Interview with Ron Michaelson

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Interview # 1: Monday, October 3, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Monday, October 3, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm out at Sangamon State University, but now it's known as University of Illinois at Springfield.

Michaelson: Sometimes they just say University of Illinois–Springfield. So I'm not sure which is correct, to be honest with you.

DePue: And we're talking to Ron Michaelson. Good afternoon.

Michaelson: Hi.

DePue: As a preface to this:. in the process of talking to you earlier, you mentioned that you had been interviewed by Professor Cullom Davis.

Michaelson: Yes, and you said that was back in the 1980s.

DePue: Right.

Michaelson: And largely it was about my experience with the Governor Ogilvie administration, from '69 to '73. And, you know, that was a long time ago. We were interviewed, no less, a long time ago working for the governor.

DePue: Today's conversation is going to be about the Illinois State Board of Elections. And that's the primary focus. Obviously that's a perfect match for Illinois' statecraft project. So I'm excited about hearing more from your perspective of actually having to administer it; to run these elections, to, I guess, oversee the voting process, to see what you have to say about that. But let's just start very quickly and ask you to tell us when and where you were born.

Michaelson: Chicago, Illinois, December 31, 1941, which makes me sixty-nine as we speak.

DePue: Where did you grow up?

Michaelson: Five years in Chicago and then the rest of my early childhood and through high school in Park Ridge, Illinois, a near-northwest suburb of Chicago. My parents kept a home in Park Ridge for quite a while after I left home and went to college, et cetera, and then they moved to Carol Stream in a retirement setting. My sister and brother-in-law still live in Park Ridge so I kind of consider Park Ridge as my childhood home. Moved to Springfield in 1969 in January right after Governor Ogilvie was elected in the fall of '68.

DePue: Where did you go to college?

Michaelson: Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. Graduated in '63. Majored in political science. I went to Columbia Law School for a year from '63 to '64 in New York City. Didn't really like law school that much so I decided to go to grad school in political science, and came home to Park Ridge actually and commuted to Northwestern in Evanston where I got my Master's in 1965. I was never involved in politics in college or post-college. And it was there that there was an advertisement in class one day, Would any students like to do a little field survey research work on behalf of the United Republican Fund, which was a fundraising arm of the Republican Party in Illinois. You'd have to interview fifteen local Republican officials, and you'd get paid something for it. Don't remember what that was. And so I just volunteered. I thought that it sounded interesting. And one of the people I interviewed was then the sheriff of Cook County. It was Richard Ogilvie. I never met him before, but I admired his work because he was a Republican sheriff, one of the first Republicans elected countywide in Cook County in a long, long time. And said, you know, "Would there ever be an opportunity to go to work for you?" And he said, "Well, the only jobs I have right now are to be a guard in the Cook County Jail," and he said, "I don't think that's kind of what you're looking for." But he said, "I'd keep it in mind." He'll keep it in mind. Well it was very nice of him but I thought that was just kind of a throwaway comment.

DePue: This was '65, you said?

Michaelson: This was ’65. And then early in ’66, after he had announced his candidacy for president of the Cook County Board—a big job—a huge job, I got a call from somebody on his staff who said, you know, “Sheriff remembered your conversation and wondered if you want to come and work on this campaign staff as Director of Research.” And I said, “Sure.” I’d actually started my PhD work at SIU—Carbondale. And, you know, it was something I didn’t have to devote full-time to but he evidently remembered our conversation, our interview.

DePue: And a name and some way to get in contact with you as well.

Michaelson: Yeah, right, yeah. And so I did research for him on the campaign; you know, researched county issues—things he could talk about during the campaign because he was kind of a progressive guy. He wanted to—you know—shake things up in Cook County Government, et cetera, et cetera. And at the same time I commuted to Carbondale. I went to school Monday through Wednesday, drove to St. Louis and flew to Chicago on Wednesday nights and worked on the campaign staff Thursday through Sunday and did that back and forth.

DePue: Who was paying the plane tickets?

Michaelson: You know what? I really don’t remember. (laughter) I kind of think the campaign did because I’m sure I couldn’t afford it.

DePue: I was going to say—your average college student—that’s a lot of money.

Michaelson: Yeah I don’t think I could afford it. I think they did. Anyway he was elected, you know, which was a big deal for a Republican, and the first Republican in who knows how many years. He asked me to join the staff and I said okay. I kind of finished up my coursework or I was in the process of finishing up and actually I got academic credit for the work I was doing on the campaign staff. It all worked out pretty cool. And so I kind of worked on my dissertation while I was working on his staff. And then of course, two years later in the middle of his term, he decides to run for governor and he wins and I come to go to work for him in Springfield in ’69. I got my PhD in ’70 so I kind of finished it up while I was working for him in Springfield. So we moved to Springfield and I always thought, since the whole family was in the Chicago area that after four years we’d move back. As a matter of fact, I asked the governor when he asked me to come along with him, I said, any way I could be based in Chicago because I really didn’t want to go to Springfield. And he said, “Well you probably could but I’ll tell you what. All the action’s going to be in Springfield.” It’s kind of unlike what’s happening these days or what’s particularly under Blagojevich. And so I said okay. So we went to Springfield and have been in Springfield ever since. So we’ve been Springfield residents for over forty years now or close to forty, I guess. Eighty-nine—yeah, it’s a little over forty years.

DePue: When you first were in college and then you got a chance to meet Ogilvie and you struck up the conversation, would you have considered yourself a Republican at the time?

Michaelson: Probably nominally.

DePue: You're coming from a Republican area of the state.

Michaelson: Right and my folks were Republican. But, you know, I wasn't even politically active in college. I mean they had a Young Republican chapter on campus as they had a Young Democrats chapter. I never got involved in that, you know. So I wasn't politically active. When I started to learn who was on the governor's staff, and even on his staff as Cook County Board, almost to a person everybody had been involved in Young Republicans on their various college campuses. You know they'd been involved in partisan politics for quite a while and here I was a guy coming in who had no involvement. But, you know, they didn't ostracize me or anything. But I guess I brought a little different perspective and background.

DePue: Sixty-five is one thing, but by the time you get to 1968 and you're working on the campaign—did you say in '68?—anybody who thinks about what's going on in college campuses at the time in 1968—

Michaelson: A lot of unrest.

DePue: And to a certain extent I would think that college Republicans are kind of out of disfavor, shall we say?

Michaelson: Yeah and of course I had graduated in '63, so that was five years prior. And you know when I was doing my doctorate work at SIU, I was just down there to go to class and do what I had to do and then I hopped on the plane and flew back to Chicago. So I really wasn't in touch at all with what was going on in the campus in Carbondale for sure, even though nationally, you know, that was getting close to the time when there was a lot of campus unrest with the whole Vietnam War issue.

DePue: Any reflections on what happened in 1968 at the Democratic Convention? It's right in Chicago.

Michaelson: It sure was.

DePue: It's not that far from where you grew up.

Michaelson: It sure was. I just remember watching it on television. This was in the summer. I wasn't doing coursework. I was working full-time for the——well Ogilvie was president of the Cook County Board. Let me just preface my answer by saying I didn't do much work on the campaign staff for governor. I did a couple position papers; one on insurance reform in Illinois. I remember

that one. But he kind of told me to stay behind and make sure the office was running decently because he was going to be gone a lot campaigning obviously and somebody had to mind the store. And that largely was my responsibility. But I remember watching the Grant Park riots on television and Mayor Daley, you know, being quite vociferous at the Democratic National Convention which was being held right in Chicago and, you know, the police response and all that stuff. Yeah, that was right in my backyard although I was not down there. I just saw it on television.

DePue: Being a political science major involved in the campaign and the height of all of the discontent about Vietnam and so many other issues, did that cause you to reexamine your own political views?

Michaelson: No, not really. It really didn't. And of course we were working on state issues and without much regard to what was happening nationally, although you recognize that what was happening nationally might affect your candidate's fortune on the ballot for sure because at that time the governor was elected in the same year that presidents were elected. The 1970 constitution changed that so anybody running for statewide office had to be really concerned about the top of the ticket and if that was going to help you or hurt you. It was Nixon against Humphrey in '68, and Nixon was kind of a law and order guy and there was a lot of unhappiness with the way Daley handled things. But then there was a certain element that thought the Mayor was 100 percent correct in how he handled things, and those hooligans and thugs—they shouldn't be doing what they were doing. And as it turned out, all that stuff didn't have much effect on the governor's race. That certainly wasn't my recollection at all. And of course, the governor ran against Sam Shapiro who was just elevated to the governorship two years prior as lieutenant governor when former Governor Kerner took a federal judgeship. Sam had never been elected in his own right and he was probably not the strongest candidate that the Democrats could have found, and in politics you have to be at the right place at the right time. And Ogilvie, certainly in his early years, was at the right place at the right time to make those kind of moves.

DePue: Others have suggested that Shapiro wasn't enthusiastic enough. He wasn't driven enough to run a good campaign.

Michaelson: He was an older man from Kankakee. Yeah he was kind of laid back. I think that was just his persona. And I think Ogilvie worked a lot harder than Shapiro did and Sam was probably relying more on party support rather than getting votes on his own accord. But he wasn't the best candidate, that's for sure.

DePue: Once we get to Ogilvie's election, very briefly what did you do for the administration?

Michaelson: Well, I was one of his assistants. Intergovernmental relations was kind of my bag, so relationships with local governments in Illinois and with the feds. I did some speechwriting for him. I did some legislative liaison work for him but again in areas that I was involved in. We set up a new department of local government affairs—one of his initiatives—and I was involved in getting that legislation through and helping pick the new director and kind of working that angle. So there was a lot of intergovernmental stuff: local government, counties, townships. There were about six or seven or us all who had different substantive areas of responsibility, kind of all who reported to the governor. And it was a great time.

DePue: You reported directly to the governor?

Michaelson: Yeah. We had kind of a chief of staff but, you know, if I want to see the governor, I'd just ask the governor's secretary if I could see the governor. And so you know everything wasn't funneled through the chief of staff, if you will.

DePue: Were you the young kid on the staff?

Michaelson: We had a lot of young kids on the staff. I remember somebody called Ogilvie's staff the whiz kids because there were a lot of young people. By young, I mean under thirty for sure. And some people said maybe that was one of his downfalls, but yeah—it was a very youth-oriented administration, particularly at the staff level in the governor's office.

DePue: Since I know that your interview with Professor Davis went into this in great depth, so let me just finish the Ogilvie years with your reflections on the man.

Michaelson: Well about four or five years after he left office, I used to just stop in in Chicago and say hello and chat, and he said, "You know, Ron, Number one, I don't regret anything we did. I don't regret putting in the first state income tax." In fact he told me his only regret was it wasn't any larger. He should have asked for more and so we could have gotten more things done. But he said, "I really think our administration looks better as time goes on, as people look back and reflect upon what we actually accomplished." And I think that's really true. Accomplishments were legion. He just did—all sorts of stuff we got done. And, you know, the income tax probably in the end cost him the election but he came very, very close to winning in '72—very close.

But he was a great man to work for. He entrusted you with a lot of responsibility at a young age and if you made a mistake, he kind of acted as a teacher and he didn't like read me out and was really angry. And he was—I wouldn't say gruff—but he didn't have a lot of charisma. He couldn't smile well because he had a shrapnel wound in his cheek from World War II. He'd have press conferences and they'd ask him a question and he'd answer it like, "Yes," or "No." He'd just be really succinct, short, blunt answers, you know. (laughter)

DePue: When you're used to interviewing Daley—

Michaelson: Yeah, exactly. But I have tremendous respect for the man and many people look back and say he might have been one of the best governors in Illinois' history, for sure. Obviously, I can't be totally objective on that score, but when you look at everything that was accomplished in just four years, he really turned the state around significantly.

DePue: Well it's been a rather bumpy ride governor-wise since that time frame.

Michaelson: It really has. You know we had Dan Walker, this populist guy who was so unpopular that he couldn't even get his party's nomination when he tried to run for re-election. He was beaten in his party's primary. You can't try to fight Daley in city hall as a Democratic governor.

DePue: But he got to the office by—

Michaelson: He got to the office that way.

DePue: —by fighting—

Michaelson: Yes, he did. And so his administration was not very noteworthy. Then of course we had big Jim Thompson who served the longest tenure of any Illinois governor. Thompson got a lot done during his years and one of his detriments was when he left office in '90 he left the cupboard really bare in terms of state finances.

That's when Jim Edgar was elected and came in and we had a real fiscal crisis. It's not the kind of crisis we have today but we were about a billion dollars in debt as I recall. Jim had to do some pretty tough stuff to turn things around. But after Edgar's years things obviously have deteriorated. George Ryan also liked to spend money. The legislature liked George. He was just like an old school guy that both sides of the aisle liked him and had known him for years. The legislature always liked to spend money and George didn't object. In the early time of his administration nationally and economically things were very rosy. It was the dot com era and we were flush with money and obviously by the end of Ryan's administration the state was broke again. And George just didn't have staff around him that served him well. He had very poor staff and, you know, I'm not trying to absolve George of any culpability himself but he did not have good staff to say, Hey Governor—we shouldn't be doing this. And obviously he's paid a very, very steep price for that.

DePue: And as we sit today we're waiting for the sentencing for Rod Blagojevich to find out how long he's going to be sitting in prison.

Michaelson: Bill Holland, our Auditor General, who's now a nonpartisan independent constitutional officer—he's been around state government for a long time. I

had Bill talk to one of my classes last week. Bill's a pretty straight shooter although he served ten years as chief of staff to Phil Rock when Phil was president of the Senate. But Bill said Blagojevich did more damage to the state of Illinois in his time than all the other governors put together. It wasn't just Blagojevich's lack of personal integrity but it was his lack of interest in governing the state of Illinois: being a manager, being a governor, making state government work and function. And that's what really has fallen apart in this state. You know state morale is awful. The state isn't providing services very efficiently. And of course, I don't know how many billion dollars we are in the hole. It changes every day—five, seven, whatever. It's just atrocious where we are and we don't seem to be making much progress even under Governor Quinn with a 60 percent increase in the income tax. And we're still in trouble.

DePue: Let's go back to 1973. Here you are—you've got a PhD but you're still pretty darn young and your guy just lost his election. So what happens to you in 1973?

Michaelson: That was a good question. It was kind of a turning point in my life because I had some offers to go into academia to teach. I remember I travelled out to Santa Barbara, California, to take a look at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, a small liberal arts school that I really liked. And I went out there in January or February—a pretty enticing time to go out there, gorgeous campus overlooking the Pacific Ocean. And they also wanted me to be the head baseball coach; I was a big baseball player for a long time. And that was appealing. And I had a couple other academic offers. And then Sangamon State came to me because I started part-time teaching. And I think in 1970 was my first part-time class that I taught at Sangamon State. So I had only taught a couple classes.

DePue: And we should say that Sangamon State at that time is three years old.

Michaelson: Yes, three years old. In fact, Jim and Brenda Edgar were students in the very first class I taught out here—State Legislative Politics. And anyway they came to me with an offer to have a faculty rank which meant teaching one course a semester but work in the office of the vice president for academic affairs. Over the four years we had our first child in 1970 and our second in 1972.

DePue: What's your wife's name?

Michaelson: Jan.

DePue: What was her maiden name?

Michaelson: Baker. She was from Grand Rapids. I met her in college, and Springfield kind of got to grow on us during the four years. You know we met some friends and found a good church. And it was kind of like, now, do we really want to leave Springfield? So obviously we didn't. I accepted the offer from

Sangamon State and came out here at a great time because the school was just in its formative years. The vice president for academic affairs, John Keiser, was a wonderful man to work for and it was a great experience but I was really frustrated because the pace of activity was so different from what I was used to in the governor's office. Even though there was a lot of stuff going on, it just seemed to move at a glacial pace compared to what I was used to. I suppose that's not a fair comparison because I was kind of in the fast lane working on the governor's staff but I was going to stick it out for a while until, in the fall of '74 or late summer of '74 I got a call. I think it was Don Adams who was then—he might have been chairman. He was from Springfield, involved in Republican politics. He might at that time have been chairman of the state Republican Party. I know his nickname was Doc. He was always called Doc Adams. I guess our paths had crossed during my time with Ogilvie and I don't recall, but he called and said, "You know we just set up the state board of elections and I'm on the board." It was a four-person board—two Republicans and two Democrats. And he said, "We're just starting to put together a staff and we need somebody to handle the administrative stuff, like hiring personnel and budget and blah-blah-blah, would you be interested?" It sounded appealing and to get in the ground floor on something and to get back into state government somewhat, not in the academic vein. And so I took it. So I was at Sangamon State for eighteen months basically.

DePue: Before we move beyond Sangamon State, I wanted to ask you your reflections on the place at that time. I think I mentioned to you before we started I had an interview recently with Cullom Davis who was there at the inception as well. And here's this experimental school. What were your impressions?

Michaelson: Bob Spencer was the president and he was a political scientist. Bob was very visionary and had a good understanding of where he wanted Sangamon State to go with the emphasis on public affairs. That was the mandate that the legislature gave the university due to its location here in the capital city. So Bob was a visionary. He wasn't much of a manager. John Keiser, the vice president of academic affairs with whom I worked kind of ran the place. John was a very talented guy. And I remember our press secretary was Chris Vlahopoulus who was Governor Kerner's press secretary. It's Greek, obviously. And Chris was a wonderful guy and he was very good at handling the political stuff and contacts and legislators because you're just putting together this university. We're hiring faculty and we had faculty from all different stripes, you know. Some were buttoned-down professors and others looked like they just came in from protesting against the Vietnam War or something. We had a wide variety and trying to pull all these new faculty members together. You're going to make some mistakes when you're hiring everybody —we're starting from scratch. Not everybody is going to be a perfect hire but you're trying to get everybody working together. I thought the school had a lot of promise. Of course, it was totally commuter. They had no dormitories. And it was mostly graduate students or state workers coming

back part-time to finish their Bachelor's degree or to work on a Master's, who had far more part-time students than full-time students. But I had a favorable impression of the place because after I left and took the job with the state board, I continued teaching out here part-time; not every single year but quite often. Cullom was, I should say, one of the strongest foundational faculty members that they hired. He was a good, high class, solid academic who also knew how to get along with people and relate.

DePue: You said you made the move to the Illinois Board of Elections in September of 1974?

Michaelson: Right.

DePue: And from your earlier comments, I got the distinct impression this is brand new. Was there a piece of legislation that created this?

Michaelson: The 1970 constitution. Heretofore, the secretary of state had run elections as still is the case in most states. I think there are about a dozen state boards of elections now. And this is one of the few areas where Illinois kind of became a leader rather than a follower. (laughter) The constitution was pretty progressive in deciding that we needed this new body to run elections and take it out of the hands of a single, partisan, elected statewide official which, when you come to think of it, makes a lot of sense. So the constitution said two things—very brief: It said there shall be a state board of elections which will have supervisory power over the administration of election and registration laws in the state of Illinois. That was number one. And number two: it said no political party shall have a majority on the board. That's all the constitution says.

So then it was up to the legislature to put the meat on the bones and to figure out what this thing is going to look like; how many are you going to have on the board, you know. How are they going to be appointed? So they decided on a four-person board; two R's and two D's. And from each party, one had to be from Cook and one had to be from downstate. And the appointment process was unique. Each of the four legislative leaders gave three names to the governor, then the governor had to pick one of those three. And of course, the governor at this time was Dan Walker. And so the board was created before any staff was hired. And they were part-time but they were salaried positions. I don't remember what the early salaries were but the chairman would rotate every two years between parties. Mike Lavelle, who was a Chicago Democrat, was the first chairman. He was an attorney, nicely tied in with the Democratic Party in the city of Chicago. Frank Lunding was from Chicago—where was Frank from? Maybe the suburbs. No—he was from Cook County and he was the Republican. And then downstate was Doc Adams from Springfield—a Republican. And then Bill Harris was from Marion, Illinois, and he was the other Democrat. So that was the original board.

DePue: This might sound like a peculiar question but Frank Lunding, you say, is the Republican from Cook County.

Michaelson: Yeah.

DePue: Well now I'm thinking—

Michaelson: He was from suburban Cook.

DePue: OK, so my question isn't really relevant because I was thinking if he was from Chicago, you'd end up with a liberal Republican.

Michaelson: Yeah, yeah. Frank was from suburban Cook.

DePue: What's then the purpose of the board of elections—if you can flesh that out a little bit for us?

Michaelson: The purpose of the board of elections is to oversee the conduct of elections in the State of Illinois. Of course, elections are highly decentralized because you've got a county clerk in each county that actually runs elections in that county. He or she finds the polling places and is responsible for the election judges. And they're responsible for determining what kind of voting equipment you're going to have. And all these things are done at the county level but the state board supervises that. And the biggest responsibility vis-à-vis the election process is ballot access. All statewide candidates including judges, constitutional officers, legislative candidates, congressional candidates, U.S. Senate candidates, everybody has to file their nominating petitions with the state board of elections. And then if they're objected to, the state board acts as an electoral board and hears those objections, rules on them and determines who should have access to the ballot. So the whole ballot access function is a huge and probably in times the most controversial function that the state board has in determining how people get on the ballot and whether they stay there.

Then it was early on in the board's history, after Watergate, that the legislature created the Illinois Campaign Finance Act, which was largely a disclosure law mandating that all candidates for public office disclose where they got their money and how they spent it. All of those reports were filed with the state board of elections and they had to be made available for public consumption. So it has been a two-pronged set of responsibilities: one, the administration of the election process, and two, regulation of campaign money. The Illinois election code is very detailed, and now there was someplace where people could go to for interpretation of the code and what does this mean and what does that mean.

