Interview with James Thompson
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Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Monday, April 11, 2016. This is Mark DePue. I'm once again with Governor Jim Thompson. I should be calling you "Grandpa" today.

Thompson: Indeed, indeed. This morning on Amazon [Web Services (AWS) a comprehensive, evolving cloud computing platform.], I just bought my granddaughter a cuddly little lamb. So I'm now a sucker for buying things for little girls, (both laugh) and she's not even a month old.

DePue: Why don't you tell us a little bit more about the blessed event if you would?

Thompson: We knew last December, or sometime around there, that they were going to have this baby in the spring. Since it was a planned C-section [Caesarean Section] we were able to do the date with some precision. So we went over there a couple of days before the baby's birth and had dinner with our daughter and son-in-law. Then the baby was born, and we got to see the baby, I think, that evening for the first time.

Of course, we went back to the hospital each day (laughs) and started inquiring about pictures, "Where are the pictures?" (laughs) And then we stayed after the baby came home, eleven days in London. It was magical; it

was just wonderful. She's a beautiful child with a wonderful Greek name now. Her father is Greek.

DePue: Remind me of the last name again.

Thompson: Persephone, the goddess of spring in Greek mythology.

DePue: That's the last name.

Thompson: No, the first name.

DePue: That's the first name?

Thompson: Yes, Persephone.

DePue: What's her last name?

Thompson: Tomazos.

DePue: Is there a middle name?

Thompson: Oh yes. You've got to go by Greek custom, and then you got to go by the parents' preference, so this child is named (clears throat) Persephone Elaine—Elaine is her grandmother on the other side—Jayne Thompson Tomazos. So, all the parents and grandparents get satisfied with the child's name. (laughing)

DePue: That's a lot of name to deal with.

Thompson: That's a lot of name, so my guess is her friends will call her "Seph."

DePue: Well, that'll be kind of unique, won't it?

Thompson: Yeah, yeah, Persephone.

DePue: What's Grandpa and Grandma going to call her?

Thompson: I don't know what I'm going to call her. I mean, after I'm done with "honey" and "baby" and all of that—

DePue: Terms of endearment.

Thompson: All those terms of endearment. I guess, she'll have to get a little older before I start calling her by an abbreviation of her name or a nickname.

DePue: How is Mom doing?

Thompson: Mom's doing great, and her husband Tommy has just been wonderful. He's been cooking dinner every night. He's an accomplished cook, because his

father owned a restaurant, and he grew up in that restaurant. So he's just been a wonderful husband and father. He's obsessed with the baby. (laughs)

DePue: Now, Samantha was working before all of this, was she not?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: What's she going to be doing for the next—

Thompson: She's still able to do that, because a lot of that is by the Internet.

DePue: Today, as I mentioned before we got started, Governor, we get to talk about your years after you were in the governorship.

Thompson: My first real job.

DePue: No, there were several before that, I would have to say. (Thompson laughs)

DePue: But I wanted to ask you a couple of other questions, because we were also talking about the passing of Senator Phil Rock. Do you want to make any final comments on that?

Thompson: Phil Rock was a dear, dear friend. When he became the Democratic leader of the Senate, we formed a real friendship and partnership in some ways, even though we were of different political faiths. In fact, there's a lot of people in Springfield who used to kid Rock about being my floor leader. (laughs) These are Democrats who were, you know, giving it to Rock. He and I agreed on a lot of things. Of course, he had to bring his caucus along with him. We didn't agree on everything, but he was, I think, a really effective leader. I miss him as a friend. I'm not in office any longer, so I don't miss him politically, but he was just a great guy.

DePue: I'm curious, did you agree, in terms of political positions, more with Pate Philip or with Phil Rock?

Thompson: Oh, it would depend. Those guys were so different. Then, when you combined Madigan and Daniels, those guys were so different. So it went by issue, but I was friends with all four. That made a big difference. And I trusted all four, and they trusted me, so it really was an issue determinative relationship, as well as a friendship.

DePue: We're talking about Phil Rock and the olden days, if you will, of Illinois politics. I want to get your reflections on what's going on in the contemporary world. Let's start with Illinois politics.

Thompson: The answer is not much! (laughs)

DePue: Over nine months without a budget.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Could you even fathom something like that when you were governor?

Thompson: No, no. I just can't imagine it, even though it's occurring now. But it's, I think, going to come to an end, because so far at least…Here's what's happened. The Democrats in the House and Senate have refused to take up a lot of what the governor calls his "Turnaround Agenda." The federal courts in a number of instances have issued orders compelling the comptroller to continue paying for programs that are in some way related to federal law, Medicaid for example and other social services. So, in some respects, we're being run by the federal courts, to some degree in the state budget, which is not good.

DePue: And all the state employees are getting their paychecks.

Thompson: The state employees are getting their paychecks, but that's not going to last forever, because the Illinois Supreme Court ruled the other day—in a decision which hasn't gotten a lot of press but is going to help decide this—that the state could not pay for things for which there was no appropriation.[1] And what's number one, right off the bat? State employees.

DePue: You say that was the Illinois Supreme Court decision?

Thompson: That's the Illinois Supreme Court. The state employees are being paid now because a) I think the governor and the comptroller think that that's the easiest course; they don't want to deal with what happens if state employees are not paid, and there's a circuit court decision from downstate somewhere saying pay the state employees. But now the Supreme Court has said, you cannot pay for something for which there is no appropriation, and there is no appropriation for state employees' salaries.

DePue: The circuit court…Is that a federal circuit court?

Thompson: No, it's a county court. So, at some point, and I would think sooner than not, somebody's going to challenge the paying of state employees, given this Supreme Court decision.

DePue: I have already seen an article in reference to the attorney general doing that.

Thompson: Mm-hmm. Since neither side, I think, Democrats or the governor, can envision not having state employees on the job, that's going to be a wedge to get this thing settled. Plus, so far at least, the diminution of social services hasn't been bad enough to stir the Democrats.

[1] *State v. American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees, Council 31*, 2016 IL 118422.

But it's getting worse on things that are not being paid for—for women and children and the elderly and the disabled—and soon that constituency will be a Democratic, and to some extent, Republican pressure point, as well. And the Supreme Court decision on pension [reform], taking that out of the argument, although politicians will keep trying to put it back in, coming up with plans that get around the Supreme Court decision. But they've tried that before and lost, so it doesn't look very reasonable to assume that you can save a lot of money on the issue of pensions in the next budget.

Here's the other thing—and I think we talked about this last time—the longer this goes, with the state essentially paying out last year's budget without last year's revenues, the longer this goes, the number of unpaid bills increase. So, even if you have a solution…Let's say Madigan and Cullerton and the Republican leaders and the governor get together; there's going to have to be a tax increase—everybody has acknowledged that—and there's going to have to be some budget cutting—everybody acknowledges that. But even with the tax increase and budget cutting, neither side is going to be able to pay for everything they want to pay for, because they first have to pay the old bills.

DePue: With interest.

Thompson: With interest. And if those old bills are now up about what, $7 billion? That's a pretty big chunk of the budget, isn't it? It's not going to all be done in one year, but it's got to be done. We've got people borrowing money to provide state services. One of our clients is borrowing $5 million a month to account for the failure of the state to pay, and that, at some point, gets to be an unsustainable burden, because even if you say, "Well, they'll get paid eventually, with interest," you can't sustain a business like that.

DePue: Another example is CWLP [City Water Light & Power], which provides all of the utilities, at least the electricity and water, et cetera, for the city of Springfield.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And they've got a deadbeat client, I guess you could say.

Thompson: Right. (laughs) Isn't that exciting? Glad I'm not there. (laughs)

DePue: Governor, I think I might have asked you this before. Who would you lay more blame on, in this deadlock?

Thompson: I think both sides are at fault, obviously. Without taking their side on any issue, both sides are at fault for failing to resolve this. I mean, they were elected to resolve issues like this. And to go nine months without a budget, to be the only state in America without a budget, with the federal courts commanding you to do this and that instead of your elected representatives

agreeing on what to do, and piling up bills that will have to be paid before programs, they're both at fault.

DePue: Let's shift the focus from state level politics to national level politics. Have you ever seen a presidential year like this?

Thompson: Never, never. I mean, I've seen my share of candidates, with whom I have a philosophical disagreement. Look, no candidate is perfect. I'm called a moderate Republican; I don't know precisely what that means, but I'm supposed to be liberal on social issues and conservative on fiscal issues. But even that definition doesn't really tell you much, because you'd have to say, which fiscal issues; which social issues? But let's take that as a measure. There are not a lot of us left (laughs) in my party.

DePue: Moderate Republicans?

Thompson: Yeah, not a lot of us left.

DePue: Have you ever been called a RINO [Republican in name only] Republican?

Thompson: Oh sure, mostly by people kidding me, but…I've never asked for presidential candidates to agree with me on everything. Ronald Reagan was more conservative than me; I voted for him. Both George Bushes were more conservative than me; I voted for them. But this year is going to be really hard.

DePue: I assume you've already voted in a Republican primary.

Thompson: I did.

DePue: And is it okay to ask who you voted for in the Republican primary?

Thompson: No. (DePue laughs) But it's apparently not hard to go from, "Well, I can't expect every presidential candidate to agree on everything with me, but I'm going to vote for him anyway," to a presidential candidate being absolutely unacceptable to me.

DePue: Are you referring to Trump in that case?

Thompson: I'd never support Trump. First of all, he's not a Republican. Secondly, he has said and done things that are absolutely…Well, you can apply a lot of words, cockeyed, impossible, crazy. You need a serious, smart person as president of the United States, not somebody who says, "I'm going to build this wall on the Mexican border. I'm going to make the Mexicans pay for it. You know how I'll do it; I will not allow their products to come in without a 35 percent duty."

First of all, those are not "their" products, they're the products of an American company who happens to be in Mexico. You could say that about any country in the world where Americans have factories and build products. You can't tariff them. Or to say, "We're going to use torture in the War against Terrorism," or any of the just absolutely incredible things he's said. He doesn't have the temperament to be the president of the United States.

DePue: Does that mean that when you get to the general election and you've got a choice between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, that you vote for Hillary?

Thompson: I don't know. I have to wait and see what Hillary's got to say.

DePue: On both Republican and Democratic sides, this seems to be the year that the electorate is pushing back against the establishment.

Thompson: You know, I'm not sure what the establishment is.

DePue: Well, Governor, they would think *you* represent the establishment.

Thompson: Oh, I'm sure they do. I'm sure they do. And yet, I was elected four times in this state by, I suspect, some of the people who are now decrying establishment candidates and supporting Trump. In fact, I **know** some of the people who voted for me four times are now supporting Trump. I don't think the label "establishment" has anything to do with it.

Look, there are a lot of people out there in America who are scared. They're hurting in terms of the economy. They're losing their way in terms of getting and keeping a good job. Wages have not kept up like they kept up in the past. There are a lot fewer opportunities for young people, their children. I don't blame them for being scared. I don't blame them for wanting answers from the government. If that's what attacking the establishment means, it's not a label that makes any sense. But there are issues out there where people have a legitimate grievance that their basic needs are not being met.

Now, all of that is not the fault of government officials. Part of it is the twists and turns of a global economy. What happens in Europe or in Asia today is relevant to how Americans get along, economically. That wasn't true fifty years ago, but it certainly is true today. We have to adopt policies that take account of that. We have to spend the government's money in ways that take account of that. So I can understand the anger; I can understand the fear, and it's up to our candidates to respond to that. And so far; I haven't seen that.

The Democratic side doesn't have all the answers here either. When you see a candidate like [Bernie] Sanders saying, "We're going to break up the banks," how that's supposed to help the average person, I don't know. "We're going to be tough on billionaires." Okay. How that's going to help the average person, I don't know. And you can go through Hillary's platform and

see agendas and issues that I might not agree with. It's just a tough time in America right now, politically. I don't think either party is responding in a way that's, so far as I can see now, going to help people.

DePue: You mentioned Hillary Clinton. Put on your old U.S. attorney hat and let me put you on the spot again. Any predictions whether or not she'll be indicted before the election?

Thompson: Not going to happen.

DePue: Because?

Thompson: Because it's hard for me to understand that there is a crime there, the willful and intentional violation of federal law. Yeah, the State Department didn't want people using their private computers, but there's a long way from that to pointing out what federal statute she's violated. But it's just not going to happen. You've got too many people running around, admitting now that they did the same thing, you know? Other members of the cabinet, for example, who have said, "Oh, I've used a private computer for a while."

DePue: Well, I took you through the whole litany of current politics.

Thompson: Yeah, let's get to my real job. (laughs)

DePue: Let's go back to the 1990s and move on from being the governor for fourteen years. Part of your intent—I think you've already answered this—was to spend more time with Jayne and Samantha.

Thompson: That's part of it, but also to assure our economic security. I love public service. I love education and teaching. But it doesn't pay very much, and I came out of the governor's office with debts. I was maintaining a home in Chicago, and the state was paying me as though I were living in the mansion full-time and had no home expenses, just for example. And my daughter was growing up. My wife found it difficult to work, because I was a public figure. So I wanted to do something for our economic security as well. It was one of the reasons why I left after four terms. I could have gone for a fifth and won, but then that would have made me close to being too old to start, for example, at a law firm.

So, I decided to leave, and I interviewed with nine law firms, I think it was. They all made me offers, which was (laughs) nice. I eventually picked the one that offered me the least money, but the money was so far above my governor's salary it didn't make much difference. And the firm that offered me the least money also gave me the shortest route to leadership, which was really important to me, as it would be to anybody.

You come from being the governor of a state of eleven million people and part of local, state, national, and international affairs for all that time, I

just didn't want to sit in a corner office. I wanted a chance to lead again, so I picked Winston. The chairman of Winston, Tom Reynolds, told me he was going to retire in two years and that I would be his successor. And at the time I didn't really think about the fact that that's not how things work in modern day law firms in America.

DePue: Yeah, I wouldn't think that the chair gets to pick his successor.

Thompson: No, the chair is somebody who's been there for thirty years and worked his way up, as Tommy had, Tommy Reynolds. But he was able to do it, and I became the chair after two years. I probably, at that time, was the only one of two law firm chairmen in America who hadn't grown up in the law firm. The other was Mayor [Dennis] Archer of Detroit, who after having served as mayor went to a law firm in Detroit and became the chair.

DePue: Didn't you already have a relationship with Winston & Strawn?

Thompson: I did. I had served at Winston for a year while I was running for governor. They gave me a home and said, "Okay, you're a member of the firm; now go out and run." (laughs)

DePue: Were you receiving any compensation?

Thompson: Oh sure.

DePue: While you were governor?

Thompson: No, no, before, during the race, for the first time, '75 to'76.

DePue: Let me ask you another prying type of question. Do you recall your salary, starting off with Winston & Strawn?

Thompson: When I was just there for a year?

DePue: No, in 1991, when you rejoined the firm.

Thompson: Oh, I don't know, it was like $600,000 maybe, $700,000.[2]

DePue: I'm completely ignorant about all this stuff, Governor, so do you get the salary plus your hourly rate?

Thompson: No, no, you just get the salary. The hourly rate goes to the firm.

DePue: Do you recall what your hourly rate was?

[2] Equivalent to $1 million or $1.2 million in April 2016. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl.

Thompson: It only has very little to do with me, because it's set in relationship to what clients are willing to pay at the time. My hourly rate now is far greater than it was twenty-five years ago. The market just keeps going up, and partners go up with it.

DePue: You mentioned that you interviewed with how many law firms?

Thompson: Nine.

DePue: And all nine made offers?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: Lucrative offers?

Thompson: Yes. All the rest of them offered me more money than Winston. One of them offered to change the name of the firm.

DePue: So what was it about Jim Thompson that was so attractive to all these law firms?

Thompson: Well, I had been a U.S. attorney; I had been a law school professor; I had been a governor of a major state; I had been a trial and appellate lawyer for all those years; I was an author. That's a pretty good package.

DePue: Did they identify you as the rainmaker for the law firm?

Thompson: Oh, you know the rainmaker business is—

DePue: This is John Grisham[3]; this is how most people understand law in the United States.

Thompson: Yeah, I know. There were other rainmakers at Winston that were far more important than I in making rain or bringing in clients.

DePue: Was there anybody even close to the name recognition that you had, though?

Thompson: Oh, Dan Webb. In the first two years, Tom Reynolds himself was the big rainmaker. But look, I was brought in with the understanding that very shortly I would be the chairman of the firm, and that meant running the place. So there was not as much emphasis on my making rain as it was in guiding the law firm and its future growth.

DePue: I'm assuming that there were lots of other ambitious lawyers in Winston & Strawn that would have liked to have the opportunity to take the reins of leadership?

[3] Popular author of suspense novels centered on the practice of law, one of which was titled *The Rainmaker*.

Thompson: I'm sure there were, but they didn't have the support of the troops. While I was chairman, there was never any push by anybody else in the firm to be the chairman. And when you recall that my chairmanship was extended for five years beyond the normal term…Not only was I reelected chairman by the executive committee, but when I reached the point where I would have been obliged to relinquish the chairmanship, the whole partnership voted twice to keep me, the first time for two years and the second time for three years. So that doesn't assume a law firm that was quickly ready to change its leadership.

DePue: So how exactly were you selected as the chair? Was it the partners?

Thompson: Selected to the chair by the executive committee.

DePue: Which consists of whom?

Thompson: At any given time, it consists of maybe fifteen to twenty or twenty-five, depending on how big the law firm is and how many offices have to be represented. The executive committee has gotten bigger over the years. But the executive committee was basically the leadership of the firm and the representatives of the various offices that we had at the time.

Now after I came on as chairman, I expanded the reach of the law firm, internationally and nationally. So it got bigger. But, from the beginning, there was never any opposition to my being chairman, and I was continually reelected by the executive committee when my terms were up. I forget what the terms were, maybe three years; I'm not sure.

But the true test is that when I reached sixty-five, when, under our rules, under our partnership agreement, I would have had to relinquish the chairmanship, the partners themselves, all the partners of the firm, voted to extend me for two years and then in another vote, voted to extend me for three more years.

DePue: Now a lot of the questions I'm going to ask are out of pure ignorance on my part.

Thompson: Okay.

DePue: I assume you started day one as a partner.

Thompson: I started day one as an equity partner, which is the top ranking of the partnership.

DePue: And how many lawyers, roughly, were there at Winston & Strawn when you started?

Thompson: Then? Maybe 300, 350, something like that.

DePue: And how many partners, any idea of that?

Thompson: There would have been equity partners, maybe seventy, seventy-five. See, you've got associates, who are young lawyers on the road to becoming partners; then you have plain partners, which is the next step up, but they're not owners of the firm; and then you have equity partners at the end, which are owners of the firm.

DePue: And the executive committee is who determines who's going to be the chair?

Thompson: Chair, yes.

DePue: What's the link between equity partners and the executive committee?

Thompson: All of the members of the executive committee would have been equity partners. They all would have been owners of the firm. They would have been at the top rank of the firm.

DePue: So, roughly, there's somewhere in the neighborhood of seventy people who would have had a voice in who the next chair is going to be?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: How would you describe the law firm? What kind of business was it doing?

Thompson: Like most American law firms it was made up of civil litigation, civil transactions, what we would call corporate and litigation, those two. But then there were a lot of subcategories, environmental law, labor law, bankruptcy law. There's a whole bunch of subcategories under the broad heading of either corporate or litigation.

DePue: What was it that Winston & Strawn made its name on?

Thompson: In the early days, it made its name on—and this goes back to the nineteenth century, when the firm was founded, since we were the oldest law firm in Chicago—railroad cases, like Lincoln.

Railroads were powerful corporations back then. They were expanding the reach of America, and there was a lot of litigation involved and even contract work involved with railroads. That's where we started.

But we've always been involved in the community. One of our partners was one of the nominators of Lincoln at the Republican National Convention. Like a lot of American law firms who started small or maybe focused on one particular kind of practice of law, we were known from the beginning as a litigation firm. Then we broadened our work and became known also for corporate work, mergers, acquisitions. So the firm just grew with the times.

DePue: What was the area that you were most interested in working on?

Thompson: I was a litigator. That's what I had been in a prior life in the state's attorney's office and the attorney general's office and the U.S. attorney's office. I had always been a litigator.

DePue: Which means what, exactly?

Thompson: Try cases, defend people.

DePue: Individuals, not corporations?

Thompson: Both.

DePue: Tell me a little bit more about Tom, Tom Reynolds.

Thompson: Tom Reynolds? Tom was an extraordinary person. His father had been in the firm, and he came to the firm, worked his way up, became both chairman and really valuable to the local and national business community. He was a deal guy; even though he was sometimes a litigator, he was mostly a deal guy. He put companies together. He'd represent companies. He had a national reputation, served on corporate boards.

I remember succeeding him on a corporate board. His son, Tom III, also was at the firm. And Tom Senior, my predecessor as chair, was on the board of a company which was an Irish company. He was on the Irish board; he got me a position on the board of the American company. Then he decided in later life to stop traveling internationally.

I was elected to the Irish board to take his place, and his son was elected to the U.S. board to take my place. I got the chance while I was at Winston to serve on a number of corporate boards, which really broadened my experience. I hadn't been involved with anything like that, had always been in government or education. I had always been a prosecutor.

Helping to run major American corporations was something new to me. But my experiences as governor, I think, were very helpful there, and I think that's why people wanted me on their boards. As I say, I think I'm correct that there were seventeen in total over the years—

DePue: Seventeen boards?

Thompson: …including two international boards, an Irish board and a French company board, meetings in Dublin and Paris.

DePue: Did most of those boards come with some compensation?

Thompson: Oh yeah, they all came with compensation.

DePue: Above and beyond travel and expenses?

Thompson: Oh yes. I'm still on two boards, and I'm on one union board. Now, unions don't have boards as such, but the hotel and restaurant employees' union has a public review board, which is the board at the union that is responsible for keeping the union free from bad people and to make sure the union is running according to its constitution and federal law.

DePue: In other words, free from corruption.

Thompson: Yes. So I'm the chair of that board.

DePue: Before I get too much farther into the legal world here, I forgot to ask you about one other thing when you retired.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Were you looking forward to having more time to pursue your hobby?[4]

Thompson: I've always had time to pursue my hobby. (both laugh)

DePue: In or out of office, huh?

Thompson: Yeah, because the hobby depended on the ability to travel, and I traveled a lot as governor. At the law firm I got the opportunity to travel. Serving on the corporate boards, I got the opportunity to travel, so, yeah.

DePue: Going back to Tom Reynolds, I understand he had a role in your administration or maybe in your campaigns?

Thompson: Yes, he was the chairman of Citizens for Thompson.

DePue: In what years?

Thompson: All the years.

DePue: Four times he did that?

Thompson: Yeah. He also helped me put together my finance committee, all the guys he knew from the North Shore.

DePue: How did you know him in 1976?

Thompson: Somebody had to introduce us, and I just…I can't…Webb was at Winston then, before I was, and there were a couple of other guys who had worked for me in one capacity or another when I was governor, who were at Winston. So

[4] Reference to Thompson's love of collecting antiques.

I think it's probably fair to say that they raised the idea. Plus, I was a public personality as U.S. attorney.

DePue: The 1982 election, we talked a lot about, your toughest election by far.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Any memories of his involvement in 1982, especially in the middle of the campaign?

Thompson: No, not really. He was always there. And I used him on a couple of occasions when I was governor when we were considering gambling. I'd appointed a committee to study that. I don't remember now what part of gambling it was. It wasn't river boat gambling, and it wasn't casino. It was off-track betting; I think that's right. He studied it, and they came up with a report, and I said, "No." (laughs)

He later became the first chairman of the Sports Facilities Authority when I was building what is now U.S. Cellular for the White Sox. I appointed him as the chairman of that.

DePue: We have heard, in some of the other conversations—I don't know if this is on the record—there was a decision made in the '82 election campaign to bring Phil O'Connor on?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Was he involved with that; do you recall?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Who else in the law firm would you like to mention here that was there when you got there? I'm holding a picture here that doesn't have to do with your law firm years, it has to do with your years as U.S. attorney.

Thompson: Oh, the Kiddie Corps[5]?

DePue: The Kiddie Corps, yeah. It's a great picture.

Thompson: Except they're not kiddies any more.

DePue: Who are some of the names who we've mentioned?

Thompson: That's a pretty powerful group.

[5] During his years as U.S. attorney, called "The Days of the Giants," Jim Thompson and his predecessor, William Bauer, hired a bright, aggressive group of young lawyers, called the "Kiddie Corps" and gave them a mandate to go after official corruption wherever they found it, on the police force, in City Hall; it didn`t matter.

DePue: You've already mentioned Dan Webb.

Thompson: Webb, yeah. Ty Fahner, who was at one time my director of law enforcement and who I appointed as attorney general when there was the Scott vacancy, and then became chairman of Mayer Brown, our number one competitor; and Tony Valukas, who I got appointed as U.S. attorney, who later became chairman of Jenner & Block, another one of our competitors. So two of my "kids" became chairmen of major law firms. Sam Skinner, god, he became chairman of all kinds of things. I got his appointment as U.S. attorney. I tried the Kerner case with him. I got him his appointment with George H. W. Bush as secretary of transportation, and then he became chief of staff to the president, then he became chairman of the president's reelection committee, then he was president of Commonwealth Edison, and then he became CEO of Yellow Freight Company, and now he's in a law firm and on about six boards.

DePue: What law firm is he with?

Thompson: (asks Jayne Thompson) Hey Honey, what's Sam's law firm? Greenberg Traurig. And he and I serve on the Navigant board together. Let's see…God, I can't remember names any more.

DePue: One of the names you haven't mentioned—I don't know that he's in that picture—but was Jim Fletcher in the law firm when you got there?

Thompson: He was. Fletch was in the firm, and he was in charge of the lobbying practice. Then it got to the point where the law firm started presenting conflicts. Fletch would have the opportunity to have a lobbying client, and yet taking that lobbying client would have been a conflict with another client of the firm. So Fletch left[6] to start his own lobbying practice down in Springfield.

We continued on. I tried to get Mike Kasper, who was one of our young associates who worked for Fletcher, to stay with the firm, but the firm would have presented the same sort of problem to him about conflicts. So he left to join Fletcher, where he's had an extraordinary success. He represents Mayor Emanuel; he is the counsel for the state Democratic Party, because Mike Madigan, who was his first employer, is the chairman of the state Democratic Party. So we've had a number of really notable people come out of Winston.

DePue: Did you have an assistant? You called them bag boys when you were governor?

Thompson: Yeah, but they don't like the title now. Now they call themselves executive assistants. (both laugh)

[6] On leaving Winston & Strawn, see Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 27, 2015.

DePue: Have you always had an executive assistant then?

Thompson: Yes, oh yeah. I think I've had twenty-two or twenty-three of them.

DePue: Does that include your years as governor?

Thompson: Yes. Then they were happy to be called bag boys, because they got to fly on the airplane and go everywhere around the world. (laughs) But John is my last one. Bag boy was a year job, between college and the next step, and—

DePue: John Frier.

Thompson: …Frier became the last one, he and stayed fifteen years. (laughs)

DePue: That's longer than you served as governor.

Thompson: That's true. So he'll be job hunting now, with my retirement.

DePue: Let's go back then. You've talked about this a little bit already, your selection as the chair of Winston & Strawn, but as I understand from reading some of the newspaper articles of those days, this wasn't without a considerable amount of controversy too, at the time.

Thompson: That's not true, just plain not true.

DePue: Well, tell me about the Gary Fairchild situation.

Thompson: Gary Fairchild, when I first came to the firm, was the managing partner. He was the guy who did the administration, day-to-day. We've always had a chairman, who's the CEO [chief executive officer] and a managing partner, who's like a COO [chief operating officer]. Fairchild was the managing partner. He'd been managing partner under Reynolds and just carried on.

DePue: He answered to Reynolds then?

Thompson: When Reynolds was the chairman, yeah. Then he answered to me, when I was the chairman. Then one day it was discovered that Gary had been unfaithful to the firm. He had put a lot of his personal expenses on the firm's credit card, even down to ordering pizza at home for he and the kids. And his wife, Maureen Fairchild, who was at another law firm, was doing the same thing.

DePue: To Winston & Strawn?

Thompson: To Winston & Strawn, yes, because she took control of his credit card for a while…and to her firm. So when that became known, I picked up the phone to Tony Valukas, who Fairchild had hired as his lawyer, and I said, "I want his resignation on my desk now." And Tony got that done. Then he [Reynolds] resigned as a partner at Winston, or he would have been expelled, obviously.

DePue: How did you find out about this?

Thompson: I'm not quite sure, whether it was the accounting department of the firm, who came forward and said, "Uh, should we be paying these bills?" I think that's probably how it happened. But he had such control over accounting stuff—because that was part of administration—that he was able to get away with it for a while.

DePue: The numbers I have seen in newspaper articles were $500,000 or more.

Thompson: Hmm.

DePue: And that there were overbillings of several clients to the tune of $236,000.

Thompson: Yeah, that's about right.

DePue: The $236,000 was going into his pocket and not to the firm?

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Five hundred thousand, that's an awful lot of pizza.

Thompson: Yeah, I understand, but it was in small things that you would never pick up, because he was in charge of that sort of stuff. That's how he got away with it for a while.

DePue: The way you've described it so far, it's almost like he had hired his own lawyer before he was discovered. I would assume that was not the case.

Thompson: No, it was contemporaneously. Then they both were eventually convicted, he and his wife, and they both went to jail. It's like the Jackson case,[7] where both the husband and wife were guilty of offenses, and they had to serve their jail time, first one, then the other, because they had to take care of the kids. It was the same thing with Fairchild.

DePue: It's a complicated story, at least in my mind it is. I understand, before you even got to the firm there were other partners who were asked to resign for things that were going on?

Thompson: Hmm, I don't know.

DePue: You don't recall that?

Thompson: No.

[7] In early 2013, recently-resigned Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. pleaded guilty to diverting campaign funds for personal use, while his wife Sandi pleaded guilty to filing a false tax return.

DePue: How about the name of Chester Nosal, does that ring a bell?

Thompson: Yeah, I know he was a partner, but I don't—

DePue: Apparently in May of 1994—this would have been almost exactly the same timeframe that Fairchild would have been forced to resign—Nosal was suing the law firm for $17 million. He said that, in this previous case I was referring to, he was suspected of the firm's funds of being misappropriated, and then he was one of those people who was pushed out.[8] Does that ring a bell to you at all?

Thompson: Not really. I mean, every once in a while you get a partner who goes a little goofy. That's not surprising.

DePue: In the initial conversations about you joining the firm—this is pure speculation on my part—were Reynolds or others thinking that you'd be the guy to make sure that things were running on the up and up or that there was some housecleaning that needed to be done, and you were the person that could do it?

Thompson: I don't think that's why they hired me. They were perfectly capable of their own housecleaning.

DePue: Who ended up replacing Fairchild?

Thompson: Yes, Jim Neis.

DePue: Was that your selection?

Thompson: It was, but…There were two candidates, Jim Neis from Chicago and Bob Erickson from New York, both good candidates. Because he was in the Chicago office, I knew Jim Neis better than I did Bob Erickson, although I interviewed both of them. Then I went around to every member of the executive committee and asked their opinion. They were for Neis, and so was I. So, he was approved by the executive committee, unanimously, for this spot and stayed managing partner the whole time I was chairman. We were a team.

DePue: That means he was holding that position for a long time, as well. How long were you chair?

Thompson: Thirteen years.

DePue: But you started off as chair, when the law firm had a couple of black eyes. Did that have any impact on the business?

[8] See Ray Gibson, "Ex-partner Sues Firm over Firing," *Chicago Tribune*, May 6, 1994.

Thompson: No. Look, clients understand that, because it happens to them too. I mean, when the Fairchild thing arose and became public, we had clients call and say, "Hey, just keep going, because it's happened to us." You get your clients who are big businesses, you're going to get episodes like that. So they were very understanding, and it didn't result in any harm or loss.

DePue: Once you took over as chairman, what was your vision for Winston & Strawn in the future?

Thompson: I thought we were too small, and while I was not an advocate of what they called growth for growth's sake, or letterhead vanity, I thought we were too small to effectively compete with other Chicago law firms or with the New York firms. I wanted us to move from the 300s [lawyers], or whatever it was when I became chairman, to grow larger, because the country's economy was changing. In the nineteenth century, we'd have a client, and he'd have a plant somewhere in Illinois, and that was it. So you had a Chicago law firm.

That worked okay in the 19th century. But this was now near the end of the twentieth century and our clients were increasingly all over the world. And other law firms, who were more all over the world than we were, were becoming increasingly competitive. We didn't want to lose our place, and we didn't want to lose our clients.

So I pushed, from the beginning, to expand. I hired more in Chicago; I hired more in New York. I merged with a smaller law firm in New York and brought in GE [General Electric Corp.] business that we didn't have before. I got the chance to have an office in Geneva, Switzerland, which was kind of a funny thing.

In our Washington office, we had hired a group of—I'll call them international lawyers—to work out of the Washington office, from another law firm, Jones Day. And like the day after we did that and it became public, I got this phone call from a guy named Charles Adams, who was the Jones Day partner in Geneva, Switzerland. He called me up and said, "Hi, my name is Charles Adams. I'm a partner of Jones Day in Switzerland, and we want to come too." (laughs) I said, "What?" "Well yeah, you just took some Washington partners, and the partners in Geneva, we want to come too."

I said, "I'm not sure I have any interest in opening an office in Geneva, Switzerland." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what. I'm going to fly to New York. You fly to New York, have breakfast with me, and I'll tell you why you should." I said, "Okay." So I did.

I went to New York, and I met Charles Adams, the managing partner of Jones Day's Geneva, Switzerland office. He said, "We are the most profitable office in all of Jones Day." I said, "You're only like five lawyers; how can you be?" He said, "Well, given our size, we are the most profitable

office in Jones Day, and we want to come with Winston, with our international partners who came out of Washington, and we'll do well for you."

I still couldn't get over the notion that I wanted a five person office in Geneva, Switzerland. I told Neis, I said, "Go to Geneva, and see what's going on." So he did. I talked to Charles again, and I said, "Okay, even if you and your partners come…" He said, "Well, they all won't come. One won't come because he's a Jones Day lifer, and he'll go to a Swiss firm and continue to do Jones Day business. But the rest of us will come." I said, "Yeah, well what about like the files?" He said, "We'll bring the files." And I said, "Where am I going to find an office in Geneva?" He said, "We'll bring the office." I said, "But Jones Day has a lease on that office." He said, "Yes, but the lease is with my ex-father-in-law, who's not going to renew it." So I said, "Okay, I get five partners, all the files, and the office." He said, "Yeah."

DePue: See, when you started this, Governor, I was thinking you were talking about a merger.

Thompson: No.

DePue: These guys are exiting to join your law firm.

Thompson: Yes, correct.

DePue: Are they American expatriates in Switzerland?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: Go ahead.

Thompson: I said, "Well, this is going to make for a somewhat awkward conversation with Jones Day. (laughs) So, I think I had Neis call the chairman of Jones Day, or maybe I did it too. We were both working on this. As it turned out, Jones Day understood that they were losing these five lawyers and that they were losing the clients—because the clients were going with their lawyers—and that their lease in Geneva was not going to be renewed, because of the influence of Charles Adams with the landlord.

So we proposed to Jones Day that we buy their furniture for something like, I don't know, $90.000. And while Jones Day wasn't happy, we got the furniture, which was the only thing Jones Day owned after it was all over.

DePue: Would that be more than it was worth or less?

Thompson: Oh, it would be about right, because we would have had to go out and buy new. So, we ended up with an office in Geneva, Switzerland, that was extremely profitable per partner, with all the clients and an office, pretty good deal.

As time went on, I'd get phone calls like, "Hi, you don't know me, but I'm the managing partner of the Jones Day Paris office, and we want to come too." And then [in] another two, three years, I get, "Hi, you don't know me, but I'm the managing partner of the Jones Day London office, and we want to come too." So we expanded, by virtue of the Jones Day connection with the partners in Paris and London, to Paris and London.

DePue: It sure sounds like something wrong is going on with Jones Day, that everybody is willing to flee.

Thompson: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Here's what happened. The guys who were in Geneva and Paris and London were all thick as thieves, right? They were buddies. So, Charles Adams, when he came to Winston in Geneva, would call up his pals in Paris and London and say, "Hey, you know what, this is a great law firm; it's got a different culture than Jones Day; it's smaller; it's easier to practice. Why don't you come with us?"

DePue: So that's obviously the appeal that Adams had, to begin with.

Thompson: Yeah, and it worked. Then I extended us to L.A. [Los Angeles, CA] and San Francisco [CA]. Then, after I stepped down as chairman, Tom Fitzgerald, who succeeded me as chairman, and who's done a superb job, added Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai.

I helped get our licenses for Beijing and Shanghai from the Chinese government in a very short time. Ordinarily, we would have had to wait a long time for the first license in Beijing and then wait five years for the second license in Shanghai. But because, as governor, I had gone to China a number of times and established relationships with mainland China, while everybody else in America was going to Taiwan, the Chinese remember who were their friends when. So I got the licenses for Winston, and we're still there.

We've added, under Tom, Taiwan, Dubai [UAE], Brussels [Belgium], Houston [TX], Charleston [SC], Newark [NJ]…I must be missing one or two. So, now we're about, at any one time, 850 to 900 lawyers in many more offices.

DePue: So during your tenure and beyond your tenure, you close to tripled it.

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: Is that the right size?

Thompson: I think we should be a little bigger, and Tom Fitzgerald is very able at expanding the firm. We've had talks with firms that eventually didn't go anywhere, for mergers, rather than these one-offs, you know, establishing an office and then building it. But it's not an easy process, because while you can persuade the management of another firm to consider a merger, it's never an

easy job to persuade all those partners. We've had a couple back out, but Fitzgerald's not through by any means.

DePue: Has some of this growth been through mergers?

Thompson: No, it's been through large acquisitions of partners from other firms. Two firms, one in Washington and one in New York, were sort of failing firms in trouble, and the partners were leaving all over the place. We were lucky enough to get a substantial number of those. I think the firm we dealt with in New York, we took maybe sixty of their lawyers. We took more than any other law firm. That was an extraordinary thing, and it's proved very advantageous for us.

We represented Tom Brady in the Deflategate[9] case, with one of our lawyers who came from that exodus from the New York firm. He now represents—in addition to Tom—represents the [National] Football Players [League] Association, the Basketball Players Association, and the NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association] players. We have a big sports law practice now.

DePue: That's a lucrative part of the business, I would imagine.

Thompson: It is lucrative. Not as lucrative as representing the teams, but lucrative enough. And he's a very fine anti-trust lawyer, as well. He brought in Panasonic, which allowed us to open an office in Taiwan.

DePue: The overseas offices that you have, are they primarily representing American businesses overseas, or are some of these foreign companies that are also coming—

Thompson: Foreign as well. They're both, especially in China.

DePue: Now, you were quoted in the *Chicago Tribune,* August 10, 1993, about the time you took over as chair. Here's what you were quoted as saying, "We don't need to be the seventy-fifth American law firm in London, losing our shirts for the sake of a letterhead."

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And yet we've been talking for the last ten or fifteen minutes about how you wanted the law firm to—I'll use this term—aggressively expand its reach internationally as well.

[9] Deflategate was a National Football League (NFL) controversy involving the allegation that the New England Patriots deliberately under-inflated footballs used in their victory against the Indianapolis Colts in the American Football Conference (AFC) Championship Game of the 2014-15 NFL playoffs, resulting in Patriots' quarterback, Tom Brady, being suspended for four games and the team being fined $1 million and losing two draft picks. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deflategate)

Thompson: Yeah, but there's a difference. What I call "letterhead vanity" is what some firms have been through, being able to say, "Why, we're in"…You know, pick a place, "Paris." But they didn't make any money there. It was an effort on their part to show that they were becoming international. We have been much more conservative.

Winston's a very conservative law firm. We don't have any debt; we don't do crazy things with our partners' money; we have made a bigger profit each year since I started as chairman and continued through Tom Fitzgerald to the present day; we've grown; we've each year done better than the year before, and we don't do crazy things. And we've taken advantage of other firm's problems by getting a lot of their good lawyers. So we rank pretty well in American legal circles; it's fair to say.

DePue: You mentioned that you made more profits every single year you were there. I assume that that's extended into the timeframe since you've stepped down.

Thompson: It has.

DePue: I assume that this is a matter of public record. Do you remember roughly what the—

Thompson: Oh it is, because we report our numbers each year to the *American Lawyer*, which is the magazine of lawyers.

DePue: Do you remember roughly what the annual profit would have been when you took over?

Thompson: No, I can't remember.

DePue: Or what their annual profits are, roughly, now?

Thompson: No, but I think our revenues have topped $1 billion for the first time, under Tom. So Winston & Strawn's a very good place for lawyers to be; I'll say that.

DePue: What I wanted to turn to next is to talk to you about some of your efforts as a lobbyist, as well. Let's start with this question, because I know next to nothing about how law firms work. Being a lobbyist for various institutions and organizations is one of the functions of your law firm, or was that a separate arrangement?

Thompson: No, that was part of the firm's work.

DePue: Let's start with Arlington Racecourse.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Just tell me whatever comes to your mind here, when I ask you about these relationships. This is, of course, Dick Duchossois, who, I think, became the owner of Arlington in 1985, maybe, and then shortly after that there was a major fire while you were still governor.

Thompson: Right, correct. I was at that fire the evening of or the next morning, standing next to Duchossois. He said, "We will rebuild." And I said, "The State of Illinois will do everything it can to help you rebuild."

DePue: Did you know Duchossois before that?

Thompson: I did.

DePue: Had he been a supporter of you politically?

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: When you made that statement, what was in your mind? Why was it in the interest of the State of Illinois to help rebuild that racetrack?

Thompson: Because there were a lot of jobs in Illinois agriculture associated with racetrack operations.

DePue: Now, I understand that what Duchossois wanted was…This is at a time period when you're governor and certainly beyond the time that you're governor, that there's a growth in gambling, especially in different forms of gambling, in the state of Illinois.

Thompson: Riverboat.

DePue: Which generally, as I understand, owners of the racetracks weren't all that enthusiastic about, because that was competition. So what was—

Thompson: Well, you could say that, but I think the truth is it really wasn't competition, because guys who go to racetracks are horse guys.

DePue: You tapped your head as if this is a cerebral exercise here.

Thompson: Yeah, and I think Duchossois, as a horse guy and as a track owner, looked upon it not so much as competition but as opportunity, because the racetracks and the horse owners had influence in the Illinois General Assembly. When a bill came along to help another form of gambling, they would say, "Me too." So they would want some form of enticement for their industry, the racetrack industry, to be supportive of somebody else's gambling interests.

DePue: As I understand, then and still today, one of the things they wanted was casino gambling, slot machines in the race tracks.

Thompson: Yeah, they haven't got that yet.

DePue: And they haven't got that yet.

Thompson: No.

DePue: Was the firm hired, in part, to help them achieve that goal?

Thompson: No, I don't think we were ever hired specifically for slot machines. I'm trying to remember now what it was that the racetrack industry wanted. There was something they wanted that we got attached to another bill that was going through. I can't remember now what it was, but it was something for Duchossois.

DePue: For Arlington specifically?

Thompson: Yeah. I think later it got tossed out as unconstitutional, but— (laughs)

DePue: You were successful in getting it, and then it was declared unconstitutional by the courts?

Thompson: Yeah, I forget what it was.

DePue: I read someplace though that, while you were representing Arlington, you were actually working out of George Ryan's secretary of state office in the Capitol Building.[10] Does that ring any bells to you?

Thompson: No, I think I was working out of Pate's office.

DePue: Oh, probably not a bad office either to be—

Thompson: Not a bad office either. Ryan didn't have anything to do with getting it passed, at least as far as I was concerned. Ryan, I'm sure, was supporting it. No, I was working out of Pate's office.

DePue: Now, when we started this conversation—

Thompson: Edgar was there.

DePue: Yeah, well that's not a surprise, is it?

Thompson: No.

DePue: But you kind of refer to those who follow the races, it's a more cerebral kind of exercise than other gambling.

[10] For this claim, see Rick Pearson and Ray Long, "Thompson Still Helped by His Ties with Ryan," *Chicago Tribune*, November 26, 1999.

Thompson: No, I didn't mean cerebral. I mean, that's what they do; they go to the race track. They don't necessarily gamble in another way. I'm sure they could, but guys who go to the track and stand there and bet on horses…It's just a different business.

DePue: I think I've asked you this before, but did you have that appeal to either harness racing or thoroughbred racing?

Thompson: Yeah. That's how I met…Oh, what the hell is his name? The guy who ran the Yankees?

DePue: Steinbrenner?

Thompson: Steinbrenner. George Steinbrenner was a horse guy.

DePue: Thoroughbreds I would assume.

Thompson: No, trotters.

DePue: Really?

Thompson: Trotters. And he used to race horses at the Hambletonian in southern Illinois at the Du Quoin State Fair.

DePue: And the Hambletonian was the premier harness racing—

Thompson: Premier harness racing place in the United States. Well, when this guy from the Middle East, who began as a student at SIU, when he bought the Du Quoin State Fair, the swells from the East didn't think much of that and moved the Hambletonian to New York.

DePue: Ouch.

Thompson: Ouch. I said, "Okay, if you can't beat them, join them." So we had the World Trotting Derby to replace the Hambletonian. But before the Hambletonian left, I was still governor, and I met George. He would come in for the harness racing at the Du Quoin State Fair. He would stay at the governor's mansion in Du Quoin. He was our house guest.

Because Du Quoin essentially is a nighttime fair—because it gets pretty hot down there—we had to do something in the daytime to wait for the harness racing in the evening. George and I would pile into my helicopter, and we'd go all around southern Illinois, doing interesting things. So I became a friend of Steinbrenner because he was a house guest at Du Quoin. Then when I would go to New York, I'd spend some time with him.

He was a great guy, I mean he was just…And boy did he know everybody. He had like a "rat pack" of his in New York, a bunch of buddies—ten, fifteen of them—that he'd be out with, and I got to go along on those.

DePue: The other place that Steinbrenner's name has come up in our conversations is when you were out there purchasing items for the Dana-Thomas House.

Thompson: Correct, yeah. So, it was during a Republican Convention—the one in New York recently—I went to Yankee Stadium one day, and Steinbrenner had a big box there, in the old stadium, he had a big box. He wasn't going to open it that day, but when he heard I was coming, he opened his box. It was a lot of fun.

I remember, I'm sitting in the box with George, and the door opens, and in walks five or six state legislators who had somehow inveigled their way in, after he decided to open it. They took one look, and there I'm sitting with Steinbrenner. That was sort of a revelation, I guess. Anyway, he was a great friend, and we did some neat stuff together.

DePue: Let's move on to another client, Oprah Winfrey. Why were you representing her?

Thompson: Oprah, who lived and worked in Chicago at that time…Yes.

DePue: I just showed you the picture of you and Oprah—

Thompson: Oprah and Joe Biden, who was chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Oprah came to me and said, "I want to…" She was very, very concerned about children being harmed by sex offenders. Her idea was to establish a national registry of sex offenders so that the police had someplace to turn to that had records for help in solving crimes. That recourse required an act of the Congress. I said, "Okay, let's go do this."

So we drew up a bill and went down to the Congress with Oprah, and the first time was just absolutely incredible. Oprah and I were walking down the long hall—I think in the House Building—and word got out that Oprah was there. You could see the doors to the representatives' offices just fly open, secretaries sticking their head out to see Oprah, congressmen sticking their head out to see Oprah. The same thing happened over in the Senate.

So there was immediate acceptance by the guys who ran the House and the Senate that this was a pretty good idea. So Oprah and I went to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee. He [Joe Biden] was the chair, and I said, "Senator, we don't have our complete draft yet." He said, "That's okay. We'll have the hearing anyway. You just introduce the idea." I said, "Okay."

We had the hearing, and I introduced the idea. They decided to vote for the bill[11], even though they didn't have the bill yet, and we eventually got it passed in record time in both houses and took it to the president to sign. It was Bill Clinton. Oprah and I went to the White House for the bill signing in the Roosevelt Room. The president signed the bill; we all took pictures, and he invited Oprah into the Oval Office. I went along, and it was all grand.

DePue: How would you explain the incredible success that Oprah Winfrey has had over the years?

Thompson: First of all, she's extremely smart, and she knew how to pick her causes. In terms of her television show, which ran for many years from Chicago, she had an extraordinary relationship with American women, just extraordinary. She had worked herself up in the industry. I think she came out of Baltimore as a young person in television. But she just had this hold on America, which she still has, even though she's not doing a daily show anymore. She owns a television network. She endorses products. She's just an American icon, and it was not hard to pass her bill.

DePue: What were your impressions of Joe Biden?

Thompson: I liked Joe. Still do. He was an engaging guy, smart guy, great politician, been a great vice president. Everybody likes Joe.

DePue: Here's the next one, a lobbyist for RTA [Regional Transportation Authority]. I read in another *Tribune* article from 1994 that they were paying the firm $120,000 in one particular year. Do you remember any of the work that you were doing for RTA at the time?

Thompson: Not, not really.

DePue: I think some of it was representing RTA at the federal level.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And it was, of course, the CTA [Chicago Transit Authority], Pace [suburban division of the Transit Authority], and Metra [northeast IL commuter rail system]. You don't remember any particulars on that?

Thompson: No, not really. I was very much involved with [this] stuff when I was governor, because I took a big interest in our federal transportation work and relationships, because I always viewed Illinois as the number one transportation state in America. We were getting a huge amount of money

[11] Thompson is talking about the National Child Protection Act. Winfrey testified November 12, 1991, but the 102nd Congress did not act on the bill. The 103rd Congress passed the bill after Biden reintroduced it.

from the federal government for our highways and mass transit in order to keep that up.

When I left the governor's office, I had these relationships and this reputation of always being involved in transportation matters, because of the position of Illinois in the nation's transportation system, whether it was the world's busiest airport in O'Hare, or the meeting-up place for railroads from the East and the West or the Illinois River and the Mississippi River. You name a mode of transportation, we're there. So it was kind of natural that I'd do some work for the RTA.

DePue: I suspect you might have more memories about this, but I don't know how much you personally were involved with the defense work for Representative Dan Rostenkowski, when he got himself in trouble. That would have been in May of 1994. A lot of this is happening around the same timeframe.

Thompson: Yeah. I knew Dan very well and did a lot of work with him as governor, a lot of work. He was very helpful to Illinois, and he was a very powerful congressman.

DePue: Chair of the Ways and Means Committee—

Thompson: That's pretty powerful.

DePue: He controls a lot of what happens in the budget.

Thompson: The money, yes. He and I always got along very, very well, and he was very helpful to the state and to me. So when he got into trouble, he first was represented by a Washington law firm, who took his money and didn't get any results for him. He eventually ended up hiring Dan Webb, but it was too late. So Webb was essentially just there for the sentencing. Dan was out of money, so I was the chairman of the Rostenkowski Fund Raising Committee at that point. (laughs)

DePue: His defense fund, I take it?

Thompson: Yeah, his defense fund, because otherwise he wouldn't have been able to pay Winston.

DePue: You launched your political career by being the U.S. attorney here in Chicago and sending all kinds of politicians to jail for wrongdoings. And now you're on the other side of the equation.

Thompson: Right. That's what a lawyer does. You can be the biggest prosecutor in the world, but when you're not in a prosecutorial office, and you're in a private law firm, you fight just as hard for your clients there as you fought when you were the prosecutor.

DePue: He went to jail, in part, because of his role in the U.S. House Post Office scandal[12].

Thompson: Yes. I think if Webb had been in there from the beginning, he might have escaped the penitentiary. But he didn't.

