay raises. I mean, it just…you can't win.

DePue: That leads to my next question.

Thompson: And Illinois has tried every kind of conceivable process. I think the law now is that we still have a commission and it recommends pay raises, and they always range in the 3 percent area, something like that. I don't know how frequent they are. Maybe we finally made peace on the issue of pay raises. But up until this time, it was hard to do.

DePue: What do you think Quinn's motives were?

Thompson: Quinn was—and I say it affectionately—a rabble rouser. I mean, he was the classic political rabble-rouser. He was against the establishment, and I don't know whether he at that time thought about a political career for himself. He was behind CUB, a bill I ultimately signed—

DePue: CUB standing for?

Thompson: The Citizens Utility Board, which intruded into the process of utility rate hikes. Another area where you can't win!

DePue: And that happened before this, had it not?

Thompson: I think so.

DePue: He'd been around since the Walker administration.

Thompson: He worked for Walker. He was one of Walker's staffers. And then he got onto this citizens protest kind of thing, and he picked up issues—he was very smart,

he's a smart politician—where he could easily inflame political public opinion, whether it was legislative pay raises or utility rates.

DePue: Even as early as 1976, Mike Madigan had a very low regard for Pat Quinn. This would have been at the tail end of the Walker administration, and he made one of my favorite Illinois political statements, "He should be ashamed to call himself an Irishman."

Thompson: There you go!

DePue: And Dawn Clark Netsch had even harsher things to say about him at the time.

Thompson: Yeah, well, now he's governor of the state of Illinois. See, if you hang in there long enough… It was like utility rates: once the attorney general of Illinois and the Cook County state's attorney and the mayor of the city of Chicago decided that they can make political hay by opposing every single utility rate increase *ever* proposed—not agreeing to any of them no matter what they were, big or small, always against them—who's the target? The governor, whose Commerce Commission has to rule on rate increases for utilities. So again, you've got one person in government that you can mount a campaign against in order to influence public policy; it's not the legislature, it's the governor and his people.

Governor Rhodes of Ohio, whom I had a great deal of regard for, one of a kind, ran for governor four times in Ohio and was elected four times. He was a character, and he did what he did without much regard to public opinion. He endeared himself, I guess, to voters in most areas; he'd go off and visit some part of the state of Ohio. He never had a schedule. He made it up in the morning when he got up, and then he'd take off.

So he told me a story. We were talking about utility rates at one of the national governor's conferences, and I guess I was bemoaning to him the difficulty of doing things like setting proper utility rates, because of all the political blow-back and backlash. He said, "I'll tell you how to do it. You appoint your best friend as the chairman of the utility board, and when they raise rates and the public starts yelling, you call him up and tell him he's fired, that you're not going to stand for this, and you agree with the people. And because he's your best friend, he's not going to mind." I said, "I don't think I can do that." (both laugh)

There were a lot of things that Jim Rhodes did that I couldn't do. First time I ever met him was at the hotel where the National Governor's Association was being held. I think this was a summer meeting. I see this guy walking down the hall holding a case of whiskey on his shoulder, trailed by about ten or twelve guys. He stops and says, "Who are you?" I say, "Jim Thompson, governor of Illinois." "Well, I'm Jim Rhodes of Ohio, you come with us." And he walks into this hotel suite and sets down the case of whiskey, starts opening the bottles. Turns out these twelve guys following him are reporters from Ohio. I'm sitting there drinking with the governor of Ohio and these twelve reporters, and I

thought, Uh, this wouldn't happen in Illinois! (laughs) That was my introduction to Jim Rhodes.

DePue: Republican or Democrat?

Thompson: He was a Republican. Yeah, a dear friend. Dear, dear friend.

DePue: You mentioned your inauguration speech, and I want to read a quote. But before we get there, by January 7 you and the legislature had already fashioned a compromise. Do you remember what the compromise was?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Phasing in this pay increase over a period of years.

Thompson: Oh, okay. I'm sure that was popular.

DePue: Well, I don't know if "popular" would be the word, (Thompson laughs) at a time everybody was mad at you.

Thompson: Yeah. They were.

DePue: And here was the comment that you made in the inauguration, "I did veto them, but many people concluded that the manner in which I did so, to paraphrase Macbeth, 'Kept the word of promise to your ear and broke it to your hope.' And you were right, and I apologize."

Thompson: There you go. It was the only way to end it. And it did end it. When you make mistakes in public life, I've learned over the years—I hope I didn't make too many—and it's clear that you made one and it's causing you injury, you stop; or as they say, if you're in a hole, stop digging. I thought an apology was warranted. So I did.

DePue: You're an acute observer of politics in the United States. It seems to me that there's an awful lot of politicians that have a very, very hard time getting to that point.

Thompson: Yeah, and when they do, they temper it. I mean, this always pisses me off to read, "If I've offended anybody, I apologize." That's not a real apology, because obviously you've offended a lot of people (laughs), or you wouldn't be up there saying this. Just apologize. So I did.

DePue: But that didn't stop the consequences of the vote by any means, because Pat Quinn was still out there.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Would you like me to lay out the specifics of his amendment, or do you want to address that?

Thompson: No, I don't remember it, actually.

DePue: The proposal, which became known as the Cutback Amendment, essentially was, if those SOBs think that they're going to raise their pay, then here's one way we can save the state some money. We'll just have a lot less legislators. We'll reduce the state legislature by one third. And you've already talked a little bit about the cumulative voting process, 177 House members, fifty-nine Senate members. There were fifty-nine Senate districts, and within each Senate district there were three House members that ran at-large in that House district.

And the way the system worked at that time for cumulative voting was that the parties had a tacit agreement—I think it might have been official once they got it into the state constitution in 1970—that they would run their primaries, just like normal. But once they got to the general election, there would be two Democrats and two Republicans on the ticket for three seats. And so the way it typically worked out is that the majority party got the two seats, and the minority party got one seat. And then there were all kinds of peculiar things, like you could bullet vote, you could walk into the voting booth and vote for one person three times.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Or you could split your vote between two candidates. It became fairly complicated, but I guess the electorate was educated on that.

Thompson: At least the party leadership educated their troops, is probably a better way to say it. And it worked. What Quinn did in the Cutback Amendment was, I think, hurtful to Illinois for two reasons; one, to say that it's appropriate public policy to take revenge—that's the only way I'll put it—for a pay raise for legislators by cutting the number of legislators seems to me using the axe instead of a more appropriate remedy. That's bad public policy. And two, as it turned out, you lost some of the best members of the legislature when you eliminated cumulative voting.

Just as an example, Redmond couldn't have been elected as a Democrat in DuPage County without cumulative voting. Pete Peters and Artie Telcser from the city, two of the best members of the legislature, couldn't have been elected without cumulative voting, because they were from deeply Democratic Chicago districts. You lost talented members of the legislature; you lost members of the legislature who could be fearless in their voting, because they had such a small constituency back home. So I think the Cutback Amendment was wrong. And I think using the Cutback Amendment to oppose pay raises is just an example of bad public policy.

DePue: From what I understand, you were vocal in your opposition to the Cutback Amendment?

Thompson: Yeah. For those reasons. It didn't make any sense. It wasn't good government, in my opinion.

DePue: Would you say that this was a matter of demagoguery on Quinn's part?

Thompson: Oh, I wouldn't call it demagoguery. He obviously had a purpose in doing what he was doing. He was making himself a leader of the anti-establishment forces, whatever they were. And I really don't think he had ultimate political ambitions; maybe he did, but it never appeared to be at the time.

DePue: He had no problems getting enough signatures to put this on the 1980 ballot.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And were you surprised by the outcome of the 1980 election on that particular initiative?

Thompson: No.

DePue: I mean, it overwhelmingly was passed by the Illinois public.

Thompson: Oh, sure. Of course.

DePue: And that means that 1982, the election was going to be quite different, because you're going to have just two members, each running for their own defined district, in each one of the Illinois Senate districts.

Thompson: You've got a lot of districts in Illinois now, let's just take today, with a Democratic senator and two Democratic representatives. And the contrary is true in some of the Republican districts, although with the current state of redistricting in Illinois, there aren't too many three-representative Republican districts. I just think that we lost something with that process.

DePue: Many of the critics of changing from the cumulative voting process to what we have now say there is a loss of congeniality in the House especially. Do you think that was the case?

Thompson: I think if you go down to the legislature today, even the legislators will tell you… I can't say that you have the same dysfunction as Washington, where you've got the House Republican and the Senate Democratic and a Democratic president and you just have gridlock. We haven't reached that stage in Illinois; stuff passes the legislature and is signed by the governor, so we don't have gridlock in Illinois. But the legislative process has become so partisan here, so nasty, so negative. They've started now with the political commercials for the current legislative election. And political commercials these days have become just crazy. I mean,

they'll take votes out of context, they'll take statements out of context, they'll create phony headlines—political commercials today are just awful. Part of it is a byproduct of the loss of the minority members in the legislature, so that the whole legislative electoral process has really been led down the wrong path in Illinois.

When I was governor, we had civility between the governor and the legislature. You don't have that today, even though they're all Democrats. We had civility in the House and the Senate. People didn't go on rampages like they do today. People didn't do political commercials like they do today. We've lost a lot of civility in the political process in Illinois, and it's not a healthy thing.

DePue: You mentioned that today there's not gridlock. But as I recall, at least how it was reported in the newspapers and the media, during the Blagojevich administration there was gridlock between the executive and the legislative branch.

Thompson: Oh, true. But even though that was true on a number of issues, life went on, the legislature functioned. Congress is not functioning today. It's just not functioning. They all ought to be ashamed of themselves in both parties. And people have such a low regard—what's the public opinion rating of Congress, 13 percent?

DePue: Something in the neighborhood of that.

Thompson: Yeah. I mean, that's terrible! That's just terrible. And then they want people to vote?

DePue: How much damage did this do to your reputation at the time and your ability to govern?

Thompson: It certainly damaged my reputation at the time, though that recovered. And it didn't really affect my ability to govern.

DePue: For all the political prognosticators out there, one of the things that they thought it damaged was your presidential aspirations.

Thompson: Ah, see, they forget that the timing for a presidential candidacy was never right, just never right. And they made up the presidential candidacy theory in my early days, after I had just been elected and hadn't even started to govern yet. Then when the Reagan-Bush era started, I was part of supporting Reagan and Bush. What, was I going to run for president against Reagan or Bush? No. I was one of their supporters. I ran Reagan's campaigns in Illinois. I ran Bush's campaigns in Illinois. They were successful campaigns. I never lost a presidential race in Illinois for the candidates I supported. The timing never worked, even if I had ambitions beyond my nine-year-old statement. So the notion that this controversy over vetoing a pay raise kept me from the presidency is just fanciful.

DePue: But it's wonderful, just for the mill, if you're a cartoonist, isn't it?

Thompson: Sure. Absolutely. Cartoonists have a field day with the politicians. They can always find something wrong.

DePue: (laughs) I mentioned a little bit about your inauguration and the apology that you made. Anything else stand out in that inauguration for you? That was your second time around.

Thompson: Not that I remember.

DePue: Going back to the media again, the newspapers tended to think that maybe Samantha had stolen the show to a certain extent.

Thompson: What do you mean?

DePue: You got Jayne up there on the podium holding a brand new baby.

Thompson: Oh, well, it's okay with me. (both laugh)

DePue: That beats focusing on the alternative, huh?

Thompson: Yeah, at least the baby couldn't talk yet, wasn't demanding or sending tea bags.

DePue: And apparently, shortly thereafter, you headed to Florida, and you missed the big snowstorm in Illinois.

Thompson: No, that's not true. That is completely false. That's not what happened. I didn't leave until I had done my duty, so the only thing that I could have done was shovel some snow, right? But that wasn't my job. My job was to get the roads cleared, which they were, and my job was to get federal assistance, which I did. And I got it before any other Midwestern governor got it. So I thought my job was done, and I went on vacation. That was a mistake. (pauses) You know, the press never misses an opportunity to insist that governors or presidents live unlike other people when it comes to things like vacations.

I mean, look at the criticism Obama is getting now for golfing while the world is in crisis. Well, the world's always in crisis! What do they want the man to do? Be in the White House continuously? Then they'll get to demand that he's not spending enough hours in the White House, he should stop sleeping so much, he should stay awake and worry about Ukraine, or ISIS, or all these other things. President of the United States is one of the most difficult, wearing, stressful jobs in existence, I would think. You've got to let the man have some time off from that.

The only thing Obama did wrong the last couple of weeks was to allow himself to be photographed grinning from his golf cart, minutes after making a statement of sorrow about the beheading of James Foley. The two things were absolutely inconsistent, and made him look foolish. He should have waited, gone golfing the next day. You have to have the press follow you while you're golfing?

That's crazy. He's entitled to some privacy. I don't know what his handlers were thinking, allowing the press to be there at the first tee. And he's with friends, of course he's going to smile. It just came out wrong. But to criticize him, even some of the Democrats criticizing him for taking some time on the golf course while things are going awry in other parts of the world, they're not going to make them any better by sitting in the White House. They're going to happen. ISIS is still going to be fighting in Iraq and Syria, no matter where the president is.

Okay, now that I've said my piece on that, Florida and snow. As I say, I did my job. But the press is not content to let you be on vacation while there's still snow around elsewhere. I was staying at the apartment of Alan Dixon. Eventually, I think the press found me, and I went back because it just wasn't worth it anymore. And the press met me at the airport gate. They can't do that now, but back then they could go right to the gate with their cameras and stuff. I'm talking to the press at the gate, and Hugh Hill from Channel 7 was the lead reporter. He was a wonderful guy, but Hugh's style was to bark questions, be the tough guy, rah, rah, rah. He never was a tough guy, but that was his style. And the crowd around the gate started booing. He said, "See? They're booing!" I said, "They're not booing me, Hugh, they're booing you!" "Why would they be booing me?" I said, "Because they're going to Florida, and you're yelling at me for having gone to Florida. These people are waiting to get on the plane to go to Florida." So that ended the press conference.

DePue: While we're in this neighborhood of snowstorms, (Thompson laughs) let's talk about the mayor of Chicago.

Thompson: Yeah, Michael Bilandic?

DePue: Right. And I think April of '79 is the next mayoral election.

Thompson: He made this mistake of telling people that the streets were plowed when they weren't plowed. They would see him on television saying, "We've plowed the streets, and we've plowed the parking lots, and you can park your car," when their car was stuck in the snow on a street that hadn't been plowed. Even worse, the snow had impacted the operation of the CTA, and even the L in Chicago. I don't know who had the loss of sense to do this, but to get to the Loop, they were running the L trains and not stopping at a lot of stations in between the start and the finish in the Loop. These were all stations in black neighborhoods where people depended on the L to get to work. And they stood there, watching the trains speed by. Well, that caused a terrible uproar in the black community, as it should have. The result of all of this mismanagement cost Bilandic the election, and Jane Byrne was elected. And let me tell you, ever since that election, the streets are plowed the moment the first snowflake hits in Chicago. And the mayor is nowhere to be seen; the head of the Department of Sanitation and staff that's responsible for taking the snow away, they're the ones you see on television, not the mayor.

DePue: Well, I happened to be living in the Chicago area in the early 1990s, and I remember a big snowstorm hit. I was amazed watching a press conference, and you would have thought that they were planning for the D-Day invasion.

Thompson: Yes, right. Exactly. The Democrats in Chicago don't need more than one lesson. (laughs)

DePue: Any comments about Jane Byrne?

Thompson: She's now been restored almost single-handedly by Sneed and the *Sun-Times* to sort of an icon in Chicago.[4] And in many ways, she was; only woman mayor we've ever had. She had some good ideas; she was smart. But she was also impulsive. And she associated herself with some people that were less than palatable, let's say—Chuckie Swibel and others. So there was the good side of Jane Byrne, and the bad side of Jane Byrne. I always was able to deal with her on city-state issues. We did the Crosstown deal together. I've always gotten along with all of the mayors in the city of Chicago. The only one I ever had minor difficulties with was Harold Washington. But I never had issues as far as dealing with state issues with the mayor of the city of Chicago, whether it was Rich Daley or Jane Byrne or Bilandic or Sawyer, or any of them.

DePue: I think it was in 1979 that maybe your first specific dealing with Mayor Byrne was her attempt to get a state bailout for the RTA. Do you recall that at all?

Thompson: Not really.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We decided to accept defeat, and the leaf blowers are done now. Governor, do you want to start with a story of your own here?

Thompson: You noticed the license plate on my car, number 8. You know the difference between old money and new money?

DePue: Oh yeah.

Thompson: Well there's also a difference between old plates and new plates. Old plates are the simple number plates: 8, 9, 10, 11. There are very few of those, and the ones between one and a hundred are considered the ultimate in license plates, for those who care about that stuff. When I was a U.S. attorney, the secretary of state was a guy by the name of John Lewis; I think he had been appointed by a governor to fill a vacancy, or something like that. He was the secretary of state who introduced what we called the "zero plates," I think it's 01, 02, 03… They were just new vanity plates, we'll call them.

[4] Longtime newspaper columnist Michael Sneed.

He was in my office one day; he was in Chicago, and he came by to say hello. He said, "How would you like one of the new number plates, the new zero plates?" And I forget what I had on my car at that time, just a regular license plate, I guess. I said, "What do you have?" He said, "You can pick any one you want. You can have 01. You can have 007." I said, "Let me think about that." I guess that afternoon or the next day, I was chatting with some of my young assistants in the office, "What do you think I ought to get, 01 or 007?"[5] And they all had their various opinions. Then I thought to myself, I don't know how long the James Bond phenomenon is going to last; maybe twenty or thirty years from now, nobody will know what 007 means. Maybe I'll take the 01. I called up John and said, "Okay, I'll take the 01." He gave it to me, and it was a neat plate.

So I'm elected governor, and Alan Dixon was the secretary of state at the time. I said, "Listen, would you put my plate on the shelf? Hold it until I leave office, and then give it back to me?" He said, "Sure." Then Edgar came in. I asked him, and he said, "Sure." Well, later on, I found out that Edgar gave it away to somebody.

DePue: (laughs) Had he forgotten about that pledge to you?

Thompson: I guess so. And when Edgar was just leaving the secretary of state's office to become governor, and George was coming in as secretary of state, George found out about this and called up and yelled at Edgar for not keeping my plate. So Edgar says, "Okay, okay, I'll give him 8. I gave 8 to a friend of mine, but with the explicit understanding that when I left the secretary of state's office, he had to give the plate back."

DePue: And this isn't 08, it's 8.

Thompson: Eight. This is old plate, this is old money; this is not a vanity plate. So Edgar gave me 8 as recompense for giving my plate away. (laughs) And of course, I like 8 a lot better than I like 01, because that was a new-fangled thing. And there are a lot

[5] 007 is the code number of the fictional British secret agent James Bond.

of zero plates out there, but there aren't a lot of 8s out there, there's only one.[6]

DePue: Okay, governor, do you know who's got 01?

Thompson: I have no idea.

DePue: Never did know?

Thompson: Never did know.

DePue: Let's get back to your administration. (Thompson laughs) Oftentimes, when you're entering into a new administration, you make some personnel changes. Do you recall any personnel changes that you made in 1979?

Thompson: Not really.

DePue: Art Quern, would he have come on board at that time?

Thompson: No, he was there from the beginning.

DePue: How about the legislative agenda for 1979? You made a declaration early on that education would be your top priority.

Thompson: Yeah.

[6] In between these plates, Thompson enjoyed an even rarer one. This 1979 slide is in Thompson Office Files.

DePue: What would you have meant by that?

Thompson: I probably meant that it would get the most money in the budget. It's the only way you can make something a priority, pay for it.

DePue: Your recommendation was an $80 million increase, but the State Board of Education's recommendation was $171 million.

Thompson: The State Board of Education is always higher than the governor, because they have no responsibility to raise the money. Government agencies—including the governor's own agencies, cabinet, code departments—always ask for more money than they end up getting. Legislature wants to spend more money than they have. It's only the governor who can put some brakes on that kind of attitude.

This has always bugged me: the federal government decides how much they want to spend, and then if their revenue falls short, they borrow the rest, resulting in just a huge, trillions of dollars debt. State governments are supposed to find out how much revenue they have and then spend no more than that. And the only thing you borrow for are capital projects that are going to last a long time; for that you can issue bonds. But state governments can't spend more than they have, unlike the feds. The feds are in the business of pleasing everybody.

DePue: Well, that's the theory, Governor.

Thompson: That's the theory.

DePue: One way we've managed to get around that now is not bother to pay the bills until many, many months after the fact.

Thompson: That's right. Now we're in a situation in this state where the bills outstanding are in the billions. They've come down somewhat. I mean, Quinn's cut the budget pretty substantially; you've got to give him credit for that. Through economic bad times, it just got out of whack. And so for a while, they were skipping pension payments, and that gave them some extra cash; you can't do that anymore. It's going to be a long time before the state of Illinois gets out of the present hole we're in. And it's not going to be easy for any governor, whether it's Quinn or Rauner, or any legislature.

DePue: Since we're talking about the budget, I wanted to lay out some specifics, and then let you kind of respond in a general sense on some of these things.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: You're going to be talking in the 1979 legislative session about the 1980 budget. It's another lean year that you're looking at, because unemployment is 5.8 percent at the beginning of the year, and on the rise. Inflation is at 10 percent and on the rise. And again, compared to the inflation rates we have today, I don't know that people can really comprehend the impact of that high of an inflation rate.

Thompson: Right. It got worse. (laughs)

DePue: Yeah, it got worse, and you had a high inflation rate the year before. So there's an awful lot of pressure for increasing the budget as well. I know that the expenditures for fiscal year 1980 were up 19 percent, but I'm having a hard time trying to figure out how you raised revenue by 19 percent. When you started the year, was it both your budget director, Mandeville, and the legislature making revenue predictions?[7]

Thompson: Sure. They always do. The Bureau of the Budget makes a revenue prediction, which ends up being the governor's revenue prediction, and they have a specific legislative body within the legislature that makes revenue predictions for the guidance of the legislature.[8]

DePue: You make your budget address early in the year, usually about March, I believe?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And then it's always at the end of the legislative year, late June, that there's some kind of agreement. Maybe late May. How successful were you early on in your administration to have the legislature adopt a budget that looked roughly like the one that you had proposed?

Thompson: I thought I was successful in most years, because the governor has a veto; although since the 1970 constitution, the veto is not as good as it once was. The 1970 constitution purported to give the governor expanded veto powers, and in some areas they did. The amendatory veto? Oh, I loved that. I used that a lot. But the others, the 1970 constitution changed the number of votes needed to override the governor from two-thirds to three-fifths. And while it gave the governor a reduction veto—

DePue: Which wasn't there before?

Thompson: Which wasn't there before, so you didn't have to veto the whole budget to achieve reductions. That could be overridden by a simple majority. So if the governor reduces a line item by the use of the reduction veto, the legislature could override it with the same majority it took to pass it in the first place. That was not a very effective tool that the 1970 constitution gave you. But nevertheless, the governor's veto powers are considerable. We were a strong-governor state in the end, unlike some states which are a weak-governor state—Texas, for example. Generally, I was able to achieve what I wanted to achieve. It was never the same budget that I submitted; obviously not. But it was close enough.

[7] For the politics and process of revenue estimating during the Thompson administration, see Robert Mandeville, December 12, 2013, and February 20, 2014. Both interviews by Mike Czaplicki. See Appendix for the Bureau of the Budget's revenue estimates for fiscal years 1978 through 1991.
[8] Illinois Economic and Fiscal Commission.

DePue: Did they start with your budget proposal and then tinker with the margins? Or did they have their own budget proposal?

Thompson: No, they did their own.

DePue: And then that's when the negotiations started between the two branches?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Again, talking about the types of vetoes—total veto, the line-item veto, reduction veto—what was the difference between a line item veto and a reduction veto?

Thompson: The line-item veto took the appropriation out. Let's say they appropriated $50,000 for something. The line item veto took the whole fifty. The reduction veto, if I wanted to change fifty to twenty-five, I could do that.

DePue: And for the line item veto, it would take a three-fifths vote—

Thompson: Three-fifths, right.

DePue: But for the reduction veto, just—

Thompson: Simple majority. So I didn't use the reduction veto very often.

DePue: How about the amendatory veto?

Thompson: Oh, I love the amendatory veto.

DePue: That is a topic of much discussion. And I've talked to people who were involved with the creation of the constitution, the inclusion of the amendatory veto, and the assumption was that the amendatory veto was to correct clerical errors.[9]

Thompson: (laughs) But that's not what the constitution said.

DePue: Would you disagree with me that that's what they intended to do?

Thompson: I don't know what they intended, but I was going by the literal words of the constitution.

DePue: How did you interpret the amendatory veto?

Thompson: That I could change legislation. And I used it widely. When I say "widely," I used the veto a number of times. Generally, the legislature went along with my amendatory vetoes. And sometimes, the sponsor of the bill asked for the amendatory veto because they discovered after they passed the bill that they didn't like some of the changes that would affect. So the sponsor would come to the governor and say, "Could you use your amendatory veto to change my bill?"

[9] Mary Lee Leahy, interview by Mark DePue, April 23, 2008, 51-52.

And I'd say, "Yeah." I would use it there. I'd use it where I disagreed with the legislature on the measure but didn't want to lose the whole bill, so I'd change it. And the legislature generally went along. I even went so far as to change a tax bill from one form of tax to another—that was a reach.

So whatever the intent of the 1970 framers was, I didn't think I was bound by that, as my reading of the constitution said I could do this. And we were the strongest state with a governor having an amendatory veto. My amendatory veto power was wider and stronger than any other governor in the country. Up in Wisconsin, the governors would change legislation by changing letters, commas, semicolons, trying to write a whole new sentence by taking letters out—I mean, it was a ridiculous looking thing. I just rewrote it.

Then Madigan, who was the Speaker, I guess felt that I was intruding on legislative powers by my use of the amendatory veto. So he decided he wasn't going to go along with this any longer. Because up until then, this was within the control of the sponsor; the sponsor could either move to accept the governor's changes, or he could move to override the governor's changes, in which event it became a total veto. And usually, whatever the sponsor wanted, the legislature would do, unless it became a partisan fight and the governor's party stood with him. But Madigan decided that he didn't like my broad use of the amendatory veto, so he set up a House rule and a House committee on amendatory vetoes. He cut my power somewhat. He didn't use it very often. And I probably moderated my use of the amendatory veto in response.

DePue: The framers had their own intention, but you read it differently than some of the framers did—stay with me, here—how could Madigan then decide he has his own interpretation and win that argument?

Thompson: Because he had control of the floor of the House. He had iron-clad control of the floor of the House. He had more power than any Speaker in Illinois history.

DePue: Which means that he had the votes to override your vetoes, essentially? That case, as I understand, is a three-fifths vote.

Thompson: He would not accept the amendment, which converted my amendatory veto to a total veto. Then he either had to override me with the three-fifths majority—which he didn't have, unless Republicans voted with him—or the bill was dead. And since Madigan didn't particularly care whether the bill was dead or not—the sponsor might, but Madigan didn't—we reached sort of a détente on the issue. I still used the amendatory veto. I just didn't use it as broadly as I had before, and I was careful to think about the consequences of Madigan's potential opposition before I did an amendatory veto. But over the whole course of fourteen years, most of the amendatory vetoes were either at the request of the sponsor or they were noncontroversial changes; they weren't a reversal of the total bill.

DePue: It was 1983 when Madigan became Speaker. Was it shortly thereafter that you reached the détente with him?

Thompson: No, I don't think he did it at the beginning. I think as he consolidated his power, he just figured, Oh, the governor's taking away legislative powers too broadly, I'm not going to let him do that anymore. But when you say, "the framer's intention," I don't think the framers of the United States Constitution had any notion it was going to be used to allow gay marriage. I don't think they thought about a lot of the things that the Constitution stands for today. So the notion of the framer's views gives way to reality, and only guys like the Supreme Court justice—why am I forgetting his name? He's a friend of mine. (laughs)

DePue: Rehnquist?

Thompson: No, not Rehnquist. The guy that's there now, the senior member of the court. Scalia. Only Justice Scalia pays much attention to the intention of the framers, or the literal words of the Constitution.

DePue: I'm not clear then, are you a strict constructionist, or a living document kind of a guy?

Thompson: I'm a living document kind of a guy.

DePue: Let's go back to Illinois, governance and politics of 1979. Do you remember a meeting that year in Washington, DC, I believe, that discussed federal revenue-sharing?

Thompson: The only revenue-sharing meeting that I remember was at the White House. The governors had asked for a meeting with the president because they wanted increased revenue-sharing from the federal government. I forget who started the idea of revenue-sharing; maybe it was Nixon.[10]

DePue: I believe you're right in that respect.

Thompson: We came out of the meeting, and I don't think we got what we wanted.

DePue: This would have been with Carter, now?

Thompson: Yeah. The press was there, and they asked me whether I was upset about not getting increased revenue-sharing for the states. I said, "No. There is no revenue. If there's no revenue, you can't share it." I said we could get debt-sharing, because that's where the money's coming from, from the feds. They don't have any revenue to give away to the states. They have an unbalanced budget. They

[10] Thompson was also one of three governors to testify before the Joint Economic Committee of Congress, which was holding hearings on a bill to end federal revenue-sharing, on February 28, 1979.

borrow. So I see the notion of revenue-sharing is sort of backwards when there is no revenue.

DePue: But the states were in a box, since most of them had to have a balanced budget, and the federal government didn't.

Thompson: That's right. But that's part of the challenge of being governor.

DePue: You proposed a gas tax hike in 1979.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: One and a half cents per gallon, or perhaps something that was tied to inflation. Was the gas tax explicitly used for road construction, road maintenance at the time?

Thompson: Yeah, it was at the time. There's another area where you can't win. I mean, you never can win on raising taxes, but the legislature was always *deathly* afraid of gas taxes. So they went for years, or decades, without being raised. In the meantime, you had more roads to maintain. And you had more fuel-efficient cars, and you had more cars on the roads as people became more affluent. So what you had was declining revenues and expanding needs. You had many more roads to maintain than when the gas tax was set at that level, and more cars were driving on the roads, creating the maintenance problems. Illinois is one of those freeze-thaw states; if we were a far northern state where it gets frozen at the start of the winter and stays frozen all winter, we wouldn't have the effects of thawing on the roadways. The roads would have a thaw in the middle of the winter, and then water would get into the cracks that had developed. It went back and forth like that during the course of the winter, so you were always repairing the roads. And we didn't have a southern state where they didn't have any snow. The midwestern states had that. You had a static revenue and an expanding need. That doesn't work in government. So I was looking for ways to increase the revenue, simply to maintain the roads we had, because I was always a roads governor. And I couldn't persuade the legislature to do it.

DePue: Was that an issue that crossed party boundaries, that both sides could be opposed to that one?

Thompson: Sure. On this issue, I got a phone call from my friend, Bill Clinton, the governor of Arkansas, who was my seat mate at the national governor's conference. They have two-year terms down there. He was elected, then he ran for re-election two years later and he lost. And a day after he was defeated, when he should have been in hiding licking his wounds, he called me because he was a friend of mine and knew I had proposed a gas tax. He said, "Jim, Jim, don't push the gas tax. It beat me." And in fact, that was one of the issues in his election; he tried to raise the gas tax, or maybe he successfully raised the gas tax and people got mad. I said, "Well Bill, thank you. I'm sorry about your loss. But I've got to keep pushing. I need the gas tax revenue for my roads. And that was not all that beat

you."

Bill had opened up the mental health institutions of Arkansas to Cuban immigrants who were mentally ill and that Castro was only too happy to send to the United States. The president had prevailed on Bill to let them in. Well, you can imagine the reaction of conservative Arkansas to that notion. And then the Air Force lost a missile in his woods in Arkansas, and that was a big hullaballoo. His wife didn't have his name, and Arkansas wasn't used to a couple like that. I guess it was a young governor moving too fast, and between the Cuban crazies, the missile in the woods, and the gas tax, he lost. Now, he came back two years later and won, and served as governor until he became president of the United States. So I guess in the end, it was okay. But I'll never forget that phone call. I thought that was an amazing thing for him to do. He, a governor of another party who had just been defeated, had bigger things on his plate than calling me and trying to save me from myself.

DePue: It's also a reflection of the political animal that he was and is.

Thompson: Yeah. It's a reflection, too, of the governor's conference. Governors were rarely partisan. The only time that we had, to my knowledge, partisan politics in the NGA was during my term as chairman. The governor from Texas was a Democrat, and he was campaigning to be the next chairman of the RG [Republican Governors Association].[11] So he spent some time sniping at me. But apart from that episode, the NGA was always a very congenial place. You had gubernatorial courtesy; you didn't go into another state and campaign against the incumbent governor, even though he was of a different party. You don't see that today, I mean, we just had Christie in Illinois campaigning for Rauner, right? We didn't do that back then. It was like senatorial courtesy. The senators didn't do that back then. They do it now, which is just a reflection of how politics have changed. But I always thought that was an extraordinary thing for Bill to do, very personal thing for him to do, to try to save me from making a mistake. But I didn't listen to him. (laughs)

DePue: I was going to say, it didn't change your mind.

Thompson: It didn't change my mind. We needed it. And I finally got it, I think, in '83 or something like that?

DePue: Eighty-three, I believe, is when the fuel tax went in.

Thompson: I got that and RTA reform the same year.

DePue: Plus a temporary income tax increase.

[11] Thompson chaired the National Governors Association from 1983 to 1984. Mark White was the governor of Texas during this period. The NGA alternates the chairmanship between the two parties.

Thompson: And a temporary income tax increase, yeah.

DePue: Which we'll get to when we get to the conversation about '83.

Thompson: I guess I used all my muscle.

DePue: (laughs) The Illinois Senate at the time also was proposing to eliminate sales tax on food and medicine.

Thompson: Yeah. That was Richie Daley. He was the sponsor of that.

DePue: When he was sitting in the Illinois Senate?

Thompson: Yes. I *vigorously* opposed that, because it was going to take out a whole chunk of revenue that the state needed to maintain the budget. He was doing it for a political reason, and it was going to yank a whole big segment of revenue out of the budget at once. So I campaigned against that.

DePue: You used phrases like, "A pie-in-the-sky proposal" and "a crude political deception."

Thompson: Yeah. Gee, that sounds like something my opponents would say about me, right? (laughs) That sounds like Bakalis. Did I steal his words? I guess I did.

DePue: You were predicting a loss of $50 million in the first year, and apparently this was something that would be phased in over four years—

Thompson: No.

DePue: —$660 million?

Thompson: No, that's not what happened. He was going to take it all at once. Just all of it, eliminate the entire sales tax on food and drugs.

DePue: Which was what, about 5 percent at the time?

Thompson: Yeah, that's a lot of revenue. I knew I couldn't win, since the legislature was Democratic. So I prevailed upon Sam Vadalabene, a Democratic state senator from the Carbondale area, to propose phasing it out a penny a year. And while I didn't like it, it was obviously preferable to having the whole five cents yanked at once. So that's how that happened.

DePue: My understanding is that at one point in this process, and this is something that lasted much of the year, it looks like, you had vetoed it, and then you came back into a special session, perhaps?