I think the biggest challenge the board faced in its early days was being the new kid on the block in elections and telling the county clerks and the election boards throughout the state that, hey, you know, you've got

another player in the game now. We're not going to tell you how to do your job but one of the things that was emphasized early on was what we call uniformity: that we want elections to be conducted the same way in LaSalle County as they're conducted in Adams County, as they're conducted in Champaign County. We want county clerks to use the same procedures and methods and so forth. So we have a consistently uniform election process in the state.

DePue: Does that mean include punch cards versus something—a piece of paper versus electronic voting?

Michaelson: Yeah, although there is no requirement that everybody in the state… Every county uses the same kind of voting equipment but most counties at that time were going to the punch card system. So there was always this balance between here's Big Brother in Springfield looking over our shoulder versus, you know, county clerks are constitutional officials, too. Their office is a constitutional office. And they're elected and you have to give them some leeway or some room to roam. That was always a tension the twenty-seven years I was executive director was trying to have a good working relationship with these local election officials, some of whom were very willing to work with us and others of which were really tough to work with.

DePue: How much did you have to step away from your own personal political views and try to assume the role of being a nonpartisan?

Michaelson: One hundred percent, because one of the things in the law that the legislature passed was no employee of the state board of elections, including myself, could participate in any kind of partisan political activity, which meant other than voting. You couldn't contribute to a candidate. You couldn't have a yard sign in your front yard. You couldn't have a bumper sticker on your car. You couldn't wear a lapel pin. You couldn't go to a campaign rally. And the law said anybody who was caught doing such, it was grounds for immediate dismissal—very strong.

DePue: The state and federal?

Michaelson: Right—everything, everything. So we never had to dismiss anybody but frankly as director it gave me a great excuse when a legislator would call and ask if I could buy a fifty-dollar or a hundred-dollar ticket to his fundraiser. I gleefully said, "Senator, I'd love to go. But as you know, I'm statutorily prohibited from doing anything like that or I'll lose my job." "Oh, I'm sorry. I remember that now" you know—blah, blah, blah. So it was a great excuse and now it didn't apply to members of the board. Members of the board were part-time and each was very political in his or her own way, but staff totally out.

DePue: Well the comment about the board members leads right into my next question then. It's an even-numbered board, correct? So don't they always split in the middle and by party?

Michaelson: Well it's really interesting because the original legislation—the four member board—in addition to that appointment procedure how they got nominated and appointed, there was also a provision in the law which spoke about how to break ties. It said anytime you had a two to two vote, all four names would be put into a hat. One name would be drawn out of the hat; that person couldn't vote, which meant you had a two to one vote for one party or the other. I should also say sometimes the split wasn't R vs. D but it was Cook County versus downstate. That was very much in evidence. Well, in the later years of the Walker administration, the board found some issues with Dan Walker's campaign disclosure filing as I recall. Anyway the board did something that Walker didn't like and Walker went to court and wanted to enjoin the board from doing whatever they were going to be doing. He said actually the board is unconstitutionally created. He said the appointment process was unconstitutional because, in essence, the legislative branch was making the appointments to an executive agency.

What was happening was, these legislative leaders, you know, being smart political animals, when they had to give the governor three names—or it might have been two names at the time but I really think it was two names—anyway they'd only include one name that they really wanted. The other name or names on the list were totally people that the governor could never appoint; like in one instance they included the name of a member of ConCon who voted against the creation of the state board of elections; Betty Ann Keagan was her name. And thus they forced the governor's hand. So in essence the legislature was making the appointments. And Dan Walker didn't like that. So he said it's a violation of the separation of powers.

DePue: By the state constitution or the federal?

Michaelson: State or federal—I don't remember which; probably both. And then secondly he said when you draw a name out of the hat to break the ties, you are now violating the provision in the Illinois constitution that says no party shall have a majority because by definition all of a sudden on that vote of three people, one party does have a majority. It went to the Illinois Supreme Court and the Supreme Court sided with Walker in both instances. The court said to the legislature, "You have to go back and remake the state board of elections." This was in '75 and '76, *Walker v. the State Board of Elections.* And the court gave the legislature a certain number of days to fix the issue. Dan Walker was still governor. and it was such a contentious issue because there essentially had to be a bill that Walker would approve, they never agreed to anything because Walker wanted an independent number of board members so you wouldn't have ties. And he wanted a so-called independent to be the tie-breaker, if you can define independent.

So the legislature and the governor could never agree, and we had to go back to the Supreme Court and get a stay from the court's decision because they said if this isn't done by such and such a date the state board of elections goes out of business, meaning all of us staff people would lose their jobs. I mean it still had to be put back together because it was mandated by the state constitution but, you know, there could have been a vacuum of one month, two months, three months, or whatever. They were very nervous days for everybody.

Well, it took the election of Jim Thompson to get it done when he got Walker out of the picture. Thompson was able to sit down with the legislature and figure out a solution. Their solution was an eight-person board—four and four; two from Cook and two from downstate from each party, staggered terms and all that stuff, and no tie-breaker. And the theory was, hey, if it's a four to four vote, if it's important enough, you know, people are going to compromise and work things around so you can find the fifth vote; no tie-breaker. And the appointment process was changed so that the governor got to directly appoint members of his own party with the consent of the senate and for the party that didn't hold the governorship, the highest-ranking Democratic state official, whether it be the secretary of state or the attorney general—whoever was the highest ranking for all the Democratic nominations and again we're talking about Thompson being governor—they would give the governor three names and the governor picked one of those three. That's how the minority members got appointed. So it satisfied the separation of powers issue and the legislature passed it and the governor signed it. And of course then we had to have a new board created and things were much, much better.

Getting back to that original board—that four-person board—since we were forming the agency, the board members were very, very involved. I was appointed executive director in 1976 and joined the board in '74. They didn't have an executive director. And so the board members themselves were getting highly involved and the initial hirings of staff were highly political. Every applicant had to be vetted to see if they were Republican or Democrat and how strong. And the Republicans wanted to make sure they got as many people hired as the Democrats did. Contracts that the board let out were always politically connected contractors.

The board was getting a lot of critical reviews from some newspaper people. I remember the political reporter from Channel 20 did an expose once. And they weren't fun times. They were not fun times and I think finally in response to some of this stuff, the board said, we want to hire an executive director and we should probably get out of this day-to-day stuff and let somebody run things. They had a big national search and they had a consultant from Washington by the name of Dick Smolka, S-m-o-l-k-a, who was an academic who was involved in a lot of election administration stuff nationally. He came in and chaired the search committee. And then, of course,

I applied for it and I was selected. Then when we got the new board, things really kind of settled down. But those early years were really, really tough. They were difficult for sure.

DePue: I wonder if you can provide a couple examples of disputes that would be brought to the board of elections so I can better understand the kinds of things you were dealing with.

Michaelson: Well, some disputes would be on ballot access when objections were filed to a candidacy. This is, of course, prior to a primary election when your nomination papers, petitions are filed. Let's say you had a Democratic challenger who wanted to run against an incumbent for the state legislature. And often times the Democrats would file an objection to this challenger's petitions for whatever reason; you know, signatures, weren't eligible or they weren't a registered voter or all sorts of reasons why you can disqualify signatures and because obviously the incumbents never wanted any challengers. You don't want to run against anybody in the primary. And if it looked like the challenger was kind of getting a raw end of the deal, the Republicans on the board would stand up and they would say this guy shouldn't be thrown off, you know. Some of these objections you're making are just picayune or not based in fact and let the people decide. And so quite often you'd have disputes over that. The Democrats were trying to satisfy their party leaders and knocking off people who were challenging incumbent Democrats. And the Republicans would do the same thing on the other side for sure. So quite often you had disputes regarding ballot access. The other party was trying to say, hey—but then sometimes they would say what the Democrats want to do should be their thing and what the Republicans want to do should be our thing. Let us both do our things because a primary is a party election. But that's kind of typical of one thing.

I remember in those early days Mike Lavelle, who was chairman and who was a pretty bright guy, wanted to give somebody a contract to do some PR work for the board and some press releases. And there was obviously somebody who was connected politically Democratic or Republican—No No—it's too political, it's too partisan. There were a lot of these partisan clashes in those first couple years when these four real political board members—they were both trying to protect their own flanks. They were both trying to protect the interests of their own party, whether it would be contracts or personal hirings or, as I say, ballot access questions. And even when it came time to handle complaints to campaign disclosure, someone would be late filing and maybe it would be an incumbent Republican and the Democrats wanted to go after him and to fine the person—the maximum allowable—and the Republicans were just saying, you know, give this guy a break; it's just unintentional. Those kinds of disputes; you know each side trying to pick on the arm of the other side because in Illinois, politics is a real serious business here.

DePue: Well that's a perfect lead-in for my next question, then. The tradition in Illinois at that time especially was that the slate-makers would get together. This is especially known because of the Daley machine in Chicago. The slate makers would pick the candidates they wanted and anybody else who was interested in getting the support of the Democratic Party was just out of luck. They weren't going to get any backing. Was that an aspect of the kind of thing you guys had to be watching out for or is it just a fact of life that you had to deal with?

Michaelson: That was just kind of a fact of life that you had to deal with. And the Democrats—since they had a much more disciplined and organized party statewide—were more apt to do that and particularly with Daley, in essence, running the party statewide. The Democrats engaged in more slate-making than the Republicans; let's put it that way. The latter option is correct. That was just a fact of life we had to deal with.

DePue: Illinois also has a reputation—it certainly had a reputation at that time—for shenanigans going on in elections: vote fraud, especially in Chicago. The 1960 election is a perfect example. Was the board of elections responsible to respond to those kinds of challenges?

Michaelson: Yeah we really were. And initially the Chicago board resisted any oversight from the state board because Chicago was one of half a dozen municipalities that had their own board of elections. The county clerk did not run elections in the city of Chicago, for instance. Aurora was one and East St. Louis was one and Rockford was one and Bloomington was one. Certain cities have their own municipal boards. In Chicago they were very much of the mind that they wanted to do their own thing. And of course, they had a three-member board. There are always two Democrats and one Republican. And the allegations of vote fraud there were regular and probably with substance. The Republicans weren't blameless either in other parts of the state, but the Democrats in Chicago for sure. A lot of people think they stole the election for John Kennedy in 1960s as you mentioned. And Nixon, to his credit—although people said he should challenge the results in Illinois—he said he didn't want to go there; if this was what it was going to be, this was what it was going to be. But I got asked that question a lot.

But as the United States Attorney got more active in Chicago and particularly looking at things like election fraud, other watchdog groups like the League of Women Voters and other civic groups in the Chicago area and the newspapers started to get more interested, really I think the force of public opinion started to curtail the incidents of election fraud in Chicago. I don't think the state board of elections can take all the credit for that. We certainly tried to do our part but when you get down to it, the best defense against election fraud is having honest-to-goodness Republican and Democratic election judges in every polling place because that's often where fraud occurs. In the old days in Chicago, there were certain precincts and certain wards

where you couldn't find any legitimate Republicans to serve as election judges. And when you don't have that check and balance in the polling place, then that's the opportunity for mischief. That's gotten a lot better.

DePue: Was that something that the board of elections was involved in to ensure that there are elections judges in the right party in all these localities?

Michaelson: Yeah we certainly tried and to the city's credit, particularly in recent years, they've undertaken an aggressive judge's recruitment program in the colleges. They've got a lot of college students now serving as election judges, particularly now that you're using electronic voting in the city—you know a little more technologically advanced—and college students have a real easy time understanding that and thus being able to help voters and all that stuff. So Chicago has done a much more aggressive job of recruiting judges and the situation is better. But you know whenever you have the human factor in elections, which you're always going to have: a) you're going to have unintentional errors; and b) you're going to have the occasional situation where you're going to have intentional mischief; you know you're going to have intentional fraud.

DePue: When you do get an allegation of voting fraud, what powers does the board of election have?

Michaelson: We had no prosecutorial powers. Our powers were investigatory only so we would send out investigators, put together a file, and then we would either turn it over to the state's attorney or the attorney general.

DePue: Would you have the power to seize the ballot boxes?

Michaelson: Uh-huh, but then it was up to the state's attorney or the attorney general to decide whether prosecution was merited; you know it was basically their call. And depending on the severity of the case, sometimes we'd turn it over to both the state's attorney and the attorney general. In recent years—even before Lisa Madigan the attorney general has taken more interest in election fraud cases. The attorney general has people out in the polling places on Election Day just like State Board of Elections does. So they're kind of serving as a watchdog, too, and they've done this for the last twenty years at least.

DePue: I would think, though, that the board of elections inspectors, if that's what they're called, and maybe this goes back to your earlier comment about making sure that these people are at least on the surface nonpartisan because you go in and you investigate something and you are partisan and you have a vested interest in how that election turns out. Is that a problem?

Michaelson: When you say who was partisan—

DePue: People who are going out to conduct the investigations.

Michaelson: Well from the election board?

DePue: Yes.

Michaelson: Well they had to be nonpartisan as well. The entire staff had to be nonpartisan.

DePue: But saying it is one thing and proving it is another.

Michaelson: Doing it—yeah, you're right. You're right. The problem we had was we didn't have enough people to put in as many counties as we wanted to. You know we'd always get indications from various counties. Sometimes they'd call us and say, Hey, we think something might be amiss here, or, We think we might have problems, or, This is my first election; could you have somebody come down and just hold my hand and make sure I get through this thing? And we always got requests from East St. Louis because fraud was endemic in East St. Louis. They always asked us to come down and try to help out. Well we usually had a staff of sixty, sixty-five people and these weren't all elections people. Some were campaign disclosure people. On Election Day we had tons of calls come into the office: voters, county clerks, press and so forth. The phones were really busy all day. You had to have a certain number of staff in the office, so we didn't have a whole lot of people we could put out in the field, so we had to be really careful and precise in terms of our use of our manpower. Where do you want to send them? But we just couldn't cover everything. But I do think our presence in some cases probably was a deterrent to shenanigans. I'm sure it was in East St. Louis. East St. Louis has an executive director, James Lewis. I think he still is. He's been there for a long time. James is a really honest guy; really conscientious guy, but he's got an unbelievably (laughter) difficult job there. He's got no money. It's a one-party city basically and a history of fraud and whatever. And he's always asked us to be down there, at least when I was in charge. We always had people in East St. Louis—one or two people every election. And I really think that in some ways just the fact—you know, in East St. Louis word gets around pretty quickly that, hey, the Feds are here or the state's here or whomever is here. And it probably did serve as a deterrent. It probably did help.

DePue: You mentioned there were about sixty on the staff. But this is a very episodic thing. There was only an election every two years. I guess there are primaries you can throw in there as well but the general public is thinking, Well, what are these people doing when there is not an election going on?

Michaelson: Not just the general public—my wife asks me that all the time. (laughter) It's amazing how certainly as you ramp up to the primaries, when petitions are being filed and then objections to the petitions and getting the ballot ready for the primary—that's really a busy time. But campaign disclosure reports are filed—now they're filed quarterly. So that's a very consistent business, shall I call it. There's stuff going on all the time. And with our early primary, the calendar is such that you've got an election in November, those who have

two-year terms which means every member of the Illinois House and a third of the Senate. Now this year in 2012 the entire Senate is running. So you have a November election. You start circulating petitions in September of the next year, just ten months later. You're circulating petitions and then you're filing them in December for your March primary. Well prior to circulation in September, the state board of elections has to prepare a number of publications, one of which is called a "Candidate's Guide," which we started midway in my tenure. And that's an interesting story in itself. So remind me to come back to it. But that kind of lays out all the requirements for running for office, for each office: how many signatures do you need in your petition, when do you file it, where do you file it—all these things. It's a really important document. Of course the law changes every two years, so you need some lead time to prepare that document. So that's done in the summer or spring right after your November election. So the election people really with other publications they put out, too, because they have publications on voter registration and absentee voting, overseas voting, nursing home voting—all these things are written publications that have to be updated and so forth. There is stuff going on all the time. It's just amazing but there really is activity going on all the time although it is peak activity during petition filing and getting ready for the primary.

DePue: Are you able to bring on some extra folks during the elections themselves?

Michaelson: Once in a while we hire a few contractual people but not often—not often.

DePue: Most of our conversation up to this point has been about vote fraud and the conduct of the elections. But you've mentioned a couple ties about campaign disclosure. Can you flesh that out a little bit more for us?

Michaelson: Yeah. Illinois was one of the last states in the union to enact a campaign disclosure law. They had no regulation of money in campaigns until the Watergate episode and Illinois was kind of, you know, embarrassed into passing a disclosure law only; no contribution limits, no other regulations other than disclose where you get your money and how you spend it. The philosophy behind that is a sunlight philosophy; sunlight is the best disinfectant. You know, hey, someone can contribute a million dollars to the governor but everybody's going to know that someone contributed, who it was and then you make your own decision. Do you still want to vote for that guy or not? And so this was in '74. The Illinois legislature always resisted any further regulation until actually last year when they passed contribution limits for the very first time.

One thing we worked very hard on at the board was to improve the public access to all these campaign disclosure documents that were filed. In 1998, there was a modest reform called the Illinois Gift Ban Act and one of the things it did was it would require political committees that received or spent more than ten thousand dollars in a year to file their reports

electronically rather than by paper. We were dealing with thousands and thousands of pages of paper reports which we had to make available to the public. If somebody wanted Governor Thompson's report, we had to Xerox five hundred pages and they'd pay for it and we'd give it to them. But this new act required some of the committees to file electronically. Our own staff wrote a software program that we gave to candidates free of charge so they could file electronically; a number of candidates who weren't required to file electronically filed their reports electronically anyway because they thought it was easier. The cool thing about electronic filing is, the moment it's submitted to the state board, it's on the state board's website. Immediately you've got up to the minute—up to the second—data, if you will. Actually sometime back in the late '90s we got an award for the best disclosure operation in the nation on the fact we used electronic filing so well and had such a good website and had the software available to political committees to use. Obviously that's been enhanced today and the vast majority of candidates now file electronically and so newspapers, the media, the public, political opponents, anybody, can immediately find out the results of a candidate's latest disclosure filing—where is he getting his money, who's giving him his money. And that's all good. But that's the only thing the Illinois legislature was ever willing to do was allow or require disclosure.

DePue: I assume that the disclosure we're talking about only applies to state and local elections?

Michaelson: Right.

DePue: So U.S. Senate—

Michaelson: U.S. Senate and Congress—they file with the Federal Election Commission.

DePue: Right, and then there are campaign limitations.

Michaelson: Yes. But Illinois (laughter) resisted contribution limits until last year.

DePue: From your perspective, why has Illinois been walking against the current?

Michaelson: Yeah, the political culture here resists regulation. Both parties, quite frankly, were happy because both parties had access to big money and could easily get a ten thousand or a twenty thousand contribution from *x* person or somebody's law firm. See Illinois doesn't prohibit direct contributions from labor unions or corporations, either. Those are prohibited at the federal level; not so in Illinois. So a labor union can contribute one hundred thousand dollars or ADM can contribute fifty thousand dollars. And both parties like that because both parties take elections seriously; a highly competitive state, which means money for campaigns, money for TV ads and so forth. And they like that free and open non-regulatory system.

DePue: But part of the equation is the public pressure to make changes and you hear criticism and have for a long time but continuing today that Illinois electorate—the people—just are more tolerant of our corrupt officials than other states. Would you agree with that?

Michaelson: Well yeah, I think they've kind of been conditioned, unfortunately. I remember a former mayor in New Orleans in Louisiana has always had an aura of corruption and their state politics as well as local politics in New Orleans. The former mayor said, "You can make corruption illegal but you can't make it unpopular." And, you know, I think there was some truth to that down there and maybe in Illinois, too. It's really too bad, but media like the Chicago Tribune, for instance, in the last couple of years they have really gotten on this horse—oversight of government—and trying to clean things up. They're one of the major instigators in finally getting contribution limits passed. They weren't the only ones, but they were kind of leading the charge. And legislature was a reluctant dragon on this one, too. It wasn't an easy sell but Governor Quinn, to his credit, he wanted it and it finally got done. It's an imperfect bill but it still allows the party leaders, the four caucus leaders in a general election campaign—to contribute without limit *x* amount of money to any other political candidates, which gives Madigan and Cross and whomever, great power to dole out hefty sums of money to candidates that they've targeted they want to support and they want to make sure they win and so forth and so on. And despite pressure to put limits on those, the legislature didn't do it. So, party leaders can still make contributions without limitation in the general election, and that's a big loophole which they're going to try to close. But I guess the point is, the contribution limits bill that was passed was far from perfect. But at least they finally got something done.

DePue: One of the criticisms of the Illinois legislature for a long time has been that the four leaders—the four tops, they're sometimes called—have so much power that the rest of the membership is kind of irrelevant. And the thing you just discussed only gives them more power.

Michaelson: Oh absolutely. I don't know why I'd want to be a member or just a rank and file member of the legislature. I really don't because all the big stuff—with the big votes—the controversial stuff is all held to the end and then you're told by your leaders how to vote basically once they've made a determination, or if they've come to some kind of agreement with the other side on a package. And those kind of agreements are becoming less frequent but you're relegated to almost a nonentity during the session. You're not much of a player, particularly if you're in the minority. If you're in the minority in the House, you've got zero chance to pass any bill that has any substance to it that might help you in your reelection campaign. You know, (laughter) forget it! You can introduce it and you can go home and say, I introduced this thing. But you're not going to get it passed; Madigan won't let you.