DePue: Maybe this is the wrong question to ask a law firm that was representing the individual, but was he deserving of the punishment?

Thompson: Oh, I can't say that. That's the judge's job, not mine.

DePue: Here's one of the ironies of modern political history, I think. Obviously, Rostenkowski's seat, before that time, was a very safe Democratic seat. A Republican won the seat, I think in the 1994 election perhaps?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Do you recall who won the election in 1996 for that seat? That's an unfair question for me to ask.

Thompson: It certainly is.

DePue: One Rod Blagojevich.

Thompson: Yeah, who I also defended for a while, (both laugh) along with George [Ryan]. Boy, I'm a governor's best friend, right?

DePue: Oh, we've got more to talk about, Governor. (both laugh) I think you might remember a little bit about this one, as well, the law firm's defense for Chief Justice James Heiple.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: That was a few years later, in 1997. Lay that one out for us.

Thompson: That was a fascinating case. The chief justice got in difficulty, and the primary reason why he got into difficulty was that he had authored an opinion having to do with adoption. It was one of those where a young boy was taken from one family and to the other.

DePue: This was a case that Governor Edgar had strong feelings about.[13]

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[12] The Congressional Post Office scandal refers to the discovery of corruption among various Congressional Post Office employees and members of the United States House of Representatives, investigated 1991–95, climaxing in House Ways and Means Committee chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL) pleading guilty in 1996 to reduced charges of mail fraud. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congressional_Post_Office_scandal)

[13] On the Baby Richard case, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 18, 2010, Volume IV: 738-745.

Thompson: Yes, he did. The Supreme Court, the first time it heard the case, was unanimous that this was the proper disposition. Then a news columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times* started whipping up public opinion on the issue, Baby Richard. And there'd be column after column after column.

So the chief became indiscreet and started making public comments in response to the columns. Then the case got back up there again, and some of the fellow justices went the other way. But the chief got into a public controversy with the Cardinal, with legislators, with the press. So there was a drumbeat down in Springfield for impeachment. That's how it all started, this Baby Richard case.

DePue: But simply because he's [the chief justice] taken a position different from what the public wants to happen, that's not terms for impeachment; is it?

Thompson: No, but [there's] nothing to prevent the legislature from thinking so or starting proceedings. So, one of his law clerks suggested to the chief that he hire me. The law clerk came up to my office in Winston and said the chief wanted to hire me to defend him against impeachment. We talked for a while, and then I agreed that I would do it, because I didn't think impeachment was appropriate.

DePue: And the decision on impeachment belongs to the Illinois Senate?

Thompson: It starts in the House and goes to the Senate.

DePue: Okay.

Thompson: I thought this was kind of a historic thing and improper, so I agreed to defend him. I hadn't known him before this. The drumbeat continued, and I remember going down to the chief's house in central Illinois one rainy day. I was there, I don't know, three or four hours. I always thought that we weren't going to get out of this scot-free, that we had to give them something, because this was political. This wasn't really legal; it was political. And we had to make some kind of political response.

So I suggested to the chief that he resign as chief, remain a justice, but give them a scalp. Well, that did not go over so well at the beginning. So we spent another couple of hours discussing that, and I finally persuaded him that he needed to do this. We had to throw some red meat out there.

DePue: Wasn't there also something involving a traffic stop?

Thompson: Yeah, but that was for sound and fury, because they couldn't get away with saying they were impeaching him because of a decision. That was a little too far. So they got up these other things.

DePue: Misdemeanors.

Thompson: Yeah. So he said, "All right, I'll do it." I said, "Okay. Now." He said, "What do you mean, now?" I said, "Right now. You send a fax to the clerk of the Supreme Court, announcing your retirement as chief justice." I practically had to drag him to the fax machine to get this done, but he did it. That was a big deal, but I had something I could go to the legislature with and say, "Hey, here's your pound of flesh." So the proceedings went forward.

DePue: That wasn't enough for the legislature?

Thompson: Well, they had to go through with the drama. The House convened a special committee to take evidence. We were down there for a couple of weeks, I guess. There were witnesses; the police officer that he encountered had testified and a couple of his fellow justices testified; the legislators on the committee asked a lot of questions, and Heiple testified. I mean, it was a real thing. They had control of the audience and everybody had special seats; it was real political theater.

DePue: Were the justices testifying for or against him?

Thompson: Well, let's just say they were not helpful.

DePue: I assume that you're right in the midst of this, that you're speaking to the House members as well.

Thompson: Absolutely. I remember, early on, one of the reporters had gone to see Pate and said, "Hey, what about this impeachment?" And Pate said something like, "Well Thompson's defending him. I'm not sure that I'm going to…I don't know enough about this yet." It was not a typical Pate answer of "hang 'em high," although I'm sure that's what he felt. Eventually the committee voted not to impeach. So the trial was over, and it was a real trial.

And I discovered one day, when I was researching over in the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, that Lincoln had defended a justice of the Supreme Court in impeachment proceedings. There have only been two impeachment proceedings in the history of Illinois. Lincoln defended the first, and I defended the second. I said, "This is pretty heady company." Lincoln got his guy off too, in the House. We both got them off in the House. They didn't have to go to the Senate for a trial. But I was thinking, Hey, I'm hot stuff, me and Abe. So I worked that into speeches. (both laugh)

DePue: You were quoted at the time as saying, "I'd been interested in political attacks on federal judges in the last political campaign, and so this is an area about the independence of the judiciary that I'm extremely interested in."

Thompson: Yes, and I later was on a committee to protect the federal judiciary against attacks, mainly southern senators. I was legitimately and for a long time interested in protecting the independence of the judiciary. And this was a really important case to do that in, because they weren't impeaching him

because of traffic stops and that kind of stuff, they were impeaching him because he had made an unpopular decision and then indiscreetly started fighting with the press and the Cardinal about it.

DePue: Not the way it's supposed to work.

Thompson: Not the way it's supposed to work.

DePue: I'm going to pause here for just a couple of minutes, Governor, if you don't mind.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Governor, we're back from a pretty quick break. The next one I wanted to ask you about is a bill where you were representing Bill Wirtz in his liquor distributor business. Now let me just read a little bit.

Thompson: Oh, that's the one that was declared unconstitutional, not the horse racing. But they were on the same bill, which is how we got it passed.

DePue: I'm going to read just a little bit of background here, because I wasn't familiar with this one at all. You and former Senate president, Phil Rock, were key lobbyists in a campaign to pass the Wirtz Bill.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: The bill blocked distilleries from arbitrarily breaking contracts with distributors or bypassing them, arguably to protect Illinois jobs from disruption. The bill was highly controversial, because it seemed too favorable to distributors, particularly to Bill Wirtz. He owned Judge and Dolph, which was one of the four major alcohol distributors in the state.

Thompson: Right. But there's also horse racing in the bill. (DePue laughs) So you can't get a better bill than that, horse racing, liquor.

DePue: Any more insights than what I just offered there on that?

Thompson: (laughs) Yeah, when I said before, part of it was held unconstitutional, it was the liquor part that was held unconstitutional, not the racing part.

DePue: Let's face it, alcohol distributors make campaign donations, as well.

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: And had he made donations to you in the past?

Thompson: I'm sure he did.

DePue: This is though almost ten years; this is 1998. Any other comments in relation to that?

Thompson: No. I mean, Wirtz was a friend of mine, a strong supporter. I had known his dad. I had known his grandfather. So I went back with the Wirtz family a long way. His grandfather had a secret office in the hotel…Oh, what was the name of the hotel? Not the Blackhawk. Anyway, it was the hotel across the street from the State of Illinois Building in Chicago. His grandfather, who owned the hotel, had a secret room there that he would let me use for secret meetings. Imagine that today. You'd have the BGA and FOIA[14] and everybody else wanting to know, "Who are you meeting with at that hotel?"

DePue: The Open Meetings Act and all that?

Thompson: All that, yeah.

DePue: What was secret about the secret meetings, Governor?

Thompson: (laughs) Oh, you know, it had to do with stuff that was not public. But you had to know how to get into this room, right? Which was not known, except to his grandfather and me and the hotel employee who was in charge of the room.

I think that was the room where I locked in members of the legislature until we got a bill for the election commissioners that had been declared void by the Supreme Court, and we had to replace it. It was a very useful room for a governor, because in the State of Illinois Building, if you went to the governor's office in the State of Illinois Building, **everybody** and his brother saw you going in. Then all the chatter would start; gossip would start. It was like running the gauntlet to get in and out of there.

So I needed a place where I could meet with people without all that public exposure, which is, of course, why governors and mayors go to lunch with people, right? And they're huddling in the corner. I did that too, but this was neat to have. That's a way of saying I had known his grandfather, then I knew his father, and now I know the son. So three generations of the Wirtz family. They were always strong supporters of mine.

DePue: Strong as in making contributions?

Thompson: Yeah, sure.

[14]BGA (Better Government Association) and FOIA (Freedom of Information Act). Thompson is talking about the Bismarck Hotel at 171 West Randolph Street. At the time of this interview, the renovated building operated as the Kimpton Hotel Allegro.

DePue: The bill was passed…I'm going to read a little bit here—

Thompson: As was their union, as a matter of fact.

DePue: "It was passed after more than $700,000 was contributed to politicians by liquor distributors, according to the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform." It's just the kind of thing that these organizations like to look at and say, "See, there's corruption going on here."

Thompson: Well, I don't think that $700,000 was all at once, over this bill, was it?

DePue: No, I got the impression this was to several politicians, as well.

Thompson: Yeah, and over a period of time I would suppose.

DePue: But apparently three years later the U.S. District Court judge struck it down, saying that it was unconstitutional because of a violation of the Commerce Clause.

Thompson: Yeah. Well, they got three years of protection, didn't they?

DePue: (laughs) And you obviously don't feel any angst at all about your position in that.

Thompson: No.

DePue: Here's another important client, I would assume, Commonwealth Edison in the 1990s. The firm's work was to help rewrite the state's electrical utility laws at the time. Can you shed any light on that one?

Thompson: Well, look, there have been any number of politicians—mayors, legislators, governors—who have made the utilities a whipping boy.

DePue: Gee, there's one in particular that comes to mind.[15]

Thompson: There's one in particular, absolutely. I always took the position that electrical utilities, like telephones, were the lifeblood of commerce in the state of Illinois, that you couldn't have business in the state of Illinois unless you had reliable electric service. Otherwise, everybody would be sitting in the dark with their candles or their lanterns. So I was never of the whipping boy school, and I had to fight politicians who were.

DePue: Was it about this time that there was lots of discussion about the deregulation, that you could have competition in the electrical business.

[15] Former Illinois governor Pat Quinn, who early in his career organized the drive that led to the General Assembly's creation of the Citizens Utility Board in 1983.

Thompson: Yes. So I had been through the wars on behalf of the utilities, as governor and as a lawyer, and I was for strong utilities.[16]

DePue: Which means you were arguing against deregulation?

Thompson: No, no. I was hired by Commonwealth Edison to protect their interests while dereg [deregulation]…We knew dereg was going to happen. It ended up that the chair of the committee, which was going to start the dereg process in the Senate, I believe, had injured his leg somehow in some kind of misadventure. So we didn't do this at the Capitol. We did this at a motel in the chairman's district, so he could more easily get from his house to the hearings every day, instead of having to go down to Springfield or having to stay in Springfield. So it was kind of a surreal scene to have the committee there every day in this large room in the hotel and have all the lawyers and all the advocates and on and on and on. And it took about…I'm going to say almost a month. And I was there.

I was able gradually to do more and more and more of the work on the bill. I remember one meeting where they called for an adjournment while the senators went in the back room. I was invited in, and they kept everybody else out, which I thought was a compliment. Anyway, we got the bill done; it passed; the governor signed it, and Commonwealth Edison was very happy with how it came out. So that was that episode.

DePue: This one is pretty similar; in terms of the kind of institution you represented, and that's Ameritech. Do you recall any specifics on that?

Thompson: Not really. The only thing I remember about [the] Ameritech lobby…Obviously, I put them in the same category as Commonwealth Edison. You needed a strong phone system, or you couldn't do business in the state.

DePue: What did you think about—it would have happened in your years as governor, I think—the breaking up of Ma Bell?

Thompson: Oh, AT&T?

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: That, again, was a populist cause, and that led to the regional phone companies, Midwest, South, Northwest, East. But the whole thing is changing. Technology just changes so quickly that now phones are used less and less, and it's the Internet.

[16] On utility deregulation under Thompson, see Philip O'Connor, interview by Mike Czaplicki, September 1, 2015.

DePue: But some have argued that busting up AT&T or Ma Bell helped open the door for all that innovation to occur.

Thompson: Oh, that's probably right, probably right, but that wasn't anything I was a part of. The only thing I remember about the Ameritech thing was the first cellular phone call in Illinois, which I made from Chicago down to Springfield, I guess, or maybe the president of Ameritech made the call to me in Springfield. Anyway, I was on the first cell call in Illinois, which was kind of cool. But I don't remember the Ameritech representation.

DePue: The last one I'll ask you about today is Barr Laboratories, and the firm's support for a bill in the late 1990s that would have stripped most of the oversight authority from the board that evaluated the safety of generic drugs.

Thompson: I don't have a clue about that.

DePue: Any other important clients or issues the firm was working on during the 1990s that you wanted to talk about, that I haven't mentioned here?

Thompson: [pause] No, I don't think so.

DePue: Well then, Governor, let's call it a day, and we'll pick this up tomorrow.

Thompson: Okay.

(end of interview #25)

Interview with James Thompson

IST-A-L-2013-054.26

Interview # 26: April 12, 2016

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Tuesday, April 12, 2016. This is Mark DePue, and I am once again in Governor Thompson's apartment, here on the thirty-fourth floor in downtown Chicago, for session twenty-six, Governor.

Thompson: Oh boy. (laughs)

DePue: But we're making progress.

Thompson: And I wonder why I'm hoarse at the end of the day.

DePue: Hopefully I'll wear you out enough that you can get a good night's sleep afterwards.

Thompson: That's for sure.

DePue: Yesterday we had an interesting conversation about your career as a lawyer, in the 1990s especially. By any measure, it was a very successful career at Winston & Strawn, and you were chair for most of those years. I want to kind of cover the same terrain today, but talk about politics. You step out of office in January of 1991, but by virtue of having fourteen years as governor…Let's see, the last governor was Ogilvie. Was he still alive at the time?

Thompson: I don't think he was.

DePue: Anyway, you immediately take on the role of elder statesman, to a certain extent, in the Republican Party, even though you're still pretty young. How often did people in the Republican machinery come and want to talk to you, get your advice and opinions about various things, over the next twenty or thirty years?

Thompson: Not often.

DePue: Really?

Thompson: Look, you got to understand about politics, people who run for public office and hold public office, by and large, are not inclined to go seek advice from somebody else. It took a big assumption on their part that they were qualified and that they could win an election campaign. And once they've gone through that, they quite naturally think, I don't need any advice. I have my staff, who work for me. Why do I want to go ask some guy who used to hold this job? I mean, that's plain natural, a natural part of politics. They might ask you to help them raise money. They might ask you to be a delegate to the national convention, which I did for so many years afterward. But they're not looking for advice.

DePue: Speaking of raising money—some of this we got from our interview with Kim Fox[17], who was always helpful in that regard with you—Citizens for Thompson, that fund still existed once you stepped out of being governor.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And I think you and I have talked about that a little bit. From my understanding, the funds in that did not last all that long afterwards.

Thompson: I started giving it away, making contributions to other political candidates. I told you about my experience with Hartigan and Edgar. (laughs) Every time Hartigan criticized me in the campaign against Edgar, I'd write Edgar a check. And I contributed to other candidates. Once you're doing that, but you're not raising money, it goes.

DePue: What can you tell me about the America 2000 Fund? Does that ring a bell to you?

Thompson: (sighs) I've heard the name, but as we sit here today, I can't tell you I remember what it was.

DePue: A couple other names here, and see if this jogs any memory for you, because even the 1990s, that's still over twenty years ago.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Gary Skoien?

Thompson: Gary Skoien, yeah.

DePue: An unsuccessful bid to unseat Phil Crane in 1992 and '94. Any reflections on that?

Thompson: Not really. These young guys who worked for me sometimes decided they wanted to run for public office. Greg Baise tried it once, and a couple of others did, but I wasn't involved in their campaigns.

DePue: How about Gayle Franzen?

Thompson: Yeah, Franzen's another example. Franzen was in my cabinet as director of corrections, a dear friend of mine. He decided to run for public office. I'm trying to remember now whether it was him or Baise who announced their candidacy, did a fly-around and got off the plane in Chicago and said, "I don't want to do this." (both laugh) It was one of those two.

[17]See Kim Blackwell Fox interview by Mike Czaplicki, July 14, 2014.

DePue: Franzen was apparently running for DuPage County Board.

Thompson: No, that was not the election I was talking about.

DePue: The reality sinks in, if you're getting any sense of the expanse of the state then, I take it.

Thompson: Oh yeah, absolutely.

DePue: Here's what some people would say is the most political activity in state life today, and that's redistricting. I wanted to take a look at the three redistrictings since you stepped out of office. Let's start with redistricting in 1990. Unlike what the Illinois State Constitution intended and expected to happen, every year was a deadlock between the legislature and the governor and ends up being a draw of a hat.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: In this case, it was a draw from a crystal bowl. Do you remember that event?

Thompson: No.

DePue: You were out of office at the time.

Thompson: I thought they used Abe Lincoln's hat, or allegedly Abraham Lincoln's hat.

DePue: I've seen two or three crystal bowls that the name thing was in.

Thompson: Oh, really?

DePue: One was in Pate Philip's home, and the other one was in Lee Daniels' office.

Thompson: Oh god, I know I know nothing about that. (laughs)

DePue: And obviously the name that was drawn determined that the Republicans were going to have control of redistricting that year. No memories about that experience at all?

Thompson: No, no.

DePue: I'm kind of surprised, Governor, because that set the stage for the Republicans being able to take control of the House and the Senate eventually. Pate Phillip becomes the president of the Senate in '93, and then Lee Daniels takes control of the House in 1995.

Let me move on to the presidential election year…Gosh, Governor, this conversation might go quicker than I intended.

Thompson: I think so. When you're gone, you're gone.

DePue: Who did you support in the 1992 presidential election? That was Bush's reelection year, so I assume it was an easy choice.

Thompson: It was Bush, yes.

DePue: What did you think of Ross Perot's role in that particular race?

Thompson: Crazy.

DePue: That's all you want to say about it?

Thompson: Yeah, crazy. I don't know whether he cost Bush the election or not, but third party candidates in a presidential race are…It can't work. We've never had a third party candidate for president even come close, except for Teddy Roosevelt, and that didn't work either. All it did was be responsible for the election of Wilson.

The presidential contest is so vast and so complex and so tied to the two major parties, that it is an exceedingly lonely road for a third party candidate. I mean, that happened to John Anderson, here in the state of Illinois. It happened to Perot. It happened to Teddy. Third party candidacies are easier said than does, that's for sure.

DePue: And yet we could be steering that direction in this particular political campaign.

Thompson: Well, I don't know. Trump issues that threat every once in a while, and he's the only one who would do it. But when you get to the national convention—and I assume he's going to the convention—and you get through with the convention, it's pretty difficult to make the ballot in all fifty states, just as a matter of timing.

Then there's the matter of organization, and if you were not so well organized that you lost the Republican nomination at the convention, how are you going to get organized on behalf of a third-party candidacy? And where's the money going to come from? If you've got Republican and Democratic candidates for president, who are out and running, where does a third-party candidate get money? You might get voters, but where does he get money? So I don't see Trump, if he doesn't get the Republican nomination, going third party.

DePue: Getting back to the 1992 election, another year where, at least on the Republican side, a lot of the electorate was clearly upset with George Bush. Now, he's coming off this great triumph of Desert Storm, and his poll numbers were through the roof during that timeframe; then they plummeted when he decided to raise taxes somewhat, even though he'd had that famous statement, "Read my lips, no new taxes."

Thompson: I don't think that was the reason he lost. I think he lost the confidence of the American people, especially because, at the end of the primary season, he was running against a candidate, Bill Clinton, who knew exceedingly well what the issues were. I recall very well that campaign. I was very involved in that campaign.

DePue: In what way?

Thompson: The Speaker, then-Speaker Denny Hastert, convened in his office a weekly group to talk about the election.

DePue: No this is '92; that wouldn't have been Hastert at the time, because that was before Newt Gingrich even.

Thompson: In the campaign that Bush lost?

DePue: Yeah, because Hastert was the compromise candidate after Newt Gingrich was pushed out.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And it would have been a Democratic speaker in '92.

Thompson: No, unh uh.

DePue: It was '94 when the Republicans took over control of the House.

Thompson: Maybe he wasn't Speaker; maybe he was minority leader, one of the two, because I remember very clearly meeting every week in Hastert's office. He'd bring in a group of lobbyists who were politically sharp, members of his staff, acquaintances who had worked in prior campaigns. We'd sit around the table with Denny, trying to figure out ways to help the president.

I was getting more and more frustrated, because I believed—and I was as close to Clinton as anybody—that George didn't understand the economic impact on his base, white, mid-forties, suburban voters who, if you paid attention to the economy at the time, were being laid off in large numbers and whose kids, coming out of colleges, couldn't get jobs. And there was no—to my mind—connection between the White House and the president and that challenge, that danger. Clinton was just hammering the heck out of that.

DePue: "It's the economy, stupid."

Thompson: Yeah, and it was. I remember sitting in one meeting—it was either at the White House or at Hastert's office—I said, "Look, why can't the president go to Chicago and go right from his Air Force One to an unemployment office and meet with the people who have been laid off, who are standing in line to get unemployment compensation assistance, and talk to them?" So the guy

from the White House says, "Well, you know, they might start arguing with him." I said, "Good, good, and he can talk back, and he can make it clear that he is doing everything he can to help them."

I said, "You guys come into Chicago, and where do you go? You go to a country club and speak, or you go to an airport rally, speak in a hangar, and then you depart. That's not what Bill Clinton's doing. He's down where the action is." He said, "Do you know how much trouble it is to get the presidential motorcade in and out of places like that, that you're suggesting?" And I said, "You know what? If that's your attitude, you won't have to worry about the motorcade next year, because you won't be there and neither will the president and neither will the motorcade."

I just grew so frustrated, going down to Washington week after week after week to try and help, and seeing that they didn't have a clue about how Clinton was connecting with the country. They all thought that the election would end when one more girlfriend would pop out of the cake for Clinton and it would be all over. (DePue laughs)

I said, "You know, you misunderstand that whole thing, with the girlfriends. People are not laughing at Clinton; they're laughing with Clinton. They don't care about that. They care about their own economic situation. They don't care about one more girlfriend out of the cake. You're crazy." And I was right. I was right.

The president, coming from that 90 percent approval rating after the Gulf War, could not connect with the American people, because he and his staff didn't have a clue. I mean, this is a president who is famous for dialing up his friends and talking about stuff. Well, the guys he was dialing up, they were sitting in their country club, or they were sitting in their home or their factory or wherever. They weren't hurting. But his voters were hurting. It was a white-collar recession going on, and his base of support, his political base of support was getting hurt. So, he lost.

DePue: You obviously knew Clinton from all of the governors' conferences you attended.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: I would assume you knew Hillary as well from all of those.

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: Your impressions of both? You've given us some glimmer of your thoughts about Bill at least.

Thompson: Bill is an exceedingly smart guy; he's an exceedingly passionate guy; he's a great politician. He doesn't leave the room until he's persuaded everybody, he thinks, to his point of view.

Hillary is different. She's far more reserved. She's not the natural politician that Bill is, but she's smart, and she works hard. She's much more disciplined than he is. I mean, you didn't see Hillary hanging around McDonald's and eating cheeseburgers during the middle of his run. They're just different personalities, and she is a very, very able person. Just a different personality than Bill.

DePue: Governor, I don't think I'm the first to make this comparison. The way you've described Bill Clinton is the way people describe your campaign style and your personality. And that, in certain respects, you're both a little bit larger than life in that area, as well.

Thompson: Yeah, that's right. I won't talk about myself, but that's what's appealing about Bill Clinton. Look, voters look at politicians, and the first thing they say is, "Do I like this guy?" Before they get to the issues and whether or not they agree with him, any of those other things, it's do I like this guy? Do I like his personality? Do I identify with him? Does he understand things about me?

You laugh about my dog, and I didn't get the dog to be a campaign prop. I got the dog because I'd had dogs as a kid. I was walking down the street in southern Illinois, and there was this convertible full of Irish setter puppies. Who could resist? I bought one on the spot. We went across the street for a bowl and dog food and a collar and a leash, and we continued the campaign. But pretty soon it became clear that people liked the dog. They just liked him, especially in southern Illinois. I used to make speeches where I'd say, "The dog's more popular than I am, and that's fine. You want to meet the dog; he's going to be on the stage up here." (DePue laughs)

So yeah, but what did that teach me? It taught me that people who liked and had dogs, which was fairly common in southern Illinois, liked the fact that I had a dog. We had something in common. Or during the campaign sometime, when I'd walk into a banquet hall, and I'm tilted to the right because my back was out, people, at once, who had back problems would identify with me, "Oh, you've got that too, and I've got that." And they'd get talking.

Or people would identify with Samantha, because they had children. It doesn't take a lot. These are ordinary everyday common things. They're not something that you have to put on a special show for. If you realize these things, that's half the battle. And some politicians have it, and some don't.

DePue: The election that year, George Bush Sr. polled 37.4 percent; Perot polled 18.9 percent, which is—

Thompson: That's pretty good.

DePue: …at least a record in the modern era for a third party candidate, and Clinton got 43 percent. So, well south of 50 percent, but it didn't make a whole lot of difference.

Thompson: Right, correct.

DePue: So that would sure look like Perot played the spoiler for Bush.

Thompson: Yeah, I think that's a fair conclusion, but you'd have to know where those votes would have gone, had Perot not been a candidate. Would they have gone automatically to Bush? I don't know.

Clinton was speaking to the heart of America. He really was. And George was seen as a guy who looked at his watch during the debate, or didn't understand what that thing was at the grocery counter. Remember that?

DePue: I do vaguely remember that, yeah.

Thompson: One of which says, "I'm not so interested in this. I want to get out of here," and the other one says, "I don't really understand what life out here is exactly all about, because I'm in the bubble in the White House."

DePue: But the other part of me thinks that you were all-in for Bush when it came to policies.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And I'm assuming you liked him personally.

Thompson: I did, very much. He was an extremely likeable guy in private life. I can remember, Jayne and I went to Kennebunkport for the weekend. He had a bunch of people up there, and we were going to sit around for two days and talk about the campaign. She and I got to the house a little bit late, and they were having dinner. It was the president who jumped up, opened the door, welcomed us, found a place for us at the table. And then after dinner, we were going to go for a walk; it was the president who jumped up and got the coats, passed them out. He was just a hell of a guy, I mean, likeable.

(laughs) I've told you this story about Samantha and George Bush, right?

DePue: I can't recall.

Thompson: She was two years old.

DePue: So this was when he was running for vice-president?

Thompson: Yeah. She had started hitting people, a two-year-old thing, especially other babies, which horrified her mother. She called it "whapping." I was bringing her downstairs to meet the vice-president or the candidate for vice-president…I forget what the hell he was. I said, "Now, no whapping." "Oh no, okay Daddy, okay."

We go downstairs, and the vice-president's coming up the stairs in the mansion. He gets to the top of the stairs, I'm standing there with Samantha in my arms, and he says, "Hello, Samantha, how are you?" And she goes whap, hits him right in the jaw. The newspaper photographers caught the swing and labeled it, "Samantha Thompson Shakes Hands with Vice-President."

Two years later we were at Kennebunkport for a governors conference, and I'm walking across the lawn at Kennebunkport with Jayne and Samantha. The vice-president comes by and says, "Samantha, no hitting, no hitting."

DePue: (laughs) I'm sure at four years old she didn't remember that incident at all.

Thompson: Oh, she remembered.[18]

DePue: Oh, did she?

Thompson: Oh yeah.

DePue: I don't think you told me that story. I would have remembered that story.

Thompson: Oh really? A great story.

DePue: So you're not surprised that Clinton won that election?

Thompson: No.

DePue: His first big initiative that first four years of administration was healthcare reform. What did you think about his efforts to reform American healthcare?

Thompson: It went astray pretty quickly, because he gave it to Hillary, and they were concocting the plan in secret. They weren't including the Congress in their discussions, and it just all blew up

DePue: Let's go to the 1994 gubernatorial campaign. Jim Edgar is running for re-election that year against Dawn Clark Netsch. Did you play any role in that particular campaign?

Thompson: Not really. Jim didn't need any help in that. He destroyed her like—

[18] And she did over thirty years later. See Samantha Thompson's interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014.

DePue: And the issue that he destroyed her over?

Thompson: Taxes.

DePue: That Netsch was recommending that the state raise the personal income tax from 3 to 4.25 percent, and I think also the corporate income tax.

Thompson: Yeah, they were linked.

DePue: And correspondingly, pushed to lower property taxes.

Thompson: See, voters, when they hear a proposition like that, they don't believe you on lower property taxes, but they sure as hell believe you on raising their income tax. (laughs) He defined her early, and you never want to let your opponent define you before you define yourself. And from that moment on, she was gone.

DePue: That makes me think of the current campaign where Trump is always out early defining his opponents.

Thompson: Sure, "Lying Ted, Little Marco." (sighs)

DePue: Well, Governor, we live in interesting times; what can we say?

Thompson: We certainly do.

DePue: Were you surprised that it was Netsch that the Democrats ended up with? Because Burris was in the mix, and I can't recall who else was running that year.[19] I should know.

Thompson: I think it was one of those, "It's her turn" kind of thing. Burris was not going to be a step up.

DePue: As you recall, she seemed to surprise everybody with that one campaign ad, where she's playing pool.

Thompson: Yeah, yeah, but that was so far from reality that people just took it for what it was, a gag.

DePue: Did you like Netsch?

Thompson: Yeah. Oh yeah, we were fellow Northwestern Law School folks. She and I ended up, not co-chairs, but when Tom Fitzgerald was running for the Illinois Supreme Court, and had announced his candidacy, Netsch and I were on

[19] Comptroller Dawn Clark Netsch defeated Attorney General Roland Burris, Cook County Board President Richard Phelan, lawyer James Gierach, and LaRouchie candidate Sheila Jones. On the 1994 campaign, see Jim Edgar, June 18, 2010, Volume IV: 720-774; Dawn Clark Netsch, March 17 & June 23, 2011. All interviews by Mark DePue.

either side of him and spoke on his behalf. We were kind of the godfathers of that occasion. Even though he was a Democrat, I thought he was a wonderful man and a great judge, and I supported him for the Illinois Supreme Court. Netsch was my sidekick on the announcement date.

DePue: Netsch goes down to defeat in 1994, and as you suggested, by a pretty wide margin, 63.9 percent that Edgar polled, versus 34.4 for Netsch.

Thompson: Almost a record.

DePue: Well, you beat me to the punch in that respect. (Thompson laughs) Your margin of victory in '78 was bigger.

Thompson: No, in '76.

DePue: Seventy-six, was it? That would have been against Howlett that year.

Thompson: Yep.

DePue: Ninety-four, that was a huge win for the Republicans at the national level. That's the year that Newt Gingrich had his Contract with America[20], where they ended up for the first year since the late 1940s, I believe, that the Republicans had control of the U.S. House of Representatives.[21]

Thompson: Right. So I guess, when I was describing those meetings in Hastert's office, he was the—

DePue: Was it Bob Michel[22] maybe that you had the meetings with?

Thompson: No, it was Hastert.[23] I forget which office he held. Was he the whip or something like that?

DePue: Probably so.

Thompson: Yeah, because I know we met in his office in the House Office Building.

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[20] The Contract with America was the conservative action of more than 300 Republican Congressional candidates who signed it. Led by the Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, it was presented at a September 27, 1994 press conference. The contract was rooted in three core principles, accountability, responsibility and opportunity. (http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h2052.html)

[21] Republicans had last controlled the U.S. House during the 83rd Congress (January 3, 1953–January 3, 1955).

[22] Illinois representative Bob Michel was the House minority leader from 1981 to 1995. In 1992, Newt Gingrich served as minority whip.

[23] Former Speak of the House, Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) was indicted on charges that he lied to the FBI and tried to mask cash transactions made from various banks. He pleaded guilty in the federal court case, which involved millions of dollars in hush money to keep secret allegations of misconduct decades ago.

DePue: Since we're talking about him, what's your feelings about his current legal and personal challenges?

Thompson: Good god. Who knew? I mean, it's just so completely opposed to his personality in all the years I've known him. The public attitude, especially around his home town and in the party, was a fondness, "Denny." He was always Denny, no matter what title he had.

I campaigned with him the first time he ran for… I'm trying to remember whether it was the first time he ran for the legislature or the first time, as a legislator, he ran for the Congress. It might have been that.

DePue: And I should know better. Maybe it was '86 that he was running for U.S. House, '88 maybe, at the latest?

Thompson: Yeah, because I remember walking him through the district out there. We were at some big shopping center in Aurora, and I was leading him around, introducing him to people as the candidate for whatever it was. My relationship with him was a really good one.

He appointed me to the 9/11 Commission. I got a call one day, and he said, "Hi, this is Denny." I said, "Mr. Speaker, how are you?" "Well, I'm flying back from Europe, Jim, but I wanted to call you and ask you if you would serve on this 9/11 Commission." I said, "Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I would."

And he appointed me to the committee for some celebration coming up. I can't quite remember what it was now. He had an appointment; Governor Ryan had an appointment. It was one of the Lincoln commissions, and Lura Lynn wanted to be on the commission. George was reluctant to appoint his wife.

DePue: Was it the Bicentennial Commission?

Thompson: Yeah. So George called up Denny and said, "Why don't you appoint my wife?" And he said, "Because I'm appointing Thompson." He [Ryan] said, "Well, you appoint Lura Lynn; I'll appoint Thompson." (both laugh) So he wasn't embarrassed that he was appointing his own wife.

I mean, to me this is just unfathomable and then his conduct in dealing with this years later. He should have gone right to his lawyer, right off the bat, and gotten some guidance, rather than trying to deal with somebody who wanted $3.5 million, which he's out there getting in dribs and drabs and violating the bank structuring act. Then his interview without counsel with the FBI.

DePue: We talked about Bill Clinton's personal foibles and eventually his legal challenges—we'll get into that a little bit later—but I'd gotten the impression

from you that your feeling was the public is willing to forgive a girlfriend here or there on the side, at least in the case of Bill Clinton, but—

Thompson: No, not in the case of Bill Clinton, throughout American history.

DePue: But they're not willing to forgive Denny Hastert for his—

Thompson: Oh, absolutely not, absolutely not. I mean, he was a teacher, and that's a special status. And these kids were so young. And he was the coach; he was the—

DePue: The authority figure.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Moving beyond that, we've talked a little bit about 1994, a big year politically, both at the national level but again at the state level, because that's the year finally that the Republicans take control of the Illinois House. Now there's a situation I don't think you ever had when you were in office. We have the governor and both houses of the legislature controlled by the same party.

Thompson: I never had that.

DePue: What's your thought about that? Great opportunities now to do some things that could not have gotten done before that?

Thompson: You had Daniels as Speaker, right? And you had Pate as Senate president. And you had—

DePue: Edgar as governor.

Thompson: Edgar, yeah. I don't know, because I'm not sure the three of them were always on the same page with regard to issues. And that only lasted for what, two years?

DePue: Yeah, two years.

Thompson: So, whether it was opportunity lost or not, I don't know.

DePue: They did move quite a bit of legislation that year, a couple that were somewhat noteworthy. That was the year, I think it was '95, that there was a lot of talk about educational reform. One of the things was '95 legislation that gave Mayor Daley control over the Chicago school system.

Thompson: Because he asked for it.

DePue: Right, because he was frustrated about the problems of the Chicago school district, and he wasn't in charge of it.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: It was shortly after that that he named his budget director, Paul Vallas, to be the chief executive officer for Chicago public schools. Was Samantha in the Chicago public schools at that time?

Thompson: In '95?

DePue: Yeah, '95-'96.

Thompson: Yes, she was.

DePue: Any thoughts about that particular portion of the reform and what was going on in the Chicago public schools at the time?

Thompson: She was in a really outstanding Chicago public school near our house, up on the North Side. And it was outstanding for one reason. It had a tough, old-school principal who ran the place.

DePue: The name of the school that she was in?

Thompson: Oh, I'll have to ask Jayne.

DePue: How about the principal? Do you remember his name or her name?

Thompson: Her name, but I don't remember it. This principal knew every child in the school. When this principal walked the halls, there was order. Just imagine a woman Marine sergeant, back in the '40s, okay? (laughs) There you go, you got her. And it was a wonderful school, in some ways, like the school I went to when I was Samantha's age. It was a Chicago public school, and it had a tough principal and tough teachers, and there was order, and you learned.

So just because it's a Chicago public school doesn't mean it's going to be horrible. It could be, but it could be wonderful as well. So, both Sam and I had, I think, a real foundation in learning from [a] Chicago public school, at the same age.

DePue: Did you have an opportunity in those years to go to parent-teacher conferences?

Thompson: I did.

DePue: What was that like for a young lady like Samantha?

Thompson: (laughs) Oh, it was a fun experience, and it continued through high school. I went to parent-teachers' night, or parents' night in the high school, sat next to Mike Madigan.

DePue: His kids were going to the same school?

Thompson: His daughter was.

DePue: Lisa?

Thompson: Yeah, the Madigan family and the Thompson family have been friends for a long time.

DePue: That was one of the reforms. Another reform that Edgar was able to push through that year—he worked very hard on this one—was educational reform at the state level. It established a minimum that the state would contribute each year for every student in the state.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: It was quite a few years after that that was maintained, and that's obviously slipped a little the last few years. Any thoughts about those reforms, as well?

Thompson: And currently you've got talk about, even after the whole budget is settled, higher education's going to take a 25 percent cut. Wow! Wow, wow, wow! That's unbelievable.

DePue: Higher education.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Which I know is always one of the things that you were very supportive of.

Thompson: I was, especially at our land grant school, the U of I, but also at the community college level, the other universities. I mean, I had lockers in universities around the state for my racquetball stuff. I played; every time I got near a university, I'd go play.

DePue: If you had had the opportunity in your administration—even for just two years—of having control of both houses, was there something that you would have loved to push that you knew otherwise wasn't politically feasible?

Thompson: No. As a governor, I got everything I wanted, except a World's Fair, and I got it from the Democrats, with some help from the Republicans. So I can't say that the failure to have both houses at once hurt me.

I was kind of in a good position, because even though the members of the legislature that were Republican were more conservative than I, they were loyal. That put me in a position where, if I didn't agree with the Democrats on something, I could veto it, and I'd get upheld, because the Republicans would stay with me.

DePue: Governor Edgar, when I had the chance to interview him, said that he actually preferred having a divided legislature, rather than one that was controlled by the Republicans in both houses.[24]

Thompson: (laughs) What a smart man.

DePue: You agree with that sentiment.

Thompson: Let's just say there was more opportunity.

DePue: How so?

Thompson: (laughs) Because, I think, when the legislature's divided, the governor is…I don't know; he's in a position where he can work both sides of the aisle and still have the troops on his side, ready and able to protect him from the other side. In that kind of a situation, if the governor has the right personality, he can be the bridge between, let's say the House and the Senate, which I often was. I was the guy who used to carry the messages when they weren't talking to each other. (laughs) So I didn't suffer politically, because I didn't have both houses Republican at the same time.

DePue: Moving along on the timeline then, the next election year obviously was 1996, so it's not an election year for the governor, but it is for the president. And now you've got a new crop of Republicans that are running in the Republican primary. The main figures in that year were Bob Dole, Pat Buchanan, Steve Forbes, and then there were some also-rans in there, but those were the top three. Who did you support that year in the primary, or did you come out to support anybody?

Thompson: What year was this?

DePue: Ninety-six.

Thompson: And did Dole end up as the candidate?

DePue: He did indeed.

Thompson: I don't remember being that active that year. I knew Dole; I liked him, and I presume I contributed to his campaign or went to fundraisers for him, but—

DePue: If I can characterize the other two, Pat Buchanan certainly would have represented the right wing of the party.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Steve Forbes was the flat-tax guy.

[24] Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 28, 2010, Volume III: 682.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And I've got to believe that Bob Dole was your kind of Republican.

Thompson: Right. But as I say, I don't think I was that active.

DePue: Do you recall going to the Republican convention that year in San Diego?

Thompson: Is that the one where Pat Buchanan spoke?

DePue: I'm sure he did, but there was probably two or three conventions where he was a speaker.

Thompson: Yeah, I'm trying to remember, because there was one where Samantha was with me on the floor, and when he spoke we just walked out.[25] But I don't have any particular recollection of that convention.

DePue: What was it that Buchanan was saying that you walked out on?

Thompson: He was exceedingly right wing and—

DePue: What in particular did you get upset about or object to? Maybe I should put it that way.

Thompson: (sighs) I don't remember with any particularity, but Samantha was old enough to understand what he was saying, and I certainly understood what he was saying, and neither of us liked it. It was just too…authoritarian.

DePue: She would have been a teenager by that time.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: That particular election year, the attacks on Clinton's character were still going on. Did it make sense to you politically that the Republicans still were pushing that?

Thompson: No. In that kind of a situation, the candidate is his own worst enemy. You don't need the other side piling on, because then it becomes political. Whereas, if you hold back, all the focus is on the other guy. You don't need to raise every issue you can, especially when they're personal, you know?

[25] Thompson is thinking of the 1992 RNC in Houston. Buchanan's speech attracted much criticism at the time. It is known as the "Culture War Speech," after its assertion that "There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as was the Cold War itself." Speech text is available at *Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory* Project, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/buchanan-culture-war-speech-speech-text/. For other views on this convention, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, April 23, 2010, Volume III: 634-635; Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, April 1, 2009, 121; and Samantha Thompson, April 4, 2014.

DePue: Again, I keep thinking about our current political campaign; there's not a whole lot of holding back this year.

Thompson: No.

DePue: Clinton is able to survive that election and do quite well against Dole, wins reelection relatively easily. But during this time he's also moderating some of his things. I want to get your reaction to a couple of things that were happening between the Republican House and a Democrat president and much like we were talking before, in terms of your own analogy with an Illinois legislature. Balanced budget initiatives?

Thompson: See, Clinton had some able people. Didn't he have Rubin working for him as treasury secretary? And he came out with a balanced budget. Now there's a shock. When's the last time you saw a balanced budget out of the Congress?

DePue: Well, did he come out, or was it the Congress who forced the issue on that?

Thompson: Yeah, but it was mutual, I think. Clinton was moderating, after his initial issues. The Republicans were pushing on him from the House. So he not only got a balanced budget, didn't he start to reduce the debt? I think so.

DePue: In the end of his administration there were years of reducing the debt.

Thompson: And he got a good economy, right? So he got the jobs and the tax revenue.

DePue: That was during the dot-com boom.

Thompson: Yeah, what'd they say he was doing? Triangulating between the Republicans and the liberal Democrats. And he was going to be at the other end of the triangle.

DePue: Well gosh, Governor, I thought it was John Kasich and maybe Newt Gingrich a little bit that actually led to the balanced budget.

Thompson: Maybe.

DePue: Again, echoes of our current campaign. I'm sorry about that.

Thompson: That's all right.

DePue: How about this one, welfare reform?

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Another initiative I believe that originated in the House.

Thompson: Yeah, look, there's only so much a Democratic president can do when you've got clever people like Gingrich and a Republican House, and the public has

heard about "welfare reform" and "welfare queens" and on and on and on for years,[26] that, if you're smart—and Clinton was smart—you'll do something about it. You'll grab the issue. It's like his crime bill, for which he's now being hammered in Hillary's campaign, the '94 crime bill. You know, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em, and take credit.

DePue: Well, based on his rather vigorous defense of the crime bill, l just this last week, that was one that he wasn't just doing for political reasons, he—

Thompson: No, I know. Yeah. But you see, here's what happens when you're out campaigning for somebody else and some protester jumps up with signs and starts yelling at you from two rows back on [an] issue that you took credit for.

But these are now different times. These are black lives matter times, and these are gang versus police times, and he got a little carried away in his response. I mean, you can't win an argument with eighteen-year-old protesters with signs. (laughs) They're not there to debate you. They're there to harass you. He could have given them a simple answer and waited until the security yanked them out of there. But no, he spent twelve, fifteen minutes explaining the crime bill.

DePue: Bill Clinton's known for giving lengthy answers, sometimes, to policy issue.

Thompson: Yeah, but… (speaking to Jayne Thompson) All right, Honey, wait, wait; we've got two questions here to be answered. Now I remember—see, this is my delayed memory—Samantha's school was Hawthorne, right? Hawthorne Scholastic Academy.

Thompson: Yeah. And the principal was?

Jayne: June Dudeck.[27]

Thompson: Mrs. Dudeck, okay.

Jayne: See, you and I both have too much to remember. (DePue laughs) Too many days.

Thompson: I know, but it just takes me a little while longer until it comes out in my head.

Jayne: That's because there's too much in there.

Thompson: But he was asking me about Samantha's Chicago public school, which I said was a great school.

[26] For more about the political attacks against welfare programs during the Thompson administration, see Jeffrey Miller, interview by Mike Czaplicki, May 28, 2015.
[27] Dudeck, who was Hawthorne's principal from 1975 to 1993. She died December 31, 2014, at age 86. "June Dudeck," *Chicago Tribune*, January 3, 2015.

Jayne: It still is.

Thompson: And a lot of it was the credit of the principal who walked the halls and knew everybody and kept order.

Jayne: And it's interesting, because Hawthorne Scholastic Academy is still a very fine school in the city of Chicago. A lot of the young professionals in the city, that's where their kids go.

DePue: How close are we now to that school?

Thompson: Where was it, Hon?

Jayne: Oh, it was up at 3700 North Clifton.

Thompson: Was that a magnet school? Yeah. We're next to one of the best now, only a block away, Ogden, one of the best Chicago public schools there is. I mean it's just an incredible school. This is a brand new school building, and they teach god knows what, Mandarin and—

DePue: Wow!

Thompson: Oh yeah. Where you going kid?

Jayne: Have fun, gentlemen. I have errands to run. Places to go, people to see, things to do.

Thompson: You've always got errands to run!

DePue: Let me ask you this question to go back to the '96 timeframe. You talked about the crime bill, you talked about welfare reform; how well did you know Newt Gingrich? What did you think about Newt Gingrich?

Thompson: I didn't know him all that well.

DePue: What did you think about his tenure as Speaker?

Thompson: Uh, checkered. I mean, for the Speaker of the House to get mad at the president, because he sat in the back of an airplane is—

DePue: Because Newt sat in the back of an airplane?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Was he riding Air Force One or something?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: I don't remember that.

Thompson: Oh, yeah. Isn't that what led to the shutdown of the government the first time?

DePue: I don't remember that being the reason.

Thompson: You check up on that.

DePue: What did you think about shutting down the government?

Thompson: I think it's crazy to shut down the government for any reason. I think you're elected to do things, not to not do things.

DePue: What happens if that's part of the explanation for why there was a balanced budget?

Thompson: What do you mean?

DePue: That that gave the Republicans a little bit more leverage to get some negotiating room. Now, I'm fuzzy about the series of events there.

Thompson: Why would the Republicans get leverage from shutting down the government?

DePue: It's a question of who's going to blink first, isn't it, Governor?

Thompson: Mm-hmm. Didn't they blink first?

DePue: The Republicans?

Thompson: Mm-hmm. Look, when Republicans shut down the government, what happens? You got the president hammering them every night. The president is a single person, and the Republican legislature is a diffuse body, and they can't answer him very well.

Then the press, which doesn't like a shutdown government, starts writing the stories about, you know, the veterans went to Washington to see the Washington Monument or the FDR Monument, and it was closed down and they couldn't go. Then they've got a picture of these elderly veterans being held back by the rope. Those guys just got *hammered*, not the president. The president didn't get hammered.

DePue: But in a certain respect, the measure of whether or not they got hammered is how they'd do in the next election cycle.

Thompson: But people have short memories in the election cycle. Citizens aren't going to hold that against the shutting-down Republicans forever, because the government opens back up again and you have normalcy. The press goes on to something else.

DePue: That's an interesting comment about the press. Since you brought the press in here, what do you think of the role of the press in the last twenty years or so, in terms of the political process?

Thompson: Oh, it's changed radically.

DePue: In what way?

Thompson: Cable television. Cable television has been responsible for a lot of changes in the political system. In the old days, you had network news, right? It came out at 6:00, or maybe 6:00 and 10:00, and then it was over. Cable television goes twenty-four hours a day, and they repeat, and they repeat, and they repeat the stories, and they repeat the film. Instead of being momentarily or permanently forgotten, after the news is over, it's just drummed in to your head. And it starts again the next day.

Cable television has also been responsible for carrying on what's been a fixture of American politics for the last 100 years, the decline of political parties and the ascendancy of individual candidates. In the nineteenth century the parties stood for something. Their platforms were meaningful—you know, free silver—and it was the candidates who were controlled by the parties. Now politics is very individual. It's the other way around. Except for some foot-soldier work during election times, parties don't stand for anything anymore. The national party platforms are a joke. That's why they can load all this junk in there, because they know it's going to be forgotten the next day. It's just changed our politics.

DePue: Is that primarily because the role of the press has factored differently into this?

Thompson: The press has, in part, made the individual political figure stronger and the parties less important. It was going on before cable television. It's just continued. There's no party discipline any more. Tell me what the Republican Party or the Democratic Party stand for, on a number of issues. And there are wings of the parties. There were wings of the parties too in the nineteenth century, but not as strong as they are today.

DePue: A lot of pundits would say though, Governor, that the parties' platform positions, what the parties stand for, has moved to the extreme for both Democrats and Republicans.

Thompson: That's true; that's true, but there is still the separate issue of… I mean, you look at the party platforms, they're what? How many pages long? They got how many issues in there? Hundreds.

DePue: I don't know. I've never looked at the platform.

Thompson: See, there, you haven't looked at the platforms; that's my point. (DePue laughs) What's the point of it? The minute the convention's over, they're forgotten.

DePue: A couple of [sessions] ago we talked about Rutan [vs. Illinois, U.S. Supreme Court decision] and the impact that Rutan had in your particular governorship. Did Rutan and those kind of decisions play a role in the weakening of the parties as you've been discussing?

Thompson: Certainly, certainly, absolutely.

DePue: How so?

Thompson: They led to the inability of political officeholders, in most instances, to influence elections, because they had no troops anymore. You look at Illinois today, who's got the troops? One guy, Madigan. Why? Because he's been there so long. (laughs) And he's, in Democratic administrations, gotten so many people jobs, in the non-Rutan areas, or even in the Rutan areas, he's got them hired. The Supreme Court can't watch everybody.

But nobody else has that kind of…The mayor of Chicago, he doesn't have an army. Daley used to have an army. The original Mayor Daley had an army, but this mayor doesn't have an army. This mayor has to depend on the good will of the Democratic leaders in the legislature.

DePue: Governor, I've had some who explain that Madigan's source of power is that, when it comes to fundraising, it's not individual representatives who are raising money necessarily, it's people contributing money to the Four Tops, to the party leaders in both the House and the Senate, and nobody does it better than Madigan, who then turns around and can dole out the money to various candidates who need the help, who then are beholden to him.

Thompson: You got it, put perfectly.

DePue: It looks like you're going to take a break here, Governor.