Thompson: That might be. But it was my urging of Senator Vadalabene, who was a friend of mine, and for whom I had paved every inch of his legislative district. If they had

had torrential rains down there, people were in trouble; there was nowhere for the water to go, because it was all concrete. Sam helped save me.

DePue: I want to go back to the Thompson Proposition and your pledge to put caps on taxes in general. And now we're talking about the revenue shortfall the state was having, and the challenges that they were having in some of these attempts to eliminate things like taxes on food and medicine. So that makes you fair game for political cartoons like this one.

Thompson: Oh, I'm sure. This looks like a Campbell special. Yeah. What am I doing? I'm trying to fix the roof while the structure is falling down, is that it? You know, I don't remember this cartoon. "Symbolism." Was that his opposition to the Thompson Proposition?

DePue: That was his suggesting that you were being a hypocrite on the Thompson Proposition, that you hadn't pushed nearly hard enough, once you got to '79, to

actually follow through on the implications of the Thompson Proposition. That's how I interpreted it, at least.[12]

Thompson: Yeah, I guess so. But I don't know what "pushed hard enough" means. The Democrats obviously were not going to pass it. And what leverage did I have to

[12] Bill Campbell's cartoon from Thompson Scrapbooks. Campbell (May 16, 1943–July 12, 2002) was a talented cartoonist from Monmouth who ran the Campbell Cartoon Service and served as the editorial cartoonist for the *Quad-City Times*. A car accident later in 1979 left him paralyzed, ending his drawing career. "William Campbell Jr.," *Quad-City Times*, July 15, 2002. Also see Mike Cramer, "Poison Pen Pals," *Illinois Issues* (August 1994), for an overview of Illinois' political cartoonists in the second half of the twentieth century.

force them to pass it, beyond the proposition itself? Once the proposition was passed by the voters, it became up to the legislature to enact it. Voters had expressed their will, I expressed my will; I didn't have any way to push it in the legislature.

DePue: Do you remember where the budget was at that year in terms of whether or not there was a pension shortfall that year?

Thompson: I don't recall.

DePue: And I want to take that subject up again when we get to the 1982, '83 timeframe, I think. How about corporate personal property tax? That seemed to be an issue also in 1979.

Thompson: I really don't remember that. Didn't we eventually eliminate that?

DePue: Yeah, I think so. But that was later than this timeframe.

Thompson: Yeah, I don't remember it in connection with this timeframe.

DePue: To move to a different subject for you, there was some growing sentiment about all of the nuclear power plants in the state of Illinois, and a growing anti-nuclear protest, especially at Northern Illinois University. What was your position at the time on the building of more nuclear power plants?

Thompson: I was for it.

DePue: Was that something you were willing to push hard for?

Thompson: I mean, that was under the control of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The feds had control of that. But I was for the construction of more nukes. I thought the nuclear power plants served us well; it was reliable, dependable power, it was cheap power. It didn't have any environmental impacts, like coal. I was for it. And I remember going to campuses and arguing with students about it. I took pride in the fact that Illinois had more nuclear power than any other state. I used to say that in speeches. So while I was generally favorable to the coal industry and coal-fired plants, we didn't know as much about environmental damage as we do now. And I wanted Illinois to have a variety of power sources so that we were not prisoners to one source.

DePue: Was this a timeframe when acid rain became a real hot issue as well? Which is certainly a byproduct of high-sulfur coal.

Thompson: Yeah, that started.

DePue: What's the logic of you going to college campuses and debating students?

Thompson: That's where the debate was centered, and I was supposed to be the leader of public opinion in the state of Illinois. I never worried about going into college campuses and talking with students, whether they agreed with me or not. You know, you encourage young people to vote, you encourage young people to participate in politics, so you can't have that attitude and at the same time say, I won't talk to you, I won't debate with you, I'll be afraid to oppose your opinion.

DePue: And in May of 1979, you made a trip to Japan. What were your goals for that trip? For trips in general?

Thompson: When I came into office, Illinois had three foreign trade offices; Sao Paulo, Brussels—I'm trying to remember the third.[13] Those had been part of Illinois' economic development efforts for a long time.

DePue: The first two are kind of curious, since that's not necessarily large markets; although Brazil is going to have a much larger market over the years.

Thompson: Yeah, those offices weren't very helpful at the time, in my opinion. I was a big supporter of Illinois exports, both grain, raw materials, and manufactured products. I used to say, "Abraham Lincoln told us Illinois must trade with the world," which was why Lincoln supported the building of canals and railroads in Illinois. And I took up that war cry.

DePue: How about meat products, especially beef and pork, and you're going to places like Japan that had pretty high tariffs on meat coming in?

Thompson: We weren't in a position to control tariffs, and you didn't have the establishment of organizations that now can help eliminate unfair tariffs. There are still tariffs. The United States still has tariffs. But generally the importing-exporting situation is much better now. Japan was an obvious market for things like corn and manufactured products; meat—

DePue: Soy beans?

Thompson: Soy beans. So I thought we needed to expand our international trade efforts. Starting with three Illinois trade offices which I inherited, I ended up with thirteen, after my fourteen years. And they were in obvious places. I not only had one trade office in Japan, I had two—in Tokyo and Osaka—and opened the first American state trade office in China. All the other governors were afraid of China, communist state. So they opened trade offices in Taiwan. I wanted to go where I thought the market was; the market was China, with billions of people. And so I opened an Illinois trade office in the old Manchurian area, in Liaoning province, because the province, in its mix of agriculture and industry, sort of

[13] In September 1972, Gov. Richard Ogilvie signed a bill allowing the Department of Business and Economic Development to open a trade office in East Asia. The office opened in Hong Kong under Governor Walker's administration in 1974, and was followed by the Sao Paulo office in 1975.

mimicked Illinois. I was the first American governor to open a trade office in mainland China.

Of course, that limited me later, because I became the Chinese favorite governor. So I was not allowed to do things the other governors were allowed to do. The other governors could get away with having a trade office in both China and Taiwan; they followed me into China, okay, but they maintained their Taiwan office. I tried to open an office in Taiwan and the Chinese wouldn't let me. They said, "You can't, you're our governor. You were the first one here. You're in a special status, you can't do that." They wouldn't even let me *visit* Taiwan.

DePue: I'm missing something here, because Taiwan was a sovereign nation.

Thompson: Yeah. Well, it was breakaway.

DePue: But how could Communist China block you to go there?

Thompson: They couldn't physically block me, but they let me know they would be monumentally unhappy if I did it, since I was their favorite governor.

DePue: Now, I've talked to Orion Samuelson. Did he accompany you on a couple of the trips?[14]

Thompson: He might have, yeah.

DePue: Or others that were taking not just grain products, but taking hogs or beef cattle, or things like that?

Thompson: Yeah. When I opened the Illinois trade office, I took the biggest delegation from America ever to visit China. My delegation was bigger than Nixon's when he opened up relations with China. The Chinese had a very special fondness for me, and I wasn't going to interrupt that relationship. So when we got invitations for me to visit Taiwan, I sent the lieutenant governor; when the next invitation came, I sent the director of law enforcement. I eventually sent the Speaker; I said, "Mike, I can't go to Taiwan, you've got to go!" So he went. And it wasn't until I left office that I was ever able to visit Taiwan. Now Winston has an office in Taiwan, but I never had one.

We once sent a bunch of hogs to China from Illinois, and one of them was bigger than all the others. And the Chinese named him "Big Jim," picking up my political nickname. And I'd get regular reports on how Big Jim was just leading the flock; he's siring more piglets than any other pig. Then one day, Big Jim died, but the Chinese were afraid to tell me he died. So they kept sending me these phony reports that Big Jim was doing his duty over there, when he was dead!

[14] Orion Samuelson, interview by Mark DePue, February 2-3, 2009.

(laughs) It wasn't until a couple of years later, when one of their missions came to the mansion, they finally confessed that Big Jim had passed on to pig heaven.

DePue: How quickly did you see some benefits from your efforts and foreign travel?

Thompson: The China trip alone, we signed agreements for trade and sales of material that were more than the investment we ever put into foreign travel altogether in the fourteen years. And I opened offices in places that I thought were natural markets. We had never had an office in Mexico or Canada; now, these are our neighbors, and we do a lot of trade with Mexico and Canada. My theory was, if we're already doing a lot of trade with two countries that are on our borders, why in the world did Illinois not have offices there to promote Illinois trade? Other states had them long before. I also figured that for small companies in Illinois who didn't have the trade expertise on their staffs, they could learn foreign trade in Canada and Mexico, and then when they learned it, they could go on to places like China or Japan or Europe. And I thought that was very successful. Then I opened offices in Eastern Europe—Poland and Hungary.

DePue: While they were still under the Soviet bloc? Because that would have ended right at the end of your administration, in '90, '91.

Thompson: Yeah, I guess so. I had an office in Moscow. Poland and Hungary were funny. I wanted to do Poland and Hungary. My staff didn't want me to do Poland and Hungary; I don't remember why, but they were against it. So I waited until we went to a conference of Polish people, or something like that. I got up on the stage, and with my staff sitting behind me, I announced we were going to open offices in Poland and Hungary. (laughs) And that was that. We opened offices in Poland and Hungary.

DePue: Did those initiatives take any legislative approval?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Poland seems to be a logical place—

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: —if for no other reason than there's how many Poles living in the Chicago area?

Thompson: More than there are in Warsaw.

DePue: I think maybe Warsaw was the only city that had more Poles.

Thompson: Yeah, that may be. I guess that's how you phrase it. But it just made sense. And then Edgar cut back some of my offices after he came in, because he wasn't as interested in foreign trade as I was.[15]

DePue: Are there any humorous stories that you haven't already mentioned about your trips overseas?

Thompson: There was one. I had an office in Barcelona, brand new office. I was over there to oversee that and negotiate with the president of Catalonia, where Barcelona was situated. I was staying in the presidential palace, and about midnight, there's a banging on my bedroom door. I opened it, and it's the president. He said, "Do you know Gussie Busch?"[16] I said, "Yeah." He had been negotiating with Anheuser Busch to put an amusement park in Barcelona, like they had in other places in the world. Apparently the negotiations had broke down, somehow. He said, "Can you call him and talk to him and help me do this?" I said, "Well, I'll try."

Got on the phone to Busch's office in St. Louis, and they said, "He's not in the office." I said, "I have to talk to him, where is he?" "He's attending his son's baseball game." And they gave me his cellphone number. So I called Gussie Busch while he was sitting in the stands of his son's baseball game. I said, "You've got to restart the negotiations with the president of Catalonia." He did, and they built their park.

DePue: This would have been in the days when cellphones were the size of a brick, probably.

Thompson: Exactly right, but he had one. Oh, I once did a trade mission to China where we were touring the Great Wall, and then we got back in our busses and we left one of our members behind. He didn't know we had left! (laughs) This was a friend of mine; he was an antique dealer in Geneva. Nice guy, elderly guy. About twenty miles down the road, I'm looking over the bus, and I don't see him. And I said, "Whoa, turn the bus around!" So we went back, and there he was, patiently waiting for the bus. (laughs)

DePue: China, at that time, was probably no place to be stranded.

Thompson: Ah, no. Especially out at the Great Wall. But we got him. The only other thing, I guess, that was politically involved, Adlai attacked me for my trips.[17] They were political fodder for him. I don't know where he got this, but he was a Japan expert, went over there a lot, and he jumped me in the debate with an accusation that I spent all my time "antiquing" in Japan. Well, A, there is not a lot of antiquing to do; and B, if you did a lot of it, you would find hugely expensive Japanese antiques that I really didn't have any interest in. I don't collect

[15] For his view of the foreign trade offices, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, April 23, 2010, Volume III: 656-659.
[16] Nickname of August Busch Jr.
[17] Adlai Stevenson III, Thompson's opponent in the 1982 and 1986 gubernatorial campaigns.

Orientalia. And yeah, one afternoon, after I'd finished my duties and my meetings for the day, with meetings still to come at night, I took an hour and went around with a driver, looking at whatever there was to look at. That became a big debate thing with him.

DePue: I understand that you did oftentimes take Dave Bourland along on some of these trips.[18]

Thompson: Sure. Oh, yeah.

DePue: In what capacity?

Thompson: As a curator of the mansion.

DePue: To purchase things for the mansion? Who would be paying his bill to do that?

Thompson: The state. He was a state employee. The state, at that time, was responsible for the upkeep and furnishing of the mansion, since we had a very inactive mansion association with not a lot of money.

DePue: One other question here about all these different trade missions that you took and trade offices that you were opening. What's the logic for states to open up their own trade offices versus going through a U.S. trade office, or the U.S. embassy or consulates?

Thompson: Because the U.S. trade office, or the embassy or the consulate can't pick favorites among the states. They can only give you the same kind of help they give every other state, whereas an Illinois state trade office can concentrate on Illinois and encourage imports from Illinois, as opposed to Iowa or Ohio or Minnesota. Let them do their own work. That's not to say we turned down help from the federal government, I mean, I sought it. But they weren't in any position to help me specifically if I was competing with other states, which I was.

DePue: Moving on later in that year, August 21, you sign a piece of legislation to raise the drinking age in Illinois to twenty-one, (Thompson laughs) effective January 1, 1980.

Thompson: Yeah. Well, I didn't have any choice. The federal government decided that they didn't want the drinking age at eighteen, which it was. And so they told states, you either raise the drinking age or we're taking away your federal gas tax.

DePue: Was MADD actively lobbying in the state of Illinois?[19]

Thompson: Sure.

[18] David Bourland, interview by Mark DePue, May 29, 2014.
[19] Mothers Against Drunk Driving was founded the following year.

DePue: Or did they focus primarily on the federal level?

Thompson: Yeah, MADD lobbied in Illinois, but I don't think they were strong enough on their own to raise the drinking age to twenty-one. We really didn't have any bad incidents of underage drinking. Raising it to twenty-one didn't stop the underage drinking; kids used phony IDs, they got it on college campuses, things like that. But we didn't have any choice. Neither did any other state have any choice. We all raised it to twenty-one. So I had to sign the bill. The only thing I probably shouldn't have done was to sign it between halves of an Illinois football game on the football field at the University of Illinois. That was sort of a provocative thing to do, I guess.

DePue: You had already told me that story, but (Thompson laughs) Governor, what were you thinking?

Thompson: What was I thinking, yeah. That was as bad as what I did down at Busch Stadium in St. Louis, between a double-header of the Cardinals and the Cubs, when I went down there to salute Jack Buck, the announcer for the Cardinals. I provoked a crowd by saying, "I was born a Cubs fan, I am a Cubs fan, and I'll always be a Cubs fan." I got roundly booed by the audience. My staff was saying, "What were you thinking? We wouldn't have let you out in the field if we knew you were going to do that!"

DePue: When Dave Gilbert told me that story though, he said that there was no end of people coming up and congratulating you when you got back to Chicago.

Thompson: Of course. But down there that was hostile territory, that's for sure.

DePue: But those people weren't likely to be voting in Illinois' gubernatorial election, anyway.

Thompson: No, they were not.

DePue: Moving along in 1979, do you remember when Pope John Paul II came to Chicago?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: That would have been early in October.

Thompson: Right. He was in a plane that landed on the military side of O'Hare, and I went out and met the pope there.

DePue: And in late 1979, that was the timeframe that Robert Hartley came out with his book, *Big Jim Thompson of Illinois*.

Thompson: Yeah. Go back a moment on that pope's visit. There's a story connected with that. An alderman in the city of Chicago, Vito Marzullo, who was the leader of the so-

called West Side Bloc, a bloc of Democrats who didn't brook any interference in their neighborhood.

DePue: And with a name like Marzullo, I guess we know what his religious upbringing was.

Thompson: Yeah. So my first ever meeting with Alderman Marzullo was when I was a young prosecutor in Ben Adamowski's office. It was the election of 1960, where Ben was running for re-election. And the fears were that the Daley machine would use the river wards, the so-called infamous river wards of Chicago to influence the outcome of the election by stealing votes. I was a young prosecutor, and I was out there on patrol in the river wards with a state's attorney's policeman to enforce the voting laws; to stop any vote fraud that we saw.

We went by this one polling place that was below grade, below the sidewalk. It was a store, so it had a big, glass storefront window, and the voting machine was right in front of the window. And it was the old voting machines that you stepped inside and pulled the curtain. We stopped in front of this window, and there was the voting machine, and the curtain was closed, and there were four legs coming out at the bottom. I thought, I don't know any four-legged voters. So we stopped the car; we went in, grabbed the curtain, pulled it back, and there was the precinct captain inside the voting machine, telling the voter how to vote, making sure he voted that way. We stopped that. And we were there about ten minutes when, finally, one of the election judges called me over and said, "The boss wants to talk to you." I said, "Who's the boss?" And he said, "Alderman Marzullo." I said, "Oh yeah? Where do I find him?" And he gave me the address. So I went over there, and Vito looked up at me, and he was about this high.

DePue: Little guy?

Thompson: Little guy. And he was the boss. He said, "What are you doing in my ward?" I said, "I'm preventing vote fraud." He said, "There is no vote fraud in my ward!" I said, "Alderman, I just saw vote fraud in your ward." "There won't be any more vote fraud in my ward, so you can leave now." I said, "Okay, if you promise me there will be no more vote fraud, I'll leave. I'll continue patrolling, but I'll leave." That was my first acquaintance with Alderman Marzullo, and he was a powerful guy in the Democratic machine of Chicago; he controlled the West Side, all the Italian wards.

So when the pope visited Chicago, I was out there on the airport on the tarmac on the military side, and as the pope came down the stairs and got onto the tarmac, the mayor was there welcoming him. But pretty soon, you had a flying squad of nuns engulfing the pope. You don't argue with nuns; they got elbows, as I once found out when I was on an airline and I had the middle seat, and there was a nun on either side of me. I spent the whole flight like this. All of a sudden, somebody was tugging on my sleeve, and I turned around, and it was Vito. I said, "Hi, Vito, how are you?" "I need to meet the pope." I said, "Well, there he is." "I

can't get through there." The notion of this little guy trying to fight his way through the nuns that were engulfing the pope. This was a major problem, right? So I said, "Okay, come on." I grabbed him by the hand. We got through the nuns, because I was big and he was small. Brought him up to the pope. Now, I'm a Presbyterian, and I don't know how to address the pope. I don't know, what do you call him, right? I was not prepared. So I said, "Okay, Pope? This is Vito. Vito, this is the pope." And Vito met the pope. He never forgot that, and we became friends.

And this was during Jane Byrne's administration, when a member of the legislature from the Democratic side, an assistant majority leader, Ted Lechowicz, became a sort of subterranean ally of mine, because he liked me and I did stuff for him. He could get stuff passed under Madigan's nose, if I really needed it, and still maintain his relationship with Madigan.

There was also a legislator from the West Side of Chicago, a Republican, back in the three-member districts. And instead of being a moderate, progressive guy like Art Telcser or Pete Peters, this was a Republican alderman who was elected by two hundred votes, who was completely under the domination of the Democrats. He was a Republican in name only. He voted for the Speaker; that was the last Republican vote you could get out of him the whole session. He was just a royal pain in the ass. And one day, I needed his vote on something, and he wasn't giving it to me. I came from Vito's ward. So I went back to my office, and I called up Vito. I said, "Vito, your boy, Ron"—whatever his name was—"is giving me a lot of trouble, and I need his vote." "Okay," he said. Ten minutes later, Ron was voting the way he should have been voting. So because of stuff like that, and because of my friendship with Vito as being one of the old-time guys in Chicago politics that I liked, just because they were old-time guys, I named my year-long fellowships after Marzullo. They are now the Marzullo Fellowships.

DePue: Fellowships in what respect?

Thompson: You had the summer interns, which were the Currys; the year-longs, which were the Marzullo; and I had a second year-long program, which were the Dunn Fellowships, named for Mike Dunn's father.

DePue: We started this series of anecdotes you had by asking you about Robert Hartley's book.

Thompson: Oh, yeah. *Big Jim of Illinois*?

DePue: Right. *Big Jim Thompson of Illinois*.

Thompson: It was interesting.

DePue: Do you think he got it right?

Thompson: Mostly.

DePue: Did you read the whole thing?

Thompson: Oh, sure. I'm sure I have several copies.

DePue: There hasn't been a biography of you since.

Thompson: No.

DePue: Something you'd like to see happen?

Thompson: You mean an autobiography?

DePue: Well, apparently you're not interested in writing an autobiography.

Thompson: I am not.

DePue: What would be your feeling if somebody—

Thompson: It's the really good stories you couldn't tell.

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: (laughs) The characters are still alive. I don't need another book. This will do.

DePue: This will be rather exhaustive, at least that's my intention.

Thompson: That's okay, but these are my words, so…

DePue: Did you think that the book helped or hurt you politically?

Thompson: I don't think it made any difference. Most people have never read it.

DePue: And since it was written in 1979, that was still early in your administration.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Moving along in 1979 then, in November, you've got the Iranian hostage crisis. That's when it began. And certainly that's going to have major political implications for the next presidential election. It also had implications as far as the oil embargo and more pressure on inflation.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Do you want to make any comments as far as that's concerned?

Thompson: That was something that impacted every American, the oil embargo, gas prices, gas shortages—I remember those days—lines at the pump going down the street.

DePue: That was probably after the Arab–Israeli war in ‘73.

Thompson: Yeah. But you keep mentioning inflation. Inflation is obviously beyond the control of a governor. Also beyond the control of a president, for most respects, unless you have price controls, which don’t work. And that’s the other tough challenge for a governor, revenue. Inflation is raising the cost of providing governmental services, but it has no impact on revenue. It certainly doesn’t increase revenue. So a governor and the legislature are stuck. It’s hard to raise taxes when you have high inflation, yet you have to try to provide services with declining revenue; these are the cost of services.

I went through some tough economic times in Illinois during the time I was governor; the worst were ‘82 and ‘83. And we had some good times. But we were a microcosm of the nation, and we rose or fell with the nation in terms of revenues and expenditures. We were, as Teddy Roosevelt said, the most American of any state; we reflected America in our mix of agriculture and business and services, and our geographical position of farm and small-town, and suburban and urban. So whatever challenges the country was facing, or what other big-state governors were facing, we had in Illinois. It’s very difficult for even presidents to control the economy—maybe a little bit on the macro side, certainly not on a micro side—and it’s even worse for governors. And yet, political leaders, governors or presidents, live and die by the economy. They get credit for good times, and they get the blame for bad times, when they don’t have any real thing to do with either. That’s just part of the political process.

DePue: Here’s another one for you, Governor, and it fits into the same category as the Iranian hostage crisis. The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan on December 24, 1979, and shortly thereafter, Jimmy Carter suspends grain sales to the Soviet Union.

Thompson: That hurt us. Anytime you embargo or suspend grain sales anywhere in the world, it hurts Illinois. Illinois is a big exporter of grain; Illinois and Iowa are probably the two biggest.

DePue: And it also started to have an impact on land prices for farmers.

Thompson: Yeah, anytime farmers have difficulties selling grain, land prices decline. When in good times, land prices jump up. Not much a governor can do about that, either.

DePue: That doesn’t sound too severe until you realize that in the high days of the 1970s, a lot of farmers were purchasing a lot of land and borrowing the money to do it.

Thompson: Yeah, purchasing at high prices and borrowing the money. Same thing that happened in the housing crisis in 2007 and 2008; it became a bubble.

DePue: Perhaps this one has less of an impact, but Carter also decided to pull the United States out of the 1980 Olympics.

Thompson: I didn't see any impact to that. That's a political decision.

DePue: That's probably a pretty decent place for us to stop for today, if you don't mind, and we'll pick it up again and talk about 1980, a presidential year, and get into 1981 as well the next time we meet.

Thompson: Yeah, trouble coming.

DePue: Yes, exactly. And much of it is economic trouble.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Thank you very much, Governor.

Thompson: My pleasure.

(end of interview #10)

Interview with James Thompson

IST-A-L-2013-054.11

Interview # 11: October 20, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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

DePue: Today is Monday, October 20, 2014. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. And after a bit of a hiatus, I'm back with Gov. Jim Thompson. Good afternoon, Governor.

Thompson: Howdy. Glad you're back.

DePue: And we're back in Chicago as well.

Thompson: On a beautiful day.

DePue: It is a gorgeous day. But it was wonderful to see your—what do you refer to it as? Your cabin in Michigan?

Thompson: Oh, no. It's not a cabin, no. My house.

DePue: That was a lot of fun. I really appreciate having the chance to go there. Last time, we pretty much finished up 1979, but in December of '79—maybe I shouldn't say this—almost like clockwork, there is a Chicago schools problem. A crisis starts on November 13, when Moody's Investors Service slashed the Board of Education's credit rating over doubts the school board would be able to pay its debts. There were no buyers for something like $124 million in notes, which included a payoff of $84 million. And the state, about a week later, advanced the city $41.5 million. I wanted to start with just your reflections on the perpetual nature of the problems that the school district in Chicago had, and what the role of the state government should be when they have them.

Thompson: Though there is some supervision over the Chicago school district by state authorities, notably the State Board of Education on matters dealing largely with curriculum, the plain fact is that at that time, and certainly still today, the city of Chicago runs its own school system. Whether you have an appointed board or an elected board—we've had both in Chicago's history—that has always been true. And the Chicago school system from time to time runs into financial difficulties, either because the mayor and the school board have determined not to increase school taxes, or because they've spent more than their revenue, something state government is guilty of as well. So of course, they look to the state to bail the system out. And while that may be appropriate on a one-off basis, you certainly don't want to get into the habit of running the Chicago school system by making frequent loans or grants without actually running it; to pay for it without having any authority over it.

When '79 rolled around, I thought, This is enough. We've got to have a fundamental understanding about the role of the state of Illinois and the role of the city of Chicago in the Chicago school system. So I brought everybody down to the governor's mansion and locked them up, literally; I told them they were not free to leave until we had solved this. Brought in the bankers from New York, and brought in the Chicago people; brought in the school people; brought in my Bureau of the Budget, my senior staff, my legislative people and said, "Let's try to get this done."[20]

[20] For other recollections of the Chicago school funding summit, see Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 20, 2014, 213-222; Julian D'Esposito, interview by Mike Czaplicki, September 2, 2014, 79-88; Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2009, Volume II: 308-314.

(pause in recording)

DePue: It looks like we're back recording again, Governor. I wanted to read this to you, and this is an article on January 6, 1980. Casey Banas and Meg O'Connor? Do you recognize those names?

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: What they're talking about is the process, and this is reiterating what you just mentioned: "To avoid bickering, he put the participants into seven different rooms in the mansion, bringing them together only for special occasions such as meals." And do you remember, was there any resistance to that process?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Were they cooperative? They liked the idea?

Thompson: Yeah, they were cooperative. My house, my rules; that was my attitude.

DePue: What was your attitude, though, as far as what the state's role would be in solving this city problem?

Thompson: I didn't have any preconceptions about that. My view of the state's primary role here was to get agreement among all the participants to sort of bring the hammer down on ending a process that wasn't working.

DePue: But I did read that you were not willing to pick up the tab for teachers' salaries.

Thompson: Right, because there is no end to that. Once you start down that road, you'll never get off it; of course, the next school district will be in, and the next and the next and the next, and then pretty soon they'll be telling you that the State of Illinois should pay for all the educational costs for all the schools in Illinois. That wouldn't be unusual for somebody to get onto that track, once you did it for one district.

DePue: Why was Chicago treated separately from the rest of the school districts in the state?

Thompson: What do you mean, treated separately?

DePue: There's the Chicago school district, and then there's the rest of the state. And when you deal with the budget, as I understand it, Chicago is always separated.

Thompson: But school districts in Illinois get money from the state according to a school-aid formula. And the formula reacts to the resources of each district; what the resources of the district are from local property taxes, from any federal money they may get, although that would be minimal, I suppose, in the case of school districts other than Chicago. But the Chicago district has always been treated

according to a different formula than other districts. And other districts are treated according to a formula that's different from other downstate districts. I mean, if you look at a suburban school system—take Winnetka or Wilmette up on the North Shore—you're going to have a different formula application to them than you would to East St. Louis, for example.

DePue: One of the things that's in the constitution—and I'm not sure of the exact verbiage, we can check on this—is that the state is supposed to be picking up the majority of the educational expenses.[21]

Thompson: No.

DePue: That's not in the constitution?

Thompson: That's not in the constitution. There is language in the constitution regarding state funding of local schools, but the Supreme Court of Illinois has held a number of times that that is hortatory, not mandatory. That's an *ideal* expressed by the constitution, not a command in the constitution.[22]

DePue: Which explains why Illinois has almost never, if ever, had that relationship with the schools.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: Is this your first real dealing with Jane Byrne, then, as mayor of Chicago?

Thompson: I basically had two protracted dealings with Mayor Byrne; one over the Crosstown Expressway and the money that the federal government was going to provide for the construction of that, and how we would divide that money if we didn't do the Crosstown Expressway. The other was the Chicago school system. The rest of the time it was fleeting or one-offs that weren't as large as those two.

DePue: How would you describe your relationship with her?

Thompson: It was a very cordial one. Very cordial relationship.

DePue: Do you think she was an effective mayor?

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[21] DePue is thinking of Article X, Section 1 of the Illinois Constitution, which reads in part, "The State shall provide for an efficient system of high quality public educational institutions and services…The State has the primary responsibility for financing the system of public education." For a detailed discussion of this provision, see Ann Lousin, interview by Mark DePue, June 18, 2013. Also see, Dawn Clark Netsch, interview by Mark DePue, March 17, 2011; Michael Bakalis, interview by Mark DePue, May 19, 2014; and Jane Galloway Buresh, *A Fundamental Goal: Education for the People of Illinois* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975).

[22] On the Illinois Supreme Court's interpretation of this sentence, see Mark Mathewson, "Litigation of Equal Education: A Question of Interpreting State Constitution," *Illinois Issues* (May 1990). In *Blase v. State* of Illinois, 55 Ill. 2d (1973) at 98, the Supreme Court held the sentence "was intended only to express a goal or objective, and not to state a specific command."

Thompson: She had her moments. Some of the people who were around her weren't the best, to put it charitably. I think her heart was in the right place. Hey, no mayor or governor is all good or all bad.

DePue: Was she still suffering from being in the shadow of Mayor Daley, to a certain extent?

Thompson: No, never. Not after she was elected on her own, absolutely not. She was the boss. And she was no shrinking violet.

DePue: How about the Chicago Teachers Union? Were they helpful in this process?

Thompson: Well, they had to be. I mean, they didn't have any choice. If the schools were going to be saved—as everybody said, they had to be "saved"—then the Chicago Teachers Union had to be part of the process. I think they understood that; they're a smart union. My relationship with organized labor developed over time, so 1979, just two years in, had not seen the full growth of that relationship yet. Still, it was a cordial relationship with organized labor. And I think that helped in the relationship with the CTU during the course of this time.

DePue: When you went into these negotiations, what was your goal? That you wouldn't have to have this kind of an exercise again?

Thompson: Right. I mean, you can't run a school system, or any other kind of school system, if you're constantly running down to the governor's mansion saying, "Save me! Save me!" So I wanted to see if we could come to a plan that enabled the system to stand on its own. And for that to happen, everybody had to contribute.

DePue: Politics has got to be in your mind as well. If you keep having to do that, then there's going to be some erosion in the next election campaign.

Thompson: Look, this is, in some respects, a parochial state; every state is, nothing different about Illinois. There's a perception, I would have to say generally downstate—more pronounced in some areas downstate than others—that Chicago gets everything and downstate gets nothing; they don't get the money, they don't get the attention of the governor in the legislature, on and on. And there's a perception sometimes, not from Chicago citizens, but from interest groups in Chicago, why is downstate getting so much and we're not getting enough?

And it can get localized. I can have people in western Illinois telling me that all their gas tax money is going to Chicago, which is crazy on its face; it's probably the other way around. But they firmly believe it. And you'll get attitudes like that around the state; farmers may have one view, people in small towns may have another view, people in suburban areas may have another view. So you try and homogenize all those views and pay attention to every area of the state. Paying attention is almost as good as sending the money. No, truly. I mean, it's just a part of the human relation. If people think you're paying attention to them and listening to them, and care about what happens to them, other issues become

subsidiary. Not forgotten, they still may gripe and grumble about some things, but they become subsidiary. And they think you're fair. And that's critical to a relationship.

DePue: What areas of the state did you notice that the anti-Chicago bias, if I can call it that, was most pronounced?

Thompson: Anything south of Cook County. (laughs) To generalize.

DePue: Well, you mentioned western Illinois.

Thompson: Yeah, western Illinois. It's in the water there. (DePue laughs) Truly. But people in Rockford feel the same way. It's not just down in the west, it's southern Illinois, God, for sure. They've been abandoned. It's just people take a local view; it's how state policy affects *them* in Rockford, or Cairo or Bloomington or Quincy or Charleston—you know, everything's local.

DePue: Let me throw a name at you here. Illinois senator from DuPage County, so not southern or western Illinois by any means, James Pate Philip—

Thompson: Yeah, sure.

DePue: —who always had an opinion that Chicago was getting more than it needed.

Thompson: Certainly, that was Pate's view. As I say, south of Cook County, (laughs) that was the view. Or west of Cook County in this case, that was the view. Sometimes they were more just being gruff about it to get a rise out of me, and sometimes they were poor-mouthing, but people had those views. Look, this is a huge state! One third of Illinois is below the Mason–Dixon Line. How do you think that affects their view? Yellow Dog Democrats came from there; the phrase came from there. And people believe what they read in their local paper in Cairo or Carbondale, or what they watch on their local television stations. And the news media reflects the view of the citizenry down there, so that's not surprising.

So it's the job of the governor to establish that he is a fair man; even though he comes from Chicago, even though he is of one political party, he is fair to the whole state. That's why, for example, in deciding the capital budget of the state, while you might assume naturally that most capital projects would be in and around Chicago, I used to have a joke that whenever it rained, there were floods in the Metro East area, because I had paved the whole area for southwestern Illinois. I paid attention to those things. I paid attention to which schools were getting the money in the capital budget. I paid attention to what highway contracts, where they were going, and what they were for. I mean, that is crucial. You can't run a state as large and as diverse as Illinois without consciously doing that. I mean, this is not Rhode Island, this is not Connecticut; this is Illinois, and it's just huge. The same thing would be true of Texas, or California, or New York. You'd have those same feelings there.

DePue: Short-term versus long-term solutions, do you recall any of the specifics on those?

Thompson: No. I don't.

DePue: Here is one thing that caught my attention, state aid anticipation certificates were issued for $100 million.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: What is a state aid anticipation certificate?

Thompson: It means that they got the money that was due them under the state aid formula, but they got it early.

DePue: With a requirement to pay it back?

Thompson: It would be deducted from state aid when the time came when it would have come.

DePue: So a very short-term solution.

Thompson: It was short-term, yeah.

DePue: Do you recall any of the long-term solutions that were involved?

Thompson: No.

DePue: You mentioned earlier about the tax structure for the city. Did you see that that needed to be part of the solution?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Your solution was to bring people together down in Springfield, and to sit them down. Why break them up into smaller groups?

Thompson: Because if you put them all together at the beginning, you'd have a river of babble; you wouldn't get a lot accomplished. You had to break it down into smaller groups, with somebody from my office in each group, so that they could work out tentative things that they could bring to the big group.