We haven't talked about this, but this is really something that happened once we went to single member districts after the Cutback Amendment in 1980. Legislative leaders have gotten much more powerful. Under cumulative voting, you always had a very close division of power in the Illinois House. By that I mean, Republicans or Democrats controlled the House barely, so there was room for a lot of compromise and a lot of deal-making. The Speaker in no way had the same power that the Speaker has now under single member districts where frankly, as I'm sure you know, we have a lot of non-contested races. You know the districts are drawn so much—there are so many strong Republican and so many strong Democratic districts where in both cases, the other party doesn't even bother running anybody. And you have a small number of contested races. Of course, when one party is drawing the lines using computer technology, they can draw these lines so expertly to advantage their party. The Democrats and the Republicans would have done the same thing but the Democrats have drawn lines now that have guaranteed them the majority for the next ten years without question and a sizable majority, thus contributing to the power of the Speaker. And then with the kind of money that the Speaker not only can raise but can dole out, it really enhances the power of that office. And then particularly when you have a person like Madigan who's so brilliant; you know he just knows state government backwards and forwards and he knows he's the longest serving legislator, either in the House or the Senate. He's been here longer than anybody. And an interesting little piece of trivia is that there were only two legislators who served in the 1970 Illinois Constitutional Convention; only two legislators ran and won. I think one reason there were only two legislators was, although Con Con delegates got paid eighty-five hundred dollars, if you were a legislator you didn't get paid because you were getting a legislative salary. (laughter)

DePue: Well they were both conducting business at the same time as well.

Michaelson: Yeah, the two were Mike Madigan and Richard M. Daley, who was then to become mayor. That's really incredible and now Madigan's the longest-serving member of the legislature.

DePue: And I have heard it said that Madigan was there to keep an eye on Daley. (laughter)

Michaelson: (laughter) Yeah, I think so. But yeah, single member districts have really enhanced the power of leaders and it certainly hasn't done what Pat Quinn said it was going to do when he passed the Cutback Amendment in 1980.

DePue: Well, that was one of the questions. This has been a great conversation. I wanted to get a general sense of what it is the state board of election does and then kind of take a waltz through the history of Illinois elections since the time you got there. So that was going to be part of it. But before we start that waltz,

I wanted to ask you a couple of other questions. Does the board of election have anything to do with redistricting—with monitoring that process?

Michaelson: No. People have suggested that we should. (laughter)

DePue: You're probably happy that you don't.

Michaelson: That's what my board members always said, We don't want any part of this thing! We had one example where we were asked to perform the districting process. It wasn't redistricting. It was to draw districts in the Belleville Community College district where they used to elect their trustees at large and state law said, You're going to elect them by districts and the state board is going to draw the district boundaries, without regard to incumbency or where the incumbent trustees lived or anything. And we did it. I don't know if there are four or five districts. This was back in the '80s, I think. With a little bit of—not too much controversy—we had a few calls; people down there wondering why—but that's the only time we ever got involved and it was not something the board wanted to get into.

DePue: We just took a very quick break and we're back at it again with Ron Michaelson. I had one more question before we start talking about specific elections in a chronological sense. And that deals with the old practice of elected officials getting to take their campaign war chests into retirement with them. Any reflections on that and the change that that has brought?

Michaelson: Yeah. We had examples of incumbents using their campaign money to buy a fur coat for their wife, to buy country club memberships, to buy a new car, to buy a second house in Florida. I remember Frank Savikas, who was a Democratic senator from the city of Chicago, was kind of always the poster boy for personal use. And it was legal as long as you paid tax on the money because it was considered, obviously, income.

The Gift Ban Act of 1998 which was passed the last year of the Edgar administration and I worked on that bill—it's kind of an interesting story. The Public Policy Institute at SIU–Carbondale, where Mike Lawrence was the assistant director, and I think Paul Simon was still alive; this was 1998,he was director and said, "Can't we do anything to start the campaign finance reform in Illinois?" They came up with the idea of going to each of the four caucuses and say, Give us one person that you will trust and the four representatives will meet every other week to try to hash out a bill, but after each meeting they'll go back to their caucus and say, Can you live with this? Can you live with this? And then they'd come back and we'd work some more. I was asked to participate, representing the state board, since we were going to have to administer most of this stuff. The governor's office was involved occasionally on it but they were on board in terms of the concept. and Mike Lawrence was kind of the facilitator. We had Kirk Dillard from the Senate Republicans. We had Jack Kubik, K-u-b-i-k, from the House Republicans; he was a Cook

County suburban legislator. The House Democrat had just retired from the House and he was secretary of DOT—had just retired. What's his name? Oh, I can see his face so clearly.

DePue: We can get that in the transcripts somewhere down the road.

Michaelson: Yeah, I'll get it. The Senate Democrat was a guy by the name of Barack Obama. We met in the Abraham Lincoln Hotel—now the Abraham Lincoln Hotel—every other week to try to thrash out a bill. And we finally did, and it was the last bill voted on by the House in that session. It was called the Gift Ban Act of 1998, but it had a lot of campaign disclosure stuff in it. We've already talked about some of it: the electronic filing. But one of the items was prohibition on personal use of campaign funds. We finally got that in, but it was grandfathered and the provision was that for all current campaign committee accounts, the effective date of the act. Let's say, if George Ryan had fifty thousand dollars in his political account, even if you added another half a million after that time, at any point until he retired, he had fifty thousand dollars that he could spend for personal use if he wanted to. So am I making myself clear?

DePue: Whatever he had at the moment.

Michaelson: Whatever he had at the time, if you want to, you could use personally but from here on out, prohibition. I really don't know—it would be an interesting study to find out to what extent any public officials used personal money after the effective date of that act because a certain amount was grandfathered in. But I imagine not many because this was a pretty high profile issue and for somebody to go out and using campaign funds for personal use afterwards even though they have a certain amount they could use would have not created a very good impression.

DePue: Let me paint a scenario here. Mike Madigan was Speaker of the House at that time, as he still is today. Let's assume that he had a fairly sizable war chest at that time and does that mean that he'd have to report any time he dipped into using that campaign fund that he had existing at that time for personal use?

Michaelson: Right because you have to account for the use of all your money. So he would have had to account that, hey, I used ten thousand dollars personally. I've reported to the IRS and am going to pay taxes on it. But yeah, that would have been a matter of public record.

DePue: At the time he's reporting it, does it become income to him?

Michaelson: Yes.

DePue: But before that it would not be?

Michaelson: Well, before that, it was. You know the Savikas story of buying a house in Florida—that had to be reported to the IRS. That was personal income. Even though it was campaign money, when you convert it to personal use, you've got to report it to the IRS and then pay taxes.

DePue: But at that moment that he converted it to his personal use?

Michaelson: Right. So that's my recollection on that. And I will think of that guy's name before we're done. But it was a pretty unique mechanism to bring agreement on what was the first campaign finance reform measure passed in Illinois since 1974—since the original act. Remember—we had a bill signing in Carbondale. I went down to it and the governor signed the bill in the Public Policy Institute office with Paul Simon and Mike Lawrence. For Illinois it was (laughter) a major step forward.

DePue: Do you remember anything specific about Obama's involvement with it?

Michaelson: Oh yeah. He was very regular in attendance. He was very bright. He was very personable. I got to know him well enough that I know my brother, who just retired as general secretary of the Reformed Church of America—he's met Obama three or four times in religious settings, if you will, and he kind of told Obama he as my brother, blah, blah, blah, and Obama, Oh yeah, sure—I remember Ron, blah, blah, blah. So yeah—so I know him or knew him—no but I worked with him on that project. And that lasted two or three months. That was really the only thing I ever worked with him on when he was in the state Senate. But he was very impressive—very impressive.

DePue: Did you have a sense at that time that he had a future?

Michaelson: No—not for president. Did he have a future maybe in Illinois politics or in the state Senate? Yeah. He was in his first term but I thought that a person of color who was intelligent and well-spoken and personable—yeah, he was an impressive guy. Certainly I wasn't thinking (laughter) presidency! But yeah.

DePue: Okay. You got to this position in September of 1974, an off-year election year for the State of Illinois. That was when both the governorship and the presidency were running in sync at that time. But this particular off-year election, you've got Dan Walker who, as you mentioned already, is butting heads seriously with the state legislature. He can't break through that group of resistant, Daley Democrats from Chicago who are against him and he's obviously not getting any support from Republicans. So he goes out and tries to cultivate his own set of candidates for the legislature. Now I guess as I go through each one of these elections, you can respond personally if you'd like but the question is basically about the board of elections involvement and whether or not in any of these things we discussed there was any involvement from the board of elections side.

Michaelson: Okay. Not in the election of ’74 for sure and of course, I was like the third or fourth person hired. That was in September, and by November we might have had ten or twelve people on board. You know, we’re still (laughter) very much in the infancy and I have really no recollection of the ’74 election.

DePue: Okay, ‘76—two years later—you become the executive director. And how were you selected for that position?

Michaelson: That this national search committee brought back a recommendation and the four-member board hired me.

DePue: Do you remember the members of the board?

Michaelson: Sure. Yeah. Mike Lavelle. You might have recorded him earlier or maybe not. Mike Lavelle, Frank Lunding.

DePue: Okay—yeah, we did.

Michaelson: Yeah, Don Adams and Bill Harris. I think you did record them.

DePue: I’m sorry. The 1976 election then? And again, I don’t know if you have as much involvement with federal elections, with either the Senate or especially presidential elections.

Michaelson: No. Of course, the Senate and President—they still have to file their petitions with the state board of elections. And on a couple occasions we had presidential candidates file in person, which was pretty interesting, but not in ’76.

DePue: Would the primary seasons in the presidential elections have more involvement for you than the general elections?

Michaelson: Yes, because of the ballot access thing. In presidential elections in Illinois, for many years the presidential primary has always been what we call a beauty contest. It had no binding effect at all. Delegates were elected separately or are elected separately. And all delegates are pledged to specific candidates on both sides of the aisle.

DePue: In their party convention?

Michaelson: In their party—yeah. And those delegates who are elected are going to go to the national convention, you know, supposedly pledged to support those particular candidates. Then the presidential candidates on the ballot—again—we called it a beauty contest because it was just kind of a popularity contest—but quite frankly it might enhance or hurt a candidate’s chances in the campaign depending on how well they did in Illinois. So it wasn’t totally ignored, for sure. My only recollection of the ’76 election was this was the first election now when the Illinois governor was going to be elected for a

two-year term because then he or she would be up again in ’78 and then you’d have your four years after that. But this was the way to get you off of the presidential election cycle.

DePue: Which was a result of the 1970 constitution?

Michaelson: The 1970 constitution and ConCon delegates thinking that not enough attention is being paid to statewide races in a presidential year. You know the governor’s race always takes a significant backseat to the presidential race which I’m sure was correct. So Michael Howlett beat Dan Walker in the primary. And Howlett was a long-time Democratic state official. I think he was state auditor at the time. You’ll have to check that.

DePue: I was thinking he was secretary of state at the time.

Michaelson: He might have been. He might have been. ’76—Mike Howlett—

DePue: ’76—well he was controller for a while. That was up through ’72. And I know he’s on here someplace. There he is—secretary of state.

Michaelson: Secretary of state? Okay. So he beat Dan Walker in the primary and there’s this guy Jim Thompson who gets the Republican nomination. I’ll never forget. I’m at the Illinois State Fair and Jim Thompson is walking down the main street in the fair with Jim Fletcher, who is his campaign aide. Jim Fletcher now is one of the biggest lobbyists in the state and wanted to be Thompson’s chief of staff and all sorts of stuff but a really talented guy. And walking down the main street and nobody’s with him and nobody’s talking to him—you know, just the two of them walking down alone. And obviously they’re out campaigning. And I’m thinking to myself, How does this guy who’s never run for public office before and he’s running against Mike Howlett, who’s been elected statewide and he has a well-known name—how does he think he’s going to win? Well (laughter) he becomes governor for fourteen years! But that’s my recollection of the ’76—

DePue: At least the number I’m looking at is he won by a margin of 65 percent in the general election.

Michaelson: Well, Jim Thompson was a tremendous campaigner, you know, kind of like Barack Obama who’s a great campaigner. Blagojevich was a great campaigner. Thompson had people skills. He had charisma. He was 6’6”. He was the kind of guy who, if there were one hundred people in the room and Jim Thompson walked in, all of a sudden everybody knows that Jim Thompson just walked into that room. They say Bill Clinton had the same kind of aura about him, and that’s the way Jim Thompson was. He wasn’t totally unknown because he was the prosecutor that put Otto Kerner behind bars. And Otto Kerner was (laughter) obviously well-known and unfortunately was indicted when he was a judge but was indicted for things he allegedly did while he was governor: racetrack stock and so forth; that was a pretty sad

ending to his career. But Thompson was the prosecutor. So he had some notoriety but still had never run for office.

DePue: Well, how much of that wide margin that Thompson had, had to do with Dan Walker's damage that he'd done to the party?

Michaelson: Probably a lot because Dan Walker did a lot of damage to the Democrats—he really did.

DePue: And we should say this—his legal problems originated after he got out of office. It had nothing to do with Walker as governor.

Michaelson: Absolutely. It was a business venture. He allegedly filed some false bank statements and whatever, I'm not sure.

DePue: Well one other election I think we can dispatch pretty quickly here: In 1978 a gubernatorial election again that year, as you mentioned before—Jim Thompson against State Controller Michael Bakalis.

Michaelson: We had some role in that because Thompson circulated petitions. It was called the Thompson Proposition, (laughter) and was advisory only. I don't recall the exact wording but it was something regarding Illinois: Shall we increase our taxes to provide certain public services. It was kind of an apple pie kind of question. But Thompson supposedly wanted to get the state's sense of what they wanted to do in terms of taxes and revenue so he got hundreds of thousands of signatures on a petition, filed it with us and got this measure on the ballot which, as I say, was advisory only, but it was called the Thompson Proposition; got tremendous publicity over it. The Democrats argued at the time that it wasn't—and here my memory is not good as to why they argued—it wasn't a valid measure to put on the ballot even though it was totally advisory in nature because they saw he was gaining a lot of attention. And it meant nothing. It meant nothing. And I wish I remembered exactly what the proposition said. But he got it on the ballot and it certainly enhanced his chances for reelection against Mike Bakalis.

DePue: Maybe I don't understand what the proposition was but it sounds like it's quizzing the state if it's willing to have a tax increase to do certain things which in today's climate would be a death knell for the thing.

Michaelson: Yeah. Either you or I should go back and get the exact wording—what the proposition was.

DePue: How about we start our next session with that?

Michaelson: Okay because I probably have it in my office. But yeah, the Thompson Proposition of '78 filed with us really guaranteed Thompson's reelection. I think it's as easy as that.

DePue: I know you've got a schedule to meet here so we're going to have to stop for today. But we've got a lot of fascinating (laughter) Illinois political history to cover here.

Michaelson: We do and chronologically it probably starts with the Cutback Amendment in '80.

DePue: Yes, I definitely wanted to spend some time talking about that. Okay. Thank you very much.

Michaelson: Okay.

(end of interview #1)

Interview with Ron Michaelson

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Interview # 2: Monday, October 10, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Monday, October 10, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today is my second session with Ron Michaelson. Good morning.

Michaelson: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: It's Columbus Day. So we feel like pioneers or explorers in this search through Illinois political history.

Michaelson: You've got it! (laughter)

DePue: Strangers in a peculiar line-up sometimes. We left off last time—you were just getting into the Thompson Proposition. And I wanted to pick it up and give you a chance to elaborate a little bit more on that.

Michaelson: Yeah, the Thompson Proposition was an interesting political device, shall we call it, that Jim Thompson used in his '78 election because Jim Thompson had only served a two-year term. We were in the midst of the transition to gubernatorial elections in nonpresidential years. So he was elected in '76 and had to stand for reelection in 1978. Now this was the year that California passed its Prop 13 by way of a binding state initiative which puts limits on property taxes in California; a very controversial thing out there and got a tremendous amount of publicity. Here in Illinois we don't have binding referenda except for changing the structure and process of the general assembly which did occur in 1980 and we'll talk about that shortly. So Jim Thompson said, Let's have an advisory referendum on the ballot and let's see if Illinoisans feel similar to Californians and others regarding taxes. And the question was shall there be a limit on state and local taxes in Illinois. And you know, it's kind of a motherhood and apple pie kind of question. He got enough signatures to put it on the ballot. He was running against Michael Bakalis, and he got a tremendous amount of publicity by circulating this referendum which obviously had no binding sense whatever to it. And it passed overwhelmingly. But the fact that Thompson was able to circulate it and he was the promoter of it gained him a lot of publicity. And obviously he easily was reelected in 1978. Those petitions were filed with the State Board of Elections. I don't remember the number of signatures. It was monstrous. Nobody really objected to the signatures. Everybody knew it was not binding anyway and they saw he had so many signatures. They realized that Thompson had executed a really nice political ploy here in attaching onto this kind of issue. And that's why he was a very smart politician in the good sense of the word. And thus he had another four-year term in 1978.

DePue: An anti-tax vote in Illinois was no new thing since it wasn't that far back—1972 that Ogilvie lost the election to—

Michaelson: To Dan Walker.

DePue: To Dan Walker and Ogilvie's weakness was, of course, he had to implement the income tax.

Michaelson: The state income tax—that's right. This is only six years later, as you mentioned, and there was still some resentment lingering around regarding the new state income tax that was relatively new and Thompson took advantage of that and that was that.

DePue: And so that was the '78 elections; the next election obviously in 1980. There is going to be no gubernatorial election in Illinois that year.

Michaelson: No gubernatorial election. This is the year that Ronald Reagan ran against Jimmy Carter. And this is the year where we had tremendously high inflation. I remember long lines at the gas pumps and interest rates were like 13, 14 percent and, you know, a lot of economic distress and unhappiness. And

obviously Reagan took advantage of it. And we're getting off of Illinois politics for a sec, but I remember Reagan's tag line in that election was, "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" And that was a brilliant question to ask and obviously most people honestly had to say probably not. But it was in the spring of 1980 where we had a very controversial binding referendum filed with us by Pat Quinn and his Coalition for Political Honesty. Now we have to back up a little bit. It was after the 1978 election. It was the 1979 session of the general assembly where some kind of a blue ribbon commission had recommended salary increases for members of the legislature and members of the executive branch. And these increases were substantial; at least for legislators my recollection was at least 20 percent increases and some higher. And Thompson was behind this and initially he was behind it, passed the bill—the legislature did. There was a lot of anger growing amongst the population regarding the size of these increases and so Thompson kind of backed off and said, These are too large. And it was actually after the 1978 election when in the veto session Thompson vetoed those pay increases but he kind of had an understanding with the legislature. In fact, he vetoed it when he was on vacation down in—I think in the Carolinas. And then the legislature quickly overrode his veto which was not troublesome to him. And so everybody got their raises but Thompson looked like he was a white knight trying to keep them from being so excessive.

DePue: As I understand, he had campaigned in the '78 gubernatorial election promising that he would veto any such measures.

Michaelson: I think that's probably right. I don't recall that but it sounds right because of the nature of the Thompson Proposition.

DePue: And the angst then was because he vetoed it so quickly it gave the legislature a chance to override it.

Michaelson: Right and the fact that it appeared that he and the legislature were working hand in glove here to accomplish this. Well this raised the ire of the *Peoria Journal Star* for one—the newspaper. And Pat Quinn—I don't recall when he actually founded his Coalition for Political Honesty. In fact, Pat was on this blue ribbon commission that recommended the pay increases and he even at that time said, No, they were not necessary.

DePue: We're talking about the same Pat Quinn who's currently governor. But who was Pat Quinn in 1978?

Michaelson: Pat Quinn cut his teeth with Dan Walker. He worked on Walker's campaign when Walker was walking the state with his red bandana. Quinn was an advance man for him. And then Quinn joined his staff and was on the staff for not the duration of the Walker administration. Pat found that he was a little more comfortable outside of government than inside government and I remember there were even allegations back then that Quinn was on the

governor's payroll but he didn't work in the governor's office. He was out in DOT or somewhere else and was he a ghost pay roller and all this kind of stuff. Well, Pat took leave of the governor and started this grassroots stuff. He was concerned about electric rate increases and things. But he really grabbed hold of this pay raise thing. And, by the way, the legislature and Thompson finally stepped back and they cut those pay raises and implemented them in stages over a few years so the impact wasn't quite as heavy. But Pat's Coalition for Political Honesty said this is inside politics and not the way things should be done and a lot of his people were located in Peoria and they had a really big sell in the Coalition in Peoria and the *State Journal Star* in Peoria was firmly in their corner. And Pat organized a tea party revolution. You know, we think the Tea Party today is something unique to Illinois politics. No, they had a tea party back in '79 and one of the things the Coalition did was get people to send tea bags to the governor's office. And one day they got thousands upon thousands of tea bags delivered and they were dumped on a table there. And it was a great media shot. And so Pat's exposure certainly was enhanced by these kind of shenanigans. And that led to his suggestion that the legislature was too large, spending too much money on the legislature; the house was 177 members. And then he said this unique way we elect members to the House, which was called cumulative voting, which was a multi-member district system where in most districts you had two from one party and one from the other party. And cumulative voting was a product of the 1870 Illinois constitution and its intent was to bring the state together politically, because back at that time most of the people in southern Illinois were Democrats and most of the people in northern Illinois were Republicans. And cumulative voting allowed Republican districts in Chicago to have a Democrat. Of course, later on it was Democratic districts in Chicago to have a Republican. And the strong districts all around the state still had a minority representation.