Thompson: That's it exactly.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Okay, Governor, we're back from the break. I want to continue this conversation about the role of the press in modern-day politics. Let me start with this question. I think it was 1988, around that timeframe, that Rush Limbaugh started his radio talk show, and a lot of people have thought that that has had a fairly big impact on American politics, as well.

Thompson: I think it's certainly clear that he found and increased a conservative audience. Rush is a showman; he's very talented as a radio person. He can be

persuasive. I don't listen to him, because I don't agree with him, but people sitting out in their homes or out in the country, on the farm, listening to him every day, he can be very persuasive. And he's part of the growth of the conservative movement in American politics.

DePue: In what respects do you disagree with him?

Thompson: Oh, he's too conservative for me. I mean, just—

DePue: Fiscally too conservative? Socially too conservative?

Thompson: Socially, for sure and in terms of American national policy. But as I say, I don't listen to him that often, so I can't give you chapter and verse on what he stands for. It's just not something I'm interested in.

DePue: You've already talked about the role that cable news has had. It's given such a megaphone to both sides in the political discussion. Would you agree with the conservatives who say that American media is biased towards the liberal side of the equation?

Thompson: Yeah, and in return, they've given us Trump. (laughs) How do you like that?

DePue: Who's "they" in this case?

Thompson: The media.

DePue: The media has given us Trump?

Thompson: Absolutely!

DePue: By giving him a megaphone so often?

Thompson: Yeah, absolutely. The first time he went on about running for president, they did a few stories, and then they didn't cover him anymore, and that faded away. But this time, oh my god, you would think he was coming from the mountaintop. I mean, that's why we have Trump as a presidential candidate, the media, pure and simple.

DePue: You're talking about more than just Fox News?

Thompson: Yeah, he's a good story. He's a showman. He can say outrageous things, and the press can't get there fast enough to report it or print it. So he says more outrageous things, and they keep covering him. And that draws the crowds to his auditoriums. Now, I don't know if those are voters or not. I don't know if they're Republicans or not. It doesn't make any difference. I mean— (sighs)

DePue: Just about everybody who pays attention to American politics will be in agreement on this thing. There has not been a year like this in a long, long time in American politics.

Thompson: That's certainly true. Any given day he'll say things that in other candidates would destroy them.

DePue: Let me ask you about one other portion of the traditional media, and that's newspapers, and how the role of newspapers been changing over the last couple of decades.

Thompson: Substantially. I may be one of the last people in America to read newspapers.

DePue: I just saw your copy of *The Wall Street Journal* over there.

Thompson: I read four newspapers a day; that's how much of a junkie I am.

DePue: And those are?

Thompson: Those are *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *Chicago Sun-Times*. I used to read *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*, but newspapers started to stack up (laughs) and I said, "I don't have that much time." And anyway, I can pick up what I'm missing by going to the Internet and going to *Politico* or *Real Clear Politics,* and then I get a sampling from around the country.

DePue: So you've mentioned a couple of the main Internet sites for news right now.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: How has that changed the way we consume news?

Thompson: I watch the evening news now—

DePue: Which one?

Thompson: David Muir on ABC [American Broadcasting Company]. But I don't watch the Sunday morning programs. I'll sometimes watch CNN [Cable News Network]. When there's a campaign going on, or a primary or something like that, I'll watch CNN, because I'm a political junkie.

DePue: So you watched the debates, I assume?

Thompson: Oh yeah, both parties, and I am so tired of the debates. (both laugh) I suspect the candidates are too. The first few Republican debates, when they had twelve people up there, that was just nuts.

DePue: They started with seventeen.

Thompson: Seventeen, just nuts! All the yelling and screaming and—

DePue: So have all of these changes in the way the media has been impacting politics, has this been good or bad, or is it just change?

Thompson: I think it's been both bad and changed. It's encouraged a candidate like Trump. He's been campaigning for the presidency how long now, months? Do you know what he stands for, other than that wall on the Mexican border and banning Muslims from entering the country?

DePue: And tariffs or—

Thompson: Yeah. The world's more complicated than that. The American presidency is more complicated than that. We don't have any idea about who his advisors would be. He trots up these lists of retired generals, and…I don't want those folks running the country. I mean, that's crazy.

DePue: Have you been surprised at how far left the Democrats have moved in this last cycle?

Thompson: I'm not sure it's fair to say that the Democrats, as a party—if there is a party—have moved so much, except you've got the two Democratic candidates for the presidency, one of whom is far left. In the first place, he's not even a Democrat; he's a Socialist.[28]

DePue: But he's doing rather well in the Democratic primary.

Thompson: Yeah, absolutely, and in states where you would think they would hang a Socialist. And he's old; he's, what, seventy-four?

DePue: Something like that.

Thompson: Yeah. And all he talks about is breaking up the banks—I'm not sure what that will do—and taxing the billionaires. I'm not sure what he stands for, apart from breaking up the banks and taxing the billionaires.

DePue: Well, I think he'd probably like to raise your bracket's tax rate too.

Thompson: Oh absolutely, no question about it. So would she; Hillary would too. (laughs) But at least Hillary has got the smarts and the experience to be a president. She was part of the White House for eight years; she certainly learned something. And she was a senator for how many years, six years?

DePue: Yeah, about that.

[28] Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT).

Thompson: And secretary of state in very perilous times. Yeah, she's qualified, and she's smart. But Bernie? I can't—

DePue: Well, Governor, should we move back to the 1996 timeframe again?

Thompson: (laughs) Whatever you'd like.

DePue: After I keep pulling you back and forth here. I apologize for that, but I think it's important to get your reflections on the role of the press, because that has, in my mind, changed so dramatically—

Thompson: It has.

DePue: …in the last two or three decades. Once Clinton is back in office, we've talked about some of the signature things that he was working on, welfare reform, the crime bill, balancing the budget. These are significant things, but it's that second term as president that he also ran into the buzz saw, and the Republicans took him to task and attempted to impeach him. On the surface, the thing that got all the press was Monica Lewinsky and his affair. Once you got beyond that, it was lying under oath. So, having just set up the framework of that, what's your thoughts about the Republicans' attempt to impeach President Clinton?

Thompson: I thought it was foolish. It wasn't going to get past the Senate. So you had an impeachment resolution jammed through the House, but he wasn't going to get convicted in the Senate. I think, whether the Republicans or the Democrats are in power, the notion of impeaching a president requires, it would seem to me, an awful lot. If he committed murder or he committed a treasonous act or a corrupt act or something of that sort…But to impeach him for personal conduct—

DePue: For committing crimes?

Thompson: Well—

DePue: Certainly lying under oath raised that—

Thompson: Yeah, then they should have prosecuted him. I mean, I don't think that's…That's not why they impeached him, for lying under oath. Politicians lie every day, give me a break! They just do. I'm sure half the impeachment committee had committed lies at one time or another. Maybe they weren't perjury, maybe they weren't under oath, but… They impeached him because they thought they could get away with it.[29]

[29] Compare Thompson's view with the "broad construction" offered by former president and then-House minority leader Gerald Ford in 1970: "An impeachable offense is whatever a majority of the House of Representatives considers it to be at a given moment in history." Senate Historical Office, "Impeachment," (https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Senate_Impeachment_Role.htm.)

DePue: So it was purely political. There were no other motives, as far as the Republicans were concerned?

Thompson: I think that's right.

DePue: Was it justified that he was disbarred, that he lost his law license?

Thompson: Well, that's a different standard. He didn't fight very hard to keep it. He probably regarded that as a small price to pay.

DePue: Are you saying that, if you were in the House at that time as a representative, you would have voted against impeachment proceedings?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: How about the violation of constitutional powers, exceeding your constitutional powers, because you thought, as a president, you could get away with it, or as a governor, you could get away with it?

Thompson: Well, you'd be sued.

DePue: But not grounds for impeachment?

Thompson: I don't think conduct for which there is a reasonable argument on both sides is an impeachable offense. Otherwise, Obama would have been impeached long ago, right? I mean, if you listen to the Republicans on Obama's use of his executive power and his failing to carry out congressional measures and all these fights we're currently engaged in today, it's all political. Maybe they're right, and Obama's wrong, but it's not an impeachable offense. The Constitution is not a statute. It doesn't lay out very clearly, in the area of powers…The president is a very powerful person, and it's hard to say where the line is.

DePue: Certainly impeachment has always been a political activity, but as part of the balance of power and the separation of powers in the Constitution.

Thompson: Sure, certainly, certainly. But it's the most extreme power used by one institution against another.

DePue: Let's see what's next on my list. I think we've talked about this one as well, but what was it about Bill Clinton that he didn't seem to suffer any permanent damage to his reputation because of that experience?

Thompson: Because the average person in America is consumed with his own life and his own issues. He doesn't have a lot of time to spend on the affairs of others. You never know, if they're spending time on the affairs of others, how they're going to take it. The American people are not a monolith. As I say, they've got their own concerns. They've got to put a roof over their head; they've got

to educate their kids; they've got to hold down a job. They don't have the luxury of sitting by the radio every day or the television and worrying about what Bill Clinton or anybody else is doing.

DePue: Let's move back to the state of Illinois. In the 1998 gubernatorial election, that was the year that George Ryan was the Republican candidate. I think he rather handily beat Chad Koppie in the primary?

Thompson: Who?

DePue: See. I didn't recognize the name either. Then on the Democrat side—

Thompson: I once ran against a mule skinner in a primary. (DePue laughs) He brought his mule to the Capitol too.

DePue: On the Democratic side, it was a bit more crowded, Glenn Poshard, Roland Burris, John Schmidt, and three others, but the first three were the prime candidates. What did you think about George Ryan as a candidate for governor? He'd been in your administration for eight years.

Thompson: He surprised me. He was a better candidate than I thought he'd be, and he was a smart candidate. When the Democrats chose [Glenn] Poshard, they chose a southerner, when all the Democratic votes were northern or Chicago. He was not in tune with the Democratic Party, north of southern Illinois. He sort of abandoned the positions of the Democratic Party in Illinois. He was too conservative.

George took advantage of that. If you remember that election, George Ryan—an old-time politician from Kankakee, conservative—carried the lakefront wards in Chicago. Who would have thunk? Right?

Poshard was anti-gay, and Ryan didn't say very much about it. But you may be sure his agents were at work, sticking the pins in Glenn. And guns, Poshard was a southern Illinois guy, and he never let go of those roots. So he was kind of anathema up north, on the Democratic side. So he lost.

DePue: Does that mean, if he's anathema to Democrats in the north, they just don't bother to show up and vote in the first place?

Thompson: Mm-hmm, or they voted for George. Stranger things have happened. (DePue laughs)

DePue: He ended up winning, 51 percent to 47.8, which sounds pretty close, but it's a fairly comfortable margin.

Thompson: In gubernatorial politics it's a landslide.

DePue: So this is, by my count, seven elections in a row that the Republicans have won as governor, your four, two for Edgar and one for Ryan.

Thompson: Right. The largest in the nation. We had the longest string of Republican gubernatorial victories in the country.

DePue: And for a state…Would you agree that the state was trending blue, was trending Democrat during those years?

Thompson: It was certainly true on the state legislative side, and it was certainly true with regard to the other state officers, but it was not necessarily true on the national side, until Clinton beat Bush.

DePue: So '92 and on, I think the election has always gone to the Democrat, ever since.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: How do you explain, then, seven elections in a row the Republican gubernatorial candidate won, in a state like this?

Thompson: We nominated moderate candidates. Illinoisans are, for the most part, moderate people.

DePue: I want to finish off today and kind of shift gears and talk about your personal life and some of the personal losses that you had in the 1990s, the people important in your life that passed away during that timeframe. One was your father's death on September 25, 1992.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: And just your opportunity to reflect on that relationship and the impact of that.

Thompson: I was always very close to my dad. As a boy, when he was a practicing physician, I spent a lot of time in his medical office doing my homework, while he was taking care of patients. This was back in the days when doctors did make calls. I would ride with him in the car and wait in the car while he went in and took care of people in their homes. And as a youngster I spent a fair amount of time out on his father's farm, my grandparents' farm. They didn't own it, they were just tenant farmers. But small-town Illinois, back then when I was a kid growing up, was a wonderful place. The farm was a wonderful place for a city kid. Our family has always been close.

Even after I got married, Jayne was always very close to my dad. They had their own thing going. I had the house in Wisconsin, and then my dad built a house in Wisconsin, just a couple hundred feet away, and we spent a lot of time up there, the whole family.

So when he died it was a very difficult thing. He was suddenly taken ill. He had always been a healthy guy. Then they discovered colon cancer, and it had already spread to his lung. Back in those days, '92, they didn't have all the miraculous cures they have now. He started his medical life as a chest physician, so he took one look at the x-ray and he said, "Nope." He started on an anti-cancer treatment for his lung, and a couple days after he started that, he died of a heart attack. It was a merciful thing, because I remember Jayne's mother going through lung cancer, and it was not an easy thing.

He was gone, and I was the oldest kid, so it was my obligation to take care of my mom. He had left her in good financial circumstances. So I just helped her with that and looked after her. That's what the oldest kid used to do, you know. My brother was in Pennsylvania by then; Karen was in the northern suburbs, and Larry was in the western suburbs. So I became the caregiver.

DePue: Were your parents still living in Chicago?

Thompson: Yeah, Oak Park.

DePue: The next one, I'm sure you remember, because it had to be a shock. October 1996, Art Quern[30] dies in plane crash.

Thompson: Boy, that was a shock. You never believe that somebody of Art's age is going to die. He was in many ways the heart and soul of my administration; he was just that valuable and that good. He came from Rockefeller's administration in New York to Springfield, first as cabinet director and then as chief of staff or deputy governor, whatever we called it back then. He was just a wonderful man, a wonderful family, and losing him was really difficult, personally.

DePue: I can tell you, for both Mike Czaplicki and myself, that's the one we regret never having had the opportunity to interview for this project.

Thompson: Yeah. He would have been a good one.

DePue: How about this one, Michael Hasten, who was a partner at Winston & Strawn?

Thompson: Oh yeah, Mike.

DePue: Died August of 1997, only fifty years old.

Thompson: Yeah. He was part of my administration. I think I had him in a couple of jobs, short term projects and other things, before he became chairman of the Commerce Commission, very smart guy, very valuable. And then, as you say,

[30] Arthur F. Quern, 54, died November 1, 1996 in a plane crash at an airfield north of Chicago.

he was at Winston. He was at Winston when I got there. His nephew is there today.

DePue: Oh?

Thompson: Yeah, and worked with me on a couple of cases.

DePue: The next one here, again I would think that you remember pretty well. May 25, 1998, was when Fred Inbau passed away.

Thompson: Yeah, Fred was one of my mentors. I mean, I've had mentors in my life; even at an advanced age, Fred Inbau, first; Bill Bauer, who made me U.S. attorney. But Fred was my criminal law teacher in law school, and then offered me the chance to come and work at the law school when the Ford Foundation gave the school a big grant. I came there to run it, because he had always liked me, even though philosophically he and I were different.

He was all pro-police and prosecution, and I was, in my younger days, (laughs) more liberal, on the defense side. He gave me the chance to author a criminal law book with him and then a second one. The first one was *Substantive Criminal Law*; we each wrote part of that. The second was *Criminal Procedure*, which I remember spending a whole summer in the library writing. (laughs) We taught seminars together, and he was just a fine, fine man. I have his briefcase.

And I got a text the other day from his granddaughter, who said that her daughter, Fred's great-granddaughter, was going to be coming to Chicago to look at law school possibilities and wanted to meet me, so that I could tell her—his great, great granddaughter—stories about him, because she obviously had never known him. I said, "Sure, come along." So that's something I've got to do, is have lunch with his granddaughter and great-granddaughter and tell Fred Inbau stories.

DePue: You said, "I've got to do," but I suspect you're rather looking forward to that.

Thompson: Oh sure, absolutely. He was an amazing guy. He was a wonderful teacher. We formed an organization together, Americans for Effective Law Enforcement. It was kind of a counterweight to the ACLU.

DePue: When was that?

Thompson: Back when I was teaching with him.

DePue: Did you stay in touch with him when you got in the law practice here in town?

Thompson: Oh sure, sure. Yeah, he was an original.

DePue: Sometimes I think we overlook the importance of our mentors.

Thompson: Yeah. I wouldn't have been in the attorney general's office, I don't think, except for the influence of Fred. And I wouldn't have been U.S. attorney, except for the influence of Bauer. And I wouldn't have been governor unless I had been U.S. attorney. So yeah, very important.

DePue: Turning points. Well, Governor, should we finish off today with that, or should we dive into a little bit of conversation about the 2000 presidential campaign?

Thompson: Who ran? (laughs)

DePue: You might remember, George W. Bush and Al Gore, and it was a bit of a contested election that year.

Thompson: Oh lord, yeah. Let's save that for next time.

DePue: Save that for next time. So to entice whoever's looking at this somewhere down the road, next time will start with that. Then we get to talk about 9/11 and the 9/11 Commission and some other issues in your life in the 2000s.

Thompson: Wonderful.

DePue: Looking forward to it, Governor.

(end of interview #26)

Interview with James Thompson

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Interview # 27: May 18, 2016

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Wednesday, May 18, 2016. I am with Governor Jim Thompson in your home here in downtown Chicago. Governor, we're close to closing in on my personal record. This is our twenty-seventh session.

Thompson: Oh my God. (laughs) No wonder I'm tired.

DePue: We'll see how you feel after the next couple of hours, because today's subject is a little bit of politics and a lot about the 9/11 Commission. That's a subject I want to spend quite a bit of time on, because obviously it has great importance historically for the United States in our country's history, and you played a central role, serving on the 9/11 Commission.

But first, as I had warned you last time when we finished off, I wanted to start with a little bit of discussion about the 2000 presidential election season, which was George Bush against Al Gore. And we know how that one ended.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: The reason this is especially relevant—I know you have a personal feeling for all of these—George Bush, your kind of a candidate on the Republican side?

Thompson: Yeah, I liked him. I supported him, endorsed him, helped raise money for him. Winston, as I recall, raised a lot of money for him. In fact, I went down to the governor's mansion in Texas and had breakfast with he and his advisors. I think Karl Rove was at that breakfast. I thought he'd be a good candidate, not because he was a Bush, so much—because he's very different from his father—but because he was a popular governor in Texas; he was a good campaigner, and he was a better name and had a record of activity as a governor than his opponents in the Republican primary—who I don't even recall who they are—had. So to me he was a pretty obvious choice.

DePue: John McCain was his chief opponent.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Steve Forbes. You will remember Steve Forbes and the flat tax.

Thompson: I do.

DePue: And Alan Keyes, whose name is going to come up again later on.[31]

[31] On Keyes' 2004 race against Barack Obama for the U.S. Senate, see James Thompson, interview by Mark DePue, August 9, 2016.

Thompson: (sighs) Oh god, yes, right. Yeah, so it's not hard to see why Bush won. Now, I liked McCain; I've always liked McCain. We have a good relationship, and when he was the candidate, I supported him, raised money for him. But that year, I thought Bush was the stronger candidate.

DePue: Do you recall if you went to the Republican Convention in Philadelphia that year?

Thompson: This is 2000?

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: I think so. It might have been my last convention, because I stopped going. I thought it was time for the young guys to go.

DePue: What did you think of Bush's selection as vice president? He puts Dick Cheney in the head of the search committee for that.

Thompson: (laughs) Damn clever. (laughs) No, that was surprising. But I guess what it said was that the candidates that were put forth for Bush to consider for vice president, in his mind, didn't rank as high as the guy he had chairing the committee. So he went to him and said, "Ah, you're it."

DePue: Do you remember the word that the talking heads all started to use when they found out Dick Cheney was the nominee?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Gravitas.

Thompson: Yeah, right, gravitas. So, long experience, gravitas, Washington trained, to go with this rookie governor from Texas.

DePue: And Governor, we've mentioned two names of people in the Bush administration that liberals loved to vilify.

Thompson: Well, one of them is Bush, (laughs), and one of them is Cheney.

DePue: And the other one is Karl Rove.

Thompson: And Karl Rove, three.

DePue: Your reflection on Rove and Cheney?

Thompson: I liked Cheney. I served on a board, down in Texas, with his wife, so I knew them both pretty well. And Rove, I always thought Rove was a master political manager or handler or senior adviser, whatever title he wanted to assume. I thought he was smart. His reputation down in Texas was something of…I don't know, operating on the fringes, I guess. But hell, it was Texas;

everything down in Texas is on the fringes. It's just a different palate down there.

DePue: On the Democratic side, you've got Al Gore and Joe Lieberman as his vice presidential nod.

Thompson: Yeah. Well, Gore was boring and was subject to gaffes. Bush was too, but Bush's gaffes weren't the same kind of gaffes as Gore. Bush was not claiming to have invented the Internet or talking about the lock box that Social Security receipts were in. Gore let himself get astray in embarrassing ways. Lieberman, I'm not sure why he was on the ticket. I don't think he added anything to the ticket.

DePue: In a political sense?

Thompson: Yeah. I mean, he was a good guy. He was a good senator, but I didn't see A) how he added anything politically, and B) I didn't see him as someone who could take over the presidency if something happened to Gore.

DePue: You would say that for Cheney though? Because Cheney wasn't really adding anything politically, being from Wyoming. That's a safe Republican state.

Thompson: Right. Actually, they had to transfer his residence from Texas to Wyoming to get around the Constitution, which forbids the two candidates from the same state. But Cheney was an experienced guy. Whether you agreed with his policies or not, he certainly understood the power of Washington and how to run a government.

DePue: Let's fast forward to election night. Anybody who pays attention to American politics is transfixed by watching the results come in state by state, seeing how states go. And Florida is an interesting place because the vast majority of the state is in one time zone, and the panhandle, I believe, is in another time zone. But early in the evening the networks were calling Florida for Gore. And then the networks withdrew that call and decided it was too close to call, and only 2:30 in the morning, Eastern Time—1:30, I guess, Central Standard Time—they decided to declare Florida for Bush. But it was an incredibly close vote, close enough that it required a recount.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So, I think I'll get out of your way and turn it over to you here.

Thompson: Plumbing the depths of my recollection, it obviously was a fascinating election to us political junkies, and obviously we all followed it really closely. Then, when the recount began and the lawyers began flocking to Florida, as a lawyer it made it a doubly interesting thing. It was fun to watch the interplay between the recount in different sections of the state, one attitude in Miami and another attitude in the panhandle or the more Republican areas of Florida,

and the intervention of the Florida Supreme Court. It certainly looked like the Florida Supreme Court was sympathetic to Gore. It was a very liberal court in other matters, so it perhaps is not surprising that they seemed to favor Gore and, by their rulings, helped Gore.

DePue: Do you recall specifically how the rulings helped Gore?

Thompson: In terms of how the recount should be conducted and what kind of ballots should be counted or not counted. It just was a legal challenge.

DePue: Wasn't one of the issues whether or not Florida's own election law should be followed closely or other considerations be taken into account?

Thompson: Yeah, see it was hard because, as I recall it, this was the first time in Florida's history that this kind of question had arisen, the hanging chads and the necessity to count and count again, and who was going to do the counting, and how close watchers could be to the counting, and skirmishes in state court in different counties.

So the Bush people finally decided that the only way they were going to bring this to a conclusion was to go to the U.S. Supreme Court, which they did. There was a quick argument in the U.S. Supreme Court, a quick decision with an opinion, which stated plainly that this opinion was good for this case and this case only (laughs) and provoked just vigorous dissents in the U.S. Supreme Court. Then the case was over. The U.S. Supreme Court stopped the recount.

It was like, in a way, what happened in my '82 election, when the Illinois Supreme Court stopped the attempt to recount. We never had a recount, but the Illinois Supreme Court, in a 4–3 decision, decided that the recount statute was unconstitutional and stopped it. That gave me the victory, because I was ahead in the vote count.

DePue: By a one vote margin in the Illinois Supreme Court.

Thompson: Yes. But the two opinions were different. The Illinois Supreme Court did not say this opinion is for this case only and never to be followed again, like the U.S. Supreme Court.

DePue: I'm talking to a partisan obviously, but did the U.S. Supreme Court make the right call?

Thompson: I thought the way the Florida Supreme Court was handling the recount was wrong. I think they were biased, and the Supreme Court of the United States putting a stop to it didn't bother me.

DePue: With Florida going to Bush, that gave him 271 electoral votes. But Gore and Lieberman polled more votes than Bush and Cheney did.

Thompson: Right. And that's happened before, and that's happened since. That's the effect of the Electoral College, so that can happen. You can win a state by a tremendous margin and get X number of electoral votes, and your opponent can win another state by a tiny margin and get X number of electoral votes. And if you combine the two states' popular votes, one would be ahead, and if you combine the electoral votes, the other would be ahead.

DePue: Elections like 2000, in the United States, caused lots of people to say, "Is it time to reform our Electoral College system?" What do you think?

Thompson: I wouldn't be offended if we abolished the Electoral College and just did a straight popular vote. But remember that the Electoral College was there to, in part, protect small states, just the way each state gets two senators protects the small states.

I may be more offended by the Senate rule than I am by the Electoral College rule. You can get a tiny state, which by population only gets one U.S. representative, but they get two senators. It skews the way the Senate works, because while a lot of the issues around seniority in the Senate have changed, there's still enough that a senator who is continuously reelected from a small state can exercise an outsized influence in the Senate, for good or ill.

DePue: So that would be a rule that you would consider changing?

Thompson: No, not me. See, I'm eighty years old; (DePue laughs) I'm sitting in my living room in Chicago, and I don't have any real deep interest in either one. And I certainly have no power to effect change. So I'm going to let it go.

DePue: But the whole Electoral College system and the two senators for each state and trying to carve out power for some of the smaller states, it's all part of that grand compromise the country started with.

Thompson: Yes, exactly right.

DePue: It doesn't seem like we have any grand compromises here recently; does it?

Thompson: No, no, we don't have any grand compromises. Illinois doesn't have a budget. The United States doesn't have a budget, hasn't had a budget for a long time; it's all been by continuing resolution. I don't see many compromises.

DePue: I don't want to get too deeply into this presidential year, but since we're skirting this area anyway, what are your comments on an issue that has come up in both Republican and Democratic primaries because of the oversized role of superdelegates and how each state does things differently, especially now that Hillary Clinton seems to have a huge advantage, because of her lock on the superdelegates?

Thompson: I don't think the superdelegates come about as a result of anything done by the state. That's party rule. Democrats have decided to create this category of superdelegate.

DePue: Yeah, I should have qualified, the parties in each separate state.

Thompson: But the Democratic superdelegate rule is a national rule. The real issue involving the states is how they conduct their primaries. Some states are open primaries, anybody can vote in the Republican primary. Some states are closed primaries, only Republicans can vote in the Republican primary. Some states award their delegates by congressional districts. Some are winner take all. It's a really interesting mix, when you take into account fifty states. You really have to have a smart staff working months ahead of the primary to make sure that you're complying with all the rules, that you understand all the rules, that you're complying with them, and that you know how to select your delegates for the ballot or the convention; some of them are conventions.

Some states have a primary vote that the public or party affiliates can vote in, and yet it doesn't affect any delegate selection, because the delegates are still selected by county and then state organizations. That happened to Trump when he might have won a state, but Cruz was smart enough to go in there and control the delegate selection; that was post primary, and there was a lot of controversy about that, same thing on the Democratic side.

DePue: So is it time for reform of that? The Constitution is pretty clear; those are all decision of the parties, as you said and each one of the states.

Thompson: Yeah, I think it would really be unsettling for the federal government, either through legislation or a constitutional enactment, to try and federalize the way delegates to national party conventions are selected. The states can regulate it, but in the end, a convention is a party apparatus not a governmental apparatus. So I don't think it's going to change, except by state action.

DePue: It certainly has gotten plenty of dialogue this political season.

Thompson: It certainly has. It's just the result of a multitude of candidates and their ability to navigate the selection rules.

DePue: Last time, after we met, you expressed the desire to talk a little bit more about Navy Pier. So we're changing the subject entirely, probably much to your relief. I think we've talked about it briefly, but I know you want to say a few more words about Navy Pier.

Thompson: Yeah, let me just—

(pause in recording)

DePue: We're back.

Thompson: I don't know how much I told you about Navy Pier before or what I said, but just let me give you a brief outline, so the record is clear. I attended the University of Illinois at Navy Pier for two years, following graduation from high school. And every time I passed the pier in later years, I could see this facility slowly sliding into the lake [Lake Michigan]. I thought that was a waste.

I had tried to interest Mayor Daley in a state park in Chicago that would have begun at Navy Pier and included the pier, then run up Lake Shore Drive and then over Chicago Avenue, including the Armory, which we later gave to the Museum of Contemporary Art. He didn't bite on that, because I think he probably thought, "Oh, Thompson's trying to take over this stretch of land within the city of Chicago, and I don't need any state park here."

So I tried another tack. I went back to him, and I said, "How about if I get the legislature to appropriate the money to restore Navy Pier and turn it into a place where a lot of people will visit and spend money? The state will pay for it, but it will be managed under the McCormick Place board, and we'll set it up so that you, Mayor, get to name the chairman of the board, and I, the governor, get to name the executive director." I had that post in mind for Jim Reilly, who was formerly my legislative aide and then my chief of staff.[32] Well, that one he agreed to.

So I went to the legislature. In those days—I don't know how it is now; maybe it's still a custom; maybe it's not—on the final day of the session, the four leaders and the governor would gather in the governor's office, and each person would present a list of his "personals." Madigan had streets and sewers and stuff like that for his ward and other stuff within his district. Pate and Lee had DuPage County things. Rock had a miscellaneous list. I handed over mine, and number one was $150 million to restore Navy Pier in Chicago.

Now, luckily for me, it was a good budget year, and there was only one question. Pate said to me, "One hundred and fifty million dollars as a personal?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Oh, okay." (both laugh) So they put it in a bill and passed it, and we had the restoration of Navy Pier.

I'm pleased to say it was the largest, most visited place in the city of Chicago. I kept insisting that the pier was within a day's drive of fifty million people in the Midwest. It still continues to be, today, the most visited place in the city of Chicago. And now they're redoing it, bigger Ferris wheel, children's museum, a hotel that's new out there, and I think the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre [is] out there too. But it's just an extraordinary place, and a new generation of management has decided to invest millions more.

[32] Jim Reilly, interview by Mark DePue, August 11, 2009.

DePue: And at the base of the pier are a couple high-rise apartment complexes that have got to be among the best places to live in Chicago, I would say.

Thompson: Oh yeah, absolutely. You know me; I like to build things, right? So doing the pier where I went to school was personal. It's like the White Sox stadium; it's like McCormick Place, one of which I've built; it's stuff I've built all over the state, university campuses…It's just my thing.

DePue:

From his living room, Thompson had a view of Navy Pier; its Ferris wheel is visible behind the flags flying above Northwestern University's medical school. This wheel was replaced in 2016 by the larger Centennial Wheel. Photo by Mike Czaplicki, January 30, 2014.

I can see why you wanted to go back and revisit that subject.

Thompson: (laughs) Yeah.

DePue: Governor, we have now gotten to the point where I wanted to talk about national security issues.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: And that might sound like a curious thing to the outsider, that here I am talking to the former governor of Illinois about national security. I wanted to start with 1989. I'm very unclear about this, but as I understand, George H. W. Bush appointed you to be chair of the Intelligence Oversight Board.

Thompson: Yes, that's true.

DePue: And tell me, why you and what that is?

Thompson: The President's Intelligence Oversight Board, PIOB, was a three-man board created by President George H. W. Bush to oversee all the intelligence agencies of the United States, to make sure that in their actions they were complying with the Constitution and laws of the United States. That was the mission.

He asked me to chair it, I suppose because I had been extraordinarily helpful to him in his election campaign and because I was a former prosecutor at both the state, local, and national level. Given that background, it's probably not surprising that he did that. I was tremendously honored to do it.

It came at an interesting time in the life of our nation, because during that time we had Desert Storm. So I got to see, at a pretty close watch, how the intelligence agencies worked in that context of war, along with the ability to use technology to implement a war effort in a way that never existed before. We had satellites with cameras that could, from hundreds of thousands of feet in the air, focus on a license plate on the ground, tell you where trucks were and where they weren't. So it was fascinating. We got to see a lot of that.

Within the intelligence community, the agencies—the CIA, the FBI, the Defense Intelligence Agency, there must have been ten of them—all knew that the president, through this commission, was keeping a watch out for any illegal activities by our nation's intelligence agencies.

We had pretty good power. We had the power to call in anybody in the administration. We had an office in the Old Executive Office Building, now the Eisenhower Building, right next to the White House. That was pretty neat, a fireplace. I had a diplomatic passport. I had a CIA safe in the basement of my house.

DePue: Here in Chicago?

Thompson: Yeah. And I had access to the president's mess, which I thought was pretty cool.

DePue: In the White House?

Thompson: In the White House, back before Clinton opened it up to everybody in the White House. You could go there for lunch.

DePue: Is there a tunnel between the office buildings?

Thompson: No. When I had lunch in the mess, I would sit at the president's table, because he rarely ate there. But his top aides and cabinet members and senators and foreign dignitaries all got to the mess. They had a brass nameplate, with my name on it, put on the table. I thought, This is really something. (laughs)

DePue: Did they have Governor Thompson?

Thompson: Yeah. So there I am, sitting at the president's table, with my own nameplate, being served lunch by the Filipino stewards who served the president. Yeah, this is pretty good. It was a good job.

DePue: I assume that it wasn't just the meal of the day, that you had some choice in what you got to eat.

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: How was the food in the White House?

Thompson: It was good. And you could invite guests.

DePue: Oh.

Thompson: That was pretty cool too, to call somebody up and say, "Hey, you want to have lunch at the White House?" Hmm.

DePue: How big a staff did you have?

Thompson: Maybe two or three, all of whom were loaned by other agencies, so we didn't add to the cost of government to have this commission.

DePue: How often were you out in D.C.? How often did you do this job?

Thompson: I think it was pretty close to monthly.

DePue: I'm trying to comprehend though how this works. You've got a tiny staff; you're only out there once a month for a couple of days, whatever, and yet you're supposed to oversee all these intelligence agencies who are masters at hiding things.

Thompson: Yeah, I know.

DePue: So how did that work?

Thompson: Just like you described.

DePue: (laughs) You had a chance, in the inside, to see the cooperation, or maybe the lack thereof, of the various intelligence agencies.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And this is kind of jumping ahead ten, fifteen years.

Thompson: That was sort of a prelude to what I did later.

DePue: But at the time, what was your impression of that?

Thompson: Our role at PIOB really didn't deal with the issue of whether agencies were cooperating with their brother agencies. That was not part of our task. We were concerned with whether, in the carrying out of their duties, they violated the law or the Constitution. We were a disciplinary sort of agency, and we had, obviously, the power of the president behind us, because it was his personal commission. He created it. But we were not concerned at that time with how the agencies worked together. We saw some of that, but it was not within our purview to do anything about it.

DePue: Do you remember any specific issues or incidents that came up?

Thompson: No, but it was more observing how agencies worked or didn't work together. It was pretty obvious that, what were later described as "silos," existed.

DePue: Not in that respect, but just issues that dealt with whether or not they were following the law, whether or not these things that they were doing were constitutional.

Thompson: Yeah, but I can't tell you.

DePue: Oh, darn it.

Thompson: (laughs) I don't want to have to kill you.

DePue: (laughs) How long did you serve on that board?

Thompson: Through the Bush administration and then through the first couple of months of the Clinton administration. It's pretty amusing—

DePue: So this is post-governor years, as well?

Thompson: Yeah. Clinton was looking for something to give Gore to do, right? And Gore was supposed to help streamline government. So Gore's big idea was to take the President's Intelligence Oversight Board and combine it with the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, PFIAB, which was a much larger committee and had all these distinguished people sitting on it.

Gore proudly announced, a couple of months into their term, that by combining PFIAB and PIOB they were saving all this money. That's how it was portrayed. Well, they weren't saving any money, because these were all loaned staff, and they didn't get fired. They went back to their own agencies, and PFIAB hired a new person. So they spent money, not saved money. But that was political, and I understood it.

Right after the president was elected, he held a lunch in the Library of Congress for all the governors that he had served with. Obviously, I had served with Clinton and was two seats down in the Governors' Council, and we traded "young governor" roles. He liked me, and I liked him. So I

said, "Mr. President, you know I'm the chairman of the President's Intelligence Oversight Board, and I'd be pleased to continue in that position under your administration." (laughing) And he said, "Oh, Jim"—He know what they were going to do, I think— "when you're through with all of that, come back, and I'll give you a real job." And of course, since it was now going to be combined with PFIAB, and he had appointments to make from his own party and his own acquaintances to PFIAB, I wasn't going to get there. And besides, the president threw open the White House mess to all the staff in the White House. So it wasn't what it was. (both laugh)

DePue: You kind of liked that perk of going to the president's mess.

Thompson: It was a great perk. If you had the president's table in the president's mess, and you had an office next to the White House, and you had a diplomatic passport, which means you don't go through customs, and you had a CIA safe, what the hell? Sure, I was sorry to see that go. But we did good work on PIOB.

DePue: So did President Clinton find another job for you there, Governor?

Thompson: No, he never did. But we're still friends.

DePue: If anybody should understand the way political patronage works, you would, right?

Thompson: I would.

DePue: I assumed that you weren't in this position too much beyond the Bush years, but I have a list of some of the things that happened in the international scene, just to get your reflections on it. If you don't have any reflections, that's fine, but this is the prelude to coming up to 9/11 itself. This is one before your tenure, but the Lockerbie bombing of Pan Am Flight 103; 259 died, and Libya was very much tied to that one eventually.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: In 1992-93, about the timeframe you were handing things over, the U.S. involvement in Somalia. What did you think about that?

Thompson: I didn't really get interested at that point with those two things. Later on, yes, I got interested, but not with those two.

DePue: So in retrospect, looking back. How about February 26, 1993—and you're out of this position by that time—the World Trade Center bombing, the first time.

Thompson: Yeah, that was an extraordinary thing. It proved that foreign-directed terrorism could exist in the United States right under our noses, and we weren't prepared. I think that was pretty clear.

DePue: A couple of years later, April 19, 1995, the Oklahoma City bombing, 168 died.

Thompson: As they later proved, that was the act of one person, a domestic person, not related to international terrorism. He was sort of…I guess you would call him insane. That can happen anytime by…I mean, though the numbers aren't comparable, that's the kind of act that occurs when a gunman goes into a theatre and starts shooting people or goes into a school and starts shooting school kids. It's the act of one person, usually mentally disturbed or mentally incompetent, for his own private reasons.

I don't think you can compare Oklahoma City with the World Trade Center, except to say that these kinds of events made it pretty clear that we had to do something in the area of prevention and intelligence gathering and more physical means to protect buildings or infrastructure. So you started seeing these concrete pillars put in front of a federal courthouse—we've got that in Chicago—more policemen watching over what they called "hotspots." The nation's attitude changed, and the federal government's attitude changed. It had been demonstrated that either foreign terrorists or individual mad men in the United States could injure you very badly.

DePue: I'm going to list two or three here now, June 1996, the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia, twenty were killed in that; August of 1998, the U.S. Embassies in Tanzania and Kenya were both bombed, 224 killed, and thousands were injured; and then, October of 2000, the attack on the U.S.S. Cole in the port of Aden, Yemen, and seventeen American sailors were killed.

Thompson: Yeah, and now we begin to see Al-Qaeda at work. I always thought President Clinton made a mistake in not responding to the bombing of the Cole. We knew pretty clearly, not too long after the event, that it was an Al-Qaeda job, with orders coming from Afghanistan. I always wondered whether, if we had gone in to Afghanistan to oust Al-Qaeda and killed or captured leadership, whether we could have prevented 9/11. We'll never know. But I thought we should have responded in that fashion to the Cole bombing.

I think President Clinton was in a position where, for political reasons, he did not want to respond, because he was having so much problems of his own it would have seemed, or so they thought, a move to cover what was going on in Washington by saying, "Okay, now we're at war; we've got to stick together." I think that's probably what happened on the political side. So we didn't take steps to respond to Al-Qaeda until 9/11, in any meaningful way.

DePue: I'm going to violate my own rule and jump ahead just a little bit (Thompson laughs) and quote what was said in the 9/11 Commission Report about these series of things. "The U.S. government took the threat of Al-Qaeda seriously,

but not in the sense of mustering anything like the kind of effort that would be gathered to confront an enemy of the first, second, or even third rank."

Thompson: Right, it's true.

DePue: That's essentially what you had just been talking about.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Governor, the next question is going to be a very personal question for you. We all remember the events of 9/11. I want you to walk me through your experiences, your memories from that day.

Thompson: That morning, I was getting prepared for work, and I guess there was a radio or television report that a plane had crashed in to a World Trade tower. At first it wasn't clear whether this was deliberate or accidental. But then the second plane hit the second tower, and it was pretty clear that this was an act of sabotage or terrorism on a grand scale. I think I heard about the first plane as I was getting ready, and I heard about the second plane as I was climbing into my car.

I went to the office, and Jim Neis and I talked. We decided, since we didn't know whether this was the end of it or not, we decided to close the office. That was a pretty common reaction in the business community that morning. People were closing offices, closing buildings. There was a lot more police presence in the streets. The thing I remember most clearly was, as I was preparing to go home, a number of my young assistants asked if they could go home with me. They didn't want to be alone on this morning. So I came home with four or five people who work for me.

DePue: Were you living here at the time?

Thompson: Yeah, not in this building, but in Chicago, on a street a couple of blocks from here. For the rest of the day and into the early evening, we all sat huddled around the television set. Mrs. Thompson fed us, but we didn't move. It was such a horrifying event. Finally, as it became clear what was going on and that it was not going to be followed by anything bad in Chicago, the guys went home. But I thought that was an extraordinary thing, the feeling that everybody wanted to be together in the same room. They didn't want to go home by themselves; now these are grown men. I mean, it was such an extraordinary event.

About a week later, John Frier and I went down to Bloomington to a flea market where his dad had set up a booth. I didn't think there would be very many people there, given what had occurred a week before. That place was jammed. I thought to myself, This is another manifestation of what happened to me in my office. People wanted to gather together, as though there were safety in numbers.

And on the drive down from Chicago to Bloomington, we continually passed automobiles; they were flying the American flag. In the flea market, people were buying American flags and wearing them in their buttonholes. It was kind of extraordinary, the country coming together in a patriotic way that you ordinarily wouldn't see, except for singing the "Star Spangled Banner" at a ball game or something like that. I'll never forget that; it's just seared into my memory.

DePue: Did you have a chance to watch the president's address, in the cathedral in Washington, D.C.?

Thompson: Yes. This was a time when Americans, regardless of party or age or ethnicity or any of the other culturally dividing things, really did seem to come together.

DePue: How well do you think President Bush did in rallying the country?

Thompson: I thought he did very well. Of course, the image that stuck in everybody's mind and in the mind of the press was the bullhorn response on the ruins of the towers. He was the tough leader. And he was a natural kind of guy to respond to this; that was just his manner.

DePue: Were you reflecting back on the election just a year before, saying boy, we're lucky that it was Bush?

Thompson: No, not really. (sighs) I take them as they come, and I'm sure whoever had been president at the time would have responded just as forcefully. They'd just have a different manner, you know. Here you had a Texan; he's going to have a different manner than somebody from the East Coast.

DePue: What's your reaction to his comment early after this, as he's trying to rally support, he says, "You're either with us or against us."

Thompson: Yeah, that's exactly what he should have said. You're dealing with foreign countries who have their own political issues, who have their own domestic problems, who have their own culture and politics. At a time like that, if you want to rally the free nations of the world, you can't pause for them to fine tune their response based, in part at least, on what's going on in their own country. And since you're the leader of the free world, and you're the most powerful military in the world, that's exactly what he should have said, "You're either with us or you're against us."

DePue: You're the former Governor of the state of Illinois, 9/11 happens, and I'm assuming that everybody evacuated your office building, because there's an assumption that's a threat.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: What other threats, potential facilities in Illinois, were right at the top of the list?

Thompson: I have my own notions, and I'm sure the police department has their own notions; other political leaders have their notions. The United States is an open country. Once you get past our borders—and even that's a challenge for the country—there's no way in the world that you can protect every facility from terrorist attacks. I'll just list them. Your electric utilities, you could seriously cripple a state if you took out a lot of the electrical facilities; our modes of transportation, our super highways, our bridges, our mass transit in the city of Chicago, that was an immediate worry, because people there are herded together in a container, a steel container, and if there's a bomb on a train, you're trapped; oil pipelines that sit there on the surface and go across hundreds of miles of barren territory.

I guess it was after my work on the 9/11 Commission, and I had more time to think about this and reflect on it and listen to others on the Commission and others in government, who testified before the Commission, there's even more. I remember one that I always felt very strongly about that nobody else paid much attention to. If you were a terrorist, and you had confederates in other cities, let's say you had six terrorists in six different cities, all you had to do was fill a bulb with a poison and run it up your sleeve, and go through a supermarket and pause over the produce section and (makes a dripping noise).

People wouldn't see that; they would think you were examining the produce. You could pick up a tomato or whatever and put it back down, but in the meantime you were spraying. People would start becoming ill or dying in six cities across the nation at about the same time. You'd have mass panic. People would be afraid to go to the grocery store once they figured out that the food had been poisoned by terrorists. People would be afraid to buy food that wasn't in a can or a bottle. That would cause mass panic. I used to give speeches, listing the things that were targets for terrorists in an open country.

Well, just the other day in Chicago, somebody was spraying something on produce, and people got sick, and I thought, I was right. But we are; we are just an extraordinarily open country, and it would be extremely, extremely difficult to protect any of our facilities. Or with the current work of the terrorists, ISIS, in Europe, demonstrating that bombs at stadiums, good lord. And [there's] the irony of what happened in Europe the other day, when they found this suspected bomb at a soccer match and evacuated the stadium and called off the game. It turned out that it was a practice bomb, left over from a practice of the security people a day or two before. They forgot to pick up this one.

But it just shows you A) how alert we've become, and B) there's still no way to protect all these things, no way, especially against people who are

willing to die, you know? A guy's walking around with a vest full of explosives, and he walks into a football stadium or something like that, and he's going to blow himself up to accomplish the killing of others.

DePue: And in the case of 9/11, there were nineteen of them that were willing to die.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: That's hard for Americans to comprehend, as you suggest.

Thompson: Exactly. It's also an analogous issue of how do you fight a war against soldiers on the other side who are not in uniform? They're in civilian dress; they're wearing bombs under their vest; they're willing to die. It's not like fighting the armed forces of another country, both of those forces operating on the assumption they don't want to die; they just want to kill the other people.

DePue: That gets us to the point of the 9/11 Commission. How did you find out that you were under consideration?

Thompson: Wait, one more.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We're back at it. Governor, the 9/11 Commission, how were you involved with that?

Thompson: I was either at my office or my home when the phone rang, and I was told that the Speaker [Dennis Hastert] wanted to talk to me. I said, "Sure." Then he got on, and he said, "Hey, Jim, I'm just coming back from a NATO conference. I'm over the Atlantic Ocean, but I've got an appointment to the 9/11 Commission, and I want you to take the seat." I said, "Certainly, absolutely, I'll do it." It was as simple as that.

DePue: How long after the events of 9/11 did this occur, do you recall?

Thompson: No. There was some delay in getting the commission together, so it wasn't immediately after. Congress had to pass the legislation establishing the commission. There was a false start at the beginning, because they were supposed to name a former senator, who was then in private practice, as the chairman and [another as] the deputy chairman, Republican, Democrat. [Henry] Kissinger was going to be the other. So Kissinger and this senator—gosh, I wish I could remember his name; it will come to me [it was George Mitchell] —were going to be the chairs.

The first question that was raised was, "They're both in private practice. Kissinger is a consultant and the senator…" This was the senator who sort of brought peace to Ireland.

DePue: I don't think I can help you with that one.

Thompson: It'll come. Anyway, the question started arising, "Well, how do we know they don't have conflicts? They will have to give the names of their clients." Well, (laughs) that settled that. Neither the senator nor Kissinger were willing to name their clients in order to take this position. So they had to come up with a new chair and deputy chair, and they eventually did. And they [the chair and deputy chair] were very able. Then the process of naming the other members of the Commission took place. The Speaker got a seat, so I got that seat. Then we had to wait for the FBI investigations, because you needed to have a top secret clearance.

DePue: You didn't already have one previously?

Thompson: I did, but they had to update it. I had it from the President's Intelligence Oversight Board, but that was some years ago, so they had to update it on the intervening years. Good lord, talk about complicated, "List all the foreign travel you've done, where and when, and list all your clients, on and on and on. Then we had to meet only in a SCIF [sensitive compartmented information facility], which is a secure facility. And we had to get offices in Washington; we had to hire staff. One of the offices at the office complex we were in had to be a SCIF. You had to turn in your cell phones at the door. So it was pretty rigorous, in terms of security.

DePue: Does that mean you're not going to go over to the White House and eat in the president's mess?

Thompson: No, those days were gone. Those days were gone.

DePue: Now this is certainly not the first commission that Congress had set up for something like that. One of the most famous ones dealt with the JFK assassination.

Thompson: The Warren Commission.

DePue: What was the legislated purpose of the commission?

Thompson: The purpose was to reinvestigate what led to 9/11. That was the first purpose. That meant digging into history. The second purpose was to propose measures that would strengthen our security going forward, including recommendations for how agencies of government acted.

DePue: So this includes practically the entire federal government, doesn't it?

Thompson: It does.

DePue: The president and the president's administration, previous and present?

Thompson: Correct. Yes, Congress.

DePue: All those intelligence agencies you had dealt with before?

Thompson: All those intelligence agencies, all twelve or fifteen of them, however many of them there were, and there were a lot.

DePue: This is a nonpartisan group, correct?

Thompson: It is a bipartisan group.

DePue: A bipartisan group. The task was something that has all kinds of political implications; does it not?

Thompson: Absolutely, because you were, in one sense, assessing blame or absolving people of blame on the historical side. And, on the going forward side, you were preparing recommendations for action, which raised **a lot** of political questions.

DePue: Now, much of what you're being asked to do is the normal purview of historians. Why was it important, do you think, to assess blame?

Thompson: We had historians on staff. We had a superb staff, which included historians. The momentum behind the commission was driven in large part by the families of the 9/11 victims. They were organized, and they were together. They came to Washington frequently, and they lobbied until they got the 9/11 Commission. Then they sat in front of us at every public meeting, just to make sure that we were doing it right. They'd come in with posters of their dead children or spouses, and they'd sit there holding them throughout the public meeting.

After we were appointed and started up and hired a staff and got an office and began our investigations, we ran into, at one point, the expiration of time and budget for the commission. There was some sentiment in Washington to end it. But again the families stepped up and just were determined that we would not only be renewed, but given the resources we needed for the investigation.

And we got a champion, John McCain. The person that had to say "yes" to the money and the new deadline was the Speaker [Dennis Hastert], because the Senate had already passed both. He was not exactly sure whether he and his people wanted this to continue much. Before we went to see the Speaker—I think there were two of us, me because I knew the Speaker, and somebody else on the commission, I forget, maybe a Democrat, because we usually went to things in pairs—McCain said to me, "You go tell the Speaker that if this isn't done, there will be no highway bill," which of course was a big, big deal.

So I'm sent as part of my mission to go beard the Speaker in his office and say, "Uh, the Senator wanted me to tell you that, unless this is done, there will be no highway bill." I'm saying this with "ugh." (both laugh) But he got the message, so they passed it.

DePue: And the highway bill was something that affects everybody.

Thompson: **Everybody,** yes, exactly. He was going to hold it up in the Senate.