DePue: Were they all essentially talking over the same issues?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: And how did it work out?

Thompson: It worked out. We solved the crisis, at least for the moment. And if everybody wasn't happy, at least everybody felt they had been listened to, they had

contributed, people understood their point of view, and they got a settlement that was probably fair.

DePue: I figure this is a good opportunity to ask you to reflect on your style of leadership and management at the time. What was the concept you took into the job of being governor?

Thompson: My fundamental concept, and I've said this over and over again for almost forty years, was that while you may run as the representative of a political party, once you are elected to the office of governor of Illinois, your constitutional responsibility—and it's that important, it's a constitutional responsibility—is to administer the law fairly to every citizen, whether they're Republican, Democrat, or of no party. Whether they voted for you or they didn't vote for you, you owed every citizen of Illinois the same equal obligation. That was my fundamental attitude going into the governor's office, and it was my fundamental attitude all fourteen years in the governor's office. And if you start from that place, and people understand that that's what you're doing, then I think it's easier than if you're in a constant campaign mode. Now, by that I mean in a constant polarized mode, where people get the idea that you're just reflecting the views of your party.

I had enough Republicans who thought that I was probably a Democrat anyway, so nobody ever thought that I was a polarized person. And I think people respected that. Look, this is 2014, and all year long, people have wanted me to run for governor. So I say, "That's very nice, but four terms is enough, thank you very much." "No, no, no, we need you. You need to get down there and get this all fixed." Well, that's a great compliment, right? I haven't been governor for twenty-three years, and yet, people will say to me on the street, "Oh, you should run." So that's got to reflect some kind of attitude about you, right? Although my wife says, "No, it reflects that they've forgotten you tried to tax them a couple of times!" (both laugh) I said, "That's not fair. Nobody ever forgets that." I've been amazed, frankly. Twenty-three years later, people who weren't even born when I left office—so they didn't enjoy the Thompson years, because they weren't part of them—will say those kinds of things to me now in 2014. That's an enormous compliment. But it's not so much of a compliment to me, as a compliment to the way I tried to do things. And that's the foundation for everything.

And you can extend that if you approach the legislature that same way; if you'll listen to a Democrat legislator as equally as a Republican; if you'll go to their offices without party divide; if you'll go to every area of the state, and I did. God, I was all over the state of Illinois all the time; A, because it was my job, and B, because it was enjoyable. I really did like going around the state of Illinois. That's the attitude you've got to have. And you've got to have an attitude of not being afraid to make the tough decisions, because there are tough problems in a state like Illinois. There are challenging problems; even in good times there are challenging problems. When the budget is good, people expect twice as much. When the budget is bad, if they know you're saying no to everybody, okay, it

hurts, but not as bad. So there's always a challenge, whether it's the Illinois economy or the national economy, or Illinois' place in the world, and jobs and the environment, and senior citizens and abused children—I mean, go down the list of all the code departments and you'll see what a tough job state government is, and so what a tough job being governor is. And you've got to be able to respond to that.

DePue: Did you enjoy the challenges? Did you get up and excited about it?

Thompson: I did. There wasn't a day in fourteen years when I wasn't excited about being governor of Illinois and wanting to do something for the people of this state. Every once in a while I would think about it; how many people have been elected governor of this state since we began? Thirty-some, forty-some? Think about that. Out of all the millions of people who have lived and died in Illinois since 1818, only thirty-seven of us, at that time, had been selected as governor.[23]

DePue: Well, here's a statistic that you hear a lot lately, "Thompson didn't go to jail, because we've had four of them that have gone to jail."

Thompson: Every once in a while people will say that to me, and I don't like that. I really don't. I'll say, "Thank you very much," but I just don't like hearing that, because I don't want to be judged on the basis that I didn't go to jail. I think I'm more complete than that. And I know why they say it; they don't say it to diminish me, they're saying it because they're really upset with what's happened in the state of Illinois, as far as politics are concerned. That's why they're saying it; it's not any reflection of my worth. I understand that.

DePue: You mentioned that you enjoyed the challenges, and there were certainly plenty of challenges.

Thompson: Yes there were.

DePue: You went through a litany of them. Were there some that you just saw as intractable? That you kind of had to sigh and wade into it in a different perspective?

Thompson: No. I mean, there's never going to be enough money contributed by the citizens of this state in tax revenues to satisfy all the people who want to spend money. It just won't happen. You could tax Illinois residents at 100 percent, and you'd still have people wanting more. So that's a persistent challenge, to get people to understand that unlike the federal government, which just writes a check to itself every year (laughs) without regard to where the money is coming from, we just cannot do that as a state. Trying to deal with cruelties of human nature—people abusing children, people killing other people, people robbing other people—is a perpetual challenge. Highways wearing out is a perpetual challenge because you live in a freeze-thaw-freeze-thaw jurisdiction, you've got more cars on the road than when

[23] Thompson was the thirty-seventh governor of the state.

you started, you've got those cars driving more miles, and there never will be a highway invented that doesn't wear out. Finding enough jobs for the people of this state—we've got eleven million people in this state—is a perpetual challenge. So there are plenty of those. But they didn't get me down.

DePue: How would you describe your management style with the team of people that you were working with?

Thompson: Pretty relaxed. I was not a micro-manager, by any means. I tried to hire people who were smart and accomplished and willing to work hard; that's what I was looking for. They didn't have to agree with me on everything, they didn't even have to be in my political party. That's what I was looking for. And I trusted them to go do the job I gave them. Now, yeah, you retain jurisdiction, you retain supervision. But it's not a day-to-day, do-this-do-that, how-are-you-doing-today kind of thing. You've got the governor, then you've got his immediate staff that's the inner circle, and then the circle widens with the cabinet, and then with the bureaucracy. I didn't try to tell the Department of Revenue how to run its business; I didn't try to tell the Department of Children and Family Services how to run its business. Keep an eye on them, yeah. Appoint people to run those departments that I thought were capable, yeah. Listen to their problems when they had them, and try to help them when they asked for it. But it was a management style that tried to respect the talents of the people that you had asked to run things.[24]

DePue: What happens when you had somebody who wasn't cutting the mustard, who wasn't living up to your expectations?

Thompson: That didn't happen very often, I have to say. And one of the reasons it didn't, I think, is because they were so carefully selected to begin with. If you'll just hire anybody, or just let the county chairman recommend everybody, then you're going to run into problems. But since I was pretty close on the issue of hiring people… I did a lot of interviewing; I think I've told you before, it took me thirty interviews to get a director of agriculture. And the proof in the pudding is, he not only was a great director, he went on to become Reagan's director. So if you do that, I think you'll be rarely disappointed. I was disappointed a couple of times, so people left.

DePue: Some chief executives have a hard time, though, of doing the hard part of the firing.

[24] Thompson's management style and decision making is discussed in D'Esposito, September 2, 2014, 66-69; Jeffrey Miller, interview by Mike Czaplicki, June 24, 2015; Gregory Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 6, 2013; Tyrone Fahner, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 16, 2015; Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 11, 2014, 137-138, 147-148, and 151-153; Bernard Turnock, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 16, 2014, 52.

Thompson: Well, yeah. That's certainly me, I have a hard time doing that. Fortunately, I didn't have to do it very often.

DePue: You remember a couple of occasions when you did?

Thompson: Yeah, I do. My patience finally wore out with a cabinet officer who became an alcoholic. He kept promising, kept promising, kept promising, kept promising to do better and to not drink anymore. He just broke his promise every time. And the last time, they found him on the lawn of his house in Springfield. His wife came in to see me and said, "Please do not try to save him anymore. He has to hit bottom before he'll recover." I consulted a couple of experts, who told me the same thing. So finally, I said, "You're gone. I can't rely on you anymore. You're gone." And he eventually recovered.

DePue: I assume you're deliberately leaving out the position and the name there.

Thompson: Oh, yeah. I mean, there's no point in that.

DePue: Were others telling you that you had waited too long on that one?

Thompson: No. It was my job to do, and I did it when—I probably did wait too long. But when his wife said, "No more," I thought, okay.

DePue: Did you have regular staff meetings or regular cabinet meetings?

Thompson: Staff meetings yes, cabinet meetings, no. In my fourteen years, I had one cabinet meeting. I went down there with the usual notion of, oh, I've got all these great people I've hired for the cabinet; once a week we'll have a cabinet meeting and discuss things. Well, we had a cabinet meeting. I came out of it, and I said to my staff, "Well, that was a complete waste of time! No more." So we never had another one.

DePue: Did you prefer to work with the cabinet members one on one?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Did you usually, when you had those kinds of meetings, have somebody on your staff in the room as well?

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: Who would that person or those people be?

Thompson: They were called the program staff, Paula Wolff's shop. She would have people on her program staff assigned to watch over various cabinet agencies; some of them even eventually became cabinet directors. If there was a discussion to be had with a cabinet director on a matter of policy, for example, you would have a person from program staff, whose jurisdiction that fell in, part of the meeting.

And it might also include Paula herself, or it might include a member of Dr. Mandeville's staff, the budget, if a budget question was involved. Or it might involve Fletcher, or it might involve Gilbert, depending on what the issue was you were going to discuss.

DePue: Here's one to put you on the spot. Did you ever have an occasion where you lost your temper?

Thompson: Boy, rarely. I mean, most people who have worked for me think that I don't lose my temper often enough. (laughs) Look, it's not my nature to lose my temper. It's not my nature. I can only recall doing it once, when a state senator asked me to give one of his constituents a job. And it was a run-of-the-mill job, it wasn't brain surgery. I said, "Okay," because this senator had been pretty good in supporting me. So I had one of my—probably the patronage director, whoever it was at the time—I said, "Get that done." They came back to me and said, "The director won't do it." I said, "What do you mean he won't do it? Why not?" "Well, he doesn't want to hire this person." I said, "What's the reason?" "He didn't give a reason."

I'm not going to go back and tell the senator, "Uh, we can't hire your guy because my director won't do it, and he won't give a reason." So I said, "Go back to the director and tell him I want it done." Whoever the patronage director was came back and said, "He still won't do it." I said, "Okay." I picked up the phone, and I called the director in his office. And he wasn't in his office, he was out playing golf. We tracked him down to the golf course. And I said, "Mr. Director, do you know a man by the name of Junior Munges(??)?" "Yeah." I said, "Well, he's supposed to go to work for you." "Well, I don't want him." I said, "Mr. Director, listen to me very *carefully*. If you don't hire Junior Munges(??), when you come into your office tomorrow, he will have replaced your secretary and he'll be sitting right outside your door," and I hung up the phone. He hired him. That's the only time I lost my temper. I didn't lose my temper at *him*, I just—and of course, my staff is watching this display (laughs) because they had never seen it before.

DePue: Did you have any idea why he didn't want to hire this person?

Thompson: He just didn't want to do patronage hiring.

DePue: Oh. Which term would apply better to how you envisioned your role as the governor, a leader or a manager?

Thompson: A leader, obviously. As I said, I didn't micro-manage state government. I managed my staff, but even there, I didn't have to manage them very much, because they knew what I wanted and they wanted to get it done. And I had picked them well.

DePue: Who assisted you early on, or even when you had replacements, with finding the right people?

Thompson: Paula, Fletcher, sometimes Gilbert. Sometimes I'd go outside and ask people's opinions. It depended on the job.

DePue: Here's the indication of whether the public thinks you're doing a good job, a *Chicago Sun-Times* poll on your leadership. This is February 7, 1980, and there had been a couple rough spots; certainly the whole Cutback Amendment, the increase of legislative and executive pay, didn't go over well with the public.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: We've talked about that. So there were some things that had occurred. But 9 percent of the public rated you excellent in leadership skills, 39 percent good, 33 percent fair, 11 percent poor, 6 percent don't know.

Thompson: Not bad.

DePue: Did you pay attention to those kind of polls much?

Thompson: Oh, I read them, but what are you going to do with them? A poll, when you're running, might tell you where you need to pay more political attention. If you're running behind what you thought you ought to be running in DuPage or Rockford or southern Illinois, then you pay extra attention to boost it up. But polls taken between elections on just generic leadership issues and things of that sort—well, sure, it's human nature to pay attention to it, but I've just got to do my job. And as I say, that's not a bad poll.

DePue: I wanted to throw some figures out for the national economy, and I'm going to do this quite a bit, obviously, as we go through here. You had already mentioned there were some tough years; 1980 wasn't the toughest, but it wasn't good that year.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Thirteen and a half percent inflation rate—that's very high.

Thompson: Yep.

DePue: Unemployment at 7.1 percent, that's very high. And a thirty-year loan rate at 13.4 percent, so obviously that's depressing the housing market. The inflation rate and unemployment rate are going to translate into how much money is coming into the state coffers, and how much has to go out in the inflation side of the ledger.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: What I wanted to do then is to discuss the budgeting process for 1981. The 1980 budget was $11.8 billion. And the '81 budget that you proposed was $14.5 billion, a big increase. Was that a function of the inflation rate?

Thompson: Oh, partially. It might also have reflected federal funds, because they would have become part of my budget. The budget is what you're appropriating, and obviously if you've got federal funds, you're appropriating those too. That figure is not a net Illinois budget; it would be a combined budget figure. So a $3 billion difference in one year? That seems like a lot to me.[25]

DePue: And again, one of the things I want to discuss and get a better understanding myself is the whole budgeting process. That's the budget you propose in your annual budget address to the legislature, but that's not necessarily what's going to drive the budget discussions after that, is it?

Thompson: Right. That's correct.

DePue: What does drive that budget discussion? Who does that?

Thompson: The appropriations committees of the House and Senate, overseen by their leaders, the president of the Senate and Speaker of the House.

DePue: In 1980, did you even consider tax increases?

Thompson: I don't remember what the year was.

DePue: I know that it was later on before we started to see some tax increases.

Thompson: Yeah. And as I say, they were temporary.

DePue: Let me ask you this philosophical question. What kind of taxes, if you had to raise taxes, would you be more inclined to support? And I'll throw out a few options here for you: income taxes, sales taxes, gas taxes, sin taxes, the whole variety of fees that are imposed?

Thompson: Income tax first, simply because it reflects the ability of people to pay. The less you make, the less you pay in taxes. Not necessarily true with sales taxes; you need to be careful on sales taxes. But once we got the food and medicine out of the sales tax in Illinois, you could be a little more sympathetic to it, I think it's fair to say.

DePue: To an increase in sales tax?

Thompson: Yeah. And then the only thing you needed to watch was whether you were getting out of line with sales taxes in comparable states. That would be a reference point.

Gas taxes—I was never shy about gas taxes, because they are raised so infrequently, you've got a lot of catch-up to do. While your mileage driven is

[25] The $2.67 billion increase in the governor's budget recommendation is equivalent to a $3.43 billion increase in constant 2012 dollars, with the largest single increase an additional $1.18 billion in transportation spending. But counting only general funds appropriations, Thompson's recommendation increased by $699 million, which in constant dollars was actually a decrease of $277 million.

greater, or the number of cars are greater, while you're contending with the freeze-thaw, when a gas tax sits at the same level for ten or twelve years, you're just courting disaster on your road program. And then everybody's complaining about the roads, if they're not complaining about the gas tax. So I was never shy about proposing gas taxes, never. The legislature didn't always agree with me, but you had to say it, you had to do it.

Sin taxes don't get a lot of money. And sometimes you say to yourself, it's not worth the political cost to do something for not a lot of money, you know? I guess that would be my general attitude.

DePue: A lot of money, you already alluded to it, was coming from the federal government.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: What kind of strings were typically attached when you got it?

Thompson: Money for Medicaid, for example, came with the strings that attached to the federal supervision of the Medicaid program. I mean, the feds didn't just write you a check. The same thing is true of road money from the federal government; you had to build the roads according to how they wanted them built. You might be able to pick where they were going to be built, but you couldn't deviate from the federal government's supervision of how they were going to be built under federal highway safety standards. Then there were grants in some of the aid programs—senior citizens, or Children and Family Services, or Public Health. There would probably be very few code departments that didn't get some federal money. And they were never without strings. The only one I recall without strings was revenue-sharing, and boy, that ended quickly (laughs) because the federal government had no revenue to share. And Nixon put an end to that.

DePue: You mentioned Medicaid. Was this a time when you saw Medicaid costs increasing past what inflation was?

Thompson: Sure, because it's not so much the cost of the service—you might control the cost of the service, which is your inflation issue—it's the numbers enjoying the service. When the economy is bad, you said a 7 percent unemployment rate, your Medicaid rate is going to go up because your public aid rate is going to go up.

DePue: At the same time, the revenues that are coming in, they're going down.

Thompson: That is correct. Your tax revenues are going down, and your expense is going up.

DePue: How do you reconcile that when you're dealing with the budget?

Thompson: You cut the budget. You cut those areas you can cut, which means you go to those areas where all the money is, which means you start with education; it's where all the money is.

DePue: This is from the *Chicago Sun-Times*. It had a breakdown of where the money was coming from and where the 1981 budget money was going to: 28 percent to education, 22 percent to transportation, 18 percent to public aid, 9 percent to health and human services.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And once you get past those four, and actually the first three, it goes down real quick.

Thompson: Yeah. Except in very bad years where you just say, "Hey, we're cutting the budget across the board." You do that so that people understand that everybody's got to share in the pain of the budget cut, not because you expect to get a lot of money out of the state geological survey, or the state museum, or those places. They got to take their share, but you're not going to get a lot of money out of them; you're going to get the money from education, public aid, Medicaid, and what was the third one?

DePue: Health and human services, 9 percent.

Thompson: Yeah, but that's a little tougher. But nevertheless, the big code departments are going to get more money taken away from them than the little code departments, simply because they have more money to take away than the little departments do.

DePue: Which kind of goes back full circle to the whole discussion we started with, with the Chicago school system and the problems from the shortfalls that they had.

Thompson: Right. But they can, admittedly not easy, raise taxes. They've got another source. I don't have another source.

DePue: Yeah, what's not on the table here and that we haven't talked about in terms of a tax source is property tax.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Which is something under local control. How much control did you feel like you had? Oftentimes you hear politicians talk about trying to control property tax, but—

Thompson: Yeah, well, they can't. (laughs) I didn't have an ounce worth of control over property taxes. And didn't want any. No.

DePue: You signed a 5 percent welfare payment increase in July. But with well over double that for inflation, those on welfare are actually losing ground.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: Was there any political cost for making those kinds of calls?

Thompson: Yeah, sure. The people who were part of the welfare advocacy constituency would decry those as real cuts. But I would say, "Hey, I've cushioned you at least to the extent of a 5 percent increase. I could have said no increase, but I didn't. I've cushioned you against the economic woes and inflation. But I can't give you everything you want and still treat fairly other parts of the budget. I can't."

DePue: Another area of increase, and not a huge number, but university employees got an 8 percent increase in that '81 budget.

Thompson: That's probably catch-up, I would guess. A catch-up is not always on the tax side, a catch-up can come on the expenditure side too, if people had been frozen in place for a long time.

DePue: Was there any thought at that time about raising legislative, judicial, or executive pay?

Thompson: No, I learned my lesson. As I think I told you, you can't win that issue, so I just shut up and let the legislature deal with it.

DePue: Just a couple of figures here, and let you reflect on it if you want: actual appropriations for fiscal year 1981 were $14.685 billion, for an increase from your original budget of $219 million.

Thompson: Well, of course.

DePue: About a 1.5 percent increase over what you had proposed.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: If you can just explain from your perspective that legislative process, where you submit a budget, then the legislature works and it comes back to you.[26]

Thompson: I submit a budget, the legislature takes that as usually the base. (laughs) They go up from there. But it's fair to say they work off my budget, simply because it's so big and unwieldy.

DePue: So they don't start from ground zero themselves?

Thompson: They don't, no, no, no, no. You never start from a zero budget base. I mean, politicians like to talk about that.

DePue: Zero-based budgeting?

Thompson: Zero-based budgeting, but it's a—

[26] See Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 11, 2014, especially 151-158 and 163-184. For an agency head's recollection of seeking legislative approval for his budget, see Tyrone Fahner, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 16, 2015.

DePue: In other words, each line item is going to be looked at, and if there's cuts called for, you can cut, and if there's increases that are needed—

Thompson: That never happens. That's political rhetoric.[27]

DePue: Well, your predecessor, Dan Walker, said that's how he wanted to do it.

Thompson: Yeah, right, but he didn't. Nobody's ever done zero-based budgeting. It sounds good, but it's not; it can't work. So then the appropriations committees in both the House and Senate will take up departments' budgets one at a time; they'll take up the Department of Public Aid's budget, they'll take up the Department of Children and Family Services budget, they'll take up the senior citizen's budget. And the director will go to those budget hearings in the legislature and testify in support of my budget. They'll get asked questions, and sometimes the questions will be, "I think your department deserves much more than the governor is giving you," rah, rah, rah, rah, rah. Or, "I think your budget's high. I think we'll take you down a peg." So they can do both. Then they'll have all of their hearings, and they'll put together their recommendations for the budget, and that will go to the leaders, who get the final aye. And then the legislature will make their appropriations.

Then it comes back to me. And I get almost the last word. I can veto line items, but if I veto line items, it only takes a majority vote to override me. I can do reduction vetoes in line items, but if I do that, it only takes a majority vote to override me. That's the same vote that voted for the appropriation to begin with, right? Good luck with that. So I didn't do a lot of reduction or line item vetoes. If I vetoed whole sections, or parts of the budget, it would take three-fifths to override me. I get my last chance, but they get the ultimate last chance because my budget vetoes can go back to them. A lot of times they'll accept it, because in your veto messages, you are using a rationale for why you did what you did on their appropriations. They can either accept that or reject it.

But I got a final weapon. I don't have to spend it. So it's a game of check, checkmate, counter, counterpoint. And it generally works out pretty well, especially the longer you're governor, and the longer you've worked with the legislature, worked with the legislative leaders, and worked with the approps committees. They understand their role, and they understand my role. You know, budgets don't really seriously get out of whack. At least they didn't in my time.

DePue: If you mind me putting on a constitutional lawyer hat, which will not fit well at all, mind you—

Thompson: Yeah, sure.

[27] For a similar take, see Jeffrey Miller, interview by Mike Czaplicki, May 28, 2015. Also see Jess McDonald, interview by Mark DePue, September 3, 2010, 52; Dawn Clark Netsch, interview by Mark DePue, March 20, 2010, Volume I: 60; and Dan Walker, interview by Mark DePue, August 22, 2007, 78.

DePue: If the legislature has determined that they want to spend money on a particular project or program, how does the chief executive have the authority to decide not to spend it?

Thompson: Because the constitution gives me the authority to—what's the phrase—not administer the laws, but enforce the law.

DePue: Faithfully execute the law?

Thompson: Yeah. But how can they force me to spend? I mean, what are they going to do? They can't spend it. They're not the governor, the governor has to spend it. If I tell my director of whatever, "Don't spend that money," even though it's been appropriated, what are they going to do? They'd have to impeach me, wouldn't they?

DePue: That would be the recourse.

Thompson: That would be the recourse. But it never got that far.

DePue: Do you remember any programs that you directed to not spend the money that had been funded?

Thompson: No. And a lot of times, funds lapse simply because you didn't get to it in time. So they'll lapse and then be re-appropriated in the next year. It all works out.

DePue: And that was the attitude the public always took towards budgeting as well?

Thompson: Yeah, sure. (DePue laughs) A lot of times, legislators would call for more spending just for show, to satisfy the folks back home. And if you vetoed it, they weren't going to go do it again. They'd tell their constituents, "Well, by God, we'll be back next year."

DePue: Or, "It was that governor who did it."

Thompson: It was the governor who did it, yeah. (laughs) Both of which were true; it was the governor who did it, and they would come back the next year.

DePue: Now I'd like to turn to the national level, after saying that I was going to do that a couple times already. This is a presidential election year. Jimmy Carter was president of the United States. From the contemporary affairs today, many people, especially Republicans, especially conservatives, would look back and be happy to proclaim that Jimmy Carter was the worse president we've had in the modern era.

Thompson: (laughs) Yeah, right.

DePue: How would you assess the man as president?

Thompson: He was an honest man of integrity, and he had the good of the nation at heart. He was a micro-manager; I mean, he did the schedules for the White House tennis court, for God's sake. He did! I don't think he was a very effective president. He made us turn down the thermostats to sixty-eight and wear sweaters, and to flush toilets that were low-flush toilets. So there was a lot of symbolism in the Carter administration. Like we were going to have 68-degree police? I don't think so. So we all, in the public offices, turned down the thermostats to 68, and just waited for the reporters to run in and check the thermostats and write a story about the governor's office is 69 degrees! But I didn't think he was that effective a president. I mean, I liked him, but…

DePue: You had a chance to meet him a few times, I assume?

Thompson: Oh, yeah. When you're governor, you meet every president that is president while you're governor, sure.

DePue: Let's talk about the slate of candidates on the Republican side of the ticket for 1980, and the two that come to mind immediately are George Bush and Ronald Reagan. And Reagan had won a pretty close campaign in 1976 against Gerald Ford as well.

Thompson: In '80, I really campaigned for Reagan, even though I was not his campaign manager. Senator Totten was his campaign manager.[28]

DePue: Now, early on, you wanted George Bush, did you not?

Thompson: I think I stayed neutral in '80.

DePue: My understanding is you were definitely a Gerald Ford guy.

Thompson: Yeah. I campaigned vigorously for Ford, and he carried Illinois.

DePue: And as a moderate Republican, I would certainly think that you were much more aligned philosophically, politically, with Gerald Ford than Ronald Reagan.

Thompson: But I didn't see a lot of political benefit in my getting into that contest. I did later, when it was, for example, Bush versus Dole in '88.

DePue: Right.

Thompson: But I don't think I got into the '80 very much. Which year did the guy from Texas run?

DePue: Ross Perot?

[28] Don Totten, a Republican from Hoffman Estates who also served as Schaumburg Township Republican committeeman and the first chairman of the American Legislative Exchange Council. He had been Reagan's Midwest coordinator during the 1976 campaign.

Thompson: No, Connally.

DePue: John Connally?

Thompson: Yeah, was that ‘80?

DePue: It could have been.

Thompson: I think so.

DePue: John Anderson was in the mix as well, but as an independent.

Thompson: Yeah. In 1980, I told my people, “You can be for whoever you want.” There were some of my people who were for Connally, and forever after, various people would say I was a Connally guy. Well, I was not a Connally guy. Some of my people were. Some of my people were Bush guys, some of my people were Reagan guys. I said, “I’m staying out of the primary.” Now, when Reagan was nominated, I campaigned vigorously for him, even though I didn’t have the title campaign chairman. But Senator Totten had no campaign machine, I did. So that was all right. In ‘84, I was Reagan’s chairman. I had proved myself to the Reagan people by then. In ‘80 I was not part of the primary. I invited all the presidential candidates to the governor’s mansion to have dinner to meet my people and various people from around the state.[29]

DePue: That was in the midst of the primary?

Thompson: Yeah. The only one who didn’t come was Reagan, because Totten had ginned him up, “It’s not real, he’s not for you. Don’t go.”

DePue: You had made your reputation as a moderate Republican.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And Ronald Reagan, especially in the midst of the campaign, was coming across as a very different kind of Republican, as a true conservative Republican.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: In your heart of hearts at the time, what were your feelings about Reagan’s positions? Let’s start with—

Thompson: It didn’t make any difference. I liked Reagan better than his Democratic opponent. That’s all I had to say.

[29] On these dinners and the 1980 campaign, see Jim Edgar, June 10, 2009, Volume II: 318-322; D’Esposito, September 2, 2014, 71; Baise, August 6, 2013; Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, March 9, 2015; Kim Blackwell Fox, interview by Mike Czaplicki, July 14, 2014.

DePue: Did the whole notion of supply-side economics make sense to you?

Thompson: I didn't know. I don't think people still know whether it did or it didn't.

DePue: So again, you weren't willing to wade in on Bush's comments about voodoo economics?

Thompson: No. No, no, no, no. I try to tend to my own knitting.

DePue: Did you have doubts? If you're talking about the middle of 1980, a lot of the prognosticators weren't all that optimistic about Reagan being able to win the election.

Thompson: Well, I thought he could. And one of the reasons I thought he could was because I watched conservative Democrats say they were for Reagan. When I'd go door to door and I hit Democratic households, they'd stick their head out of the door, stand on the porch, and they'd look up and down their block, "I'm for Reagan." Yeah, so I picked that up pretty early. And I thought, If I'm getting that in Illinois, then—and at that point in '80, Illinois was still what I'll call a neutral presidential state. Either party could win. And in fact, Illinois had a history of being right in the election for sixty years, before we voted for Ford and the country didn't. So I thought we could carry Illinois, and I thought if he could carry Illinois, he could carry the country. And he did.

DePue: July 14-17 of 1980 in Detroit, Michigan, was the Republican National Convention. And I understand you were there.

Thompson: I was there.

DePue: We've talked about your own personal presidential aspirations many times. I think there was some talk about you being a potential vice presidential candidate.

Thompson: Yeah, well…

DePue: What were your thoughts about that?

Thompson: (laughs) I knew that wasn't going anywhere.

DePue: Why?

Thompson: Well, because.

DePue: It balances the ticket, a moderate Republican from a northern industrial state?

Thompson: Listen, conservative Republicans are not interested in balancing the ticket. (laughs) That would be apostasy. At the convention, Reagan wanted to see if he could talk Jerry Ford into running as his vice presidential candidate. And he asked a group of three of us, and I forget now who the other two were, to see if we could

talk Ford into doing that. So the three of us literally disappeared from the convention for a day and a half.

DePue: Because Ford wasn't at the convention?

Thompson: No, he was there. But we were to do this in strict secrecy, so we were sealed away in the convention space, or I guess maybe back at the hotel, I forget which, dragging in Ford guys to try and persuade them of this idea. We made all sorts of promises, like, "Oh, he won't have to go to funerals, we'll go." (laughs) The three of us. We'll do all the unpleasant things a vice president has to do, he won't have to. And we were negotiating with Kissinger as Ford's representative. The Ford people weren't buying this very much, but right in the middle of this, Ford himself goes on national television, interviewed at the convention, and says, "Yes, I've been solicited to be the vice presidential candidate, and I'm thinking about it. It would be sort of a co-presidency." Well, Reagan's sitting in his suite with his guys, and he hears the word *co-president*? That was the end of that! (DePue laughs) We were sent back to the convention. (laughs) Hadn't missed much. He went with Bush, who was smart enough not to talk about a co-presidency.

DePue: Yeah, exactly.

Thompson: It was fun negotiating on Reagan's behalf to try and get Jerry Ford to be vice president. That was fun.

DePue: Even a humble man like Gerald Ford didn't want to necessarily take that big a step down, huh?

Thompson: No, of course not. Why would he? He was the one being asked.

DePue: Now you've talked about this a little bit already, but how hard did you campaign for Reagan, then, in the fall?

Thompson: Hard. Hard. Absolutely. I mean, what was the choice that year? Reagan versus Carter, right? So, hello.

DePue: How well did you know Reagan personally at that time?

Thompson: Not very well. But I took a shine to him, you know? He's a very likable guy. I've always described him sort of as the nation's grandfather.

DePue: Well, the Democrats at the time were trying to describe him as a political lightweight; that he was nothing more than a second-rate actor.

Thompson: Really? Well, people who called him that didn't get elected president twice, now did they? No, he was a smart cookie.

DePue: Now, a new president like that coming in, he's going to have the same problems and the same process of selecting the people to serve in his administration, in his cabinet. Were you part of that list in any one of the cabinet positions?

Thompson: No. And if I was, it was all newspaper talk. It was never serious. I didn't really want to go to Washington.

DePue: Why not?

Thompson: Because I enjoyed being governor of Illinois. It was a better job.

DePue: Anything else would have been a step down?

Thompson: Yeah, you betcha.

DePue: And did the Reagan people even approach you on any positions?

Thompson: No. I spent my time promoting Jack Block, to send him to Washington.

DePue: Already in the midst of the campaign?

Thompson: No, after it was over.

DePue: I think the U.S. Senate race that year in Illinois was Alan Dixon, who just recently passed away, versus Dave O'Neal.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Any comments on that one?

Thompson: No.

DePue: But Dixon winning gives you an opportunity that you might not have anticipated a couple of years before.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Before we get to that, any thoughts about John Anderson, another Illinoisan, who was running as an independent that year?

Thompson: I thought that was sort of a Don Quixote candidacy. I didn't take that very seriously.

DePue: An alternative to a conservative on the Republican side, running as an independent?

Thompson: It wasn't going to happen. How many independent presidents have we elected in our history?

DePue: I think the number is zero.

Thompson: That's correct.

DePue: It has a lot to do with the U.S. Constitution.

Thompson: It does, indeed.

DePue: July, maybe this is stepping back a little bit, Attorney General William Scott is convicted of income tax evasion due to mishandling of campaign funds. Any thoughts about that?

Thompson: On a personal level, I was really upset because I went to work for Bill Scott when he was elected attorney general the first time. And he treated me well. I became what I thought was an influential person in his administration. We had a close, personal connection. He asked my advice on a lot of things that were not part of my assignment. I worked hard for him, and he gave me a chance to move to the state level. But he had done this foolish thing and got convicted. So it fell to me to appoint his successor as attorney general. I talked to a number of potential candidates, lawyers I knew and trusted. And I appointed Fahner, who worked hard at it.

DePue: And he was part of the U.S. attorney's office?

Thompson: He was.

DePue: Why him?

Thompson: Because he had been a very able prosecutor, he wanted to do it, and I thought highly of Ty. He shouldn't have had his name on the ballot as Tyrone, because a lot of people thought he was black, downstate.

DePue: Did you figure he had a good shot of getting elected?

Thompson: Yeah. And you've got to remember, the Tylenol killer was loose at that time.[30] Ty led the investigation into the Tylenol killer in the state of Illinois. He was running against Neil Hartigan, who was just apoplectic that he was going to catch the Tylenol killer right before the election! Oh, to listen to Neil, "This is all deliberate, you're going to do it right before the election!" I said, "Neil, for God's sake, we haven't caught him yet."

DePue: The ultimate October surprise, huh?

[30] For an account of events during this scare, see Tyrone Fahner, interview by Mike Czaplicki, May 5, 2015, and Turnock, April 16, 2014, 39-45.

Thompson: Yeah, you got that right! He had the whole country afraid to pick up a Tylenol bottle, or a lot of other bottles in the drug store, right? But he didn't get him before the election.

DePue: If he got him, Ty Fahner would have been our attorney general?

Thompson: He would have been our attorney general, you betcha. But he did okay. Became chairman of Mayer Brown. Became a big car dealer. So he did okay.

DePue: We have talked about this next subject a few times, but I wanted to take a couple more minutes to let you talk about attending the state fair, because all indications were you relished going to the state fair.