DePue: I think the way as I understand it, each senatorial district had three representatives and they all represented the district at large.

Michaelson: At large, right. And each party decided how many were going to run. If each party was going to run two, then three of the four would be elected because the voters had three votes and they could distribute them any way they wanted. They could bullet vote—they could cast three votes for—one vote for one candidate and he'd get three, or they could cast votes for two candidates and each would get one and a half, or they could vote for three candidates and all three of them would get one. It was a little confusing. But the parties in many districts said—the Republicans in a Republican district said, Hey we'll run two and you run one. And in a Democratic district, they'd say, You run two Democrats and we'll run one Republican. And this resulted in a lot of races for the House where there were only three candidates on the ballot and three to be elected, meaning there was no contest. And so this party collusion really bothered Pat as well and he said, If we have single member districts, we'll have one-on-one races and we'll have more competition, better political

balance, et cetera. So his Cutback Amendment did two things; eliminated cumulative voting and provided for single member districts and cut the size of the House from 177 to 118—cut it by a third. He said this would save money, less staff, et cetera, et cetera. But the real story is the petition circulation process. Article 14, Section Three of the State Constitution says that you can change the structure and process of the General Assembly by petition if petition gatherers can collect a minimum of 8 percent of the vote for governor in the preceding election. The Constitutional Convention put this provision in—the only binding referendum in Illinois—because they didn't trust the legislature to reform itself. So the citizens could change the process and structure of the legislature. And the number of signatures they needed was a little more than 252,000 gathered statewide. They had to be filed the first week of May with the State Board of Elections.

DePue: Of 1980?

Michaelson: Nineteen-eighty—for placement on the November ballot. Now Pat started collecting signatures. And it was obvious that he was going to get a lot of signatures. So during the 1980 legislative session, before the filing date, the legislature passed a law that said, All signatures on a petition page have to be registered voters from the same election jurisdiction, basically meaning the same county or those—I think there were eight municipalities that had their own boards of election—that's election jurisdiction so if there are Chicago signatures on a petition, all you could have is Chicago people. You couldn't have Cook County people on that same petition page. The reason they did it ostensibly was to make it easier for the State Board of Elections to review the authenticity of the signatures because it is a lot easier if each petition page has signatures from only one jurisdiction. You go to the county clerk's office and check the registration rolls from that jurisdiction versus if you had a petition—of twenty names on the petition there were twelve different counties represented. It would have made the job a lot more tedious. The problem was the legislature passed it in the middle of Quinn's petition drive. So Quinn had two options: one—to start over again.

DePue: Now this couldn't have been news to the legislature that they were doing this to Quinn so there is some malfeasance perhaps?

Michaelson: Yeah. They absolutely wanted to stop the petition drive from being successful.

DePue: They as in Republicans or Democrats?

Michaelson: They as Republicans and Democrats. Both parties liked cumulative voting and they didn't want to lose any of their people in the House. They liked the way things were going. And they disliked this populist bomb thrower Pat Quinn coming in and trying to upset the apple cart. So they changed the rules in the middle of the game. And Pat Quinn said, Sorry. This is totally unfair. We're going to continue on and collect signatures as we have. And if they want to

take it to court, the courts can sort it out. So I got a call from Quinn's people the day before they were supposed to file. State law for any kind of petition—it's usually a candidate petition—state law requires petitions to be bound together in one document. You know if you're running for the House you just can't come in to the State Board and have thirty loose pages of paper and throw them on a desk and say, "This is my petition." The law says that they have to be bound together. Now for candidates it's usually simple unless you're a gubernatorial candidate and you're filing thousands and thousands of signatures. You have kind of a thicker book. Well Pat Quinn, rather than file the minimum or close to the minimum which was 252,000 filed about 475,000—filed almost twice as much as necessary; very smart on his part because the more you file, the more difficult it is for objectors to go after your petition. But the problem Pat had was how do you bind together in one document petitions that have 475,000 signatures. He said, "We're going to bring this document in a twenty-four-foot-long narrow box," kind of like a canoe. And the petition would be lying inside the box, if you will, and he said they would have it bound together. And of course he alerts the media, and it was a big media show. It took four people to carry this thing in and drop this huge box on the floor and said, "Here we are." So (laughter) that was a wonderful day. The problem we had—the Board—was that both the Republicans and Democrats wanted to get their hands on that petition and look at it and see if there were grounds to objection because you had five business days to put together an objection to the petition. That's not a long time.

DePue: When you say "get their hands on the petition," certainly they knew what the language in the petition was, didn't they?

Michaelson: Yeah but they wanted to look at the pages to see—

DePue: The signatures.

Michaelson: Yeah, were there circulars on every page; were the pages notarized; all these requirements of petitions. So what we had to do—our staff—we had to unbind the document and we had to copy that sucker in the days of fairly primitive Xerox copy machines. I don't remember the number of pages. But literally hundreds of thousands of pages we had to copy and of course anybody—they had to pay for a copy of a petition. And both parties were gladly happy to pay. But we had people working around the clock. And we hired extra help because they wanted this thing immediately and of course, we had to make sure we didn't lose any pages. And then we had to put the petition back together again. It was a horrendous job—a horrendous job. Well, the parties understood that with so many signatures being filed, they weren't going to be able to go through each page and find discrepancies and cut it down to below the minimum—252,000. So they went to court and basically said the petition is invalid because it did not conform to the requirement of the law that the legislature just passed that all the signatures on the same page had to be from

the same election jurisdiction. And actually we went through the petition and took out the pages that complied with the law—all the signatures from the same jurisdiction. And when you counted those number of signatures up, he had about 100,000—okay—that complied with the law which was way less than he needed.

DePue: I'm going to interject here. Politicians—both Republican and Democrat—strongly objected to the Cutback Amendment. But the Cutback Amendment resulted because of this populist outrage over what Thompson had done two years before. And politicians in Illinois aren't any different from anyplace else. They know that they don't want to get on the wrong side of public sentiment. But yet they're fighting this thing tooth and nail.

Michaelson: Well that's true. That is true but there was so much at stake for both parties politically. They did not want to lose cumulative voting and they did not want Pat Quinn to succeed because they saw him as a potential threat to their own fortunes. This guy was gaining a lot of publicity and notoriety and he obviously went to work for Dan Walker, so he was a Democrat. And the Democrats particularly were thinking, Hey this guy could cause us real problems down the road.

DePue: Do you recall how the press was dealing with it? Were editorials coming out in favor of it in general?

Michaelson: It was very popular. Both parties knew that if this got on the ballot, no way to defeat it—no way to defeat it. And yeah, Pat was good at demagoguing the issues and talking about how we're going to save so much money; we're going to cut the size of the House and we're going to have one-on-one contests in every House district now and have real elections and a new day in politics in Illinois, et cetera, et cetera. He did a great job at that. So both parties knew they had to stop this before it got on the ballot. And the lawsuit went to the Illinois Supreme Court. And the Supreme Court—I don't recall the vote—but the Supreme Court basically said, You can't change the rules in the middle of the game. They said it was just unfair. And most people who understood the issues—it was kind of a complicated issue. But yeah it does sound unfair. This group had already been out working and in the middle of their campaign to collect signatures you change the ground rules. And so the court said, No, you can't do that. There was also a legal issue. The constitution says any kind of referendum has to affect both the structure and the process of the General Assembly. The argument was this affected the structure; *i.e.* cut the size of the House by a third. Obviously the structure is being affected. But how does it affect the legislative process, whatever that means? It's kind of ambiguous. But the court said by getting away from cumulative voting and going to single member districts and reducing the size, the whole legislative process is going to be changed; it's going to be affected. And they didn't buy that argument. They set it meets both criteria and thus it can be on the ballot. And it won by two to one. And most party people, I

think, really kind of threw in the towel, that they saw this thing—it was kind of like a motherhood and apple pie question, just like the Thompson Proposition once it got on the ballot. So this vaulted Pat Quinn into prominence. There were some Democrats—I remember Mike Madigan—was he Speaker of the House at the time? He might have been.

DePue: I think he was—yes.

Michaelson: He said some very nasty things about Pat Quinn.

DePue: Actually, Wayne Redmond was at that time.

Michaelson: Well, Madigan was obviously in a prominent role in the House Democrats. He said, "Pat Quinn ought to be ashamed to call himself an Irishman." Obviously Madigan is Irish and, you know, a big Irish contingent in the city. And the Democrats said some very nasty things about Pat Quinn. And of course, the more the Democrats did it, the more Pat loved it because it just (laughter) heightened his name recognition and to have politicians picking on you in the eyes of a lot of people who said, Hey—good for you. So we had a new day in Illinois politics and no more cumulative voting and the size of the House was reduced. Now a lot of Pat Quinn's arguments for single member districts haven't come to pass. We've introduced more bills, not less. It costs more to run the House, not less. But the biggest thing is we don't have competitive elections in the House like he said we would with one-to-one contests because so many districts are drawn for political advantage for the Republicans or the Democrats. We call them strong Republican or strong Democratic districts so often the minority party doesn't even bother to field a candidate. And we have a relatively small number of districts in the middle where there is actual competition. And this is a product of technology. The staff has become so good at drawing districts.

DePue: Are you talking about the redistricting process after—

Michaelson: Every ten years, yeah. So it results in a lot of noncompetitive districts and a lot of—no races. And this is not what Pat Quinn wanted, but it's the way things have turned out.

DePue: When I talk to lots of people, and all the politicians that I've talked to during this time frame—this always comes up in the interviews and I ask them their views. And almost inevitably they're reminiscing about the good old days when cumulative voting occurred and their complaint is that it made for more party solidarity. You lost the moderate Republicans or the liberal Republicans that would be coming from these Chicago districts and the same thing for conservative districts.

Michaelson: Yeah, there's no question that some of the better legislators in the House came from minority districts. I'll give you a Republican and a Democrat example. Bill Redmond, who served as Speaker of the House at one time, was a

Democrat from DuPage County; never would have been elected in a system other than cumulative voting and served with great distinction. In Chicago we had a Republican named Art Telscer, T-e-l-s-c-e-r [*sic*]. He was a wonderful legislator; never would have been elected in a system other than cumulative voting. And the reason these minority legislators in some areas were so good was that they could afford to be more independent because they weren't going to get challenged by anybody in their own party because the party wasn't going to run two in their district. So they could afford to be outspoken. And we had examples on both sides of the aisle, both in the Chicago area as well as downstate of good minority legislators. By good I mean people who would be willing to be courageous and speak out and not worried about their political backside, et cetera. And there's no question that was a big advantage.

DePue: Another criticism that you hear is that the pattern where the four senior leaders in the House and the Senate—often times they're called the four tops—became not less powerful but more powerful because of this.

Michaelson: I think that's very, very true. Under cumulative voting, the split in balance of power being Republicans and Democrats was always very close; maybe three to four to five votes either way and thus the need for coalitions and for deal-making and less opportunity for kingpins to emerge in the House. Under cumulative voting, you could not have the kind of Speaker that we have now in Mike Madigan who's amassed a tremendous amount of power and influence. And I think that's very true. I think that's very true. We have more leader-dominance in our current single member district system and the leaders have been able to raise a lot of money because they are leaders. And then there's a small number of districts that are competitive so they don't have to spread their money around. They can put a lot of money in these targeted races. For instance, in 2010, in our last election, my recollection that of the 118 races in the House, I saw a list there were something like eleven or twelve or thirteen targeted races where the leaders put a lot of money into those races. And that's it. So leaders are much more powerful and influential under our current system than cumulative voting. Back in the late 1990s, the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at U of I put together a task force on legislative representation. Former Governor—well Edgar must have left office at the time. I don't know. You know I still think it was in the mid to late 1990s. We'll have to check the date. But I was on that task force of twenty, thirty people and was staffed by the U of I. And one of the recommendations of the task force was to revisit—Illinois should revisit cumulative voting. Now it wasn't a majority—I mean it wasn't unanimous but it was a majority recommendation. I remember Pat Quinn coming to one of the meetings and of course, trying to make his argument that single member districts have worked but I had the impression that he was kind of swimming upstream making that argument because we have so few competitive elections now. But obviously you need a constitutional amendment to do this and it was one of those reports that I think is just sitting on the shelf and there really hasn't been any serious effort to revise cumulative voting. But people still talk about it from time to

time. I think Governor Edgar is in that camp or at least that one time he was. But I don't think it will happen.

DePue: I wanted to go back to a procedural thing. And this might be the perfect example to use. How is it when you have this task of seeing petitions or when people are getting signatures so they can run for election in the first place—what's the procedure that the Board of Elections goes through to screen these things?

Michaelson: All right, that's a really good question. All petitions filed are presumptively valid. And this is going to be an important point when we talk about the 1986 election. All positions are presumptively valid which means that unless there's an objection filed to them, those names will be on the primary election ballot. However, if an objection is filed and there are five business days after the last day to file petitions for an objector to file, then you can file an objection for any one of a number of reasons: not enough signatures, a circulator did not live in the jurisdiction, it's not notarized, people signing weren't registered voters—all sorts of reasons. If an objection is filed, a hearing is held by the State Board of Elections. It's kind of like a mini-judicial proceeding. Both sides usually have attorneys. Sometimes they file written briefs. They come in and argue their case and the board decides whether the objection was filed on merit and determines whether the candidate will go on the ballot or whether the candidate will not go on the ballot. There is a procedure where the board sits at what we call a state electoral board when they hear these objections. And the losing party can appeal to the circuit court, which happens rarely, but it's a process that usually takes three to four weeks to hear all the cases. And usually you'll find out that those being objected to are challengers, not incumbents. Incumbents know the rules. They know the ropes. And quite often the objectors themselves are incumbents or somebody standing in for an incumbent who doesn't want opposition in his or her primary race. And it's not uncommon for Democrat and House Republican staffers anytime a petition is filed challenging one of their incumbents. They'll get a copy of that petition, review it and look for any way they can knock that person off. And that's kind of the hardball kind of politics that we have here in Illinois.

DePue: Okay and that was one of my questions. And who is it that's reviewing? Once the challenge is made, who is it that's reviewing these petitions, checking the signatures against election rolls?

Michaelson: The challenger—the objector—has the burden of proof. You just can't come in there and say, "I challenge Mark DePue's petition." It's insufficient. No, you've got to come in with chapter and verse; with reasons as to why the petition is insufficient. And then, to answer your question further, it's the State Board staff that has to take these challenges—the specificity of these challenges—and check them out. They may have to go to the county clerk's registration rolls and see if John Smith is really a registered voter at 123 Main Street or whatever. The State Board doesn't do the objector's work. The

objector has the burden of proof but the Board staff has to do some of the leg work to see if the objection does have merit. But then the Board itself makes the file decision.

DePue: Is your explaining it—does this mean that occasionally when there is an election—let's say there's a statewide election and there's a challenge made. Then your staff potentially would have to review hundreds of thousands of signatures, or tens of thousands at least of signatures?

Michaelson: Potentially. It usually doesn't happen. Usually for statewide candidates—statewide candidates are smart enough to file way more than they need which has the tendency to discourage objections. It's usually objections to legislative candidates and sometimes judicial, but most likely legislative. The practical difficulty is when you have a petition filing in the first week of December and then you have five business days for objections. It's usually around the middle of December when you have everything in front of you that you see what the workload is going to be. We've got fifteen objections that we've got to resolve and state law has a date certain that indicates when you have to certify the ballot for the primary election. Certifying the ballot means sending the ballot out to each county telling them who's going to be on the ballot, in what order, how to spell their names, et cetera. That's usually early in January—the tenth maybe, roughly.

DePue: And that's what the State Board of Elections does?

Michaelson: Right. So the State Board has three, maybe four weeks to handle all these objections and rule on them. Well guess what? It's over Christmas. It's over New Year's. Every other year this happens. And this is one of the negative consequences of a March primary and it's really bad—really tough on the State Board staff but most other people couldn't give a rip. But we had people working on Christmas Eve and New Year's and stuff and holding electoral hearings the week between Christmas and New Year's. And the candidates and objectors have to appear. It's just awful—just awful but—

DePue: I want to interject here again. And for those of us who don't live and breathe this stuff, can you walk us through the petitioning calendar for a typical election because you've been hinting at this but—?

Michaelson: Yeah, state law says you can start to circulate your petitions ninety days before the first day to file. Even though it's an odd year right now, we have a primary in March. The first day to file right now is November 28. And so you could start to circulate ninety days prior to November 28 which would have been roughly the end of August. You can't circulate any before. Then you've got this one week to file petitions. For this year it's the twenty-eighth of November to the fifth of December.

DePue: And that's geared towards when the primary is?

Michaelson: Geared towards when the primary is. And that filing period has to be held so many days prior to the primary; it's ninety-something—I don't remember the exact day. But it's geared to the primary. Everything is geared to the primary. And then you have this five business days for objections. And then you have the reviews and then the terminations. And then you have the certification of the ballot. That's roughly two months before the primary, because—guess what? The counties have to print the ballots and they have to get absentee balloting ready and absentee ballots for overseas and military voters. So there is a period of time where counties have to do a lot of work to ramp things up. So everything is geared to the date of the primary. And by the way, for nonpresidential years and the last time around we were the second earliest primary in the nation. Texas was first and we were second. State Board Elections tried when I was there constantly to get the primary date changed.

DePue: Make it later?

Michaelson: Make it later. Number one—I think it's ridiculous that you have a campaign season from March to November. September is the most popular time to hold a primary in a nonpresidential year. Ours is March. You're voting perhaps in bad weather. You're certainly campaigning in the winter time prior to a March primary. And there's no need for this kind of a period of time between a primary and a general election. Some people say maybe there'd be less money spent in campaigns if the campaign season were shortened. I don't know about that. But if it was lengthened, too, we wouldn't have this primary—I mean the petition filing and all this stuff happening over Christmas and New Year's. You know, you get rid of all that and everything would be happening the same calendar year. And you look at a member of the House who gets elected in November. Ten months after—no, actually he or she will take office in January. Let me get the chronology right. Elected, let's say, in November of 2010—primary will be in March of 2012. So in September of 2011 they'll start circulating petitions for the March primary; taking office in January, starting to circulate their petitions in September—that's like nine months. Nine months after they take office, they're already circulating their petitions for the next election because obviously they have two-year terms. You know that's crazy! You can't spend any time thinking about governing the state and doing your job as a legislator because just looming right after the session you've got to be thinking about putting your campaign staff together to circulate petitions.

DePue: What is it about the American politics or Illinois politics that keeps driving those primaries earlier and earlier?

Michaelson: Well, obviously in presidential years all states want to have a say in the nomination process. And so this front-loading of the process is just absurd now. I just saw a news report this morning before we came in here that the Iowa caucus is now going to be held on January the third—

DePue: In a response because Florida decided to get in early?

Michaelson: Because Florida moved theirs up. And then South Carolina had to move theirs. And Nevada moved theirs. And so you're going to have a caucus—the Bowl season isn't even over yet and you're going to have your first presidential issue event, if you will.

DePue: You're suggesting that maybe the Super Bowl is more important than politics?

Michaelson: (laughter) Yeah, but in nonpresidential years, as I say, it's ludicrous to have such an early primary. But I used to talk to the new legislative members every two years in December after they were elected. I usually talked to them about how they have to comply with the Illinois Campaign Finance Act: their disclosure of contributions and expenditures. Then I always used to throw in this early primary thing. And I said, "Do you realize that, you know less than a year from now you're going to be circulating petitions?" "Oh no, no!" I said, "Would you support a later primary?" Everybody's hand would go up: I'll sponsor that bill. Count me in! I said, "Great, great." Guess what—it never happened. Two things developed during that session—number one: all of a sudden you have bigger ticket items; budget and gun control, abortion, whatever—bigger ticket items than the date of the primary, so it starts to go down in the list of priorities. And then number two—these newcomers all of a sudden think to themselves, I like this job. I'd like to be reelected. And I know I was elected under the current system—under the current calendar. What would be the consequence for me if we changed the primary—if we moved it to September? Would that help or hurt my reelection chances? And often the answer is I don't know. So the safe thing to do is what—no change. We only get change when the status quo becomes more painful than change. To most of these people, the status quo is very comfortable. They know they can work with the current system. I remember one year Phil Rock, who was the Senate president was in favor the early primary—changing the date. Governor Edgar was in favor of changing the date. I almost think that Madigan, you know, kind of chimed in and said it was all right with him. But it just always got lost in the shuffle; it just never seemed to be a terribly important thing to do.

DePue: Well we're still with the 1980 election.

Michaelson: We're not making much progress here, are we?

DePue: (laughter) But the Cutback Amendment is a topic of fascination for me and it was, as you say—

Michaelson: That was huge.

DePue: Yeah. The senatorial election that year, is there anything to discuss about there? Adlai Stevenson's decision to step down so Alan Dixon decides to run for the Senate seat as the Democrat; Dave O'Neal as the Republican. And

Dixon wins a pretty easy victory; I mean a great campaigner but he won 56 to 42 percent.