DePue: Your comments about the families is fascinating to me. I guess I never really thought about that dimension of it, but you're talking about families of people who worked every day in the twin towers or in the Pentagon.

Thompson: Yes, correct.

DePue: These are—

Thompson: These are the survivors, the mothers, the fathers, the sisters, the brothers, the husbands, the wives.

DePue: I would believe it's an incredibly talented group of people, as well as incredibly focused through the whole process.

Thompson: Absolutely. They would not take no for an answer. They had a lot of suggestions about how we should be doing what we were doing. Not all of them were acceptable to us, but… We had to work on two levels. 1) We had to carry out our task that we were given by the legislation; and 2) while much of our work was done in secret, we did have public meetings from time to time, and there was a lot of press focus.

I think it was Condoleezza Rice [then national security adviser, who came and testified]. The photographers were down on the floor, between the stage and the witness table. When she came in [and] raised her hand—because everybody was sworn—there was so many clicks of the cameras that you would have thought it was a cicada infestation. I mean, it was just stunning, maybe thirty cameramen. And in the back row there were the television cameras. There was just immense public interest, immense press coverage, both print and television and radio. Foreign correspondents from other countries attended the hearings and sent reporters.

So, we were operating with the rest of the government over here, the American public over here, and the families here. We were the object of immense focus; it's fair to say.

DePue: You've had a long career in government and private business. You've taken cases to the U.S. Supreme Court and the state Supreme Court. You've had high profile court cases as a prosecutor and as a defender. Was there anything like this in your experience?

Thompson: No, no, not at all. So different from the President's Intelligence Oversight Board, which had no public function at all. This was monumental. One of the commissioners once said—I forget who it was, but we all agreed immediately that he was right—"We have the weight of history on our shoulders." We all agreed that that was true, and it was a reminder of how we had all decided to conduct ourselves.

Now you have on this commission, an equal number of Republicans and Democrats, and not theoretical people, partisans. I mean, I ran for election four times as a partisan and was involved in presidential campaigns. Tom Kean, the chair, was a governor. Lee Hamilton was, in his earlier days, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Rick Ben-Veniste was a student of mine, as it turned out. (DePue laughs) He had now come into his own career, but he was a student of mine at Northwestern, when I was teaching; he was a famous Watergate prosecutor. Bob Kerrey was a senator from Nebraska. Fred Fielding had been White House Counsel a couple of times, I think, immensely influential lawyer in Washington, a Republican. John Lehman had been secretary of the navy. Jamie Gorelick had been a Democratic appointee in the Justice Department. Timmy Roemer was a congressman from Indiana. Slade Gorton was a former senator from Washington State.

You had an equal number of Republicans and Democrats, and we all thought this may be the most important thing we'll ever do in our lives and that we would not let partisanship take hold. We would operate in a bipartisan fashion, even though we were, in one form or another, partisans politically. The result was, because of the strength of character of these commissioners and that resolve, we never took a vote where there was a dissent. All our decisions were unanimous, and the report has no dissent, no footnotes explaining that there were other views, blah, blah, blah, which is an extraordinary achievement, I think, looking at the size of this and looking at the material we looked at and the conclusions we came to. So it was different than anything I'd ever done in my life.

DePue: How often did the group meet?

Thompson: Probably monthly. It was a lot of work, supervising a staff that large. We must have had twenty-five to thirty members of the staff.

DePue: I need to understand better how the commission process worked, because you do have that staff, and I can't imagine that the committee wrote this, rather that there were staffers that probably wrote it and after long discussions. But what was the staff doing, and what was your connection with—

Thompson: The staff was carrying out investigations at our direction. The staff was combing millions of documents to see where they were relevant. The staff was setting up the public hearings and the witnesses who would testify. We had

some pretty high powered witnesses, the president of the United States, the vice president of the United States, the former president of the United States, the director of the CIA; it was pretty top shelf.

To come to a satisfactory resolution about what happened at 9/11 and why it happened—the "why" was as important as the happening—and then to take what we learned from that and make recommendations to the future to try and make the nation safer—not safe, but safer—it's a pretty monumental task.

DePue: Was there something specific that you brought to this commission and your particular contributions that you'd like to emphasize?

Thompson: On occasion, they would send me to go argue with the president's counsel about… I mean, this was not easy. We would ask the White House for documents that they didn't necessarily want to give us, and the lead player in that, from the White House, was the White House counsel.

DePue: Do you remember the name?

Thompson: No. [It was] the lawyer from Texas that the president wanted to put on the Supreme Court.

DePue: I can't remember the name.

Thompson: Hispanic name.

DePue: Alberto Gonzales?

Thompson: Yeah. So we'd get into arguments with the White House about, we need these papers, and we want them, and here's why. They'd back up and were not really excited to give us some things, as you can imagine. Their job is to protect the president. Their job is to protect the office of the president, not only this president but future presidents. That's their first duty.

DePue: Executive privilege.

Thompson: Yeah. But we had a mission that was commanded by legislation, signed by the president. So we were not going to be swayed by those kind of arguments now. You can either get into a public confrontation, or you can do it through back channels. I would sometimes be deputized to go to the White House and talk to the White House counsel, sometimes alone, sometimes with Fred Fielding, who was a former White House counsel. And since this was a Republican administration, they weren't sending Democrats over there; they send two Republicans. (laughs) We'd go in there and argue with them, and say, "Hey, if you want to have a public fight about this, we'll have a public fight about this. But you're going to lose, and you're going to look bad politically." Eventually we got what we needed. So I was used on some of those subterranean missions.

Then, at the public hearings, every commissioner had the chance to ask questions of the witness. There was kind of a joke that, at the public hearings, they would put me in a chair next to Bob Kerrey, whose method of asking questions was somewhat different. He would start, and five minutes later he hadn't finished the question. (both laugh) And the witness is sitting there looking absolutely puzzled, and the other commissioners are (whispering) "Thompson." It was my job to keep Kerrey on track with his method of questioning.

DePue: The old prosecutor skills come into play then, huh?

Thompson: (laughs) Oh yeah. You look at this group, and it is an immensely talented group, oh boy. The two chairs, Tom Kean, the chair and Lee Hamilton, the deputy, from the beginning—and this was one of the real reasons why we stayed in a bipartisan fashion—Tom Kean made it clear that, though he was the chairman, he regarded Lee Hamilton as a co-chairman, not a deputy chairman, and the two would always act together. And they did.

With that kind of discipline from the top, it was really going to be difficult for the rest of the commission to be an outlier. I mean, we had our moments, because you can't come to a task like that with completely shedding your background. As I say, I was a prosecutor; Rick Ben-Veniste was a prosecutor; Jamie Gorelick had been in the Justice Department—deputy AG, former counsel to the army—and these senators and reps had sat on congressional committees that helped train them. So we had our moments, but we always resolved them.

DePue: Was there any comment made about the lack of any minorities and the fact that there was only one woman on the commission?

Thompson: No.

DePue: That was never an issue?

Thompson: No.

DePue: What I'd like to turn to next here, Governor, and to get your reaction to some things and hopefully draw out some more stories as we go through this, is some of the findings that are in the commission report. As you mentioned, it is very extensive, and—compliments to you or the group or whoever wrote it—it's very readable.

Thompson: It was interesting. After this came out, first of all, they had to reprint it; it was so popular. I'd see people on airplanes reading it, and other commission members would tell me stories about people taking it to the beach and reading. Now, you can't imagine any other government report in history where ordinary people—not part of the Washington establishment—were taking

something this thick and reading it, almost as you would read a novel. Of course, it was written that way.

There were very skillful writers we had, whose only job was to write it in a way that people would understand it. We were determined not to fall into the trap of prior government commissions or reports, which after three pages, you're going, Oh, my god. So it is immensely readable. As I say, it had to be reprinted, and there were millions of copies in circulation.

DePue: I want to start with four kinds of failures that were cited by the commission in the report. The first type of failure, category of failure, was one of "imagination."

Thompson: I forget who on the commission came up with it; it might have been Governor Kean, to use that phrase. What he was trying to say was government officials usually are dealing with what's in front of them, and too many times they forget to say, "what if" and to look into the future and to imagine how things might be different. Or intelligence agents or FBI or somebody like that, presented with a certain set of facts, sometimes tend to just operate on those facts, and they don't start thinking, "what if." That was pretty clear from all the evidence we had, that in some instances, the dots were not being connected. The way we tried to describe that was failure of imagination.

DePue: You're dealing with immense government bureaucracies that had been around for a long time.

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: My experience with the bureaucracy is that normally one of their top priorities eventually becomes the continuance of the bureaucracy.

Thompson: Certainly.

DePue: Here's the phrase that caught my attention, that somehow you need to "bureaucratize imagination."

Thompson: I guess by that we meant you had to infuse the ability to use imagination to solve future problems or to raise future issues, to make that a work of a bureaucracy, which otherwise wouldn't think in that fashion. I guess that's what we were trying to say.

DePue: It goes back, I think, to what you were talking about before, trying to identify what's a potential target and how it might be attacked.

Thompson: Correct, correct. I mean, the FBI was compelling. You had this agent out in, I think it was Milwaukee, investigating a Saudi[33] who was taking flight instruction. The agent thought he had enough to get a search warrant for the guy's computer. He had to get permission for that from FBI headquarters in Washington before he could go to a judge and ask for a warrant, and they said, "No." He had no way of protesting that or taking that up or however you would do it. They said, "No," and so the investigation of that guy just stopped cold.

You can find other instances of where the FBI might have had some data that didn't get to the CIA and vice versa, even though they were all supposed to be operating on the same wavelength. What we call the silos within each investigative agency were pretty tough to overcome. I suspect there are still some silos out there, not as much as before; there is more information sharing, and now there's information sharing with local officials.

There are task forces in each major area—Chicago as an example—where on a regular basis, the FBI and other agencies will meet with the Chicago Police Department and the sheriff's office and whatever other law enforcement offices there are, so that they're all working on the same page.

DePue: Another category was "policy," another kind of failure that was identified. Here's my paraphrase of it, it's probably not very precise or good, I should say, but in terms of what the commission meant by "Policy." Was it feasible, prior to 9/11, to put troops on the ground in Afghanistan to go after Al-Qaeda bases?

Thompson: It was certainly feasible, because they did it after 9/11. It would have been feasible, as I said before, in response to the Cole.

DePue: But obviously, a reluctance on the part of two administrations to do that kind of thing.

Thompson: There was a reluctance in the White House—no question about that—for different reasons. There would not have been, I think, any reluctance in the military to do it, because the military always believes they can do anything. All they need is orders, and they'll do it. But Clinton was in a bad posture politically. What was that phrase at that time? There was a movie about this too; was it *Wag the Dog*?

DePue: Yeah, I know what you're talking about.

[33] Thompson is thinking of Zacarias Moussaoui, who was born in France to Moroccan parents. He was investigated by the FBI's field office in Minneapolis, after instructors at a flight school in Eagan, Minnesota, grew suspicious of his behavior.

Thompson: Yeah, there was a movie that had the president creating this big international furor to get attention away from something else that was happening. I think Clinton found himself in that position.

DePue: That if he had done something, the public and the media would scream "You're just doing this to distract our attention from your political problems."

Thompson: Yes, exactly. So he didn't do it. Now, it's easy for me or other members of the commission, in hindsight, to say, "By god, if we were sitting in the White House, the minute the Cole was bombed, we'd be in Afghanistan looking for Al-Qaeda." That's very easy to say. But we weren't there. He was, and it wasn't until 9/11 that the scope of the damage was such, the loss of life was such, it was pretty clear where this was coming from, that, bang, right into Afghanistan they went.

DePue: The next area of failure that was addressed in the Commission Report was in "capabilities." I'll use a direct quote here and then another quick comment after that. Here's the direct quote, "Looking back we are struck with the narrow and unimaginative menu of options for action offered to both President Clinton and President Bush." The report goes on to say that oftentimes the Defense Department was left out of these discussions, that it was primarily focused on terrorism and on the CIA, as the main player in that.

Thompson: Yeah, and that's a great difficulty, because just think about the White House today, for the moment. The president's national security advisor is in the White House, and with that daily exposure to the president and his senior staff, the president and his senior staff come to see the national security advisor as sort of a quick substitute for the Department of Defense or the State Department or the CIA or any of the agencies under the president that would normally be gathered together and asked for their collective opinion.

Instead, senior staff in the White House—whether it's the national security advisor, or the director of intelligence now—become the substitutes for that, and you lose a lot of the expertise and a lot of the different views that you would hear if you convened a meeting in the White House of all of those agencies.

DePue: The Governor and I are going to take a break for lunch, and we'll be back this afternoon.

(end of interview #27)

Interview with James Thompson
IST-A-L-2013-054.28
Interview # 28: May 18, 2016
Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: This is now the afternoon of Wednesday, May 18th. I'm once again with Governor Jim Thompson, and we've had a very interesting discussion this morning about the War on Terror and especially your involvement in the 9/11 Commission. We need to pick it up where we left off.

Thompson: Okay.

DePue: The fourth failure that the commission cited and recognized was in "management." I think you guys broke it up into two or three different parts. One of them was "operational management." That was a matter of information not shared, analysis not pooled.

Thompson: Yeah, that, I think, was one of the gravest of the ills in the intelligence community that we focused on. In some ways it's not surprising. Each intelligence agency, whether it's FBI or CIA or DIA or any of the others, once they're established they develop a culture. Part of that culture tells them that they're the best, and part of that culture tells them that they don't need any help. So they derive from that, a reluctance to share, thinking they can do it all. But they can't, and the failure to share information, in response to a terrorist action, is sometimes fatal, as in the case with the failure to follow up the investigation in Milwaukee with the Saudi in pilot training.

Since that time and since this attitude has been commented on pretty severely, not only by us but by others, there has gradually come less of a reluctance to share. The structures of intelligence agencies have been changed. We now have a DNI, a director of national intelligence, which was one of the recommendations of the commission. Theoretically, at least, the DNI has supervision of all the intelligence agencies and a mission to promote sharing. Sometimes that happens, and sometimes that doesn't.

DePue: I refer to the wiring diagram, which governments love, that's in the *9/11 Commission Report,* under "Who Answers to the DNI?"

Thompson: Yeah, in here it's called the national intelligence director. He's in a box right under the president, so he's obviously a presidential appointee. And then, under him, is CIA director, USD Intelligence, the Department of Defense, FBI, then broken down by areas of the world and broken down by individual areas of concern.

That's all well and good, but like any governmental official, it depends, at least in part, on how aggressive the director is, how willing to ride herd on the agencies he is, whether he retains his clout from the president, even though he is theoretically in charge of all of these agencies. And each DNI director can be different.

I guess the summation for all of this is that all the intelligence agencies are better at sharing amongst federal agencies and with local and state agencies. After all, sometimes this can happen on the local level, the Times Square bomber. The guy that was going to blow up his car in the middle of Times Square was caught by a New York City patrolman. So, while these super agencies run from Washington, whether it's the Bureau or the CIA or the DIA, get all the headlines and all of the resources. Sometimes it's a beat cop that finds something that leads to the elimination of a terrorism plot. And to increase the chances of that happening, his superiors—the police superintendent and his director of intelligence, and they all have them now—have to be on the share list with the federal agencies.

DePue: One of the things I wanted to ask you about, since we're in this neighborhood, and this fell into the category of "institutional management," was what has become known as the wall of separation. I don't believe this is language from the commission report; this is from another source. It's talking about the Army Intelligence and Special Operations Command, ASOC. "It never informed the FBI about the activities of some of the suspects, thus leaving them free to continue plotting and preparing for 9/11. At the root of this fear was a clearly defined prohibition against interagency intelligence sharing in terror investigations. This prohibition, commonly referred to as "the wall," blocking such communications, dated back to the Carter administration's 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, FISA, which was enacted to diffuse allegations of FBI espionage abuses. Deputy Attorney General Jamie Gorelick called for increased restrictions on information sharing between the intelligence, CIA, and law enforcement, FBI, agencies."

Thompson: Well, she's given that up, clearly. But she was then representing a discreet intelligence agency. In 9/11 she was responsible, along with the rest of the members of the commission, for fashioning a policy for the future. And it became clear in the aftermath of 9/11 that failure to share was at the root of the problem.

DePue: Mentioning Jamie Gorelick's name calls into question, though, at least her involvement with the 9/11 Commission, since there was a direct connection with some of the things that are going to be criticized by the commission report.

Thompson: I think you have to weigh the pluses and the minuses of anybody on the commission. In her case, she was extremely experienced, not only with the Defense Department, but with the Justice Department. She was whip smart. She knew everybody in Washington; she knew all the agencies. And she had an effect on the commission because of those attributes. So I don't think you can say that a position held in her prior experience, that might not have even been her personal position, but the position of the agency that she commanded or advised, should enter into whether or not she could ably serve on the commission. You know, you can't dispose of your history. It's not that convenient.

Really smart people are capable of acting in different roles. Take a lawyer, who started life as a prosecutor and then ended his career as a defense lawyer. He carries his prosecutorial experience over to his new position, but he doesn't act in his new position as a prosecutor; he acts as a defense lawyer. If Jamie had one position, while she was general counsel to the army, she was able to shed that in her work on the commission.

DePue: You wouldn't happen to know anybody who went from prosecution to defense, would you? (laughs)

Thompson: Oh sure. It happens all the time.

DePue: Like yours truly here.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: The next few questions I have are on the findings and/or recommendations, however you want to refer to them, of the commission. There's quite a lengthy list. Some of these I don't know if you want to address, and some of them you probably want to address in some detail. But here's one, "Subject to much debate, all the way to present, Islam is not the enemy; Islamic terrorism is the enemy."

Thompson: Yes, and in fact, in today's presidential debates and presidential arguments and speeches, you find Republicans attacking the president for failing to use the phrase "Islamic terrorist." Much of that is political. But we were not afraid to use that phrase—and again, we were both Republicans and Democrats—and it's the truth. It's people who, not because they're Islamic, but because they profess that they're doing what they're doing in defense of Islam, whether that's blowing other people up, killing women and children, torture, whatever they do, they do in the name of their religion, supposedly. That's

what they say. So I don't know why you would fail to describe them in a way that they've described themselves.

DePue: Do you see anything inherent in the Islamic religion, Muslim religion, to say it's inherent that there's a faction that would become violent, in that respect?

Thompson: To the contrary. As far as I'm told and have read, it's contrary to the basic tenets of Islam, and a number of Islamic leaders and Islamic scholars say it has no place.

DePue: But this is not the first time in Islamic history that this kind of an experience has occurred. In fact, at the very birth of Islam, that was oftentimes the way that the message was carried forward.

Thompson: Well, yeah, but you can find other instances in history, including in American history, where people of a certain faith or a certain political view were convinced or said they were convinced, that their faith or their political view compelled them to carry out acts which would otherwise be illegal or reprehensible.

DePue: The next finding is something that you've mentioned before, in a different phrase, "The U.S. cannot stop all terrorism but should expect the best effort from government."

Thompson: Yeah, and I think that we certainly had that. I think, without question, I would describe the United States in 2016 as safer than it was at the time of 9/11 and shortly thereafter. It's hard to describe this, other than to say, "Well, X didn't happen." But you never know, in the intelligence business, you never know about the plots discovered and avoided. That's not part of the public record or the public discourse, except when they happen in a public place, like the "Times Square bomber" or the "underwear bomber," those acts.

The immense amount of resources we have devoted to uncovering and/or preventing terrorism surely has to have some effect. I mean, we've spent billions and hundreds of billions since 9/11, in the uncovering and the prevention of terrorism. Despite those one-off events of the two bomb attempts that I just mentioned, we haven't had mass tragedies. We haven't had any of the fears we thought about at the time come true.

Now, have we been lucky, as well as vigilant? Yes. Does that mean we'll never have those events on our soil? No, not at all. These people are inflamed with the passion of one kind or another. They're willing to die for what they want to achieve, and it's really, really difficult to guard against that. All you can hope to do is, on the one hand, increase your protective forces, your intelligence gathering, and your intelligence sharing, and on the other hand, protect your vital infrastructure, and on the third hand, seek to destroy, cripple the organized efforts, whether it's Al Qaeda or ISIS (Islamic State of

Iraq and Syria) or subgroups of those agencies, which is what we're trying to do in Iraq and Syria.

The press tells us we've had some success against ISIS, through the use of foreign troops or their homeland troops in Iraq, the Kurds, our drones, aiming at the leaders of those groups, our use of advisors to the Iraqis and the Kurds, although we're soon going to have so many advisors over there that you might confuse it with a small army. And we're getting casualties from that. Those three things are about the most effective things we can do, in fighting what is essentially a phantom army, in places that are far away and very difficult, that are even—in our sense—premedieval, a place like Afghanistan, that's the same as Afghanistan was 1,000 years ago, basically. So you do the best you can, while at the same time, trying to finance and employ all the other things that government's supposed to do.

DePue: The next few deal with primarily Muslim countries. I'll start with this one. The commission was emphasizing the need to fight against sanctuaries.

Thompson: Yeah, that's easier said than done, because—

DePue: In this case, we're talking about sanctuaries where organizations like Al Qaeda can base themselves and grow and flourish.

Thompson: Yeah, right. The difficulty is that, if they were trying to do that in an area we controlled, it would be easier to stop them. To try and eliminate sanctuaries in places like Iraq or Afghanistan or Syria or Malaysia or Indonesia or Pakistan [is] very difficult, because we don't have any license to go over their borders and take military action. So we have to depend upon the home governments to do that for us. Sometimes they're willing, and sometimes they're not so willing.

If, for example, the home government's interests are not being injured, and the injury is someplace else in another country, they might be a little more reluctant to take on that mission.

DePue: I think, before I go to the next few here, it's important to put this in the context. When did the report get published? It's sometime in 2004, as I understand. Do you recall when?

Thompson: I think that's right. It should say right in that book.

DePue: I looked the other day.

Thompson: You couldn't find it?

DePue: I couldn't find the copyright date. It must be there someplace, but I'll be darned if I could find it. But if you read the text, it certainly sounded like it was 2004.

Thompson: Probably because there's no copyright.

DePue: That's an interesting concept. (Thompson laughs) While you're looking at that, I'll give you this to chew on here. The commission expressed a fear of Iraq becoming a failed state. That's why I wanted to put it into context. This would have been after President Bush's decision to invade Iraq and before things really got hot in Iraq. So, in that timeframe is when the commission report was published.

Thompson: (pages turning) That's very strange; there's no date.

DePue: It's so good to have my legal counsel confirm my early assessment here.

Thompson: (laughs) I don't get it. I don't think there was a copyright. We wanted it to spread as widely as we could.

DePue: The other thing I was struck by is there's no index in the book. There are extensive footnotes.

Thompson: Yeah, you're right. There is no index. There's a table of contents, but that's about it. I don't remember the date.

DePue: Everything I've read in the report suggests that it came out in 2004, and I ought to know anyway; I've seen some other things. So, in 2004, after the invasion of Iraq, and now the commission's expressing a fear that Iraq becomes a failed state. [The report was issued on July 22, 2004.]

Thompson: If you were assessing that prediction today or examining that fear today, you would have to agree with it. The central government of Iraq, which is dominated by Shiites, and being fought against by Sunni tribal leaders and the Sunni military forces, and beset by ISIS, which operates on a very different level than the Sunni brigades. ISIS has command of the second largest city in Iraq, Mosul. So, if the Iraqi government is unable to evict ISIS from Mosul—they've retaken a couple of small towns with Kurdish help—you'd have to conclude that it was a failed state in a very real sense.

They're still too sectarian. The sectarian divisions are more important than their concept of a national government, an inclusive national government. [There are] still too many tribal leaders that run things pretty much the way they want to in their tribal areas. Then you've got all this interference from the outside, ISIS. It's a failed state.

DePue: This statement then, that the commission feared a failed state in Iraq, would the extension be that the commission supported the concept that the United States should have a continued presence in Iraq, the United States military has a force?

Thompson: I don't think you can draw that conclusion. I don't think I ever did. We sometimes take great pride in being the policeman of the world, but we're really not capable of being the policeman of the world. We can't really enforce our notions very well thousands of miles from our homeland, in a culture that's radically different from ours, radically different. This country is a couple of hundred years old. Afghanistan and Iraq and those places are pre-biblical. It's just a whole different world, and our notions of what's right and fair run smack up against that.

DePue: Does that mean you have no criticism of President Obama's decision, I think circa 2011, to withdraw all U.S. troops?

Thompson: No, I don't criticize that. I want to know why we're still in Afghanistan. How long have we been in Afghanistan? Eleven years, twelve years, fifteen years, whatever it is, crazy.

DePue: Well, those who support the concept of us still being in Afghanistan and the concept that we should have stayed in Iraq are using the example of what's happened in Iraq after we left, that the government kind of fell apart at the seams, that they're still very vulnerable without that support from the Americans.

Thompson: Well, you know, sometimes that happens. We can't be responsible for every country in the world, for an undefined period of time. We can't be; we don't have the resources to do that. You could list all the multitude of problems we have at home. You could list the demands on our military and our potential demands on the military.

I'd be more concerned about the Russian attempt to upset the balance of power in Europe through their actions in Crimea, through their actions in the Baltic Sea. I'd be more upset by the actions of the Chinese in building these islands in parts of the Pacific Ocean that are way outside their territory and furnishing them with runways and planes. I'd be more upset by the growing ability of North Korea to be able to send missiles at longer and longer ranges, with perhaps the miniaturization of nuclear power, that if they can't reach our western shores, maybe it will reach some of our territories and those of our allies. Those, to me, are current, and I'll include in that, the undoubted efforts of Iran to continue with their nuclear ambitions, even though we can't see it. I'd be more concerned about that than I'm concerned about the governments of Afghanistan or Iraq falling apart.

DePue: Do you see any link whatsoever with President Obama's decision to withdraw American forces from Iraq to the emergence of ISIS a few years later?

Thompson: (sighs) I don't think you can draw a clear line between the two. I really don't. I think ISIS would have become a force, even with the continued presence of

American troops, because American troops can't be all over the country. They're mostly stationed or would be stationed in—

DePue: Baghdad?

Thompson: Baghdad or in Kabul, in the case of Afghanistan. I think those forces would have occurred anyway, because the whole Mideast is chaotic. Certainly Iraq and Afghanistan are chaotic. I don't think the presence or the absence of American troops would have made a difference to ISIS. But then, nobody elected me president, so I'm just opining.

DePue: But, what did you think of President Bush's decision to invade Iraq or liberate Iraq, depending on what side of the political spectrum you're on, in 2003?

Thompson: You mean the second Iraq War?

DePue: That's the one.

Thompson: I, along with everybody else, believed that there were weapons of mass destruction, because that's what the government said. That's what Colin Powell said. And I could be persuaded that weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Saddam Hussein were a threat. Well, it turned out that there weren't any weapons of mass destruction. So then you have to wonder at the real motive for invading Iraq the second time.

DePue: Does that mean you don't believe that the Bush administration believed there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq?

Thompson: No, they might have believed it. They were wrong. They were just plain wrong. You never know what's in the minds of the military or the White House or those people on why they wanted to go into Iraq the second time. But it was an enormously destabilizing thing.

Then, when we won the war, we didn't run the place right. We disbanded the Iraqi army, which was the only force in Iraq capable of maintaining order, which led to the Shiite composition of the central government, which led to the roving bands of Sunni forces, sometimes Sunni terrorists. It led to all sorts of terrible things.

DePue: Wars always have unintended consequences.

Thompson: Yes, they do.

DePue: The next nations the commission report addressed included Pakistan. There was quite a lengthy discussion about Pakistan, looking at all the various pluses and minuses of eliciting the support of Pakistan. And then, also Afghanistan, which by the time the report came out, the United States was very much an occupying force, following the war there.

One thing really struck me, there was great praise in the report for Hamid Karzai, the president of Afghanistan. Any comments about either of those countries or the commission report?

Thompson: Karzai turned out to be not so hot. It was a corrupt regime. I mean, the whole country is tribes and corruption, Afghanistan. It's just the way it is. The United States can stay there for the next fifty years, and it's not going to change. And I don't think we have any business trying to change it.

We eliminated our objective in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda is not really a force anymore. There's a new force, ISIS, which nobody had ever heard of before, when we were fighting the Afghanistan War. My own view is we should be out of Afghanistan, period, just out. And the same thing with Iraq, out.

DePue: Governor, that is somewhat contrary…No, it's not somewhat, it's contrary to one of the commission's findings, that we must fight against sanctuaries, because once you get out, they become sanctuaries.

Thompson: Well, but there's some limit to that notion. There has to be.

DePue: To what notion?

Thompson: That we must fight sanctuaries. There has to be some limit to that. We don't have the resources to obliterate every sanctuary in the world, and in some cases, it would mean obliterating the country. You would…What are you going to do? As Curtis LeMay said, "Bomb them back to the Stone Age"? There are limits, and that recommendation is one that has limits.

DePue: Are you saying that you had strong reservations about that being part of the commission report?

Thompson: No, I'm not saying that, but I think the unspoken part, like the unspoken part of a lot of recommendations, is that there are, in some cases, limits to what you can achieve.

We don't have the ability to police the entire world. We're a country with our own needs, and we're a country that constantly faces new challenges. We have protected our homeland pretty well since the publication of that report. While there are sanctuaries left in the world for evil forces, whether it's a diminished Al Qaeda or ISIS, there's only so much you can do, when these sanctuaries are in someone else's country, unless the government of that country is willing to be a partner in the effort.

DePue: Interesting you should use that phrase. The next nation on the list that the commission was addressing was Saudi Arabia, which you guys labeled a "problematic ally." Problematic in part, because fifteen of the nineteen hijackers came from Saudi Arabia.

Thompson: And also because for years and years and years, and I think probably still today, both the private sector and the government of Saudi Arabia has sponsored this extreme form of Islam, Wahhabism, and has sponsored and supported madrassas all over the world to teach young people Wahhabism. Oftentimes these madrassas are under the control of ministers and leaders who are dangerous people. If you are inculcating a whole new generation of Muslims with that kind of belief, it's a very dangerous thing.

Now, hopefully, as the younger generation assumes command in Saudi Arabia, you still have an elderly king, but you've got a deputy prince who is thirty-five and has been tasked with modernizing the country and cutting back the actions of the religious police within Saudi Arabia itself. You hope that, in future years, they will not continue to support that kind of religious zealotry in other countries of the world. But it's going to take years, and it's going to take smart politics, because once again you're talking about the internal affairs of another country.

DePue: This was an interesting phrase in the book, "The problems of U.S.–Saudi relationship must be confronted ultimately. It has to be a relationship more than oil."

Thompson: Well, yeah. If you were to assess U.S. policies towards Saudi today, you would find much less reliance on the oil factor than you would have found ten or twenty years ago, simply because other parts of the world have stepped up their production of oil and because we have undergone some technological change that has lessened the need for oil.

We're in the process of becoming oil exporters, with all the fracking that's going on in the United States. Venezuela has more oil under its territory than Saudi does. They're [Saudi Arabia] no longer the number one reservoir of oil. They may be the number one producer of oil, but they're not the number one reservoir of oil. And deep sea drilling has lessened dependence on Saudi and the Mideast.

The drop in the price of oil has diminished the efforts of new exploration or new methods of recovery, but it's going to bounce back. Electric cars are going to become more of a reality. Buses are running on natural gas. So, it's a different world in terms of U.S.–Saudi relations that, in prior times, were so oil dominant.

But the big thing now, I think, within the administration and the American military, is not looking so much to Saudi for oil, but looking to Saudi as a force to preserve peace in the Mideast, a different task.

DePue: Again, Saudi Arabia is an interesting case in point. No doubt you are aware that there have been recent discussions about, "Hey, it's finally time to release those twenty-eight pages."

Thompson: Oh, they should release them. We've all read them on the commission. There's nothing in the twenty-eight pages you can't release. That's ridiculous.

DePue: Whose decision was it to prevent their release?

Thompson: The administration's. It's just—

DePue: Okay, Governor, then what's in those twenty-eight pages?

Thompson: (laughs) As soon as they're released, I'll tell you.[34]

DePue: (laughs) Apparently you don't think there's a really big bombshell in there?

Thompson: No, there's not a big bombshell.

DePue: Here's the next recommendation or discovery. When Muslim governments do not respect the principles of human rights, the U.S. "must stand for a better future. We need to defend our ideals abroad vigorously." What does that mean?

Thompson: I'm not sure. It's certainly hortatory language, which you'll find in reports like this. It expresses an ideal. It doesn't really express defined or narrowed policy. You'd have to comb all the programs of the United States government to find examples of where we do that now, whether it's the Voice of America, or it's America taking the lead in international conferences, you can find a dozen examples I suppose. But that's more of an expression of a goal than it is of concrete policy.

DePue: In that same context, there is a reminder to the world, whoever reads this report, that the United States has been the defender of Muslim populations throughout the world. You cited Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia, Afghanistan, and the list goes on and on.

Thompson: Yeah, we have used the military might of America to defend Muslim people.

DePue: And gotten blamed in the process.

Thompson: More often than Muslim countries have defended Muslim people…and gotten blamed in the process. That's exactly right.

DePue: The next one, kind of a supplement to that, "Supporting economic policies that encourage development, open societies and opportunity among the Muslim countries.

[34] A long-classified U.S. report released July15, 2016, found that some of the 9/11 hijackers were in contact with and received support from individuals likely connected to the Saudi government. (http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/15/politics/congress-releases-28-pages-saudis-9-11/)

Thompson: Yeah, that's a goal, but it's very hard to achieve. It just is.

DePue: Do you support the argument that much of Islamic terrorism is a result of the desperate poverty of a lot of these countries and the lack of opportunity?

Thompson: Oh, I suppose in some sense that's true, but those countries have some measure of wealth. They certainly could develop wealth on their own, if they weren't killing each other. We can't be the world's military keeper, and we can't be the world's economic keeper. I'm no isolationist, and I'm not a Trump disciple, but there are limits to what any country, any country, can do.

I've talked about some of the different dangers that we face now that we didn't face before. There is a desperate need in America to develop our own resources. Our infrastructure is falling apart. I once headed a committee of the National Governors Association, focused on American infrastructure. At that time, I said we had a $1 trillion infrastructure deficit. It's got to be worse today.

DePue: But this current administration [Obama] spent $1 trillion to address that problem; didn't it?

Thompson: No. You can't even get an infrastructure bill out of Congress. I mean, we're lucky we're spending what we are spending on highways.

DePue: So the stimulus bill was not about infrastructure?[35]

Thompson: No. Bridges are falling apart. There are so many infrastructure needs in this country that are greater than they were ten years ago or even twenty years ago or thirty years ago.

DePue: The next finding was kind of a statement of the obvious and already being exercised by 2004. The fight against Islamic terrorism had to be done as a coalition.

Thompson: Well, yeah. You have to persuade Muslim nations that they're next, you know? You have to persuade Pakistan and Saudi that, once the terrorists get through with Iraq and Afghanistan, they're next. Look what the Saudis have spent on fighting and defending their country against Islamic terrorism, because they know they'd be next. They'd be attacked for allowing American troops on their soil. They'd be attacked for relationships with America. They'd be attacked for exporting oil to western democracies. The same thing would be true of Pakistan. So, unless you can pull these countries together and fight a common enemy, terrorism, it's not going to succeed.

[35] American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which funded a range of priorities, including tax cuts, extended unemployment benefits, health and education, infrastructure, and energy efficiency to try and offset the economic contraction following the 2008 financial crisis.

DePue: But all of these countries you mentioned, their enemy is also terrorism.

Thompson: Yeah, oh absolutely. ISIS, in territory they control, sets up their own government, right? They're selling oil. They're imposing taxes on people, and they enforce it with death. So, they've got to get wise.

DePue: And imposing it with death done in such barbaric fashion. We thought that was gone 2,000 years ago.

Thompson: We shouldn't have thought that, because it's today.

DePue: The next point that the commission made deals with proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Here's a quote, "Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction warrants a maximum effort by strengthening counter-proliferation efforts." The commission report mentions that bin Laden saw it as a religious obligation to acquire nuclear weapons in particular.

Then, this is a passage I found very interesting. It supports the reason that the commission came out so strongly on this, "A nuclear bomb can be built with relatively small amounts of nuclear material. A trained nuclear engineer, with an amount of highly enriched uranium or plutonium, about the size of a grapefruit or an orange, together with the commercially available material, could fashion a nuclear device that would fit in a van like the one Ramzi Yousef parked in the garage of the World Trade Center in 1993. Such a bomb would level lower Manhattan."

Thompson: Yeah, absolutely true. So you look at the world today, and you see what the North Koreans say they are doing, and you look at what the Iranians say they are not doing, and you've got countries who are thinking to themselves, If the day comes when the United States doesn't protect us, maybe we ought to have our own nuclear forces, whether it's Israel or Japan or South Korea.

DePue: Or Saudi Arabia.

Thompson: Or Saudi Arabia, sure.

DePue: I'm going to belabor the point here. We were previously talking about Iraq and President Bush's decision to invade Iraq, based on the belief that Saddam Hussein was going after development of nuclear weapons, and to a certain extent you were questioning his motives. But this particular finding of the commission was certainly supportive of the concept that, if a country is developing nuclear weapons, and it's a rogue nation, something has to be done. That's what I'm reading into this, Governor.

Thompson: Then why aren't we doing something about North Korea? If we can get into the computers of Iran and delay their production of nuclear material, as we did—a joint U.S.–Israeli effort—why aren't we doing that in North Korea? I

mean, they tell us they're going to send missiles to our shores. That's what Kim Jong-un says.

DePue: And they just tested a couple of missiles, just a couple of weeks ago.

Thompson: Yeah, correct.

DePue: So you're saying that was not the intention of the commission report, to validate Bush's decision, that it wasn't that political?

Thompson: It's hard to know.

DePue: But you were on the commission, Governor.

Thompson: Yeah, I know, but it's hard to know exactly what was in the minds of the men who planned that invasion. We'll never know that, will we?

DePue: So you're not willing to take their statements at face value?

Thompson: Even if you take their statements at face value, if the statements later prove to be untrue, then where are you?

DePue: The argument for that always ends up being, did they believe what they were saying was true?

Thompson: Yeah, and how do we know that? We can't get into their minds.

DePue: What's your feeling about recent developments that the—I don't want to call it a treaty, because it wasn't ratified by the Senate—the agreement between the United States and Iran, which allows the continued existence of a small amount of fissionable material—

Thompson: For commercial purposes, yeah.

DePue: …kind of guaranteed that, in the future—I don't know how many years down the road—they'd have the ability to convert those to nuclear weapons?

Thompson: Well—

DePue: None of these issues have gone away, have they? (laughs)

Thompson: Thank God for the Israelis, (laughs) who can enforce that with our bunker bombs. Look, Republicans denounce the Iranian agreement. I'm all for trying to bring people back into the family of nations, unless we were willing to go to war…That's the alternative.

Were we willing to go to war with Iran and try to take out their nuclear facilities, the ones you knew about and the ones you don't know about, with perhaps nuclear weapons of our own, if the bunker bombs aren't

good enough? Are we willing to go to war over that issue? I guess not. That's why we made the deal.

Will some future country, like Israel, be willing to go to war to enforce it down the line? I don't know. It depends on how this comes out, who the Iranians elect as their leaders, how long Khamenei [Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei, the second and current supreme leader of Iran] is around, whether the country opens up.

DePue: That's quite a statement, Governor, to say will the Iranians elect new leaders. It's really not a democracy in any sense of the word.

Thompson: No, it's not a democracy, but age plays a part, eventually. I don't know what's going to happen there. Remember Obama said he had drawn the red line in Syria. If they used chemical weapons on their own people, we would invade. Didn't happen. They're still doing it today. So I guess there was no appetite to go to war over an issue in Syria.

DePue: And some would say the unintended consequence of that is a flood of refugees into Europe.

Thompson: Right, absolutely.

DePue: And expansion of the potential for Islamic terrorism into Europe.

Thompson: Correct. There are some parts of Belgium that might as well be run by ISIS. It's just a matter of fact.

DePue: Let's turn to a different topic here, Governor. (laughs)

Thompson: Get me off the war path.

DePue: One of the suggestions, there needs to be a vigorous tracking of terrorist financing. Any comments on that?

Thompson: And we do. I think the United States and our allies, the Brits and others, have done a good job at that. Whenever we impose sanctions on a nation, that's the first sanction, is to eliminate the financing, eliminate their ability to deal in the world of finance, to use their resources. Obviously, we're going to continue to do that, in terms of our fight against ISIS or Al Qaeda. That's the way the world operates these days, is by international finance.

DePue: After that short reprieve, we go right back in to another thorny political issue, because another one of the findings was that there should be an improved border security system, screening and tracking systems, that it needs to be internalized in homeland security. I assume that the Department of Homeland Security existed prior to the time the commission report came out, that that had been created?

Thompson: Yeah, I think that's right.

DePue: That the Homeland Security should "complete a biometric entry/exit screening system, including a single system for speeding qualified travelers." All of this gets you right into the area of immigration control.

Thompson: Yeah, and we're not there yet. We're not where we should be in immigration control. People still get into our country, and our borders are still porous, in terms of saboteurs coming in not legitimately, either over the Canadian border, which is loosely guarded, or the Mexican border.

If the narcos (dealers of narcotics, illegal drugs) can get in, the saboteurs can get in. They have more resources than the narcos. We haven't done all the biometric things we could be doing. One of the issues is, people come in legitimately on a visitor's visa, and then they overstay. And the ability to track them vigorously is not there yet. So, that's an issue that's just as important as whether they get in in the first place. To have them come in on a visa, whether it's a student visa or a visitor's visa, and then stay and begin plots is another challenge.

And the problem is, politics too often infects this issue with other battles. Look at all the words that were uttered in the Republican debates about immigration, none of it having to do with the potential of terrorism. It was all trying to keep Mexicans out of the United States or Salvadorans out of the United States, who come up here for economic advancement.

DePue: There was one element, and that was reluctance on Trump's part to accept any more Muslim immigrants, because of the Syrian refugee issue.

Thompson: Yeah, well… (DePue laughs) Don't get me started on Trump.

DePue: Gosh, I was planning to go there a couple more questions.

Thompson: Yeah, well, it'll get violent. So, when you've got phony policy issues like that, infecting a campaign for the presidency…In fact, Mexican immigration is down, not up. And the problems we have now are with the Central Americans sending their kids up here by themselves. (sighs)

DePue: Or even pregnant Chinese women coming here, having their babies, and going home.

Thompson: Yeah, yeah, the birthers. That's not a real big problem, I don't think, (DePue laughs) because maybe those kids will come back some day and pay taxes. That's the way I look at it.

I've got a granddaughter now who's Greek, English, and Canadian. The Canadians and the Greeks will give her a passport and the Americans. She's American because her mother's American; the Americans will give her

a passport. The English won't give her a passport, of course, being smarter than the rest of us. (laughs)

DePue: It's a sign of the new world we live in.

Thompson: I tell you, it's amazing. She's two months old; she has a passport. She can't change the picture in that until she's five, so you've got a passport with an infant's photo (laughs) until she's five. God knows who they're letting in, right?

DePue: Pity the customs official, four years from now, who looks at that passport photo.

Thompson: Yeah and says, "Wait a second." And she's got a social security card, very exciting.

DePue: But I'm guessing you would be willing to concede that, even though the Republican debates didn't have anything to do with anti-terrorism, there is a direct link, in terms of our porous borders, as you mentioned?

Thompson: Yeah, that's true. The conditions that exist for what I'll call regular immigration, exist for terrorists as well.

DePue: To help this part of the discussion, I'd like to have you define what biometric entry/exit screening is.

Thompson: Photos and fingerprints and your eye.

DePue: Iris scans?

Thompson: Iris scanning. Everything that technology has to identify people, should be part of our entry and exit procedures.

DePue: To include vigorously developing a no-fly list, a no-entry list?

Thompson: Yeah, but sometimes they don't work. I was on the no-fly list, while I was a member of the commission. I had to go get a letter to present at an airport on those occasions—probably every fifth or sixth time I flew—because somebody with my name, with terrorist leanings, was on the no-fly list. I'd say to the poor counter clerk, "Hey, was he a six-foot-six Swede?" "Uh, uh… no." Eventually I got off the no-fly list. So they're not magic.

DePue: But again, the commission is recommending strongly that there be this biometric exit/entry system developed.

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: And so the question is, your thoughts on both President Bush and certainly President Obama not being willing to vigorously enforce the existing laws on immigration that we have on the books.

Thompson: What do you mean not being willing to enforce the existing laws? What aren't they enforcing?

DePue: I know that there's been legislation passed that's for construction of the wall, for increased border security guards. Now, President Obama's—

Thompson: Trump's going to take care of the wall, so we shouldn't worry about that. He's going to build this $10 billion wall, and Mexico will pay for it.

DePue: That was a question I had. I'm assuming that you are not a fan of the logic behind building the wall as a solution to the problem?

Thompson: (sighs) They'll just tunnel under the wall. They'll get ladders long enough to go over the wall. They'll come in by boat from other countries, as the narcos do now. The wall is not a be all and end all. You going to build a wall on the Canadian border?

DePue: So are you suggesting that we really can't do much of anything to protect our borders?

Thompson: We can; we can. And we're doing a pretty good job of it, I think. As I say, Mexican immigration is down.

DePue: Well, that's a function of the economy more than anything else, isn't it?

Thompson: No, it's also a function of border control. These people, more often, are captured and sent back, even if you have to do it multiple times. America is still an economic magnet for people in Mexico.

DePue: Despite all the bad things said about the United States, it's still a good place to come to?

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: See, I told you we'd get into the politics here.

Thompson: Absolutely, everything's political.

DePue: I don't know if you keep in touch with your commission members and talk about these kinds of things?

Thompson: We had a tenth year reunion at the University of Indiana, where Mr. Hamilton is teaching. So the whole gang showed up there, and I think we issued new

recommendations. (laughs) You can't keep us down. Talk about a permanent commission, here we are.

DePue: As an informal thing, or did this actually go someplace?

Thompson: No, it was an informal thing. We also graded the administration and the Congress on what they had done in response to our first recommendations. Their report card was better now than it was at the time you showed me that first one.

DePue: Yeah, this postscript here.

Thompson: Yeah, those grades have been raised.

DePue: All A's, across the board?

Thompson: No, of course not. Congress, for example, still has a multitude of committees dealing with intelligence. Half the intelligence agencies spend a lot of time running up to the Hill to testify, rather than finding out terrorists.

DePue: Here's an issue that's kind of a related to immigration and travel, because the commission report was very explicit in talking about the **huge** number of people who come to visit the United States yearly as something that we certainly want to continue. It's an economic engine, as much as anything else.

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: So what was the commission's opinion about profiling of passengers, because generally there's been a great reluctance in the United States to do that.

Thompson: Really?

DePue: You disagree with that.

Thompson: You don't think they're profiling?

DePue: If you look at the procedures you have to go through at O'Hare Airport, which everybody right now is complaining about, because now there's a three-hour wait to go through security.

Thompson: So they get a good long look at them, don't they, in a three-hour line. (laughs)

DePue: Is that explicitly written someplace that they are allowed to do that?

Thompson: No, and you don't see many examples of that these days, sometimes. Where you see it now is where other passengers in the airplane take one look at somebody with a costume that suggests that they're Muslim and overhears conversation or mistakenly overhears conversation, reports it to the steward and the pilot, and, you know.

DePue: And you find out they're Sikhs instead.

Thompson: Yeah, right.

DePue: Or all of the 9/11 hijackers deliberately shaving and dressing like westerners.

Thompson: Sure, absolutely. In the promotion of their religion, they're willing to violate the tenets of their religion.

DePue: Here's another very thorny issue, and I want to see how the commission felt about this one. It's this balance—always a tension in American politics and American society—balancing our privacy rights with security needs. The FISA (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act) Court is a great example of that perhaps, as well as this case that Apple's been pursuing recently, about breaking into the telephone of the terrorist who committed mass murder out in California.

Thompson: I don't think you can say that the commission, as a commission, was overly concerned with the possibility that we had gone too far in an invasion of privacy. I think that's the way I would put it. Individual commission members might have felt a degree of difference. I mean, when you've got prosecutors on the commission, they might have one instinct. When you've got people who have been involved in civil libertarian organizations or endeavors, you might have another instinct. But I think as the whole, the commission was pretty sanguine about the fact that, given the way society is now, as opposed to what society was when this country was formed and the Constitution was being written and then the amendments were being written, there has to be some balance, which will in some instances lessen the degree of privacy, in an effort to protect the country. It just has to be.

We're that kind of world now where technology reigns supreme. The people who wrote the First Amendment or the Fourth Amendment didn't conceive of the Internet or telephones or all the other agents of technology by which people can plot and scheme. It's a different world. I think most Americans would say, "Hey, record my phone, okay, fine. Just go catch the criminals."

DePue: Here's one I found very interesting. I hadn't expected, but it makes sense, especially from a group of politicians working on the commission. There was an assessment of risks and vulnerabilities. Many of the risks were identified, with being in New York City and Washington, D.C., targets that the terrorists would want to go after. Chicago would certainly have its risks as well. Then there is this general warning, when you get to general revenue sharing, against all the politicians in Congress resorting to pork barrel spending.

Thompson: That was in our report? (DePue laughs) Where the hell was that?

DePue: I'd have to look at the page, but yeah, there was a—

Thompson: I'm sure commission members were pork barrelers in their time. I'm convinced of it.

DePue: But it makes sense, that there's a pot of money that's going to go to support hardening defenses or places like the stock market or the board of trade and the like, that it didn't just turn in to pork barrel spending. Not that politicians would ever do that.

Thompson: No. Take Washington, seat of our national government, [the] White House, Congress. You've got to protect and defend those institutions, those structures. Same with the Defense Department. Same with military bases. You've got to protect what protects us. New York is the heart of our economy, in terms of the market, so there's a special need there.

DePue: I'm sure you remember one of the ironies of the attack on the Pentagon Building. It's obviously got the five wings, and the wing that was actually hit was the wing that they had just done a major upgrade, in terms of strengthening the structure, as well as doing some remodeling there.

Thompson: When you crash a plane in to it, it's a different story. It's what people anticipate. They didn't anticipate that. You can harden only so much.

DePue: But they probably did reduce the amount of loss because of that.

Thompson: Sure. It's like the electric utilities say that they are hardened against attack by a plane. I don't believe it, but that's what they say.

DePue: To include nuclear facilities?

Thompson: No, no.

DePue: That's different.

Thompson: Well no, that would be included. Anything that produces electricity would have been hardened.

DePue: Some of this is pretty obvious, "encourage to adopt an incident command system and a communications connectivity." That pretty much goes without saying that this is fancy phrasing for, you guys need to learn to communicate better with each other.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Some of it was addressing things as simple as better radio communications when you're responding to things like what happened in the twin towers, when suddenly you discover that, when you're in the heart of the building, you can't communicate with your folks outside.

Thompson: Yeah, because you've got different systems. The systems are not integrated. And look, it takes time to do all this. The FBI still today has a crappy technology system. Their computer system is just substandard. They've been trying for years, years, to upgrade it. I doubt that it's still [been] upgraded.

DePue: Another one of the recommendations, "establish a national counterterrorism center."

Thompson: I can recall an FBI guy telling me, in a seminar in Washington not too long ago, that if they really wanted to find out about somebody, they didn't go to the FBI files, they went to the credit card companies, because the credit card companies know more about Americans than the government does. So there you go.

DePue: "Establish a national counterterrorism center." We've kind of talked about that, to a certain extent, getting the various intelligence agencies to work together.

Thompson: And we did that. That's been done.

DePue: And "strengthen congressional oversight," a permanent standing committee with a non-partisan staff. I think you just kind of addressed that one and a little disappointment to the extent that that hasn't happened.

