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Interview with Thomas Donovan part one

Date: 2 April 2009

Location: Office of Thomas Donovan, Chicago, IL.
Present: Thomas Donovan, Dr. Tim Lacy Ph.D., & Jason Marcus Waak

Jason Marcus Waak: The date is 2 April 2009. We're sitting with Thomas R. Donovan. He's recalling his memories as a member of the Richard J. Daley administration. Thank you for sitting with us for the interview. If you could begin, just describe your early life and education.

Thomas Donovan: Well Jason, when I first got involved in city government, it really started with my involvement in the Eleventh Ward politics. I started at the very bottom. I was a worker. I worked at the Chicago Park District as a tradesman. I was a tradesman for eight years in the private sector. Then I went to work for the Chicago Park District. And while I was there, I started going to night school. I was about three years into my degree and there was an opportunity.

I was going to I.I.T. to go into a master's program of public administration, if you had executive experience. I didn't have executive experience at the time. So I would have had to go from being a tradesman to something in government that was considered in the executive branch, so that I could be accepted into this program. It's very hard to talk about Mayor Daley without talking about politics and government, because the background all comes into place.

JMW: Could you give us a year? You started as a tradesman and worked for eight years. Then you went to the park district. What year would you say that was?

TD: I started with the park district in 1965. So I was at the park district for five years. And while I was there, I was going to night school. In order to get into the executive program that I discussed, which was a master's program at I.I.T., I had to have executive experience. I spoke to the then person, who was the head of patronage for Mayor Richard J. Daley, named Robert Soldat. I explained my situation and asked if he saw any

opportunities. He spoke to the mayor. The mayor played very close attention what happened in his ward and his people. They agreed to interview me for a job in the Department of Streets and Sanitation.

The title was Administrative Services Officer Two. The pay was approximately what a tradesman made with the private sector and with the park district. I was ultimately interviewed by the mayor for the job. That was the close attention that the mayor paid to things. So I went to work for the City of Chicago on February 16, 1969, in that position. I was there approximately six weeks. I went to mass on a Saturday morning at Nativity, which was the mayor's parish. I was coming down the stairs after mass and the mayor saw me. And he said, "Tom, I'd like you to call me."

Well, first of all, let me go back to the interview. When I was being interviewed by the mayor, he said, "What are you studying in school? What would you like to do?" He asked me about the course. They were just the general questions. But I think the mayor liked the thought that I was going to night school, because he was a night school student. The mayor didn't know me. He knew my family. But he didn't know them well. He knew who I was. And naturally, I was in awe of the mayor, as everyone was.

So when I saw him at mass that morning, and he asked to call for an appointment to come and see him, I didn't know what it was about. Well, I called for an appointment and had it scheduled. I was scheduled for Wednesday and I got a call on Tuesday to come down and see him. He called me into his office. And he said, "Tom, how would you like to be my personnel officer?" Now, this was April 1, 1969. So it was six weeks later. I knew that was the head of patronage. And I knew that my friend Bob Soldat was the head of patronage. So I knew that something was happening (TD laughs).

So I said, "Mr. Mayor, I really don't know much about government. I've only been in the Department of Streets and Sanitation for six weeks. I don't even know the department, much less the city. But I'll try to do anything that you want me to do. Will Bob train me?" And he said, "No. The mayor will." So I didn't know exactly what was behind it. But he wanted to make a change. So that was my start of working for the mayor. I was hired, as I said, April 1, 1969 by him, as Administrative Assistant to the Mayor. That was my title.

Over the years, my duties changed tremendously. The first responsibility I had in that office, the only responsibility, was the head of patronage, which was a critical job to the mayor. It was a critical job to the Democratic Party. The mayor was the chairman of the Democratic Party. But the mayor always knew the big scheme of things, that it wasn't as important as most people thought. And he knew that it was an essential part of government at that point in time, because you had to win elections. It was totally legal at that point in time. There were no restrictions on political hiring or firing. The mayor always felt that it should be done with the highest of motives. I don't remember the mayor using the term patronage in all of the years that I worked for him. He would say personnel.

So I started out with him in that title and doing that job. And over the years, my duties changed, as he got more confidence in me. Naturally, I was involved in more things at city hall. I had an office, eventually up on the sixth floor. I moved many times. And I also had an office in the back on the fifth floor in the mayor's office. So, if you were to speak to someone today and say, "Tom Donovan and Mayor Daley," they'll say, "Well, Tom Donovan was the chief of staff for Mayor Daley," which is what people tends to call me. I never was the chief of staff. He never had a chief of staff. I always was the Administrative Assistant to the Mayor.

My duties evolved into what people considered to be the chief of staff. Over the years, they evolved from working with patronage. Naturally, that brought you into everything, which included the preparation of the budget and working with the departments' heads to make sure that they were prepared for the city council presentations for the budget and the Finance Committee, and all of the things that went along with it. Plus, there was working with city government, and working with the mayor in his role as the chairman of the Democratic party of Cook County.

People look at Richard J. Daley in a lot of different ways. If you were to ask a man on the street who didn't know Mayor Daley, they'll think of a party boss, the city boss. If you were to talk to people who are the architects, the builders, and the developers, they'll look at the way that he grew and developed the city of Chicago. So there are people that look at him as Richard J. Daley the politician, or Richard J. Daley

the governmental leader and the builder, or Richard J. Daley the man. The truth is that he was all of those.

And while the mayor was a very complex person, he was a very simple person. He had very basic values. There was a right and there was a wrong. There wasn't much gray area. So, you knew when you worked for the mayor you knew what you were going to be doing virtually every day. Also, if you would look at the way the media would portray him at times, they would portray him in an unflattering manner. They would show you films of him where he was angry at a city council meeting. That was intentionally done to put him in the poorest light.