Michaelson: Alan Dixon was a great campaigner. And Dave O'Neal wasn't the most prominent Republican. But this was a very pivotal election for Jim Edgar who had joined Governor Thompson's staff. And he left the Illinois House. He had been elected to the House from his home in Charleston. Alan Dixon was secretary of state when he was elected to the United States Senate. And he was elected in the middle of his term. And state law says when there's a vacancy for one of the constitutional offices, the governor gets to fill the vacancy. And the governor does not have to fill it with a member of the departing person's party. Some Democrats were unhappy that Alan Dixon left secretary of state in the middle of his term to be elected to the United States Senate. Obviously you'd have to agree that being a United States Senator is a political promotion. So Jim Thompson appointed Jim Edgar to secretary of state in 1980. And he took the job—made it Republican from a Democrat. And there were some patronage jobs and contracts that the Democrats lost and the Republicans gained. So the Democrats locally were unhappy but it is what it is. Alan moved on. Jim Thompson was appointed and then, of course, Jim Edgar and the rest is history. For Edgar, he gets reelected secretary of state, serves a good couple terms of office and it puts him in place to run for governor in 1990. And it was somewhat of a surprise appointment. Obviously a lot of Republicans wanted to be appointed secretary of state.

DePue: Well George Ryan, in particular.

Michaelson: And Jim Thompson chose a relatively young man who left the legislature to join Thompson's staff at Thompson's request and I think Thompson appreciated that and he probably saw some political promise in Edgar. And he was right about that.

DePue: Okay. The 1982 election—a bad year for Republicans nationally. The gubernatorial election—I know you've got quite a bit to say about that. So let's focus our attention there.

Michaelson: All right. That was Thompson against Neil Hartigan. I believe Hartigan was attorney general at the time.

DePue: No—1980.

Michaelson: No, Adlai Stevenson—sorry. Nineteen eighty-two—he ran against Adlai Stevenson.

DePue: Nineteen eighty-two—yes.

Michaelson: Adlai Stevenson, the third—the son of the former Governor Adlai Stevenson and candidate for president in '52 and '56. He runs against Adlai Stevenson, who was one of these Democrats that was not a strong follower of the

Democratic line and Mayor Daley. Stevenson was a little more independent, a little more liberal. Some call him a little more elitist from a moralistic, political culture rather than the individualistic, political culture that most Illinois politicians come from; very bright, intellectual. And we have the closest election in the history of the state of Illinois at a statewide level—a gubernatorial election. And we had in the city of Chicago, Harold Washington, a black candidate. I don't think the mayoral election was in November, however.

DePue: No, those are always off-cycle from the gubernatorial, or the state elections.

Michaelson: We still had straight party voting. I guess this will be the point. And I think Harold Washington was mayor. But we had straight party voting and the Democrats in Chicago had as their campaign slogan, "Punch 10," because ten was the punch number on the ballot in Chicago for straight Democratic voting. And the reason I bring this up is during the campaign, in the last few weeks, I remember polls that showed Thompson winning by 15 percent; that this was not going to be close.

DePue: Now to clarify this, when you say, "Punch 10," so you'd be voting for the Democratic candidate for governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, controller, attorney general—

Michaelson: Everybody—all the way down the list, legislative, local and so forth. Straight party voting was very advantageous for Democrats in Chicago and Cook County. It was advantageous for some Republicans elsewhere. It's a relic now. We eliminated it later during the Edgar administration actually. But pollsters did not understand or comprehend the impact of the "Punch 10" campaign in Chicago, ten being the Democratic punch for straight party. And when election night rolled around, Jim Thompson had a plurality of 5,074 votes. Now we have roughly 12,000 election precincts in the state. An election precinct is your smallest unit. Five thousand seventy-four means Thompson was elected by less than one-half of a vote per precinct, incredibly, incredibly close. It takes the counties about ten days to complete their official canvas of the vote and send it in to the State Board of Elections because the vote isn't final until the State Board certifies the final results, which usually is about two and a half weeks to three weeks after Election Day. And there is a date certain by law when the State Board has to certify the results. Now for most people everybody knows the winner on election night because these really unofficial tallies that are made by AP and news organizations and whatever. And everybody usually knows those results. Well, all of a sudden here we have a plurality of 5,074. The canvas means you're reviewing your results—you're double-checking to make sure everything is correct and then Democratic and Republican Party chairmen from each county has to sign the canvas there saying, Yeah, I agree. This is what it is. And then the canvas is sent to Springfield. Well there was a tremendous interest amongst the media and others as to—Is this 5,074? Is this really going to hold up? What are the

individual canvases going to show? What we did was we hired state policemen for around the clock protection. And the canvases came in. They went into a locked room and it was literally guarded twenty-four hours a day by state police because we didn't want anybody to tamper with the results of the canvas nor did we want the results leaked at all. We wanted to let the process run its course and we'd aggregate all the results and we'd announce the results.

DePue: During that process, would your people be reviewing the ballots to see if there is some chicanery going on?

Michaelson: No, not really. You have to accept the canvas as final and official from each county.

DePue: The canvas being the results for the election?

Michaelson: The canvas from each election jurisdiction of which we had 110; your counties plus your eight municipal boards. And so these start dribbling in over time. And the news media were just frenetic because they wanted to get their hands on something. I know some of them tried calling the counties and asking them for their official canvas results. And some of the county clerks gave them out and some of them said, No, we'll wait for the State Board to issue the results. So those were tense times for three weeks. And we got all the stuff and the final totals were 5,074. I honestly don't remember if those were the unofficial totals on election night. It could have been off a few. But the difference was not great, if any, so 5,074. Obviously the losing candidate owes it to himself, owes it to his supporters, everybody who worked for him to ask for a recount. So Mr. Stevenson filed for a recount. And those representing the governor argued and I don't remember the legal arguments but they said the recount law that was on the books for statewide officials which had never been used was unconstitutional. I don't have a recollection of why they argued it was unconstitutional. Well, the case quickly moved to the Illinois Supreme Court where there are seven justices and there are four Democrats and three Republicans.

DePue: Because we elect our justices.

Michaelson: Because we elect our justices on a partisan basis which is another issue for another time.

DePue: (laughter)

Michaelson: And so the political cynics thought that well the four Democrats are going to uphold the law and allow the recount to continue and the three Republicans are going to say, No, the law is imperfect. It needs to be changed—no recount. So the decision comes out four to three but it was four to three for the provision, for the ruling that the law was unconstitutional and there could be no recount. One Democratic justice changed, went over with the Republican

justices. So the three Republicans and one Democrat were the majority of four and the three Democratic justices were the minority of three. The Democrat was Seymour Simon, who was a Cook County independent liberal-type of Democrat. He was not, for lack of a better word, your "Daley Democrat." He was not your organization guy who was going to go along with the party line. And for whatever reason, whether it was Simon felt the law was imperfect or whether he wanted to stick it to the regular Democrats, I have no idea, but for whatever reason he voted with the Republicans four to three. There could be no recount and thus Jim Thompson's reelection was a sure thing, pretty tough. And then the legislature (laughter) subsequently rewrote the law. But that was an amazing election.

DePue: You emphasized early on about the role that "Punch 10" had in here. Did that change the outcome, do you think, and made it a closer race?

Michaelson: Yes, absolutely because the closeness of the race astounded everybody and particularly the pollsters. Nobody anticipated a razor-thin election. And what they didn't understand was the potency of the campaign in Chicago for "Punch 10." And obviously there were some local candidates that they were very interested in and I don't recall them. They weren't doing this for Adlai Stevenson—no way, no way! But how easy it was for Democratic voters to come out and just punch ten and do their thing. And they had a great turnout of these kinds of Democrats in the city. And that just made the election so close.

DePue: This might be a good time to mention this then—tell us about the political demography, if you will, of that time frame when you first got to the position and being in the State Board of Elections..

Michaelson: All right. That's a great question. The city, of course, was solidly Democrat. The collar counties, which we define as suburban Cook outside the city and then the counties of Lake, DuPage, McHenry, Kane and Will, [are] named the collar counties because they form a collar around the city of Chicago. Those were solidly Republican and statewide elections were fought downstate. A statewide Republican would try to win 60 percent of the vote in the collars. If he or she could win 60 percent of the vote of the collars, it would tend to offset the Chicago Democratic votes to such an extent that they could probably prevail in a statewide race. But downstate was really up for grabs. It was pretty competitive. There were pockets of strong Democratic strength in places like the quad cities and the Metro East area and Decatur and some of the university communities and some of the smaller downstate rural counties and far down the state of Illinois tended to be strongly Democratic. And so elections were basically won or lost downstate. That was the situation back in the 1980s. It's totally different today.

DePue: So a pretty even split between Republicans and Democrats?

Michaelson: Yeah, yeah. Remember the saying, "Will it play in Peoria?" They used to say that in Washington a lot because they thought Peoria was very typical of the nation as a whole; you know, Peoria had an industrial base, had an agricultural base, had some minority representation. It was split between Republicans and Democrats, very homogeneous and yeah, if someone could play in Peoria, could probably sell not only in Illinois but nationwide. Well they called Illinois a bell-weather state in presidential elections; whoever carried Illinois usually won in the presidential race. And Illinois was very competitive. We called it a competitive two-party state; neither one party dominated. Now you might say well how come the Republicans held the governorship for twenty-four years. Well, there was a lot of good luck and circumstance which we'll talk about a little later. We already talked about how Thompson just squeaked by. And he's elected in '82. But Illinois was always a very competitive two-party state. We usually had one Republican United States senator and one Democrat. For many years it was the two D's—Everett Dirksen from Pekin and then Paul Douglas from Chicago; very often had an even split with our senators and the congressional delegation was usually fairly balanced. That's changed. It's changed. Now what we're seeing is Chicago is still Democrat, but Chicago lost 3 percent of its population just in the last census. So Chicago is losing population but still strongly Democrat.

The big change is in the collar counties. The collar counties are less Republican than they used to be: migration from the city, young voters just establishing themselves in the collars. They're just less Republican than they used to be. They're still probably Republican but you don't have those pluralities that you used to have. And downstate has become more Republican. A lot of conservative Democrats downstate don't like—or let me put it this way—are more attracted to the social conservative issues that Republicans espouse, such as gun control, pro-life, opposition to same-sex marriage and these kinds of things that are being more attractive to conservative Democrats and they're now tending to vote Republican. So downstate is becoming much more Republican. Well, in the last gubernatorial election between Quinn and Brady, I think Brady carried ninety-nine counties. The problem is all your voters are in Chicago and the collars. And when Republicans run conservative statewide candidates, sure, they're going to get the downstate vote, but Bill Brady did real poorly in the collars. You need a moderate Republican to win a statewide race. The conservative Republicans like the Bill Brady's of the world, they just can't win because of the changing nature of the electorate in the collar counties and particularly the females. They don't react well to the conservative positions on a lot of these, what I'll call 'hot-button' social items. So we've changed. Illinois is now a blue state. I think the U.S. Senate race makes my argument: Mark Kirk, who beat Giannoulias. Giannoulias obviously had some political baggage of his own but Mark Kirk was a moderate. Mark Kirk was a member of Congress in the collar counties. Mark Kirk was not a conservative like Bill Brady and Kirk was able to win to the United States Senate against Giannoulias. So that's the kind of candidate that can win. But obviously with Obama running for

president, you knew it was going to be a landslide for him in Illinois, but statewide Illinois is a pretty solid blue state. And the Republicans are swimming upstream. They have to find the right kind of candidates to win statewide. So, electoral politics has changed a lot in Illinois over the last twenty to thirty years, a lot of demographic changes.

DePue: Okay—back to the election chronology then. Let's go to the 1984 elections. And at the top of the ticket it's another presidential year. So I don't know if you want to reflect on that Reagan versus Mondale of Minnesota.

Michaelson: (laughter) My only recollection of that race was the tremendous line that Reagan used in one of the debates against Mondale—that he wasn't going to hold Mondale's youth and inexperience against him because everybody was—you know, not everybody; some people were wondering whether Reagan was too old, and he just diffused that issue. Obviously it was a line that didn't just come to him; he had thought about it. Even Mondale admitted it was a great line. (laughter) That's my recollection of that campaign. But it was brilliant. It was brilliant. He took that issue right away.

DePue: I imagine this one was of more interest to you here in Illinois—the senatorial election between Charles Percy, who was running for reelection against Paul Simon.

Michaelson: Yeah that was the race where an independent expenditure from the state of California in the eyes of many people gave Simon the victory. There was a fellow in California by the name of Michael Goland, G-o-l-a-n-d. Federal campaign finance law allows someone to spend independently, either for or against a candidate, an unlimited amount of money. It's usually for communication, whether it's a TV ad or billboards or whatever—an unlimited amount of money.

DePue: This would have been federal law or state law?

Michaelson: Federal law because we're talking about a federal election here, the United States Senate. And this is confirmed by the United States Supreme Court in the *Buckley vs. Valeo* decision in 1976. So Michael Goland disliked Chuck Percy. He disliked Percy for two reasons: Michael Goland was a Jew and Michael Goland had a disability. Allegedly, he thought Percy's position on the Arab-Israeli issue was not sufficiently pro-Israeli. He also didn't think Percy gave enough support to disability causes or whatever. He came into Illinois; he purchased billboards all over the state. The billboard had a picture of a green chameleon and it just said, "Percy is a chameleon." That's all it said. It attracted a lot of attention—a tremendous amount of attention. I don't remember how much money Goland spent but he spent a lot of money. Paul Simon started to get concerned because newspapers were editorializing that it's not right for an outsider to come into this state and spend this kind of money to affect a United States Senate race from Illinois. And you know most

people thought, yeah, that probably is right. Actually Paul Simon late in the campaign came out and said, "I wish this guy would stop. This is not good for our political climate here, our campaign"—because Simon saw that this was starting to backfire. But this "Percy is a chameleon," which I guess meant that Chuck Percy flip-flopped on issues—I don't know. But it was a simple little phrase with that green chameleon and you saw it everywhere. I don't think it was on television. I don't have a recollection it was on television. But it was definitely on billboards all over.

DePue: Well, for political mud-slinging, (laughter) it's mild.

Michaelson: Pretty mild—it's pretty mild. Well, Simon wins a very close race. Carter Hendren is Chuck Percy's campaign manager. Carter ran Jim Edgar's campaigns and is still a political consultant in Springfield today. If you ask Carter Hendren why Chuck Percy lost that race, I guarantee you he will say the chameleon ads by Michael Goland from California. Goland, according to the Supreme Court, had a first amendment right to do what he did. It's a form of expression which can't be limited. Percy took the defeat with grace—the graceful man that he was. I mean we had two high-quality people running, as I saw it, and this was just a personal reflection. I thought Illinois was not going to lose, whoever was elected.

DePue: Would you describe Percy as a moderate Republican?

Michaelson: Yes, moderate Republican; popular, a very successful businessman at Bell & Howell who later got into politics and lived in Kenilworth and obviously was well-to-do. I always liked Chuck Percy, and of course, Paul Simon was a man of great integrity, so I don't think there could have been a loser in that race, but that was an interesting race.

DePue: Simon ends up winning with just 50.1 percent of the vote.

Michaelson: It was that close? Okay. Yeah, I knew it was close.

DePue: The '86 gubernatorial election I know you've got quite a bit to say there as well.

Michaelson: Yeah, I do. Let's take a restroom break.

DePue: Okay.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We are back after a quick break, and we're up 1986 and the gubernatorial election. I know you've got quite a bit to say.

Michaelson: Well, that was a fascinating election. You know to be governor for fourteen years in Illinois as Jim Thompson was, not only do you have to be good but

you have to be at times lucky. Things have to just fall right for you all the time. And they did for Jim Thompson. We've already talked about the closeness of the '82 election and the Supreme Court justice who surprisingly voted with the Republicans so he wouldn't have a recount. And the '86 election is another example of how Thompson benefited by an incredible sequence of events in the primary which essentially gave him a free ride in the general election, taking nothing away from Thompson's prowess and how good he was, but as I say, sometimes in politics you have to be both lucky and good. In '86 there was a band of people who were followers of Lyndon LaRouche.[1] LaRouche is this really crackpot, far, far left political organizer or whatever he is. I know he served some time in the slammer. I don't know if he's still in prison or not. But those who followed Lyndon LaRouche wanted to run in the Democratic primary. Just an example of how goofy LaRouche was—I know one time he contended that Queen Elizabeth was head of an international drug smuggling operation, and he was serious. I mean it's that kind of far-out stuff. So these six LaRouche—we called them LaRouchies—filed petitions to run in the Democratic primary. Now you've got to understand a couple things. There's not a litmus test to say if you're a Republican or Democrat. If you want to say you're going to run in the Democratic primary, you can run in the Democratic primary. We have no party registration in Illinois. So you run wherever you want to.

DePue: I'm going to jump in here just a little bit, though, because part of the tradition of Illinois politics also, especially for the Democratic machine in Chicago, was that there was this group of people called the slate-makers. They would hand pick who their candidates were for all of these elections and that's not just for the city elections but for statewide—everything.

Michaelson: It's also for statewide—absolutely. But that wouldn't preclude somebody else from filing a petition to run. They just weren't going to get party support because the party was going to support those whom they slated to be the candidates. But there was nothing barring anybody from filing a petition and getting on the ballot just kind of as an annoyance, I guess. So these LaRouche adherents filed for all six of the statewide constitutional offices in Illinois and filed as Democrats. A couple of important things here—they didn't file the required number of signatures, which was 5,000. They were way short of 5,000.

DePue: All six of the candidates?

Michaelson: Um huh. And they might have filed as a slate, meaning everybody's using the same petition and you all rise or fall as a group. I don't recall. But I know they didn't have enough signatures—probably filed as a slate. But as we talked before the break, petitions are presumptively valid unless they're objected to. And no one objected to the petitions. We at the State Board knew they didn't

[1] Rouche is pronounced roosh, hence rooshies

have enough signatures. But even we had no legal authority to not place them on the ballot.

DePue: Would it have occurred to pick up the phone and call somebody in the Democratic circles and say, You might want to look at this?

Michaelson: We wouldn't do that because it might be construed as a partisan activity and we couldn't get involved in that. So, two entities dropped the ball badly. Number one, the Democrats dropped the ball by ignoring the LaRouche petitions and not objecting to them because if they objected to them, off the ballot—no issues. The second group that dropped the ball was the media, not so much during the petition filing process but during the primary election campaign. The media absolutely ignored the LaRouchies; never wrote about them, thought that they were just a joke and, as I say, just completely wrote them off. And the Democrats—not only did they not object to them, but once they were on the ballot, basically ignored them during the campaign; you know just took for granted that these were just goofball radicals that had no chance of winning.

DePue: This isn't the old Democratic Party machine that Richard J. Daley had built then.

Michaelson: In 1986, which is—

DePue: That would have been about the time Harold Washington was—

Michaelson: It would have been about the time Harold Washington. Yeah I think it was before Richard M. Daley.

DePue: That's right. It was before Washington died.

Michaelson: Yeah, okay. So, lo and behold, two of the LaRouchies win: the lieutenant governor candidate and the secretary of state candidate win. The lieutenant governor candidate had the last name of Fairchild. I believe it was Mark Fairchild and he beat George Sangmeister for the nomination for lieutenant governor. George Sangmeister was a state senator, was Jewish, and George was either from the southern suburbs or—

DePue: I've got Mokena down.

Michaelson: Mokena? Okay—near Kankakee. Fairchild—you know ballot-sounding names mean a lot. And if a Democratic primary voter goes in and he sees 'Fairchild' and 'Sangmeister' and this voter doesn't really follow party politics, doesn't know that George Sangmeister is a state senator and blah, blah, blah. You know if you don't know any better, you may just vote for Fairchild.

DePue: Well let's throw one other thing in the mix here because I know that the candidates take seriously who's at the top of that ticket. How does that factor into it? Is that something that the board of elections has to do with?

Michaelson: In what way? Of course, we had Adlai Stevenson again.

DePue: No, I mean in terms of if you have several candidates for the same position in the primary. If you had four candidates down there, whose name was at the top of those four?

Michaelson: Oh, that's done by—if they all file at 8:00 a.m. on the first day to file, their names go into a lottery and ballot position is determined by luck of the draw basically. Now I don't remember how many candidates we actually had in the Democratic side—if there were only two or whether there were more. I just don't have a recollection of that.

DePue: Whether or not it was Sangmeister first or second on the—

Michaelson: Right. And for secretary of state we had a female by the name of Janice Hart, H-a-r-t, who ran against Aurelia Pucinski. Now the name Pucinski is obviously a Polish name from the city of Chicago, and the name Pucinski in the city of Chicago had a lot of political credibility. It was probably her father or either her father or uncle who used to be an alderman, and the Polish community in the city is a potent force. So Janice Hart, who actually had the same last name spelling as Gary Hart from Colorado, who was a presidential candidate off and on in the mid-1980s, a U.S. Senator from Colorado. Anecdotally I heard that some people thought Janice Hart was related to Gary Hart and they liked Gary Hart. And so they voted for Janice Hart. But again you have a ballot-sounding name of Janice Hart versus Aurelia Pucinski. And the name Pucinski obviously doesn't sell well outside of Chicago if you don't know anybody and you don't know the background. So these two people won—amazingly they won. I have no recollection of the margin of victory but they won, and the Democratic Party is now thrown into a tailspin. Of course, the governor and lieutenant governor in primaries run independently, but you run as a team in the general election, just like president and vice-president. Adlai Stevenson quickly said, "I'm not running with Mark Fairchild."

DePue: I want to read a quote if you don't mind into here. This is what Stevenson said, "I'm exploring every legal remedy to purge these extremists from the Democratic ticket. But one thing I want to make absolutely clear—I will never serve on a ticket with the candidates who espouse the hate-filled folly of Lyndon LaRouche and the U.S. Labor Party."