Thompson: That has not happened. We still have all these committees in Congress, in both the House and the Senate, that have a piece, just a piece, of jurisdiction over intelligence efforts. And to get rid of that, to reduce it all into two or three, at most, has not been done and probably can't be done because why? Because it will eliminate a committee chairman; it will eliminate a ranking member; it will eliminate staff. And one does not trod on Congressional turf.

DePue: So you can't change the bureaucracy of Congress?

Thompson: No, you cannot.

DePue: But you can recommend it be changed?

Thompson: Absolutely, and we kept doing that. We lamented that. It was one of our loudest lamentations.

DePue: And "the FBI to establish a specialized and integrated national security workforce." I can't recall too many of the specifics of that. I don't know if you can either.

Thompson: I think that was code for saying, you can't just take agents who are trained to catch bank robbers and throw them into intelligence. You've got to have a separate, discreet intelligence function in the FBI.

DePue: I know one of the recommendations, and maybe I skipped over it here, is that there's got to be a recognition you have to increase funding for these kinds of things.

Thompson: And that's followed. Congress has been good about spending money; there's no question about that. The money that goes into the intelligence budget is just enormous. You don't even know half of it, because it's hidden.

DePue: But there was a recommendation for some of this that intelligence financing be made public. Do you recall that part?

Thompson: Yeah, I do, but I don't know if I agree with that, in my later years. I think there's a risk, if you completely make public all the money spent in various areas of intelligence. Others are likely to conclude that some areas are underfunded and therefore vulnerable.

DePue: Essentially, you're revealing the intelligence strategy?

Thompson: Yeah, the strategy, but you may also be revealing the strength of the intelligence resource.

DePue: I've gotten through my list of recommendations. Anything else that you recall?

Thompson: No. Once you get through the history of 9/11, there's still plenty of meat in there. As I say, we came back again, ten years later, and constructed another book. We've all made speeches all over the country, all of us, in that time.

I think the American public is more aware of our efforts against terrorism now than they were before. I think members of the public are much more likely to speak up. And certainly we've funded all these efforts enormously, just enormously. It might have reached $1 trillion for all I know. The money that goes into this is amazing.

But the task is to defend the country. So, it's hard to say, "Ah, you're spending too much money to defend the country, and the dangers have lessened." They haven't lessened. If anything they've gotten worse. We've just been smarter and more vigilant.

DePue: We had mentioned briefly this report card of sorts. I wonder if you have any comments that you'd like to make on that. It broke down the various aspects of the investigation, various agencies of the government, types of activities, and you gave them an A through an F.

Thompson: Yeah, and I think in the eleven years since this, they've made a lot of progress; they really have. We still are upset with some of the failures or some of the things that we said should occur that haven't occurred yet. But others

are catching up. Airline passenger prescreening is catching up; it's no longer an F.

DePue: Interagency communication, sharing ideas?

Thompson: Yeah, that's improved. But it's interesting, the privacy and civil liberties oversight board, yeah, they enacted one; the president took about a year to fill the positions, and you haven't heard of it since.

DePue: After you look at that another couple of moments here, Governor, I'd like to have you read what I've highlighted on top, which is a quotation by you, I believe.

Thompson: [reading] "The results were dismal." That was true. "Progress in many important areas has been slow or nonexistent. While the terrorists have been learning and adapting, we have been moving at a bureaucratic crawl." I think all of that is true, at least as of that time, eleven years ago. We've been doing better. I don't think we're moving at a bureaucratic crawl any more, but it's taken an awful lot of time and an awful lot of money and an awful lot of effort to get us to the place where we are now, and we still need to improve.

DePue: How well was the commission report received when it did come out?

Thompson: Very well, both by the Congress, even the White House, and by the American public, it was sensational.

DePue: We talked about that before, going on the airplane and seeing people. That had to be reassuring.

Thompson: Yeah, it was reassuring. You saw people do that, and it made it all worthwhile.

DePue: But, Governor, this being America, there were critics. So I want you to respond quickly to some of the critiques of the commission report, and whether or not they were valid, the inadequacy of funding and the amount of time you were expected to complete this job.

Thompson: In the end, the funding was adequate. We had all the staff we wanted and the time; we didn't need much more time than that.

DePue: Second one, you kind of addressed earlier as well, the difficulties of obtaining President Bush and Vice President Cheney's testimony.

Thompson: It wasn't that difficult actually. Their only request was to be questioned together and questioned in the White House. We thought those were two perfectly reasonable requests. The cynics that were in the Washington press corps or in opposing politicians had just assumed that Bush would sit there like a stone, and Cheney would answer all the questions.

DePue: That Bush needed to have his brain next to him.

Thompson: Yeah, and in fact, the reverse was true. Bush answered many more questions than Cheney.

DePue: And I assume this was private.

Thompson: It was.

DePue: This was not disclosed.

Thompson: It was not. But we spent a good bit of time with the president and the vice president. Everybody on the commission got to ask all the questions they wanted of both men, and they were answered. In fact, one interesting thing was that Jamie Gorelick had been attacked by somebody—whether it was in the FBI or somebody else—with some public criticism, and before they answered any questions, the president, on his own motion, apologized to her for that public criticism, which I thought was interesting.

DePue: So paint the picture here, the setting when you were talking to these two gentlemen. You were in the White House?

Thompson: We were in the White House.

DePue: Which room?

Thompson: Oh, gosh…it wasn't one of the formal rooms; it was more of an informal room.

DePue: I guess that's my curiosity. The White House isn't designed to serve as a place for committee hearings or things like that.

Thompson: No, I know, but they have their own staff rooms, where they get together. The setting itself was informal.

DePue: It wasn't a big long table with the commissioners and two chairs in front?

Thompson: No, no. There were two chairs, and we were sort of in a circle.

DePue: I'm just curious about those kinds of things. Were the president and vice president candid?

Thompson: I thought they were.

DePue: Were they at all defensive?

Thompson: No, they were not defensive; those two guys are not defensive in the slightest. Interestingly enough, I thought, and we were through and left the White House, and there was the gang of reporters waiting for us, the commission

was pretty unanimous in their comments—the individual members—about the president and the vice president doing a great job, and they were grateful. Even the Democrats said that. We pretty much spoke with one mind. There might have been instances in which some members of the commission had stronger feelings than others about some of the issues, but I thought it was remarkable we came together.

DePue: I don't mean to ask this about your questioning of those two gentlemen, rather your questioning across the board, to the scores, if not hundreds, of witnesses you had come before you, what in general was your tack, your line of questioning?

Thompson: I guess I was more of a prosecutor. I got into this fight with Richard Clarke, because he worked in the White House under Clinton. He said something like it was all right to lie to achieve an end. I just went after him, and (sighs) we went round and round.

DePue: Here was another criticism, after the report came out, that there were conflicts of interest. You've already addressed one, one of them being Jamie Gorelick, as a Clinton staffer, as the part author of the wall of separation. As you mentioned before, you didn't see any conflict of interest that should prevent her from serving?

Thompson: Right.

DePue: I'm going to mispronounce this gentleman's name, Philip Zelikow?

Thompson: Oh, Phil Zelikow.

DePue: He was executive director, so he was the main staffer who was heading up the—

Thompson: He ran the commission, on the staff level.

DePue: He had close ties to the administration, and there were allegations that he was in contact with Karl Rove, with other operatives in the White House, et cetera.

Thompson: The question is whether any of that infected his work, and it did not. A staffer couldn't get away with shading something or omitting something or slanting something, because of their associations or prior positions, because look who you had on the commission. This was a pretty smart group. They wouldn't have tolerated that.

DePue: But was it okay, as far as the commission was concerned, for Zelikow to be in contact with the White House?

Thompson: It depends on what he was in contact with the White House for. I was in contact with the White House. I was sent over there to be in contact with the White House. (laughs)

DePue: I don't know much about the details, but telling the White House the direction that the commission's investigation is going, alerting them of items that might be of great concern to the White House, kind of working to improve the opinion the commission will have about President Bush's handling of the incidents leading up to 9/11, those kind of things.

Thompson: That didn't happen.

DePue: Stonewalling by the CIA, one specific allegation that the CIA had destroyed video tapes of interrogations with two Al Qaeda operatives. Do you remember that one?

Thompson: Yeah, I think they did.

DePue: And that gets into another lengthy political discussion that once again is part of our current political debate. That's the use of enhanced interrogations, e.g., waterboarding.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: That there is a lot of concern then that much of the testimony that you were receiving had been tainted because of enhanced interrogation procedures.

Thompson: I don't think so.

DePue: Because it didn't occur or because it didn't necessarily taint the information?

Thompson: Both.

DePue: There are certainly statements on both sides, twice at least, that enhanced interrogation was used. Do you think it was appropriate when it was used by the Bush administration? (Thompson sighs) You've been sighing an awful lot here today, Governor. (laughs)

Thompson: I don't know what value enhanced interrogation has, unless it leads to something else or unless what is said under that kind of interrogation is corroborated by non-tainted material.

We didn't rely really on interrogations as interrogations. All of us, especially the lawyers, were trained in a culture which demanded either utility, in the sense that interrogation led to something else, led to a plot, led to another group, led to something, so that the interrogation was validated, or the fruits of the interrogation were validated, or with that information in hand, you found corroboration in sources that were untainted. So I think, even if we

received material in a couple of instances where that occurred, we wouldn't give it the weight, unless we saw a reason for it, unless we saw something else that gave it credibility.

DePue: Another criticism—maybe you felt the same way—that both the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] and NORAD [North American Aerospace Defense Command] were very reluctant to cooperate with the investigation.

Thompson: Yeah, that's true. That was true, and we raised holy hell about that.

DePue: But, as far as you're concerned, it in no way invalidated the commission's findings?

Thompson: No, no.

DePue: It wasn't an inhibitor, once you got past that?

Thompson: No.

DePue: And another criticism, that the commission glossed over or ignored many of the warning signs that the FBI in particular had been giving, prior to 9/11. This kind of folds into this criticism that maybe there was some protection of the Bush administration in this.

Thompson: I don't know what that means.

DePue: That if there were strong warnings that the FBI was giving, of certain activities or terrorist cells leading up to 9/11, that there wasn't aggressive action taken by the administration.

Thompson: I think what you're referring to is the president's daily brief, which talked about the…I forget what was the phrase that was used. Something was red hot or…There was a phrase that was used in one of the intelligence briefings that went to Bush, that a lot of people claimed were ignored, that that's how 9/11 happened. It's not true. I have read and re-read and re-read. First of all, we were able to get that intelligence briefing from the White House, when normally nobody would see that but the president and his national security advisor. We got it.

DePue: All of the reports leading up to 9/11?

Thompson: No, the president's daily brief that people said should have warned the White House. We got that, and we all read it, and we all weighed it. There was not enough specificity in that for the president to be able to take any action. There was no suggestion of a particular date; there was no suggestion of a particular effort; there was no suggestion of a particular danger or wrongdoing. You could read that report and say, "Yeah, the alarm bells may be ringing, but for what end?" It was not actionable, to use the word of the military. It was like

somebody coming to the president and saying, "I think something bad is going to happen." And the president would say, "Well, when?" "Well, I don't know." "Where?" "Well, I don't know." "Who's going to do it?" "Well, I don't know." That became so politicized that it wasn't actionable.

DePue: It reminds me of a phrase very early in the 9/11 Commission Report, essentially making the statement from the commission's perspective of the challenges that any intelligence agency had when you're sifting through, not a few pieces of evidence, but thousands and thousands.

Thompson: Thousands, yeah, sure.

DePue: And trying to figure out which ones are irrelevant and which ones make sense.

Thompson: And trying to read chattering on the Internet or trying to give weight to intercepts of phone calls in the Mideast. It's hard work. There's no straight arrows in this stuff.

DePue: Only in retrospect.

Thompson: Yeah. Nobody sends you something saying, "You can find this here," and tell you where here is.

DePue: One other criticism—I'm sure there are a lot more dealt with—dealt with Able Danger. Does that phrase ring a bell? A highly classified data mining project. Anthony Shaffer, I think he's now one of the reliable talking heads on the evening talk shows. He was warning about this, that it was ignored, that Able Danger reports were ignored. That's—

Thompson: I remember the phrase, but I have no other memory of that.

DePue: I don't think I can help you out much beyond that, except former FBI director Louis Freeh was critical of the decision to downplay the reports that were coming from this data mining project. It's kind of what we were just talking about. You've got this huge amount of information, and you have to figure out what pieces of the information connect together.

I'm going to pull you out of the weeds here, Governor, and probably thankfully so on your part—

Thompson: Good.

DePue: ...and ask you, in retrospect now, how well you think the 9/11 Commission did its job?

Thompson: I think it did its job superbly. I think they took some of the best resources in the nation, some of the best minds, dealing with law enforcement and terrorism in the nation, and the commission and its staff did an absolutely

superb job. I think the public response and the congressional response verified that.

DePue: Are you proud of your involvement in it?

Thompson: Absolutely. One of the most important things I've ever done in my entire career. I think it was Tim Roemer who said it, "You know, the weight of history is on our shoulders." We believed that, and we conducted ourselves accordingly.

DePue: Anything else in your career that you would put up at that level?

Thompson: Oh, being a great governor of the state of Illinois for fourteen years, sure. No, they're all different. The U.S. attorney's office was different than the governorship and different than being the chair of Winston & Strawn for thirteen years and different than the 9/11 Commission. It was all different.

DePue: Was being on the 9/11 Commission kind of the culmination, joining together all these different skills and experiences that you'd had?

Thompson: Oh, that's certainly right. Yeah.

DePue: What I'd like to finish with today—and a lot of this we've already talked about so we don't have to belabor the point—but things that happened subsequent to the 9/11 report, in the process of fighting the War on Terror. Let's just get your reaction to it. A couple of them were preceding that. The first one is the Bush administration's decision to take on the Taliban and invade Afghanistan, to root it out at its core.

Thompson: I think that was appropriate. And it wasn't just the Taliban, it was Al Qaeda. They're two different outfits.

DePue: Yeah, you're right to mention the difference there, because it certainly was Al Qaeda that attacked us. This happened very early on as well, the Patriot Act.

Thompson: The Patriot Act? I thought that was appropriate.

DePue: Do you think there was any place that went too far?

Thompson: No.

DePue: There certainly has been discussion in retrospect about that. We did discuss this, but I'll give you a chance to make a definitive comment on it. Is waterboarding appropriate in the future?

Thompson: (sighs) I can't say I know enough about its physical and psychological effects to say one way or the other. You've got to make the judgment in terms of

what your objective is and what the dangers are that you're trying to avoid. (sighs) I don't know.

DePue: Here's another topic that has not gone away in the fifteen years since then, the question of whether or not it's appropriate to hold prisoners at Guantanamo Bay.

Thompson: Frankly, I don't see why Guantanamo Bay is so different than any other prison that they might go to. I mean, they're not going to let them loose. [If] they close Guantanamo Bay, they're going to go to some other prison. My guess is Guantanamo Bay is a hell of a lot better than remanding them to the custody of some countries who…Egypt or, you know.

DePue: Or a prison in Illinois that has been vacated, that's just sitting there, and maybe Illinois can make some money in using that as—

Thompson: Hey, I'm all for that. It's going to sit there in Thomson, Illinois.

DePue: But then you get into the NIMBY, not in my back yard.

Thompson: No, I think the community was welcoming it, jobs, jobs, jobs.

DePue: The other aspect that I've always heard in that respect is that if they are brought to the soil of the United States, then it's a more difficult argument to make that the protections of the Constitution do not apply to them, because they're prisoners of war. Maybe that's a different question.

Thompson: I don't know the answer to that, but they sure seem to have had some success in some cases in getting their cases up in the Supreme Court of the United States.

DePue: So should they be treated as prisoners of war or criminal proceedings?

Thompson: No, I think they should be prisoners of war. But there's nothing that says you can't hold prisoners of war in Thomson, Illinois, as opposed to Guantanamo.

DePue: So your statement is, you're not in favor of treating this as a law enforcement problem.

Thompson: No.

DePue: How about domestic terrorists? Which we now have a lot more of here recently.

Thompson: They're not prisoners of war. In most cases, they're citizens of the United States. So the answer has to be criminal.

DePue: We've already talked about Bush's decision to invade Iraq. Just to put a different twist on that, how about the neo-conservative argument that we could go in and basically reconstruct countries like Iraq and maybe even Afghanistan in our own image, to a certain extent?

Thompson: I don't believe that.

DePue: What you heard from Cheney and others was that they will be welcoming, that they would embrace us when we come.

Thompson: I don't believe that.

DePue: I knew what the answer was to that already. (Thompson laughs) I know you're no fan of the way things developed in Iraq, but were you supportive at the time of Bush's decision to surge?

Thompson: Yeah and Obama's decision to surge.

DePue: In Afghanistan.

Thompson: Yeah. And Obama in…Where did he surge, in Iraq or Afghanistan?

DePue: Afghanistan, using an example of the success that Bush had in Iraq.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: How about the Obama administration's reaction to the Arab Spring? How about the potential of the Arab Spring, and what's been the reality of the Arab Spring?

Thompson: I don't think anybody could have known. The Arab Spring arose spontaneously in the Mideast. I don't think we were qualified to judge what was going to happen from that. Nobody knew. So, to the extent that it seemed smart to encourage greater freedoms in those countries, I don't think that was a bad idea. It didn't, in many instances, produce the results we wanted, but that doesn't mean the idea was wrong.

DePue: Many conservatives have been very critical of the president's relationship with Israel, that he seems much more inclined to work with Arab countries of the region.

Thompson: He has to. Israel is surrounded by Arab countries. So, if you're going to defend Israel, you have to deal with Arab countries. The notion that you can't deal with Arab countries or attempt to deal with Arab countries in the protection of Israel is wrong.

DePue: Again, this is the conservative argument that the president oftentimes has taken the Palestinian side of the argument over the Israeli side or has given them equal weight.

Thompson: I don't know whether he's giving them equal weight or not, but there are certainly issues between the Israelis and the Palestinians that are not one-sided.

DePue: So you're not being critical of that by any means then?

Thompson: No.

DePue: We talked just a little bit about this as well, the Iran nuclear deal. I'm hearing you say you are generally okay with the approach that President Obama has taken on that?

Thompson: Look, I have to say the president and his advisors are much more knowledgeable about that than I am. I'm reacting as a citizen, as a layman on these issues. And I guess it was something of an attempt to try and pull the Iranians away from an all-out dash to the bomb. I think it seems to have done that, if you believe what they're doing over there and if you believe enough checks are in place and that the appropriate international nuclear agencies are screening and observing and investigating.

DePue: Do you trust the Iranian regime, the current regime, to honor those agreements?

Thompson: I don't know. I don't generally trust them. In return for that, they've gotten the ability to sell their oil; they've gotten the ability to get their money unfrozen. I think that's important to them. Whether, in the end, they'll decide, "Oh, that's not so important. We're going to build a bomb." North Korea, that's all he's doing is building bombs, while letting his nation starve. How are we going to prevent that?

DePue: Again, one of the arguments about not allowing Iran to have access to the money is that they are still a major state sponsor of terror, throughout that region especially, or are you disagreeing with that?

Thompson: No, I'm not disagreeing with that. But you can't base all of your policies on one issue. There are other countries who are sponsoring terror. They just call it something else. (laughs)

DePue: Governor, then here's my last question for today. It's almost like I'm torturing you as we go through this—

Thompson: No, you're not.

DePue: …but it's been a fascinating discussion. And now, by virtue of your role on the 9/11 Commission and even before on the intelligence oversight, you're a foreign policy and international expert.

Thompson: I guess so. (laughter)

DePue: What do you see as the major international threats today?

Thompson: Destabilization attempts by Russia in Europe in NATO-defended countries. Chinese military aggression in the Pacific. The continued terrorist activities originating in countries like Iraq or Afghanistan, but now spreading throughout the world. And an insufficient attention to our domestic problems at home. That's a pretty full range.

DePue: That's a lot. And you didn't even mention North Korea this time. You mentioned it before. (Thompson sighs) Thank you, Governor.

Thompson: Thank you.

(end of interview #28)

Interview with James Thompson

IST-A-L-2013-054.29

Interview # 29: June 9, 2016

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Thursday, June 9, 2016. Governor, this is our twenty-ninth session. (Thompson laughs) I told you, we're closing in on the end here.

Thompson: Good, good. I'm ready.

DePue: Today we get to talk about politics in the 2000s and activities in your life in the 2000s and beyond. I want to pick it up with a little bit of your professional career and talk about just one topic, on the lobbying side of things. This is dealing with your involvement with Philip Morris. What can you tell us about that?

Thompson: The Philip Morris case that I worked on, and I guess I'm still working on, (laughs) is a really interesting case. It started sixteen years ago. I didn't have anything to do with the trial. It was down in Madison County. You've heard that Madison County—

DePue: Has a reputation for being generous.

Thompson: Has a reputation, yes…Well, more than generous according to some critics. The word "hellhole" comes to mind. I don't know. But I got into it after the verdict by the trial judge down there, who ruled for the plaintiffs' lawyer and entered a verdict for damages of $10 billion and gave the plaintiffs' lawyer $1.8 billion as a lawyer's fee.

DePue: And this is dealing with smoking and the impact of smoking?

Thompson: This claim was not for personal injury from smoking; this claim was under the Consumer Fraud Act in Illinois. They claimed that Philip Morris' use of the descriptor "lights" on the cigarettes was deceptive, that there was no proof that the light cigarettes were any different from the regular cigarettes and that, under federal law, you couldn't use the descriptor "lights." We had argued that the Federal Trade Commission [FTC], in prior decisions, had approved the use of the descriptor, "lights," and that the light cigarettes, under federal testing, from the federal testing labs, did not show what the plaintiffs claimed. But the judge entered the verdict, $10 billion, $1.8 billion for the lawyers, and promptly retired. The case went then to the Supreme Court. That's where I got into it.

DePue: You're talking about the Illinois Supreme Court?

Thompson: After a time, the case was heard by the Illinois Supreme Court. I argued it for Philip Morris. We lost one judge to recusal because Justice Thomas had hired one of the plaintiff's lawyers to represent him in a defamation case against the newspaper. So Thomas recused himself, which was sort of unhelpful from our side, since Justice Thomas usually is very conservative in business cases.

In any event, we went to the Illinois Supreme Court with the remaining six justices. The court later ruled, four to two, that the lawsuit should be dismissed, that there was no fraud proved under the Illinois Consumer Fraud Act, that the labeling of the cigarettes as "lights" was not a violation, and two of the justices said, "And in any event, there remain deep

questions about whether this was an appropriate class action and whether the damages claimed were properly measured." But they didn't rule on the merits of the case; they simply dismissed it as not a consumer fraud.

The plaintiffs' lawyers went up to the Supreme Court of the United States. The Supreme Court of the United States refused to hear it. Several years intervened. The plaintiffs filed another lawsuit, claiming that the Federal Trade Commission, which we said had approved the labeling of these cigarettes as "lights," had changed its mind in the intervening years and now said that they meant no such thing. Of course, this was a different Federal Trade Commission, with different members, tossing the old Federal Trade Commission out of the bus, I guess.

So then the new trial judge in Madison County, said, "No, I'm not going to reverse it, not on that ground." Dismissed it. They went up to the appellate court this time, with judges from Madison County participating in the appeals court.

DePue: Is this the U.S. appellate court now or still the state?

Thompson: No, this is Illinois. And that Illinois appellate court reversed the trial judge and reinstated the original ten billion dollar verdict. We went to the Illinois Supreme Court and said, "Hey, wait a minute. Appellate courts can't reverse the Supreme Court." I argued the case again in the Illinois Supreme Court.

They held, in an opinion by Justice Burke, that the appellate court had no power to reverse the Supreme Court. So they tossed the case out and said, if you've got new evidence—because the plaintiffs claimed that this later FTC ruling was new evidence—you come to us and ask us to recall our mandate. Don't go to the appellate court. So the plaintiffs' lawyer did. He went to the Supreme Court of Illinois and asked them to recall their mandate, so he could argue new evidence. That was denied, unanimously.

So they went back up to the U.S. Supreme Court and argued that Justice Karmeier should be recused, because he was biased against the plaintiffs. Now, they had raised that before. Justice Karmeier denied the recusal motion. The Illinois Supreme Court refused to participate in the issue of whether Karmeier should be recused. They left it up to Karmeier. So the case is back up in the U.S. Supreme Court, solely on the grounds of whether Justice Karmeier should be recused.

The U.S. Supreme Court decided a case this morning, called *Williams v. Pennsylvania*, in which they held that, in a criminal case, a death penalty case in Pennsylvania, a justice who had formerly participated in the case as a prosecutor could not sit as a justice on the Supreme Court appeal, which seems to me rather obvious. And Justice Kennedy wrote an opinion this morning saying essentially that; if you were a former prosecutor, you can't

later be a judge in the same case. But our friends, the plaintiffs' lawyers in Philip Morris, will claim that this applies to Justice Karmeier. So we probably won't know until Monday whether they're going to send our case back or whether they'll deny the petition for certiorari. We'll see.

So sixteen years of back and forth, up and down, between state and federal and trial courts and appellate courts, Philip Morris is still living. I should mention one other thing about this case that was interesting. That is, when I was assigned to represent Philip Morris, right after the verdict, there was a question about an appeal bond. We lost the case, and we wanted to appeal, and we had to get an appeal bond, under the Illinois statute. But the Illinois appeal bond was of a ruinous amount. It would have threatened Philip Morris with bankruptcy had we attempted to post that.

DePue: For us non-lawyers out there, what exactly is an appeals bond?

Thompson: In this case, the plaintiffs won. They got a judgment against Philip Morris for ten billion. Under the law, if you want to appeal that judgment, you've got to post a bond that guarantees that the ten billion will be there, in the event you lose the appeal, because they don't want people appealing a case, spending their money in the meantime, and then if they lose in the Supreme Court, saying, "Well, I'm sorry, it's all gone." But forcing us to post an appeal bond of that magnitude, in this case, would have been tantamount to risking bankruptcy for the company.

So, I started a campaign to get the appeal bond statute amended, so that the amount we would have to post wouldn't be ruinous. This involved my having to go to newspapers around the state and have editorial board meetings, asking them to support the amendment of the appeal bond law. We also tried in the legislature to get the legislature to amend the appeal bond law. Of course we were opposed by the Trial Lawyers Association, so that didn't go anywhere.

Eventually a deal was reached with the plaintiffs' lawyers, and we were able to go on with the appeal. But it was interesting, because at the beginning of the assignment for Philip Morris, I was both a lobbyist and appellate lawyer in the same matter, which never had happened to me before.

DePue: What would have happened if there had been a final resolution on all this for that ten billion that would go against Philip Morris? Where would that money go to, other than the lawyers?

Thompson: Now this is a class action. And the class, as it was settled in this case by the judge, was every person who had purchased light cigarettes for the past thirty years. That's a lot of people.

DePue: (laughs) In Illinois, or in the United States?

Thompson: In the United States. That's an awful lot of people. Now remember, in this case, we hadn't even reached the merits yet. There's never been a ruling on whether they proved damages. There's never been a ruling on whether the class was appropriately formed.

In any event, to answer your question, the judge ruled on the damages question that the money should go—besides the lawyers—to various schools in the state of Illinois. He, in effect, passed out the dollars; it didn't go to the class. So in the Philip Morris litigation, we've never gotten to the merits of whether this is an appropriate case to begin with, and we're still going.

DePue: At this rate it could be going for many years more.

Thompson: Yes, it could. I was talking to some of our summer associates yesterday at the firm, Matt Carter and I, who've worked on this case now…Were highlighting it for the summer associates on its torturous history through state and federal courts. I said, "How many of you have read Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*?" Of course none had. I said, "Well, in that book, Dickens describes a case called *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*. It's a case about an estate, and it went on for years and years and years. And as Dickens describes it, people were born into the case; people died out of the case. (both laugh) Little children who were promised a hobby horse if they were part of the winners of that case not only didn't get the hobby horse, but they rode a real horse, and in fact, rode the real horse out of this life, and eventually the entire estate was consumed by the lawyers' fees, and then it ended. (laughs) I said, "This sounds to me like *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* in this case."

DePue: Let's shift gears here and get into Illinois politics and Illinois governorships, I guess. I want to talk quite a bit about your relationship with George Ryan. But before we get into his case, I want to get your assessment of the Ryan governorship. George Ryan was different from probably both you and Governor Edgar in a lot of respects.

Thompson: Correct, that is true.

DePue: And I know that he had a long relationship with you as lieutenant governor, but he had a reputation for liking to make deals. Would you say that's accurate about George?

Thompson: Yeah, in the sense that…Here's what I'll say; despite his conviction for things that happened when he was secretary of state and despite all the criticism of him for things that he went on trial for, in many ways George Ryan was a good governor. He wanted to get things done for Illinois. And having come from the legislature…He was first on the county board in Kankakee County and then went to the legislature, worked his way up into leadership positions, and for one session was Speaker. He knew that, in order to make progress in the state and to get things done, governors had to deal with the legislature.

So yes, he was willing to make a deal on legislation, if that would get things done, whether it was an appropriation for the operations of state government or an appropriation for schools. No matter what the issue was, you had to have both the legislature and the governor, either branch; you couldn't do it by yourself. Yes, he would make deals.

DePue: Perhaps the best example of that is the Illinois FIRST program, $6.3 billion to various projects. Was this similar to your Build Illinois initiative?

Thompson: Yeah, but with a couple of exceptions. The Build Illinois program was based on the revenues from one tax, the used car tax, which had little or no statewide application to people, except those who were selling their own used cars.

George, on the other hand, to get his Illinois FIRST program passed, had to cobble together, god, six, seven, eight different small taxes. So, it affected more people on the tax end. He got that done, and he got the bonds based on that, and he got the program rolling. But I told him at the time, "You know, you're not approaching this right, in order to get credit for it. You're going to get blamed for the taxes, but you're not going to get credit for the programs."

I would drive by, in the suburbs of Chicago, and I'd see a small sign that said, "Illinois FIRST, Governor George Ryan." Half the time it would be hidden by a bush. I said to him; I said, "Go out and look around where your projects are. You got this little tiny sign that sometimes you can't even see. You can't do that."

I said, "Let me tell you what we did on the Build Illinois program. When we decided on a project, I would go there, and I would make sure that all the legislators from that district were invited, make sure that the press—the newspapers, the radio, the television—were invited. We would have a giant billboard, not a little sign, billboard, announcing the project. And we would break ground, shovels ready, big line of people. Then I'd come back, when the building had started, and I'd have the same people come—the press, the legislators—and I'd hold a press conference on the progress. And then, when the project was finished, I'd go back and hold a third press conference with all those people, all the while in front of that giant billboard."

I did that all over the state of Illinois. We got it down to an art. So people knew what the Build Illinois program was, and they knew what was being done for their community. And since it didn't have a collection of little taxes, but one tax, I got credit for that. In fact, from the moment Build Illinois was announced—I announced it, I think, in the State of the State Address—and when the reporters got hold of Speaker Madigan after my speech, they asked for his reaction, and he said, "Best public works program since FDR." (laughs) Okay, the Speaker's saying great things about this. This is going to be fun.

But George was the governor; he did things his own way, and he had his own staff. So I'm not critical of him. I just tried to help him get credit.

DePue: Thus the conversation you and I have had offline about this warehouse someplace that has this collection of shovels and t-shirts.

Thompson: Oh god, yes. We still haven't discovered where it is. (laughs)

DePue: Yeah, it would be wonderful to find that someday.

Thompson: I'm not sure it would. (both laugh) I'm not sure what I'd do with all those shovels and t-shirts.

DePue: There's nothing else that you'd be embarrassed about that's hidden away in that warehouse?

Thompson: No, I don't think so. Maybe some old schedules.

DePue: Here's another thing that got a lot of attention for Governor Ryan. That was his initiative to visit Cuba in 1999. What did you think about that?

Thompson: Good for him. I think the policy of the United States towards Cuba, through a number of presidential administrations, has been wrongheaded. Here we are with the island of Cuba—in which Americans had a lot invested, before the revolution—sixty miles from our shores. So it certainly should be within the U.S. sphere of influence. But because U.S. policy just shut the door on Cuba, what happened? Canadians made investments in Cuba, but not U.S. The Russians took a big political stake in Cuba, sixty miles from our shores. We should never have let that happen.

To say that we can't deal with a Communist government in Cuba; we have to embargo them, do all sorts of other things to make it hard for Cuba and their citizens, while we at the same time are doing what? We are certainly engaged with the Communist government of China. In fact, Chinese products are a huge part of our economy. We currently are engaged with the Communist government of Vietnam. The president was just there promoting trade. If you're going to talk about human rights violations, why are we saying no to Cuba but yes to Vietnam, yes to China, yes to Saudi Arabia, yes to other countries around the world whose other policies we don't necessarily approve of?

This policy is wrongheaded. It was put in place by Republican legislators from Florida. And finally Obama has started to open the doors, and I really support him in what he's done.

But George understood that this was a place where we could do business, and so he went. He wasn't afraid to do that. See, George Ryan was never afraid of anything. Just as I took steps to go to Mexico and Canada and

Warsaw and China and all the other places where we put in trade offices, Japan, George did the same thing for Cuba, and I think he was right.

DePue: This next issue is something for which Governor Ryan got an awful lot of attention, not just at the state level, but nationally as well. I'll set up a couple of things here that built to a decision. In 1999 he was faced with whether or not to execute Anthony Porter. Two days away from the execution, Porter's lawyers won a stay of execution, and he was eventually exonerated by student journalists at Northwestern University. Over the next few years there were other cases that various schools—law schools, journalist schools—were pursuing, and there were incidents where people on death row in Illinois were determined to be innocent.

So, on January 11, 2003—this is after Ryan had lost his election, and we'll get to that in a little bit—Ryan commutes the death sentences of 167 prisoners on death row. Tell me what your feeling about that issue was. This from a governor who ran on the issue of restoring the death penalty, I believe, and certainly was always tough on crime.

Thompson: Yes, correct. But I think what George Ryan did was right. The manner in which the death penalty was carried out in Illinois, in terms of the prosecutions, had over the years become wrong. Whatever you think about the death penalty, as an abstract matter, too many cases happened in Illinois where they weren't getting it right. And as you said, subsequent investigations by journalists and students and others had found cases where people faced with the death penalty were innocent.

I know that George really struggled with this issue. A lot of people said, "Oh, he's only doing that for politics, for sympathy for himself." Nothing could be further from the truth. He and I had long conversations about this. I was no softie; I wasn't looking for public sympathy for any position I had. I thought he was right, and I thought that, to close the door on Illinois' bad practices in obtaining death penalties, he had to act, not just in one case or two cases or three cases, but he had to stop it, period, with his clemency power and give the legislature a chance to act, knowing what they knew then.

In fact, I can remember, I think, on the day before, he went to Northwestern Law School to announce this policy, to Lincoln Hall, where I used to sit as a law student. For some reason I was in the governor's mansion the day before. I don't remember what I was doing there. George wasn't there. George was in Chicago, and we were going back and forth on the telephone and back and forth with pages from his speech, which he was going to go give the next day, and I encouraged him to do it. I thought he was right.

DePue: A couple of the comments you've made here, Governor, it sounds like you had a special relationship with Ryan. I doubt he would have the same kind of

comments about dealings with Governor Edgar as he had about you. What was the nature of your relationship with him when he was governor?

Thompson: He served as the Speaker when I was governor. Whatever he thought about some legislative matter, if I had a different opinion and asked him to change his mind, he did it more often than not. He'd say, "Okay, you're the governor, and I'm your leader, and I'm going to do it for you."

He was my lieutenant governor for eight years, and I gave him more responsibility in that office than, I think, any previous lieutenant governor had ever had. He was responsible in large part for the state's farm policies and for small business policies and economic development policies. He toured the state relentlessly, promoting agriculture and business with not just my blessings, but with my request. We had a good personal relationship.

Yeah, he could be gruff, and (laughs) his bark was far worse than his bite. I had a great affection for him and his family. As I say, in many ways I thought he was a good governor.

I don't know whether we've discussed this or not, but I can recall one bill he was faced with that sought to deny abortions to poor women. Now, George is pro-life; George is an opponent of abortion. But that wasn't the issue in this case. The issue in this case was, can you, as a matter of state policy, allow abortions for people who can afford it, but deny it to indigent women? I said to him, "George, that's unconstitutional. You can't do that." He said, "I agree with you." And he vetoed the bill, which I thought was a really courageous thing for him to do, given his background, given general Republican attitudes about abortion.

DePue: Did that mean that state dollars were going to be spent to pay for abortions?

Thompson: Yes. And there were other ways that he proved he was a master of state government, with all those years in the legislature. I thought he did well as governor, despite whatever he was indicted for from his secretary of state days.

DePue: I wonder, Governor, if you care to share any of the anecdotes or stories about the gruff George Ryan?

Thompson: Yeah. (laughs) Actually, this one wasn't about the gruff George Ryan. He came over to see me in the mansion, and I was upstairs getting ready. So he was sitting downstairs in the family dining room, having a cup of coffee and reading the papers. About five minutes later the butler came in, just took his newspaper right out of his hands, and said, "The Governor wants that." He took the paper and walked out of the room. (laughs) So you can imagine, by the time I got down there, what mood he was in. It was simply a matter of my not knowing he was there yet and asking the butler for the papers, never

knowing that George was reading them downstairs. The butler thinks what the governor wants, the governor gets. "The governor wants that!" And he takes it right out. So we had a few agitated moments (both laugh) before the meeting began.

But otherwise…I mean, I knew his family. His wife, Lura Lynn, was just a wonderful, wonderful woman, no pretentions. And when the federal investigation started, he turned to me, and we helped him. In that first FBI sit-down, I represented him.

DePue: When was that? Was that early in his administration?

Thompson: No, it was later on.

DePue: But there were already rumors, at the time that he became governor, about investigations going on, about his experiences when he was secretary of state.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Especially the Safe Roads case.

Thompson: I don't remember that.

DePue: How much were you hearing, at the time that he was elected, about his legal difficulties?

Thompson: I don't think I was hearing that much. I don't remember what Safe Roads was.

DePue: Operation Safe Roads?

Thompson: Yeah. Oh, was that the FBI investigation of the secretary of state's office and licenses?

DePue: The secretary of state's office and giving licenses to people for bribes—

Thompson: Yeah, for contributions.

DePue: And the whole issue of the Willis Family.

Thompson: Yeah. No, I knew about that.

DePue: Before we get too much farther into George Ryan, I wanted to ask you one more question about his decision to overturn capital punishment in the state. You're a career lawyer, been on the prosecution side, defense side, for your entire life. What was it about Illinois's judicial system that was flawed, that led to the decisions where people were—

Thompson: It wasn't really Illinois' judicial system. It was the bad work and sometimes the false testimony, false police work, in the trials that produced death penalty decisions. That was the evil.

DePue: Eyewitness accounts of saying, "Yes, that's the man."

Thompson: Yeah, or confessions being extorted out of people, or duress being used in questioning. Whatever the ground was, it wasn't in the courts. The courts only could work on the evidence they had in the record. It was what happened before the trial. Look, whether you're a death penalty advocate or not, whether you're a former prosecutor or not, the one thing, one thing, that absolutely chills any discussion of the death penalty is the idea that an innocent person can be convicted and sentenced to death and put to death. I mean, that just stops all conversation. That's a horrible occurrence that no prosecutor, no matter how tough he was, no governor, no matter how much he favored the death penalty, could abide for a moment. That's horrible. And I think the revelation of some of those cases really affected George.

DePue: Were you surprised when Governor Ryan elected not to run for re-election?

Thompson: No, I wasn't surprised. His troubles were mounting by then. He was elected the first time, because he ran a very smart political campaign and because his opponent was a Democrat from southern Illinois whose principles and values were not in tune with the Democrats of Chicago and suburbia. And George took advantage of that. But he just couldn't overcome what happened thereafter.

DePue: That was an interesting election in 2002. Republican primary, Jim Ryan, Patrick O'Malley, Corinne Wood. Who did you support in that?

Thompson: Jim Ryan.

DePue: There's a little bit of irony here in Illinois politics with George Ryan's name being dragged through the mud. Would you agree with that, by that time?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: That you have another person with the surname Ryan.

Thompson: Right. It was not helpful.

DePue: Ryan did win the primary, close to 45 percent. Then O'Malley and Wood pretty much split the rest evenly between the two of them.

How about the Democratic primary? Were you watching that pretty closely? I'll give you the names here, Rod Blagojevich, Paul Vallas, Roland Burris. I think there might have been a couple of other distant runners.

Thompson: You know, I didn't take that much interest in the Democratic primary. I didn't know Rod Blagojevich.

DePue: Did you know Vallas?

Thompson: I knew Vallas, but I didn't understand why he wouldn't take airplanes to campaign downstate. I mean, it just… Especially to visit the metro centers, Rock Island and Peoria and places like that. And Burris wasn't going to be a gubernatorial candidate, in my opinion.

DePue: But he was a perennial also-ran.

Thompson: Oh yeah. He'd do it today if the opportunity arose. But I never met Blagojevich, until the day after the primary. I was doing an interview at one television station—I forget where it was—and he was being interviewed that same day, and we met in the hallway. I introduced myself, and he introduced himself, and we chatted. He was a personable guy. And John Frier, who was with me that day, his mother is Serbian.

DePue: John Frier, he was your bag boy?

Thompson: Travel aide, yeah. He was standing there, and he introduced himself to Blagojevich and said, "My mother is Serbian, so I'm half Serbian." (laughs) Blagojevich said, "What was your mother's maiden name?" "Vasiljevic."[36] So thereafter, after Rod was elected, whenever he ran into John, he would say, "Oh, Mr. Vasiljevic." He had a pretty good memory.

But I was impressed with him that day. He had just won, and he was a personable guy. I later heard that, during the general campaign against Ryan, he would go out and give speeches, especially in suburbia, and say, "I want to be the kind of governor Jim Thompson was." Word would come back to me from people who were in these audiences, you know? And I thought, Well, that clever son of a gun. That's just… (laughs)

Because I was pushing Ryan. That's not a complaint on my part; it just was observation. Jim Ryan was a fine attorney general, but running for governor is a different thing. You can't run for governor just talking about the things you talked about when you were the attorney general. If you're attorney general, you can bring lawsuits against utilities in an effort to get them to lower rates and prevent rate increases and stuff like that. That's what an AG does.

But as governor, you've got a responsibility for the whole wide economy of Illinois, and without electricity and without telephones and computers and everything else that depends on electricity, you're not going to have a prosperous state. So you just can't be, as a gubernatorial candidate or

[36] According to Frier, Vasiljevic was actually his maternal grandmother's maiden name.

as a governor, you can't be the kind of person you were with the same issues as you were with attorney general. Ryan had a tough time understanding that.

DePue: Do you think Ryan could have possibly won that year?

Thompson: Yeah. In fact, he invited me (laughs) to address his assistant attorneys general at the yearly convention they held. I went out there, and I made that speech. I made that speech.

DePue: What I recall of Blagojevich's campaign, other than saying that he wanted to be like Jim Thompson (Thompson laughs)—and I'll ask you for clarification on that—it was essentially, "The Republicans are corrupt. I want to clean up government."

Thompson: I know, right, absolutely.

DePue: And that was resonating, big time.

Thompson: But it's not so much the corruption; it was the twenty-six years of Republican rule. Different things can build up during that time. And, obviously, the corruption allegations and the rumors about Ryan, and the things of that sort, sure that played a part. Blagojevich was smart enough to take advantage of it. And Jim Ryan was saddled with it. He was saddled with the twenty-six years, and he was saddled with the Ryan allegations.

DePue: And he was carrying the Ryan name.

Thompson: Carrying the Ryan name, all these things. So he lost.

DePue: What do you think Blagojevich meant when he said, "I want to be a governor like Jim Thompson."

Thompson: I think he was implicitly saying to his audiences, especially in the suburbs, that Thompson was a successful governor, elected four times, fourteen years, and benefited the state. I want to be like him. It was very clever, a very, very clever thing. He didn't do this all the time; he picked his audiences. But it was smart.

DePue: Governor-wise, I don't think you'd disagree, two very different people. Were there similarities in his campaigning style to your campaigning style?

Thompson: Blagojevich? Yeah, probably. I would think so. He came out of the ethnic politics of Chicago, was a member of the General Assembly and all that.

DePue: Right after the election, he asked you if you would co-chair his transition team.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Were you surprised by that?

Thompson: Very surprised by that, because I hadn't had any communication with him since his election. I was obviously a Ryan supporter. I campaigned for Jim, contributed to Jim, made speeches for Jim.

I was sitting in a restaurant in San Francisco. I was out visiting the Winston office in San Francisco, and I was at breakfast with a partner of mine out there. The phone rang, and it was Rod. He asked me to do this, and I was floored. But he was going to be the governor, and when the governor asks you to do something, you do it, I think. So I accepted. I was co-chair, along with the head of the state AFL-CIO, there's a (laughs)—

DePue: Margaret Blackshere?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: As co-chair of the transition team, what do you do?

Thompson: In some respects it's an honorific title; it's meant to show unity after the election, a Republican and a Democrat, another very clever thing he did. They set up committees, and we were supposed to sort of watch over these committees and watch their work and watch the efforts of transition. But it wasn't a very specifically defined role. I do think it was more of an honorific title, meant to convey to the press and the public that "I'm elected as a Democrat, but I can work with Republicans. Look at my transition committee."

I remember (laughs) sitting down with Rod and some of his advisers. He came to my office with some of his crew—

DePue: Your law office here in town?

Thompson: Yeah. And, as governors might do, he'd say, "What can you tell me about being governor?" (DePue laughs) So, I'd give my sermon. I remember saying, "Now, Rod, you know this better than anybody, having been a member of the legislature. The most important thing a governor does is to work with the legislature, no matter what party controls it. If you want to get things done for the people of Illinois, you will work with the legislature. I did that for fourteen years, and for almost all of those fourteen years, I had a Democratic legislature, and we got things done. You've got to do the same thing."

DePue: Theoretically though, he would have an advantage because I believe that—

Thompson: He had a Democratic legislature.

DePue: He had a Democratic legislature in both the Senate and the House. Up to that point, I think Pate Philip had been the president of the Senate, and they lost control that year.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So all the better for Blagojevich, then.

Thompson: All the better.

DePue: It should have been smooth sailing for him and the legislature.

Thompson: It was not to be.

DePue: Did you have any inkling at that point…When you got to know Blagojevich a little bit better, did you get a sense of his leadership or his management style?

Thompson: No, no, I didn't know. Later on, yes.

DePue: I imagine later on, everybody and their brother and sister were bending your ears.

Thompson: (laughs) I remember when Honda [Motor Co.] was trying to decide between Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois to put their new factory. Honda hired me to put together the case for Illinois. That required me to work closely with the Blagojevich administration, marshalling the resources of the state—the Department of Economic Opportunity and the universities and local government, labor, everything you would marshal together to support Illinois's request for the factory. We worked well together. I've got to say, in that instance, the Blagojevich administration went all out to get that plant. They did it in the right way, and nothing I asked for was ever denied.

There was one unfortunate meeting with the governor, where I had these Honda executives for a meeting with the governor in the governor's office in Chicago. We waited; the governor's running late; the governor's running late. The re-election was going on. He comes whizzing into the room, and before he said anything to the Japanese dignitaries from Honda, he said, "Jim, Jim, I just came from my debate, and she thinks I ought to be in jail." (both laugh) I went, Oh, my god! I said, "Well, Governor, I don't think that's going to happen, and I don't think you should take things said in a debate as seriousness." Then he settled down, but—

DePue: He said this so everybody could hear it?

Thompson: **Yes**. I thought the Japanese guys were going to go, Oh, wow, our first meeting with the governor from Illinois, (laughing) and he wants our plant, and the first thing he does walking into the room is talk about how his opponent had said he ought to be in jail.

DePue: Of course, his opponent at the time was Judy Baar Topinka, but we'll get to that race later.

Thompson: Correct. (laughs) But then, after he sat down and got all put together, every time the Japanese asked him a question, he'd get this terrified look in his face and look to me, and I'd have to answer it. He'd say, "Yes, that's right, Jim. You're right. What he says is correct." I thought, Oh, my God. (sighs) Blago!

DePue: We're going to put Blago aside for a while—

Thompson: Hard to do that.

DePue: Yeah, but we'll pick him up later, because I want to return back to George Ryan. I understand that the last couple of days that Ryan was in office, you were actually down in the mansion with him. Do you remember that?

Thompson: No, I really don't.

DePue: This was in James Merriner's book on George Ryan, and much of it covered the trial.[37]

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: He also mentioned that the two of you were reminiscing and mentioned that you actually had two of your dogs buried on the grounds of the mansion.

Thompson: True.

DePue: The Guv?

Thompson: Guv and Sam.

DePue: Is there a stone or a marker someplace?

Thompson: No.

DePue: So somewhere on the grounds, a mysterious location on the grounds, huh?

Thompson: Yes. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

DePue: That takes us to the point of George Ryan and the firm's involvement with his corruption trial. We've mentioned this briefly, but I just want to reiterate; a lot of his problems stemmed from the secretary of state years. The one that seemed to catch the public's attention was an incident involving Reverend Duane and Janet Willis, who were driving down Route I-94. Six of their children—they had nine, I think, altogether—are in the car with them, and a

[37] *The Man Who Emptied Death Row: Governor George Ryan and the Politics of Crime* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

piece of metal falls off a truck that they're following. They drive over that; it bounces up, punctures the gas tank, sparks flying all over the road, and the entire car is immolated. The only people who got out alive were the two parents. The six children perished in that.

That was in November of 1994, and once investigators started to dig in on that, that's when they started to find out about this whole issue of giving driver's licenses to people and taking bribes. And the incident that occurred…I can't remember the ethnic background of the driver, Polish maybe, who didn't speak English well enough.

Thompson: I don't remember either, Eastern European, I think.

DePue: Yeah. But the driver obviously couldn't understand what other people were trying to tell him, and that whole issue just exploded.

Thompson: Right, because the truck he was driving was defective, and that piece fell off, and that tragic accident happened. Not only was the death of the six children a huge issue in the campaign, in the public's mind George was responsible. He was running the secretary of state's office. Whether it was a faulty piece on the truck that led to the deaths, and George Ryan didn't have anything personally to do with the deaths; he wore the jacket.

DePue: How about all the reports though that people in the secretary of state's office were expected to pay into the campaign fund, and that was one of the reasons they were doing this in the first place?

Thompson: Correct, that's right. So, obviously this became a political issue, and the Willises were the public face of this for a long time thereafter as well.

DePue: I don't recall the specifics. When did Patrick Fitzgerald become the U.S. attorney? I know he was appointed by Peter Fitzgerald, correct?

Thompson: That's correct.

DePue: And there's no relationship between them.

Thompson: There's no relationship. In fact, Patrick was from New York. He was a prosecutor in New York, and Fitzgerald plucked him out of that office and had the president put him in Chicago.

DePue: One of the things that caught my attention was that he was from Brooklyn and attended a Jesuit school when he was in New York.

Thompson: Oh yeah. And, of course, the local bar was all pissed off that "one of our own" wasn't appointed. I guess we were all offended by Fitzgerald's, in essence, saying there's no lawyer in Chicago good enough to do this.

DePue: This is Senator Peter Fitzgerald.

Thompson: Yes. And guys like me—former prosecutor, former U.S. attorney—[are] thinking, Wait a minute. We've had successful U.S. attorneys from Chicago; their names were Thompson, Webb, Valukas. You want any more names? And all of a sudden, the Chicago bar's not good enough for this, and you got to go to Brooklyn? That was the normal reaction here. Pat Fitzgerald turned out to be a very fine prosecutor.