Thompson: I loved the state fair! I championed the state fair. I gave the state fair a budget to be a great state fair. I did not stint on the state fair. And I worked that fair; I was there every day. I walked in the parade to open the state fair, I cut the ribbon on opening the state fair. I was in the fairgrounds every day for a long period of time. I had a tent on the fairgrounds, the governor's tent. I would go in there, sit at a table, and anybody who wanted to could come in and talk to me. And they did, big line. I'd stay in there four or five hours at a time. Then I'd be back at the fair every night for the grandstand entertainment, and I'd bring my favorites to the state fair. Willie Nelson was there every year I was governor. It was wonderful. My daughter grew up in the state fair.[31] And I liked it so much, I bought a second state fair, Du Quoin. That's a story by itself.

DePue: What was it about the state fair? Was it just good politics, or good fun?

Thompson: It was fun, especially for a city kid; it was fun going to the state fair. And it was good politics, certainly. Where else are you going to get a chance to interact with a representative sample of people from all over the state of Illinois, outside of the Chicago metro area? Because the people who came to the state fair came from all over downstate Illinois. I just loved it. And I would hit every booth, I'd go to the ethnic village and have eight things to eat.

DePue: All of them bad, I would guess!

Thompson: No, they were good! They were good.

DePue: You mean they were delicious?

Thompson: Yeah, they were delicious. And elephant's ears, and everything you could possibly eat on the commercial vendor's side—I went down the row. I didn't go on all the rides, because I was too chicken to go on some of the rides. But you know, I went down the giant slide every year; it was a big deal.

[31] Samantha Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014.

DePue: There are lots of pictures of you going down the giant slide.

Thompson: Yeah, I even dragged the Japanese governor down the giant slide! He wasn't so thrilled.

DePue: You and Jayne; you, Jayne, and the dogs.

Thompson: And the dogs.

DePue: And Samantha.

Thompson: Yeah, absolutely. So I was a big state fair governor, it's fair to say. And I just enjoyed it.

DePue: Did you ever purchase something that you hadn't necessarily intended—

Thompson: Oh, certainly!

DePue: —like a hog?

Thompson: A hog, yeah. Oh, I intended to purchase it. The hog people didn't intend for me to purchase it.

DePue: Let's hear that story. I think there's a couple of stories in here, Governor.

Thompson: The tradition is, the leaders of the hog industry in the state of Illinois would get together before the state fair, and decide how much they wanted the governor to bid for the champion hog. I mean, there were other bidders, obviously. But that was my assignment. And so they told me. I started bidding, and when I got to their limit, I kept going. And then members of my staff, I think it was Skilbeck, would come up and—

DePue: Jab you?

Thompson: "Listen, they only agreed to pay nine thousand, you're already above nine thousand!" It got to, I guess, thirteen thousand, and I bid thirteen thousand and one cent, or something like that. It was sold to me, and these guys were sweating; they had to go raise another four grand to pay for this.

DePue: So you're not bidding with your own money?

Thompson: Oh, no, no, no, no. (DePue laughs) I was bidding with the Hog Farmer's Association money. So they finally recovered; their faces got normal color again. They were going to refuse to pay if I went beyond that; that was already stretching it. But I got this kid a record price for his hog.

DePue: What happened to the hog, then?

Thompson: Oh, the hogs later got sboth laughed. Samantha bought three rabbits, champion rabbits. They came home with us to Chicago, oh, God! And they were in our basement.

DePue: So that had to be your money, I would guess.

Thompson: I don't remember. I don't think it was, somehow. But we ended up with the rabbits, personally. And they were named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. That was my daughter's names for them. She named them, I didn't. We had those rabbits for probably three or four weeks. My wife finally said, "The rabbits are going. Get them out of my basement." So we took them up to the Lambs Farm north of Chicago.[32] They happily accepted the rabbits. Those were the only two times I think I went a little nuts.

DePue: You mentioned the Du Quoin fair.

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: And that there's a story there.

Thompson: For years there was a state fair in southern Illinois, at the fairgrounds in Du Quoin, which is close to twenty miles south of Carbondale. It was called a state fair, but it was privately owned. The fair was basically a nighttime fair because it was really hot down on the fairground during the day; it was right around Labor Day. It was started by a guy who had the Coca Cola distributorship for southern Illinois. He not only bought the fairgrounds and built the fairgrounds, but he built a house on the fairgrounds, where I believe his children were raised. And he built a second house on the state fairgrounds not too far away; there were adjoining houses on the fairgrounds for other members of his family. The second one was sold to the mayor of Du Quoin, who moved his family in; The Rednours, who were southern Illinois Democrats. His kids grew up there.

Then the family that built the fair finally sold it to a guy by the name of Jabr, who was from one of those Middle Eastern countries.[33] He had been a student at SIU Carbondale, and then had become an entrepreneur. He bought the fair, and he continued to run it. Well, two things happened: the people who ran the Hambletonian, which was *the* big race in harness racing for the United States, were an eastern crowd of horse owners who didn't cotton to the fact that the fairgrounds were now being run by this Middle Eastern guy. And then Jabr's financial luck and/or interest turned, and the fairgrounds were getting kind of run down. We eventually lost the Hambletonian; they gave it to another race track out East.

[32] A center in Libertyville that provided services for developmentally disabled adults. It included a petting zoo and pet store.
[33] Saad Saleh al-Jabr, an Iraqi exile who was the first foreign student at Southern Illinois University. Wes Smith, "Down-home Iraqi," *Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1991.

We had, as a family, enjoyed that fair every year. Obviously, our whole family and friends were always at the state fair in Springfield. But when that ended, we moved down to Du Quoin, and stayed in the house on the grounds. And Samantha had the run of the fairground; imagine a kid being able to run out her back door and spend all day on a fairgrounds. Which she did, along with the kid from next door, one of the Rednour kids.[34]

DePue: And a state trooper, maybe?

Thompson: And a state trooper. So word came back to me that the Du Quoin state fair was suffering, and Skilbeck and I went down to see it. The legislative guys from that area came. We toured the grounds. I listened to their notions of, We're going to lose this fair; it means a great deal to southern Illinois. So after my tour of the grounds, I said, "The State of Illinois is going to buy this fair." $25 million. Of course, I didn't have an appropriation to do that. But I knew that if I went there and announced that I was going to buy it, the representatives and senators from southern Illinois would damn well make sure that there was an appropriation, or they would be withholding their votes on stuff that Madigan and other folks wanted. They knew how to play that game. They'd do hard votes for Madigan that their constituents were not necessarily thrilled about, but as long as they got their share, they'd do it. So I just announced it, $25 million. And I can't remember whether a reporter asked me or not, "Do you have $25 million?" They were always asking dumb questions like that. I said, "I am sure the legislature will appropriate the necessary funds to buy the state fair for the people of southern Illinois." So we bought the fair. I got my appropriation, $25 million. I bought the fair, put a lot of money into it so that it was once again the pride of southern Illinois, and started a new harness racing championship, the World Trotting Derby. So that was that. Governors, now don't go to the Du Quoin state fair.

DePue: But they certainly feel an obligation to go to Springfield's version?

Thompson: Oh, sure.

DePue: Any memories about Republican Day at the fair?

Thompson: I always enjoyed it. We always got up there and gave stem winders. We had a reception on the ag director's lawn, because the ag director had a house on the state fairgrounds; it's where he lived. The only cabinet member to have a house. So the receptions were held there on both the Republican and Democrat Day, they used the same lawn. And it was a great time. All the county chairmen would come, and you'd spend some relaxed time with them, casual time with them. But I made it a habit to go on Democratic Day as well, I didn't hide. And I'd get on the fairgrounds and I'd go right to the Democratic tent, shake hands with everybody. I'd go to the Labor tent, shake hands with everybody. I even rebuilt the Labor Pavilion for the labor unions. In fact, I think there's a plaque on the wall of the

[34] Samantha Thompson, April 4, 2014.

Labor Pavilion, attesting to my rebuilding it. So it didn't make any difference what was going on in the state fair, I loved it. I started craft demonstrations, built a new barn for that purpose, and people would be in there spinning wool and doing all these other crafts from the nineteenth century. It was very popular. A lot of people would go in there and see those things for the first time.

DePue: Did Jayne share your love of the state fair?

Thompson: Oh, yeah. She loved the state fair. She spent a lot of time out there. And we had relatives come down from Chicago and stay with us, and friends come down from Chicago and stay with us and go to the fair. My first state fair, '77, we had forty people in the house. The kids were sleeping on the floor, and it was great. It was just great.

DePue: Here's another change of gears for us. Earlier today when I was asking about your view of the role of being governor and what a governor was supposed to do, you said one thing was to make sure that there were enough jobs in the state. September of 1980, Chrysler was looking to build a new plant in the Belvidere area. Can you talk about your involvement with that?

Thompson: We had this big plant at Belvidere. And it soon became clear that Chrysler would not survive as a national auto company without significant help from the federal government and from those states where Chrysler had a facility, which included Illinois. At first, the governors were skittish about loaning money to Chrysler. As you might suspect, the first-hand reception to that notion was not very good in the legislature. And I think I was the last state in.

DePue: So this isn't a new plant, it's an existing plant, is that correct?

Thompson: Yeah, existing. If Chrysler had gone down, that plant would have closed, unless somebody else came and bought it.

DePue: And the figure I saw was that it employed something like five thousand people.

Thompson: Right. I was finally able to persuade my legislature to extend the loan to Chrysler. Then later on, after we brought Mitsubishi to the state of Illinois, it was a Chrysler-Mitsubishi project. I bought the first car off the line in Normal for my wife, and the Japanese side, not to be outdone, because I had bought a Chrysler product, gave me a Mitsubishi car for the mansion. They wanted to give it to me, I said, "No, you can't give it to me. But you can give it to the people of the state of Illinois, and we'll keep it at the mansion." So that's what we did. We saved the plant in Belvidere, and brought a new plant to Bloomington-Normal.

DePue: You said you were the last governor to come on board. Did you have some personal reluctance to doing that?

Thompson: Yeah, this was a brand new idea; it was sort of radical that a state government would extend a loan to a national automobile manufacturer, because you didn't know you were going to get the money back.

DePue: Yeah, I would think the other question is, where does this end?

Thompson: And where does this end, exactly. So I was pretty conservative about it. When I became the last guy in, I became persuaded, and then I got the legislature to go along, and we did it.

DePue: How did that break out politically in the legislature? Were the Republicans the more reluctant group to—

Thompson: Yeah, sure. They always would be. But we got it done, because we had Republican legislators from that area—Rockford, Belvidere. In fact, there might have been a majority of Republican legislators from that area. They would go to their caucus and say, "Hey, this is my political survival." So their leadership had to pay attention too.

DePue: Is that the kind of issue that would have to be taken up in the veto session? Or in the next legislative year?

Thompson: Oh, I don't remember where we did it. But once we decided to do it, it was one of those boom-boom-boom things.

DePue: Moving along on the timeline, we're into November. November 4 is Election Day, and Reagan wins by a landslide. And maybe a month before that, there wasn't anything like predictions that that would be the outcome of the election.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Were you surprised?

Thompson: No, I wasn't surprised. I might have been surprised at the magnitude of the margin. But you've got to remember the hostages played a part in there too. Every night Walter Cronkite would say, "Day eighty-four of Iranian hostages," and boy, didn't that give Carter a lot of problem.

DePue: Some would say that Carter had an unlucky presidency with some of the things he dealt with.

Thompson: Well, that's true. Just like Mr. Obama.

DePue: Was it unlucky, or was he unable to rise to the occasion?

Thompson: I think it was both.

DePue: The outcome, 49.6 percent for Reagan, 41.7 percent for Carter—so that's a pretty big spread in a state like Illinois.

Thompson: It is.

DePue: And 7.3 percent for Anderson. Whose votes would Anderson have been pulling away that year?

Thompson: Carter's.

DePue: Dixon wins the Senate race, 56 percent to 42 percent. Didn't go too well for the Republicans in that respect.

Thompson: Damned shame.

DePue: But that gives you an opportunity, doesn't it? (Thompson laughs) Before we get beyond the election, the other significant thing for you is that the Republicans actually win a majority in the Illinois House.

Thompson: Amazing. Then my troubles began! (both laugh)

DePue: George Ryan was going to be Speaker for that time. And you now have the responsibility to select the next secretary of state, Jim Edgar. How did the process work out that you decided to select Edgar as the secretary of state? The secretary of state position and the attorney general position, if there's positions in state constitutional offices that are kind of a pathway to the governorship, those were the two.

Thompson: Yeah, who were powerful on their own.

DePue: Exactly. So you have to have that in mind when you were selecting the secretary of state.

Thompson: The three most powerful positions in state government are governor, attorney general and secretary of state. So I held one, and appointed two. Yeah. But there wasn't any process, he was my pick from the start. I knew Pate wanted it, and I knew George wanted it. But I was thinking ahead to when I would leave the governorship. I didn't know when that was, but I wanted somebody to succeed me who could win the election. And I thought that was Edgar. So I appointed him secretary of state for that purpose, and because I thought he was a very able guy, and he had worked for me.

DePue: He was your legislative liaison at the time, correct?

Thompson: That is correct. I saw him as a natural successor. In fact, when I hired him, I told him he would be governor one day. He went home and told Brenda that he had just heard the most unbelievable thing from me, that I told him he would be

governor one day. Of course, that scared her to death. So (laughs) that day kept going further into the future.

DePue: She was happy to have you re-elected?

Thompson: Yeah, happy. Happy, happy, happy. I just picked him, I said, "That's it. It's going to be Edgar."

DePue: What did you tell Pate Philip?

Thompson: I said, "No."

DePue: Simple as that? "No?"

Thompson: Simple as that. "No."

DePue: You didn't give him a reason why?

Thompson: No. I said, "I'm picking Edgar."

DePue: How about George Ryan?

Thompson: Same thing. Now, that's pretty gutsy to tell your two legislative leaders; that no, it's not them. Of course, if I had picked one of them, the other one would have been just beside themselves. So I was safe with picking Edgar.

DePue: Do you remember what you told Ryan when you told him that Edgar was going to get it?

Thompson: No.

DePue: The story that I've heard is that you told Ryan, "I need you as the Speaker of the House."

Thompson: Oh, I'm sure I said that. Absolutely. Why wouldn't I say that? And I would have said the same thing to Pate. And it was true. That was a true statement. I mean, my fate lay in the House and the Senate, it didn't lie in the secretary of state's office.

DePue: But in the House especially, you had the majority. You weren't going to have the majority in the Senate.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Was there something else about George Ryan that—

Thompson: But you still had to have your caucus for you.

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: Right?

DePue: Was there something else about George Ryan that led you to appoint Jim Edgar? Was there a reason not to appoint Ryan, other than—

Thompson: No. Uh-uh, because whether you were a conservative Republican like George and Pate, or you were a moderate like Edgar and me, it was irrelevant in the secretary of state's office.

DePue: But you thought that Edgar, when the time came, had a much better chance of winning the next governorship?

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: Why?

Thompson: Because the state was used to moderate governors. Now, George later proved me wrong when he won election as governor. But the special circumstance in that case was his opponent, Poshard, who abandoned a lot of traditional Democratic positions; that hurt him in Chicago.

DePue: I think we probably ought to call it a day.

Thompson: Is that enough for talking? Gosh!

DePue: And then we'll pick it up tomorrow, Governor.

(end of interview #11)

Interview with James Thompson
IST-A-L-2013-054.12
Interview # 12: October 21, 2014
Interviewer: Mark DePue

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham

DePue: Today is Tuesday, October 21, 2014. This is Mark DePue, the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and I'm once again sitting across the table from Gov. Jim Thompson. Good morning, Governor.

Thompson: Good morning.

DePue: I thought we were going to have a beautiful morning today, and it was drizzling when I walked over here.

Thompson: We had sunshine for about thirty seconds.

DePue: Oh, well.

Thompson: Oh, well, it is fall. We're going to have a lovely weekend, though. I'm going to be in Michigan.

DePue: At the house in Michigan?

Thompson: The house in Michigan, yes. Mrs. Thompson's going to be in New York, helping her daughter straighten out her apartment. I chose not to be part of that venture. (laughs)

DePue: I don't blame you on that.

Thompson: I said, "That's awfully nice of you. I'm getting in my car and going to Michigan."

DePue: So what's on the horizon for Samantha?

Thompson: Wedding bells, many wedding bells. She is getting married in two ceremonies, actually, in November, the first a very small Presbyterian wedding, although conducted in an Episcopal church. In fact, the same Episcopal church where Jayne and I had our Presbyterian wedding, because like Samantha, we couldn't get into our church. They were booked. And this time when Samantha wanted to have a Presbyterian ceremony at her church, Fourth Presbyterian in Chicago, they don't do Thursday weddings. They only do Saturday weddings.

DePue: Is that the one that's just a block or two away from here?

Thompson: Yeah, a block away. So she had to go to the Episcopalians, who took her in. She'll be married there on Thursday, and two days later will be the big wedding at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral on Saturday. Her future husband is Greek Orthodox; he's a Canadian whose parents came over from Rhodes to Montreal and opened a restaurant there, and that's where he was born and grew up. He's a lawyer. They met in New York four years ago. And Jayne and I couldn't be happier about

Samantha being married, and being married to him. We think he's wonderful; my wife especially, because he's frugal, like my wife is! So she's looking for additional help in the family. (laughs)

DePue: And Samantha is?

Thompson: Samantha takes after her father.

DePue: Uh-oh.

Thompson: Uh-oh! (laughs)

DePue: She's taken her time to find the right person.

Thompson: She has, and good for her. He's really wonderful. We really, really like him, we like his family, and we are very happy that this is happening.

DePue: It sounds like the family has lived the classic immigrant story, to include the second generation doing much better.

Thompson: That's correct.

DePue: What is his name?

Thompson: His name is Anastasios Tomazos, T-o-m-a-z-o-s. But he's known as Tommy Tomazos.

DePue: Has Samantha decided what happens with her last name in this whole equation?

Thompson: I think I'm right that she will keep her name along with his, so it will be Samantha Jayne Thompson Tomazos; whereas my wife made her maiden name her middle name, so it became Jayne Carr Thompson. So it's close enough.

DePue: And how much has the father of the bride been involved with the planning?

Thompson: (laughs) I learned early my role. My role was not to worry about anything. I mean, I tried three or four times to express an opinion, and the answer from my daughter always was, "Don't worry, Dad, it'll be fine." No answer beyond that, right? "Don't worry about that, Dad, it'll be fine." Once I expressed my opinion about an hors d'oeuvre to be served, I thought that's easy. She said, "That's okay, Dad, you don't have to eat it." So I gave up (both laugh) and assumed the traditional role: write the checks with a smile. So that's what I've been doing.

DePue: The first wedding you mentioned is going to be small and intimate, and the second wedding is not.

Thompson: Big, right. Well, you know, Greeks can't have a small, intimate wedding.

DePue: But it sounds like they're going to have to bring in most of the Greek relatives from Canada to do this, or do they have some relations here in town as well?

Thompson: No, they don't have any relations here in town. Some of the Canadian Greeks will come. I don't know how many are coming from Rhodes; they were all invited. Tommy has a lot of friends in London and a lot of friends he went to school with, and he was at the law firm Skadden Arps for eight years, so he's got friends from there as well. It'll be a fun wedding.

DePue: Very good, so the next time we meet will be after the wedding, I think.

Thompson: Yes, sir.

DePue: Let's start today talking a little bit about into 1981. I wanted to start with just a couple of questions about some changes in staffing that you had, and that's inevitable in any administration. But one in particular here was the chief of staff position, because Jim Fletcher moved on. Where did Fletcher move to?

Thompson: Fletcher moved to the great land of highly increased salary. (both laugh) Fletch started a lobbying firm, and remains today the largest and best lobbying firm in Springfield. He has Republican staffers, Democratic staffers. He is very successful at what he does.[35] After years of loyal service to me, first as campaign manager in the first campaign and then as deputy governor, he went to the private sector. So I promoted Art Quern, who had been my public aid director, to be the deputy governor. Quern was just a wonderful, wonderful man. He came to me from Nelson Rockefeller's staff in New York. That was one of the positions that I had instituted sort of a nationwide search for, and he came so highly recommended and everybody fell in love with him. And it was a great tragedy when he was later killed in an airplane crash, taking off from an airport north of Chicago on a day when the winds were bad.[36] But while he was there, I mean, he was just a wonderful man. And he had an excellent reputation in Springfield and in state government.

DePue: How would you describe his management style?

Thompson: I would say he was a consensus builder, listened to everybody. He was not a top-down manager, he was a person who conciliated diverse views. And everybody who ever worked for him really enjoyed working for him. Very effective guy.

DePue: Next one I wanted to ask you about was a move for Bob Kjellander, who had been your personnel director and now was going to take over Jim Edgar's job as legislative liaison.

[35] For his approach to lobbying, see Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 27, 2015.
[36] Quern was killed October 30, 1996, when the corporate jet he was traveling on crashed while taking off from Palwaukee Municipal Airport. At the time of his death, he was chairman of the Illinois Board of Higher Education and chairman of Aon Risk Services Companies. *New York Times*, November 1, 1996.

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: What can you say about Bob Kjellander? First of all, he's in that peculiar position of having to answer all of the calls from the county chairman looking for jobs. (Thompson laughs) Maybe he was appreciative of a chance to do a different kind of liaison work.

Thompson: I think so. Bob, who remains a friend to this day, knew the ins and outs of state government. That was very helpful in taking on the legislative role, because you not only had to deal with Republican legislators, but Democratic legislators as well, particularly when they were in the majority. And in attempting to respond to their requests, it was particularly important that you knew how state government functioned so that you could fulfill as many of those requests as possible in the easiest possible way and get things done, which is what the legislators appreciated. So I think that was a good move for Bob to go to that position. He later ran my campaign for re-election in '82. But his legislative experience and his knowledge of state government was really important.

DePue: Since Kjellander moved on from being the personnel director—i.e., the patronage chief is how most of the public views it—Greg Baise came in. And this was one of your former—I think you affectionately refer to them as "bag boys."

Thompson: Yes, my (laughs) travel aides. Let's call them travel aides, since some of them don't like the title bag boy.

DePue: I can't imagine.

Thompson: Baise was the first travel aide after I was elected governor. Dan Patterson did that position while in the campaign. And then I put Danny in the Bureau of the Budget for a year before he went back to school to get his master's out in California. So Baise was the first one that was brought in after I was elected governor. He was just a young guy in his twenties. He had a keen interest in politics; he had got himself elected as alderman in his hometown. To show you what kind of talent Baise had, he not only worked his way up the travel aide ladder—travel aide to scheduling to patronage—but he later became a member of my cabinet twice as transportation secretary, probably one of the most important positions in the administration. I had him run Ronald Reagan's campaign for re-election in Illinois, which he did superbly at, and then he ran my last campaign in '86. He is now the president of the Illinois Manufacturer's Association. So he's had quite a career for himself; very, very able guy.[37]

DePue: We've talked about the bag boys, the travel aides before. But you always talk about them with a certain amount of affection and pride.

Thompson: Absolutely.

[37] Gregory Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 6, 2013.

DePue: How do you find out who is a potential travel aide in the first place? And are they just kind of breaking into politics and the whole study of it?

Thompson: All different ways, actually. And some of them weren't really that interested in politics, because they've followed different careers. I've had twenty-three, because I carried it over to the law firm when I left the governorship. I still have it today. It's supposed to be a year-long job, and then they either go up through state government, like Baise did, or they go back to school, maybe to law school or to a master's degree; they come right out of college. First of all, the position itself is one that's useful to me. This is the kid who's with me night and day. They're with me every day, and they go on all my trips either around the state, around the country, around the world. They're the kid who carries the bag, holds the coat, keeps track of my stuff—my speeches, books for example—makes phone calls when I say, "John, call back to Art Quern and tell him…," so they're very useful. At the same time, it's a wonderful job because you're traveling day and night with the governor of the state. You're observing everything that happens first-hand. You're learning an awful lot, you're meeting an awful lot of people—

DePue: To include all of the Republican Party chairmen for the counties, I imagine.

Thompson: Yeah. So it's a great job for a kid out of college who's got the interest in it. And man, they came from everywhere! Two of them were state troopers on my detail. I once used the gossip column in Chicago, Sneed, to advertise for a bag boy.[38] Truly! This kid responded, and I was a little put off when in his letter to me he said, "I drove the Oscar Mayer Wiener mobile, so I can drive you." (both laugh) I thought, "Is that a smart remark?" You know, another hot dog—but I hired him anyway. One of them was an intern in the Senate, and when I went over to his college to get an honorary degree, he was graduating and was the class speaker. And both he and I ended up in the library at the last minute, frantically preparing notes for our speeches. I thought, Oh, this kid's too much like me, last-minute… (laughs) But he today is a prominent lawyer-lobbyist in Chicago and Springfield. Some came recommended by the current bag boy; one of them recommended his best friend. And one of them I met while I was touring one of the colleges in Springfield. I was making some kind of commencement speech, and this kid had been assigned to guide me around the campus. I took a liking to him, and I said, "So what are your plans after graduating?" because he was in the graduating class. And he said, "I don't have any plans." I said, "Well, now you do."

One of them I stole from Lynn Martin, who was running for the U.S. Senate. That was the kid who was an intern in the Illinois Senate; that's where I met him. When the bag boy job was open and ready to go, I called him and I said, "Listen, I'd like to have you come to work for me." And he said, "Governor, that's really a great offer. But I can't because I've promised to be the northern Illinois coordinator for Lynn Martin's campaign for the Senate." He was just a political junkie, so that was going to be a great thing to do. I said, "Really?" He

[38] Michael Sneed.

said, “Yeah, really; I’m really sorry.” So I said, “Okay.”

I put down the phone, and I picked up the phone again and called Lynn Martin. I said, “Lynn, you’ve got a youngster who’s about to go to work for you to run northern Illinois, John Nicolay.” “Yes.” I said, “I want you to fire him.” She said, “What?” I said, “I want you to fire him because I want him to come to work for me, and he said no, he has to work for you. So the only way to get this done is for you to fire him, Lynn.” She said, “Oh, well, okay.” (laughs) She called him and fired him. He was just taken aback, and she said, “I think you should call the Governor back.” So he did, and I said, “Oh, you’ve been fired? That’s a tragedy. Get a cardboard box, put all your stuff in it, and show up at the governor’s office.” He did. When I left, he was one of the two bag boys; I had two at one time. It was the year I left the governorship, and I took both of them with me to the law firm. And he stayed six years, I guess, while I put him through law school. I made him go to law school. He’s had a really successful career.

One of them’s a banker down in Dallas. The two troopers, one went back to the state police and one became a banker in Chicago. One helped to build the White Sox stadium, and then built stadiums all over the country. I got an email from him Sunday; he’s forming a board for his company, and he’s invited me to be on the board. And I thought that’s just the neatest thing I’ve ever heard. This kid has been so successful.

DePue: And his name?

Thompson: Tim Romani out in Denver.[39] So successful. A football or a basketball arena doesn’t get built in America without this kid being part of it. And he’s in and out of Chicago now for the next twenty-two weeks doing the Wrigley restoration.

DePue: I don’t know how I would approach Wrigley, with all of the historic tradition that stadium has.

Thompson: Well, just tore the bleachers down. So they’re underway. (laughs) The locker room for the team is going to be under the field. It’s going to be an amazing thing; $600 million plan.

DePue: Well, I hope they do some work on the men’s restrooms there.

Thompson: Absolutely. Although that’s part of the tradition. (DePue laughs) For a kid who carried my bags to end up so successful that he’s one of the nation’s leading businessmen in sports and has offered to have me on his board of directors, I mean, that’s coming full circle. So they’ve done very well. One of them is even a trooper. His lifelong ambition was to be in law enforcement, and he ended up becoming a state trooper.

[39] Tim Romani, interview by Mark DePue, August 24, 2015.

DePue: Did you look at these relationships as opportunities to mentor?

Thompson: Yeah, absolutely, that's what they were. They were useful to me, but I wanted to be more useful to them. And they certainly were mentoring relationships, because I think the mentoring was successful, at least in part, for what they did afterwards. It was like the mentoring of the assistants in the U.S. attorney's offices, who became judges and chairman of major law firms and renowned lawyers. So yeah, absolutely.

DePue: Let's go back to state governance in a different way here, and go back to the fall of 1980. We're dealing with fiscal year 1981, obviously, at that time. And we'd already talked yesterday about the significant increase in the budget, but a lot of that was dealing with the very high inflation rates. But as I understand, by the time you got near the end of 1980, you were looking at what you anticipated, you and Mandeville, of a $100 million shortfall.

Thompson: Yeah, we had a shortfall in current revenue, but between 1977 and 1980, we had built a surplus in the general revenue fund.[40] We were able to fund that $100 million out of the surplus, so we didn't have to raise taxes. We had an increase in the budget, and we had no red ink.

DePue: Yeah, the rainy day fund, I guess, is what the journalists were calling it, $390 million.

Thompson: Yeah, right.

DePue: How did you and Mandeville manage to—

Thompson: Oh, just we were both smart guys. (both laugh)

DePue: Well as we talked yesterday, the legislature normally had a higher budget, by the time they were done, than you had proposed.

Thompson: Yeah, I know. But we put some money away for a rainy day, which the end of 1980 certainly was, and by and large got the legislature to go along with it. They knew it was going to be there to spend if they had to or wanted to. But it saved us.

DePue: One of the other decisions I know you made, I think it was November twelfth, was a hiring freeze.

Thompson: Yeah.

[40] Budget director Bob Mandeville prioritized the cash balance on June 30, the end of the state fiscal year. In his view, "Appropriations are necessary, but accrual accounting is sort of mystical and the cash balance is not. It's absolute. If you can guarantee a cash balance…you're going to be in good shape." He felt the optimal cash balance was 4 percent of the total budget. The June 30, 1977, general fund cash balance was $52 million. By June 30, 1979, the balance was $390 million, and this increased to $483 million in 1980. Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 10, 2014, 91 and 103.

DePue: What was the rationale for that?

Thompson: Personnel costs were, of course, not the largest part of the state budget, but they were large. And left unchecked, bureaucracies will grow. It's just the human nature of things; everybody wants more employees, everybody wants more assistants. If you don't pay attention to that, your budget can get out of whack that way. So instituting a hiring freeze and making all new jobs come from a dispensation in the governor's office was a way to help control budget growth.

It was also a way to prevent unofficial patronage from being employed by the bureaucracy. See, whenever anybody makes a fuss about the governor and patronage powers, they're forgetting the fact that the governor is not the only patronage person in state government. Bureaucracies have their own patronage, the labor unions have their own patronage, and none of them are elected. So putting in a hiring freeze also has the effect of reducing or eliminating that kind of patronage hiring.

DePue: But isn't that the equivalent of saying, "You guys don't get to play patronage games, only my office gets to do the patronage?"

Thompson: Correct. That's right.

DePue: Which effectively gives you more power.

Thompson: Yes, that's right. That's another attribute of it. So there's a budgetary reason and a governance reason.

DePue: You mentioned the word "dispensation," that dispensation had to come from the governor's office. Explain what that means.

Thompson: We had a six-member committee in the governor's office to review requests for new positions, or to hire, or to fill a vacancy. And you couldn't get it done without that committee saying okay.[41]

DePue: And did they have to fit within the budget that the particular agency had?

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: I am assuming this hiring freeze had nothing to do with the secretary of state's or attorney general's office.

[41] On the hiring freeze and patronage, see Gregory Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 7, 2013; Bernard Turnock, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 16, 2014, 64-66; Jeffrey Miller, interview by Mike Czaplicki, June 15, 2015; David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, March 27, 2014; Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 11, 2014, 139-141; Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 24, 2015. On Cynthia Rutan's successful challenge to this system through a lawsuit that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, see Mary Lee Leahy, interview by Mark DePue, May 27, 2008, 80-100; Jim Thompson, interview by Mark DePue, February 16, 2016.

Thompson: It did not. Just the governor's office. Just governor's agencies.

DePue: What percentage of the state workers were under your control? Do you have an idea?

Thompson: Most of them.

DePue: Over 80 percent, do you think?

Thompson: Yeah, I would guess.

DePue: Did you keep this hiring freeze in place for the long-term, or just for that particular fiscal year?

Thompson: I think we did it twice, actually. We had it then and it apparently went off, and then reimposed it at a later time, for the same reasons. It was effective.

DePue: That gets us into 1981, following an off-year election as far as you were concerned, a presidential election. But it was a good Republican year; the House now was going to be controlled by the Republicans, and in the Senate, you had thirty Democrats and twenty-nine Republicans.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So it started as an interesting year. Now, I understand that the first thing that has to happen is you get to serve as the temporary president of the Senate, and swear in?

Thompson: Yeah, the governor serves as the presiding officer of the session in which the Senate elects its new leadership. The governor goes up there for twenty minutes or thirty minutes on the opening day of the new Senate, and he presides. The majority party in the chamber nominates its leader, and their speeches and seconding speeches. And then the other party does the same thing. And then there's a roll call vote. The Republican and Democratic leaders vote for each other like grade school elections. (laughs) And the new president of the Senate is elected, he comes up and takes the gavel from the governor, and has him escorted out, that's it. End of story. Thirty minutes, you're out of there. You go downstairs—

DePue: Ah, but it wasn't the end of the story in 1981.

Thompson: Well, not that year, no. (laughs)

DePue: Can I read a little bit from—

Thompson: Hey, baby! (Jayne Thompson speaking in the background) Mark, Mrs. Thompson would like to make a contribution to this enterprise. And she wants to double-

check with you on how to do that. I've told her she doesn't have to, but she insists.

DePue: Well, and this in the midst of some expenses dealing with the wedding, I would suspect.

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: If you don't mind, I'd like to read some passages from a March '81 *Illinois Issues* article, to kind of lay this out and maybe prompt your memory a little bit, although I'm sure you remember this one very well.[42]

Thompson: I do.

DePue: I think they met one day, there was a couple of days' break, and they came back into session on Martin Luther King Day: "10 a.m., Thompson gavels the Senate to order. Acting secretary, Ed Fernandes calls the roll. Fifty-one of the fifty-nine senators are present. Thompson notes the quorum. Late arrivals bring the total to fifty-seven, with all twenty-nine Republicans present, but only twenty-eight of the thirty Democrats." I believe Sen. Charles Chew was sick.

Thompson: Charlie Chew, yeah.

DePue: And Harold Washington was in Chicago to sort out who's going to succeed him, since he had just gotten elected to Congress.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: So twenty-nine versus twenty-eight Democrats. "Thompson proceeds to the election of the president. Roger Keats nominates David Shapiro"—and this would be on the Republican side of the ledger—"John Maitland and Adeline Geo-Karis second. Jim Donnewald nominates Phil Rock. Jerome Joyce, Frank Savickas, and Howard Carroll second." Farther into the article, I'm going to quote you, "The nominations having been closed, the nominations are Sen. David Shapiro of Amboy, Sen. Philip Rock of Oak Park. The secretary will call the roll of the senators. Each senator should answer the roll by stating the name of the nominated candidate for whom he is voting, or he may vote present. The vote of a majority of the members present and voting will be required to elect the president. Open the roll." And here's the critical line here that you stated at that time: "The vote of a majority of the members present and voting will be required to elect the president."

Thompson: Yeah.

[42] Diane Ross, "The Day the Republicans Stole the Senate," *Illinois Issues* (March 1981).