Michaelson: Yeah, that's it. That's it. Now we had an example in 2008 here in the Democrats when Scott Lee Cohen gets the nomination for lieutenant governor and he proved to be such an embarrassment he was finally forced to withdraw and the Democrats replaced him with Sheila Simon. Cohen ends up running as

an independent. There was no legal way for the Democrats to get rid of Cohen just like there was no legal way for Stevenson to get rid of Fairchild or Janice Hart, for that matter. They were stuck. (laughter) Fairchild and Hart were not going to voluntarily withdraw; no, they weren't. They loved this. And Stevenson, as we've already said, said he's not going to run with Fairchild. And the Democrats had no option but to create a new political party at the statewide level and run their candidates, circulate petitions which had to be filed in June, in the middle of the summer, for a new political party, had to go out and get 25,000 signatures which was the requirement for parties. And they formed what they called the Illinois Solidarity Party. Stevenson was at the top and I don't remember who the lieutenant governor candidate was. For those six statewide offices, they had the Illinois Solidarity Party.

DePue: Any idea why they chose that name?

Michaelson: No—no idea.

DePue: The cachet of the Polish solidarity movement?

Michaelson: (laughter) No—no idea. But on the Democratic side, you still have your Democratic candidates and on the general election ballot for governor it was blank, then Mark Fairchild for lieutenant governor. Then you had Janice Hart for secretary of state and all of the other four Democrats who won the primary. Of course they withdrew because they wanted to be on the Illinois Solidarity Party ballot. It was a nightmare for the Democratic Party, and it raised so many questions for us as election administrators which we couldn't answer because this was unprecedented stuff that wasn't in the Illinois election code. I did a lot of national interviews about this stuff because it was so bizarre. One question that was asked of me was what if on the Democratic side *blank* for governor and Fairchild for lieutenant governor get elected? Who's governor? Does the Democratic Party get to appoint somebody to be governor or does Fairchild automatically become governor because there was no governor running mate? We didn't know. There was nothing in the law that spoke to that. It was crazy stuff like this. The Democrats tried to get the message across that we've got the Illinois Solidarity Party. We're really the Democrats but after the Solidarity Party—there are only six of us—then you go over and vote for the rest of the Democrats under the Democratic Party label.

DePue: No "Punch 10" this time around?

Michaelson: No "Punch 10" this time. I mean obviously this was doomed to fail. I mean it was a public relations nightmare for the party and obviously it gave Jim Thompson a very easy run to reelection. How fortunate for Thompson that Fairchild and Hart got onto the ballot and created this massive chaos. It was the Democratic Party's fault. They just should never have allowed it to happen. But maybe Jim Thompson would have won anyway. Who knows?

But again it goes back to my point of being good and being lucky. So Thompson gets four more years and this (laughter) Illinois Solidarity Party obviously ceased to exist. It was only put into place for that election, and it was probably the most bizarre thing that I saw happen in Illinois elections in my thirty-plus years. It was just wild.

DePue: Did Stevenson have some challenges just because of the tight timeline he had to work with to get his petitions out, to get them in to file with you?

Michaelson: Yeah, you know you had a March primary. And you have a filing period sometime in June. Basically he had three months to circulate and get 25,000-plus signatures. Obviously you put all your county chairmen to work and so forth and so on. I don't recall how difficult it was. Obviously, it was very time-consuming and time he didn't want to spend doing this kind of thing. But they were able to get the job done and no one objected to those petitions or whatever. But it was doomed from the outset, but quite frankly, it's the only alternative they had.

DePue: Anything else going on in that particular year? I know that there was another senatorial election—Dixon versus conservative Judy Koehler. Is that how you pronounce the name?

Michaelson: Judy Koehler.

DePue: Judy Koehler.

Michaelson: You know what? Judy Koehler was from Peoria—very conservative, a member of the House or was it the Senate—in the legislature, anyway. And to the Republicans' credit, they ran a female candidate but, as we've talked previous, even back then she was too conservative to win a statewide election. I don't think it was very close.

DePue: Fifty-six percent is what Dixon pulled.

Michaelson: Yeah and Alan Dixon, you know they used to call him Al the Pal. He's just a real gregarious guy who was liked by members on both sides of the aisle; a downstate Democrat from Belleville and always was good in constituent stuff. He's the kind of guy that even if you didn't like what he stood for you liked him personally; just a likeable, gregarious person who always seemed to work hard and a tough candidate—a tough candidate statewide.

DePue: So now the State of Illinois at that time has two Democrats in the Senate and they're both downstate Democrats.

Michaelson: That's Simon and Dixon—yeah, which is quite unusual, quite unusual: a) They have two from one party; and b) They have them both from downstate. And both roughly from the same area downstate; Dixon from Belleville and Paul Simon from—

DePue: Troy.

Michaelson: —Troy which is—you could probably throw a stone from one to the other, they're so close. That was unusual in its own right.

DePue: Similarities in politics between the two?

Michaelson: Yes, well I think Paul Simon was certainly on the liberal side of things. I think Dixon was a little closer to the center, but they certainly got along well. My perception is that Alan was a little closer to the center than Paul.

DePue: Okay. We've gotten up through 1988. I think this is probably a good place for us to break today and pick up next time. I don't know that we have too much more. I think a lot of the more controversial issues that you dealt with in the State Board of Elections we talked about today.

Michaelson: I think so.

DePue: And so a lot of what we'll have—your reflections on politics in the state of Illinois in the 1990s and 2000s.

Michaelson: Okay.

DePue: There's a little bit of interesting controversy there as well so it will be fun to pick it up again. Thank you very much and we'll do this again next time.

Michaelson: Sounds good.

(end of interview #2 #3 continues)

Interview with Ron Michaelson

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Interview # 3: October 21, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Friday, October twenty-first. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm having my third and I think final session with Ron Michaelson. Good morning, Ron.

Michaelson: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: We're not in your office but adjacent to your office in the—what do they call this?

Michaelson: The Public Affairs Center.

DePue: The Public Affairs Center at UI-S. Well last time obviously, the conversation has been about your role working with the Illinois State Board of Elections. And what more interesting state can you find to have a job like that than Illinois?

Michaelson: My friends used to ask me, Doesn't it get boring after a while because you just do the same thing election after election? And I always tried to convince them every election was unique, different, a new set of challenges and politics is never boring in Illinois. So that's one reason it kept my interest because there was always something new.

DePue: This is not one on the elections. We got through 1988 basically the last time we spoke; not a specific question to an election but I think you mentioned that you had a role in creating a candidate guide. Is that something you can talk with us about?

Michaelson: I did. Sometime during the mid-'80s—and I certainly don't recall the date—since we were getting so many questions from would-be candidates: how

many signatures do I need to run for *x* office; where do I get my petitions; when do I file them; what has to be included in my petition? We thought that it just made sense to put together a publication which explained everything for every office you wanted to run for these are the requirements; this is what you have to do. And our enabling legislation in the Illinois election code gave the State Board of Elections responsibility to publish whatever information was necessary to educate people on the electoral process. So we did it and we called it a "Candidate's Guide." Our intent was to do it every two years because you have a different set of offices come up every two years. I remember the first year we did it. I went down for my annual appropriation appearance before the Approp committees to justify our budget request and the only thing some people wanted to talk about was, Why in the world did you guys publish a "Candidate's Guide"—by what authority? It's astounding that you would do anything like this, et cetera, et cetera. I caught, you know, hell for doing it.

DePue: Is there some political implications in having done it?

Michaelson: What some of the legislators were saying is you're making it too easy for challengers to run for office. (laughter) We know the ropes. We know the answers. Why make it easy for anybody else? And I just sat there somewhat incredulous and I said, "Well, it's just part of our mission, and this is what we plan to do." Well, that is the last I ever heard of that issue. Once they were convinced that we were going to do it and it was the right thing to do—and I think everybody knew it was the right thing to do—now it's become one of the most helpful, I think, publications that the State Board of Elections distributes because this is what we're all about, you know: encouraging people to run, not holding any secrets back, and this is what you have to do. Initially it was a little rocky, but we persevered and now it's obviously an established service.

DePue: So initially it's one of the few things that Republicans and Democrats could agree on?

Michaelson: (laughter) Yeah, I think that's true. Only in Illinois would you get a reaction such as that, frankly.

DePue: Okay, so let's get to the 1990 election. And as we go through these elections, we had very lively discussions last time about 1982 and 1986 gubernatorial elections because you guys, the State Board of Elections played a significant role in both of those. Maybe that's not necessarily the case for upcoming elections but 1990 was another interesting race because the Secretary of State, Jim Edgar, a very prominent figure in the state for a long period of time, against Attorney General Neil Hartigan—worthy opponents, both. Do you have any memories about that particular election?

Michaelson: I sure do. Let's back up to the primary in March of 1990 because this was the first primary where I was out of the country. I was not here which had never happened before and it had never happened after that. But I was asked to join an official delegation of the State Department—a ten-person delegation to visit the Soviet Union and monitor and witness its first free elections under Mr. Gorbachev. There were some members of the Federal Election Commission. There were two representatives from states, myself and Secretary of State of Vermont, who was Jim Douglas, who I think now is their governor. There were ten of us. I talked to my board and the trip was over the primary in Illinois, the March primary. And the board said, Oh that's really an easy, easy one. You should go. You're representing Illinois. It's a great honor and we'll get by. No one is indispensable. (laughter) So I went over to the Soviet Union and also Kazakhstan for ten or twelve days and had a remarkable time. And the delegation from the Soviet Union came back to the states for the November election and one of the states they visited was Illinois because I was part of the delegation going over there. So we hosted the Soviet delegation in Chicago on Election Day and on election night. I'm talking November now, of course. We took them to a polling place to see how polling worked here. Of course, we wined and dined them. We took them to a pizza place the night before and just tried to show them what life was like in Chicago and Illinois. Then we went to Jim Edgar's election night rally, if you will, and that was in the Hyatt Regency downtown at Michigan and Wacker. It turned out that the election was very close, and by ten o'clock or eleven o'clock at night the delegation was getting pretty weary. They'd been tramping all over the city (laughter) and going to polling places and stuff and they were pretty tired. I had hoped that if Mr. Edgar was the winner we would have been able to introduce them to the next governor and so forth and so on. Well, at ten o'clock or eleven o'clock at night the election was still up for grabs. So that didn't happen. But that was a very interesting election cycle for me just because of the Russian element to it.

DePue: Now if I'm getting my timeline right, you mentioned Soviet Union here. This is before the Soviet Union implodes and it becomes Russia and becomes a lot of other nations. I think that was '91.

Michaelson: That is correct, but they were moving in that direction and we actually witnessed the first so-called free and open elections in Moscow. We went to Red Square and we were treated like kings, you know, with police escorts everywhere we went. It was a pretty big deal for me anyway.

DePue: Your impressions then of election Soviet-style?

Michaelson: Well, they really made it to be kind of a party. They had live music at all the polling places. They had things to eat. They were trying to make it a real civic event, which they were pretty successful in doing. Mr. Gorbachev was really committed to this idea of no longer having closed elections where there was only one candidate on the ballot and one party and people basically had no

choice. Everybody was registered as soon as they became of voting age. There was national registration, if you will. The government registered everybody. Heretofore, when people came to vote they had no choice. It was just—I guess we're supposed to vote and we know who's going to win because (laughter) there's no competition. Well, this started to change back there in 1990 so it was very interesting to be there, and I don't know if we convinced them totally of our democratic way we conduct elections but they were very cordial and very friendly and nice and it was a great experience. So, election year 1990 for me was quite a different thing. I do remember the campaign—the Hartigan-Edgar campaign—which was very close. I remember a couple TV commercials which were very prominent in the campaign. Hartigan put on a commercial ridiculing all the money and expense that went into putting gardens and roses in the grounds of the executive mansion. Jim Edgar as secretary of state was responsible for buildings and grounds, if you will. And it was a pretty cute commercial of this bumble bee running around, flying around amongst all the roses and stuff in the gardens at the mansion and kind of talking about excess and unnecessary stuff. And that had quite an impact. Governor Edgar, or then Secretary of State Edgar—candidate Edgar—had a commercial in which he was calling Hartigan a flip-flopper and he used the personage of Irwin Corey.

DePue: Professor Irwin Corey.

Michaelson: Professor Irwin Corey. And I know the governor told me later he never liked that commercial, but it was Irwin Corey and it was pretty funny. He was making fun of Hartigan for changing his position on issues and stuff. It was a great campaign, and I just saw the money-raised figures just a few days ago; I was looking at gubernatorial elections over the past twenty or thirty years, and both candidates raised roughly the same amount of money. They were both competitive. We had a downstater in Edgar versus Cook County Hartigan—well known in Chicago politics and a capable man. And of course, Edgar won in a very close election; not controversially close but he prevailed.

DePue: I think he announced it at two o'clock in the morning.

Michaelson: That sounds about right, yeah.

DePue: A shameless plug on my part but I would invite people listening to this to go check out the interview we had with Governor Edgar himself where he talked quite a bit about the election night and the election season.

Michaelson: Yeah, it was a very interesting election.

DePue: I wonder if you recall or you can speak on behalf of the Soviets who came over here and their impressions of what they experienced and saw in Illinois politics.

Michaelson: Well, they were not negative. If they had any negative feelings, they were too polite to indicate them. They were just fascinated by how everything went on and particularly in Chicago with all the hustle and bustle around Election Day and then over at Edgar's campaign headquarters at the Hyatt that night even though there wasn't the victory announcement yet. But everything that was going on—all the balloons and bells and whistles and music and food and so forth—yeah, they were just kind of standing in awe and saying, Really? And this is just for governor of one of your fifty states? You're not talking about president or anything. It was pretty cool.

DePue: I imagine it was. Okay, there was a senatorial election that year. It was Paul Simon versus U.S. Congresswoman Lynn Martin. Any memories about that one?

Michaelson: Paul Simon obviously had a great name and a great reputation. Lynn Martin was a moderate. She was from Rockford. She was a member of Congress. I don't remember the margin of victory but—

DePue: Sixty-five percent to 35 percent. So she got really trounced.

Michaelson: She got trounced pretty good. There was just a lot of attention focused on the governor's race; much more than the U.S. Senate race.

DePue: That gets us up to 1992 then—legislative elections; probably not much going on there. I know there was another senatorial campaign. In this case it was Albert Hofeld versus Alan Dixon. We talked about Dixon last time.

Michaelson: Yeah, right. You know Dixon won easily and is just a strong campaigner, good speaker, good orator, and not much doubt on who was going to win that race.

DePue: But here's the problem with it. This is in the primary campaign and I probably didn't set this up enough. Albert Hofeld is a personal injury lawyer, a Democrat; he spent four and a half million dollars attacking Dixon. A third person entered the race on the Democratic ticket—that was Carol Moseley Braun. This is the year of the woman. This is the fallback after the backlash against Dixon's vote in favor of Clarence Thomas as a Supreme Court justice. So here's this core of women who are angry, and Hofeld, who spent a ton of money in the Democratic primary challenging Dixon, who is the unbeatable guy before this time and now Carol Moseley Braun emerges as the winner.

Michaelson: Yeah, I remember Hofeld spent a lot of his personal money which by law you can certainly do. And without question, without Hofeld's involvement on a one-to-one race despite the issues with Dixon's vote for Clarence Thomas, Dixon probably beats Carol Moseley Braun head-on, I think. But strange things happen when you have a three-way race and that was Carol Moseley Braun's big entrance into politics on the national stage. Those were

tumultuous times. I remember those Clarence Thomas hearings were very controversial and attracted a lot of (laughter) national attention.

DePue: But no issues as far as the State Board of Elections?

Michaelson: No issues where the State Board of Elections was concerned—no.

DePue: The general election—it was Moseley Braun against Republican Richard Williamson. She won fifty-three to forty-three so a pretty sizable victory. Okay, that gets us up to 1994 and another gubernatorial election. This time around the sitting incumbent Jim Edgar—after he had weathered some very tough years trying to balance the budget and in tough economic times and we're just kind of emerging from that by 1994—against Democrat candidate Dawn Clark Netsch, who was the controller.

Michaelson: I remember that well. This is, of course, in the middle of Bill Clinton's first term. Clinton got off to a rough start due to pushing healthcare and giving it to his wife Hillary to push. And the Democrats nationally were in difficulty. It's not surprising that first in the midterm of the president's first term that he suffers some losses. So obviously that kind of climate also prevailed in Illinois. So it turned out to be a huge Republican year since the Republicans in Illinois won both the House and the Senate in 1994. Dawn Clark Netsch in the campaign came out with her position on taxes and we call it still today the "tax swap idea": increase the income tax and lower property taxes as a fairer way to raise revenues and also to fund education. It's a pretty responsible position. It's not the kind of position that you take in a campaign if you think you're running against a popular incumbent. Edgar used her position and the Republicans used her position just to demonize her, raise taxes or whatever. I do remember one commercial that she shot which was really, really good and it showed her playing pool and actually shooting pool. And I've talked to Mrs. Netsch about this and she said they did a lot of practicing. It wasn't a phony duck deal—she was actually shooting pool. And I forget the purpose of the commercial.[2] I guess the deal was she is a straight-shooter. And she was calling it like it is, particularly with her positions on the tax law.

DePue: Oh, I think it also played contrary to her image as the "North Shore liberal." This was her ad I know that played before the primary.

Michaelson: Oh, was it before the primary? Yeah, so she's in a pool hall. You don't expect North Shore liberal elites to be in pool halls. I think it was one of the largest margins in the history of the state. You talk about a landslide. It was indeed a landslide. So it was very uncontroversial, and it enabled the Republicans to keep the governorship for four more years which ran the total up to twenty-six, I think.

[2] See Mark DePue's in-depth interview with Netsch, a very interesting woman. The line for the commercial was, "She's a straight shooter."

DePue: Now here's an aspect of any state politics but in particular, Illinois state politics. In 1990, the Republicans won the draw to determine who had control of redistricting, which I'm sure you know James "Pate" Philip—credited with making him the president of the Senate. And of course you already mentioned in '94 now the Republicans finally controlled the Illinois House—and that would be Lee Daniels. Did the fact that for those two years, and only those two years, the Republicans controlled the House and the Senate and the governorship have any impact on you?

Michaelson: It did. It really did. Two bills were passed during that time which greatly affected the election process. The first was the elimination of straight party voting. Straight party voting was always an accepted option in Illinois. Although in strong Republican areas, Republicans benefited by straight party voting, I think if you look at the statistics, it was certainly more beneficial to the Democrats than the Republicans. And the Republicans got that bill through to eliminate straight party voting. We were in a minority of states that still allowed straight party voting, and the argument obviously was that people ought to make more informed choices and not just check a box and walk out of the polling booth. So they got that through. I know the Democrats, once they actually retook control of the House in '96, there was talk about them reinstituting straight party voting but it never happened. Obviously I don't think it ever will come back in Illinois. So that was a huge change in the electoral process.

The second one was, we lengthened the time of polling hours from twelve hours to thirteen hours. It used to be 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. A law was passed to make it 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. You say, Well what's the political significance of that? Well the Republicans in the suburbs wanted the extra hour to give commuters who commuted into the city, give them time to vote after work. That was the story. You say, Well, couldn't they vote before they went? I suppose they could but it was largely a Republican measure—another hour on the polling day. They passed that and it's been thirteen hours ever since. See, every state can enact its own length of polling hours. So those two things happened in that little window of '94 to '96 where Republicans held everything.

The other thing I remember—this has nothing to do with the election process—but Michael Madigan, of course, had to step down as Speaker. Heretofore, the party not in power, on the door of the leader, it said, "Minority Leader," Minority Leader Lee Daniels or Minority Leader whomever. Madigan wouldn't put "Minority" on his door. It was "Democratic Leader." And that's a true story: "Democratic Leader." And of course he only needed that for two years because—

DePue: He knew he'd be back. (laughter)

Michaelson: Yeah. But yeah that was an interesting two years.

DePue: Well that reminds me of something. And I don't think we've talked about this. But I'm going to ask you to jump back more than two decades here. And maybe this is even before the time you were in the Board of Elections. But I think it was the 1972 gubernatorial election in the primary campaign where something occurred—I believe it might have been a state Supreme Court decision that allowed people to not follow party lines but to vote open election in primaries.

Michaelson: Exactly. Everybody was a free agent. You could take a Democratic ballot in the primary and you could vote—we still had straight party voting—you could vote straight Republican in the general election and vice versa. There were no restrictions. And of course, we don't have party registration in Illinois. We have individual registration. So there was nothing stopping anybody from walking in and saying, I'd like a Republican ballot or I'd like a Democratic ballot. And there were stories in 1972 that Republicans who were interested in reelecting Governor Ogilvie—when they looked at the Democratic primary between Paul Simon and Dan Walker—thought that Paul Simon would be the more difficult candidate. So some Republicans allegedly purposely voted in the Democratic primary and voted for Dan Walker; party-raiding is what it's called. Whether that made the difference, whether that's why Walker won the primary, who knows but obviously the whole thing backfired because Walker won the general election. Now maybe Paul Simon would have won the general, too, given the whole climate with the income tax, but yeah, allegedly people did that. There were no legal prohibitions against doing that, and that's still possible today.

DePue: You mentioned the term—is it "rating" or "raiding?"

Michaelson: Raiding—r-a-i-d-i-n-g; you know a bona fide Republican, if you will, would go over and try to cause mischief in the Democratic primary.

DePue: Say it's not so! (laughter) Was there any other election that was turned because of that that you recall?

Michaelson: That was the most prominent in my recollection anyway.