DePue: And you got to know him a little bit better over the years, didn't you?

Thompson: I did. I tried to hire him for Winston.

DePue: Before this or after this?

Thompson: No, after this, after he left the office.

DePue: He also was the attorney who prosecuted I. Lewis Libby, otherwise known as "Scooter" Libby.

Thompson: Scooter Libby, yes.

DePue: Kind of an aside, but any thoughts about that case? That's a national level case.

Thompson: Some lawyers have criticized him for prosecuting Libby for perjury, when he knew who had committed the crime that he was questioning Libby about. But that aside, I thought Pat was a good prosecutor. When he left the U.S. attorney's office, a number of the law firms were trying to get him to join them. Winston was among them, and I got sent to try and persuade him to come to Winston. But he went to Skadden [Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP and Affiliates] instead.

DePue: Did you have a cordial conversation with him?

Thompson: Oh, absolutely.

DePue: How would you describe Fitzgerald's personality?

Thompson: Stoic, very prosecutorial. He was a tough prosecutor.

DePue: Here's one of the curiosities about George Ryan, and I don't have the specific time this came out; I think it was about the time he stepped out of office. Apparently, the Ryan administration had kept a detailed political favors list.

Thompson: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: That was like 550 pages long and recorded every favor that he or the administration had done since 1991.

Thompson: Yeah, that was one of his staff's brilliant idea, to keep this book, so they were able to say, when somebody asked him for a favor, "Hey, wait a second; you already got one this month." And it was the same way in their legislative dealings. Guys would come to them, and they kept book, and they were able to say, "Wait a second, you didn't vote for us on this bill," or "We already gave you something last month." It was sort of a crazy thing to do, especially when it ended up (laughs) out of their hands. (sighs)

DePue: Was your name in the list?

Thompson: I don't think it was.

DePue: He never performed any favors for you?

Thompson: And if it was, it didn't show any favors. (laughs)

DePue: Governor, just about everybody else's name was on that list.

Thompson: Yeah, I know, but it's one of those things where you hear about the list, and the list is coming out, and the first thing you ask is, "Is my name in it?" (laughs)

DePue: And you don't recall?

Thompson: No, I don't recall.

DePue: That's why I wanted to get the list.[38]

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: One of his closest advisers, all the way through this, and I believe his chief of staff, was Scott Fawell.

Thompson: Yeah, I think the list was Scott's idea.

DePue: And Scott Fawell came to trial before George Ryan did. Were you or Winston & Strawn involved with Scott Fawell's trial at all?

Thompson: No.

DePue: You're going to have a chance to get to know Fawell better. What's your impression of Fawell? Am I saying it right?

[38] For more on the list, see Matt O'Connor and Ray Gibson, "U.S. Reveals Ryan Political Favor List," *Chicago Tribune*, January 28, 2003; Steve Warmbir, Chris Fusco, Tom Novak, and Scott Fornek, "Fawell's Secret List of Clout," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 31, 2003. There were two lists, a "priority list" of requests for favors, and a "master list" of the priority list requests that were actually carried out. Thompson's name was on the priority list.

Thompson: Yeah, you're saying it right. He was a smart political operative. He helped run the successful Ryan election campaign. But…he did not help keep George on the straight and narrow. And he had his own interests as well, for which he was punished. The irony is that George thought of him as a son. He really did; the relationship was that close.

DePue: And from what I've been able to pick up, it was mutual. But we'll get into why it didn't stand up after a while. Ed Genson was his attorney?

Thompson: Yes, it was Genson, soft G.

DePue: He was found guilty, as I understand, in the Operation Safe Road case and was convicted to something like six and a half years.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And a $750,000 decision against Citizens for Ryan.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: This is all before George Ryan's case came up.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: How did Winston & Strawn get involved with Ryan's defense?

Thompson: He asked me. When his first FBI interview was scheduled, he asked me to go with him.

DePue: Was this before Fawell went to trial?

Thompson: I don't remember what the time was, as far as Fawell's case was concerned. So I went with him to the interview. After that, I said, "George, you've got to have Dan Webb. He's our best defense lawyer. I'm an appellate lawyer basically, and you need the best."

DePue: Can you tell me what happened when he went to be interviewed by the FBI? Is this on the record? Is this something where, if you're lying to the FBI, that's going to be brought into the case?

Thompson: Correct. It's a separate offense.

DePue: So what's the discussion when he's sitting before the FBI?

Thompson: Oh, they're asking him questions about his administration and about his political practices and things of that sort. I didn't know the answers to the questions that the FBI was going to ask him, so the interview just proceeded.

DePue: George was doing all the talking?

Thompson: Yeah, and I think he just wanted me there for comfort. When the interview was over, I said to him, "Hey, listen. This is getting serious. You need Webb." And Webb was willing to take the case.

DePue: How long was the discussion with the FBI?

Thompson: Oh, maybe forty-five minutes.

DePue: That's all?

Thompson: Yeah. It was preliminary.

DePue: Was he to have other discussions with the FBI after that?

Thompson: I don't remember if he did or if he didn't. I think, if the FBI thought they had caught him on one or two questions in the first interview, they wouldn't ask him anymore. They would take it and run.

DePue: I would assume, if he had further discussions, Webb would have been there.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: At the time, were you still the chair of Winston & Strawn?

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Tell me about Dan Webb before we go any further. How would you describe him?

Thompson: He started out as a country boy. (laughs) When I was in the U.S. attorney's office, I made it a practice to interview every job applicant in the U.S. attorney's office. Then I'd send around the person to the chiefs in the office—chief of the criminal division, chief of the civil division, chief of appeals—to get their opinion. But I would make the final decision.

So Webb showed up, and I think, at the time, he was working for Chicago Title and Trust. It was his first job out of law school. He came from western Illinois, and he was a real country kid, honest to god, worked in the hammer factory[39] in his hometown, while he was going to school. I interviewed him, and I immediately liked him, and I thought, Oh, god, get this guy in front of a jury. He was twenty-something years old, but he looked twelve. I thought, Every mother's heart's going to be with him.

DePue: That was the thing, you thought he would be good in front of a jury?

[39] The Vaughan & Bushnell factory in Bushnell, Illinois. For Webb's work as an assistant U.S. attorney, see Dan Webb, interview by Mark DePue, July 19, 2016.

Thompson: Sure. His grades were fine; he was smart. But he just had that appeal; he had that every-mother's-son appeal. So I sent him around, and the chief of the criminal division made a little note on the resume, "N.B.B.R." I called him up; I said, "What the hell does N.B.B.R. mean?" He said, "Nice boy, but rural." I said, "That's why we're hiring him."

So, I hired him, and he rose in the U.S. attorney's office while I was there, and obviously rose after I was there and eventually was appointed U.S. attorney himself. He had a distinguished career. He served in my cabinet, as the head of the state police. Winston & Strawn hired him before I got there. He quickly established his credentials there, and he's now today one of the most sought after litigators in the nation.

DePue: *Corporate Crime Reporter*, is that a legal journal?

Thompson: It's a newsletter, yeah.

DePue: Ranks him as "the best white-collar criminal defense attorney in the nation."

Thompson: That's true, absolutely true.

DePue: So, if you got the best criminal defense attorney in the nation—

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: I'm sure there would be others who would argue, but obviously he's right at the top of his career. That doesn't come cheap, Governor.

Thompson: No, it doesn't.

DePue: And Ryan had money to do this?

Thompson: Ryan had money in his campaign fund.

DePue: Could the campaign fund be used in that respect?

Thompson: Yes, it could be. Ryan had other lawyers, as well, who took their share of the campaign fund. So, there was not much left by the time George came to Winston. We were paid for a while, and then the campaign fund was broke, and George was broke, so we soldiered on.

DePue: Who made the decision that Winston & Strawn was going to suck it up?

Thompson: Webb and I.

DePue: Did you have to take that to the board of directors?

Thompson: No. I mean, what are you going to do? You've agreed to represent an Illinois governor. That's a hell of an assignment. And it's to Winston's credit and

Webb's credit that they and he were selected for this case with national implications. So what are you going to do? In the middle of the case say, "Oh, you don't have any money anymore; we're withdrawing." In the first place, I'm not sure a judge would have let you withdraw, and it would just have been a bad thing to do. So we soldiered on.

DePue: March 2003, Scott Fawell is convicted of racketeering and fraud. We mentioned that a little bit before. December 17, 2003, about a year after Ryan's out of office, he and lobbyist and adviser, Lawrence Warner, are indicted on twenty-two counts, including racketeering, bribery, extortion, money laundering, tax fraud, making false statements, a ninety-one page indictment. You and Webb had already been working with the governor through this entire timeframe?

Thompson: Webb was. I didn't have anything to do with the trial after my initial FBI interview. Webb was handling that. I wouldn't interfere with that. Look, if you remember Judge Kerner's indictment, there were many counts. You follow the old theory, don't pink the dragon; slay him or leave him alone. So when you indict somebody like a governor, you don't want one or two counts. You've got the whole ball of wax in that indictment, as many counts as you can find, because that's serious stuff, to indict a governor, and you'd better have your entire case in there.

DePue: And my perception of Fitzgerald, as a prosecutor, thorough and tenacious; would that be an accurate statement?

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: What else can you tell me about Lawrence Warner?

Thompson: He was a pal of George's for a long time, an insurance executive. I think his specialty was erecting the plywood, after a fire in a place. He'd go by, and if the windows were all destroyed by the fire people, Warner's company was sort of a clean-up. He had other insurance businesses too.

DePue: According to James Merriner, from the book [*The Man Who Emptied Death Row: Governor George Ryan and the Politics of Crime*] that he wrote on Ryan and the trial, (reading) "Ryan and Warner conspired to fix many of the major contracts in the secretary of state's office." So again, much of this goes back to his secretary of state days. "In return, Ryan and his family members received illegal cash payments, gifts, vacations, personal services. Of the twenty-two counts, four applied only to Warner, the rest to both or to Ryan alone." I don't know that I want you to respond to that right now, as we get into this.

You've already mentioned this to a certain extent, but how closely are you following this defense as it's being played out over a period of years?

Thompson: I think the only knowledge I had of the defense was what was in the papers then. Once you get Dan Webb on your case, you don't superintend him or look over him or follow him. He had a first-rate crew trying the case with him.

DePue: Who else was involved?

Thompson: Ray Mitchell was involved and some of our top trial lawyers that were Webb's assistants in other cases. So, George had the benefit of the best team that Winston could put together, regardless of cost.

DePue: Do you know his strategy, going into a case like this?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Who was the judge that presided over this?

Thompson: Oh, I'm trying to remember her name now, a woman judge.

DePue: I can help you out if you'd like.

Thompson: Go ahead; help me.

DePue: Rebecca Pallmeyer?

Thompson: Oh yeah, Pallmeyer.

DePue: Tell me about her.

Thompson: She had a good reputation, one of the few women district court judges. I didn't know that much about her. It seemed, during the course of the trial, that she wasn't doing Webb any favors—let's put it that way—in her rulings, which were usually in accordance with the prosecutors. Now, that's not unusual by itself in criminal cases.

But this was Webb's responsibility. I just didn't follow it that closely, and I didn't know Judge Pallmeyer.

DePue: September 2005, jury selection. Apparently there were 301 prospective jurors, and they eventually did get to the twelve [jurors] and six [alternates]. Tell me a little bit about the strategy that prosecutors and defense attorneys typically would take in selecting the jurors.

Thompson: As I said, I wasn't involved in the trial, so I can't tell you what Webb's strategy was, other, than normally a defense attorney would seek to make sure that a juror didn't have any biases against the defendant, personally. In this case, since the defendant was a public office holder, a politician, you'd want to make sure that people didn't have any political biases. So you'd probe in that area. If you knew ahead of time what your defenses were going to be, you

would want to try and see if you could find out whether a defense of that kind would be comfortable with a prospective juror. The prosecutor would do just the opposite.

You can apply general rules to the selection of the jury, but a lot of it is instinct and how the person speaks and what kind of body language you can discern from a potential juror when they're answering questions—do they look away; do they look at you; do they look at the defendant; do they look at the prosecutor?—but a lot of it is just gut instinct that you learn, having tried a lot of cases. So that's what Webb and his assistants would do, in trying to decide who should be on the jury.

DePue: I understand that Pallmeyer, in her discussions with the two attorneys, basically put out an edict that the issue of Operation Safe Roads and the Willises and the issue of George Ryan and his pardoning of all of the people on death row, were not to come up in the case.

Thompson: Right, that was irrelevant.

DePue: And you agreed with that position?

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: The trial begins in late 2005. I think it had gotten a delay; that's not unusual in these kinds of cases. And for a long time, I'm sure Webb and the defense team were thinking that Fawell was not going to be testifying, because of this relationship you talked about before.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: I'm going to back up just a little bit. How much had you and George been talking personally? Had you had many conversations after the whole process began?

Thompson: No.

DePue: None?

Thompson: No, I mean we might have had conversations, but there was no reason for he and I to be talking, when he had Webb.

DePue: I would have thought, just in the nature of a personal relationship.

Thompson: No, but you see, what would we talk about? Am I going to substitute my own opinions for those of Webb? No. Am I going to try and dictate strategy to Webb? No. Am I going to engage in discussions with George about Webb's strategy? No. I had turned the case over to the best in the nation. (laughs) There's nothing more I could do.

DePue: What you're saying then is, as a matter of professional courtesy, as much as anything else, you're going to keep out of this.

Thompson: Well, it's not just courtesy; Webb was my partner. George was my friend, and Webb was my partner. I put the two together, and I thought George got the best there was.

DePue: Do you remember hearing the news that Fawell now was going to be a prosecutor's witness?

Thompson: Yeah, and you hear the stories about how the prosecutors got Fawell to do that, that they took him around the country and stuck him in primitive jails, on the theory they were looking for an appropriate place to put him, while they were bringing him from the penitentiary to the trial. You hear all that backroom talk. I don't know whether that influenced Fawell to testify against George or whether there was the possibility that Fawell would be indicted on other things if he didn't testify. I don't know, it was just—

DePue: But it wasn't much of a secret about why he decided to testify; was it? I mean, that was all a matter of court proceedings.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So what was the reason?

Thompson: I don't know.

DePue: This is where sex comes in, as we have to have sex in a case like this, right?

Thompson: Were these the Costa Rican prostitutes, or is this the girlfriend?

DePue: The girlfriend/fiancé of Scott Fawell, who had also been indicted and convicted and pled guilty.

Thompson: Okay, okay.

DePue: I'm probably going to say her name wrong, Andrea Coutretsis?

Thompson: I don't know. She was Greek, I think. Yeah, he eventually decided that his relationship with his fiancé was more important than his relationship with George Ryan.

DePue: Who he still felt was his father figure, apparently?

Thompson: (laughs) Not for long, I guess.

DePue: Were you in the court during any of this?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Why weren't you in the court during any of this?

Thompson: Because I didn't belong there.

DePue: Even as an observer?

Thompson: First of all, I think if I went to court, Pallmeyer would say, "Governor, what are you doing here?" I mean, I was known; people knew my face. I would have been "a distraction" in the trial. So I didn't go; I didn't think it was my place to go, and for what reason would I go? Am I spying on Webb? Am I trying to influence the jury? To do that, I'd have to go up and sit next to Ryan, wouldn't I? It would not have been proper for me to be in the trial. If I was just one of Webb's partners, an unknown person, sure, you can go up there and watch Webb. But the governor? No.

DePue: Would Webb come back and the two of you sit down and discuss the case or just kind of fill you in on what was going on in the courtroom?

Thompson: He might have from time to time, but it was not anything beyond that.

DePue: You don't remember any particulars on that.

Thompson: No.

DePue: What do you think about the implications that eventually pulled in not just Governor Ryan and Warner but most of Ryan's kids as well, that they were tainted with this whole process?

Thompson: Look, George loves his kids and would do anything for his kids. Larry Warner was a clever guy, and to the extent that he could help George financially or help his kids financially or pay for a wedding reception or do things like that, he did it. George shouldn't have accepted it, but he did.

DePue: So simply a wrong judgment call or illegal to do it?

Thompson: No. I think it was a wrong judgment call.

DePue: Not illegal?

Thompson: No. George didn't do things for Larry from Ryan because he or his kids got a financial advantage. Look, George's attitude was, if he could do something for his dear friend Larry Warner, he'd do it. He didn't have to get anything in return. He didn't ask Warner for things; Warner offered things.

You'll see an interesting case come down from the Supreme Court this term from the former governor of Connecticut, was it? No, of

Virginia…What's his name?[40] This case was argued in the Supreme Court recently, and there'll be an opinion before July on what's a bribe, and what's not?

DePue: The governor of Virginia who was convicted.

Thompson: McDonnell, yes, he and his wife. The whole issue in that case is, how much can your friends do for you without it being a bribe. What's quid pro quo?

George's things arose out of friendship. Larry Warner was a close, dear friend of his, and George's nature is, if he can do his friend a favor, he'll do his friend a favor. He wouldn't ask anything for it.

It's like the charge in the indictment that he used to vacation on the seaside home of one of his friends—I'm trying to remember his name now—George would go down there and vacation every year, done that for years. Then, when the politics against George heated up, he did a stupid thing. What he would do was he'd write a check to his friend for the expenses of the vacation. Then his friend would cash it and give the money back to George.

That became a count in the indictment. Why? Because George had raised the rates that currency exchanges could charge, and this guy was in the currency exchange business. Now, the fact that the two previous governors had raised rates—I think every governor had raised rates. It's just normal operation of government—they didn't allow George to put that evidence in at the trial.

I mean, that was just George' nature. He wouldn't think that spending a week at the home of his friend to vacation—he and Mrs. Ryan and his friend and his wife, which they'd been doing for years—was in any way a bribe or a criminal act. But for some reason, he got nervous about that, or maybe one of his staff members said, "Hey, wait, they're all looking around for stuff about you. Maybe you'd better not be accepting vacations at this guy's place." So George said, "Okay, I'll write him a check."

DePue: Damned if he did write the check and damned if he didn't?

Thompson: Yeah, that's where prosecutors can sometimes turn innocent acts into criminal acts, in my opinion anyway. And it's always been difficult, I think, to properly explain the criminal side of the quid pro quo. The courts have gotten more

[40] The court decided *McDonnell v. United States* on June 27, 2016, which reversed former Virginia governor Robert McDonnell's conviction, further narrowing the legal definition of corruption. Thompson was initially thinking of former Connecticut governor John Rowland, who was in the middle of an appeal of his conviction for violating campaign finance laws. He lost his appeal a week after this interview.

liberal of late, the Supreme Court of the United States included, in saying, hey, this is politics. This is normal politics.

The Seventh Circuit wrote an opinion in the Blago case, saying that, and now the Supreme Court's going to write an opinion, and I think they're going to say that in the *McDonnell* case. You can't criminalize politics.

DePue: One of the things I read, in terms of Webb's defense, was, "Hey, if the governor was accepting all these things, why isn't he a wealthy man? Why is he flat broke?"

Thompson: (laughs) Good question.

DePue: And the thing you heard on the street, in terms of George Ryan, and I've heard this from others, George's failing, was that he didn't understand that the rules had changed.

Thompson: Right, that's part of it.

DePue: Can you elaborate on that?

Thompson: It's the same thing that happened, I think, in the case of the Chicago congressman, Rostenkowski, who eventually did things in the House. He was a powerful chairman of Ways and Means. These guys get a little in love with themselves, I'm now a powerful congressman, and I'm due this; I'm entitled to this, the politics of entitlement of public officials.

Rostenkowski fell victim to that and was convicted and represented in the end by Webb. All the money was gone. (laughs) It had been taken by Washington lawyers in the initial defense. If he'd had Webb from the beginning, he could have worked out a plea with the Bush administration, since he was a pal of the president's. But no, he hired these Washington lawyers and spent every dime he had with them. And what did he get for it? He got an indictment and conviction.

Then, in the end, he got Webb. So we defended Rostenkowski for no money. In fact, I had to create a Rostenkowski defense fund, which I chaired to try and raise money to do what? Pay off Webb's bill. (laughs)

DePue: For the lawyers in DC?

Thompson: No, for Webb's work.

DePue: Was there something similar going on, in terms of George Ryan's case?

Thompson: No, no, no, but as I say, sometimes people get to Webb too late. It happened to Rostenkowski. Now, that was not the same as George; George went right to

Webb. But that was a good case for Webb to be in. He just got in it too late, the Rostenkowski case. It was a national headlines case.

DePue: When we say, "Ryan just didn't understand the rules changed. He was playing under the old set of rules," what rules are we talking about here?

Thompson: Look, today you've got investigative reporters on newspapers and on the cable news networks, local television stations, that they are looking at every single thing a public official does or says. It's incredible. The relationships between the press and the public officials have changed. They're much more adversarial, I think. I don't know whether that's the right word, but there's a tension in the relationship that didn't exist earlier.

DePue: I thought, from our founding days, that we were supposed to have that adversarial relationship between the press and the politics?

Thompson: Yes, but they've brought it to a fine art now. (DePue laughs) So, I think either George on his own, or some staff member said to George, "Oh look, maybe you should be careful and not be vacationing with whatever his name was because you know the press is looking at everything." George, instead of saying, "Hey, screw that. I've been vacationing with this guy for years before I was governor and before he was anything, and we're family friends, and I'm not going to change that."

Instead of that, he said, "Well, okay, I'll give him a check, and then he can give me the money back. So, if the press asks, it's okay." Except in this case, if the FBI asks, it was not okay. George was old school, and I don't think he really realized how the relationship between public officials and the press and prosecutors had changed.

DePue: *Rutan* is something we've talked about a lot already.

Thompson: Oh, *Rutan*, yes.

DePue: And that's certainly one of the instances where the rules changed. I could be off base on this, but in the pre-*Rutan* days, here, in part, is how the old patronage system worked. I help you get a job; you help me with my campaign funds. There was this expectation that somebody—

Thompson: Well, you become a political supporter of mine.

DePue: Yes.

Thompson: With all that entails, yeah.

DePue: I don't know if there's any specifics that relate to Ryan's case involved with that, but certainly I have heard anecdotes where Ryan had difficulty in

understanding how *Rutan* did change, and he was reluctant to accept its implications; let's put it that way.

Thompson: Yeah, that could be.

DePue: How about campaign funds and how a politician can use his own campaign funds? Had the rules changed on that?

Thompson: No, at that time, you could still use campaign funds for personal use if you declared it as income. The rules have since changed; you can't use it for personal use.

DePue: We've talked a little bit about some of the family members. Were you hearing anything about how Mrs. Ryan was dealing with all this while her husband was being dragged through this long process?

Thompson: It wasn't a question of hearing something; I observed it. It was very difficult for her. As I say, she was a gentle, kind, wonderful person, and she loved George. To watch him being dragged through all of this was not an easy thing for her. To see her children's name in this was not an easy thing for her. It wouldn't be an easy thing for anybody.

DePue: April 17, 2006, he is found guilty on all twenty-two counts, and I understand that later on, the judge dismissed two of those counts.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: But as we were discussing in a different case earlier today, there's always going to be an appeal like this. Walk me through the appeals process.

Thompson: Yes, that's where I got back in. While Webb was still in the case and still represented George, since it was now an appellate matter and since that was my specialty, I got more involved in it.

DePue: Just a point of clarification for me, would the appeal process start after the sentencing or even beforehand?

Thompson: After the sentencing.

DePue: So he's sentenced September 6, 2006, to six and a half years.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Turning it back over to you for the appellate process then.

Thompson: Webb stayed involved in the appellate process and so did the trial team, some of whom were appellate lawyers. I don't think my name was on the briefs, but I watched the work of the appellate lawyers. I'm sure I made comments. I

didn't argue the case in the Seventh Circuit. I got more involved when it went up to the Supreme Court of the United States.

DePue: What were the issues that it was being appealed on?

Thompson: Judge's instructions, whether some of the counts were actually criminal offenses. There was a big to-do, as I recall, on one of the jurors that the judge removed from the case, because—let me get this right—she had said that one of the other jurors had been investigating the offense beyond the courtroom. I mean, it was just a whole big mess about the jury in the Ryan case. I don't remember the specifics, but it was quite heated. Pallmeyer ruled for the prosecutors in that matter, so that became a part of the appeal. Generally what you'd expect in a criminal appeal.

DePue: And the appeals go on, both before and after he's actually sent to prison, correct?

Thompson: Yes, he was not given a stay of the prison sentence just because the appeal was pending. People rarely are.

DePue: I understand. November 7, 2007, he's finally sent to prison in Oxford, Wisconsin. Were you there the day he was sent to prison?

Thompson: I was riding in the car with him. John[41] drove. John's got a picture of himself driving Ryan to prison.

DePue: Why? Why did you go with him on that?

Thompson: Because I was his friend. So John and I drove Governor and Mrs. Ryan up to the penitentiary. The kids followed in a car behind us, and we had made arrangements to turn him over at the back gate of the penitentiary, so he wasn't subjected to all the press at the front gate. I mean, they had a helicopter following us up I-94. So it was a madhouse.

DePue: What were the emotions on that day?

Thompson: Pretty high, especially with Mrs. Ryan. But George was…He a soldier, you know? He wasn't going to show either fear or resentment or sorrow. He accepted it. I remember, we turned him over at the back gate and drove back to Chicago. We did the same thing when he came out of the penitentiary.

DePue: I've got to ask you this, Governor. Was justice done in this case?

Thompson: I don't think some of Judge Pallmeyer's rulings were correct, and I don't think some of the counts of the indictment correctly described a criminal offense,

[41] John Frier, Thompson's assistant.

and I don't think the Seventh Circuit's opinion was correct. So I guess my best answer would be, I don't think it was completely done.

DePue: Are you also saying that he was guilty on some of the counts? (Thompson sighs) Or is that an unfair question to ask?

Thompson: It may be. I can't separate my feelings, you know?

DePue: He was transferred to a prison in Terre Haute in 2008. What led to that?

Thompson: George is an elderly guy. He's older than I am, and that's pretty old. And Oxford is an interesting facility. You would never know it was a prison. Just drive up to the front door and walk in. There's no guards. Once you're inside there, you have to turn over any of what they would regard as contraband, and then you just wait for the prisoner to come and talk to you. It's like visiting a high school.

There's no real aspect of a prison. If you were a prisoner at Oxford, you could walk out the front door and walk down the road. They'd eventually catch you. Then you'd be indicted again for flight, but that's the kind of institution it was. Talk about minimum security; there was no security. I visited him up there at Oxford.

The transfer was made because the prison at Oxford had no real good access to medical facilities, and Terre Haute did. Terre Haute was more of a community, with community medical facilities. Oxford was not; Oxford's out in the country. Ordinarily they'd send white collar criminals to Oxford; they'd send lawyers there, accountants there, whoever (coughs) committed nonviolent offenses. They had the same kind of camp at Terre Haute, but you knew Terre Haute was a penitentiary. The camp was next door to it. Oxford, it was all by itself. And you had to go through much more secure precautions at Terre Haute. But that's why he was transferred.

DePue: When somebody like a governor goes to a prison like that, do they still retain their title, so to speak? Does the prison staff treat them differently?

Thompson: No, the prison staff does not treat them differently. The inmates do. The inmates will call him "Governor." The inmates will look for political favors that they think he can do for them. The inmates think it's quite a treat to have a governor in their midst. But the staff, no; the staff goes the other way. They are not going to be accused of one ounce of favoritism, and they show it. It's tough.

DePue: While the governor was in prison, Lura Lynn Ryan developed cancer—maybe it had already been developing before that time—and there was quite a discussion about the possibility of George being released so he could visit Lura Lynn. Were you involved with that?

Thompson: I was.

DePue: Tell me about that.

Thompson: It fell to me to negotiate with the prison authorities and the corrections department of the federal government, to try and get him compassionate relief to see his wife. It was very difficult, because they didn't want to be accused of favoritism. Joe Smith would have gotten better access in the prison to visiting a sick wife then Governor Ryan. It just went the opposite way, and it was very difficult negotiating that.

When they finally did it, they'd pull him out in the middle of the night and drive him up there, let him go into the hospital, clear everybody else out of there, even his family, and then when the visit was over, right back to the penitentiary.

The result was that, because they allowed him to visit his wife as she was dying, he wasn't allowed to go to the funeral, the end result being there was no funeral. The family decided not to have a funeral if George couldn't go. They said, "We'll hold a memorial service for her when he's released from prison."

DePue: Is that what happened?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: As I recall, there was a point in time where there was a public announcement made by the prison that he would not be released.

Thompson: Yeah. Oh, this became news.

DePue: And then how far down the road after that did they very privately—

Thompson: I'm not sure of the timing. But they were just bound and determined that nobody, nobody could ever say a word about how he got anything different from any other prisoner. In fact, he didn't get what any other prisoner could get.

DePue: Was that strictly the decision of the staff, the administration there in Terre Haute?

Thompson: And in Washington.

DePue: So Washington, DC got involved?

Thompson: Sure, sure.

DePue: The attorney general gets involved.

Thompson: No, it's not the attorney general; it's the staff in the Corrections Department.

DePue: I understand there was an attempt to get an early release for the governor in 2010, as well.

Thompson: I don't remember much of that. The federal government's tough on releases. You serve 85 percent of your sentence, and that's it.

DePue: Mrs. Ryan passed away June 27, 2011. You've already said that he didn't get an opportunity to attend the funeral. Is the family bitter about that?

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: I don't know if you could possibly gauge this, but more bitter about that than even his conviction, perhaps?

Thompson: No, I don't think they were on a par.

DePue: July 3, 2013, Governor, this is shortly before you and I started this interview series.

Thompson: Yes, right. (both laugh)

DePue: We've been at it for a while. July 3, 2013, he's released from prison. Tell me about that day.

Thompson: That was another long negotiation, for the circumstances of his release. We were trying to avoid him coming out of the penitentiary and being besieged by shouting reporters and cameramen.

DePue: Who's "we" in this case?

Thompson: George and I. It becomes a mob scene, really, and it's an unfair reflection on the person. I felt that when he went into the penitentiary, which was why I was bound and determined to take him myself and take him through the back door. We were able to do that. And [that's] why I didn't want any scene when he was released, and frankly, neither did they. By that time, the prison officials were just as happy to have no scene and commotion at their front gate than I was.

The result was, he was released in the very early morning hours. We were down there to meet him. The transfer took place, I think, at a parking lot of an establishment in Terre Haute. It could have been a McDonald's; it could have been anything. He was driven back to Chicago, where he was assigned to a halfway house run by the Salvation Army. Yeah, it wasn't prison, but the rules were just as tough, and they made sure that you understood you were still in custody.

Ordinarily, a prisoner would stay there for a month, maybe two months, while he was reintroduced into society. Well, obviously, that didn't fit George Ryan. He didn't need to be reintroduced into society. He once ran society. (laughs) They'd give courses on how to write a check and all that stuff, how to set up a bank account, none of which applied to George. So I was able finally to negotiate a deal where he was transferred into the halfway house, the institution, but then let go the same day. So I took him there, and then I waited for him. Although they tipped the reporters outside, and the reporters were just camped there. They sat for hours.

DePue: Where exactly is this again?

Thompson: It's on the west side of Chicago. There must have been thirty newspapermen and photographers, television crews. It was just horrible. We got him out of there, but to get him out, he had to walk out one door where the press was waiting and then into a car, and I drove him back to Kankakee.

And they were camped on his lawn in Kankakee, and a helicopter followed us all the way from the west side of Chicago down to Kankakee. They stayed on his lawn for days, waiting for him to talk. He was a prisoner in his own house, as much as he was in the halfway house or the penitentiary, until they got tired of it.

DePue: I'm sure every time the press had an opportunity, they were yelling questions at him.

Thompson: Yeah, yeah, sure.

DePue: Did he ever say anything to the press?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Not one word?

Thompson: No. Here's what I negotiated. When I saw that they were camped on his lawn in Kankakee and weren't going away, I negotiated with the press a deal where he would come out and say something, and that was it. We made that deal, and I got him out of the house and back down to the lawn, and he spoke his piece and then went back into the house. And after two or three days they went away.

DePue: Do you remember anything that he said?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Just some obligatory comments about I'm happy to be out of prison?

Thompson: Yeah, right. So it was not an easy time for him in prison, obviously. A prison's a prison, no matter how they treat you or how the inmates respect you or…It's a prison, whether it's for a day or six years.

DePue: Have you kept in touch with Governor Ryan since his release?

Thompson: Sure. Oh yes, we chat regularly. We lunch. He comes to Chicago frequently.

DePue: How's he doing now?

Thompson: He's doing okay. His health is decent for a man his age, and he still has friends. So he's getting along okay.

DePue: Governor, we've been at this right at two hours, just shy of that. The next subject is Conrad Black and Hollinger International.

Thompson: Oh, god.

DePue: So do we start the next session with that?

Thompson: Yeah, start with that. I'll have to rest up for that one.

DePue: (laughs) But I think, if we have a good two-plus hour session next time, we might be able to finish this thing up.

Thompson: Okay, we'll do that. We'll finish next time.

DePue: Thank you very much, Governor. This has been a fun session. Well, they all are fun, but—

Thompson: They're all fun!

DePue: Thank you very much.

(end of interview #29)

Interview with James Thompson

IST-A-L-2013-054.30

Interview # 30: August 9, 2016

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Tuesday, August 9, 2016. This is Mark DePue, and I'm once again with Governor Jim Thompson. Good morning, Governor.

Thompson: Good morning.

DePue: For our thirtieth session, (Thompson laughs) and we're closing in on the end of this.

Thompson: Close to expiration.

DePue: And we are at your gorgeous summer home in Buchanan, overlooking your lake here. You brought me out to your…What do you call this room here?

Thompson: Sunroom.

DePue: The sunroom, well, that's fitting. You say you've been fishing here lately?

Thompson: I haven't been, but my nephews have been fishing, and the bass are big and biting.

DePue: Now I assume that you're bringing the bass in. Anything else that you bring in?

Thompson: They're also catching sunfish, bluegill, perch. The lake is loaded.

DePue: And that's all stuff that's been stocked here?

Thompson: Yes. Walleye.

DePue: Holy cow, that's great. Today, after all those pleasantries, (Thompson laughs) we get to continue our discussion. As I threatened last time, we're going to start with Hollinger International and Conrad Black. Let's start with this, Governor. Who is Conrad Black, and what is Hollinger International?

Thompson: Conrad Black is a Canadian who owned *The Daily Telegraph* in London and some other smaller newspapers, and he purchased the *Chicago Sun-Times*. I

had been on the board of the *Chicago Sun-Times* under previous ownership, and when Conrad Black bought the paper, he asked me to go on the Hollinger board.

DePue: And what was the Hollinger board?

Thompson: Hollinger was the company through which he owned the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the London *Telegraph* and some other papers.

DePue: What was your connection with Conrad Black? How did you get involved in this in the first place?

Thompson: Just because I was on the *Sun-Times* board.

DePue: *Sun-Times*?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Who else was on that board with you?

Thompson: An all-star cast, Henry Kissinger was on the board; Marie-Josée Kravis; the guy who owned Sotheby's, one of the auction houses; former prime ministers; Les Wexner, who owns The Limited, big clothing person. It was just a huge conglomeration of business and political people.

DePue: I've got a couple of others here. Richard Burt?[42]

Thompson: Yeah, Richard Burt. I knew him. He had been in government, so I've known him for a long time. He's a friend of mine.

DePue: And Robert Strauss.

Thompson: Yeah, Bob Strauss, who was a partner in a Washington law firm, had been the United States ambassador to Russia, a really smart guy, a good friend of mine.

DePue: What was the role of the board of directors in managing a company like this, because as you said yourself, these were some heavy hitters?

Thompson: We represent the stockholders of the company, basically. That's what a board of directors does, represents the stockholders. Directors don't run the company; they oversee the management who runs the company. So Hollinger had a board that was extremely talented, very knowledgeable in business and politics.

DePue: How does something like that work? How often are you meeting, and how much information are you being—

[42] Burt had served as U.S. ambassador to West Germany from 1985 to early 1989.

Thompson: We met four times a year. You read the reports of management on what they've done since the last meeting. But the board of directors does not take any active role in managing the company. That would be beyond our scope.

DePue: Is the management bringing decisions for you to make?

Thompson: Sometimes, it depends on the issue. For example, if the company wants to acquire something, oftentimes the management can acquire it by themselves, or if it reaches a certain price level, then it's got to go to the board of directors.

DePue: If you don't mind, Governor, I'm going to read a little bit from a document that Mike Czaplicki has put together, where he's talking quite a bit about the Hollinger International case and the controversy that sprang from that. [reading]

> At Hollinger International's annual meeting in May 2003, angry minority shareholders challenged the payment of over $70 million to Black, Radler, and a few other executives.[43] These payments were to honor non-compete agreements Hollinger International made, after selling certain newspapers to other companies, and some of them had not been disclosed to the board of directors for approval.
>
> The shareholders argued this money should have been paid to the company, not to Black and Radler. It later turned out that Black and Radler steered money to themselves in other ways, such as giving the board fake, low valuations on newspapers, which they sold to other companies they controlled. These companies would then operate or sell the papers at their true value and pocket money.
>
> Any comments about that?

Thompson: Yeah, there's no doubt that the board, at one point, discovered that they had been deceived by management. The board went to the authorities, the SEC and the U.S. attorney. We got our own lawyer. We had a special committee. And as it turned out, Black and others were indicted by the United States and convicted of fraud. And ultimately, the board got back all the money that had been fraudulently obtained by Black and his confederates.

[43] Conrad Black and David Radler owned Ravelston Corporation, a privately held company that owned the majority of the shares of Hollinger Inc, which in turn controlled Hollinger International. In addition to the *Sun-Times*, Hollinger International's Chicago-area holdings included the *Daily Southtown*, the Pioneer Press chain of suburban newspapers, and northwest Indiana's *Post-Tribune*.

DePue: What happened to Black in the end?

Thompson: He went to jail.

DePue: Do you know how long?

Thompson: No, I think it was something like two or three years.

DePue: And did Radler go to jail as well?

Thompson: He did.

DePue: This put you into a situation, though, where in the trial itself you were one of the witnesses, were you not?

Thompson: Yeah, I testified for the government.

DePue: And I know from what I've read that you came under some heat from the defense as well.[44]

Thompson: Well sure, they were trying to get their clients off.

DePue: There were lots of reports in the media at that time, and many of them were not being complimentary of your tenure on the board or the other members.

Thompson: That happens. But if the board, and not just me, but all of us, were deceived by management that was fraudulent and kept their crooked deals hidden until they were discovered, and then the board went to the authorities, cooperated in the investigation, got all the money back that had been wrongfully taken, testified in the trial—I wasn't the only board member that testified in the trial—and the defendants went to jail, I think that's a pretty good result.

DePue: What was it like after all those years being a lawyer, being a U.S. attorney, working in Winston & Strawn, and suddenly you're on the other side of the equation?

Thompson: What do you mean, other side of the equation?

DePue: Now you're a witness, testifying and being grilled by a defense attorney.

Thompson: Yeah, but that's the job of the defense attorney, to grill the government's witnesses to see if they can put some daylight between the government's case and their clients. But it didn't work. The jury convicted them.

DePue: Nothing awkward about you being—

[44] For example, see Andrew Stern, "Heat Stays on Ex-Director Thompson at Black Trial," *Reuters*, May 3, 2007.

Thompson: No, not at all.

DePue: I want to read just one other thing here from the *Chicago Tribune*. This is May 2007, so this process went on, as they usually do, for several years, right?

Thompson: Yeah, there were civil suits back and forth too, involving the money.

DePue: This is again from a *Chicago Tribune* article, May 3, 2007, [reading] "Governor James R. Thompson acknowledged before a federal jury Wednesday that in his role as a corporate director he approved more than $200 million in fees to press baron Conrad M. Black's private management company, without ever reviewing a single piece of paper to support the payments." And then a little bit farther in the next paragraph, "Thompson's stewardship of the Chicago-based newspaper's audit committee was slipshod at best."[45] Would you agree with that assessment?

Thompson: No, I wouldn't agree with that assessment.

DePue: Why not?

Thompson: Because it wasn't slipshod. (laughs) Conrad Black owned the company that owned the papers, so he was entitled, under the by-laws of the company, to the compensation that he was paid.

DePue: The figure that was cited here is $200 million. That's a lot of compensation.

Thompson: Yeah, but that's not in one year.

DePue: To a simple-minded person like me, that still seems like a lot of money over a period of years. (laughs)

Thompson: Sure, but the company made a lot of money.

DePue: And further on in the article, it was saying that you were routinely making statements that you were just skimming the documents that you were given.

Thompson: No, they asked me a specific question about one government filing, which I skimmed. I should never have used that word, because the defense jumped all over it.

Look, I've been on a board for companies some twelve, fifteen times—that many boards—and you know what to look for in the documents when you're reading them. You tend to go down the page and down the page and down the page, because these are many-page documents. I think "skim" was an improper word on my part, and I regret using that word.

[45] Rudolph Bush, "Thompson Concedes Audit Was Lackluster," *Chicago Tribune*, May 3, 2007.

But the management, Black and his cohorts, had hidden the fraud so well, that it was really hard to determine it from any document. In the end, I can remember being the one representing the board that had to go fire Black and Radler as the investigation started. But they defrauded the company, and they defrauded the board of directors. They were caught, and they were prosecuted, and they had to pay the money back. So that was a pretty good end.

DePue: You'd gone through fourteen years as governor and got out essentially with no controversies at the end of that administration. Then you obviously had a long legal career as well. And this is probably the most serious blemish on your reputation that's out there. Any reflections on the nature of the press coverage in this one?

Thompson: I don't think the press coverage appropriately characterized the record. If you serve on a board of directors…This has happened time and time again in the American system, where companies are supervised by boards of directors; this is not an uncommon occurrence. If you rely on the management of the company, and if you are defrauded because they are concealing their criminal acts, and if when those criminal acts are discovered you take part in testifying against and prosecuting those that are guilty, and you pursue the money and get it back so the shareholders are not ultimately harmed, I think that's a pretty good record. I don't think that's a blemish.

DePue: Do you think that, in retrospect, now that you're ten years removed from all of this, has it really damaged your reputation in a larger scale?

Thompson: No, no. When all of this was going on at Hollinger, I served on other boards. Nobody even asked about it.

DePue: Let's turn our direction to a different politician this time. Last time you and I talked, we discussed the election of Governor Rod Blagojevich in 2002.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: You told a couple of anecdotes about him and his personality, but we really didn't delve too deeply, because I wanted to postpone. It's obviously a much bigger story in that respect.

Thompson: Being resentenced today.

DePue: (laughs) Yeah, today. It was in the news this morning, in fact. What's your prediction of his chances?

Thompson: He may get a few years off his sentence.[46]

[46] Judge James Zagel refused to reduce Blagojevich's fourteen-year sentence.

DePue: Do you think that's deserved?

Thompson: I thought fourteen years was kind of long. There's no doubt that he needed to be convicted and sentenced, and there's no doubt that being convicted as a governor of the state, you add on a couple of years, just because you don't want to encourage that kind of conduct by governmental officials.

Now, the appellate court threw out five counts, out of the indictment. So the government either has to retry him on those counts, or there is a case for changing the sentence. The government has declined to retry him—not surprising—so Judge Zagel today will resentence him. If Judge Zagel takes a couple of years off the sentence, I think that's appropriate.

DePue: James Zagel has been involved with this case from—

Thompson: The beginning.

DePue: We might have talked about this last time, but how well did you know of Blagojevich before he actually ran for governor?

Thompson: I knew nothing about him. I knew he was a state legislator, but that's all I knew.

DePue: How about his father-in-law?

Thompson: I didn't know his father-in-law—

DePue: Dick Mell?[47]

Thompson: …except by newspaper reports.

DePue: It's important to say that, at this point in time, you're the elder statesman of the Republican Party, governor for fourteen years, so your observations about what the governor is doing are certainly relevant. But obviously you don't have any kind of direct involvement with him at all, at this point, at the early stages.

Thompson: Right, correct.

DePue: How would you describe the personality of the man you're just reading about in the newspapers and watching from afar?

Thompson: I may have said this before, when I first met him, I thought he was kind of a charming guy, friendly, interested in politics, interested in your opinion. I thought he was sort of the new voice for the Democratic Party. I didn't vote

[47] Alderman from Chicago's 33rd Ward from 1975 to 2013 and ward committeeman from 1976 to 2016.

for him, and I didn't meet him, actually meet him, until the morning after the election when he was doing a newscast, and I was too.

DePue: One of the very first controversies that he found himself in was whether or not he was going to live in the mansion. As another Chicago resident (Thompson laughs) who spent a lot of time in the mansion—and then at the last part of your administration, moved the family back up to Chicago but still spent a lot of time in the mansion—what did you think about how he managed that particular controversy?

Thompson: Everybody's got to do what they're comfortable doing, but he used to spend the day in Springfield and fly back to Chicago every night, and obviously his family stayed in Chicago. Look, every governor has his own style, and governors, like everybody else, have to find comfort in how they do things and how they balance family relationships and family obligations with the demands of public office. It's not an easy balance, and every governor has to go through it, and a lot of governors do it in different ways. So I'm not going to blame him for wanting to be with his family in Chicago at night. If that worked for him, and if that worked for the state, fine.

I did it a different way. I lived full-time in the mansion for a long time, and when my daughter was ready to go to school, and I didn't know how long I was going to serve as governor, we moved back to Chicago. But when the legislature was in session, I was there, which I thought was very important. And the mansion was open for meetings, for dinner with legislators, all of which was important to me and, I thought, important to integrating your personality with the rest of state government. But I'm not going to blame Blago for flying back to Chicago if that's how he felt he could best take care of his family and take care of his job.

DePue: Were there people within the administration who were finding opportunities to come to you and whisper in your ear and complain about Blagojevich and the way he managed things?

Thompson: No, no.

DePue: So your observations were primarily as an outsider?

Thompson: Right.

DePue: I wonder if you can comment on some of the people that Blagojevich brought into office with him, his team, if you will.

Thompson: Since they've subsequently went to jail, it's pretty easy to comment. (both laugh) But it's all hindsight. Look, after he was elected and putting together his transition team, he called me and asked me to co-chair it. The other co-chair [Margaret Blackshere] was the head of the state AFL-CIO and a

Democrat. And since the new governor had asked me to do this, I accepted. I always follow the rule that if a governor asks you to do something, you do it.

I met a lot of his team. In addition to my serving as co-chair of the transition committee, Winston [Winston & Strawn, LLP] served as counsel to the transition committee. So we had a lot of meetings at Winston with the governor and with his top people to talk about how you governed, how the office worked, what the important relationships were, what your priorities ought to be. We gave that advice to the governor, and we gave that advice to his team; I had a team of people at Winston. So we were involved in the transition of the government to the Blagojevich team.

DePue: Was that pro bono work that you were doing?

Thompson: That was pro bono. Unfortunately, they didn't follow our advice and got into trouble.

DePue: Do you remember anything specifically that they didn't follow your advice on?

Thompson: They started out with terrible relationships with the legislature, which surprised me very much, almost shocked me, because I just assumed that, since Blagojevich had been a member of the legislature, he would regard his legislative relationships as important, as I always did. I had, I thought, superb legislative relationships, even though for most of my time I had a Democratic legislature. Government can't work unless the governor can work together with the legislature, regardless of political party. It just doesn't work. So one of the first things that I told Blagojevich and his new senior staff was that you've got to make your relationship with the legislature your number one priority. He had a Democratic legislature, and he had been a member of the legislature under the Democratic leadership, so I thought, That's not hard.

Well, it turned out to be very hard. In essence, he fought with and criticized the legislature, his fellow Democrats, his first year, and he got essentially what he wanted. I guess he figured out that that was the way to deal with the legislature. So the next year his relationship was even worse, and he didn't get what he wanted. And then the war was on.

Look, I had watched that in my own experience with the Walker administration, the administration that preceded my governorship. Walker had a terrible time with the legislature; he had a terrible time with Mayor Daley, of his own party; he had a terrible time with the Republicans; he had a terrible time with the Democrats in the legislature. I came in, and in my first State of the State, my first words were, "The war between the governor and the legislature is over." I mean, that's how bad it was.

And now, I saw the same thing happening in the Blagojevich administration. So there really wasn't much success in trying to educate Blago and his people in how to get things done in Springfield, I guess.

DePue: During that initial transition period, you were offering advice. Were they listening?

Thompson: Sure, they were listening; they were agreeing, but they didn't do it.

DePue: "They" suggests more than just Blagojevich.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: Who were some of the key people that come to mind right from the beginning?

Thompson: All the senior staff.

DePue: I think chief of staff started off being Lon Monk.

Thompson: He was there.

DePue: John Harris?

Thompson: He was there.

DePue: Bradley Tusk?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: John Filan?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: Chris Kelly?

Thompson: Yes. They all sat at the conference table at Winston & Strawn.

DePue: Any other names that come to mind?

Thompson: No, that was basically it.

DePue: Your impression of that group?

Thompson: I didn't know them. They were not acquaintances of mine, either social or political, so I had no way to judge them, not knowing them. Later, the whole state learned what they did.

DePue: Where did they come from? What were their connections with Blagojevich to begin with?

Thompson: They came from government in most cases. They had served, some of them, in prior administrations, from business, from lobbying. They had been around.

DePue: Would it be fair to ask you to, in broad brush, generalize about the personality or the character of Blagojevich himself and the team that he had?

Thompson: Since they all essentially were brand new to me, it was hard for me to characterize them, except for what happened later.

DePue: You talked a lot about the nature of the relationship you had with the legislature. And much of the talk you read in the news media, a year or two already into the administration, was about his personality, his character and his temperament that caused all kinds of difficulties for him. One of them was his propensity to be late.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: His practice of calling the legislature into special sessions over and over and over again to try to get his agenda through.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: I wonder if you can just talk about that.

Thompson: His relationship with the Speaker. All of those things were bad. You can't treat people that way in government and expect good results. You can't have a relationship with members of the General Assembly that's based on warfare. They are one-third of the government. You are one-third of the government. You are co-equal branches. Legislators are very powerful people. If they don't pass legislation, you don't get what you want or need. You can veto legislation, but they can override you. In the end, they fashion the state budget. You can veto it, but they can override you. So it's just plain foolish, and in some cases dangerous, to have a bad relationship with the General Assembly, no matter what party they are, no matter what the issue is.

That doesn't mean they're always right, that doesn't mean you're always going to agree with them—they may not always agree with you—but you work things out, you compromise. This is a state of 11 million people, and the people of Illinois don't have monolithic political views. The voters elected you, yes, but they also elected the legislature. So, you've got to treat members of the General Assembly and treat members of the judiciary—the third branch—with **respect**, whether you agree with them or not. As this warfare continued, it was obvious that things were not going as they should in Illinois state government. It was not an easy thing to watch.

DePue: Did you see any character flaws during that transition period when you were working with him?

Thompson: No, still too early.

DePue: You mentioned his relationship with Madigan. My memory is that it soured very early, and it only got deeper and more intense as time went on.

Thompson: That's correct.

DePue: How about the relationship with Emil Jones in the Senate?

Thompson: No, they had a fairly good relationship. Emil was Blagojevich's guy in the legislature.

DePue: Going back to some of the personalities that surrounded Blagojevich, I wonder if you knew these gentlemen beforehand, Tony Rezko and Stuart Levine?

Thompson: No.

DePue: From what I understand, they were the fundraisers; they were the fundraising supporters of him.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Now here's one that I do want to get your reaction to. One of his decisions early on was to freeze hiring. This was a period of somewhat limited budgets, the budget crunch.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So he freezes hiring, and he centralizes all new hires in the governor's office. I think his patronage chief was Joe Cini. So, in other words, most of these positions are going to be hired through the patronage chief. None of that is new in Illinois politics, is it?