DePue: Here's my first question for you. (Thompson laughs) This seems to have been in the works for a while, and in fact, there was a comment from somebody that you had approached them, a Democrat, to switch sides.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And that was James Gitz, a Freeport Democrat.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And you tried to encourage him to cross party lines even beforehand.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Lay this out, Governor, what's going on?

Thompson: (laughs) The great Thompson coup. A preface: every once in a while, the Republicans in the Senate—they never tried this in the House—when they were close to a majority would come to me with some scheme to get a Democratic senator to switch over. And when they put this to Democratic senators, all that senator had to do was say, "Well…" and they'd rush to me and say, "We've got a chance to covert X, Y, and Z! You have to talk to them." So then I'd be trapped into talking with these guys, who didn't have any likelihood of making the switch but loved to hear themselves importuned. So I get stuck with the job of importuning, right, because I'm the governor. It's just like I got stuck with the job of importuning votes for ERA from guys who were supposed to be getable, but who never were and just liked sitting in the governor's office and being begged. So I'd say, "Sure, I'll talk to him." And I'd point out all the advantages of being in the majority, blah, blah, blah. They never came to anything. Nobody ever switched. That's just a preface.

So the night before the election of the Senate president, the Republican senators came en masse to my office that night and said, "Listen, we're going to be the majority. We're going to elect Doc Shapiro tomorrow as the leader." I said, "But you only have twenty-nine votes." "Doesn't make any difference, we're going to do it. Are you with us or not?" Well, what the hell am I supposed to do? This is my party, these are my senators; these are the guys I want to stand with me all during the session, right?[43]

DePue: Who was the leader of this group? Was it Shapiro?

Thompson: It was Shapiro, but a couple of his ace aides as well, who I think were the rabble-rousers. I said, "Do you have any law on your side?" They had some attorney general's opinion from somewhere.[44] So I sat there and I thought, Ah, this may

[43] See Julian D'Esposito, interview by Mike Czaplicki, September 2, 2014, 95-97.

[44] In an interesting coincidence, the 1955 opinion the plotters relied upon was written by Illinois Atty. Gen. Latham Castle, the father of Thompson's first head of the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, John Castle.

come to nothing. It probably won't, but it's my party asking me to do this. The Democrats were fighting of course, you had Dawn Clark Netsch leading the revolt against Phil Rock, which was why this hadn't been done already.

DePue: The Crazy Eight block in the Senate?

Thompson: Yeah. I mean, this was the second time that they were doing this. They did this in '77, which kept me up in the Senate president's office for a couple of months, because they were fighting against Rock's predecessor, Hynes. So this was the second time we got a Democratic disarray that's preventing the election of the Senate president. So I'm thinking, Okay, my party's asking me to do it. I don't know whether it's going to succeed or not, but I've got to be either with them or against them. And this is the Democrats' own fault. So I said, "Okay, we'll do it." And we did it. And there was outrage! Outrage! I had hijacked the Senate.

DePue: Outrage, obviously, among the Democrats in the Senate.

Thompson: The Democrats, yes.

DePue: Was there an outcry among any other circles?

Thompson: No.

DePue: No? Not journalists?

Thompson: Journalists thought this was audacious and crazy, and what was he doing, and hijacked.

DePue: Good press?

Thompson: But it was good press. I mean, you had big headlines; "Thompson Hijacks Senate." So we did this. I swore in Doc Shapiro as the Senate president, and I left the chambers. The Democrats were just outraged; Rock was outraged. And guess what it did? It brought the Democrats together! From my standpoint, not a bad outcome. Rock had always been close to me. Crazy Eight, or whatever the hell they were called the second time around, were never close to me. I knew it would go to the Supreme Court; let the court rule on what it takes to elect a Senate president. There's no precedent. So Rock sued for a writ of mandamus in the Supreme Court of Illinois; *Rock V. Thompson*, the case was. It was a great case. It stewed up there in the Supreme Court for a while after the argument. And the Senate Democrats refused to participate in anything, till it's been court-decided. And then they did, four to three, that the appointment was null and void, or the election was null and void.

DePue: Four to three, does that mean it split on party lines?

Thompson: It did. Imagine that.

DePue: So there were four Democrats on the Supreme Court at the time.

Thompson: There were. So I said, "Okay, Supreme Court's ruled, fine." So we went back and did it all over again. (laughs)

DePue: When the senators approached you, how did they figure that this was going to work itself out, if Shapiro stayed as the Senate president, in terms of committee assignments? Because in actuality, the Democrats had the majority, and should have had the majority on the committees as well.

Thompson: Well, that wasn't my business. That was their business.

DePue: So that conversation didn't come up as you recall?

Thompson: No. Oh, no.

DePue: How about the relationship you had with Rock, you just suggested you'd had a good relationship up to this point.

Thompson: Yeah, we did. And he got a little peeved. (laughs) In fact, I think he called me a "bum" at one point and intimated he might run against me for governor. When we did the election over again and he was elected Senate president by the unanimous vote of all the Democrats who had previously refused to vote for him, except for my hijacking of the Senate unified them, he said, "And will the committee escort the governor out, and I hope to hell he never comes back!" (DePue laughs) He didn't stay mad for long. I had just done him a huge favor. And from that day forward, Rock was one of my best leaders and a dear friend as well. He's pretty gravely ill now.

DePue: Reading through the rest of this *Illinois Issues* article, there was quite a bit of drama involved, because apparently the Democratic senators all marched out, and then there was nobody to vote. It looked like they were going to lose this whole process, and Rock and Netsch came back in, then they left again, and then they came back in again. (Thompson laughs) And here's the ending sentence of this article. "Within minutes, Shapiro was escorted to the rostrum to be sworn in by Thompson. Shapiro is so shaken, he raises his left hand when Thompson instructs him to take the oath of office."

Thompson: High drama in the State House! (laughs)

DePue: And, in fact, as you mentioned, they were so peeved—

Thompson: They didn't come to the State of the State.

DePue: Yeah, here is the picture of the State of the State address.

Thompson: Yeah. Well, I got a lot of applause that day.

DePue: But it's kind of a dramatic picture, because the only part of the picture they're showing is all of the empty seats, and they were on the Democratic side. Any regrets that you went through that?

Thompson: No, look, it did several things. It said to the Democrats, "Don't tread on me, because two can play this game." And it did unify the Democrats, which was much better for me to have Rock as the leader and to have Rock unencumbered by demands from the Crazy Eight. And it showed the Republicans I could take the gamble to be on their side. So for those three reasons, I think it was fine.

DePue: How about the general public?

Thompson: I don't think they cared.

DePue: To them it was just high drama and fun to watch?

Thompson: Yeah, sure. I don't think anybody ever campaigned against me thereafter for trying to seize the Senate. (laughs) Which is not a burning issue.

DePue: I wanted to turn your attention now to the national level, because Ronald Reagan gets inaugurated on January twentieth. Were you there for that?

Thompson: For whom I had campaigned hard up and down the state. And we carried him in Illinois. Yeah, I was at the inauguration.

DePue: Any memories about that event?

Thompson: I'm trying to remember whether it was the first inauguration or the second inauguration, where they had to move it indoors because it was so bitterly cold outside.[45] It was held in the old Senate chambers, and of course there weren't any seats there, so everybody stood. And there weren't very many people allowed in. The governors were all allowed in, and Jay Rockefeller and I were the only governors tall enough to see over the crowd. So he and I were sort of like the interpreters for the rest of the governors; we'd tell them what was happening. We would look and see and then we'd lean down, and "Well, the president's taking the oath now"—it was crazy! Reagan was elected pretty handily. And so we began under a new Republican president.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that you were very different kinds of Republicans?

Thompson: In one sense, yes. On a lot of issues, he was certainly more conservative than I was. And he had conservative people around him, both his campaign staff and the people whom he appointed. Guys like Ed Meese, his attorney general—oh no, Meese was not the first attorney general, William French Smith was the first attorney general. I was more moderate in my social views and had people around

[45] Reagan's second inaugural was held indoors.

me that I picked for their competence and their loyalty, not for their political opinions.

DePue: And you thought that Reagan was going for people who were ideologically aligned more than competency?

Thompson: Yeah, which is not surprising. It happens in both parties. It certainly happened when Kennedy was president or LBJ was president. It certainly is true when Obama is president; it always happens.

DePue: The conventional wisdom going into that election was that Reagan was much too conservative to win. Do you think his resounding victory was a reflection that the country was becoming more conservative, or was it a reflection that Carter was just a weak candidate that year?

Thompson: The second. Yeah, I don't think it meant the country was becoming more conservative. I think there were two factors. Carter was a very weak president, and he just was in terrible trouble during the campaign because of the Iran hostage crisis. Secondly, this was a chance for a lot of conservative Democrats to show their conservative side at the national level, by voting for Reagan. They didn't vote for him as a Republican, they voted for him as Reagan. They were loyal to the Democratic Party back home, but this was a chance for them to show their conservative side. I mean, you had a lot of Democrats who were strong local and regional Democrats who held more conservative views on issues of national policy. And that was true also of labor guys; the building trades unions were conservative in their national outlook. It's still true today. And they were different from their public employee brethren in the union movement. So I think that was a variety of factors.

DePue: And the term that comes to mind, boll weevil Democrats, some of those southern Democrats. Because even though Reagan had a Democratically controlled House and Senate, I believe, he was able to push through some pretty significant changes.

Thompson: He was.

DePue: I wanted to get your opinion on probably the most significant in terms of historical change, and that was dropping the tax rates from 70 percent to 50 percent; then a few years later it went from 50 percent to 28 percent, and that happened in 1988.

Thompson: He was a great man. He held firm views on a lot of things, and he was a guy who, once he got it in his head he was going to do something, he'd go do it. I remember the tax cut campaign. Every time he came to Illinois to fight for the tax cuts—and to poke his buddy, Rostenkowski, on the issue of tax cuts, because I think Rosty was chairman of Ways and Means then—when he gave a speech in Illinois, he had this hatchet with him up on the rostrum. And when he got to that part of the speech involving tax cuts, he started waving the hatchet around! The crowd would

go crazy, of course, and he'd bring it down, and "We need to cut, cut, cut these taxes that stifle the average American!" Quite effective, quite effective. Reagan was a master of symbolism. I mean, he'd been a movie actor; he understood symbolism, and he understood drama. And he won. I mean, he finally persuaded Rostenkowski and Tip O'Neill to do it. And of course, Tip O'Neill and Reagan were buddies; I mean not like today with Obama and Boehner. Tip O'Neill was over at the White House once a week drinking with the president.[46]

DePue: Two Irish kids hitting it off.

Thompson: Yeah, sure. And the president finally persuaded Tip that if Tip didn't go along, he was going to suffer the consequences. So he went along.

DePue: But the first couple of years of the Reagan administration, he's slashing taxes, he's spending an awful lot more money on national defense, the deficit's going through the roof and the economy is not turning around on a dime.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And we're going to talk about this quite a bit the next time we meet as well, but this is a very tough time economically for Illinois, isn't it?

Thompson: It's true. It was at the beginning of a recessionary period. But look, the federal government was spending money it didn't have. Reagan and his people in the administration were firm believers in the supply-side theory of economics that if they would cut taxes, it would free all this money to be invested, which would result in jobs and more government revenue. And they were going to try it. So what you had happening at this period of time was programs of federal aid to states being cut, whether it was in transit money—which was never a big favorite in the Reagan administration—or federal aid to states generally. And the national economy for whatever reason, and I think it started before Reagan became president and just got worse, was entering into a recession that turned out to be the worst recession the nation had suffered since the Great Depression. The period '81, '82, '83 was just godawful. I mean, it was just awful. And the further along we went in my campaign for re-election in '82, the worse the recession got. I mean, you felt like Job, you know, what next?

DePue: Yeah, just to throw some numbers out there, as you know I like to do, 1981 started off in January at an 11.8 percent inflation rate. It was dropping at the time, but still a 10 percent inflation rate by the middle of the year; that's pretty darned high.

Thompson: It is.

[46] Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, Dan Rostenkowski represented Illinois' 8th District. Boston's Tip O'Neill served as Speaker from 1977 to 1987. John Boehner was the Speaker from 2011 to 2015.

DePue: A national unemployment rate of 7.6 percent, Illinois unemployment rate of 8.6 percent. And we mentioned this before as well, the thirty-year loan rate of 16.63 percent.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: So anybody who wants to borrow money and invest, there's not much incentive to do it at 16 percent.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Let me ask you this question in a different way, then. Reagan famously runs as a believer in the supply side, the Laffer curve and all of that, versus the Keynesian. So where would you fit in—the supply side, or Keynesian, or a pragmatist?

Thompson: I don't think I knew then, and I don't think I know now. I'm not an economist. I don't know what works and what doesn't work. I think I'm persuaded now that there's so many more factors that go into it besides economic theory. Every year that went along, Illinois was more prone to the vicissitudes of a global economy. And things were not just tough in the United States, they were tough in Europe and Asia as well. That's part of what was hurting us.

DePue: To include Carter's grain embargo?

Thompson: Yeah. I mean, all kinds of stuff can do it. It's not just a fight about whether a tax cut will improve the economy or a tax increase will improve the economy; if you're spending money you don't have, you're going to end up in a poor position. That's just fact. And it's certainly difficult to raise taxes when people are in a recession; that's godawful time to try and raise taxes. So what are you going to do? You've got to cut spending. He was for cutting spending, and he believed also in this tax cut theory, and the nation was willing to try it out. He persuaded a Democratic Congress to go along with it. Who knew?

DePue: In retrospect, did it work?

Thompson: No, it didn't work. I think there were bigger forces at work by then.

DePue: So you're saying the tax cut did not work to stimulate—

Thompson: I don't think it worked. I mean, it took us, what, three years to get out of it. I'm sure people were grateful for the tax cut, but in terms of improving the economy, I don't think it worked.

DePue: Going back a little bit on politics and getting back to the state level, Phil Rock is the Senate president, and we've already talked about that. We talked yesterday about James Pate Phillip, and we also mentioned George Ryan, and of course Ryan's desire to be the secretary of state. But what do you think of Ryan's job as Speaker of the House? He only had a chance for two years.

Thompson: Yeah, it was just for two years, so it's really hard to tell what the long-term implications would have been. I don't think George Ryan gets enough credit for things he does. Yeah, he's a conservative Republican; yeah, he came from Kankakee politics, which were pretty old-school; but George was, in the end, a leader I could count on. He did me an enormous favor by putting the right-to-work bill up for a vote in the House, because it let me be the leader of opposition to it, which endeared me to organized labor in Illinois. That presented the chance for the famous beer-on-the-mansion-lawn episode, and really locked me in with organized labor. So the Democrats couldn't peel that interest group away from me for the rest of my term as governor.

DePue: Are you saying that Ryan wasn't otherwise sympathetic with right-to-work legislation?

Thompson: He knew it wasn't going to pass. It couldn't pass; it got twelve votes, so that was pretty clear. That was pretty clear going in. But he had made a promise to a Republican or a group of Republicans to try it. He was stuck with that promise, and when George makes a promise, he keeps it. So he put it on the floor. That let me go outside the Capitol and address ten thousand union guys and say, "Over my dead body. Let's go have a beer on the lawn." And that was sort of a defining moment with me and the labor movement. I mean, I did other things: I took labor leaders on international trade missions, I worked with them and business to get modifications in worker's comp, unemployment comp, all these bedeviling issues in Illinois. They liked me. But this cemented it. So he did me the favor. It's not why he did it, he did it to keep a promise to a legislator. But it wasn't going anywhere, I knew that.

DePue: Besides this being good politics to shore up the labor vote for you, did you have other reasons to be—

Thompson: Yeah, I was against the bill. I was absolutely against the bill.

DePue: Because?

Thompson: I didn't think it was the right thing for Illinois.

DePue: Because?

Thompson: Because it would have weakened labor unions in our state, and I thought they were an important political interest.[47] And I just thought it was wrong. I didn't do it with the objective of solidifying myself with the labor unions, I did it because I thought it was the right thing to do; then when I did it, it had the additional benefit of helping me politically with organized labor. And in subsequent elections, I got not only all their money and deprived the Democrats of all the union money, but in my last election, '86, I got the AFL-CIO *endorsement*. First time *ever* for a Republican candidate for governor of Illinois, and only one of two endorsements

[47] For insight into Thompson's pro-union stance, see Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 24, 2015.

in the country for a Republican governor. So that was a benefit of it, but it wasn't why I did it.
And I'm a spur-of-the-moment guy; I didn't plan to invite everybody over to the mansion for a beer, just while I was up there, it seemed like a good idea. (laughs)

DePue: I was reading about that. I think they went through eighty-two kegs of beer.

Thompson: Yeah, probably. We had two beer wagons over there.

DePue: That's a lot of beer.

Thompson: Yeah. And Jayne did it. I marched with them over to the mansion, and by the time we all got there, she had two beer wagons on the lawn, a whole bunch of porta potties, and had my UAW-made Mitsubishi car in the driveway. I mean, that was a masterstroke. People still stop me on the street thirty-some years later and tell me they were there, and thank me for it. Now, that's extraordinary. Thirty-some years later? "I was at your house, and you invited us for a beer, and I was there."

DePue: Let's take that conversation up to the present day, because in the last three years this has been an issue of a lot of debate in the United States. And Wisconsin and Indiana both have passed right-to-work legislation.

Thompson: Yeah, they have.

DePue: Your thoughts about that?

Thompson: Unions have been critically weakened in those states. Hey, labor guys are human. If they don't have to belong to a union and pay dues, what the hell? You know? And it's hurt public employee unions as well, particularly in states like Indiana and Wisconsin. That's one side.

The other side is, and I'm sure my labor friends, especially those in public employee unions, would not like to hear this, but these days, I get a little uneasy at the idea that public employee unions support candidates for governor and the legislature, and their reward is higher and higher contracts. And you start to wonder whether those decisions about those contracts and pay and working issues with public employees are being decided on the merits, or being decided as thanks for the contribution. To me, that's an uneasy thought.

It's not illegal. If it were in the private sector, it would certainly be illegal for a union to give money to an employer. But here in the public sector, it's commonplace. And the result has been the growth of public employee unions, and the growth of the costs of government across the country, state and local, because of this. It has fed the pension crisis not only in Illinois, but across the country. We've had a major city go bankrupt, Detroit, and you've had lesser cities out in California go bankrupt because they couldn't keep up with their pension payments and their other costs of government. I haven't found any resolution in my mind, it just bothers me. It didn't bother me when I was governor. I was

grateful for the support of public employee unions, I always had it—AFSCME, SEIU.[48] Hell, I was an honorary member of SEIU. But the more I've thought about it since then, the more it's bothered me.

I wouldn't be surprised to see the Supreme Court knock it out. In an earlier case from California, Alito wrote the opinion; it was pretty clear that he's not a big fan of public employee unions and the compulsion to pay union dues if you object, or the requirement that you belong to a union to be a public employee.[49] And I wouldn't be surprised if that issue arose in a case this year or next, and that the Supreme Court knocked it out, which would really be a hammer.

DePue: Knock out the right-to-work legislation?

Thompson: Not right-to-work, knock out the notion that to be a public employee you have to belong to a union and pay for the union's expenses, even though you don't have to pay for their political expenses because that would be a violation of the First Amendment to force that. That's law now. But I wouldn't be surprised to see the Supreme Court say, if the price of public employment is to belong to a union and to contribute to its expenses, that that's unconstitutional.[50]

DePue: As I understand it, the conservative critique about labor unions and why the conservatives support right-to-work legislation, is because you have a union that heavily supports a political campaign to get their guy or their woman into the office of chief executive. So the end result is, you don't have that normal relationship when you go in to negotiate the next contract, where you have management versus labor, you have two people on the same side of the ledger negotiating.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: Do you buy that argument?

Thompson: It's a troubling, troubling argument, I think. And I've tried to say that. As I said, it never bothered me when I was governor; I sought it. But the more I reflect since that time, and with the current crises in state and local government having to do with government wages and their expense—and the state budget and pensions, which in Illinois this year are going to take up 25 percent of the budget—it's extraordinary.

[48] Service Employees International Union and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.
[49] *Knox v. Service Employees International Union*, 567 U.S. 310 (2012).
[50] Thompson anticipated correctly, as the Supreme Court took up *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* in 2015 and early 2016. Most observers felt the court would block public-sector unions from collecting dues from non-member employees, but Justice Scalia's death a month after the case was argued left the court deadlocked at 4–4, preserving the unions' ability to collect dues.

DePue: And Illinois is rated as the worst state in the country in terms of the pension problem, $100 billion is the figure I keep hearing.

Thompson: Right. I think in prior times, and certainly when I was governor, nobody thought about this too much. The cost was not as significant then as it is now. And the unions were not as powerful and wealthy, in terms of the ability to contribute, as they are now.[51] So the argument that the conservatives raise is, as I say, a troubling argument. I don't know where I'd finally come down on it, but it's out there.

DePue: Let me try to put you on the spot.

Thompson: Oh, sure.

DePue: If you had to deal with this same issue today?

Thompson: I probably wouldn't try to end the practice of public employees contributing to political campaigns; that would be the end on the conservative side. But I think I would be a lot tougher on the issue of the cost of this, and try to control wage increases that were out of line or that took too much of the budget; what I would call modest steps, or temporizing steps, or working within the current political and legislative dynamic.

And part of it now is that we've had one party control in Illinois for so long, that that facilities this kind of business because there's no questioning of it. Look at the mess the budget is in now. The legislature deliberately passed a budget which is unsustainable. The governor signed a budget he knew was unsustainable.

DePue: You're talking about Governor Quinn's inability to maintain the tax increase that went into effect a few years ago, but the budget is still tied to that tax increase.

Thompson: Right. Correct. So it's a budget horribly out of balance. I mean, it's a sham budget. Everybody has admitted as such, and that's a terrible way to run things.

DePue: Waiting to see what happens in a couple of weeks in the election.

Thompson: Yeah, no kidding. Well, if Rauner wins, I suspect the legislature will say, "Okay, you won. Roll it back!" (laughs) Yeah!

DePue: Then you might have to have somebody else finish the interview series. (Thompson laughs) I'm not worried about that—

Thompson: You're safe.

[51] For different views, see Fletcher, February 24, 2015, and Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 11, 2014, 193-195.

DePue: —but there's a whole lot of people out there in public work who are worried about it.

Thompson: Sure. They should be.

DePue: I wasn't expecting this conversation at this point, but it's a very important one. And I appreciate your taking the time to reflect on it, because this all started by our conversation about George Ryan as Speaker.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: The one other person I wanted to throw in the mix, then, is the minority leader in the House, Mike Madigan, and your relationship with him at the time.

Thompson: Oh, the usual give and take, I would say. It wasn't until Mike became Speaker for so long during the latter part of my administration that he and I would work closely together.

DePue: Here's a comment I'm reading from a UPI article, "Madigan charges Thompson Thursday of plotting with new Republican House Speaker George Ryan to squelch Democratic representation in House committees. Thompson called Madigan's charge silly, because Madigan made similar moves when his party was in power." And here's another quote from you. "It sounds like some political rhetoric on a slow day for Mr. Madigan."

Thompson: That's all true. It's the normal political jousting. I wouldn't have the slightest interest in how George Ryan, as Speaker of the House, handled his committee assignments. I mean, that was none of my business. And Ryan would have been the first to tell me that.

DePue: But at this point, would you say you had a good, solid working relationship with Mike Madigan?

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: The next block of questions deals with what some people have called the most political activity in politics, bar none, and that was redistricting. Nineteen eighty census, so you go into a redistricting process. It looks like there's some serious issues for Illinois that year, because we go from twenty-four to twenty-two U.S. House seats.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: So there's definitely going to be some pain involved. How much were you, as the governor, involved with the redistricting?

Thompson: I was involved, but as the attempted hammer to get it through the House, which failed. We were still in three-member House districts at that time, which means

we had in the Illinois House people from the city of Chicago who were called Republican, that was their ballot label, but who were not reliably Republican. These were the guys that got elected with two hundred votes; they were the tools of the Democratic ward committeemen who got them elected. So the only vote you could count on from guys like that was the vote for the selection of the Speaker; that, they had to do. But thereafter, you couldn't get a vote out of them.

When redistricting came in the House, I can recall standing on the floor of the House with George Ryan at the desk of a so-called Republican legislator from Chicago, urging him to vote for the redistricting bill; me on one side of the desk, Speaker on the other, and he just sat there like this, wouldn't talk, wouldn't say anything, just refused. That's my only real memory of being involved in redistricting, when George brought me to the floor of the House to attempt to get this guy to do it. But he didn't care; he didn't get elected because of my effort or George's effort, he got elected because of his Democratic ward committeemen support in Chicago, and he wasn't going to do it.

DePue: Was there more pain or angst involved with redrawing the congressional lines or the legislative lines?

Thompson: I don't recall. Usually the Illinois congressmen get together and draw their own districts. (laughs)

DePue: So it's an incumbent-drawn map?

Thompson: Yeah, it's an incumbent-drawn map. That's been the tradition in Illinois. These guys agree on their own to their districts, and everybody's happy.

DePue: But in this case, you've got to cut two incumbents out of the mix.

Thompson: Yeah, I know. But there are ways of doing that.

DePue: This is the second census after the 1970 Illinois Constitution. Because of the problems with the bedsheet ballot back in 1964, where you had all of the House members on the same ballot, they changed the way that the redistricting would occur. They thought that they had a fail-safe method, and that it would never happen: if there was a deadlock between the Democrats and the Republicans, it would go to a draw from a hat. But that's exactly what happened in 1980.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And it's always happened ever since.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Do you remember that process?

Thompson: I just remember it taking place, and the Democrats won. Redistricting is second only to legislative pay raises as a viper's nest of Illinois politics. You don't want to put your hand in, you'd get it bitten off.

DePue: But my impression is that's the kind of thing the general public doesn't pay much attention to.

Thompson: No, they don't. Look at the election this time. There are only seven contested House seats in the whole state. Seven!

DePue: You're talking about the Illinois House?

Thompson: Yeah. It's crazy! And that's because of redistricting. The Democrats, the last time they did it, drew such tight, partisan districts for themselves that there are less than a handful of districts where both parties can compete. And you wonder why Illinois politics is in the mess that it is today.

DePue: The conventional wisdom is that's why all the money goes to the leaders of the House and the Senate, and Madigan, who's sometimes considered the most powerful man in Illinois politics, gets to dump in an awful lot of money in just a handful of seats.

Thompson: Right. Very effective. You can have four mailers a day from the Speaker to the residents of a legislative district in a contested race, plus television. And mailers plus television is a very effective way of campaigning.

DePue: Any other comments about redistricting?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Let's get to more politics. March first, you announce for re-election in 1982. That's fairly early in the cycle, is it not?

Thompson: Yeah, but not too early for an incumbent.

DePue: Did you have to mull that issue over very much?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Did Jayne weigh in on the question?

Thompson: I think she said she heard it on the radio. (both laugh) It was either my third or my fourth race when she claims she heard it on the radio instead of hearing it from me. Or the wife of one of my cabinet members called her up and said, "Oh, it's wonderful that the governor's running for re-election." She said, "News to me!" (laughs)

DePue: I think you've already addressed this, but any problems since you had just been thwarted in your coup in the Illinois Senate? Isn't that more political baggage that you were carrying at the time?

Thompson: No. That was never a part of a campaign.

DePue: Who did you figure were your likely opponents at the time?

Thompson: Stevenson was making noises, and Rock had made noises for a while after the coup. But he won, so I figured that wasn't going anywhere. Plus, you've got to understand Phil's personality. He's not a good statewide candidate, as he proved in his unsuccessful race for the U.S. Senate later on. When he was going to run for the Senate, I begged him not to. He said, "Well, why not?" I said, "Because you're not a good statewide candidate." "Why is that?" I said, "Because you don't have the number one qualification for a statewide candidate." He said, "What is that?" And I said, "The ability to put your arm around the shoulders of an absolute fool and persuade him that you and he are best friends," which was a crude way of saying there are all kinds of people out there in the state of Illinois, and you're going to encounter them. A statewide campaign is a long, grueling effort, and you're going to meet some fools. And Phil does not suffer fools gladly. I said, "You're going to be very, very unhappy."

He refused to take my advice. He went off and ran for the Senate, he and three or four other candidates. He lost.[52] He had foolishly mortgaged his house to put some money in his campaign fund, so Pate Phillip and I had to run a fundraiser to pay off his mortgage. But he was a dear friend. And Pate, as gruff as he is, was a fellow Senate leader, and he wasn't going to leave Rock in the lurch. But I knew that about Phil, as part of his personality, so I didn't think he was a serious candidate for governor. And I don't know whether Bakalis made some noises about running again. I don't have a clear recollection of that.

DePue: I've got some quotes later on in our discussion today from Dan Walker; he seemed to still be up there.

Thompson: Oh yeah, Walker.

DePue: We've alluded to this already, but March fourth, your budget address was $14.9 billion; so not much of an increase over the previous year in some very tough economic times.

Thompson: Right.

[52] Rock came in fourth in the 1984 primary, losing to Paul Simon by 253,360 votes and finishing behind Roland Burris and Alex Seith. The other candidate was Gerald Rose. State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast at the General Primary Election, March 20, 1984*.

DePue: In this case, how difficult was it to reconcile what you knew was coming from the Reagan administration with the budget cuts that they were imposing?

Thompson: It was tough. It was absolutely tough, no question. For a lot of the states, the free ride was over; Uncle Sam was turning off the spigot.

DePue: Is that a big part of the explanation of why the budget was basically flat line that year?

Thompson: Part of it. And I don't know whether you would call it a recessionary period or pre-recessionary period, but we were not fools; we could forecast. Mandeville had a very tight, disciplined department. He would bring me the forecast, we would figure it out, and if we couldn't increase it to where we wanted to increase it, we didn't. What were you going to do? You can't rely on borrowing for anything but capital improvements to be paid over time, because the projects last over time. So the only thing to do is keep the budget flat or cut it. Eighty-two, whoa, we really had to cut it.

DePue: The next thing I wanted to ask you about, just if you have memories about this, March thirtieth is the day that Ronald Reagan was shot in D.C.

Thompson: Yeah. Oh, of course we have memories. That's something that you never get out of your memory. It's like the day Kennedy was shot. Yeah, I remember it. The nation was panicked, as a nation always is when something like that happens, or when a 9/11 happens. You've got a collective frightening, and a collective worry across the country. The thing that saved us, I think, was that he was able to joke about it as he was being taken in the ambulance to the hospital and undergoing surgery, things like asking whether the doctors were Republican, and calling his wife and saying, "Honey, I forgot to duck." That made a real difference, unlike the Kennedy assassination. His ability to respond even in extremis, and to do it with the typical Reagan humor, was very important to the country.

DePue: It wasn't just a couple months later, July of 1981, that he came to Illinois to help with a fundraiser for you.

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: Do you recall that?

Thompson: Yeah. He and I were always very close. He appreciated my effort in the campaign for him, because I really did work hard and defended him. And even after the election, I tried to sell his program. I remember walking into a labor convention and trying to sell them on Ronald Reagan, which is not an easy thing to do. But I came out of that okay. Hell, during the campaign, I went to the *New York Times* editorial board for him. The Democratic candidate, Carter, had been to the board, it was traditional that the presidential candidates appear before the *New York Times* editorial board for their endorsement session. Well, Reagan refused to go, because he and his ace aides believed that the *New York Times* editorial board was

the heart of the enemy, not without reason. (laughs) And they said, "You go. Represent Reagan." I said, "I'm not the candidate." They said, "You go." So I went and tried to persuade the *New York Times* to endorse Ronald Reagan. And my only consolation was that at the end of the session, they said, "Well, Jim, we'd endorse you, but we're not endorsing Reagan." (laughs) I said, "Fair enough."

DePue: Now how many votes do you suppose the *New York Times* endorsing you actually made the difference in Illinois?

Thompson: (laughs) Not much! But it was nice to hear.

DePue: You aren't arguing with them, I'm sure.

Thompson: No. No, no, no.

DePue: Back to Illinois, in May, and I think this is an issue that's going to be much debated for many, many months, the whole notion of RTA funding that year.

Thompson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Essentially, explain it again; I think I've heard this a couple of times.

Thompson: RTA was going broke.

DePue: Chicago Transit Authority versus RTA, where's the difference?

Thompson: The Chicago Transit Authority was a constituent member of the RTA. The RTA was the Regional Transportation Administration, which meant that it was the funding agency for the CTA, which was Chicago, and the suburbs and the Collar Counties. There was divided political control of the RTA. Even though the chairman of the RTA was a Republican, he couldn't get a budget adopted without the votes of the Democrats on the RTA, principally the Democrats from Chicago, who first and foremost were looking out for the CTA. So it was both a fiscal issue and a political issue. The Democrats were never going to agree to a funding plan that short-changed the CTA, in their view. And the Republicans were bound and determined that the Democrats were not going to control all the budgeting.

DePue: You already mentioned the RTA was going broke. Why?

Thompson: They didn't have enough revenue.

DePue: Were costs going up and the revenue was flatlining?

Thompson: Costs were going up and the revenue was going down, and federal aid was slashed. Federal aid had always been a big part of transit aid. I mean, the federal government, under Reagan at least, was kind of hostile to transit. They were okay with highways, but transit was another matter, persuading them to fund that more generously. So we were essentially left to our own devices in Illinois. And to

show you what a monumental—it wasn't so much a financial struggle, because we eventually adopted a plan that funded everybody, it was a political struggle. So even though it started in '81, it didn't end until I was re-elected and imposed by just sheer will, and a lot of hammering of all the constituent interests, a solution in '83. It took two years to get this baby done.

DePue: Part of this, obviously, was negotiations with Mayor Byrne. But who was the representative on the Republican side of the ledger that you had to deal with?

Thompson: It would have been the Republican county chairman, who got the Republican members of the RTA elected.

DePue: RTA would include DuPage County, I would assume?

Thompson: Yeah, sure. The RTA was the city, the suburbs, and the Collar. So they all had a hand in it.

DePue: I would think that throws Pate Phillip into the mix.

Thompson: Absolutely. And you could tell he wasn't thrilled about raising money to send to Chicago.

DePue: But many of his constituents are relying on our RTA to get to their jobs, aren't they?

Thompson: Well, certainly. That was a (laughs) minor consideration to Pate, at the moment, anyway.

DePue: For the 1982 budget, which in the spring of '81, you guys are in deep negotiations on, was the whole RTA issue part of that budget?

Thompson: I'm not sure. Obviously the state contributed to the RTA in some fashion.

DePue: But I know it wasn't resolved by the end of the—

Thompson: It was not. It wasn't resolved until spring '83.

DePue: July seventh, you're quoted as saying in an article by Milton Rakove, "There will be no bailout of the RTA by this legislature. All they keep saying in Chicago is more, more, more. There is no more!"

Thompson: "More, more. There is no more!" I can remember saying that. "They want more, more, more. And there is no more!" You had to take a hard line with the city, because otherwise they'd run right over you. And you weren't going to get to an equitable solution by giving in early; you'd be negotiating against yourself, because the city was just schooled in, "This is what we want, and we want it now, and we don't care where you get the money to pay for it, and that's it." That's how they negotiated. So you had to stand up and say, "No."

DePue: And since this wasn't solved until 1983, this gets to be a hot-button issue for the 1982 election, correct?

Thompson: Right.