DePue: That gets us up to 1996. I don't know that there's anything going on at the legislative level. It's not a gubernatorial year. Senate elections: that year's Democratic primary was Dick Durbin as the winner and Al Salvi. So they go head to head in the general election and it's another trounce for the Democrats; Durbin wins 56 percent to Salvi's 40 percent.

Michaelson: Yeah, Durbin was an excellent candidate. Al Salvi was not well known statewide. It really didn't, in my mind, attract a whole lot of attention and results were pretty well known—a foregone conclusion.

DePue: I don't have anything down for that as a presidential year. Obviously you've got—

Michaelson: It's Bill Clinton against Bob Dole. And again that wasn't a very exciting election either; Dole not a terribly strong candidate and Clinton rebounding.

DePue: Well, let's get up to 1998 then, another gubernatorial election. Now Edgar is out of the picture. So you've got somebody who'd been waiting in the wings for his entire career it seems like—George Ryan—and the Democrats select Glen Poshard, a moderate downstate Democrat.

Michaelson: Not a good statewide candidate for the Democrats. And you're right—George had been waiting for forty years to run for governor and he badly wanted to be governor. That was part of his downfall, I think. My recollection during that year, and even the year prior was, I kept hearing that George Ryan was raising incredible amounts of money because he wanted to outspend whomever his opponent was going to be badly. He wanted to drown him in money. And unfortunately now we know that some of that money was obtained illegally and that's what got Mr. Ryan in serious, serious trouble. But he was obsessed with raising money, even when Poshard became known as his opponent, not a strong statewide candidate for the Democrats because some of his views as a downstater on gun control and other things were not well accepted in Cook County and in the suburban areas. So it looked like George had a great chance to win but it's almost like Nixon in '72 against McGovern when Nixon was riding high, tons of money, and McGovern not a popular candidate and Nixon authorizes the Watergate break-in because he was so paranoid that the Democrats might have something. He just wanted to find out what that was, and there was no need for that. He ended up winning forty-nine states out of fifty and yet that paranoia eventually brought down his presidency. I don't want to make too strong of a parallel with the Ryan-Poshard race, but George Ryan was just obsessed with raising money and outspending Poshard. I think the final totals were something like three to one in terms of the money raising. So he had far more money and unfortunately, we all know the rest of the story.

DePue: I wonder if you can reflect, though. We've already talked about Illinois political demographics. My gut tells me that Illinois is going progressively more and more Democratic in the 1990s up to this election. Yet here it is—the state that not since 1972 have the Democrats won a gubernatorial election, and they don't win this one either. It's 54 percent Ryan, 44 percent Poshard. So he was trounced.

Michaelson: He was trounced. You have to remember that George Ryan as secretary of state—extremely high name recognition. You know any time you have your name on every driver's license when you get a license; you know the whole secretary of state function—

DePue: So even the kids know who you are.

Michaelson: Yeah, exactly. And unless you're dishonest and unscrupulous, you can be secretary of state for a lifetime because all you're doing is serving people and the name recognition is very high. In fact, the secretary of state's office in Illinois is the largest and strongest of any of the fifty states; you know it's just a very powerful political office. So George comes into the race with a great advantage. Poshard is a southern Illinois member of Congress, I think, at that time and just started off at a disadvantage. I mean you're absolutely right—the state demographically and politically is starting to move more and more in the blue area. And we see this transformation in 2000 in the presidential race and then after that it's solidly Democratic. But Ryan's money and Ryan's name and Poshard's relatively ineffective candidacy—I think those three things added up to a Ryan victory.

DePue: It was another year for an Illinois Senate race. You've got Democratic incumbent Carol Moseley Braun who's running for reelection that year, and she's got some baggage to deal with. One of the things that often times is referred to is that she made the mistake—perhaps I shouldn't say it in those terms—but many people said it was a mistake for her to visit African Dictator Sunny Abacha of Nigeria in 1996. Her challenger is an interesting personality in his own right—Peter Fitzgerald. I wonder if you can reflect on that race?

Michaelson: Yeah, Peter Fitzgerald—a very independent conservative Republican running against someone whom you rightly describe brings a lot of baggage and quite frankly, did not have a distinguished career in the Senate in her first six years. You've got the female issue, you've got the racial issue, you've got Fitzgerald who comes across as a pretty straight shooter and no-nonsense guy and he's his own man and he's not going to take directions from the party necessarily. Yeah, it was quite a contrast. I don't remember a whole lot about the campaign but Senator Braun I think brought on her defeat herself given the issue in Africa and other things that really didn't distinguish herself very much. So that was interesting.

DePue: The election was 52 percent for Fitzgerald; 46 percent for Braun. So considering some of the gubernatorial elections we've talked about, it was very tight; a pretty substantial victory for him. Two-thousand—we're coming up towards the end of your career here.

Michaelson: We are.

DePue: By this time were you getting burned out in the job?

Michaelson: Not really. How old was I then? I was fifty-nine. I was assuming I'd stay around until sixty-five anyway; a couple more—maybe two more gubernatorial elections and two more presidential elections. And of course, we had the most controversial presidential election in our history in 2000 with the Bush-Gore situation.

DePue: A quiet year in Illinois but I'm sure that had an impact on your job and the board of elections.

Michaelson: It really did. If I can just make an argument for why states should adopt a bipartisan/independent election board to administer the election process rather than what they had in Florida and which most states still have—a single partisan elected state official, usually the secretary of state, running elections. Katherine Harris was the Republican in Florida and she was a strong partisan Republican. And that thirty-four day fiasco after Election Day—Katherine Harris was in a lose-lose situation whichever way she went; you know if she ruled against the Republicans, she'd be castigated by her own people. And if she ruled for them, she'd be accused of being just a party lackey. If that had happened in Illinois, sure—it would have been tough. But when you don't have that single partisan official calling the shots, it just makes a lot of difference. There were then, and I think there still are now, about a dozen states that have a board of elections. I know in a blue ribbon commission that was appointed after that election—it was the Carter-Ford Commission—one of the things they recommended was states go to a state board of elections because of all the controversy and the issues involved in having a partisan official run elections.

DePue: Did they turn to Illinois as a model of how it can be done?

Michaelson: Not necessarily but obviously we were one of several prominent states—New York is one and Wisconsin is one, North Carolina was one—scattered across the country—that we wouldn't have had these kind of issues that happened in Florida. So as a result of those issues, the election process nationally got changed with the passage of the Help America Vote Act in 2002 which is nicknamed HAVA, H-A-V-A. That changed a lot of ways in which elections are conducted, largely because of all the controversy in Florida in 2000.

DePue: What changes were caused in Illinois because of that?

Michaelson: In Illinois we basically lost punch card voting. The federal government, for the first time, made money available to the states for purchase of new voting systems, and punch cards basically were not eligible for that kind of money. We were heavily punch card-dependent in Illinois, so basically the voting systems in most all Illinois counties over the next four to six years changed—moved away from punch cards and went to an optical scan system or an electronic system or both. So that was a major change. Another change was that the charge in Florida was people were denied the right to vote in that election because they went to the polling place and they were told their names weren't on the registration rolls but they thought they were. But they weren't on there so they were sent home. Some people allegedly should have been able to vote. So now all states have to have a system of what's called provisional voting, where if your name is not on the roll when you come in to vote, you can cast a provisional ballot. You cast a ballot—the same kind of

ballot as everybody—but the ballot is not put in the ballot box. It's put in a provisional envelope. It's segregated. And then the county clerk will further research your eligibility and if you are indeed eligible to vote, that vote gets counted. And if you weren't eligible to vote, you are told what the problem was and given a chance to remedy it. So provisional voting now is accomplished everywhere. That was one thing the Democrats in Congress wanted in HAVA. You see this was a very, very controversial bill. Basically the Democrats wanted more opportunities to expand the franchise—expand the electorate. They were saying people were denied the right to vote that shouldn't have been denied the right to vote.

DePue: What kind of people?

Michaelson: Using my example, the registration rolls weren't perfect. People were really registered. They didn't show up as being registered at the polls. They were denied the right to vote. They should have. So they wanted to make sure that nobody would get wrongly prohibited from voting. The Republicans wanted to improve the integrity of the election process. And these are two opposite poles of course: expand the franchise and strengthen the integrity. So what the Republicans got out of HAVA was that any time somebody registers to vote by mail—and we have mail registration everywhere now—the first time that person votes they can't vote absentee; they have to vote in person. And they have to have a photo I.D. Because when you register by mail, by definition nobody sees you. The registration official just takes your word for it. So the Republicans said to make sure the process is fair and full of integrity, the first time you vote, if you register by mail, you've got to vote in person and show identification. So, all these things were a result of Bush versus Gore—the Florida thing. And the election process around the country now is changed considerably because of it.

DePue: As an official of the Illinois State Board of Elections, you are prohibited from having a personal opinion. But you're no longer there. So what was your personal opinion about all of that?

Michaelson: I thought it was an unprecedented intrusion by the federal government into an area that has long been the province of the states. We have a highly decentralized election process in Illinois. States basically make most of your decisions on how elections are going to be conducted. We decide when our primaries are going to be held. We decide what kind of primary system we have. We decide how people get on the ballot, how many signatures you need on petitions. We decide when the polling hours are going to be. All these things are matters of state prerogative. And the feds reached into the states more than they ever have before and said, Hey, everybody's going to do it the same way regardless of your situation. In some cases that was acceptable and I think in some it was a little over-reaching.

DePue: Was there any constitutional challenge on that?

Michaelson: There was never a constitutional challenge. A lot of people were unhappy, but I think people recognized that with the tremendous controversy in 2000, some people still think Bush didn't deserve to win somehow.

DePue: That he stole the election?

Michaelson: Yeah, right; the Supreme Court five-to-four decision and all this stuff. Some changes had to be made. We've been nine years now with the new federal law. It's taken a while to be implemented, but now it's pretty much implemented everywhere. There were a lot of other things in the law but that was pretty major stuff.

DePue: Your view on moving away from punch cards towards voting machines?

Michaelson: You know the problem with punch cards was the hanging chad. When people don't have the strength to put that punch through the card and punch out the chad, because when it's not fully punched out you put it through a card reader that may or may not read that partial punch. Well most of our election judges, before they put it through card readers, they would clean off the backs of the cards. So chad was really not a problem. We never had a problem with hanging chad in Illinois because they were instructed to clean the backs of the cards. And card readers were very efficient. You put 200 cards through a vote-counting machine and you'll have the same count every single time you put them through. It was an efficient and accepted way of voting. But given the issues in Florida, the so-called butterfly ballot when the alignment in the voting machine wasn't quite right and people thought they were voting for Gore and they voted for Pat Buchanan or something like that. I have a copy of the butterfly ballot and the way it was laid out was kind of confusing. Punch cards just became such a dirty word in elections. It was too bad because we in Illinois had great experience with punch cards. We really did.

DePue: Is there a problem with not having a physical thing to look at if you have to have a recount; that you're going to be relying on computers where things can also be manipulated?

Michaelson: Well, that's the problem with the electronic system; you know, the touch screen, if you will, where you don't have a physical ballot you can look at. Now most counties in Illinois are using the optical scan which is a large ballot; maybe it's eleven by fourteen. And you make your dark of the oval as you put it through the counter; then you have the ballot at the end and you can see what you've done and you've got physical evidence which you don't have with electronic machines. A lot of skeptics say, Well the software can be manipulated in those electronic systems and no one would ever know, so it's still a matter of some controversy. It really is.

DePue: How about the whole issue that you discussed before about expanding the franchise versus the integrity of the process? Where would you come down on that?

Michaelson: Well, I'm not trying to dodge it but I think they're both really important. A lot of states right now have adopted laws requiring photo I.D. at the polls. You fly on an airplane, you need photo identification. A lot of things you need photo identification, maybe for cashing a check or something. This is largely a Republican versus Democratic issue. The Republicans in these states that have prevailed say this is just a matter to increase integrity or ensure integrity and make sure the person who is voting is the person they say they are. The other side says there are a lot of people who don't have photo I.D. cards. They don't drive; they don't have a driver's license. Are you going to eliminate these people from voting? Of course, the other answer is, Well everybody can get a government photo I.D. card. The courts have been upholding photo identification at the polls. It's not something that's been introduced in Illinois. But some states are moving in that direction. I guess I'm one who doesn't have a real problem with that.

DePue: With adopting I.D. cards?

Michaelson: Yeah.

DePue: This may be a little bit outside the realm of Illinois politics but it certainly impacts national elections, presidential elections, and that's the Electoral College. Your view on that?

Michaelson: From a practical matter—very, very, very difficult to change that given the fact that you've got enough smaller states that will preserve the Electoral College because you need a constitutional amendment quite obviously to change that. If you had a direct popular vote, which is obviously what some people want and just whoever gets the most votes wins, I'm not certain that some of the smaller states would ever see a presidential candidate in their state. I think candidates would go where all the numbers are. Just like here in Illinois, I think candidates would all go to Chicago. I don't know why they'd spend time downstate in some of these smaller counties; just spend it all in Chicago. And if you had a close presidential election, can you imagine the horrors of a national recount? Because if you had a close national election [in] popular [votes], you'd have to have a recount everywhere, by definition. So I think I'm in favor of the status quo. It's worked moderately well. Yes, indeed, I guess it was 2000 when Al Gore had more popular votes. But Bush won the election. And that's happened three or four times in our nation's history. I think we've done a pretty good job in presidential electoral politics in our 200-plus years and I think there are bigger problems to go after than trying to get a constitutional amendment to change the Electoral College, which I don't think would ever pass anyway.

DePue: But was it interesting though trying to explain the Electoral College to a bunch of Soviet delegates?

Michaelson: (laughter) I don't know if we even tried.

DePue: One other question here since we're talking about the process of elections. Absentee voting, absentee balloting—that's certainly changed because of what happened as well.

Michaelson: That has changed and there's probably more potential for fraud in absentee voting than any other areas now. In the olden days in Chicago there were allegations of fraud in the polling place. They had these lever machines—these big machines where you'd pull little levers next to the candidate of your choice and then you'd pull this huge lever and your vote was registered. It was really counted on a row of counters in the back of the machine. Allegedly sometimes corrupt judges would put some votes in there before you ever started and all this kind of thing.

DePue: Corrupt election judges.

Michaelson: Corrupt election judges. Did I say voters? I'm sorry.

DePue: No, you said "judges." I just wanted to–

Michaelson: Yeah, corrupt election judges—right. I lost my train of thought. Where were we going with this?

DePue: Well, we were talking about absentee ballots.

Michaelson: Right—sorry. So now rather than that, I think the potential for fraud in the absentee voting process is great, particularly in nursing homes and others where party people or candidate people go and solicit absentee votes from people who they think aren't going to get to the polls and then suggest how they vote. And it's a difficult area to police, for sure. But what's happening now in terms of absentee voting is what we call "no-excuse" absentee voting, or some people call it "early voting," where rather than having to have a reason for voting absentee such as, I'm out of the county, I have religious beliefs that prohibit me from voting on Election Day or other certain designated reasons, now you don't need a reason. You can just vote prior to Election Day for no reason whatsoever. Illinois does have early voting. A lot of states have early voting. In fact, I saw a figure in California, the last statewide election, about a third of all voters voted prior to Election Day, one-third of all voters. Now this raises havoc with candidate campaigns because rather than strategize your campaign so it peaks the day before the election, now when you have people voting ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five days before the election, you've got to change your whole strategy. You've got to peak a lot earlier, and it changes the dynamic of the campaign process.

DePue: Isn't there an irresistible temptation of the campaigns to go out and just encourage their voting block to do that?

Michaelson: They do that. They do that absolutely. And the whole theory behind it is to make it easier for people to vote —more convenience, expanding the franchise, which we talked about earlier. Let them vote any day you want. You don't have to necessarily vote on Election Day. The problem with early voting is, if you vote fifteen days before the election and then in those ensuing fifteen days something happens—whether it's a state election or national election—something critical happens—a big, God forbid, terrorist attack or a momentous thing that might change your position, *i.e.* your vote, you have no opportunity to do so. You've already voted. You can't take it back.

DePue: In political jargon that would be called the "October Surprise."

Michaelson: Yeah, right. So that's the problem. I'm kind of a traditionalist. If I'm going to be in town, I'm going to go to my polling place and vote on Election Day. Save my alternatives until the very end. See what happens and vote on Election Day. Has early voting really made a difference in terms of turnout? Not a substantial difference. It's just those who are going to vote are just voting at a more convenient time.

DePue: Well let's get up to 2002. We spent quite a bit of time there, but I think that was very helpful to have you flesh out the implications of the 2000 election—the presidential election. But before I get to the 2002 elections in Illinois, I think we have to reflect a little bit on the demise of George Ryan, because by the time you get to 2002, what had happened to him legally was very much part of the election.

Michaelson: Yes, it was. He was damaged goods for sure and it was pretty clear he had some serious legal problems, and quite obviously, Blagojevich ran against George Ryan in 2002 even though he wasn't the candidate.

DePue: Let's take a step back real quick and talk about the primary campaign that the Democrats had. That was pretty darn close.

Michaelson: It was. My recollection is Blagojevich got about a third of the vote.

DePue: The three candidates there were—it doesn't print off very well here. I know it was Blagojevich. It was Paul Vallas, who had been the chief executive officer of the Chicago schools.

Michaelson: Of the schools in Chicago.

DePue: And Roland Burris. So we've got three Chicago guys.

Michaelson: Roland Burris, who always wanted to be governor; Paul Vallas, a very well-qualified person. I was always very impressed when I heard Vallas talk and

campaign; and then Blagojevich, who was running with the help of his father-in-law, Dick Mell, alderman of the city council, a very powerful alderman. Due to those kinds of connections, Blagojevich got endorsements from a lot of county chairmen downstate. That's kind of the irony of the whole thing. Blagojevich basically won the primary with his downstate vote but when he came into office, he couldn't care less about downstate. But it was a close primary as I recall.

DePue: Yeah, his percentages were hovering in the mid-thirties.

Michaelson: Yeah, it was close. And unfortunately for the Republicans, they ran the wrong candidate because they ran a candidate with the last name of Ryan—Jim Ryan, probably the stupidest thing they ever could have done. Jim Ryan—no relation to George—a former attorney general, outstanding person, very well-qualified, never had a chance in the general election. Anecdotally, I heard people say they thought he was related to George Ryan or some people were ignorant enough to think it was one and the same person. It was just a nightmare for Jim Ryan.

DePue: How much did it have to do with the fact that the Republicans had dominated the gubernatorial seat for twenty-six years?

Michaelson: Twenty-six years. I don't recall if Blagojevich made that any part of his campaign. I mean he had plenty of fodder to run against George—the whole thing about cleaning up Illinois government and there will be a new day in Illinois politics and I forget all the buzz words he used. But he used all the right ones. And Blagojevich was a great campaigner; spoke well on the stump, easy-going, affable; and, as I say, he just ran against George, which was a pretty easy thing to do. Jim Ryan just never, ever had a chance.

DePue: But it's not an overwhelming victory. I guess in political parlance perhaps but 52 percent for Blagojevich, 45 percent for Ryan.

Michaelson: A pretty good showing considering, really. Of course, nobody knew Blagojevich very well. He had served in the Illinois House, undistinguished and he had served in the Congress for one or two terms.

DePue: Two years.

Michaelson: Two years, one term?

DePue: It used to be the Rostenkowski[3] seat.

Michaelson: Yeah he was the guy—Republicans won that seat for two years and then Blagojevich took it over and he had a very undistinguished two years in the

[3] Congressman Dan Rostenkowski was a powerful Democratic representative who for many years chaired the Ways and Means Committee in Congress. He was considered one of the most powerful men in Congress until 1994 when he was indicted for corruption.

Congress. So he didn't have a lot of name recognition. He was this new kid on the block kind of like statewide, but as I said earlier, a great campaigner and got the job done.

DePue: Okay 2002—there's also a Senate campaign. Democrat Dick Durbin, we talked about him several times before. Republican challenger, Jim Durkin.

Michaelson: Yeah, it was not a close election; kind of hard to distinguish the two names—Durkin and Durbin; you know, probably didn't help Durkin very well, but Durkin was in the legislature and a capable guy, I think. I don't remember the margin, but Durbin, I'm sure, won easily.

DePue: Sixty percent versus 38 for Durkin.

Michaelson: I think that's called a landslide. (laughter)

DePue: It is in Illinois, at least. By this time—2002, November—are you thinking seriously about where your future is going to take you?

Michaelson: Well, only because I think they had an early retirement program in 2001, I believe.

DePue: This was one of the things that George Ryan would have been pushing to help balance the budget.

Michaelson: Right and as I said earlier I always thought that I would continue on until I was sixty-five anyway. But after Blago's election in 2003, they put through a generous early retirement program—they call it a five and five; you had five years to your age and five years to your length of service. You had to buy that time. But when they put that through, some of my key people—who were a little younger than me but they were eligible for it—they all started to say, Hey, we can't pass this up. So they started to bail. I looked at the figures and said, This looks like something I ought to do. And it was getting evident to me that it looked like this guy Blagojevich was not all that he said he was going to be. Even in 2003, there were indications that this was not going to be a well-run administration. And I remember shortly after the election, something about our key legislative liaison. Now the State Board of Elections, is a constitutional office; we're independent. She got a letter from Lon Monk, one of the governor's chief aids. She got it on Friday and she said it said, Clean out your office. You're fired, and don't come to work on Monday. Well, they had no legal authority to do that, no constitutional authority, because we were an independent branch of government and they tried to fire her. And obviously we resisted and she did not get fired. But that early indication kind of told me that this may not go well. This may not go well.