Thompson: Not to me. (laughs)

DePue: You essentially did the same thing early in your administration, did you not?

Thompson: I did.

DePue: Any comments on that decision?

Thompson: I don't think there's anything wrong with that.

DePue: Later on, he is going to get in trouble in terms of his hiring processes.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: We've already talked a little bit about the legislative year, but here's one of the early controversies he found himself in. This is 2003-2004, I think. The governor decides to purchase flu shots. And as we all know, annually there's a new flu shot that comes out, and I believe there was a shortage. So he was going to go out of the country and purchase them in Canada and have a state-backed web page. It was going to cost $10 million, but the legislature never approved it. As I recall, he found ways to do it anyway.

Thompson: I don't think it's appropriate to spend money the legislature has not approved.

DePue: Isn't that unconstitutional?

Thompson: It is unconstitutional, (laughs) as the Supreme Court has said many times.

DePue: Is that grounds for impeachment?

Thompson: Oh, I suppose technically it could be. Hey listen, anything's grounds for impeachment. Impeachment's a political act, not a legal act. If the legislature decides to impeach the governor, they can.

DePue: Is it a violation of any law, as you understand it?

Thompson: Yeah. The Supreme Court of Illinois, just the other day, said that you cannot spend money that has not been appropriated by the legislature. That's not new law; that's pretty old.

DePue: So there is a law on the books that says you can't do that.

Thompson: It's not a law; it's a constitutional principle.

DePue: So you can get impeached, but you can't get convicted and sent to jail for it?

Thompson: I don't think it's a criminal offense. It might be a civil suit, but I don't think it's a criminal offense.

DePue: He's seriously at odds with Madigan. He's got somewhat of a relationship with Emil Jones. But certainly by this time, the attorney general, Lisa Madigan, comes out against him in pretty strong language, as do treasurer Judy Baar Topinka and comptroller Dan Hynes, all three of the other major constitutional officers.

Thompson: Pretty tough, huh?

DePue: By this time, what were your observations about the governor?

Thompson: It was pretty obvious that things were not working well in Springfield. But look, some guys just got to learn. You're going to be punished politically if

you don't conduct yourself appropriately, and you risk your reelection. And if criminal offenses are committed during the administration, you risk criminal punishment. So it's not a happy place to be.

DePue: You'd been a very successful governor for fourteen years—and this is a theme we might have to pick up a couple times today—but could you watch what was going on in Illinois governance and politics at that time and keep your emotions in check and keep yourself objective about it?

Thompson: You have to, at least…Look, I think I've been steadfast in not publicly criticizing any of my successors as governor, while they were in office. I didn't think that was appropriate. I didn't think I should be making suggestions to people on how they should run their office, unless they asked me. In the beginning, the Blagojevich people did ask me, and I gave them my counsel. Whether they followed it or not is up to them. But I have never been in the position of publicly criticizing my successors. Everybody's different, and I don't think governors need somebody nipping at their heels from the sidelines. And if they do, it's not going to be me. I've followed that rule through Republican and Democratic administrations.

The only reason I feel comfortable talking about it today is that he was indicted, convicted, and sent to jail, so it's not me nipping at his heels while he serves in office. But it was not easy to watch, certainly not easy to watch, because I had served in that office, and I was a different personality.

DePue: One of the things that he had to take on was the pension crisis. It was brewing a little bit when you were governor. Governor Edgar made a decision in 1995, at least attempt to try to fix it, which has since been labeled the Edgar ramp, where you have increasing amount of payments to fix the pension crisis. Then Blagojevich has a couple of things that he's doing as well.

Let's start with the Edgar ramp. I wanted to get your reaction to what Governor Edgar had attempted to do with increasing overtime, as well as higher and higher pension payments to solve the pension shortfall. We're talking about public sector pensions. And you're looking at a chart that I just gave you.

Thompson: This is one of the most difficult issues to deal with in government. I didn't have that much of it, but the problems just haunted successor governors, and they do today with Governor Rauner.

The cost of state pensions has gotten so high, there's literally nothing, or almost nothing, you can do about it, because of the constitutional provision, which the Supreme Court has unanimously and firmly enforced, that says that once the legislature grants something in a pension, you can't take it away. It's there forever.

So all these pension changes have been built up, and it's just now a huge part of the budget. What is it, a quarter of the budget or more? That means that it's crowding out education, crowding out senior citizens, crowding out mental health, crowding out law enforcement, crowding out transportation, and it just gets worse and worse.

The only thing you can do is raise taxes to pay for it, so that you have some money left for the rest of government, and as new employees are hired, put them on a different system, both of which the legislature has done. But it's going to be more and more difficult, because if the funding of the pension systems are too low in the eyes of the rating agencies, they're going to lower your bond ratings, which means that the next time you borrow money, you're going to pay more. Boy, it's…and subsequent governors and legislatures have tried to solve this, and the solutions haven't worked.

DePue: There were a couple of things in particular that I wanted to ask you about that the Blagojevich administration did. One of them was to borrow $10 billion, which you obviously have to pay back over time, but then put $7.3 billion of that into unfunded liabilities under the pension system, and then use the other for basically state expenses.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Did you agree with that?

Thompson: No. That's essentially, as they used to say, kicking the can down the road, because all you're doing is taking on new debt at new interest rates that will have to be paid back with the same dollars you can't give to the rest of government.

DePue: And then, I think it was in 2005—it certainly impacted the 2006 and the 2007 fiscal years—essentially a pension holiday, where a big portion of the pension payment that the state was supposed to make wasn't made, so the money could be used for other things.

Thompson: Yeah, that's dangerous too. Let's break for one minute.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Governor, we're back at it again here. More about Blagojevich, but we have to weave in a couple other personalities as well.

Thompson: (laughs) There certainly are a lot of personalities in Illinois government.

DePue: Oh yeah. It sounds like from the very beginning Winston & Strawn was essentially the law firm that was representing the Blagojevich administration?

Thompson: Well, I think that's a little broad. As part of our pro bono service in the community, we represented the transition team, to get them started in state government. That was our mission. When the transition period was over, we didn't represent them anymore.

DePue: At what point were you hearing that the U.S. attorney, that Patrick Fitzgerald began to be very interested in what was going on within the administration?

Thompson: When I read it in the newspapers.

DePue: That was practically within a year or so of his being in office, correct?

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: Were you hearing anything directly from the U.S. attorney's office?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Or is that inappropriate to be…

Thompson: No, no, no. I never had any communication with the U.S. attorney's office.

DePue: Let's change our discussion to the 2004 Senate election. That's an important one to talk about, in American history and world history. The first question in that regard is, how well did you know Barack Obama before he ran for Senate?

Thompson: Not well. I'd see him once in a while at the East Bank Club in Chicago when he was working out and I was working out. I knew he was a member of the legislature. But he was kind of a quiet sort, didn't make headlines very often in his state legislative service. He was obviously a protégé of Emil, who sort of guided his legislative career.

DePue: Were you hearing that from others or just from what you—

Thompson: No, just general knowledge in the political community.

DePue: Were you impressed one way or another when you first ran into him?

Thompson: He was a nice guy. We didn't meet each other that often. I was out of politics, and he was in the legislature.

DePue: Were you hearing anything from some of your old friends on the Republican side in the Senate?

Thompson: Not really.

DePue: How often did you have opportunities to talk to Pate Philip, for example?

Thompson: Oh, it varied. If Pate was on vacation in Michigan during the summer, he might call me. If he had an issue, he might call me, but not that much.

DePue: Was that something that he or others would even bring up?

Thompson: Not really.

DePue: Because in most accounts you hear that he wasn't really all that active in a leadership role in the Illinois Senate.

Thompson: Well, yeah. He was described usually as a back bencher.

DePue: Barack Obama beat Dan Hynes and Blair Hull in a fairly crowded Democratic primary race. And I think he eliminated another person before the actual race heated up. Then he's the Democratic nominee for the Senate, and he goes to the Democratic convention and makes that speech. Do you remember the speech that he made?

Thompson: I do.

DePue: What was your impression of the speech that he made at the Democratic convention?

Thompson: Powerful, very powerful.

DePue: Was that the first time he really came up on your radar screen?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: Did you see the potential beyond that, at that time?

Thompson: Oh, I think everybody assumed there was potential beyond that. That was sort of the general consensus of the political community.

DePue: Let's turn to the Republicans then.

Thompson: Let's not. (both laugh)

DePue: That's where it gets really interesting, I think.

Thompson: Yeah, right.

DePue: It's another crowded race on the Republican side. You've got Jack Ryan, no relation to Jim Ryan or George Ryan.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: You've got Jim Oberweis, Steve Rauschenberger, Andrew McKenna, General John Borling, a couple of others, a crowded race. Who did you support in that group?

Thompson: Jack Ryan.

DePue: And Jack Ryan was the one who won the primary.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Any comments about the also-rans there?

Thompson: No.

DePue: You don't want to go there? (laughs)

Thompson: No.

DePue: Well, should I discuss it, or do you want to tell what happened after that?

Thompson: Well, you tell.

DePue: You almost get the impression this one is painful for you.

Thompson: Yeah, it is.

DePue: Jack Ryan is married at the time to Jeri Ryan. Boy, Illinois is rich with Ryans; isn't it?

Thompson: Yeah, no kidding.

DePue: And Jeri Ryan is well known because she is one of the stars of *Star Trek: Voyager*. She's the one who plays the part of the Borg, I think, which is half machine and half human, and it looks like her outfit is basically spray painted on this incredibly voluptuous frame. (Thompson laughs) And they're divorced recently.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And part of the divorce proceedings was a court fight over child custody, out in California. I believe the *Tribune* initiated a lawsuit to get those court records released.

Thompson: Documents, yeah.

DePue: And questions, obviously, immediately about how much Barack Obama had to do with trying to get those court records released

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: The court records were released and—

Thompson: Lo and behold.

DePue: …it was found out that while they were in Paris, France, I believe, he was asking her to perform some kind of lewd acts in front of a stage or something like that. (Thompson laughs) And not too long after that, Jack Ryan withdraws from the race.

Thompson: You wonder why it's painful. (laughs)

DePue: Did I basically get it right there, Governor?

Thompson: Yes, you did.

DePue: So what happens after that, or do you want me to continue? (laughs)

Thompson: No, you keep going.

DePue: Oh, man.

Thompson: I'll tell you when you stray.

DePue: Then it becomes a case where the Republican Party Central Committee, chaired by Judy Baar Topinka, has to select a new candidate. Of course, they go with the also-rans, and from an interview with John Borling, he said that he was one of the leading candidates. I don't know if that was the case or not, but that was certainly his memory[48], and I have no reason to doubt him.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: But there were others within the central committee who thought, Okay, we've got this very articulate young black man who's running for the Senate; let's get our own black man to run for the Senate.

Thompson: Mm-hmm. "So we'll import one from Maryland."

DePue: Alan Keyes from Maryland. (Thompson sighs) Now, Governor, I've got to turn it over to you from here on out.

Thompson: Unbelievable that the Republican Party of Illinois had to go to **Maryland** to bring some guy to Illinois to run for the Senate, absolutely unbelievable. And who did they pick? They picked a guy who was an extreme, extreme right-winger. I thought, If he gets three votes in Illinois, he'll be lucky, a terrible candidate, just a terrible candidate, and a terrible reflection on the Republican Party of Illinois.

[48] John Borling, interview by Mark DePue, March 5, 2015.

I refused to support him. I endorsed Barack Obama at the Republican convention in New York, the presidential convention in New York, when I was asked what my views were on that race. I said, "I'm for Obama, because the Keyes nomination is a blight on the Republican Party of Illinois."

DePue: You said that as a public statement obviously.

Thompson: It was.

DePue: The kind of thing that gets in the newspapers very quickly.

Thompson: Absolutely. It was said to the press.

DePue: Did you do any campaigning for Obama?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Did you have any conversations, up to the point of making the decision to go out of state, with Topinka or anybody else?

Thompson: No.

DePue: They didn't come searching for your opinion on it?

Thompson: No, they did not.

DePue: Were you on the outs with the Republicans?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Do you know who the people were, who were especially vocal in wanting to go outside the state?

Thompson: I have no idea.

DePue: I'll confess, Governor, that I always wanted to interview Judy Baar Topinka about a lot of things—

Thompson: (laughs) Yeah, I'll bet.

DePue: …but especially that decision, and unfortunately she's passed away. Well, he did get votes, but Obama won by 70 percent to—

Thompson: Carried, what, a couple of counties in southern Illinois? That was about it.

DePue: Yeah. Alan Keyes got 27 percent.[49]

Thompson: Twenty-seven percent of the vote. Oh, my god, (sighs) disgraceful.

DePue: So the question for you, Governor, you had fourteen years; Edgar had eight years; George Ryan had four years in a state that was increasingly going blue, at least purple to blue. What had happened to the Republican Party since that time?

Thompson: We lost the governorship, obviously. And when you lose the governorship, you lose a great deal of the ability to influence not only state government but your own party.

DePue: Had George Ryan damaged the brand that severely, do you think?

Thompson: No, I think we just ran out of candidates who could win.

DePue: That goes to the issue then that one of the things a sitting governor should do is to cultivate the bench. You had obviously cultivated the bench with Jim Edgar. Had Edgar and George Ryan not done the same thing when they were governors?

Thompson: I don't know. From the moment I hired Jim Edgar, I thought of him as a future governor. That became clearer and clearer to me as time went on, even if it didn't become clearer and clearer to Edgar. (laughs) But I thought he was a future governor, and I thought he'd be a good campaigner. I thought he understood state government very well. I thought he understood politics very well. And I thought he was an appealing political personality. It turned out I was right, and he was elected and elected again, until he decided to retire. Then there wasn't any ability on my part—I was out of office—to mentor or select anybody. So it fell to others.

DePue: Let's turn to just your general impressions of national-level politics and the 2004 presidential election. We obviously already talked about George Bush's election in 2000. This time around it's George Bush versus John Kerry. Did you attend the Republican convention in Madison Square Garden in 2004?

Thompson: I think I did.

DePue: Sounds like you don't have any strong memories of that, though.

Thompson: Well, wasn't that where I endorsed Obama?

[49] Keyes won ten counties: Clark, Clay, Edwards, Effingham, Iroquois, Jasper, Massac, Richland, Wabash, and Wayne. His largest margin was in Effingham, where he beat Obama by 2,666 votes.

DePue: That would have been, yes.

Thompson: Mm-hmm, yes, so I was there.

DePue: What were your thoughts about John Kerry as the Democratic nominee?

Thompson: I thought he was a weak candidate.

DePue: In American politics these kinds of things stick more than perhaps they should, but one of the big issues about him was his Vietnam experience, and he certainly played that up. But then, some of the veterans who served with him came out in support of him. But quite a few came out and basically challenged him, because he had had three Purple Hearts and got sent home early and then, of course, was protesting the war when he came back.

Thompson: Yeah, I mean—

DePue: That whole swift boat thing.

Thompson: People had to decide what the truth was in all of that and decide whether they wanted to vote on that. But if that was a weakness, I don't think it was his only weakness. I just thought he was sort of an elite guy and portrayed that, and people didn't respond to that well.

DePue: So you are saying he was a weak candidate, based on his political skills?

Thompson: Yeah, correct.

DePue: Bush obviously wins. Bush carries 50.7 percent, Kerry 48.3 percent, pretty close in electoral votes, 286 for Bush and 251 for Kerry. By that time, you can pretty much make predictions about the colors of each one of the states, and Illinois, by that time, is a solid blue state.

The 2006 election, a gubernatorial election for Blagojevich, by 2006, an awful lot of people had soured on the Blagojevich administration. I know, from interviewing Governor Edgar, there was great concern about who they were going to find who could run against him, because he had to be out of there. That was the attitude of a lot of people, and that was certainly the way that Edgar portrayed it. Were you approached at all about the possibility of running for governor in 2006?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Were you talking to anybody else about how we might be able to replace Blagojevich?

Thompson: No.

DePue: What do you think would have happened, if Edgar had been convinced to run again?

Thompson: Oh, I think he would have won. I thought Edgar was a popular governor and good candidate.

DePue: Of course, you have to do this about a year out, so that would have been 2005. He decided, from what he told me, that he didn't have to run, because Judy Baar Topinka at that time obviously wanted to run for governor and that she was outpolling Blagojevich at that time.

Thompson: Mm-hmm. That's not surprising.

DePue: So he dropped out of the race. Now you've got the primary, Judy Baar Topinka, Jim Oberweis again, Bill Brady, Ron Gidwitz, and Andy Martin. Did you publicly endorse any of that group?

Thompson: I just don't remember.

DePue: How well did you know Topinka?

Thompson: I knew her pretty well.

DePue: What did you think of Topinka, going into the race?

Thompson: I liked her. I thought she was smart, tough. I knew her from the legislature. She and I worked together in the legislature. I campaigned for her in the legislature, even went down a sewer for her.

DePue: You've got to explain that, Governor.

Thompson: I was out campaigning with her one day, and she had this stunt set up, as it turned out. I didn't know anything. Look, Judy Baar was what I'll call a meat and potatoes politician, in one sense. Like Mike Madigan, she took care of her local constituents, even when she was running for other offices. But in this case, she was running for reelection to the Senate. I was the governor, and I went out and campaigned for her in her district.

We were out there on the streets, and she started complaining about the sewers. I forget what the problem with the sewers was, but she was complaining about them. Her crew was there, and they had a manhole opened, and she invited me to go down a ways in the sewer and look around. I'm not sure what the hell that was all about. But what the hell, you know, I did it. Of course, she had a photographer there. So the story the next day was, "Topinka Takes Thompson on a Tour of the Sewer," which was fine.

DePue: It's a headline begging to be written.

Thompson: (laughs) I've been in worse. So, I knew her very well.

DePue: The last time we brought up the names Jim Oberweis and Bill Brady, you decided not to comment on them. You want to maintain that?

Thompson: Yeah. I mean, look, I knew Brady. He was in the legislature, nice guy. And if Gidwitz was in this election, he was a friend of mine, so I wasn't going to get involved in this one.

DePue: The primary turned out, Topinka polled 38 percent, a little bit more than that. Oberweis got 31.7 percent, so he was pretty close on her heels, running essentially as a private businessman.

Thompson: Right, ice cream company.

DePue: Pardon me?

Thompson: It was an ice cream company.

DePue: Bill Brady, 18.4 percent; Gidwitz got 10.9 percent, then Andy Martin was a distant .0 something percent. Any problems then of endorsing Topinka in the general election?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Did you campaign for her at all?

Thompson: I just don't remember, probably not. It's interesting, I had at least two more interactions with Blagojevich. One, Honda was looking for a place to put a new automobile manufacturing plant. The competitors were Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Honda hired me to represent them in Illinois and to sort of take charge of the attempt to get the Honda plant to our state. And I did.

Obviously to do that, you had to have a great deal of cooperation from the governor, his staff, the legislature, labor, business, and everybody else in the state. So that was my job, to put the state together for Honda. They hired other people in Ohio and Indiana. So I worked very closely with Governor Blagojevich and his staff.

I have to say they did a superb job. He and his department of commerce—I forget what the technical name was then, because it kept changing—did everything I asked for. The University of Illinois did everything I asked for. They created a special chair, I think, for Honda. The cooperation of state government and local government was just superb, a first class job. I was familiar with it because I had done the same thing when I was

governor to get Mitsubishi there.[50] There were even a couple of people still in state government from my Mitsubishi effort that helped me in the Honda effort. (laughs) It's hilarious.

I will never forget this. The top Honda officials are coming to Illinois to meet with the governor, and I'm the master of ceremonies, I guess you would say. We're sitting in the governor's office, and he is late. So I'm chatting up the Honda people, waiting for the governor to show up. He does, and it turns out he had just come from a debate with Topinka.

He walks into his office, looks at me—doesn't say anything to anybody else, hasn't shaken hands with the Honda people yet—he looks at me and says, "Jim, she says I'm going to be indicted." I'm thunderstruck; the Honda people are thunderstruck. (laughs) He says, "I just came from a debate with her, and that's what she said, I'm going to be indicted." I said, "Oh, Governor, no, no, no, no. That's not going to happen, no, no. She shouldn't have said that." Well, that was the beginning to the conference with Honda. (both laugh)

So, I introduce the governor to the Honda people. His staff was there. We started the process of answering Honda's questions. They'd ask the governor a question, and he'd look at me. I would give the answer, and he'd say, "Yes, that's right. Governor Thompson's right. That's what…" And it just went on and on. I thought, This is a disaster, just a disaster.

It ultimately went to Indiana, and the reason they gave, which was right, had to do with air quality standards. Indiana had, under federal law, the ability to do the regulation of air quality standards in their state, which they could do quickly. Whereas, Illinois's law required us to go to the federal EPA, which didn't move that quickly. So that was the reason that Honda gave for going to Indiana instead of Illinois. (sighs) You make of it what you will.

DePue: I was just going to speculate that perhaps his opening comment was the death knell of Honda in Illinois.

Thompson: (laughs) Let's say, it wasn't helpful. But it came true.

DePue: We're back with Blagojevich again, so I wanted to pick it up with when Winston & Strawn had a different relationship with the Blagojevich people.

Thompson: Yeah, I represented him.

[50] Reference to Diamond Star Motors, a joint manufacturing venture between Mitsubishi and Chrysler that selected Normal, Illinois, as the site of its factory. The plant began automobile production in November 1988 and operated until November 2015, although Mitsubishi bought out Chrysler's interest and dropped the Diamond Star name in 1995.

DePue: How did it come to pass in the first place that you and Winston & Strawn ended up representing him?

Thompson: He asked us to.

DePue: What timeframe was that?

Thompson: Sometime there in the course of the federal investigation, as it grew heated.

DePue: Do you know roughly when that started? Was that within a year or two of his administration?

Thompson: I don't remember when it was.

DePue: Did you have any qualms about taking on another governor?

Thompson: No.

DePue: By this time, you'd been dealing with George Ryan. Is that why he came to you?

Thompson: (sighs) I'm not sure why, but I had been a former U.S. attorney, and I had, when I was U.S. attorney, prosecuted a governor. I had represented George Ryan until Webb took the case over. I had been the chairman of his transition committee. He liked me. So he decided to hire me.

DePue: Did he hire you, personally, or the firm?

Thompson: Both.

DePue: Were you primarily the one who was working with him?

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And were you still chairman at the time?

Thompson: I was.

DePue: August 2006, Judy Baar Topinka demanded that Governor Blagojevich explain why his campaign had been billed $722,000 in legal services by Winston & Strawn, since the beginning of that year. Does that sound right?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: And was he or his campaign fund paying for all of this?

Thompson: His campaign fund.

DePue: How much can you talk about the nature of the legal issues that he was involved with?

Thompson: It involved my representing him and trying to counsel him, both in his relationship with the federal government and with the press, mainly. But I wasn't the only one working on the case. So there were a number of lawyers involved, not from Winston, not just me. I eventually turned over the representation to one of my co-counsel at the firm, when it got more heated. He was also a former federal prosecutor, so he was going to do the day-to-day.

DePue: Now who's that?

Thompson: Oh, I'm trying to remember his name. It'll come to me.

DePue: Was it Brad Lerman?

Thompson: Yes, Lerman. What book is that?

DePue: *Golden: How Rod Blagojevich Talked Himself Out of the Governor's Office and into Prison*, by Jeff Coen and John Chase. It came out a few years ago. How much can you talk about the specifics of the allegations that you were dealing with?

Thompson: Not much.

DePue: Was Rod Blagojevich a good client?

Thompson: He was till he stopped paying us.

DePue: Did he listen to you?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Did he take your advice?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: By that time, were you seeing character flaws in the man?

Thompson: Ah, I think that wouldn't be fair for me to say, since I was acting as his counsel.

DePue: I was afraid of this. (both laugh) We're not going to get all the meat on the bones that I was hoping for.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Let me ask you this then. At what point in time did the firm, and you in particular, stop representing him?

Thompson: When he stopped paying us.

DePue: And when did that occur?

Thompson: Oh, I don't remember the date. He still had money in his campaign account, so I don't know why he stopped paying us. His counsel kept trying to persuade him to pay us and let the relationship continue. Frankly, I don't know why he did it, but it was pretty clear that he wasn't going to keep paying, and in that instance we couldn't represent him, so we withdrew.

DePue: Did the relationship continue beyond the 2006 election?

Thompson: I guess so.

DePue: Some of the other things that were going on in his administration still were continuing. He had thirty-six special sessions that he called during his administration, to the point where the last couple, Mike Madigan just told his members, "Don't even bother to show up."

Thompson: Right.

DePue: To get your reaction to a couple other initiatives that he took toward the end of his administration, this would have been 2007, 2008 timeframe. His Preschool for All initiative. Do you recall anything on that?

Thompson: I'm trying to remember whether he had the money to pay for it, or whether this was another one like the—

DePue: The drugs.

Thompson: The drugs.

DePue: In most cases, he wasn't bringing up alternatives for how to pay for it, except for this one, a health care proposal. I think it was universal health care, paid for with a gross receipts tax on businesses that would represent something like a $7.6 billion increase over time.

Thompson: Did that pass?

DePue: It was defeated in the House by a vote of 107 to 0.

Thompson: There you go.

DePue: Which caused him major embarrassment (Thompson laughs) and illustrates just the depths of the divide between himself and Madigan by that time.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Family care was defeated by the legislature, but Blagojevich attempted to implement it by executive order. That was declared unconstitutional. Then you get to the issue again, at what point in time should the legislature take some kind of action of impeachment?

Thompson: They ultimately did.

DePue: Would you have been in favor, if you were in the legislature by early 2008 and all these things are happening, of recommending impeachment?

Thompson: Umm. I don't think, in view of my prior representation of him, that that's something I would answer.

DePue: Then I won't even ask you about his push for free bus fare for seniors and basically stiffing the bus companies with the bill.

Thompson: (sighs) I don't remember whether I was a senior yet, so—

DePue: (laughs) You could have been riding the buses for free, Governor.

Thompson: Could have been.

DePue: Poor old John wouldn't have to escort you around town all the time.

Thompson: Yeah, exactly.

DePue: Tuesday, December 9, 2008, Rod Blagojevich is arrested outside of his home in Chicago. Do you remember hearing about that?

Thompson: I do.

DePue: Your reaction when you heard that news?

Thompson: I wasn't surprised.

DePue: Did you know it was coming?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Were you supportive of the decision? You roll your eyes as if asking, what kind of a crazy question is that?

Thompson: Yeah, right. What kind of crazy question is that?

DePue: By that time, you no longer had any kind of formal relationship with the administration?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: The issue that came to the forefront of why Fitzgerald felt he had to take action at that time was…Do you remember what that was?

Thompson: No.

DePue: His attempt to sell Barack Obama's Senate seat.

Thompson: Oh yeah, yeah.

DePue: Any reaction to all of that?

Thompson: Look, (sighs) a lot of the problems that Governor Blagojevich had, in the end, were traceable to his talking when he should have been listening. I mean, he concocted some pretty wild schemes and sat there—I guess day dreaming is the right word—with any members of his staff who had the misfortune to be trapped in the office while he was doing that. (laughs) That's the kindest thing you can say.

If you read the transcripts of the trial, and you listen to the tapes, it was incredible. He was trying to figure out what he could get for naming somebody to the Senate seat. Could he become ambassador to India? There was a tape of him talking to his wife about the possibility of becoming ambassador to India, if he did this for the Obama administration. He asked his wife to research whether or not there was a running path around the residence of the ambassador in India, and how much did it pay? I mean, it just…

This was Blagojevich "sky-bluing" I would call it. He'd hop from one subject to another, with his staff, probably horrified at this, trying to pull him away from this kind of discussion or saying nothing. It was a surreal moment in Illinois politics. That's how best I can describe it.

DePue: If Coen and Chase are to be believed, in their book, they portrayed a governor who wasn't much interested in governing, but was very, very interested in raising campaign funds and making sure that he could continue his lifestyle.

Thompson: That was true. He wasn't that much interested in governing. He built a campaign office about two blocks from his house, and most of the time he was at home or in the campaign office. You rarely saw him at what is now the Thompson Center, then the State of Illinois Center, and at that point, he just wasn't serious about it.

DePue: I asked you before questions about watching what's happening in Illinois politics, and here's another occasion to have you reflect on that. Immediately after his arrest, he's not in jail obviously, so he essentially does a media blitz, puts himself in the public eye as much as he can. He appears on *Late Night with David Letterman*. He tries to become a contestant on *I'm a Celebrity…Get Me out of Here!*, going to Puerto Rico. He'd have to go out of the country to do that, and a name you mentioned before, James Zagel,

blocked that. His wife, Patti, goes on a reality show. He does all kinds of things along the same line. What was your reaction, watching this going on?

Thompson: It was just an awful moment in Illinois government and politics. It's the only word I can use, awful. It demeaned both the office of the governor and Illinois politics. I will be right back.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We've been talking about Blagojevich and the reasons he got in trouble in the first place, and how he reacted to it, the attempt to sell the Senate seat and all of that. All of this brings a very negative light on Illinois politics in general. This is the national press now, because he's that colorful a personality. He's coming from the same state that the recent president is elected from. The president's name is all a part of this story in the first place.

Inevitably, what comes up in the press? Well, Rod Blagojevich is the fourth in a long and undistinguished line of governors of Illinois who have gone to jail, once the inevitable happens, and they think he's going to jail. How much did that bother you, having Illinois being…The late night talk show hosts—

Thompson: Almost as bad as Rhode Island, right?

DePue: New Jersey or Louisiana or—

Thompson: (laughs) We had competitors, yes.

DePue: We had the reputation that perhaps Illinois politics was the ugliest of them all.

Thompson: It depends on the time. Obviously, it was highly embarrassing to the state and its people. As a former governor, it was very painful for me to see this history in its latest incarnation. And things really haven't gotten any better, have they? I mean, our governor's not in jail nor accused of anything that could send him to jail, but the fights with the legislature have gone on. We are in our second year without a budget. It's not an easy time. People wonder why Trump draws so much support. I think people have just had it with politics, are fed up for one reason or another. It doesn't always have to be allegations of corruptions. It's sad.

DePue: What does it say about Illinois and Illinois politics?

Thompson: It doesn't work.

DePue: What's different about this state from, let's say, Iowa or Indiana?

Thompson: We've just had a different political culture. Indiana or Iowa have not had the kind of political fiefdoms that have led to these struggles. Those states are

Republican versus Democratic, and they've usually been Republican, both of them. The governor of Iowa [Terry Branstad] is serving his fifth term. (laughs) The governor of Indiana [Mike Pence] is a candidate for vice-president. So, they have a little different history.

In Illinois, we had the long reign of Democratic mayors of Chicago and the development of strong political machines as a result of that. Then you had governors who have been at odds with the mayors of Chicago, whether the governors were Republican or Democratic. You've had the rise of legislative leaders; Speaker Madigan is nearing what, his fortieth year as Speaker?

DePue: He was in the legislature in 1970. He's been the Speaker all but two years since 1983.

Thompson: And neither Iowa nor Indiana have seen that. Iowa has seen it in their governor. But it's just been a witch's brew of politics in Illinois that's a lot different from most of the states in the union.

DePue: Is it Chicago politics?

Thompson: That's part of it. That's part of it. And it's not anybody's particular fault; it's just how our political culture has developed over the years, say, for the last fifty years.

DePue: Not an easy thing to turn around, Governor?

Thompson: Not an easy thing to turn around, no.

DePue: Is it possible that it could be turned around?

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: What would that take?

Thompson: (laughs) Co-op-er-a-tion! (both laugh)

DePue: We'll get to that when we talk a little bit about Rauner's current administration, and I hope you're willing to reflect on some of that here.

Thompson: We'll see.

DePue: But that'll be after lunch, I think, Governor.

Thompson: We'll see.

DePue: Going back to Blagojevich, part of this all blows up because he's trying to sell the Senate seat. "This thing is f'ing golden."

Thompson: "Fucking golden," yes.

DePue: All heard on tape, and the colorful conversation between him and Patti even.

Thompson: Oh, geez. (laughs)

DePue: Oh my gosh. Eventually, Jesse Jackson Jr.'s name comes up, in part of this?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Do you recall who ended up getting appointed?

Thompson: Yes, our former comptroller.

DePue: Roland Burris. Did you think that was an appropriate selection?

Thompson: (sighs) Well, at least he wasn't under investigation for anything. (DePue laughs) I don't think I need to comment on that. It'll be on his tombstone for longer than he served.[51]

DePue: Yeah, and that was obviously important to him.

Thompson: Roland?

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: It was well known that, leading up to the arrest of Rob Blagojevich, he had practically no relationship with his lieutenant governor, Pat Quinn.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: How do you think Quinn handled that whole situation, in terms of stepping into the void that was left there?

Thompson: He did all right.

DePue: And how closely did you follow the impeachment? That happened almost immediately, the decision that Mike Madigan, and I think even Emil Jones, eventually—

Thompson: I followed it pretty closely.

DePue: Any comments about the impeachment proceedings?

[51] Roland Burris was known for the large memorial he maintained at Chicago's Oak Woods Cemetery in advance of his death, the walls of which he kept updated with his career accomplishments. The memorial received national attention after his appointment to the Senate.

Thompson: No.

DePue: Do you think it was done professionally?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: And how closely did you follow the governor's criminal trial?

Thompson: What was in the paper.

DePue: Any comments about that?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Well, Governor, you're making this conversation shorter than I thought.

Thompson: Yes, but I was his former lawyer, so—

DePue: Well then, Governor, let's take a lunch break, and we'll pick it up this afternoon with Illinois politics beyond Blagojevich.

Thompson: (laughs) That'll be exciting.

DePue: Okay, thanks.

(end of interview #30)

Interview with James Thompson

IST-A-L-2013-054.31

Interview # 31: August 9, 2016

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Governor, we're at it once again for our thirty-first and maybe our last session.

Thompson: (laughs) Maybe so.

DePue: Then you'll be done with me. Once again, it's August 9. We're now in the afternoon. We've got a gorgeous day out here, overlooking your lake.

Thompson: It is beautiful.

DePue: Got your relatives in. I noticed you got…Is that a lemon or a lime tree over there?

Thompson: That's a lemon tree. My wife has been nursing that since last year. Nobody ever thought it would turn out to be a lemon, because it was round, and it was the wrong color. I kept telling her, "Put it outside in the sunshine." She was afraid the birds would attack it, so it stayed in here. It's gradually turning yellow, so it may be a lemon after all.

DePue: I'm wondering how you actually pollinated the flowers to get a couple of lemons to mature.

Thompson: I have no idea. I think they came with…something.

DePue: Wow! It's a good conversation piece, Governor. (Thompson laughs) But we haven't lacked for things to talk about. You're probably greatly relieved we're past the Blagojevich years.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: The next thing I wanted to ask you about is the first election for Barack Obama, the 2008 presidential election against John McCain. The Democratic primary was Clinton versus Obama. Any reflections on that?

Thompson: No. It wasn't my party, so I didn't have an opportunity, nor did I want one, to be part of that. I've known Hillary for a long time, since Bill was first elected governor, and obviously Obama's from my state and a nice guy, so that was not a concern to me.

DePue: Were you at all surprised that Obama decided to run for president?

Thompson: No.

DePue: It almost seemed to be in the cards since that speech.

Thompson: It seemed to be in the cards since the speech, right.

DePue: Let's turn to the Republicans then, the Republican primary. Just as a refresher, John McCain, Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, Ron Paul, Rudy Giuliani, Fred Thompson, and those were just the lead candidates. Who was your man there?

Thompson: McCain.[52]

DePue: And obviously he won. Did you have any comments about the primary that particular year?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Now, McCain was running against some strong headwinds. I think you might agree with that. I wanted to get your reflections on George Bush's foreign policy initiatives, especially having been weighed down by his legacy in the Iraq War. Any comments about that? I think you've expressed your views on the Iraq War before.

Thompson: In retrospect, it did not end well. Actually, in the present day it's not over, because we still have some troops there. The special forces keep increasing, and the enemy now is ISIS. Middle Eastern wars don't seem to work well for Americans. They just don't work well for America. Middle Eastern politics and Middle Eastern military action are just a witch's cauldron. The Russians tried it and lost in Afghanistan; the British tried it and lost in Afghanistan. It's just…They never end.

DePue: Heck, Governor, Alexander the Great tried it in Afghanistan.

Thompson: Yeah, it's part of Middle Eastern culture; it just is. We have no business over there.

DePue: We were already well into the situation in Iraq when Bush decided to surge, to try a different tactic altogether. Did you agree with that decision?

Thompson: Yeah, I did. You've got to try something to get rid of it, and I think most people supported the surge idea.

DePue: Anytime you have a two-term president—maybe even more so than at the gubernatorial level—it's awfully tough for the same party to come back and win again. So McCain's got a very unpopular war that he's fighting against,[53]

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[52] Thompson and Jim Edgar initially endorsed Giuliani, but switched to McCain after Giuliani dropped his bid in the wake of the Florida primary. Dennis Conrad, "Republican Leaders See McCain as Favorite in Illinois," *Daily Journal* (Kankakee), February 2, 2008.

[53] McCain was one of the primary advocates for increasing the number of American troops in Iraq, helping convince President Bush to back the surge. DePue does not mean that McCain was fighting against the war, but against the headwinds generated by the war's unpopularity.

and right towards the end of that election campaign, you have that economic crash, the real estate bubble bursting.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: I don't know if you're willing to venture a comment on this, but how would you explain the causes of that crash? Who would you point fingers at in that regard?

Thompson: I think a lot of people were responsible. The easy lending policies, lending to people who had no real chance of paying it back, the valuations going sky high. It was just messy.

DePue: The Democrats were laying almost all of that on Wall Street bankers and brokerage firms. Would you agree with that assessment?

Thompson: It's not all their fault. The Congress played a part; the politicians played a part. Everybody likes a bubble until it bursts. Some of the policies of the Congress are responsible too. When you, in essence, tell people to lend without regard to proper safeguards, in the name of politics, it's going to turn out wrong.

DePue: Was that a Republican or a Democratic initiative?

Thompson: Democratic.

DePue: Essentially the term that applies to that, I think, is the Community Reinvestment Act?

Thompson: Yeah, that's part of it. Anytime that politicians take over lending decisions, take it away from the market, you're going to have trouble. The banks are complicit too, because they're happy to lend and make fees and figure they'll be protected if things go wrong.

DePue: Which indeed most of them were.

Thompson: Which they were, yeah.

DePue: So that was a perfect storm of issues for Barack Obama to run on and for McCain to try to defend. We know the end result. Did you attend the convention last year in St. Paul, Minnesota?

Thompson: No.

DePue: What did you think when McCain came out with his vice-presidential candidate?

Thompson: Wait a minute, yes I did; I attended that convention.

DePue: So you were there to hear Sarah Palin's acceptance?

Thompson: I was. It was a great speech, but that was the end of it. Nothing else went right after that. (laughs)

DePue: Did you initially think that was a good selection?

Thompson: I didn't know her, so it was hard to tell.

DePue: What do you think in retrospect?

Thompson: Oh, god. (sighs)

DePue: McCain was your guy all the way through the election?

Thompson: Sure, I like John McCain.

DePue: Turning to the state level, any reflections on the job Pat Quinn did, once he became governor?

Thompson: He started out okay, taking over at a very difficult time in Illinois history, after the impeachment of a governor for the first time. But then he developed a—how shall I say this—not a good relationship with Madigan and some of the other leaders and members of the General Assembly, and he was eventually beaten.

DePue: As I recall, he had a supermajority in both the House and the Senate.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Same party.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Still struggled to get some of his agenda through.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: So is that a blessing or a curse to have control of all three at the same time?

Thompson: I was in a good spot when I was governor, because, with a couple of years where either the House or the Senate were Republican, the Democrats controlled it for most of my time. I had good relationships with both parties in the General Assembly, and if I had to take a stand, the Republican Party was there to back me up on a veto. So I was in a fortunate position, I think.

But it's not so much whether your party is there or not; it's the relationship you have with the institution, with the General Assembly, without regard to politics. It's the respect you give them; it's the willingness to work

with them, and it's an attempt to find an accommodation for their views as well. That's what the people elect you to do, and that's what they expect you to do. So I tried to do it.

DePue: Pat Quinn came in with something of a reputation of being a political gadfly. He'd been the outsider with the Cutback Amendment, with the utility board—

Thompson: CUB [Citizens Utility Board].

DePue: —those kinds of issues, so was that a difficult transition to make?

Thompson: I think it is. Sometimes people can break out of their prior life and prior career and do something new. Sometimes they can't. Jim Ryan always had difficulty when he was running for governor, because he was the attorney general. He found it difficult to break away from being attorney general, when the jobs are just completely different.

I think Pat Quinn had difficulty in the same way. He put himself outside the system basically for so many years, it was hard for him to get back in, or to get in, since he had never been part of the system.

Others have been more successful. Jim Edgar was in the legislature, so it was a natural progression. George Ryan was in the legislature, so it was a natural progression. It depends on the individual.

DePue: Moving on to 2010 and the Senate campaign in Illinois that year. The Republican primary, Mark Kirk and Patrick Hughes. Did you come out in favor of Kirk in that election?

Thompson: Kirk, absolutely.

DePue: Very much in the tradition of a moderate Republican for the state of Illinois.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: The Democratic primary was Giannoulias, David Hoffman, and Cheryle Jackson. Alexi Giannoulias won that race, so you've got Kirk versus Giannoulias. Were you campaigning for Kirk at all?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: You did?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: In what way?

Thompson: Speaking for him.

DePue: What kind of functions would you normally hit the road for?

Thompson: It would be county organizations, Lincoln Day, you know, the usual track.

DePue: And Kirk won that election.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Switching to the gubernatorial race that year, you had Bill Brady, Kirk Dillard, Jim Ryan again, after quite an absence, Andy McKenna, Adam Andrzekewski, and Dan Proft. Who did you back in that group?

Thompson: I don't think I got involved in that, because I had more than one friend in there.

DePue: Were you okay, once Brady was selected out of that group?

Thompson: Yeah, he was okay. He was more conservative than I was, but I went to a fundraiser for him, and I gave him money. Chris Christie was speaking. That was the first time I ever met Chris Christie. I was so impressed with his speech, I gave more money (laughs) than I intended to give.

DePue: Chris Christie's obviously a name from this year.[54]

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: And in the Democratic primary, Pat Quinn versus Dan Hynes. Now there had been an awful lot of talk before that time whether or not Lisa Madigan would throw her hat in the ring. Much of that discussion centered on what her father was going to do.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Wonder if you could reflect on their relationship and how that has worked out. As you know better than I do, the speculation has been that, if she wanted to run for governor, she'd have a pretty clear path to being elected.

Thompson: I think she would have been a very strong candidate for governor. I've known Lisa for a long time. I babysat with Lisa on occasion. That's a funny thing to say about the attorney general of your state, but—

DePue: So Lisa and Samantha know each other well?

Thompson: Oh yeah, sure. And Samantha knows the other Madigan sister, as well.[55] But I watched Lisa grow up. When she and her mother came to Illinois, they first

[54] Christie was the Republican governor of New Jersey and a candidate for president in 2016.
[55] Tiffany Madigan. Samantha Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014.

stayed with a dear friend of mine. So I was over at the house a lot and got to know them.

[I] watched her career in politics, obviously her father's protégé and her election to the Senate in a contested Democratic primary, something unusual for Mike to do. But I think it would have been very difficult for Lisa to run for governor if Mike was going to still be the Speaker. I think she believed that too, in the end. He was not ready to go, so she decided not to run.

DePue: I wonder if you have an opinion about whether or not he should have been willing to step aside.

Thompson: No, I don't have an opinion. Look, the entire Madigan family are family friends of mine for a long time, since 1977. So I don't get into interfamily issues.

DePue: (laughs) Gosh, there's several things that…You're reluctant to criticize governors, and you obviously couldn't talk much about Blagojevich because of the legal situation, and now you've got the family situation, so—

Thompson: Well yeah. There's no point to that. When I was governor and Mike was leader, he was a good friend of mine and a good leader for me.

DePue: Did you hit the campaign trail for Bill Brady in the general election against Pat Quinn?

Thompson: Not really.

DePue: Was that in part because he wasn't your kind of Republican?

Thompson: No, I was just out of politics. It was time for another generation to hit the campaign trail.

DePue: A fairly close election, Quinn got 46.8 percent; Brady got 45.9 percent. I'd have to look at the map, but I would imagine that Brady carried almost every county except Cook County perhaps, with maybe one or two outliers.[56]

Thompson: Yeah, I think if Brady had a less hardline position on abortion, he probably would have won.

DePue: You and I might have talked about this before, but does abortion really factor into a gubernatorial election? What can a governor do on that particular social issue?

[56] Quinn won four counties, Alexander, Cook, Jackson, and St. Clair.

Thompson: He can sign or veto bills. But abortion has become… I was going to say less of an issue in politics today, but I'm not sure it has. You've got Supreme Court decisions; you've got congressional legislation; you've got state legislation, and it seems to have gotten tougher and meaner as an issue. But my recollection is that Brady's position was an absolute one, no abortion, even in the cases of rape or incest, health of the mother. And a lot of Republican women, especially suburban Republican women, won't vote for that. So he lost.

DePue: Speaking of those kinds of issues, the next topic was the 2012 presidential election, and certainly women's issues factored into that. The Democrats really pushed that hard in the Democratic convention that year.

Before we get into the election itself, I want to get your impressions of the job that President Obama had done. Were you optimistic, like almost everybody in the United States, that for the first time we had an African American president, and this is the dawn of a new day in that respect?

Thompson: (sighs) I wouldn't necessarily say optimistic. I was glad that we had reached a point where a black could be elected president, interesting statistically, since blacks are about 14 percent of the population, and women are 50 percent of the population, and a black got there before a woman. That's an interesting note of history. But I thought it was a remarkable achievement, and I think it was good for America. I think it helped, at least in the beginning, but…

And I think it's fair to say that race relations, from the political standpoint, are better in the United States than they were before. You've got a number of black officeholders in the South, who have reached high levels. You've got a lot of acceptance by people, broadly, of blacks in political office in states where they never were before.

On the other hand, you've got still the dynamic of some southerners, particularly in the Republican Party, trying to tighten the electoral laws in what the federal courts have held is a pretty clear attempt to suppress the black vote. Although that's contested by governors and legislatures in the South, that's what the federal courts have determined. But I think the election of a black president was good for America. You have to say that, whether you agree with his policies or not. I mean, that's a different question.

DePue: Have race relations improved since he's been president?

Thompson: I think overall they have. You can pick out incidents here and there in both the North and the South, but I'd have to say on balance they have.

DePue: I wanted to get your impression on some of his initiatives, both foreign policy and domestic policy. If you want to respond, that's fine. If not, we'll just move on. (Thompson laughs) So let's start with the biggest, probably, on the

list of his accomplishments, the Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as Obamacare.

Thompson: On the plus side, you've got people insured for the first time in their lives and people insured who might have been insured before and then had economic circumstances befall them that took the insurance out.

On the negative side, it was something that was jammed through the Congress without a single Republican vote, so that gives it a slippery path to begin with. That's never a good thing, especially for major legislation like that, to have it just uniquely Democratic, no Republicans, which means there wasn't a lot of discussion or negotiation or attempts to compromise; it was just jammed through.

It's going to encounter difficulties, I think, when first, there is a pending legal question on whether the administration can pay to bridge the gap between what people have to pay for their health insurance and what their health insurance costs. [There's] a legal question now on whether they have the authority to do that.

Secondly, you're going to see premiums rise substantially, simply because the coverage is so broad, and it made major changes in health insurance, the pre-existing condition being a huge change, and medicine becoming so expensive. You're going to see continued escalation of premiums. I think you're going to see, in some cases, people going backwards, unable to pay the premiums.

Now luckily, in the vast majority of cases, people get their health insurance through their employers, so that's different. But even there, you're going to see some cutback, because some employers are going to decide to pay the penalties for not providing health insurance, rather than continuing to provide health insurance at escalating prices. Or they're going to require greater contribution by employees. So we're not done yet with Obamacare. Whether we'll ever get to the point in America where everybody's covered, the federal government pays for it, and you increase taxes to support it, I don't know.

DePue: Would you be in favor of that?

Thompson: It's interesting. I grew up in the 1950s as the son of a doctor. And of course that was "socialized medicine." To my father, that was unthinkable. He provided a lot of patient care to poor people, pro bono. That's what the ethics of his profession were.

We're a long way from that now. And, I guess, having grown up under the rubric of socialized medicine, having seen all the different issues since

then, in the last fifty or sixty years, my guess is we'll probably end up with a single-payer system. It's just, I think, headed that way.

DePue: That's a prediction, not an endorsement.

Thompson: I don't know whether I'm ready to endorse it yet or not, because it's a turning away from the free markets. But it's really hard in the year 2016 that you should have a system where poor people face the possible loss of their health care. (phone rings)

Let's pause for a second and see who this is.

(pause in recording)

Thompson: Obviously we've got Medicaid for poor people. It's the in-between. You've got Medicaid here, and you've got employer provided health care here, and it's the people in the middle— (phone rings again)

(pause in recording)

Thompson: So the people in the middle are caught. It's really impossible to comprehend that, in the year 2016, that people who need medical care can't get it.

DePue: Moving on to some of his other policies and initiatives, and this is in the economic realm, his very strong support for renewable sources of energy and, I think in his own terms, his "war on coal."

Thompson: I come from a coal state, so this is difficult. I was always a strong supporter of coal when I was governor, and we always wanted the day when you could take all the impurities out of Illinois coal and burn it cleanly.

DePue: And Illinois is a high-sulfur coal state.

Thompson: We are the high-sulfur coal, but even low-sulfur coal contributes impurities. I guess the science is just not there or just plain unaffordable, or both, to keep the coal dream alive in Illinois. I used to talk about Illinois being the Saudi Arabia of coal. We had more energy buried beneath our corn fields than they had in Saudi Arabia, and that was literally true. We had more coal than they had oil. But the economics of clean coal are not there.

The emergence of natural gas, as the fuel of choice, and the subsequent falling prices of natural gas have sort of mooted the coal controversy. And you've got the renewables. And you still have in Illinois, substantial nuclear facilities, still the number one in the country, as far as I know.

The renewables, water power is miniscule in our area and for most of the United States. Solar is episodic in America. Yeah, Texas, Arizona,

New Mexico, California make sense, and eventually the science will drive a lot of that. What am I missing?

DePue: Wind power.

Thompson: Wind, yes. We don't have a lot of that either, even though you see the turbines when you drive up and down [Illinois Route] 55. I'm not sure wind is going to be that big a factor, but it's been a long time since I understood completely the science of all the renewables because of not being in office any more.

DePue: But so much of what the Democrats and the Obama administration were doing was to counter any kind of fossil fuels, to include oil and natural gas, blocking the Keystone Pipeline—

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: …their resistance to fracking, which is what led to the explosion of the natural gas you were talking about.

Thompson: Well, the Keystone Pipeline became a political issue, in my view, not a fuel or an economic issue. It's a political issue; the president decided "no," as a matter of politics, even though a lot of Democrats were in favor of it.

Fracking, I don't know that much about fracking. We don't have a lot of it in Illinois. We were so slow to develop regs that it's not been a major issue here. It has been out East and in the South. There's some concern in states like Oklahoma that fracking causes earthquakes. What the science of that is, I don't know.