DePue: What was the ultimate resolution of it?

Thompson: I don't recall the funding sources, but I finally got everybody to agree on how to fund the RTA. The political control stayed as it was, nobody got anything taken away from them. And everybody was finally satisfied as well as they could be with the distribution of funds. But it took two years. That's how knotty a political problem it was.

DePue: July thirty-first, Dave O'Neal resigns as lieutenant governor. Now, he had just lost his election for U.S. Senate.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: But he said that, in part, he just kind of got bored with the job.

Thompson: He was bored, yes, that was his quote.

DePue: Did that one surprise you?

Thompson: Yeah, I think it did. He had never said anything to me about being bored in his job. And I think losing the campaign for the Senate probably had something to do with it, and he was just going to go do something else.

DePue: What was your relationship with the man before that time?

Thompson: It was good.

DePue: What kind of jobs were you giving him to do?

Thompson: Not much.

DePue: Why?

Thompson: Because the jobs of the lieutenant governor are pretty well limited by the constitution and laws of Illinois. He had some minor responsibilities. But it's the natural tendency of a governor or a president to do it themselves, or have their allies or directors do it. Look at Joe Biden. What jobs does he have, except to be sent out to campaign? That's his job. He's not in charge of anything. That's always been the case, I think. I gave Ryan a little more responsibility. I put him in charge of a lot of economic development initiatives, which enabled him to travel around the state doing stuff. But I gave responsibility for the important assignments in my administration to my people.

The lieutenant governor doesn't have the staff. Look what happened under Blagojevich; Quinn was the lieutenant governor. I went to Quinn's office one day on something, I forget what the issue was. I said, "Could I speak to his chief of staff?" "We don't have a chief of staff." He had, like, two employees. Talk about being frozen out by the governor; that Blago-Quinn relationship was really something. Two employees? Three employees? A secretary?

DePue: Walker and Hartigan were even worse.

Thompson: Same thing, yeah.

DePue: But Quinn seemed to be able to find a way to get some visibility across the state.

Thompson: Oh sure, he's good about that. Look, he's been a rabble-rouser for thirty years, he knows how to do it. (laughs)

DePue: Did you feel any sense of abandonment, or that you'd been betrayed.

Thompson: No, no, no. It was a personal decision by Dave. So I said, "Okay." He went off, and I issued an executive order assigning whatever responsibilities he did have under the law to me. So we functioned without a lieutenant governor until the next election.

DePue: And God forbid, if something were to happen to Jim Thompson in that interim period, who would be the governor? How would that be determined?

Thompson: The attorney general would be the governor.

DePue: So then Neil Hartigan would have had his chance!

Thompson: How about that! I guess I had to have official tasters, didn't I?

DePue: (laughs) Moving on in the calendar year, September fifteenth, you signed workfare and welfare-fraud bills. Do you remember that legislation?

Thompson: Not really. Doesn't surprise me.

DePue: And the welfare fraud was to get tougher on finding out people who were trying to cheat the state in the process?

Thompson: Right. Budget measure.

DePue: Budget more than politics, do you think?

Thompson: Oh yeah.

DePue: Let's go to another subject, and I think you'll be able to reflect on it a little bit more because it's this same time frame that the Illinois Center is being constructed. It's running into some serious problems: it had a labor strike in the

middle of it, and while the labor strike was going on, the big hole that had existed was filling up with water; there were lots of budget overruns. Can you tell us about how the whole Illinois Center concept got started in the first place? Was that under your watch or was it under Walker's?

Thompson: No, under me. Before that time, the offices of state government in Chicago—that is, the executive offices, governor and the other constitutional officers and the legislative leaders—were over in the building that is now the Bilandic Center. It's where the courts are housed, the appellate court for the first district and the Supreme Court courtroom, and related clerk's office, other activities. We just ran out of room in the old state government building.

So the search was on for a new site. I had two choices really, a site in the Loop or a site north of the river. A lot of people thought we should do it north of the river. I thought that if we were going to do this, we should do it in the Loop in an area that needed revival. I was going to use the construction of the State of Illinois Center as an urban renewal kind of thing. I finally fixed on the Sherman Hotel, which had been in the city for a long, long time. Hotel had run into issues. I think it was owned at the time by the Teamsters Union. I forgot how they acquired it. Maybe they had money invested in it, then it went sort of bust and they ended up with it. I think that's what happened.

Of course, my gadfly political opponents started the drumbeat of, "Oh, he's doing it by buying the Sherman Hotel and rescuing the Teamsters from their terrible investment," which was not true. It was an appropriate site, it was big enough. It was in a neighborhood of the Loop that was becoming more and more distressed because the once proud thoroughfare of Randolph Street, where all the big downtown movie theaters were, was over. Those movie theaters went the way of all flesh. I thought this would be a North Loop revival. So I didn't pay any attention to the carpers.

DePue: You needed a whole square block?

Thompson: Yeah, which was not easily obtained in other sections of downtown Chicago, because the department stores were still there, even though the movie theaters had gone. We began to search for architects. I can remember Arthur Rubloff flying me up to Canada to meet with Canadian architects. I'm trying to remember now the name of the family up there in Canada that Rubloff was a pal of; they were big realtors up in Toronto. It's a famous Canadian family, and they had their own ideas. So we finally ended up with what's his name—God, I'm so bad on names these days.

DePue: Talking about the architect?

Thompson: Yeah. I had appointed a committee to pick the design. He came in with three different designs. One was the typical shoebox building, rectangular; one was

slightly different, and one was radical; it was the design for what is now the Thompson Center.

DePue: With lots of glass.

Thompson: With lots of glass. Let's see.

DePue: The Governor's looking at an article right now.

Thompson: God, I can't read small print either.

DePue: And it is small print. How much of the ultimate selection of the design was your selection?

Thompson: It was mine. I discharged the committee (laughs) and made my own choice. I said, "I like this one. This is radical." Why don't they have the architect's name in here?

DePue: Because the focus of the article was about cost overruns, Governor.

Thompson: Yeah, yeah, well… I picked that design and we built it.

DePue: Let me ask you—

Thompson: Honey, what was the name of my architect of the Thompson Center?

Jayne: Helmut Jahn.

Thompson: Helmut Jahn.

DePue: Helmut Jahn?

Thompson: Helmut Jahn. H-e—

Jayne: J-a-h-n.

Thompson: Yeah, J-a-h-n, H-e-l-m-u-t, Helmut Jahn. German guy, but a Chicago architect. He later did the United terminal at O'Hare, for which he won big prizes. He won big prizes for this building too. You want to get your information, babe?

Jayne: Yes. Excuse me.

(pause in recording)

Thompson: There were cost overruns, but that's not unusual in either the public or the private sector. They weren't that large.

DePue: This is such a distinctive architectural style. Obviously it's very modern, but everything before this time, and looking at your antiques and things like that, you

have a definite flair for older architecture as well. Now, maybe that's a reflection that the mansion has to retain that particular architectural style.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: What was it about this new architectural style that appealed to you so much?

Thompson: First of all, even in my antique collecting, my tastes change. You start out very conservative; you know, landscapes but not watercolors. Watercolors are daring. (laughs) The first two things I collected as antiques were scales and picture frames; that shows how daring I was. But as you can see, it's evolved. It just struck me as the chance to do something extraordinary with a public building. The more I study history and architecture, and I'm kind of a fan of architecture… When I was governor, we did some remarkable things in architecture, from honoring the old—like restoring the David Davis house in Bloomington, which was an extraordinary Victorian Italianate architecture, probably the best in Illinois—to building a new museum downstate that was more modern and that allowed people to interact with exhibits. There were drawers that kids could pull out and there was stuff in the draws; it was a very modern concept in a museum.

DePue: Was that Dixon Mounds?

Thompson: Yeah. So when I got the chance to build this building, and Helmut came up with this design, it just struck me. First of all, it had a tip of the hat to a traditional state capitol, with its sliced architectural top. It was an architectural top like a capitol building would have, but in this design it got sliced in half on a sideways angle. It was all glass, and it was very open. And to me it represented what I wanted people to think of Illinois government as, which was open. In fact, in the interior of the building, a lot of the moving parts were visible, like the inside of an escalator; you could see how an escalator worked. The atrium was just huge. So it was dramatic. It said something about what you wanted state government to represent.

I remember once making a speech about this building when I got an honorary degree in New York. The theme of the speech was, great architecture has always been the product of either government or the church. If you look at St. Peter's in Rome, extraordinary atrium. You got the usual critics, "Oh, it's just a big empty thing, this atrium's useless." "Wasting space," they said. I said, "No, celebrating space. Would you tell the pope or God that they were wasting space in St. Peter's? No. You're celebrating space; space in a building is something to be celebrated." Then I'd say, "Besides, would you rather have it filled with bureaucrats?" And it's, "Oh no, no, no, of course not."

It was a great joy to build. It had a fault when it opened; the air conditioning system didn't work right. The critics were yelling, "It's too hot," and the employees were bringing fans and putting shades in the windows, and all this business. So we sued the people who put the air conditioning in, we won, and they

corrected it. And the next year, it became one of the official *cooling* stations of Chicago, for days when the heat was just terrible and people had to seek relief. But of course, the opening days of the building, when it was too hot, that's all people remember. That's what's all in the history books about Chicago architecture. And they never step back to think, Wait a second, that only lasted one year, and it changed and went the other way.

But be that as it may, we had celebrated art inside and outside. As it was finally being constructed, we had sort of tough budget times again, so we had to skimp on the carpeting; didn't have a lot of closed offices, we had open offices; tried to save money in the final days of the building of it. Same carpet is still there, by the way, all patched with tape and stuff; awful, just awful the way the building's been neglected. That's the story of the building.

DePue: Has the building been embraced by the citizens of Chicago?

Thompson: I think so. It's the most visited building in Chicago. Everyday, people just stream in there now, so if you don't count Sears Tower, this building has remained very, very popular.

DePue: But they're coming there for business more than they're coming in as tourists, aren't they?

Thompson: Tourists come in there too. We've filmed movies in there. In fact, movies were being filmed in there before the building was completed. Companies filmed commercials in there; Cadillac did a commercial in the atrium, and the space of the atrium was a big part of the commercial. They had the car resting there on the floor of the atrium. My hopes for it being open at night so it would be a draw of people to the Loop area, of having a restaurant there open at night, they never came to fruition. But it's a very dynamic building, if it's taken care of.

DePue: If it's taken care of.

Thompson: Yeah, it hasn't been taken care of. You walk along the exterior, the metal columns have rusted and eaten away. You walk inside and the carpeting is all patched with tape. The washrooms are outdated. The building is rarely washed on the outside.

DePue: Is it a more expensive building to maintain?

Thompson: No, no. They've simply refused to spend money on it.

DePue: That goes back to what we were talking earlier, we've got some very tough economic times for the state of Illinois.

Thompson: No, no no, no.

DePue: You don't think that's part of it?

Thompson: No, no. It's like the mansion. The mansion has been dreadfully neglected. And the money's there. The legislature appropriated funds six years ago to restore the mansion. It hasn't been spent.

DePue: Because?

Thompson: The current administration won't spend it.

DePue: Because?

Thompson: The governor, as he said to me once, didn't want to be accused in the middle of a political campaign of "gilding the lily." I said, "Governor, repairing a roof, which is letting water pour into the guest rooms and stripping the plaster from the walls, and requiring us to cover up all the antique furniture in plastic, is not gilding the lily. This is not the Capitol renovation." There was such heat about that, they let the mansion go to pot.

DePue: Same rationale for the non-maintenance of the Thompson Center?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: As you know, I've had the opportunity to interview Governor Edgar as well. I wonder if you could reflect on the different architectural styles of the two men.[53]

Thompson: (laughs) Governor Edgar is a traditionalist. You can tell by his state library in Springfield, a very traditional building. It's a beautiful building. It's just a traditional library building, it's a different style. And Jim is a different personality than I am.

DePue: Putting aside the repair issues, are you proud of the Thompson Center?

Thompson: Absolutely.

[53] Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 22, 2009, Volume II: 433-435. View of the Thompson Center from Thompson's northwest corner office at Winston & Strawn. Photo by Mike Czaplicki, July 2, 2015.

DePue: Proud to have it named after you?

Thompson: Absolutely!

DePue: How did that happen, that it's named after you?

Thompson: Edgar did it. It pleased my friends and it pleased my enemies.

DePue: (laughs) Because your enemies liked to critique the building's architecture?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: What are the terms that they use when they're critiquing it?

Thompson: Oh, they don't like it.

DePue: Do they use some colorful adjectives for it?

Thompson: I don't know, but they're glad my name is on it. (laughs) I'm glad my name is on it. But I'm embarrassed at the way it looks.

DePue: I want to finish off today with some more comments about the 1981 portions of the campaign. Then we'll really get into it the next time. But just a couple of quotes from a couple of articles, and some opening shots from potential opponents. October fifteenth, Adlai Stevenson took a shot, charged that you're running a "mudslinging campaign."

Thompson: Really?

DePue: Designed to hide an administration's, "colossal failure of leadership. I'm not even the candidate yet, and he's already engaging in mudslinging."

Thompson: What mudslinging was I doing?

DePue: I'm just quoting him. I'd have to dig harder to find that out.

Thompson: He's very much mistaken. In the actual campaign I never ran a negative ad. The closest I came to running a negative ad against Adlai was an ad that said he spent six years in the Senate, or whatever it was, and he passed two bills, one of which benefitted him personally. And then he quit because, as he said, he was bored. That's my negative campaign. My negative ad of the whole campaign. Now, you contrast that with today's ads. And it was true.

DePue: The next shot was from Dan Walker on October twentieth, and he was criticizing you for attending a football game at Northern Illinois University. His comment was that you disgraced the office of governor in encouraging students to break the law because, "He drank alcoholic beverages while mingling with students at a weekend football game."

Thompson: I probably did drink alcoholic beverages that were handed to me, but I don't understand how that's encouraging the students to break the law. They were already breaking the law; they were drinking and handed me one of their drinks.

DePue: This is the perfect kind of issue for a guy like Mike Royko to take up, so I'm going to inflict on you a fairly long passage from one of Royko's columns. Did you enjoy reading Royko?

Thompson: I loved Royko. And he was a fervent supporter of mine.

DePue: "Former governor Dan Walker, who hopes to inflict himself on Illinois again—"

Thompson: (laughs) That's a good beginning!

DePue: "—is already campaigning. And he raised one of the most unusual issues in memory. It seems that Gov. Jim Thompson went to the homecoming football game at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb last Saturday. Naturally, Thompson couldn't just sit there watching the game and minding his own business; being a politician, he couldn't resist wandering around the stands, tossing around cheerful hellos, grabbing hands, baring teeth, and otherwise making a public nuisance of himself." (Thompson laughs) "Some of the students were impressed by the presence of the governor, which just shows you that they are not paying taxes yet. And to show that they were friendly, they offered to share their antifreeze with him. According to the United Press International, one student offered him a beer. Thompson accepted it. Another offered him a nip of schnapps. Thompson accepted that too. A third offered him a belt of blackberry brandy, which Thompson tossed back. At some point, Thompson asked, "Is this legal?" The students responded by happily roaring, "No," since drinking is supposed to be forbidden at NIU games. And Thompson, hoping to show them what a good sport he is, and maybe cadge a few future votes, responded by saying, "Well, I'm twenty-one—boy, am I twenty-one!' So the students cheered him for being a good fellow, or because boozy students will cheer just about anything." (Jim laughs) He goes on in that vein.[54]

Thompson: All true. All true, obviously.

DePue: But your Democratic opponents thought that maybe this was a point in time that you had gone a little bit too far.

Thompson: It shows you how dumb they were.

DePue: And somewhere later on this column, you mention that, "Well, these students were all over twenty-one," and the students came forward in a letter to the editor later, "Not just twenty-one, we're twenty-seven! We graduated a long time ago." So did you think this one was going to come back to haunt you?

[54] Mike Royko, "Bottom's Up, Big Jim," *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 22, 1981.

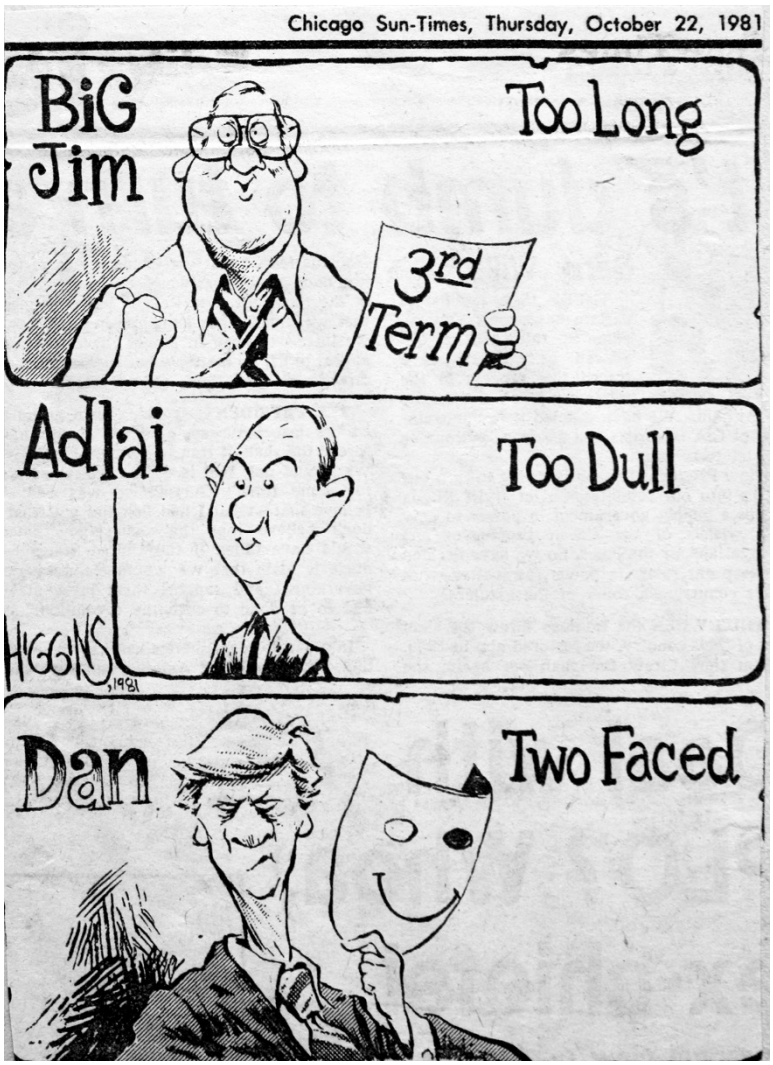
Thompson: No. Probably got me votes. Then there was a later one at Western that Adlai got all excited about, where I was accused of doing things I didn't do. You've got to remember, Western is kind of an unruly school. They have a group at Western Illinois University called the Peach Blossoms. These are all former Marines who dress in drag for football games. And they run around the stadium with a toilet plunger full of—whatever it was full of.

I was there for the homecoming. I sat on one side of the stands, then I sat on the other side of the stands, with the president of the university at my side. The group started towards us, and I said, "Who are they?" These big guys in dresses, wigs, holding the plunger came right at the president and I. So they explained to me the Peach Blossoms and their tradition at Western Illinois University. They came over, and they were just bound and determined I was going to drink, I think it was schnapps, out of this toilet plunger. And I thought to myself, Oh, no, no, no, no, no. It's one thing to be handed a beer, it's another thing to be drinking out of a toilet plunger. So I refused, and they finally went away.

I guess that was Saturday, and the next day there was a story in the papers, I think ginned up by Adlai, about how I was drinking out of a plunger offered to me by these female impersonators in the stands at Western. It was just not true. I got down early that morning and I was reading the papers, and I read this story in the paper. I thought, Oh, boy! My wife came down, and I said, "Listen, before you read this story in the paper, let me explain." (laughs) And I didn't know whether she believed me or not, since she was inclined to think that I might have done something stupid like that. But I didn't. I did a lot of stupid things, but that wasn't one of them. In my first campaign, I went to the University of Illinois, and these frat houses threw a party for me with keggers. And we had a great time. We raised money. It was a fundraiser.

DePue: That was when the drinking age was eighteen?

Thompson: Eighteen. I later had to sign the bill to raise it to twenty-one. So stupidly, I signed it at a University of Illinois football game at halftime. Oh, the boos! Oh, my God!



DePue: Governor, I want to end today with showing you an editorial cartoon from the *Chicago Sun-Times* on October twenty-second, and I'm going to let you read the caption here, because you're one of the people in the cartoon.

Thompson: Of course.

DePue: Read it aloud if you could there, for us.

Thompson: There's a picture of me, Big Jim, holding a paper that says, "Third Term," and it says, "Too long." And a picture of Adlai, and it says, "Too dull." And then a picture of Walker with a mask in front of him saying, "Two-faced." Oh, that's pretty good!

DePue: That's one of the better ones.[55] Do you think the cartoonist did you justice?

Thompson: It's not bad.

[55] Cartoon in Thompson Scrapbooks, v.8: 12/24/80–1/7/82.

DePue: What do they usually try to emphasize when they're characterizing you?

Thompson: Oh, my weight, I guess. My height.

DePue: That's probably a good place for us to stop today unless you've got any closing comments for us?

Thompson: Oh, I can't imagine.

DePue: Next time, the 1982 election.

Thompson: Won't that be exciting?

DePue: Thank you, Governor.

Thompson: Thank you.

(end of interview #12)

Interview with James Thompson

IST-A-L-2013-054.13

Interview # 13: December 18, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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

DePue: Welcome. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. And today I have the distinct pleasure of having an opportunity to interview Gov. Jim Thompson. Good morning, Governor.

Thompson: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: I have been looking forward to this interview for a long time. I don't know if you have or not.

Thompson: Well, let's see how it goes. We'll find out.

DePue: We started this project doing a series of interviews with you some time ago. We've already had twelve sessions, and we've gotten up to 1982.

Thompson: We've got to move it along, Mark. (laughs) Nineteen eighty-two after twelve sessions.

DePue: We're going to go slow today, Governor. It's all about the election of 1982.

Thompson: Wonderful.

DePue: There are some interesting stories I would hope to hear.

Thompson: Yes, there are.

DePue: The closest gubernatorial election in Illinois history, would that be correct?

Thompson: Well, modern history. If you go back to the early nineteenth century when there were fewer voters you might find a smaller margin. But in the real world, modern history, yes, the smallest—5,074—except that a hundred thousand votes were stolen in Chicago. So the *real* margin is 105,074. But it's more fun to have the 5,074, so I've got the largest margin in state history and the smallest margin in state history.

DePue: The largest would have been the '76 election?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: That illustrates one point here to start with, that you had already won two gubernatorial elections.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So this is your third that you decided to run in. I'm sure you made that decision in '81. Do you recall how you came to the conclusion that you needed to run a third time?

Thompson: I can't say that I needed to, I wanted to. Being governor of the state of Illinois—as Teddy Roosevelt told us long ago, the most American of all the states—is an extraordinary honor, an extraordinary privilege. I thought we were doing good work for the people of Illinois, and I wanted to continue.

DePue: I didn't have any campaign ads for the 1982 election, but I wanted to show a short excerpt out of one of your campaign ads from 1976; one of those things that kind of introduces you to the Illinois public, if you will.

Video: *(Thompson speaking) In four years in the U.S. attorney's office, we learned a lot about government, good and bad. We learned three things that are important to this campaign. First, where does the money come from? The public has a right to know who supports a political candidate. The public has a right to know whether anybody owns the candidate, and nobody owns Jim Thompson. That's why we're disclosing every dollar we receive every day of the campaign. Campaign promises—too many candidates make promises that they can't keep, and so my only promise is one: I'm going to do the very best job I can if the people make me their governor. Finally, we learned that good government requires good people. People who care must make government their business. That's why I'm running for governor. That's why I'm asking every Illinoisan who wants to be proud of his government to get involved in my campaign.*

(Announcer speaking) Jim Thompson, for all of Illinois. Jim Thompson for a governor and a government you can be proud of.

(Citizen speaking with candidate Thompson) "And they said, 'Jim Thompson's out on the corner.'" "That's right, he is." "I said, 'He's the first politician that I ever felt comfortable with.'" "Is that right? How come?" "Because I think you're honest." "Well, thank you."

Thompson: How about that?

DePue: So did you put her on the campaign staff after that ad?

Thompson: No, (laughs) we should have. Out of four elections, that is probably my favorite ad. Looking at that, I had more hair then; I was younger then; I was thinner then. We did this man-on-the-street out in Oak Park, hoping to show a variety of people, all of whom came up to me. I was just standing there, we were outside of a bank, and these people, passersby, came and shook my hand and chatted. We were there, gosh, most of the morning, I think. And this last lady, the one who was at the end of the commercial, she came up and said that, and I thought, Oh my God, we've struck gold. I mean, she was just extraordinary, and so natural. What a great ending, right? So we had—well, not we, I was just standing there. My staff had not gotten her consent, after she talked to me, to show her in a commercial. So for, like, a week after that, they went back and stood in front of the bank looking for her again, to get her to consent to it. And I finally said, "You know what, that's so great, we're going to do it anyway." And if she objects, she can sue us, and we'll pay." (both laugh) And she never did. We never saw her again. But that remains my favorite campaign ad. It was just great.[56]

DePue: Let's jump back up to 1981, and let's just say that there's a different view of whether or not you're going to be running for election again. And I wanted to

[56] For information on the creation of this commercial, including the shooting schedule, see Jim Thompson, interview by Mark DePue, June 12, 2014. Thompson's campaign manager Jim Fletcher called the commercial "the greatest thing that I was ever a part of in terms of creativity." Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 9, 2015.

show this political cartoon. It's a sketch of you, of Walker, and of Stevenson: "Big Jim, too long. Adlai, too dull. Dan, two-faced."

Thompson: (laughs) Who did that?

DePue: *Chicago Sun-Times*. So you probably know these cartoonists better than I do.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: We've got some MacNelly cartoons we want to show later on, but I thought that would be a good way to start this up.

Thompson: That's fine.

DePue: So, too long for you.

Thompson: You know, they didn't know what they were talking about. We did it again. (laughs)

DePue: Yeah, you were just in the middle of this whole thing. What did Jayne think about your decision?

Thompson: I think this is the election where Jayne claims that we hadn't talked about my running again, and she first heard about it when one of my cabinet members' wives called and said, "Oh, isn't this exciting, Jim is running again?" She said, "I don't know anything about that." So when I got home that night, she said, "Well, I see you're running for governor again. It would have been nice to talk about it." (laughs)

DePue: What did you think about your chances?

Thompson: I thought we'd win. I knew the challenges were greater than any that I ever faced, because the state, like the country, was in a terrible recession, the worst since the Great Depression. And as we got nearer and nearer to Election Day, (motions up) unemployment rates were going like this, interest rates were going like this, (motions down) state revenue was going like this, and it was an exceedingly challenging time. In addition, in the early part of his administration, Reagan, of course, got some of the blame for the recession. That always happens; whoever's in charge gets blamed. So he was kind of unpopular. As the campaign later developed, they were attacking me as Reagan's guy, Reagan's campaign manager, Reagan this and Reagan that, even though Reagan wasn't on the ballot. It was probably the toughest time, so I knew the election would be close. I knew it would be tough. And I decided to take the challenge and turn it around, so my campaign slogan that election was, "A tough leader for tough times." You acknowledge it, seize hold of it, and run on it, rather than letting it run you over.

DePue: You've been mentioning some of the statistics, and I think it's appropriate that we take a harder look at the statistics. This was January, '82, but that whole year was a bad year. Unemployment for the nation at 9.7 percent, 11.3 percent for Illinois.

Thompson: Yeah, horrible.

DePue: So there's certainly something Stevenson can talk about. Inflation rate of 8.4 percent. And this one I think would astound anybody today, a thirty-year loan rate of 16 percent.

Thompson: It was incredible. And the closer we got to election, the worse it got. Almost as though a great economic figure in the sky said, "Okay, it's November seventh, we're going to make sure that's the worst day of the year." It probably came close.

DePue: Here's what Stevenson had to say. He accused you of, "Presiding over an economic decline that is unprecedented for Illinois and unmatched by any other state."

Thompson: Well, I'm not sure that's completely accurate. But as I said, we're one of fifty states. We're a microcosm of the nation. Look, in the real world, let's acknowledge that recessions are governed by big macroeconomic issues. I had nothing to do with the inflation rate, sitting as governor of Illinois; I had nothing to do with the 16 percent interest rate. We're all victims of a recession, whether you're leading the state or you're a citizen who's trying to find a job or hang on to a job. It's also governed by international trends. Where are our exports? Illinois has been a big export state. Are they declining? Why are they declining? Is the rest of the country or the rest of the world in recession, and therefore they're not buying as much from us? And that all traces back to a guy on the production line in Illinois.

Truth be told, while presidents and governors get credit for good economic times simply because they're in office, and they get to claim or at least benefit from good economic times, the reverse is true. Presidents and governors get blamed for bad economic times, even though in a real sense, they have nothing to do with it. And so what you have to do, and what I tried to do, was to make sure that people were going to be protected by you as much as you could; that you cared about their jobs, you cared about their suffering.

You remember in the campaign for re-election of President Bush when Clinton was his opponent, all Clinton talked about was the economy and how it was hurting everybody in that recession. Bush could never get across the notion that he really cared about people and what they were going through, even though in what I could call that "white-collar recession" in Bush's time, it was his political base that were suffering the most. White-collar jobs were disappearing, guys who had worked and who were fifty years old all of a sudden were unemployed. The kids were coming home from college, and they couldn't get

jobs. And Clinton, that's all he talked about. It was his strength. And nothing else mattered in that election.

DePue: "It's the economy, stupid."

Thompson: "It's the economy, stupid," and that was exactly right.[57]

DePue: Let's get back to your election early in 1982. Obviously one of the first things you have to do as a governor in any year is propose a budget. I think your budget that year was $14.1 billion, which was a pretty austere budget.

Thompson: It was.

DePue: What kind of things did you see that you had to do to be able to maintain something like a balanced budget, since the revenues were cratering, quite frankly?[58]

Thompson: You had to cut spending. That's the only answer. Illinois is not the federal government. We don't print money. You might wish you could print money in the midst of a recession, but you can't. Only the Congress can print money, it seems. So what do you do? You cut spending to match what you think your revenues are going to be. That's what all states have to do. No state can print money. And when you turn to the budget, as tough as it is, you've got to first look at the places where you're spending the most money.

You know, you could close a tiny department of state government, you could close that 100 percent, and it wouldn't even begin to scratch the surface of a recessionary budget. So where do you look? Well, you look at education; education's budget is in the billions of dollars. You look at welfare, in the billions of dollars. You go to the places in the budget where your spending is right at the top, and you take that down. Does that hurt people? Absolutely. Hurts school districts; school districts would have to rely more on local property taxes, which is never popular. And welfare advocates would start beating you on the head the minute you touched the welfare budget. But that's where the money is. You have no choice.

DePue: I know the budget that you proposed was $14.1 billion; I believe the budget that eventually got signed was in the neighborhood of $15 billion. That's a fairly significant change.

Thompson: The legislature always increases budget. I've never once seen, in my time anyway, a year in which the governor proposes X and legislature comes in at

[57] During Bill Clinton's 1992 race against George H.W. Bush, Democratic strategist James Carville coined "The economy, stupid" as one of the Clinton campaign's three key messages.

[58] Early in 1981, the Bureau of the Budget projected FY1982 general revenues of $7.1 billion, net of tax relief. In reality, the state took in $6.56 billion. See "State Finance Tables" in *The Illinois Statecraft Handbook* for the Bureau of the Budget's revenue estimates for fiscal years 1978 through 1991.

minus-X. It's always plus-X when the legislature gets through spending. You've got to veto down to where you think the revenues will be; then it goes back to the legislature, and they'll either agree with you and take down the spending to your level of veto, or they'll override you and put you in a deficit position.

DePue: I want to show this one other cartoon here from early in the campaign. This is a MacNelly cartoon. He always had a way of lampooning everybody in the process.

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: It's obviously showing you're going to be—"saddled," is the wrong word, since the horse is riding you in this thing. (Thompson laughs) But that's quite a burden to bear, trying to pull the economy over the finish line to actually win this election.[59]

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Is that the way you felt about it?

Thompson: Yeah, when you get up in the morning and you read the headlines, and all the economic factors are going the wrong way, right? And the election is getting closer and closer, sure. That was a challenge. But there were ways to mitigate it. First of all, I had won two elections, and I was a known commodity in the state. Senator Stevenson had been in the Senate and had been a state representative, but nobody really knew what he was going to do or say, and how he would be as a governor. And I had been popular in two prior elections, so you've got a base. Apart from the horrible economic time, nobody was really mad at me that I could tell. So, yeah, I felt like I was carrying that economy on my back as I approached the election.

But I took some steps to show what I thought. I can recall going out to a union hall—I think it was the printer's union—and the plain fact was that 50 percent of their members were unemployed, 50 percent! I talked to the union members in the union hall, and afterwards they lined up to come talk to me. And some of them asked for autographs, and I thought, Wow, here's a guy who's without a job in the midst of this horrible recession, and he wants my autograph? Then they started handing me $5 or $10 for my campaign. And I thought, this is **amazing** that these guys—without financial resources, scrimping at home, I'm sure on unemployment insurance or union funds to feed their family—are willing

[59] Cartoon in Thompson Scrapbooks, v.9: 1/7/82–12/13/82.

to pull money out of their pocket and give it to me for my campaign, $5 or $10. You get a feeling of great humility and great gratitude then, and you just resolve to fight even harder for these people, and you're signing their union cards. So I made it pretty clear, I think, that I would do everything in my power as a governor to help mitigate the disastrous economy in Illinois. That was my campaign ethos and my campaign slogan: We were fighting.

DePue: I wonder if you can take a couple minutes and tell me about the campaign team. This is the third campaign you're running; I would assume you have some old hands, some experienced people helping.

Thompson: Yeah, Bob Kjellander was the campaign manager. Of course, all of my staff, working both on the governmental side and the political side, were working as hard as I was because they understood the dangers and the difficulties of this campaign. And then near the end, Phil O'Connor, who had been in several positions that I had appointed him to, came in and worked with Bob to end the campaign. We took an old Pat Quinn trick and used it ourselves, and that is to hold a press conference in Chicago on Sunday morning when nothing else was going on. So reporters had to show up because there was literally nothing else in town. You'd get three or four television cameras, you'd get print reporters, and whatever you announced that day—it didn't make any difference what it was—was going to be in the headlines on Monday morning. Pat Quinn, during the course of his career, made that a famous tactic of his. Now, his Sunday morning press conferences were more like attacks, which he did for thirty years before he got to be governor. And mine was announcing things that I thought would help the people of Illinois, and maybe disagreeing with Stevenson on some issue. But it worked.

DePue: You mentioned Phil O'Connor coming in. I read reports that he came onboard with the campaign about July, and that he came onboard because there were some troubles in the campaign.

Thompson: No, I don't think I would call it troubles in the campaign, I think I would call it troubles in the election. It was really tough. We wanted every voice we could have in the campaign apparatus, every idea that we could consider, to push us over the line. Phil was a new, different voice, and he was smart. And he had political instincts on what would work and what wouldn't, so adding him to the team in the middle of the summer for the November election was, I think, the right thing to do.[60]

DePue: Was David Gilbert still doing the press secretary work for you?