DePue: Did you mention her name or are you willing to mention her name?

Michaelson: No, Cris—it's a C-r-i-s, Cray, C-r-a-y.

DePue: Any idea why she was targeted?

Michaelson: No, other than before she came to work for us, she worked on the Republican staff in the House so she had partisan credentials before she came with us. But she had been with us for a few years. She knew the legislature real well and obviously couldn't exhibit any partisan tendencies. I'm not sure why she was singled out, but she was singled out. So that kind of told me this is not going to be good. I had a conversation with the Auditor General Bill Holland a few weeks ago and even he said in 2003 he saw some things happening in state government which didn't look good to him. He started to get very wary and suspicious of the integrity of the whole operation. And so I think that, combined with the attractiveness of the early out, I left. Actually stayed around kind of to help on a consulting basis for a little bit. But in retrospect it was absolutely, definitely, positively the right thing to do because state morale just started to go down and down. Nobody was happy working. It just became a very—I'm talking about state government now—a very unhospitable place to work. And then when you have your leader, so to speak, kind of destroying state government, had no interest in governing the state, no interest in the process of governing—that was just very, very disturbing. And so it was time to go. The timing was exemplary.

DePue: Any sense of guilt though that you're leaving these poor folks behind to deal with it at all?

Michaelson: (laughter) No. But I felt sorry for them in a way. I really did. But fortunately they were somewhat insulated from the rest of state government because the state board is a constitutional agency. So, lots of things happen to other governmental agencies under the control of the government that really did not impact the state board. So they were a little more blessed than many people who worked in the government.

DePue: Have there been people both within the legislature and the State Board of Elections who have come to you as a sounding board since this time, since you retired?

Michaelson: Yeah, I keep in touch with people at the state board. I mean the new executive director who was my assistant director for a long, long time.

DePue: His name?

Michaelson: Dan White was his name. He was from Chicago and he actually remained in Chicago, which made it pretty difficult for him to run the agency when the headquarters is in Springfield. But he did the best he could for a few years and then he just retired. And the new director, Rupert Borgsmiller, whom I hired many, many years ago here in Springfield—he and I have talked often. So, I guess the answer is yes, I still stay in touch but I don't want to intrude and I

don't make it a practice of going over to the state board every week or every month or every two months.

DePue: Okay from here on out then you can speak as a partisan, so to speak, with some of these questions. But I did want to ask you about the 2004 senatorial election. And obviously that's another presidential year.

Michaelson: Was that the Alan Keyes election?

DePue: That was—yeah, Barack Obama, Alan Keyes. Obama had some luck in the primary season as well on both sides.

Michaelson: He had some luck in the primary season. And Alan Keyes was the worst possible candidate the Republicans could have picked even though he was African American. He didn't live in Illinois. And he had run for president and so he kind of had a little following—and kind of a cult following. It was terrible. It was just terrible.

DePue: Well, having run the board of elections, did it make sense to you that a carpetbagger could be a candidate for the governorship or the Senate?

Michaelson: Yeah, it was legal but obviously giving Obama a real easy issue; you know, talking about a carpetbagger and an outsider and somebody who doesn't know Illinois, are you going to trust him and so forth and so on. I don't remember much about the campaign other than Obama worked hard and obviously won very easily. And Alan Keyes was just an absolute disaster as a candidate, absolute disaster.

DePue: We talked about Barack Obama before because of your first encounter when he was a freshman in the Illinois State Senate. The thing that propelled him onto the national scene, of course, was that incredible speech he made at the Democratic Convention. Do you recall that speech?

Michaelson: I sure do. And whoever got him that assignment, Barack Obama owes him for the rest of his life. I think Dick Durbin had a lot to do with it. I just don't know all the details. But that keynote speech was astounding. I mean he's a great orator and he said the right things, and it put him on the national stage. It was remarkable coming from a person with relatively little national experience and exposure. I mean, most people around the country had never heard of Barack Obama, and here he is giving the keynote at the Democratic nominating convention.

DePue: At that time he's simply an Illinois state senator.

Michaelson: Yeah. I mean—just astounding, just astounding. The only thing I remember about the speech was I think he rejected the view of a red America or a blue America but he talked about a purple. Do you remember that? And that's what stuck with me. You know he was saying, Hey, we don't want these divisions.

It should be purple everywhere or whatever. But he said it so eloquently and well.

DePue: We talked before and you talked about his potential as a political candidate but that you never imagined him being of presidential stature. Did you reassess the man at that point?

Michaelson: Absolutely, because it looked like he could perform on the national stage and perform well. Now would he ever get the nomination and become elected? There's so much circumstance of luck involved in that. But he put himself in a position. And then when he had the opportunity, was he going to run? Hillary looked like she was the putative Democratic nominee and so forth and she felt that she deserved it and all this kind of stuff. And then this upstart Obama runs. I think he was told—and I think the advice was really great advice—you may only have one chance to do this. You may only have one chance. If you want it, you've got to take a run at it right now. If you don't, Hillary wins. She might be in for eight years and other people come along and you're kind of left as a—you know–

DePue: Footnote in history?

Michaelson: That's right. And it was really good advice. And obviously the campaign was incredibly difficult but he pulled it off. But I think he was told it's either now or never. And getting back to when we talked about Jim Thompson who always wanted to be president, he never really had that opportunity. The stars never lined up just right in terms of his situation. And that's just part of the luck of the draw, if you will. But it lined up for Obama.

DePue: I want to ask you a couple questions about the 2006 election because obviously for governor, Rod Blagojevich is up for reelection. Now you'd already smelled trouble back in 2003. Were you surprised at how that election evolved?

Michaelson: Well, I was really not surprised to the extent that I saw what was happening with the money.

DePue: What do you mean there?

Michaelson: That Blagojevich had raised and was raising considerable sums of money for the campaign. And he used that money early to increase Judy Baar Topinka's negatives. Blagojevich had high negatives but rather than try to reduce his negatives, he used the money to raise Judy's negatives and she didn't have the money to respond. Remember all those ads that he said—at the end of the ad was, What's she thinking? What's she thinking? They showed Judy Baar and George Ryan dancing the polka at the State Fair many years ago.

DePue: And he's still running against George Ryan then?

Michaelson: He ran against George Ryan in 2006. And he says, "Judy was George Ryan's treasurer." Yeah, Judy was state treasurer when George Ryan was governor. They're both constitutional officers. Just phony as all get out but, What's she thinking—What's she thinking. He pounded and pounded and pounded and she was having trouble raising money. He outspent her badly. And even though she carried far more counties than he did, he increased her negatives so that neither one of them looked terribly attractive. And then when neither one looks terribly attractive, the incumbent maybe gets reelected. Given all the legal issues that had already surfaced, to think that the people of this state would be stupid enough to reelect him was just very depressing. And even Mike Madigan, one of the smartest men in Illinois politics, was the titular chair of Blagojevich's reelection campaign.

DePue: But by that time the two men despised each other, didn't they?

Michaelson: Yeah but he certainly didn't do much to try to derail him, it didn't seem like. And even Pat Quinn, his running mate, who I think increasingly saw that a) he was being frozen out of things; and b) this was not a good administration to be associated with, he couldn't say anything in the campaign either. It was very distressing. Judy Baar Topinka had name recognition throughout the state; she'd been elected to statewide office before, she was a female.

DePue: A colorful personality.

Michaelson: A colorful personality—she shot from the hip; once in a while too much so but I think people kind of liked that. You know here's someone who just tells it like it is. And it was one of the saddest elections in Illinois political history when you reelect someone who appeared to be corrupt and incapable of governing. And then it only took another year or two for him to be impeached and convicted.

DePue: Well, it's made for interesting politics in this state in the worst way perhaps.

Michaelson: It absolutely has.

DePue: I wanted to ask you a quick question about—and this goes back to the 2008 election—Illinois' moving of the primary date in part to help their native son to get the nomination.

Michaelson: As it turned out, it made no difference. Illinois moved from March to February and Hillary really didn't compete much in Illinois, although Illinois is kind of her home state where she grew up. She went to high school here, went to high school with my brother at Maine South High School. In fact, he was on a double date with her once in high school. (laughter) And so even though she can claim Illinois as home, although she was representing New York State at the time as U.S. Senator, she kind of deferred to Obama and didn't contest Illinois much. So moving the primary to February—it really made no difference. And now of course we've moved it back to March. And

there it sits again. But yeah, that was definitely an effort to help their favorite son.

DePue: Okay. Any quick comments about the last 2002 election and especially Quinn's victory over Bill Brady?

Michaelson: You mean in 2010?

DePue: Yeah.

Michaelson: You said 02.

DePue: Okay—2010.

Michaelson: Yeah, Bill Brady wins ninety-eight counties and gets beat. Quinn won three counties. We've talked about this before, I think—Bill Brady was too much of a social conservative to win statewide. The Republicans cannot run a candidate like a Bill Brady and expect to win statewide. Nothing against Senator Brady's capabilities or whatever. His ideological perspectives on things just make it very difficult.

DePue: He barely squeaked through the primary against Kirk Dillard.

Michaelson: Dillard, yeah, and Kirk Dillard would have won the general election. It's as certain as I'm sitting here; Kirk Dillard would have won the general election. He would have been another Jim Edgar in 1990 but even more so. He would have come in and made some really, really tough calls trying to get our state back on firm fiscal footing. He would have been a one-term governor. He said he only wanted to be a one-term governor. He wanted to try to get the state back on track. I would have liked to see it happen or try to have that happen, but I remember watching those primary returns. Of course, he had all these DuPage County Republican candidates. He had Schillerstrom and here's our good friend Jim Ryan running again: Bob Schillerstrom, Jim Ryan, Kirk Dillard, then he had Andy McKenna, who was a Cook County—he was state chairman of the party—and then you had one downstater—Bill Brady. And I just remember seeing those election night returns come in and Brady was sitting third, fourth, third and he moved up, gradually moved up and then all of a sudden at 12:00 or 1:00 he overtook Dillard and I'm thinking, Oh my goodness! Is he going to pull this off? And he did.

But it was such an important election for the Republicans due to redistricting. You needed the governorship to have a check on the Democrats because you knew the Democrats were in control of the House and the Senate for the redistricting effort. So you needed a Republican to have a check and balance so you could have some kind of a compromise map or at least have a shot at controlling the map if you wanted to go to the lottery. And now of course, with a strong Democratic map being drawn—it's being challenged in the courts as we speak—but who knows what may come of that. You know

you're going to have a Democrat-controlled general assembly for another ten years. If the Republicans had picked the right candidate, that wouldn't have happened. It's unfortunate they had three candidates running from DuPage County, splitting up that vote. So I mean Brady took advantage of being the only downstater in the race and then, as I say, winning ninety-nine counties but still losing in November.

DePue: Does the election in 2006 for governor and the election in 2010 for governor confirm that Illinois is a solidly blue state?

Michaelson: I would say so. I would say so. The collars are not as Republican as they used to be—demographic changes in the collar counties. The city lost population but is still solidly Democratic. Downstate is now more Republican but the votes aren't there. There are pockets of Democratic strength but lots of Republican counties now downstate but they're so small. Only a candidate like a Jim Edgar can win statewide in Illinois, who has that moderate bent—that moderate appeal.

DePue: Okay. We've been at this for quite a while. It's been fascinating for me all the way through. But we're at the point now we need to ask some wrap-up questions for you. Reflecting back on a long career, starting with Ogilvie but also a lot of years with the State Board of Elections, what's the thing that you look back in your own personal career that you would feel most proud about?

Michaelson: I would say that where I was, I was able to make a difference in some small way; that I just wasn't putting in time as a government bureaucrat and kind of making a career in government but I was able to do some things that hopefully made a difference; that I felt good that I was able to accomplish some things. I've never felt embarrassed about working for government, working in the public sector. I probably could have made more money elsewhere but I made a very nice, comfortable living. I know it sounds corny at times, but I think public service is a very admirable thing. I don't regret one minute from going into that field of work.

DePue: Any disappointments that you're willing to reflect on?

Michaelson: Well, I've just been very blessed. I was in the right place at the right time in a lot of things. I worked for probably one of the best governors Illinois has ever had in the minds of a lot of people. So I was highly privileged to be able to work for Mr. Ogilvie and I have friendships from that administration that still exist to this day—now that's a long time ago—friendships from that administration that still exist to this day. So that means those were pretty important times with some very special people. A lot of people can't say that.

DePue: You are nostalgic about thinking back. What made those four years so special for you? Was it the income tax and the new constitution? Or was there something else?

Michaelson: It was everything that we accomplished during those four years. The income tax allowed us create IDOT, create a new EPA, create a new Department of Corrections, a new Bureau of the Budget, a new department of local government affairs—all these things that we were able to do and to really change state government—really change state government for the better. To be a small part of that with guys—frankly most guys my age at the time—and so that's one reason why these relationships are still strong today. Unfortunately, a couple of them passed away but there is still that strong bond and even a bond with people who worked in the government at that time like a Jim Edgar, who was an intern who I got to know at that time. Other people on Senator Arrington's staff whom I got to know like Richard Dunn, D-u-n-n, who I still see today. So it's not just people on our staff but people who worked in state government at that time, usually on the legislative side. They all knew that some really big things happened then that really changed state government for the better. I had in class last week, Taylor Pensoneau, who wrote this book on Arrington. Taylor was a State House reporter for the St. Louis Post Dispatch at the time. I got to know Taylor then. He's still a really good friend today. So that's what makes those times really special.

DePue: Officially when you're serving in the State Board of Elections, you couldn't have a political view—a political position—but I wonder if you can reflect on how your own political views have evolved or changed over time.

Michaelson: Well, it's interesting. When I joined the Ogilvie staff, actually in 1966 when he was president of the Cook County board—everybody who worked for him had come through the college Young Republicans; you know, they were all political animals even at that young age. I never was. I was a political science major in college but my parents grew up Republican and I guess I considered myself a Republican. But I wasn't politically active. So I came to work for then-President Ogilvie and I was kind of the strange kid on the block because everybody else was involved in college YR's and here's me coming in here as this kind of academic kind of person. Dick Ogilvie was a law and order Republican at the time. But then as I worked at the state board and got to understand Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar, I think my political evolution has definitely brought me into a more moderate position. I consider myself a moderate Republican today and probably was more conservative when I first started out. But I would definitely view myself as a moderate Republican; never voted a straight ticket—sometimes would split my ticket—but was comfortable with the kind of governing philosophy and ideology that people like a Jim Thompson and a Jim Edgar had. So even when I teach class today at the university, I've had students ask me the last week of class, Are you a Republican or Democrat? I really can't tell. And my answer is, Great! I'm not here to impose my political views on you. I want you to develop your own and be challenged with various positions and so forth. And I know there are other professors out here who make no bones about their political leanings and they talk about it in class and want students to challenge them. And that's fine. That's one way to handle it. But in my classes out here the last six or seven

years as I've been full-time, the only time I've really been partisan is I consistently went after Blagojevich and that wasn't because he's a Democrat. I just consistently went against him because I thought he was rotten to the core and just terrible for Illinois. I think I'm right about that and I didn't want to sugar-coat it with my students. I said, You know, this is the kind of guy we've got.

DePue: Well, I hadn't anticipated asking this question but I'm intrigued now. Academia today in political parlance is a place that is strongly liberal in tone. Have you found that to be the case here at UIS?

Michaelson: Oh yeah, and no question at least in the Political Science Department which is just where I venture, if you will.

DePue: And you mentioned that some instructors are not shy about stating their own political views. Is that something that is more prominent among the liberals than the conservatives on the staff?

Michaelson: I don't know if there are any conservatives on the staff, really.

DePue: Then you've answered my question.

Michaelson: Yeah, I shouldn't say this for a fact, but I think I'm probably the only one of fourteen faculty members in the Political Science Department that considers himself a Republican.

DePue: Is that problematic?

Michaelson: I think they should have more balance here. I think it's good for students to see balance among their faculty. Kent Redfield is a really good friend of mine who's obviously well known in the political world and his specialty is money and politics. And he calls it the way he sees it. He doesn't pull any punches. Years and years and years ago in Kent's old life, he worked on the Democratic House staff for Bill Redmond, who was then Speaker of the House. So I assume Kent's still a Democrat but he doesn't walk around with a partisan hat on out here. So that's great. I don't care. But there are others who are pretty strident in letting people know where they're coming from politically and free marketplace of ideas in a university. But as I told others, I think I'm probably the only person who considers himself Republican on the faculty in Political Science. That's what I think. Is that healthy for the university? Probably not. But I don't go out here and proselytize students to be Republicans—no way. In fact I had a very interesting combination in class last year; the chairman of the college Young Democrats and the chairman of the college Young Republicans were roommates and both in my class and sat together. And they were best of friends. In fact the *State Journal-Register* featured them in an article one day; these two highly partisan young men were able to agree to disagree and were good personal friends. And I just thought that was just outstanding—the way things ought to be.

DePue: Well, that's the perfect lead-in to one of the questions. National Politics—and I think you can extend to the state level as well—seems to have gotten increasingly partisan, increasingly strident. Can you reflect on that?

Michaelson: I think a lot of it is due to the cable news shows in my opinion. The stridency on both sides, whether it's MSNBC on the liberal side or Fox on the conservative side and those talk show hosts or commentators—whatever you want to call them—are so strident and so hard-nosed in their positions that I tell my friends who watch Fox all the time—I say, "You should watch MSNBC once in a while just to hear what the other side is saying. Just try to broaden your perspective a little bit. You don't have to agree." But we've seen it here in Illinois and you see it in Washington even worse. There's less camaraderie between the two sides. There's less social activity at night. In the olden days Republicans and Democrats used to go out for dinner and drink and so forth and then they'd get back on the floor the next day and argue. And then they'd go out to dinner that night again. That doesn't happen anymore, and it's not happening in Washington. The polarization is so extreme. Look at the number of people in the middle in the United States Senate, for instance, who are really in the middle. It's a small number. It's a small number thus very hard to get things done and compromise.

DePue: Illinois happens to have one of those with Mark Kirk's selection.

Michaelson: Yes and I think that's great. I think that's great. And Aaron Schock who is an up and coming—he's in leadership in the House. He's kind of that same stripe, too, and I think we just need more of those kinds of people.

DePue: Final question here for you then. Can you reflect on the condition of Illinois politics as it exists today?

Michaelson: I'm discouraged. I'm not hopeful. To turn this state around is going to take years. I'm talking about both fiscally and just the whole governance process. The extensive damage that's been done—you know I don't have to recite the statistic I just saw a couple of days ago. We're now fiftieth in terms of deadbeat states—not paying our bills. We're the worst in the nation.

DePue: We're right there as far as our pension system is concerned.

Michaelson: From the unfunded liability, we're fiftieth. I'm not very encouraged. I really am not. If we could have elected someone like a Kirk Dillard, I think there would have been some really tough times but some hope. I know Pat Quinn. I've worked with him on some stuff. I can't say I know him well. I think he's way over his head. He's not showing much capacity for leadership or governance and so it's just the longer this kind of malaise continues, the harder it is to put the genie back in the bottle.

DePue: Has Illinois earned its reputation as one of the most if not **the most corrupt** state?

Michaelson: I think so. I really do. You think of not just the state government but you think of Chicago politics, Cook County politics, the Operation Greylord a few years ago when a lot of judges were convicted. It's just not at the state level. I may have used this quote before. A former mayor of New Orleans said, "You can make corruption illegal but you can't make it unpopular." And you know it's, unfortunately, kind of the way of life here. A lot of people are concerned about it. You know it's nice to see someone like the *Chicago Tribune* that's been so aggressive and forward in trying to call attention to all this stuff, particularly the fiscal issues. Everybody is going to have to swallow hard and take some bitter medicine. So I just today—and this will be my last answer to this question—I just today saw an email from a former State senator, Roger Keats, K-e-a-t-s. He is a Republican State senator from the northern suburbs. He's probably Lake County. And he said, "After sixty years, I'm moving out of Illinois." He said, "I'm moving to Texas. Taxes are much lower. I can buy a more affordable house. Government is run more fairly." The whole list of things—and he was in public life for a long time. He said, "I hate to leave Illinois. I've got a lot of friends here, but I just can't take it anymore." That's pretty sad. That's pretty sad. So right now I'm not terribly encouraged. And I regret having to say that.

DePue: Well, I've been the one asking all the questions. I'll give you an opportunity to make any final closing comments you'd like here.

Michaelson: Well, when you first asked me to do this, what shall I say, I had no idea I was going to have this much to share and fill up time—not just a filler but how many hours have we done this, five or six hours maybe?

DePue: Yeah, we're right there.

Michaelson: So as I reflect on that, I guess it tells me that I've been through a lot of pretty significant stuff here in Illinois. It's really fun to rehearse it and review it and really realize that I guess I have. I thought, well, maybe I could contribute an hour or two of some kind of substance. And it's turned out to be a heck of a lot more than that. But you know it's really fun to do this. It's enjoyable to talk about it and be able to remember—at least hopefully, decently well enough—remember a lot of this stuff. And you've done great homework, which really helped things flow along.

DePue: I appreciate that. It's been fun for me but I think more important, it's important history. It's worthy of our capturing.

Michaelson: Well, I think it's wonderful that you do this and I really enjoyed it.

DePue: Well, thank you very much, Ron.

Michaelson: Okay, you're welcome.

(end of interview #3)