I think we're still a long way from our giving up our reliance on oil. We just are. Not just us, but the rest of the world. If people were that concerned about oil, they'd develop more nuclear, despite the risks. And the risks have basically been in areas where they shouldn't have built the nuclear facilities to begin with, in bad sites.

DePue: You mean like in Japan?

Thompson: Yeah. So energy is going to have to be a composite of all forms for a long time yet. Maybe the science will eventually drive us to non-carbon fuel conclusions. It certainly won't be in my lifetime and in the lifetime of a lot of people alive today. I mean, you look at electric cars. There are not enough charging stations. There is still a limit to how far they can be driven between charges. There is an issue with the cars in the winter. I can remember standing in the Oval Office talking about electric cars with a group and with President Obama, and he was pushing electric cars. The guy standing next to me said, "Jim, you know how many cars there are in the United States?" And I said, "No." He said, "About 200,000."

DePue: Two hundred million?

Thompson: Two hundred million. He said, "You know how many are electric?" And I said, "No." He said, "About a million." (laughs) You tell me where this is going.

DePue: Governor, what took you out to the White House?

Thompson: Oh, I don't know what it was. The last time I was out there, it was immigration reform. The president called a group of Republicans to the White House—I think there were four or five of us—to counsel him on ways maybe that the Republican Congress could buy Obama's immigration plans.

DePue: Since you mentioned it, that has been an ongoing debate for I don't know how many presidential election cycles, and we still haven't resolved that issue. It's one of those things that Republicans and Democrats cannot agree on. What do you think of President Obama's handling of it?

Thompson: So far, the federal courts have decided 2–1 that his handling of the situation on extending deferral to the families of people brought here as children was unlawful, because it didn't follow the way that regulations should be considered before they're enacted.

Look, I'm a pragmatic guy. You've got eleven or twelve million people, illegally here, who have been here forever, and you're not going to deport them, so we got to fix their status. If they've been here forever, if they're part of our economy, and we're not going, as a political or legal matter, to deport them, then the only thing you can do is fix their status. Whether it's as permanent residents, with or without the possibility of citizenship, is less important than giving them some kind of legal status so they can come out from the cellars and the attics and be a legal part of our economy.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't, from now on, strictly enforce your borders. No country cannot enforce its borders. If I snuck into Mexico and was discovered, what would happen to me? The first place would be jail. Would I become part of the Mexican economy? No. And the same thing is true of most countries in the world.

So we're at the point now where we've got this eleven or twelve million—however many it is—you've got their status. You've got the fact that the trend these days is for people to go back home. You've got Mexicans going back to Mexico, voluntarily. And despite all the political rhetoric about fences and walls and crap like that, you've got fewer border crossings these days, under Obama, and you have—

DePue: You mean fewer people crossing the border?

Thompson: Yeah, illegally.

DePue: Well, you know what the Republicans say about a couple of those points.

Thompson: Yeah, I know.

DePue: It's because the economy is not doing well.

Thompson: Yeah, well, so what does that mean, that the Republicans are going to get a great economy, so they'll stay here? Give me a break. So we should do something. Get this issue over. And the notion that we're going to build a wall and make Mexico pay for it is just absurd. You can't build a big enough, high enough, long enough wall and make another nation pay. How are we going to make the other nation pay for it? Are we going to go to war?

DePue: Let's take the other nation paying for it out of the equation. You still would be opposed to building the wall?

Thompson: Yeah, it makes no sense.

DePue: So how do you control the border?

Thompson: With your border patrol people. And if you have to put more of them in, fine. Every nation should protect its borders.

DePue: How about card check, the other part of the equation that's often mentioned? An employer has to verify that this is a legal immigrant.

Thompson: I think that's fine. I think that's fine. The burden should be on the employer. Hey, I was on the 9/11 Commission, and I supported the idea of everybody having an identity card, **everybody**, me. How many identity cards do I have? A driver's license, that's an identity card. I've got a voting card; that's an identity card. It's just…What's wrong with having identity cards? They drag up these Nazi war movies where people ask for papers, and that just… (DePue laughs) Our credit card companies know more about us than the government does, so having a national identity card, carried by everybody, is not a big deal.

DePue: How about President Obama's economic policies?

Thompson: Which ones?

DePue: We haven't had a recession since the great recession, and we came out of that maybe six or eight months later. But your comment, which ones? You frowned a little bit when I said, "We haven't had one since." Do you think we haven't really had a recovery?

Thompson: I think most economists would tell you we've not had the kind of recovery that history has shown we've had in the past. It's hard to say. We've got unemployment down to what, 4.9 nationally, higher than that in Illinois. But, I think it's fair to say an awful lot of people have given up looking for work. So they don't count them anymore.

DePue: Do you lay part of that or a big chunk of that on the Obama administration?

Thompson: I think that's…a) it's part of the economy, without reference to politics, and b) it's a failure of both the president and the Congress, to the extent that politicians can control the economy.

DePue: Many of your fellow Republicans would certainly mention some of the issues that have led to that anemic growth in the economy, issues like the expansion of the regulatory state, the resistance to things like Keystone Pipeline and those initiatives, to be part of the recovery.

Thompson: Look, "the regulatory state" is too broad a brush to paint with. You'd have to say which regulations you're talking about. What about the regulations promoting public health? We don't want to do away with those. Politicians have less to do with the economy, for good or bad, than most people try to give them credit for. The notion that a president of the United States can control either the macro economy or the micro economy is a step too far, I think.

We're part of a *world* economy. What the hell is President Obama going to do about recession in Germany or recession in France or a slowdown in China or trouble with South America or trouble with our trading partners or currency fluctuations? The president can't do anything about that. We're a long way from isolationist America. We just are.

DePue: For several decades the United States was the 800 pound gorilla. Whenever we had a hiccup in our economy, then the world suffered.

Thompson: Not any more.

DePue: Now you could say that the same thing could be said almost of the Chinese economy.

Thompson: Sure. Although, you take today, compared to the rest of the world, we're doing better than most countries in the world. The dollar is terrifically strong. We're still the country where people want to put their money for safety and security. We're still an agricultural powerhouse. We've got a recovering manufacturing capacity. But we still are inextricably linked with the economies of the rest of the world.

DePue: Are you generally in favor of NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] and TPP [Trans-Pacific Partnership] and other global trade agreements?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: And neither party is talking about being strong in those this particular election cycle.

Thompson: Oh, it's pathetic.

DePue: Governor, listening to you, it reminds me of our conversations when we were discussing the economics of the early 1980s.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: How about the president's use of executive orders?

Thompson: If his opponents don't like it, they can go to court. Can't they? We don't know, as a legal matter, how far the authority of the president goes in issuing executive orders instead of legislation. We've got the Supreme Court to tell us, if they ever get a ninth member. I presume they will.

DePue: Doesn't that put an awful lot of onus on the judicial branch to decide how much power the president should have?

Thompson: That's always been true, from the founding days of our republic. And how much power the Congress has. It's always been true.

DePue: Foreign policy initiatives, how well do you think the president has conducted the War on Terror, which is a term he didn't like from the very beginning?

Thompson: (laughs) No wonder. Nobody likes the terror. I don't know. It's really hard to condemn a president for acts he takes or doesn't take in that area. If, for example…He drew a red line in Syria and then walked away from it, right? That was not a good thing to do. He should have either not drawn the red line or enforced it. You don't put a red line out there and then walk away. It diminishes your power in the world. It diminishes what people think of you, in the geopolitical system.

He's criticized for not aiding the Syrian rebels with arms. The defense is that it was very hard to choose which of the Syrian rebels to give arms to, and who was really a legitimate rebel against the Assad government. Well, we didn't have any problems giving arms to the Afghani Talibans, when they were fighting with Russia, right?

DePue: The Mujahideen, we were calling it.

Thompson: The Mujahideen, yeah. They weren't the Taliban then. They weren't Al Qaeda then. So, we've plenty of times backed the wrong people. We should have let the Russians and the Afghanis fight it out, without sticking our nose into that. We've never done well in the Middle East.

But everything has choices, and you don't always know what the consequences will be. If we had really gotten in there with the Syrian rebels, what would Russia have done? Would we have come closer to a conflict with Russia, because they view that as one of their patches of influences as well? Who knows what Putin would do? A dangerous man. So it's really hard to say yes or no to some of these issues on foreign policy and defense policy.

DePue: To sum it up then, you are reluctant to be critical of what Obama has done in foreign policy?

Thompson: Yeah, I mean—

DePue: How about this issue? It's certainly one of the things that's discussed this particular presidential year, that's the relationship with Iran, especially in contrast with or comparing it with the relationship with Israel, but in particular, the nuclear agreement with Iran?

Thompson: We have to see how that's going to turn out. By its terms, when it expires they can go ahead and go nuclear, can't they? In the meantime, all we've done is delay it.

DePue: That's assuming that the Iranians live up to the agreement.

Thompson: Yeah, right. And if they don't, then we haven't delayed it, and we may have lost the chance to stop it, if stopping it was important to America. We should have kept those computers spinning for a while longer, under the mountains in Iran.

DePue: You mean the centrifuges?

Thompson: Yeah, centrifuges.

DePue: Everything we've talked about was all fair game, part of the discussion of the 2012 presidential election, except for the nuclear deal with Iran; I don't think that was the case. But everything else was pretty much already on the plate for that particular year. The Republican primary, Mitt Romney, Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum, Rick Perry, Ron Paul, Michele Bachmann, Herman Cain—

Thompson: Oh god.

DePue: …Tim Pawlenty and probably five or six more.

Thompson: (sighs) Yes?

DePue: Who did you back there? Your sigh was almost a painful sigh, Governor.

Thompson: It was a painful sigh, no question, a very painful sigh. What year, 2012?

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: (sighs and laughs) Tell me who the candidates were again?

DePue: Mitt Romney—

Thompson: Romney.

DePue: Yeah, that's what I would have thought. Did you do any campaigning for him?

Thompson: Not really.

DePue: Did you write any checks for Romney?

Thompson: I don't remember. He was a terrible candidate.

DePue: As a politician on the stump, you mean, in terms of the campaign he ran?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: What was your criticism of his campaign?

Thompson: Getting caught, taped, saying, "Listen, I know forty seven people aren't going to vote for me, but they're on the dole," or however he phrased it. What an awful thing to say, instead of fighting for every vote.

DePue: Do you think he should have taken the gloves off more, during the campaign?

Thompson: Yeah, and…Look, some guys have it, and some guys don't, when it comes to being a politician, right? They just can't escape their background. He's a wealthy guy, and it's very hard for him to escape that, whether it was his comment, like that, about people not supporting him, because they were the beneficiaries of government aid, or…What was the other thing he said, women in government, he's got books of them?

DePue: Binders.

Thompson: Binders full. (laughs) Well, we all have binders full of candidates for positions in your administration. I never had a woman's binder. I just had a binder, and I had plenty of women in my administration. You've got to think before you talk! But some people can't escape their background, their culture, their education, their position; they just can't do it.

DePue: Gosh, this comment might come up as we get farther along in the chronology. (Thompson laughs) How about that one? Did you attend the convention that year in Tampa, Florida?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that this far along in your personal life, that you're becoming less engaged in the political process each and every year?

Thompson: Fair to say. Yes, sir. I think I was elected as a delegate, and then I told the chairman, "Give it to somebody else."

DePue: Were you surprised at all in the outcome of that election?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Again, it's the typical case in American politics that the incumbent has the big advantage.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: Until you get to the third time around for a governor.

Thompson: Correct.

DePue: And you beat the odds, Governor.

Thompson: Beat the odds.

DePue: Twice. Okay, 2014, the gubernatorial election that year.

Thompson: One more break.

DePue: This might be the last time we break, ever.

(pause in recording)

DePue: The 2014 gubernatorial election. Leading up to that, as you well remember, this is Quinn's run for reelection.

Thompson: That's for the third time, right?

DePue: Yeah, because he beat Brady the last time around. There had been an income tax increase, in part to solve some of the financial difficulties of the state, and a big part of those financial difficulties was the rising pension costs that we have already talked about before. That was due to expire right after the election, so the number one issue in that election campaign was obviously going to be what to do about that income tax increase.

Thompson: What did they do with the proceeds of it?

DePue: You're asking me? But that's a rhetorical question, because you know the answer to it. What did they do with those proceeds?

Thompson: They spent it!

DePue: On?

Thompson: Everything. No, you remember the reason for the income tax increase? To pay our old bills, right? That was the reason. Did they pay our old bills? No, they spent it. (groans)

DePue: (laughs) So not much sympathy for a continuation of that?

Thompson: No. The Democrats didn't fight for a continuation of it, did they?

DePue: Madigan did not.

Thompson: Did not.

DePue: They had control of the House; they had control of the Senate, I believe a supermajority in both. They could have easily passed it if they wanted to.

Thompson: Absolutely, absolutely.

DePue: Having said all that, did you have an opinion about Quinn's choice of changing out his lieutenant governor candidates? He had Paul Simon's daughter, Sheila Simon, and then he changed over to Paul Vallas. Do you think that was a good move?

Thompson: No.

DePue: I think Sheila did not want to run again for lieutenant governor.

Thompson: Well, Vallas had a problem. He didn't campaign very much downstate, because he wouldn't fly. I don't know how you campaign downstate, in a state as large as Illinois, without flying.

DePue: I'm not so sure that was the case for the 2012 election. That was the dig against him in 2002.

Thompson: Oh, that's right, I'm sorry. Then I take it back. I don't think the lieutenant governor candidate was an influence in the election.

DePue: Let's turn to the Republican side. The candidates there were Bruce Rauner, Kirk Dillard, Bill Brady. Did you come out and endorse any of those?

Thompson: And for a while, Schock, but not an actual candidate.

DePue: Aaron Schock.

Thompson: He talked about it. I don't think I picked a favorite in the primary. Dillard was a friend of mine.

DePue: Yeah.

Thompson: I didn't know Rauner.

DePue: And Dillard would certainly qualify more towards the moderate Republican side than the other two.

Thompson: Right, right, right.

DePue: But you didn't come out and endorse anybody in that race?

Thompson: Uh-uh.

DePue: Any comments about Rauner's campaign, much of which was financed out of his own pocket?

Thompson: That's okay. I mean, that's been done before. I don't have any criticism of that. He spent a lot of the campaign campaigning against Madigan, who of course was not his gubernatorial opponent, and campaigning against organized labor, which had more votes and money than he had. I wouldn't have conducted that kind of campaign. But he won, so it's really hard for me to criticize him, right?

DePue: Won by 50.3 percent versus Quinn's 46.4 percent.

Thompson: Hmm, that's okay.

DePue: So, they garnered the vast majority of those votes. And what I wanted to do next here is kind of lay out the fiscal situation and the business and economic situation of Illinois at the time that Rauner came to office, then get your thoughts on that, first of all, how we got there, and then we'll go through point by point in what Governor Rauner has called his "Turnaround Agenda."

By that time, the pension shortfall was determined to be something in the neighborhood of a $111 billion, and depending on who you talked to, in most cases, that put Illinois fiftieth out of fifty states.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Credit rating. You had just mentioned the state got into a nasty habit of postponing payment of their bills for four to six months.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Our credit rating was an A-minus.

Thompson: When?

DePue: By the time he was coming into office. Instead of an AAA rating, we were A-minus.

Thompson: Oh, we were still that high? Whoa!

DePue: That puts us as the worst state in the country.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: The highest unemployment rate in the Midwest.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Something you and I just talked about, chronically late payments for vendors, embarrassingly so and putting a lot of vendors in some very difficult circumstances, a ballooning budget deficit…You're not disagreeing with any of this?

Thompson: Not a thing.

DePue: Very high property tax rate.

Thompson: Well, we who own property always complain about the property tax rate, but I don't know. I don't know enough about property tax rates on a statewide basis these days, because I'm too far removed from it. The only thing I really pay attention to is Chicago's property tax rate, which is still, even with the increases, lower than the suburbs.

DePue: And one more point here, before I turn to what the governor pointed out in his assessment of Illinois, a pretty low percentage of state funding for schools.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Certainly lower than the constitution would say we're supposed to be doing.

Thompson: No, that's not correct. The constitution says that the…I forget the words, but the Supreme Court has held them to be advisory, hortatory.

DePue: Hortatory?

Thompson: Hortatory, not compulsory.

DePue: I'm now going to read a few comments from the *Illinois Turnaround*. This is a document the governor's office has put out. [reading] "An economic competitiveness in job growth package." And here's where Rauner's

administration is coming down on Illinois's economy: "*Chief Executive* magazine ranks Illinois forty-eighth among top states for business." So a bad business climate. "Seventh highest workers' compensation costs. Ninth highest unemployment insurance. One of the worst lawsuit climates, forty-sixth out of fifty." You're being quiet.

Thompson: It's all true.

DePue: "Last in job growth among its neighboring states."

Thompson: True.

DePue: And here's one that's concerning anybody who wants to figure out how to pay the bills for the state, "Ninety-four thousand Illinoisans moved out of the state last year." I believe this was written in 2015. So you're losing taxpayers on top of everything else.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: So now I get to turn to his Turnaround Agenda, (Thompson laughs) and I want your reaction to each one of those, hoping that you're willing to respond to these.

Thompson: We'll see.

DePue: Term limits. In fact, that was one of the things he wanted to get on the ballot as a separate initiative.

Thompson: He just put $1 million into advertising for term limits, just this week. I have never been in favor of term limits. I think it takes away from voters the right to choose their representatives, and that's always been my position, when I was governor, when I was not governor. What that really means is you don't trust the voters.

DePue: How about a name you and I mentioned already, Mike Madigan, who's been there forever.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And it applies for him, as well, that the voters should have their choice?

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: His district is increasingly Hispanic. In this last election, he had a Hispanic who was running against him, and I believe Madigan found a couple other names to put on the ballot.

Thompson: Right, typical Mike.

DePue: Pardon me?

Thompson: Typical Mike! I mean, that's politics.

DePue: So that doesn't sway your feelings on the subject?

Thompson: No. Voters have an opportunity and a responsibility to know who their candidates are.

DePue: How about redistricting? Here's an issue again that's been around in Illinois politics for a long time. You know better than almost anybody how it's happened in the past, that it oftentimes gets to a deadlock, and there's a name drawn out of a hat or a crystal bowl, unless you can control both the legislature and the governorship. And for the last two cycles the Democrats have gotten to draw the districts.

Thompson: Right. Crazy looking, aren't they?

DePue: Yeah. (Thompson laughs) That gives gerrymandering a very Illinois face. Are you supportive of the citizen initiative to have that taken out of the political realm as much as possible?

Thompson: Well, if you assume that you can ever take something out of the political realm. The answer's yes, but. Yes, but, to believe that there exists a group of citizens somewhere who have no connection to, or any business with, or any recognition of politics, is something that I don't think exists. If the people on the commission come from the legislature or from anywhere else, it's hard to say that politics has been taken out of it, right? If you're talking about political officeholders or if you're talking about citizens, who's going to pick the citizens? Political officeholders.

DePue: There was an initiative for redistricting this time around, to go on the ballot for 2016. Did you sign that petition?

Thompson: I don't think I was ever given the chance to sign that.

DePue: Really?

Thompson: Yeah. Here's the other problem; they keep going back to the same way of drawing those amendments that the courts then throw out on the grounds that they violate the constitutional provision. I don't know whether you can ever draw a redistricting amendment that comports with what the Supreme Court's view of the constitution is these days. I would like to see fairer district lines.

DePue: Did you just also say that it's too hard to overcome whatever constitutional challenge somebody's going to present?

Thompson: I don't know whether it is or isn't. I haven't read the judge…Who is the judge this time? It's back up in the Supreme Court, so we'll see what they say.

DePue: Yeah, it hasn't gone before the Illinois Supreme Court yet.

Thompson: Yeah, right. I'll wait for them.

DePue: Now here's one I know you have strong feelings about. Governor Rauner, you've already mentioned, very much wants to reduce the power of unions, especially public sector unions.

Thompson: Public sector unions have a lot of power, no question about it, and a lot of resources, a lot of money that they're able to put in campaigns.

DePue: He's saying they have way too much power.

Thompson: (sighs) Let's say they have a lot of power. I always got along with public sector unions. They endorsed me. They supported me. I was able to reach what I thought were reasonable accommodations with their issues. So I was a candidate for governor that was strongly supported by the labor movement, with rare exception.

DePue: Governor, you certainly know that in this arena your name comes up critically, because you were the one who signed the legislation giving them collective bargaining rights.[57]

Thompson: Yeah, I did, and I still believe in collective bargaining rights.

DePue: You said that they have strong power. Do they have too much power today?

Thompson: As compared to what? As compared to who? I thought the Supreme Court was going to change the equation, and then Justice Scalia died. Because the *Friedrichs* case from California, if Scalia had not died, would have radically changed the power of governmental unions, by allowing the free riders to get the benefits of collective bargaining without paying for it.

DePue: In other words, extending right-to-work across the entire nation.

Thompson: In the governmental employees, right, not private unions, but public employee unions. But he died, so the case was affirmed by an equally divided court. God knows who the president's going to be and who that president's going to appoint to the Supreme Court. Maybe the issue is going to be right back there, or maybe it's dead forever. I don't know.

[57] On Thompson's support for public employee collective bargaining and his pursuit of the labor vote more generally, see James Thompson, interview by Mark DePue, August 28, 2014, and March 31, 2015; Jim Fletcher, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 24, 2015; Gregory Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 7, 2013; David Gilbert, interview by Mark DePue, April 22, 2014.

But eventually public employee unions will lose a little bit of their power or some of their power, simply because government is becoming unaffordable. So the economics of it are going to have an impact, even if the law is not going to have an impact.

DePue: I want to read you a quote from a *Wall Street Journal* editorial. This was back in 2015, not too many months after Rauner came into office. [reading] "The first Illinois GOP governor in twelve years is off to a strong start by targeting the source of the state's fiscal and economic rot, the corrupt political bargain."

Thompson: I don't know what that means. I don't know what the corrupt political bargain is. Did they go on to say what it is?

DePue: I think I can encapsulate what it is, if you are willing to give me a chance on that.

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: Labor unions support a candidate. They raise lots of money, and they pump money into the campaigns to help get that candidate elected.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: That candidate is elected. He or she then feels an obligation to offer generous benefits to the labor unions, and in the process, the labor unions have more money to support them the next time around.

Thompson: That may be true, but it's not corrupt. Maybe they're not using the word corrupt in a legal sense.

DePue: But if you're a taxpayer who's paying for ever higher expenses, and then you face a $111 billion pension shortfall, because the legislature's not financing the pension system—

Thompson: You might use other words than corrupt, (both laugh) some of which would be even stronger.

DePue: So you're not sympathetic to any of that argument?

Thompson: I don't think it's corrupt. Now, as I say, the economics are going to eventually weigh on this. Look at some of the cities in California who have declared bankruptcy, and pensions have either been wiped out or severely diminished, and collective bargaining has not produced the fiscal results that it once did. So economics are going to play a part, substituting for political influence.

It's always been strange, when you think about it. If private employee's unions put in a dollar to support management, they'd all be in jail, right? But in public, they can put in billions, and nobody's in jail. Isn't it odd?

DePue: You're almost making this sound like it's a corrupt system, Governor.

Thompson: No, I'm not saying it's corrupt; it's just odd. (DePue laughs) But I'm not kidding; I think the economics are going to weigh heavily on further gains by public employees, whether it's because people like Governor Walker get elected in Wisconsin, and a Republican legislature passes legislation that severely limits public employee collective bargaining—

DePue: As I recall, they essentially, in Wisconsin, made it a right-to-work state.

Thompson: Yeah, and you've got a number of states that have gone right-to-work in the West and the South. I don't know what the end of that is or how much further it will go, but labor unions, period, have been declining in membership over the years, in America. It's only the public employee unions that have any growth to speak of, and that growth eventually is going to be restrained by the economics.

DePue: I think that's what Governor Rauner is saying, that we've reached that point, Governor, that the economics no longer support it.

Thompson: If that's what he would say, that's one thing. But to campaign against labor unions as labor unions, I think is misguided. I think that doesn't get you anywhere.

DePue: That's been the common theme today, that oftentimes your criticisms are in people's ability as politicians, as campaigners, that they're not effective campaigners.

Thompson: Look, unions have been an important part of the economic life of America. I think that's fair to say, if you look at our history. And they have been good for a lot of people over the years. But both life and politics change over the years, and priorities change over the years, and what was appropriate and necessary or affordable in past years may not be appropriate or necessary or affordable in future years.

DePue: Those kind of changes never come easy.

Thompson: No, they don't.

DePue: Moving onto some other issues, parts of his Turnaround Agenda, "More business-friendly changes in worker compensation laws." In other words, that the benefits should not be as generous as they've been in the past.

Thompson: I don't know if it's the benefits so much as the determination of liability.

DePue: A fair point. That's worth looking at again?

Thompson: Absolutely.

DePue: And an issue we've talked about a lot already today, pension reform. He's in favor of a two-tier system, where future hires go under the tier-two system, which is essentially, as I understand, based on a 401k model.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: And current employees stay under the current plans.

Thompson: Yeah. Well, under the Supreme Court's reading of the constitution, that's the only way you can do that.

DePue: You would generally be supportive of that initiative?

Thompson: Yes.

DePue: And most would say that really doesn't get us to solving the underlying issue, but no one can figure out how to get out of that.

Thompson: Not until a lot of people die.

DePue: How about a constitutional amendment, revising that element of the Illinois State Constitution?

Thompson: (sighs) With the current Illinois legislature, they'll never put it on the ballot. They just won't.

DePue: Mm-hmm. Repealing of the Illinois prevailing-wage law?

Thompson: I'd have to know more about what the actual cost of prevailing wage is before I could venture an opinion on that.

DePue: You and I have talked about this before; oftentimes we get into discussion and you refer to what's going on currently. For over a year, right at a year, Illinois did not have a budget.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And now we have a budget that terminates at the end of the calendar year, not the fiscal year.

Thompson: We have a temporary, partial budget.

DePue: I wonder, Governor, if you can reflect on how we got to that sad state of affairs in Illinois.

Thompson: The governor and the legislature couldn't agree on a budget. They both submitted unconstitutional budgets.

DePue: Unconstitutional in what respect?

Thompson: They were unbalanced.

DePue: So who's to blame?

Thompson: Both.

DePue: Equally so?

Thompson: Sure.

DePue: A lot of it always has come down to the governor would be willing to compromise. If he gets some of his Turnaround Agenda, he'd be willing to discuss a tax increase.

Thompson: That's what he says.

DePue: Is that a fair statement on his part?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: So why isn't the legislature—

Thompson: Look, people elected Rauner as governor. They knew what his positions were when they elected him; did they not? The notion of the Democrats saying, "Oh, you can't consider any substantive issues, just budget issues," is baloney. They consider substantive issues with budget issues. Are you kidding me? You go through any legislative session, you've got substantive issues mixed up with budget issues in both parties, the governor and the legislature.

The notion that a governor cannot insist on a substantive provision as a part of a budget negotiation is just plain crazy. That's never been true. If the legislature doesn't like it, they can pass their budget. And if he vetoes it, they can **override** him. That's simple. They can pass a tax increase, and if he vetoes it, they can override him! So who are we kidding here?

DePue: It sounds like you're coming down more on Rauner's side of the argument.

Thompson: No, it's not on nobody's side; it's just a plain statement of fact.

DePue: Speaker Madigan's position has always been, Let's pass a budget, and then we can talk about all of these turnaround initiatives.

Thompson: Yeah, sure. (both laugh) Right. That doesn't have quite the same effect as the sun coming up in the east tomorrow.

DePue: Are you suggesting that, if that was to happen, then Madigan knows he's got the votes to beat every single one of the initiatives?

Thompson: Certainly. Look, the governor's sitting there; the legislature is a supermajority in both houses against him. Where's his leverage? His only leverage is the budget. His only real leverage is the budget…and taxes. What, was he elected just to sit there like a mope? I don't think so.

DePue: You might be relieved, we're just about ready to move away from Illinois politics.

Thompson: (laughs) Oh, thank god!

DePue: So what's the future? How do we resolve these intractable issues that Illinois has in its finances and its politics today?

Thompson: Let's see who gets elected in this election, see whether the legislature changes at all.

DePue: Do you think it will in this election?

Thompson: I don't know. The Republicans certainly will have all the money they need. Good god, to put $1 million into term limits? Whoa! That's a fountain of fortune.

DePue: Are you saying that it would be a good thing to have more Republicans in the legislature to give Rauner more power with the legislature and to negotiate some of his issues?

Thompson: Wouldn't hurt. (laughs) I think he would agree, it wouldn't hurt.

DePue: You're being cagey today, Governor.

Thompson: That's good. I'm just an old retired guy.

DePue: By design, yeah.

Thompson: An old retired guy.

DePue: Any final comments on that?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Let's turn to the presidential level.

Thompson: Oh, god.

DePue: And you have revealed some of your feelings already. Who did you back in the Republican primary this year?

Thompson: Bush.

DePue: Jeb Bush. Would it be fair to say the Jeb Bush campaign never got any traction?

Thompson: Right.

DePue: Who would have been at the bottom of your list of candidates in the Republican primary?

Thompson: Most of the rest.

DePue: So, what's your…I know what your feeling is. Tell me what you're feeling, now that Trump has emerged from the pack.

Thompson: Feeling about what?

DePue: Is he a good, solid Republican candidate?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Most conservatives would say, he's not a real conservative. He's been a Democrat most of his life.

Thompson: He's not a real Republican either.

DePue: So you can't back him in that regard?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Do you know how you're going to vote this time around?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Are you a "Never Trumper?" That's the term being used right now.

Thompson: I'm not going to vote for Trump.

DePue: Why not?

Thompson: I don't think he's qualified to be president.

DePue: In what respect?

Thompson: Every respect.

DePue: The Democrats are saying it's because of his temperament.

Thompson: Part of it.

DePue: Are there policy issues that you're opposed to?

Thompson: It's very hard to see what his policies are. He's spent over a year without talking about policy.

DePue: Yesterday he came out with a major economic speech.

Thompson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: I don't know if you had a chance to review that at all.

Thompson: Oh, I've seen some of it.

DePue: Are you okay with that?

Thompson: Some of the tax proposals sounded okay.

DePue: You're obviously no fan of his discussion about the wall and who's going to pay for the wall.

Thompson: Oh, god, right. It's impossible.

DePue: And foreign policy?

Thompson: He hasn't got a clue.

DePue: Let's turn to the other side of the ledger then. What are your views on Hillary Clinton as a potential president?

Thompson: She's smart; she's tough, and she's experienced. That's all I think I'll say.

DePue: Terms you didn't use are, she's corrupt; she's a liar—

Thompson: Oh, she's not corrupt.

DePue: Okay, even though—

Thompson: I wish she'd stop…She should have taken Bernie Sanders' advice from the first debate, when he said, "I'm tired of talking about your e-mails." I wish she'd get tired of talking about her e-mails. Why she keeps falling for that, I do not know. Why she feels compelled to answer every question about e-mails…How long is this going to go on? Haven't we reached the depths? Is there anything more to know?

DePue: The FBI director came out and had pretty strong words.

Thompson: Yes, he did.

DePue: Everything short of an indictment.

Thompson: Yeah, right, well.

DePue: What was the phrase, extremely poor judgment, not gross negligence?

Thompson: He was very careful not to use words that would have gotten him caught up with the criminal statute.

DePue: None of that troubles you?

Thompson: Of course it troubles me. But enough is enough. Let's go on to other issues in this campaign. I hate to think that this campaign is going to be decided on e-mails, former e-mails.

DePue: That's not a reflection of her character, then, in your mind.

Thompson: She shouldn't have done it. Even she says that. It was wrong; it was misguided; it was dumb. But that's not one of the great issues facing the nation, for god's sake. (laughs)

DePue: What are the great issues facing the nation?

Thompson: Our economy, foreign relations, defense posture, our infrastructure, which is in a terrible deficit position. (sighs) I don't think e-mails compete with that.

DePue: Let's take Donald Trump out of the equation. Are the Republican answers for fixing those issues better than the Democratic answers for fixing those issues?

Thompson: First of all, I haven't seen either the Republican or Democrat…Take infrastructure, which I'm big on, because I built things. I was the chairman of the Transportation Infrastructure Committee of the National Governors Association. We're in a terrible posture in this country today with our infrastructure, our roads, our bridges, our railroads, our ports. (sighs) We've got to do something about that, or we're going to see our economy suffer. Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats have come up with a decent program to do something about that. As far as I can tell, neither of the candidates so far have.

DePue: What did you think about Barack Obama's stimulus package, close to $1 trillion, which was supposed to go to those kinds of initiatives?

Thompson: Yeah, well, it didn't. They didn't find any shovel-ready projects.

DePue: Are you ready to move on from national politics now, Governor?

Thompson: Yes, indeed.

DePue: Let's go to your personal life, a few questions about that. (Thompson laughs) What led to your decision in 2015 to retire from Winston & Strawn?

Thompson: God, I'd been working for fifty-seven years. (both laugh) I'd been working for longer than most people are alive, fifty-seven years!

DePue: How long had Jayne been talking about, "Jim, it's time to retire"?

Thompson: Never, never ever. She never pushed me to retire, ever. She's always got some project for me. I said, "Hey, fifty-seven years." And now I'm a grandfather, and my family's talking about moving from London to Chicago or the suburbs or home. That's enough work. I want to enjoy my life. I'm eighty years old for god's sake. How long am I supposed to go? (both laugh) Edgar retired way before I did, and he's a kid. Plus, I'm still not retired; I'm still on three boards. I'm just retired from the practice of law, which I've done for a very long time.

DePue: Would it be fair to say though, that for fifty-seven years, your career in law and in politics has been satisfying and stimulating, all the way through?

Thompson: Absolutely. I think I'm a very lucky guy. I've been in extraordinary positions with extraordinary results. How could I ask to have it better, unless you were president of the United States, okay? And we've only got one of those at a time. My political and legal career, I don't know how I could have done any better. To be governor for fourteen years, when that's never been done before in Illinois, to be U.S. attorney, to be chairman of Winston & Strawn, to be on the 9/11 Commission, gosh, if that isn't satisfying, I don't know what is. But at some point in your life, you want to slow down and do other things. I want to be a father and grandfather and husband. That's more important to me than more work. (laughs)

DePue: I think you just answered the next question. What are your goals for the next few years, being a good husband and father and grandfather?

Thompson: Yeah. I've done everything I could possibly do in politics and law and government. There's no more for me to achieve, I don't think.

DePue: The next couple of questions deal with some personal losses or challenges on your part. Jim Skilbeck passed away May 21, 2002. And if there is a guy I wanted to interview—

Thompson: Boy.

DePue: …that would have been the one to hear.

Thompson: Absolutely. Skilbeck was one of a kind, and I don't think there was anybody that ever worked for me that Jayne and I both were closer to. A lot of good people worked for me, just an awful lot of good people, and I can't put one above the other. But he had to be our sentimental favorite, really. He was such a big part of our life. His whole goal in life was to help me. That was it; that was his life. And he did it superbly. I knew that no matter where I went in the state or the United States, I was going to be okay because Skilbeck got there

first. He was just a wonderful man. I still have pictures of he and Samantha campaigning together, down the street, Samantha on the bullhorn, which she took from Skilbeck, "Ladies and gentlemen, let's have a big Illinois welcome for the governor of Illinois, Big Jim Thompson." And to have your little child saying that into a bullhorn, while you're marching in a parade, and to have Skilbeck standing there with his arms crossed, smiling, just—

DePue: Yeah, those are some great memories.

Thompson: Yeah, they are.

DePue: Your mother, Agnes, passed away in January 2005, at ninety-six.

Thompson: Ninety-six, the oldest person ever in her family, ever, going all the way back. She always thought she'd die young, because her parents died young, and her sisters died in their early seventies. So she **never** would have thought she would live that long, ninety-six, just amazing.

DePue: Are you going to get there?

Thompson: I sure hope I have her genes. Actually, the genes on my father's side were not bad either. I had grandparents in their nineties. Yeah, so if genes count for anything, if they can fortify me against a dissolute life, I'm all for it.

DePue: Another close ally for your administration, Tom Reynolds, passed away in February 2008.

Thompson: Yeah, Tom was a remarkable man, just a remarkable man. There was never a stronger supporter of mine for governor. He brought me to the law firm. He made me chairman. He was just a wonderful friend to Jayne and I, just wonderful, as was his wife, Suzy. They were great, great friends, and I don't know how my life would have turned out without Tom Reynolds, just as I don't know how my life would have turned out without Fred Inbau at Northwestern or Bill Bauer, U.S. attorney. You know, I owe an awful lot to an awful lot of people, I think it's fair to say. So I've always tried to give back by helping other young people achieve what they wanted to achieve. That's my payback.

DePue: This one's even more personal for you. February 2005, I understand you had brain surgery. Is that correct?

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: What happened there?

Thompson: Slipped on the ice, coming from dinner. Slipped on the ice, hit my head, got up, walked home, didn't think any more of it. Didn't think any more of it when the area around my eye turned purple or blue or yellow. I forget what

the hell color it was; it was awful. Went to the doctor; he said, "Nothing's broken." And he was right, nothing was broken, except we both forgot I was on blood thinner. So, one day when I was in New York on legal business, I got this enormous headache. God knows how many aspirin or whatever else I took that day, no, nothing. Flew home with it, called my doctor; he was out. I got his substitute. He said, "I'm going to give you another prescription. Take it. If it doesn't work in two hours, get to the hospital." Well, it didn't work, got to the hospital, had a CAT scan, brain hemorrhage, as you would think might happen if you fell and hit your head on blood thinner, right?

DePue: Concussion?

Thompson: No, no, not concussion, hemorrhage. The blood was rapidly filling my head. So the next morning, I was in surgery, and they fixed it. That afternoon, I was giving radio interviews, (both laugh) shocking everybody, starting with my wife. She called up and said, "Get off the radio! What is the matter with you? You just had brain surgery!" I said, "I assume they found one, so it's okay to do the interview."

DePue: So you didn't have a headache anymore?

Thompson: No more headache.

DePue: Not a physical headache at least.

Thompson: No.

DePue: Do you care to talk about your current health situation at all?

Thompson: Yeah, it's pretty good, except I've developed what they call Camptocormia, which means bent spine syndrome, which means my spine is bent forward, which means I can't stand up straight, and I can't walk up straight, which means I get sort of tired when I walk. So I don't walk very far any more.

There's nothing you can do about it, unless you are willing to endure a ten-hour operation, which may or may not work. I don't think so. With all the risks of that kind of surgery, uh huh. I'll walk crooked; that's okay.

DePue: Your health is pretty good otherwise?

Thompson: Yeah, oh yeah. I'm eighty years old, and nothing else is wrong with me, so—

DePue: This is one more diversion into politics, not necessarily state or national politics, but maybe just trends, if you will. You've been around politics for many, many decades, and it strikes me that, during the time frame that you've been around politics, American politics and the way it's practiced, shall we say, has changed a lot. I guess what I'm referring to is the nature of the public

discord and the nature of how both Republican and Democratic parties have evolved over time.

Thompson: It's changed, but certainly not for the better. American politics has… (sighs) terrible. There's a lot of reasons for it. Parties don't mean anything anymore. In the nineteenth century it was all party, not candidate. Now today, in the twenty-first century, it's all candidate, not party. Does anybody read the party platforms anymore? No, and they haven't for the last few decades.

Politics has become mean, personal, nasty and far from uplifting. People rarely discuss issues without fakery or falsehoods. When the press has to give "Pinocchios" to candidate's speeches.[58] And with the rise of the cable news networks, what once would be said and then gone, now is repeated endlessly, looped twenty-four hours a day, and then it loses its meaning and acquires a different meaning.

People don't want to put up with this anymore. I don't know how it's ever going to change. Yes, politics was rough and tumble in the nineteenth century too; American politics has always been rough and tumble, but not like this. To the extent it existed before, earlier in our history, you didn't hear so much of it, you know?

DePue: Jefferson and Adams, that was an ugly election.

Thompson: Yeah, but they at least were learned men. I'm not sure we have a lot of that anymore.

DePue: Some of what you've addressed, up to this point, is how the press, the media has dealt with politics. I wanted to spend a little bit more time on that. I don't know if you'll agree with this, but I think one turning point was back in the 1980s, an FCC decision. There were things that led up to the FCC's decision to do away with what was called the Fairness Doctrine, where radio and television stations, if they presented one point of view, had to present an equal amount of time on the other side of the political spectrum.

Thompson: Money has replaced that. It just is. Everybody's got the money to elaborate on their views. Corporations can elaborate on their views, and the so-called…Oh, what are they called?

DePue: PACs [Political Action Committees]?

Thompson: PACs. There's so much money in politics today that no views go unheard.

[58] *Washington Post* reporter Michael Dobbs wrote a fact checking column from 2007 through the 2008 presidential campaign, judging the veracity of politicians' claims on a scale of one ("mostly true") to four ("whoppers") Pinocchios. The *Post*'s Glenn Kessler revived the column as a blog in 2011, maintaining the well-known Pinocchio scale.

DePue: Democrats would point to the Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United* as leading to the flood of money, that the money has always been there before that. What's your view of the *Citizens United* decision?

Thompson: It doesn't bother me.

DePue: The *Citizens United* decision, to put it into an awkward nutshell, is that corporations are people; therefore, they have the right to speak.

Thompson: Yeah, that's true.

DePue: What's your view, as a life-long Republican, of the growing conservative nature of the Republican Party?

Thompson: There's nothing wrong with being conservative, depending on what the issue is. That's not the problem. The problem is being narrower, prejudiced or mean, that's the problem, or ignorant, not conservative. The word conservative has been hijacked.

DePue: Define conservative then.

Thompson: People who believe that government should do no more than is necessary to have a free and healthy people.

DePue: What's your view of conservative media, especially post–Fairness Doctrine[59], people like Rush Limbaugh on radio?

Thompson: Hey, turn it off.

DePue: Are you a fan, or you turn it off?

Thompson: I don't listen. I mean, who listens to radio? This is the Internet age.

DePue: Well, not in the late 1980s.

Thompson: You're old fashioned.

DePue: Do you have an issue with the kinds of things that they do on talk radio?

Thompson: No, it's free speech. If somebody's willing to pay for the air time and to listen to it, hey, more power to them.

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[59] The Fairness Doctrine was a policy of the United States Federal Communications Commission (FCC), introduced in 1949, that required the holders of broadcast licenses both to present controversial issues of public importance and to do so in a manner that was, in the Commission's view, honest, equitable and balanced. The FCC eliminated the policy in 1987 and removed the rule that implemented the policy from the *Federal Register* in August 2011. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairness_Doctrine)

DePue: What many of the people who are on talk radio say is that it was almost inevitable, because the mainstream media was all liberal, that if you turned on the three old networks, they all had a liberal bias, whether they admitted it or not.

Thompson: Oh… So?

DePue: Do you agree that the mainstream media, back in the '80s and '90s had a liberal perspective?

Thompson: Some did. Some did.

DePue: Not most?

Thompson: No, not most.

DePue: How about today?

Thompson: There's still some of the liberal bias left, but there's also conservative bias, so it balances out.

DePue: Part of what happened in the 1990s was the emergence, not just of talk radio as a conservative outlet, but of the cable networks. First came CNN, and then came Fox News.

Thompson: Right, and now if you watch CNN, they've got these god-awful panels of five people screaming at each other, because they all have to have a Trump supporter and another supporter. Then they've got the CNN; it's supposed to be impartial, and…You look at this, and you think, My god, this country's in trouble; it just is in trouble. Who are these people? They're just… It's a waste of time.

DePue: Which one of the networks do you watch, when you turn on the TV?

Thompson: It depends on what I'm looking for. I watch ABC; For news? ABC.

DePue: Do you watch any of the cable news? It sounds like you watch a little bit of CNN.

Thompson: Sometimes, it depends if there's something going on, an election—

DePue: Fox?

Thompson: No, I don't watch Fox.

DePue: MSNBC?

Thompson: No.

DePue: I wonder if you can reflect on newspapers, because the print business has changed dramatically in the last few decades as well.

Thompson: Yeah, it has. It's going away. I read *The New York Times* for everything but their editorials.

DePue: Why don't you read the editorials?

Thompson: Oh, because I don't agree with them.

DePue: Did I see *The Wall Street Journal* here as well?

Thompson: Sure, I read their editorials. Sometimes I don't agree with them either, but they're comforting.

DePue: I'm looking at the papers right here. You got *Chicago Tribune*; you got *Chicago Sun-Times*, with a picture of Rod Blagojevich on the front page.

Thompson: Yeah, he didn't get a break.

DePue: "Will Blago Get a Break?" And he didn't, you say.

Thompson: Did not.

DePue: So the future of newspapers in the country is on the decline as well?

Thompson: It is, sure.

DePue: Sad, or just inevitable?

Thompson: It is sad. Look, I'm from a different era, so I'm a newspaper person. I read four a day. I used to read six, and then they started piling up.

DePue: Did you read the *Washington Post*?

Thompson: I don't read six any more. The *Post* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. But I couldn't, can't keep up with that. My daughter reads everything on her phone. She reads a lot. She reads widely, but it's all on the phone.

DePue: How about the role of the Internet and social media, and how that's changing the way we understand the world and politics?

Thompson: It's sure changed politics, because nothing is forgotten anymore. You have to watch every word you say, because the minute you say it, it will be broadcast across the world. It's made for more modest politicians.

DePue: Do you have a Facebook page?

Thompson: I only have a Facebook page to see what my daughter is doing. But she has sort of turned away from Facebook, so I don't even watch that anymore. I watch Instagram, but I have…What do they call it?

DePue: Twitter?

Thompson: No. God, Twitter's awful. Twitter ought to be illegal. It's the worst thing that ever happened in America, it gave every moron out there 140 words, (sighs) awful.

DePue: One hundred forty characters, I think?

Thompson: Characters, awful, just awful.

DePue: Even worse, yeah.

Thompson: What am I thinking of? Instagram? I guess that's it. I don't follow social media that much.

DePue: Is there a future for moderate Republican–brand politicians?

Thompson: I like to think so, but you've got to get out there and fight for it. People wonder why the nation has become more conservative, or why we have more conservative candidates or politicians. It's because the conservatives—if that's an appropriate label, and it probably is not always an appropriate label—they get out there and work. They just do. They'll go out and walk door to door in the snows of March to push their candidates—God bless them—Then they deserve to win. If other people aren't that strong or caring, then they're going to lose.

DePue: Can you say the same things about trends that have been happening in the Democratic Party, that they've become more liberal in the last couple of decades?

Thompson: Yeah. If those terms have any meaning, I suppose the answer is yes.

DePue: There's an awful lot of discussion about that in this current election cycle, just in terms of comparing Hillary Clinton to her husband.

Thompson: Yeah, that's true.

DePue: I think now we've put politics entirely in the rearview mirror.

Thompson: Oh, thank God.

DePue: I want to finish with a couple more fun things perhaps. You've had a lifelong fascination, I'm venturing to say, with both Abraham Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt.

Thompson: I just bought two more Lincoln books.

DePue: Why those two people?

Thompson: Abraham Lincoln was the best American president. Yes, I know Washington is out there. He's slightly in second place, because he was there when we became a nation. But Lincoln was there when we saved the nation. And Teddy Roosevelt was just…How can you not like Teddy Roosevelt, especially if you're a Republican? He's it.

DePue: If you'll permit me to make an observation, Teddy Roosevelt, especially, is a bit larger than life.

Thompson: Yeah, no kidding.

DePue: Almost like Jim Thompson in his day.

Thompson: (laughs) I'm not in his league.

DePue: There were some who thought you were, back in the days when you had presidential aspirations.

Thompson: Well, yeah.

DePue: I want to read something here. This is dated 26 November 1979, and it's a letter signed by Doc Temple, Wayne C. Temple.

Thompson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: He worked at the state archives.

Thompson: Right.

DePue: And he's responding to a request of you and Mrs. Thompson. [reading] "Enclosed is a photo of the executive mansion here in Springfield in Lincoln's day. We can prove Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln attended parties at the executive mansion. For the Governor's Christmas card drawing, please use this photo to get a correct view of the mansion in Lincoln's day. Governor Thompson wants both Abraham and Mary Lincoln in the picture. You may want to use a side view of Abraham and Mary as they approach the mansion. Anyhow, use your wonderful talents to make the Governor and his lady happy."

Thompson: There you go.

DePue: And this is to Dr. Lloyd Ostendorf, who I guess is something of an artist. Do you remember that card?

Thompson: Artist and historian, yeah. Lincoln was more than a casual visitor to the mansion. I'm trying to remember the name now of the governor who was crippled and rarely came out of the mansion.[60] Lincoln used to go over there.

DePue: Was it Oglesby?

Thompson: No, not Oglesby.

DePue: That's before his time, I think.

Thompson: Yeah, Lincoln would go over there in the evening and help the governor write veto messages, proclamations and things of that sort.

DePue: You're well known in the state, certainly in historical circles, and IHPA [Illinois Historical Preservation Agency] especially, for being a strong backer of history and the arts.

Thompson: Yeah.

DePue: Are you still on the board for the Abraham Lincoln Historical Foundation?

Thompson: No.

DePue: Are you still on the board for the Supreme Court Historical Commission?

Thompson: Yes, I'm chairman.

DePue: Any other comments you want to make about those kinds of associations and your support for history in general?

Thompson: I've always been a huge, huge history fan and supporter, from the days when I was a child. Governors get the chance to do personal things, to support things that accord with their personal views. So, when I was governor, I was a very strong supporter of the Illinois State Museum, the historical preservation issues of the day and institutions, museums, along with infrastructure and cultural things, baseball stadiums, McCormick Place.

DePue: Even the Thompson Center?

Thompson: The Thompson Center, David Davis House in Bloomington. There's a wonderful museum that was built when I was governor, at the Dickson Mounds, just a great museum. You know, being governor is such a privilege. You get to see your state like nobody else, really, and you get to tour your state like nobody else.

[60] William Henry Bissell, who served as governor from 1857 until his death in 1860. He was the first Republican governor of Illinois, and the first of two Illinois governors (Henry Horner is the other) to die in office.

I was such a sentimentalist, Skilbeck and I spent a year saying good-bye to the state of Illinois. It was just marvelous, a good-bye tour, which Skilbeck concocted, and we carried out, T-shirts, caps, trips. It was wonderful.

DePue: I'm pretty sure, when we got done with your years as governor, I asked you a series of questions about the things you were most proud of. I want to expand that now to include your entire life, but obviously—

Thompson: Oh, good god.

DePue: …including your years as governor, the accomplishment you're most proud of?

Thompson: I don't think I could pick one out. I can't, because I had so many different careers. You can't pick one out as governor and say nothing about U.S. attorney or building Winston or even when I was a young kid prosecutor, you know? I never was able to do that, to say this is my best accomplishment. All these years, I can't.

DePue: Any particular regret that comes to mind?

Thompson: Not a one.

DePue: Any particular disappointing moment that you want to reflect on?

Thompson: Nah. If I had disappointments, they're gone.

DePue: How about this question, Governor. Why did you put up with me for almost three years? Why did you do this?

Thompson: Because it's a history, right? Didn't I just explain that I love history? Well, this is history, and because I'm proud of what I did.

DePue: I've certainly been the beneficiary of all these conversations.

Thompson: Well good, I'm glad.

DePue: It's been nothing but a joy for me to get to know you better, in a much deeper way than otherwise I'd ever have a chance to.

Thompson: Thank you.

DePue: So here's your opportunity for some closing comments.

Thompson: (laughs) I've said all I'm going to say.

DePue: (laughs) That's it?

Thompson: That's it! Good grief, three years, right? It has been three years.

DePue: Right. Thanks, Governor.

(end of interview #31)
(end of volume VI)