[60] On the 1982 campaign, see Robert Kjellander, interview by Mark DePue, February 26, 2014; David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, April 22, 2014; Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 27, 2015; Philip O'Connor, interviews by Mike Czaplicki, August 27 & September 1, 2015; Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 20, 2014, 244-249; Gene Reineke, interview by Mark DePue, December 7, 2009; Greg Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 7, 2013.

Thompson: Oh sure, yeah. Gilbert was there for a long, long time. He was my first hire in my campaign for governor.

DePue: In the ‘76 campaign?

Thompson: Yes. Dave had been the transportation editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. I don’t know how we got together, but I hired him to be the press secretary, and he was the first person I hired in the campaign. And he stayed for years and years, and is still a great friend today. Smart guy, worked hard. We really were a simpatico team, you know? So yeah, his voice was in there too.

DePue: And I’ve got to tell you, Governor, Dave Gilbert has, I think, the best Jim Thompson stories I’ve heard.

Thompson: I’m sure he does! He was everywhere, both in campaigns and in my administration. He’s seen it all.

DePue: How about the advertising firm? Did you stay with Bailey Deardourff?

Thompson: I did. I had Bailey Deardourff the whole time, all four elections.

DePue: Is that an Illinois firm?

Thompson: No, that’s a Washington-based firm. They were regarded as the best political/advertising firm in the country, and I think they were. Their success records in other elections certainly demonstrated that. They worked predominantly with Republican gubernatorial candidates; that’s their forte. And in the first campaign, ‘76, they wrote all the campaign ads. Then I started getting adventurous and started to change them just before we went on camera. So they had to take the cardboard things that we were all reading off and scratch out and write in corrections that I had done. And I think by the third campaign, I was writing my own campaign ads. (laughs)

DePue: You, personally, were writing them?

Thompson: I was, yes. And they’d hover over, and edit. So we were a good team. We really were.

DePue: How about the fundraising side? By this time, you’re experienced at the fundraising. Who was heading up that effort for you?

Thompson: A team of guys that were very successful people on the North Shore of Chicago. Campaign financial chairman was later my partner at the law firm, Winston and Strawn—he was the chairman—Tommy Reynolds. And there were maybe ten, fifteen business guys who called themselves “the Breakfast Club,” because they used to meet at the Chicago Club and have breakfast and plan the fundraising. Then we had staff people who would plan the actual fundraising dinners and the fundraising receptions, and the phone calls and all of the solicitation that’s part of

a political campaign. So you had the business types over here and the actual people doing the work of putting together an event over here. And it worked very well.[61]

DePue: The primary was in March. As I recall, you didn't have an opponent?

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And I would assume by the time the primary was happening, you pretty much know it's going to be Stevenson on the Democratic side.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Tell me about selecting your lieutenant governor, because at the beginning of the campaign, you didn't have a lieutenant governor at all.

Thompson: There were a fair number of people who wanted to be the lieutenant governor candidate.

DePue: Even with the reputation the job has?

Thompson: Yeah, sure. Everybody makes of the office what they want it to be. You're not bound by the limitations of what the constitution says your duties are, or what the statutes say your duties are. If you have a good partnership with the governor, you can do pretty much anything you want, anything the governor will let you do. I looked at all the potential candidates—legislators, people outside, my staff—and I thought, I ought to pick somebody who has got a political base that's a little different than mine. So I finally picked George Ryan, who had been Speaker of the House, who was more conservative in his views than I was, but was a very hard worker and had friends around the state. I thought George would have been a very good guy for what we, in the old days, called "balancing the ticket."

Now it doesn't seem to be the fashion anymore in politics. Rauner's election, picking Evelyn Sanguinetti—she didn't have any political base, she held local political office. But she was a woman, and I think he wanted a woman as the lieutenant governor candidate. There are all different kinds of things. Blagojevich and Quinn—that's kind of an odd combination. So I was looking for somebody who would shore me up on the conservative Republican side, even though I didn't think that we were going to be that involved in social issues, because the economy was the overriding issue of the campaign.

DePue: If you had lost the election, would Ryan have been able to hold his seat in the legislature? I would assume not.

[61] On fundraising during the Thompson administration, see Kim Blackwell Fox, interview by Mike Czaplicki, July 14, 2014.

Thompson: No, because House members have to run every two years, and he couldn't run for House member and lieutenant governor at the same time.

DePue: Did you see some obvious leadership that would assume that role in the House on the Republican side?

Thompson: One of the first things you learn is that a governor doesn't mess in the legislature's affairs, and you hope vice versa. It would have been a mistake for me, even though some governors have done it. And you could do it, but I think it's a mistake for a governor to try and influence the selection of House or Senate leaders.

DePue: In other words, that wasn't something you were concerned about.

Thompson: No. There would have been plenty of candidates lining up. I didn't think there would be a dearth of candidates.

DePue: And there certainly was.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Once you get past the primary, you get into the general election season, and that's obviously about the issues. We've already talked about the main issue being the economy, but what else was out there that was being discussed?

Thompson: You know what? I don't remember much else about what was being discussed. Well, irritating things: the Equal Rights Amendment was out there, and it was one of the most bedeviling issues that a governor could face. I was for the Equal Rights Amendment from the beginning, from 1976, no question about it. I thought, This is a matter of simple justice, even though as a lawyer I thought that kind of protection was already under the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution and the Equal Protection Clause of the Illinois Constitution, and that we didn't really need the Equal Rights Amendment to ensure that women would have equal rights. But it was an issue that a lot of women took hold of. Yes, they said they wanted to make sure that women were equal, but I think it was more of a branding issue, like the symbol of women fighting for more than equal protection from the government. They wanted equal protection in the workplace; they wanted to have an opportunity to be hired as well as men; they wanted an opportunity to be paid as well as men. None of that had anything to do with the ERA, because the ERA would have protected only against government prejudice, but it was a way for women to enlarge their presence on the political and social and economic sides. So it became very important to a lot of people. And yet, in the constitutional scheme of things, governors didn't have anything to do with it. It was simply a legislative matter. Governors didn't sign it, it didn't go across their desks. And yet, because you were sitting in the governor's chair, people just assumed you could get this done.

DePue: Let's put the ERA fight into some context here, because this is a very interesting discussion; you and I have talked about this a couple of times before. The battle started in 1972 when it was passed in the U.S. Congress.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And every year from 1972 all the way up to 1982, it had been an interesting battle—would that be the way to put it—In Illinois?

Thompson: Yeah, except that in 1982, it got really front and center.

DePue: Because that's the last year.

Thompson: So there were terrific arguments and controversies in the House and in the Senate. And of course it extended to the governor because, He's the guy in charge; he ought to be able to get this thing done. I'm faced with a Democratic legislature, yet I was assumed to be able to tell a Democratic legislature to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. In addition, it was very conservative legislature. A lot of Democrats from Chicago in 1982 were not the same as the Democrats from Chicago today. The Democrats from Chicago today would have no difficulty voting for the Equal Rights Amendment, but back in '82, the politics of Chicago were much more an ethnic politics. And in some of the ethnics, cultures of Chicago back in the eighties, the culture within the family was much different than it is today. I would have a devil of a time trying to persuade Italian legislators from Chicago to vote for this. Why? Because their wives and mothers were opposed to it. They were conservative. They came from a conservative culture. And they didn't want it. So when the representative came down to Springfield and was faced with a vote, back home his mother and his wife were on the phone and saying, "Mmmm…" Those politics wouldn't exist today, but they existed back then.

I can remember doing everything in the world to try and get this thing passed, even though a lot of the Democrats, supposedly the liberals, were opposed to it. Phil Rock, my friend, great legislative leader—he and I were great partners the whole time I was governor and he was the president of the Senate. But he was very clever. He wasn't going to put his conservative Democratic senators out on a line for ERA; he didn't want them to get the blame. He didn't want the Democratic Party to get the blame for the failure to pass it. So they held it back and held it back and held it back, and it didn't pass. And with every rebuff on the political side, the campaign for it got tougher and louder. It was not an easy summer and fall. And that election, 1982—

DePue: Well, the clock ran out in June of 1982. Once you got past June of '82, it was no longer going to pass at all.

Thompson: Yeah, but that didn't mean that people who were for it were going to suddenly drop everything and not try to punish the people who were there when it didn't get passed, including me. Before June, I mean, everyplace I went in the state of

Illinois, there would be a group of women greeting me, chanting. I'd get off the airplane, there were a group of women, "Big Jim, remember: we vote in November!" And of course, my lieutenant governor candidate, George Ryan, was against the ERA. So I got tagged with that. And in the meantime, the Democrats in both the House and the Senate were very smart. They were content to sit there, not vote for it, not pass it, but to let me take the blame, even though under the Constitution, I had nothing to do with it.

So it was a devil of an issue, really. I mean, I ended up with the wife of one of my cabinet members joining the group picketing the mansion.[62] Now, it doesn't get much closer to home than that, right? (DePue laughs) My daughter, four years old, was out on the mansion grounds, and she saw these picketers marching around the whole block. And she walked over to the fence and said to them, "You get out of here! You're bothering my daddy!" (both laugh) That's how close to home it got.

DePue: I want to remind you of a couple of the most incendiary incidents that had happened in that particular year. Leading up to that June deadline, there was a hunger strike that some of the women started. Then a couple of weeks before the deadline, a group of women, the Grassroots Group of Second Class Citizens, decided that they were going to chain themselves to the railing outside the Senate chamber. Recall that incident?[63]

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: Let me throw in one more, and then I'll let you comment on both of them. It finally went down to defeat in kind of a whimper, because as you mentioned, Senator Rock saw that it didn't even have the votes in the committee hearings; so it never even made it out of committee in the Senate, and that was the end of it.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And after that occurred, the same group of women got some pig's blood, put it in ketchup bottles and sprayed your name, and I think George Ryan's name, in pig's blood on the floor of the Capitol.

Thompson: And they were throwing blood on the doors of my office. But before that time, as the campaign of some of the fringe groups in support of the amendment got more—I won't say violent, but tougher, rowdier, then the tables turned. When they threw blood on the glass doors in my office, public opinion in Illinois started to shift. And that lifted some of the political onus on me. In politics, when you go too far, usually the issue reverses. People didn't like the idea of throwing blood on

[62] Probably Linda Miller, who was president of Illinois NOW in 1982 and married to Thompson's director of public aid. She later served as coordinator of the Thompson administration's award-winning program to reduce teen pregnancy, Parents Too Soon. Jeffrey Miller, interview by Mike Czaplicki, June 15, 2015.
[63] On ERA, see the Illinois Statecraft series, ERA Fight in Illinois, https://www.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/oralhistory/illinoisstatecraft/era/Pages/default.aspx.

the door of the governor's office, or chaining yourself to the rails in the Capitol Building. And from that day forward, we could tell by polls and by what we were hearing on the street that the tide had turned, and it was not going to be a significant issue in November because they went too far.

DePue: Going back to some of the other issues I saw in the newspaper clippings, Reagan's new federalism was something that was discussed early in the campaign, not so much later on.

Thompson: Reagan's new federalism, I thought, was finally the culmination of a movement that had begun somewhat earlier, even back to Nixon's time. For years and years and years, states were like a litter of piglets feeding off the mother. Everybody in politics assumed that it was the obligation of the federal government to transfer its wealth in one way or another to the states, whether it was in state grants, or transfers of funds for various programs that the federal government thought the states ought to be doing. The states, of course, were the beneficiaries of all this largess, and they thought it was wonderful, and they kept thinking of ways to get more.

And then it became apparent, I think, to a lot of us that this was not a situation where the federal government's money had no end. You know, the federal government was having revenue problems like the states were. I can remember back in Nixon's time visiting the White House with other governors, when he announced that they were going to have revenue-sharing; there was a program back at that time where X amount of dollars from the federal budget went to the states for whatever they wanted, revenue-sharing. And he announced in this meeting that they were going to end it. All the governors came out of the White House—we were standing on the lawn, in the driveway, and press was running around interviewing us—and a reporter came up to me and said, "Don't you think this is terrible that the president is going to end revenue-sharing with the states?" I said, "They don't have any revenue to share. And if they don't have any revenue to share, of course it's going to end. States are going to have to become more independent and self-sufficient, and raise their own revenue."

I think that feeling just got sort of a momentum to it, and as the political process went along, everybody realized that there would have to be new principles that governed the relationship between the federal government and the states. It was not going to be a matter anymore of the eight piglets sucking on the sow. Those days were over.

DePue: Finding different revenue sources to try to prevent the state from going into debt too much is going to be part of it. Now up to this point, from what I have seen, you didn't have any tax increases at all.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: But I know that there was discussion by you early on about the possibility of raising liquor taxes. And later in the campaign, the possibility of raising gas taxes to support the infrastructure.

Thompson: Yeah, there was some discussion of that in the '82 period, but most of that came after the election, in the '83 period, when I made a significant attempt to increase gas taxes, not for the purposes of supporting the state budget, but for the purpose for which they were intended—fixing the roads and building new ones. The gas tax is such a trap, it really is. First of all, people at the gas pump don't know what percentage of what they're paying per gallon is the cost of the gas, what percentage is the gas tax, what percentage is the local tax. But politicians just get afraid of it, so the years go by without a gas tax. And what's happening is that you've got more and more cars on the road, and the roads are being torn up at a greater rate. But the mileage for cars improves every year, so people buy less gas, and you get less tax to try and keep up a growing road system.

DePue: In a time of high inflation.

Thompson: In a time of high inflation, yeah. (laughs) So every once in a while, governors will raise their voice, "Hey, we've got to increase the gas tax." And then of course all the political criticism descends, and the editorials in the newspapers, and you would have thought you were taking away their first-born child. Honestly, it just… But you've got to do it. But it was not for the purpose of sustaining the state budget.

DePue: At this early stage of the campaign, into the early summer timeframe, what was the opinion that you and the campaign had about your opponent, Adlai Stevenson III? And how did you want to portray him?

Thompson: I think the question makes it sound bigger than it was. Look, the dominant theme of the campaign was terrible economic times and what I was doing to try and help people in these terrible economic times. Adlai was irrelevant to that, okay, because he wasn't in a position to help anybody. He could talk about what he would do, but he wasn't in charge. And I had always thought that Stevenson's personality didn't quite fit what people would expect of a governor. He always seemed to be above it all. You never saw Adlai campaign in the way that I campaigned, up close and personal. And I thought that his campaign strategy of attack, attack, attack wasn't going to be of much comfort to voters.

I think it was in this campaign that we released the only what I would call "negative attack" on Stevenson, even though all I did was quote him. He left the Senate; he said he was bored. And I'm thinking, How can you be bored in the United States Senate? We looked at his record; he passed two pieces of legislation in the time he was there, one of which benefitted him, a tax bill. And he came home to run for governor. I thought, Well, there's the makings of a commercial, you would think. So that's what we said in the commercial: he was a United States senator; he passed two bills, one of which benefitted him; and then he

announced he was bored, and came home. That's not going to advance a gubernatorial campaign very far, I wouldn't think. So I don't think we put a lot of focus on Adlai as a candidate or a campaigner. All of our focus was on me as a governor and a candidate. I think that was basically the root of the business.[64]

DePue: By this time in your career, you already had a reputation of being a great campaigner; superb on the road, very personable, meeting the public. Did you continue with that same approach that you'd taken in earlier campaigns?

Thompson: Sure. Absolutely. In fact, I probably doubled and tripled it. Most of the campaigning these days is television commercials. In fact, it's so predominant and prevalent, it's obnoxious. And mean, and twisted. Look at the campaign we just went through for governor. Probably the meanest, nastiest gubernatorial campaign I have ever witnessed, on both sides. So people in politics today are afraid to say anything, because somebody's out there with a recorder and you know that ten seconds after you leave the meeting, it'll be on YouTube and then it'll go to the mainstream media. Or it'll go to a blog and then go to mainstream media, and it'll be all over the place. And they'll take a vote in the legislature and twist it. If I was a legislative candidate in Illinois today, during an election, I wouldn't recognize myself. That's how bad it is. I would not recognize myself as the person who did and said these things.

We've gotten away from what I would call "retail campaigning" on the street, in businesses, on people's front porches. And the excuse is, "That doesn't touch enough people. That's too time-consuming." That's why we see all these television commercials, so the candidate can sit back or make token appearances, ride in a car in a parade on the Fourth of July or Labor Day, speak every once in a while and hope that people listen to the speech.

But they're forgetting something, I think. The reason that retail campaigning—meeting people and talking to them, expressing yourself and listening to their concerns—works is twofold. One, at least in the latter stage in the campaign when the press may be covering you, they'll see that interaction between the candidate and the voter, and they'll write about it. That's a small part of it. The press itself will, sometimes, have more respect for the candidate when they see that interaction, and so subsequent stories will be kinder.

But the real benefit of it is, people talk. It's what I call the "jungle drum theory of politics." If people have met a candidate for governor, they'll tell their family, they'll tell their neighbors, neighbors will tell neighbors, and the word spreads. And the word that is spreading is not so much what was said, not so much having to do with any issue, but the fact that somebody who is the governor took the time to have this interaction with a citizen. And he must be a pretty nice

[64] In late spring or early summer of 1982, Thompson's campaign consultants wrote "putting an emphasis on portraying the record and depicting the Governor's leadership style in building that record allows the campaign to focus or refocus on the substantive matters of this election. It is in this arena where the campaign battle should be waged." Bailey Deardourff, "Jim Thompson for Governor 1982," n.d., 15.

guy, right? Let me tell you, being thought of as a pretty nice guy is the first step on the road to a successful election. You don't get elected when your personality is a negative one.

So I spent a lot of time in parades; I wouldn't ride in the car, I'd walk. I'd bound up to the curb to shake hands. If it was a small town parade and they were watching from their porch, I'd run up to people's porches. Sometimes they'd offer me a beer. It was fun for me. That's the kind of campaigner I am. But it said a lot about who I was as a person, and people talked about that.

For example, for a long time when I was governor, Jim Skilbeck—who was my chief advance man and a very smart political personality—and I would decide we're going to go to a small town somewhere in Illinois. We'd get on the plane or the helicopter, and we'd just drop in. We'd land close to the main street of the town, and we'd start walking down the main street of the town, in and out of offices. And the word starts to spread ahead of you, "The governor's here, the governor's here, the governor's here!" Sometimes the county chairman would get mad you didn't tell him you were coming; county chairmen are like that. And I understand that, they don't want to appear insignificant or irrelevant. But doing that spread the word across the state that Jim Thompson cares about people who live in small towns. How do we know that? Well, because he just showed up in Pinckneyville the other day and was walking down the street talking to people. You know, that goes a long way, I think. And a lot of times, candidates and campaign managers and other people involved in the electoral process don't think about stuff like that. But it's a very human thing. It's important.

DePue: Governor, we're getting close to a point where we need to take a break, and this is probably a good place to stop. But we're just getting into the heated part of the campaign for the next session. (Thompson laughs)

(pause in recording)

DePue: We're back after a very brief break. We were talking about the campaign and your distinctive campaign style, and how you like that retail politics. Part of that retail politics was reaching out to the labor unions and the labor vote. Explain your rationale for that, and how successful were you in that attempt? Because this is typically Democratic turf you're going after.

Thompson: Right. If you've got any sense at all, you understand that in this state, there are Republicans, there are Democrats, and there are independents. And while you know as a Republican candidate that most of your votes are going to come from the Republican side, sometimes that's not enough to win. So you make every attempt to get the independent vote and some of the Democratic vote, and there are a couple of reasons for that. One, you want all the votes you can get. Two, when you go obviously after Democrats or go after labor votes, what it says is that if you're elected governor, you're going to be fair to all of the people of Illinois, even though some of them may not have voted for you—or maybe an awful lot

didn't vote for you. And that's very important, I think. People have to know that despite the challenges of a political campaign, when the election's over, you're going to be the governor of all the people. Democrats and independents and others are entitled to the same treatment by you, as a governor, that members of your party would be. It's a very strong two-reason interest to do it.

Secondly, if you get Democratic votes, you're taking them away from your Democratic opponent, and you're adding to his weakness. Labor not only provides votes in the state of Illinois, they're very influential in the campaigns. I mean, they marshal their forces, they get their members to the polls, and they contribute; labor unions in Illinois spend large sums of money in a campaign. And there's no rule that says only the Democrats can get the money.

So in my very first campaign, '76, I went after the labor vote. And the first labor leader to endorse me was a great guy, a Teamster official in Chicago, Louis Pike. He had Local 705 in Chicago. He endorsed me, even though the popular perception was: Here's an ex-prosecutor, and a Republican at that. Why would a Teamster official, who've had their problems with prosecutors, be endorsing him? So that became an issue. Louis said, "Hey, I'm endorsing him because I think he's the best candidate for governor," and he never asked me for anything.[65] And as he came into the campaign, others started to come into the campaign because now they had cover. So I got some labor support in the first campaign, some money. But I got an awful lot of votes, because if you look at the voting in the '76 election, there were a hell of a lot of Democrats who voted for me; Republicans did, independents did, and a big chunk of the Democratic Party voted for me, which had to include union members, right?

In the second campaign, in '78, we got even more aggressive, got more endorsements. In the third campaign, '82, I thought it was going to be important to deprive Stevenson of traditional Democratic support, including labor. Adlai's relationships with unions were tenuous at best, from what we heard. And more and more labor leaders were endorsing me.

DePue: To include the public sector unions?

Thompson: To include the public sector unions, and the teachers. In '82, I came within one vote in the state convention of the AFL-CIO of getting their endorsement, or what we called the "COPE endorsement," the Committee on Political Education of the AFL-CIO, about the tightest Democratic group you could imagine. And I lost that endorsement by one vote. But you know what? I got all the money, and I got all the votes.

DePue: How did you get the money if you'd lost that vote?

[65] On Pike and unions, see David Gilbert, interviews by Mark DePue, March 27 & April 22, 2014; Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 24, 2015.

Thompson: Because the endorsement vote didn't mean that they couldn't contribute to you, the locals or the independent state unions. The carpenters or the plumbers or the building trades could support me financially and endorse me even though their super group, the committee of the state AFL-CIO, didn't. And in '86, I got that endorsement. I was one of two Republican governors in the country to get the endorsement of the AFL-CIO, the other was Tom Kean of New Jersey. And it was, to me, a big deal just to say I had it, even though I already had the money and the votes and the endorsement of the constituent unions; it was like the Good Housekeeping seal, even though it didn't bring me anything additional.

DePue: You mentioned earlier that George Ryan was an opponent to ERA, and he's now your lieutenant governor candidate. He also was a proponent, as I understand, for the right-to-work, which is—

Thompson: Well, he really wasn't a proponent of right-to-work. Everybody assumed he was, but he really wasn't. But he had been the Speaker of the House when the proposal came up. George let the bill get out of committee and onto the House floor as a nod to his more conservative members; he was doing it for them, not doing it for the bill itself, because he knew it wouldn't pass. I told him it wouldn't pass. And I said, "If it passes, I'll veto it."

DePue: Did you say that in public as well?

Thompson: Oh, yeah. On the day the bill was up, fifteen thousand union members, organized by the Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, came to Springfield, rallied in front of the Capitol. Huge crowd. And I went out to address them. I said, "We are not going to be a right-to-work state. If this bill passes, I'll veto it. We are not doing anything in this state to deprive union members of their right to organize and support candidates and participate in the electoral life of Illinois." And you've got to remember, before this time, I brought labor into my administration. I made business guys sit down with labor to solve problems. I'd bring people to the mansion, business groups and labor groups, and I'd say, "We have to do something about worker's compensation in Illinois. We have to do something about unemployment compensation in Illinois." For years, no reform would pass unless it was an agreed bill. But I made them sit together. I took the union leaders on trade missions, along with business guys, and Republican legislators.

We were in Germany during a trade mission, and it was Oktoberfest. As part of the trip, we visited a beer hall. And here was Pate Phillip, the Republican leader in the Senate, and Bob Healey, the head of the AFL-CIO, together in the beer hall, drinking. Well, let me tell you, when they came back from a trip like that, it was far easier to get them to sit down and get things done. I treated labor as an equal partner in my administration, along with business.

So when I went to labor unions and asked them for help, votes and money, it wasn't a cold call, it was a warm call because we had been partners in government and partners in advancing the economy of Illinois; I wasn't a

stranger. I ended up—certainly by '82, certainly by '86—with the majority of the union vote, a great majority of the union money, and friendly relationships. And I thought that was really important.

DePue: Another change in direction here for you. You'd been in office for six years by the time you're running for re-election in 1982. Things happen, and there are some allegations about scandals or incidents that occurred. And I hope that this sounds familiar: accepting gifts from potential donors, flights and cash, 38 to 40 percent discounts when you're purchasing antiques. And Governor, we know you like your antiques. Here was a curious one: You're taking campaign funds and using that to buy people gifts and to pay your babysitter expenses.

Thompson: Yeah, what's scandalous about that? (DePue laughs) If Jayne and I—and she was an active participant in all of my campaigns—were going to a political function and had to leave our daughter with a babysitter, why isn't that a legitimate campaign expense? But for the campaign event, we would have been at home and there would have been no babysitter. I mean, if that's the most they've got, that's okay. This is just nutty stuff.

DePue: Was any of it in the neighborhood of violating specific laws?

Thompson: No. And I kept an open book of every gift that I ever received as governor. Where do you think they got all that information? From the book. If that's not transparency, if that didn't allow people to judge me, I don't know what would. Some Democratic politicians started that business about gifts to the governor. And of course the press liked it; they always like stuff like that. So it was in the headlines for a while.

I was visiting a grade school class down in southwestern Illinois. And at the end of the visit, the kid comes up with a stool that they had built and decorated with my name on it, which I still have. I said to the teacher, "I don't know about that, I'm not supposed to accept gifts." This is **crazy**, you know? Here's a class of grade schoolers who had built this thing and looked forward to their meeting with the governor, and decorated it. It was just a little wooden stool. Am I not supposed to accept that? What kind of state are we living in? It's just goofy.

DePue: How about some of the things like accepting plane tickets, because that does sound more like buying influence.

Thompson: First of all, in my first campaign, when I didn't have the Illinois Air Force (DePue laughs), it was very important to be able to have friends who had planes and let you use them to get around the state of Illinois. It's a huge state. You can't drive everywhere, you can't take a train everywhere; this is not the 1940s or the 1950s. And you're expected to be everywhere in the state of Illinois when you campaign, just like you're expected to be everywhere in the state of Illinois when you're governor. Plane trips were campaign donations, in-kind donations, that were

perfectly legitimate and reported on. No difference between that and cash, which most campaign contributions were.

And the plane trips they were talking about were, Illinois went to the Rose Bowl. One of the few times ever, right? So of course a delegation of Illinois politicians flew out there with guys from the business community who had planes. And of course we got our head handed to us in the Rose Bowl; it was sort of embarrassing.[66] Speaker Madigan and I were sitting together and Samantha was sitting with us, and as the score got worse against Illinois, Samantha started covering her face like this and kept saying, "Is it over yet? Is it over yet?" I was talking to Mike and said, "You know, she's got a point, is it over yet?" Oh, boy! But that's the kind of thing you're talking about. Every governor does that. Jim Edgar would fly off to the Kentucky Derby with people who had planes. If you can be corrupted or influenced by a plane ride, you've got no business being in government. I mean, it's stupid, it's silly. It doesn't happen that you would be influenced by something like that.

DePue: You mentioned Jayne. Was she helping on the campaign trail this time around?

Thompson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: And did you take Samantha with you as well?

Thompson: Yeah, absolutely. Jayne had been active in my campaigns from the beginning, from 1976 on. In fact, in '76, Jayne cut a commercial aimed at the Hispanic voters of Chicago, and she did the commercial in Spanish, which she's fluent in. It was one of the hit commercials of the campaign; candidate's wife speaking out for him to the Hispanic community, in Spanish. And it's been copied since that time. She's always been active in all of my campaigns. She's a fine campaigner; people like her.

Samantha, who I think went to her first political event when she was just weeks old, turned out to be an extraordinary campaigner. I mean, who can resist the appeal of a little kid saying, "Vote for my daddy!" (DePue laughs) Samantha loved to take a roll of stickers and walk the sides of the street in the campaigns, and peel off a sticker and put it on people.[67] Didn't even have to ask for them! She had the stickers, and she had them on them, and kept going. Skilbeck would sometimes give her the bullhorn. Skilbeck, would precede me in a parade and announce, "The governor of the state of Illinois! Let's have a big Carbondale welcome to the governor of the state of Illinois, Jim Thompson!" Well, sometimes he would let Samantha do that. And you'd hear this little voice saying, "Let's have a big Rockford welcome to my dad, the governor of the state of Illinois! Here he comes!" And people *adored* her. She was a hit.

[66] Illinois returned to the Rose Bowl in 1984 for the first time in twenty years. UCLA won the game, 45–9.
[67] Samantha Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014.

DePue: Since we're talking about Samantha, let me read a Mike Royko column on April first, April Fools' Day. "If Governor Thompson is serious about his political career, he should probably put his little daughter, Samantha, up for adoption. Many people accuse Thompson of showing off the child in order to try to win the sizeable baby-lover vote."

Thompson: (laughs) There's a baby-lover vote? I didn't realize that. I missed my calling!

DePue: "And the criticism reached its crest when *Chicago Tribune* printed an editorial sternly reprimanding the Thompsons for taking the baby to the governor's inaugural ceremony, which was held outdoors. Last Sunday the *Tribune* did a front page expose on how the Thompsons used campaign money for gifts, babysitters. I'm telling you, that Samantha's nothing but trouble! And if they don't get rid of her, she'll cause even more trouble. Why, she's already becoming a campaign issue." And this is how he concludes this column, "Stevenson immediately grabbed a chance to say that the babysitting spending should be investigated. That's easy for Adlai to say; he never used *his* campaign funds for babysitters. That's because Adlai's family isn't at all afraid to leave him home alone." (Thompson laughs) I don't know if you want to respond to that or not, Governor.

Thompson: Royko was a dear friend of mine and always supportive when I was attacked by somebody, but he was a gifted comedy writer when he wanted to be. And what he's saying is, it shows you how silly some of these issues are. Can you imagine? Here's a family of four in the state of Illinois, and they have things on their mind: They want to make sure the breadwinner of the family, whether it's the husband or the wife, keeps and does a good job, supports the family economically; they want to make sure their kids are taken care of, and they're saving for college; they want to make sure they have good relations with their family and their neighbors; they want a nice house—this is what's on their minds. Do you think they are at all interested in the issue of whether the governor used campaign funds to pay for a babysitter so that he and his wife could go to a political event? When you don't have any other issues and you're jumping on stuff like that, it's the wrong thing to do politically. It's the wrong thing to do.

DePue: Now we're going to get into the heat of the campaign and start talking about the debates. And the first thing that has to be decided is some kind of negotiating between the two teams about how many debates, and where they're going to be. What was the thought about having debates with Stevenson? Would that be a plus or a minus when you were beginning the negotiating process?

Thompson: I like debates. I looked forward to the debates. It gave me a chance personally to say who I was and what I was for, what I had done, and what I wanted to do. Yeah, it came with questions, and yeah, it came with responses by your opponent. And it gave him a chance to attack you face-to-face. But all that aside, I like debates, and I never was afraid to appear in debates.

DePue: Isn't that essentially what a prosecuting attorney does?

Thompson: Yeah! That's an argument to a jury. That's what debates are. So there was never any hesitation on my part to agree to debates, any place, any time.

DePue: The campaign ended up having four debates. The first was in Peoria on September first, and the press basically thought that Stevenson came out on top of that particular debate. But you came out swinging pretty hard afterwards, claiming that Stevenson had lied in that debate. You had five pages of facts to refute the four specific lies that the Stevenson campaign had made in that particular debate. Do you recall any of that?

Thompson: Yeah, I recall that. I don't recall what the lies were, but… (laughs)

DePue: I can help you a little bit, if you don't mind.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: The unemployment rate for Illinois rose faster in the last five years than all other states; that was one of the things you challenged. The state government debt has been rising twice as fast as the federal government debt. Twenty-one thousand businesses had failed in the last year, but you had U.S. District Court records that said 2,600, not 21,000. Now the campaign is heating up a little but, let's put it that way.

Thompson: Yeah. Look, if your opponent says something that you believe is not true, you answer it. You don't take that. You answer it. And we answered it with what we thought were facts; we put them on paper, we handed them out to the press. But you know what? As important as economic issues were in that campaign—and they were vital—people want to know what you're trying to do about it within the limits of the power of the governor's office. People know that you're not responsible for rising unemployment rates, when rising unemployment rates are happening all over the country. They're smarter than that. They want to know what you're trying to do about it in Illinois. So yeah, nobody likes to hear untrue facts uttered in a debate, and sure, you answer them. But they're not the life or death of a campaign. What you're doing is the life or death of the campaign.

DePue: This is about the time that one of these incidents occurs that kind of takes a life of its own, and it's something I know you remember. It was this whole discussion about whether or not Adlai was a wimp.

Thompson: That was one of the high points of the campaign as it turned out. It was great, just great!

DePue: How did it happen in the first place?

Thompson: I'll tell you how it happened. We were both marching in a parade in Chicago; it might have been the Labor Day parade, I'm not sure. Not together of course, he's

at a different point in the parade than I am. But I'm watching him. He had come to this parade in a raincoat and a hat, and he was carrying a briefcase. And I thought, That's sort of strange. He was walking along the side of the curb, and he was not really participating in the parade, the mass of the parade. And he was not waving to the voters, or talking to voters. Basil Talbott, who was a *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter, was walking next to him, and Basil was conducting an interview as Adlai marched down the street, completely ignoring the rest of the parade and completely ignoring all the spectators who were gathered on the curb. I thought, That's the most remarkable thing I've ever seen in a parade. Then he got to the end of the parade and he disappeared!

It wasn't until the next day, when Basil printed his story, that we found out some of the things they were talking about. First of all, the notion that you would conduct an interview while you were marching in a parade is just crazy. Reporters can wait; I mean, you're there for the people, and you're there to participate with everybody else in the parade. So he was complaining about me, complaining about the campaign, and says to Basil—and I forget what the issue was—"Thompson's trying to make me appear as some sort of a wimp." He was all agitated.

And you can see in some of the interviews he's done for this oral history that he was just beside himself that nobody was paying attention to the fact that he had been a tank commander, by god! When all this controversy arose, he wanted to run a commercial talking about that, and his campaign manager wouldn't let him. Well, that's strange. First of all, you're the candidate; you can tell the campaign manager what he's going to do or not do. Adlai always claimed to be in charge of his own campaigns, by god, and he wouldn't ask for campaign contributions because that would make him bought and sold. So the notion that his campaign manager wouldn't even let him respond to this is sort of crazy.

Basil prints his story. And of course, the press loves this stuff. I'm doing a drug-bill signing that morning at a school on the West Side of Chicago, and we had seen this story before we got to the scene of the school. I'm talking to Skilbeck and I'm talking to Gilbert, and we know I'm going to get asked about this, because the allegation by Stevenson was, *I* was trying to make him appear as some sort of wimp. Now, the word "wimp" had never, ever left my mouth. I never called him a wimp, I never implied he was a wimp—nothing. But we knew the press would ask.

So we determined that no matter what they asked, I was not going to call him a wimp; he had called himself a wimp. And if I kept my mouth shut, the story would keep going. If I got into it and said, "Well, he is," or whatever, it would end. No matter what they asked me, I wasn't going to rise to the bait. Of course, the questions they asked me had me responding by saying, "I didn't call him a wimp. I don't think he's a wimp." I must have used the word "wimp" fourteen times answering their questions, but not as an accusation on my part. And as I predicted, the story kept going, and then there were the cartoons.

DePue: And we see a cartoon right here, "Adlai III, go for it!" And here he is, dressed up with his boxing gloves, and he's about ready to go up to the Big Gym.[68]

Thompson: That was probably the kindest of the cartoons, out of all that were shown. The press had a field day with this "wimp" thing, and of course, it didn't help Adlai. It was like the one time they were asking him about his campaign day and what he did, and he said, "Well, there were no good places in the Loop to eat." That's why he went to the Arts Club, or some exclusive club, because there were no places in downtown to eat.[69] We looked at that and said, "Oh, oh, this is too good to pass up." So whenever we would eat downtown, we'd leave a place at the table for Adlai; we'd put a little sign on the table that said, "Adlai," and of course, there was the empty chair.

DePue: I would like to play an excerpt (Thompson laughs) out of the interview I had with Senator Stevenson.

Thompson: Oh, I'm sure.

[68] Cartoon in Thompson Scrapbooks, v.9: 1/7/82–12/13/82.

[69] Thompson is referring to controversy over Stevenson's membership in the Cliff Dweller's Club, a private club that banned women from membership. Stevenson defended his membership because "it's very hard for me to find a place to have lunch" and the club was convenient. Thompson had faced the same issue in his 1976 race and quit the male-only clubs. Sharon Cohen, "Club Membership Now an Issue in Tight Race," *Belleville News-Democrat*, August 18, 1982.

DePue: This is what I think you were referring to, talking about a wimp or a tough guy? And we just get to listen to this one.

Stevenson: *So ironic. He was a tough man for tough times.*

DePue: *You say that ironically; that was his slogan, right?*

Stevenson: *That was his. I'll never forgive one of my campaign consultants, managers, because I was being portrayed as a wimp, and he was a tough man for tough times. And I insisted that this guy use some of our limited television to portray me for what I was, a Marine Corps veteran of Korea who had volunteered for combat in Korea and served there as a tank platoon commander. And they never ran that. Thompson even cut into veterans' organizations; he pleaded 4F—asthma. That never came across. And to this day I've asked other consultants, why, running against a draft dodger, did my consultant refuse to depict me and my tank? I still don't know the answer."*[70]

Thompson: First of all, you remember what happened to Dukakis and his tank?[71] Secondly, the notion that a candidate for governor couldn't persuade his campaign manager to answer the wimp thing with a tank ad is just *bizarre*. And if that was Adlai's nature, he wasn't the candidate for governor of Illinois, let me tell you, because many more tough problems than that face the governor than persuading your own campaign manager to answer what he thought was an attack. I didn't plead 4F, the army doctors determined I was 4F. And he never said during the campaign that I was a draft dodger; he's waited thirty-two years to say that. He said it in your interviews four times, but he didn't say it in '82 and he didn't say it in '86. So I think that gives you some kind of indication of what kind of guy he is.

DePue: That leads us right into the second debate. What I wanted to do here is show excerpts out of the two opening statements, and let you first respond to Stevenson's and then we can take a look at your opening statements. So here's Senator Stevenson's opening statement in the second debate.

Stevenson: *The state of Illinois has some very curious priorities. Why must the state of Illinois maintain one of the largest air forces in the world? Eighteen airplanes just for the transportation of politicians. The airspace over Illinois is filled with flying politicians. (both laugh) Why must the governor have a $2 million helicopter? This is where we are number one in Illinois. There is no state, no state, I mean literally no state that spends so much money on the perquisites of its politicians—led, above all others, by the governor—than Illinois, and then short-changes such criticalities, such really high priorities, as education and also research; research which ultimately produces some 80 percent of all the new*

[70] Adlai Stevenson, interview by Mark DePue, August 5, 2014.

[71] During the 1988 presidential campaign, Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis attempted to convey his ability to serve as commander-in-chief by taking a ride in an Abrams battle tank. Instead, the press panned the event; the photo of Dukakis in civilian clothes and a large helmet, dwarfed by the tank, was widely ridiculed and became effective campaign fodder for his opponent, George H.W. Bush.

growth and all of the new jobs, all of the wealth in this country; research which increasingly is being conducted in Japan and in other countries, which understand those priorities better than does the Thompson administration.

DePue: That clip is actually from the third debate that you had. But we're going to go ahead and play your response to that as well.

Thompson: Sure.

Thompson: *Stevenson, the point I was trying to make was that but for this administration, there wouldn't even be the $35 million in agricultural research, and veterinary medicine, and the Food for Century Three program that we began. The other point I was trying to make was that even agricultural research, as important as it is, can't have every single dollar that it wants. A good governor, a tough governor, especially a governor who's trying to get his state through hard times and not just make promises to win election, has to know when to say no. And governors and other political office holders in this state have been using state aircraft to get around this state and visit the people for a long, long time. Your father did when he was governor. Nobody criticized him. He used to ride in the cockpit of the plane! It's important, Mr. Stevenson, that governors come to southern Illinois, and Rockford and Decatur and Peoria, as well as Chicago and Springfield. Your*
Senate president, Mr. Rock, offered the amendment that bought the helicopter. And I don't think he's sorry.

DePue: Anything to add from the comments you made there in terms of the response?

Thompson: It was a silly thing to say on Stevenson's part, because it's the kind of thing that he would say to titillate the press. I don't think on the mind of the voters of Illinois was the issue of, do we have too many airplanes? Is the governor flying around too much? Is the fact that we have state airplanes taking away from vital areas of the budget? The cost of the airplanes and the helicopter were miniscule when compared to the costs of education or the costs of Medicaid or the costs of research and development. You couldn't even find it in the budget. And we are, as I said, a big, big state. I mean, we go from the northern state line and up near Rockford down to Cairo, Illinois, which is closer to Mississippi than it is to Chicago. We're a big, wide state. People expect to see the governor; people expect to be able to talk to the governor in their hometowns. And the notion that you would be confined to driving around in a car in a state the size of Illinois and be able to do four or five or six events a day is ludicrous. Those were the eighties, not the forties. And as I said, his father flew around in the state planes, up in the cockpit with the pilots. I didn't hear Adlai complain about that as his father was doing it; no, he had to wait for a gubernatorial campaign. The whole thing is silly.

The state had a number of small helicopters, Bell Jet Rangers. They were medical helicopters. They airlifted patients from scenes of accidents and shootings, and other things where life was at stake, to bring them to the hospital.

Once in a while I would use those when they were not being used for medical purposes. But the instruction to the pilot was, if you get a call to go to the scene of an accident, or to pick up a medical patient and take him to the hospital, you put the governor down. Wherever you are. It might be the middle of a cornfield. You put him down, because the patient comes first. I was a secondary user of the aircrafts.

I can recall a time when I thought we were able to persuade a Wisconsin factory to move across the state lines to Illinois, so I hopped in the helicopter and flew up there, landed on the grounds of the Wisconsin factory, went in to see the CEO, made my pitch. The governor of Wisconsin, Tommy Thompson, was so upset by that, he went to his legislature and asked for a helicopter! (DePue laughs) And they gave it to him. People don't care about that stuff. The press might think they care about that stuff, so they'll run the story for a day or two. Opposition politicians like Stevenson might think that this is a good way to get the governor. I answered it; you know, people don't care about that.

DePue: What I'm hoping we can find next are the video excerpts we have from the second debate. This is the introduction for Stevenson, talking about his priorities.

Stevenson: *Thank you, Mrs. Schiller. Governor Thompson and friends (crowd laughs)—well, you are friends. With documented reasons, I have expressed my belief that Illinois' economy has declined in five years faster than in any other state. It is pointless to quarrel, we all agree that Illinois is in serious trouble. Our disagreement is over where we go from here. More baling wire, more deals, more politics as usual won't do. It pains me, then, to have my fifth campaign debased. It pains me more to envision a future for Illinois blighted by its politics. Illinois is going through a second industrial revolution; that is the central fact we must face. The McCormick reaper and the John Deere plow revolutionized agriculture, and helped Illinois establish its industrial base. Illinois won the first industrial revolution. But where are the builders and the doers from our past? The McCormick reapers of our future? We are losing PhDs in commerce and engineering. We are losing our capital. We are losing jobs in the industries from our past, and we are not gaining jobs in the industries of the future. Our share of employment in high technology is shrinking faster than in all of the other states. We are losing to states that are on the move. Illinois already has more than four hundred thousand workers displaced by technology, or the decline of mature industries. For them it is endless welfare. Already one out of ten people in Illinois are on welfare. These are not statistics, these are living, breathing human beings; they laugh, they cry. Sooner or later some turn up as crime statistics.*

DePue: He continues for a couple more minutes there, Governor. We're going to show your opening statement as well, but maybe if I can get your thoughts about just the optics of this particular presentation by Stevenson?

Thompson: Hey, what he said was largely true. And it was something that I had been acknowledging all during my campaign. I wasn't disputing that. Yeah, at one

time, we were leaders in the invention of farm implements—the reaper, the plow. Illinois was known for that. But we're still doing that. I wonder if he had ever heard of John Deere or Caterpillar, who are making the modern versions of the machinery that he was talking about from the McCormicks. It's a failure on his part to recognize that Illinois had changed. Every state had changed. We were in service industries, which were starting to replace the manufacturing activities and the agricultural activities of the prior century; and we're still doing that in Illinois, as they were in every other state. So to say, Well, we've lost the McCormicks, and we've lost this and we've lost that, without acknowledging what we had gained during a century, is useless. It shows a lack of acquaintance with your own state. You go out to a farm today and you see a combine, good god, it looks like a vehicle of the future; it's got a huge cab, it's got air conditioning, it's got radio or television—it's got everything. It can combine more product than the combines of a hundred years ago, and they're being made in the state of Illinois by the same kind of people that made them a century before. And if you don't understand that, you don't understand the state you're trying to be governor of. I didn't recognize that as an acquaintance with his own state.

DePue: Let's see how you responded back in 1982 to that.

Thompson: *My fellow Illinoisans, in Peoria, we thought we would debate the issues. My wife told me I had thrown in everything except the kitchen sink. I left the kitchen sink at home today, Mr. Stevenson, and I'm pleased that you did too. What is the job of being governor all about? I think that is the central issue of this campaign, and how well each of us are fitted for that job—by training, by experience, by temperament, by compassion, by views and philosophies. Much has been made in this campaign of strategies. Much has been made of position papers. Positions have been taken, though details somehow are lacking; details that were promised early in the campaign were always put off till next week, next month, this summer, this fall. We still don't have much. I think strategies are important. I think one ought to know what his position is on issues and not waver back and forth, not change upstate and downstate. But to me, the job of being governor of the state of Illinois—the fifth largest state in the nation, the state that mirrors the nation more than any other, whose people mirror the people of the nation more than any other—has another dimension, and that is about people.*

DePue: Obviously just part of your opening statement. This is my impression, but you looked more comfortable in front of the camera than Senator Stevenson did.

Thompson: Right. I don't say this as a personal criticism but as a political observation: either by training or experience or other life factors, or the jobs that he had held previously in governmental service, I don't think he was particularly comfortable in debates or speeches or interviews. We came from different backgrounds. I was a lawyer and a prosecutor. I was used to getting it in and mixing it up; I was used to speaking to a jury, which is a lot like a debate. And he just didn't seem comfortable to me during the course of the campaign, and I think it showed. He looked aloof, he looked as though he were not really engaged in the guts of what

the campaign was supposed to be. Now, that may be true or not true, that's just my impression. But I think you saw in the two contrasting presentations there, it was not only what was said, but how it was said, and how you looked.

DePue: You've mentioned yourself that he had a different kind of a campaign style and a different approach to that process. What I'd like to do next is to play another audio clip from our interview. Obviously, Governor, you've already listened to the interview I had with Senator Stevenson.

Thompson: I have.

DePue: This one is about winning was all that counts.

DePue: *What the newspapers were picking up was that these are two people that just don't like each other.*

Stevenson: *Well, it's certainly, you know, true in my case. I had no respect for him. But I'm a little surprised that I would have been that explicit. He was kind of the antithesis of everything I and my family stood for, and presided over the conversion of Illinois from our politics to his.*

DePue: *How were the two families different?*

Stevenson: *Winning is all that counts—governing was what counted in our family—patronage and tactics. He didn't even serve when his time came.*

DePue: You mentioned you'd heard that before. Governor, we've got just a couple of minutes, but I'll let you respond to his comments.

Thompson: You can't govern if you don't win. I mean, that's pretty obvious. If you're not first interested in winning so that you're able to govern by taking the political office like governor, you might as well be a political science professor. I mean, come on! Winning is all that counts. Well, that's exactly right; that's the end result of a campaign, and then you go on to govern. So that doesn't make any sense to me.

And he's always repeating the issue of his family. Now, I know he takes a great deal of pride in his family, his grandfather and his father. They were able men. I was so enamored of his father, I used to carry a picture of his father and me in my wallet. When I was eighteen years old and a student at Washington University in St. Louis, his father, in the middle of a campaign, was coming to an area close to there. I came across the river and attended that event, and I asked his father for a picture, and we got it taken. That was a proud possession of mine as a kid. I thought his father was a great man. But he kept talking about his family during the campaign, and what they stood for, which was the "complete antithesis of what you stand for, Thompson," as though they were royalty. And royalty doesn't go very far with the electorate of Illinois. It was just a strange way to

conduct himself, or a strange way to speak, as though, "I'm good and you're evil," and that's the campaign. I mean, that just—people didn't believe that.

DePue: Now, you heard him say that he didn't like you.

Thompson: Yeah!

DePue: Maybe that's a bit strong, but how would you feel about him during the midst of the campaign?

Thompson: Same way. I'm not going to hide it. I didn't like him.

DePue: And how about respect? He said he didn't respect you.

Thompson: I think that says more about him than it does about me.

DePue: Governor, all we have left to talk about in the campaign is the end of the campaign, the election results, and then next two months trying to figure out who actually won the election.

Thompson: Yeah, that was exciting. (laughs)

DePue: So that will be our next session. Thank you very much.

(end of interview #13)

Interview with James Thompson
IST-A-L-2013-054.14
Interview # 14: December 18, 2014
Interviewer: Mark DePue

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not

responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

DePue: Welcome back. We have been talking to Gov. Jim Thompson for quite a while here about the election in 1982. And Governor, it's a fun election to talk about. (Thompson laughs) I'm not sure it was a fun election to go through. We just finished listening to Senator Stevenson and your comments about what Stevenson was saying in terms of the personal views that the two of you had. And by the time we got close to the end of the debate circuit, we're seeing cartoons like this. That pretty much describes the things that you and Stevenson had been describing here, pretty rugged debates.[72]

Thompson: They were rugged debates. Of course, they were rugged debates in '86 as well. But it was a tough campaign.

DePue: I see we have a slide up here too. This shows the polls in September. Obviously, any kind of campaign like this, the polls are going to be important. Earlier in the campaign it was much closer, but by September, you can see that you're starting to form an eight-point lead, with still a decent amount of "Don't Know" or other candidates in there. Do you recall what the polls were trending towards the end of the campaign?

Thompson: Yes. Down. Look, it was, as we said earlier, the closest election in Illinois history. I can remember walking into my campaign suite the night of the election, and I think it was Bob Teeter, who was my pollster—he was part of the Bailey-Deardourff-Teeter combine that helped me in the campaign—and he said, "Okay, here's what's going to happen. You're going to win, but you're going to win by .1 percent." Now, how would you like to be told that the eve of your election? I guess the "You're going to win" part is okay, but you kind of wonder about that conclusion if it's going to be .1 percent, because they could do funny stuff up in Chicago back then. One-tenth of one percent isn't going to last very long if there's wet ballots, or missing ballots, or precinct committeemen in the slums who just take a voting card, as they did in this campaign, and run it through the machine a hundred times for a straight Democratic ticket. So it was a nervous night, I will say that.

[72] Cartoon in Thompson Scrapbooks, v.9: 1/7/82–12/13/82.

DePue: I have heard and seen other polls, though, that were giving you a sizeable lead. Were the polls just all over the map as you went into election night?

Thompson: They were all over the map, and we were looking at our internal polls. And as I recall it, they were showing a downward trend.[73] But it all came crashing to an end on Election Day.

DePue: Let's talk about Election Day. What's the mood on the morning of November second?

Thompson: I got up and said, "Well, that campaign is over!" (laughs)

DePue: Phew! A sigh of relief, then?

Thompson: A sigh of relief. As I said, the state was in tough economic times. Adlai focused on that and blamed me for everything. And as much as you were warmly welcomed on the campaign trail, you don't know what is inside people. They're polite generally. So who knew?

DePue: Between you and Jayne, maybe throw in Samantha as well, which one of you was sweating this out more?

Thompson: Probably me. Maybe Jayne, I don't know. Jayne is so protective of her husband that she worries about that stuff, I think, more than I do.

DePue: Where did you end up spending the election night?

Thompson: In one of the Chicago hotels. That was the tradition. And wow, it was…

DePue: Yeah, the first two elections you knew pretty early in the evening that you were going to win.

Thompson: In the first election, '76, it was crazy. I got to the campaign suite ahead of anybody else. Me and the dog, Guv. The polls closed then at 6:00, I believe, so it's just me and Guv sitting there. I turned on the television, the 6:00 news is starting, and the lead of the 6:00 news is, "Thompson has won." Now, wait a second, the polls have only been closed for, like, a minute, and they were saying, "Thompson's won." I said, "Dog, did you hear that? We won!" Because there wasn't anybody else to talk to, right? (DePue laughs) It was me and the dog!

But '82 was a much different story, let me tell you. And in the campaign suite, you sit there amongst your staff and friends, and everybody's worrying, and they say, "Don't worry, it'll be okay." They're getting reports from all over the state—what was the turnout, what's the vote look like down there in southern Illinois, western Illinois? So finally, when I went to bed, which was about 2:00, I

[73] Teeter's tracking polls of voter intention actually showed Thompson improving from his low point of 40 percent in June 1982 to 53 percent the week of October 11-16 and 56 percent the week of October 17-25. His likely voter model had Thompson at 54 percent the week of October 17-25. See Appendix for these polls.

was behind. I said, "I'm going to bed." And I said, "Wake me when I go ahead." About 4:00, they woke me up and said, "You're ahead!" I said, "By how many votes?" They told me, and I said, "Not enough!" And I went back to sleep. (laughs) Finally, when I woke up in the morning, they said I was ahead and I had won the election. But it was *so* close. And there were the usual shenanigans going on in the city. The press declared me the winner that day.

DePue: By something like nine thousand votes, I think it was in the neighborhood?

Thompson: Yeah, which shrunk later to 5,074. Immediately, Stevenson and his people started talking about a recount. And that was their war cry after that.

DePue: What was Illinois law on the subject?

Thompson: You could get a partial recount. They would sample precincts. But a recount was expensive; you had to have staff in every precinct in the state, almost, when they were recounting.

DePue: Expensive for who?

Thompson: The candidates.

DePue: The candidates would have to pay for this?

Thompson: Oh yeah. Oh, absolutely. So the margin was so narrow, and Stevenson and his people were doing the big recount war dance. Then there was talk of litigation, and it eventually did go to the Supreme Court. I thought to myself, Appearances are going to be important here, especially when the litigation started and it was in the Supreme Court. The best thing I can do is conduct myself as governor, not show any nervousness about the vote totals or where this recount thing is going; just do my job and carry out my work and be the governor. While he's the candidate on the attack and the recount, and all that political stuff, I'm going to be the governor. I thought public impressions were important, so I did that. And I remember attending the arguments in the Supreme Court of Illinois.

DePue: Before we get there, let me just lay some more groundwork, because the State Board of Elections—which is a body that was set up following the 1970 constitutional convention to oversee the state's elections—came out on November twenty-second, and declared at that time. So in-between November second and the twenty-second, we've got twenty days where I'm sure there's lots of people busy trying to recount and do things like that.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: November twenty-second, you won by 5,074 votes. That was the official count as far as the Board of Elections was concerned.

Thompson: That was about one vote a precinct.

DePue: One vote a precinct.

Thompson: Isn't that amazing?

DePue: And here's the breakdown for Cook County: 59.14 percent for Stevenson in Cook County versus 40.86 percent for you. So obviously, that's the Chicago vote, but some of the near suburbs there as well. Overwhelmingly a vote for Stevenson in Cook County. Downstate, pretty much just the opposite: 41.8 percent for Stevenson, 58.2 percent for you.

Thompson: And downstate would include the Collar Counties.

DePue: In this case, yes. So that included DuPage, Kane, and Lake Counties, et cetera.

Thompson: Yeah. I guess what that says is, in Cook County, even though I didn't win it—I won it the other three times—enough Democratic and ethnic voters in Chicago stood with me to cut Stevenson's lead coming out of Cook County to wrestle with the downstate vote. And I thought, Pretty respectable showing for tough times. The second thing it said was that the downstate vote, the Republican vote, stood with me, even though they were suffering tough economic times too. My party voters stood with me. So it was very much a downstate versus Chicago vote, just like the campaign this year between Rauner and Quinn. Quinn won Cook County, but it was the only county in the whole state that he won. *Every* other county in the state of Illinois voted for Rauner, and Rauner got the victory. It was a little bit like that.

DePue: I think maybe five minutes, just a few minutes after the Board of Election came out with their decision, Stevenson challenged the results.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And that's what gets it into the Illinois State Supreme Court. Was there going to be a full recount? Or was the Supreme Court examining whether or not the recount was going to be required?

Thompson: Yes. That was the issue in the Supreme Court. And there were some strange things. You remember who Stevenson's running mate was in '82?

DePue: No, not right now.

Thompson: Grace Mary Stern, the clerk of Lake County. She was sort of Stevenson's attack dog in that campaign. Did a nice job of it too. She, in the recount litigation, challenged how the vote was conducted in Lake County, which I won. But she conducted it. Now, what does that tell you? Here is the clerk of Lake County, who ran the election in Lake County; but she's also Adlai's lieutenant governor candidate, and she's saying in the recount that they did it all wrong in Lake County! When that argument was made by Stevenson's lawyers in the Supreme Court, you could just see the justices look down at the lawyer, and they're

thinking, Wow. I think one of them said, "Wait a minute; wait a minute! Your lieutenant governor candidate, didn't she run that election in Lake County?" "Yes." Well, (Thompson makes a face) you know. That wasn't going very far on that issue, and there were other issues. So the court took the case under advisement.

DePue: This is just the kind of thing that the newspapers are going to eat up. It's a constitutional challenge, almost.

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: It's the kind of thing that cartoonists love, and I think I've got another MacNelly cartoon here talking about that.

Thompson: You'll have to read it to me, because I can't see that far.

DePue: Stevenson-Thompson election, "Hang on! We found another ballot box! It's Truman, 3,196–Dewey, 3,968."

Thompson: (laughs) There were some lost ballot boxes in that campaign. Yeah, and some wet votes.

DePue: Here's what the Stevenson campaign was saying, and I'm sure they were pretty vociferous in what they were saying: that there was all kinds of abnormalities about this election; that there was major vote fraud going on in DuPage County, and their campaign officials had physically seen some of these doctored ballots that were going on at the end of the campaign in DuPage County; there were wet ballots; they had new punch cards and there were hanging chads, of all things.

Thompson: Oh, God. Look, first of all, the wet ballots were from Chicago, not from DuPage County. And they were mighty suspicious. Found them in the trunks of election officials' cars, and all that stuff. DuPage was a Republican stronghold. It was the most Republican county in the state. They didn't need to fool around in DuPage to produce a Republican victory. And I've heard Adlai say that at the time, and during his interview with you. But you know what? Nobody from Adlai's campaign or from Adlai's recount campaign *ever* went to the authorities with any evidence that anything bad was going on in DuPage County. He talks about it, but his campaign people didn't go to the U.S. attorney, or anybody else, with any evidence of what they were saying. That's ludicrous, crazy. It just didn't happen. Didn't have to happen in DuPage County.

DePue: You're certainly aware that Stevenson, then and to this day, says that he won that election.

Thompson: Yeah, I know.

DePue: Because of the vote fraud that occurred in DuPage County, because of all the things that were going on throughout the state, through the downstate area, that they were discovering as well.

Thompson: Yeah. Don't you think that if it that was true, he had watchers in DuPage County—he said so, right? He said his people saw this. Well, it's only a short drive from DuPage County to the U.S. attorney's office to say, "Here's the evidence. Here is what we saw." They never did that. Why didn't they do that? Because it didn't happen. DuPage didn't need to fool around with the vote to produce a Republican vote in DuPage County.[74]

DePue: Let's get into January now, and everybody's still waiting for the Illinois Supreme Court to make its decision.

Thompson: There was a lot of chatter about, There were four Democratic justices and three Republican justices, and will that play a part? And on and on and on.

DePue: How did it turn out, Governor?

Thompson: (laughs) I tell you, I was getting nervous too, because the inaugural was on Monday.

DePue: January the eleventh.

Thompson: And now we're on Friday afternoon before the inaugural. No word from the court. I was in the mansion down in Springfield, the governor's mansion, and about 4:00 I got a phone call—I forget who it was from—that said, "Supreme Court's ruled, we're rushing the opinion over to the mansion." Didn't say what they said. (laughs) So Jayne and I were sitting in the library of the mansion, I guess, and a trooper came in with the opinion. I grabbed the opinion; it was a long one. I went right to the last page, and it said, "The recount statute is unconstitutional; therefore, the case is dismissed," which meant I won. And the vote was four to three. Four votes for declaring the recount statute unconstitutional and ending Adlai's litigation, and three votes dissenting, saying no it wasn't and the recount should go forward. I said, "Well, we won. Let's prepare for the inaugural."

DePue: Who had argued the case on your behalf?

Thompson: I can't remember whether it was—

DePue: Was it a party official, or a campaign—

Thompson: No, one of my lawyers. When the recount litigation started, I called up all the really good lawyers I knew. Most of them were guys who had been in the U.S.

[74] On the Stevenson recount effort, see John Schmidt, interview by Mark DePue, August 25, 2016. For Thompson's, see David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, April 22, 2014; Gene Reineke, interview by Mark DePue, December 7, 2009; Tyrone Fahner, interview by Mike Czaplicki, May 5, 2015; Jeffrey Miller, interview by Mike Czaplicki, June 24, 2015.

attorney's office with me, and who were by then the leading lawyers in Chicago. And I think Tony Valukas argued the case in the Supreme Court. I'm not sure, but it may have been Tony. It was one of those guys. After the campaign had hired them, there were about eight or nine of them gathered in a conference room to start working on the case. I walked in there, I looked around, and I said, "I hear a lot of meters ticking." (both laugh) Here was all this high-priced talent in front of me! And we all cracked up.

But I don't think they charged me anything. I mean, they just did it. You had Skinner, who had been with me in the U.S. attorney's office and succeeded me as U.S. attorney. You had Valukas, who today chairs the law firm of Jenner & Block and has been in a lot of newsworthy cases—Lehman Brothers, and this recent General Motors Company litigation. Just a whole group of these guys who were the smartest lawyers I knew. That was the legal team. So I had the best that I think were available to defend me in the Supreme Court.

DePue: There were four Democrats sitting on the court.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Three voted against you, one voted for you.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Now, there's got to be a story there as well.

Thompson: Seymour Simon—who was the justice who switched over to the majority to hold the recount statute unconstitutional—had been a longtime officeholder in Cook County, a Democrat, president of the county board. And I forget the other offices he held. Widely known, widely respected, but sometimes a rebel in his own ranks. He was not an up-and-down party-line guy. And he joined the majority.

DePue: Senator Stevenson said that part of that reason was Stevenson had made an unpopular vote on an issue that related to Israel while he was in the U.S. Senate. I can't recall what the other part of the explanation was; certainly he discussed that when we did our interview a couple of months ago.

Thompson: Seymour Simon, for as long as I knew him, was a man of outstanding integrity. And I think he was always described by the political people and by the press as a man of integrity. The notion that he was going to rule on an election recount because of some vote Adlai had cast in the Senate—it wasn't Simon's nature. He didn't operate like that.

DePue: I want to read just a couple of things from the decision that was handed down that day. "On the grounds that the ruling was made, it was that Stevenson's allegations about voting irregularities and miscounted ballots were not strong enough to warrant a lengthy and costly ballot review." How long would that have taken if they had ruled that way?

Thompson: It would have taken a fair amount of time.

DePue: And in the meantime?

Thompson: I would be the governor.

DePue: You would be the governor.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: There was a dissenting opinion, obviously, from the three justices that voted against it. "It may be that a recount would not have changed the announced election results, but it will always be uncertain, what was the will of the people in the gubernatorial election of 1982."

Thompson: Mm-hmm. Well, when it was later determined by the U.S. attorney in Chicago and by the grand jury which indicted eighty people for vote fraud, and the estimate was made that it cost me a hundred thousand votes, I think that was an indication of the will of the people as well.

DePue: That's exactly where I want to finish up today, (Thompson laughs) because you obviously made your reputation in the U.S. attorney's office.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And at that time was it Dan Webb who was the U.S. attorney?

Thompson: It was Webb, yes.

DePue: Was he one of your lieutenants?

Thompson: He certainly was. He was an assistant U.S. attorney under me. He had been my appointee as the director of law enforcement of the state of Illinois. Brilliant lawyer. He's the chairman of my firm today, one of the most outstanding trial lawyers in the nation, by everybody's estimate. But he returned these indictments. The people who stole votes in Chicago went to the federal penitentiary. Juries didn't have any trouble with that allegation. The press was pretty clear about what went on. I mean it was bizarre behavior for a Democratic precinct captain at the end of the electoral day to say, "Forget those ballots," and take a straight Democratic ballot and run it through the machine a hundred times and report that result. Wow, talk about the will of the people. That certainly was not part of it. So it's pretty clear that election fraud in the city was a significant factor in the election and in the margin of victory. And I thought we had put an end to that when I was U.S. attorney and indicted a whole bunch of people for vote fraud in Chicago. But sometimes you just can't stamp it out. So it ended okay.

DePue: January nineteenth, just a few days after the inauguration itself, Dan Webb comes out and says, "We're going to investigate in Cook and DuPage Counties."

Thompson: Right.

DePue: They obviously did a very thorough investigation, which seemed to center much more in Cook than DuPage.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: I don't know of anything that came out in DuPage County as well, as you've talked about. April seventh, Webb told the *Chicago Tribune*, "The fraud we uncovered in these indictments is so great, the scheme is so intense, that the exact number of votes stolen in the November elections is unknown to the grand jury." But as you mentioned, and I'm not sure how he arrived at this figure, he estimated it could be as high as one hundred thousand fraudulent votes in that particular election.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: There were sixty-five indictments that were sent down, and sixty-three convictions. One was found incompetent to stand, and another one died. So that's a pretty good batting average; sixty-three out of sixty-five.

Thompson: Yeah. I would say.

DePue: Now, here's the question I have for you about this particular page of Illinois history. Why isn't this better known today to the Illinois public, or maybe even to the American public?

Thompson: Life moves on. I'll bet you if you asked the American people today about what happened in the election between Kennedy and Johnson on the one hand and Nixon on the other, they wouldn't know what you're talking about. There was vote fraud in the city of Chicago on behalf of the Kennedy campaign, although he was not the intended beneficiary. Mayor Daley and the Democrats in Chicago wanted desperately to get rid of the Republican state's attorney, Adamowski, who was a thorn in the mayor's side. And that's where all the fraud took place, out in the West Side of the city of Chicago, the River Wards, so-called. And the same thing happened down in Texas, Johnson's home state; there was a lot of vote fraud down there. If he had wanted to, Nixon could have contested that election, based on the Illinois and Texas results. And he might have lost the presidency because he didn't challenge.

People today wouldn't know what you were talking about if you asked them about that. Despite what politicians think, voters have their own lives, and they're much more important than what politicians think they are. They're not particularly concerned with a lot of the issues that politicians and the press think they are. Life goes on, you know? And new challenges each day for the people of Illinois and the people of the United States, and past history doesn't really interest very many people.

DePue: What Dan Webb found in doing his investigation was that these people were trained by their predecessors who were trained by their predecessors.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: Does it go on today, do you think?

Thompson: I think most of it is gone, I really do. Even though there are not as many poll watchers today as there were back then in the sixties or the eighties, I think it's pretty much gone. You might have a stray precinct captain or other in the city of Chicago who is a little too aggressive about standing over the voter's shoulders or filling out the ballot. But the mechanization of the ballot, the computer voting that we do now—with the voting out in the open, the voters standing at this metal desk and doing a touchscreen on the candidates in front of them—gives a lot more transparency to voting and bad conduct than in the old days when the election machines were huge and they had a curtain in front of it, and you went inside and pulled the lever and the curtain closed. And you could go past a voting place in the city of Chicago and see four legs under the curtain, not two. Not just the voter, there's somebody in there making sure he voted the right way. And we don't have the straight ticket voting in Illinois anymore. It was easier in the old days when they could just do one mark or one punch, and all the Democrats were voted for. Now the voters have to go down the ballot one by one. So I would be really hesitant in saying today that there was any significant vote fraud in the city of Chicago.

DePue: Nineteen eighty-two, January eleventh, you're sworn in for another four years. And since I've got you in front of the camera, (Thompson laughs) I'm going to take an opportunity to have you discuss in—this might be almost impossible—three to five minutes, four years down the road, 1986. And we'll cover this in much more detail later on.

Thompson: The significant thing in the four years leading up to the '86 election was the return of Adlai. There was a lot of talk about whether the Democratic candidate would be Adlai Stevenson, who had run against me in '82, or Neil Hartigan, who was the attorney general of Illinois and wanted to be governor. Would there be a Hartigan-Stevenson primary, and would they cut themselves up, to my delight in the general election? All that stuff, all that press speculation.

As it turned out, there was no primary. Stevenson was selected by the slate makers, and I was happy. I wanted him again. I thought he had flaws as a candidate that he had demonstrated during the '82 campaign, and I thought I would be better off with Stevenson than I would have been with Hartigan, even though I thought I was going to win against either of them. And the election margin in the '86 campaign was pretty healthy, a return to normalcy in my elections. I was fine.

DePue: And much healthier economic times in 1986.

Thompson: Yeah, sure.

DePue: Here's just a teaser for a future interview session that we have, but we also get to talk about the impact of LaRouchies in that campaign.

Thompson: The first thing that happened to me was Stevenson was back. The second good thing that happened to me was the LaRouchies, which proved in the end to be sort of the undoing of Adlai and was an extraordinary moment in Illinois politics.

DePue: One of many extraordinary moments, I might add. Thank you very much, Governor, for a great conversation today.

Thompson: Sure, my pleasure.

(end of interview #14)
(end of volume III)