Yet, having worked for him during the last eight years of his life, and seeing him virtually every day of those days, and in the latter years much, much more, which I'll go into, Richard J. Daley was a very even keeled man. For example, when the time came that I handled his appointments, along with patronage and other things, I would see him every day. And there were never highs and lows. He wouldn't come in in the mornings, slap you on the back, and say, "How are things, Tom? It's great." And then, he wouldn't come in and chew you out. He would come in and you would do your business. We all have some degrees of variation. But for the most part, he was very, very easy to work with and very good to work with. He was a taskmaster. He was very demanding. But he never asked the impossible. That was because Richard J. Daley had the type of training that, everything he asked me to do, he had done before at some point in his life.

So if I could just take you back in time to the evolution in my life as administrative assistant to the mayor, I would have to look at the time when he had his stroke. It was a very scary day, naturally. We were never used to the mayor being impaired. When the mayor had his stroke, we didn't have a deputy mayor, so to speak, to take over. We were a team that he had in place, that didn't need one person to tell him what to do. We just coalesced. And from the time that he was incapacitated, from the time he had his surgery, and then convalesced over the summer, the city ran. It ran well. And we accomplished things. We did it because he had put the right people in place at all levels. It wasn't a group of egos. It was people that all wanted it to work right because they had the type of loyalty and affection to the mayor, as their chief executive, their friend, their mentor, and someone that they loved. They did it to make sure that

everything went right, so that he would be pleased and know that it was done. This was quite a tribute to him. After he had his stroke, he invited me out to his home.

JMW: The stroke was in 1974.

TD: Yes 1974, before he ran the last time in 1975. Previous to all of this, the mayor had a consultant study done of his office. He actually knew what he wanted the study to come up with. But he wanted the study done to see if it would work. What he wanted to do was to change his style, in the mayor's office, a little bit to lessen his load, and to do things where he could delegate things a little bit more. So, he wanted the study to tailor the mayor's office after the White House.

When you go in for an appointment at the White House, you go through security. You go in and they greet you. And they'll take you into an ante-room room. The administrative assistant, the aide, or whoever you're going to be working with, comes in, sits down with you, and you talk a few minutes. And then they'll take you into the president. When you go into the Oval Office, that person stays in the room. They're taking the notes on the meeting. And you have your meeting. Undoubtedly, when it's over, he gets a chance to sit down, or give somebody the notes, and do the follow up on that meeting.

The mayor wanted that to happen. And what he wanted was for me to come down, work on the fifth floor by him, come in with the people to his office, and then do the follow up. So Paul Rice was very good. He did the study. And I said to Paul, "Paul, I'll do anything the mayor wants. But I have to tell you, I'm working six days a week. I work twelve hours a day. I can't handle patronage and do that, too. So you have to stick to your guns and tell the mayor that he has to give up patronage to do this." And it would be very easy for me to picture Paul not being able to do that, if the mayor was really inquiring. That's because people sometimes, if they didn't know the mayor that well, they could be intimidated by him, even though Paul really wasn't.

So to Paul's credit, he did the study. It went to the mayor's office. We had our meeting. He said to the mayor, "This is what it is." The mayor liked it. And he said, "Mr. Mayor, Tom has to give up patronage, because he's going to be with you all of the time."

I was supposed to be going with him everywhere he went, which I did in my job. I was at city hall all day. But I always went with him to the Democratic Headquarters when he had his political meetings. So I wore two hats, which at that time, was just expected. No one ever said, "Tom, you're over at Democratic Headquarters. You get paid by the city. Why?" It was just a given. So it was the times.

Well anyway, no sooner did Paul get the words out of his mouth -- and the mayor said (and I remember to this day what he said) -- he said, "Many a good man has gone down because of his personnel officer. And I'm not going to do that." That was the end of the study. When the mayor had his stroke and I came out to see him at his home, he was dressed very casually. Clearly, he was very sick. I never, at that point, thought he'd run again. And he said to me, "Tom, this isn't going to happen to me again. When I come back, have your desk up front. You're going to be up front." So I just figured that I would do anything for the mayor. I mean, I loved the mayor. I was so loyal to him. I would do anything that the mayor asked me to do.

He said, "Have your desk up front." I went out and I physically bought a desk, which is still the desk that's outside the mayor's door. I had it brought there. And I brought my secretary down. The secretaries that were there, who were very close to me and nice, weren't too pleased. But I brought it down. And I had assumed all summer that when the mayor came back, I would be doing that and we would put the Paul Rice study into effect. Most people thought they had not heard from the mayor. He had his surgery. They knew he'd had a stroke. And he hadn't done any press conferences then. So people thought that he was impaired. But he wasn't.

So when he came back from the hospital, he went up to Michigan, where he had his summer home. And he convalesced. At first, he wasn't talking to anyone. Then, suddenly I got a call from the mayor. He told me to do something, which I did. Then he called me again. Then he called me and asked for something. Then it got to where I felt that I could call him and ask him. Then it got to where we would talk everyday. So I knew that this man was totally back. But I didn't know how fearful people were of how ill he was until he said this to me one day.

The mayor said, "Tom, I want to talk to Vito Marzullo." Vito Marzullo was the alderman and committeeman for the Twenty Fifth Ward, an influential Democratic

leader, and a peer of the mayor. He was a close friend and he loved the mayor. He was a contemporary. I made the arrangements. I got an ante room in the city council. I got Vito. I called the mayor. They talked on the phone. And when they finished talking, he hung up. Vito, this old war horse, broke down and cried. He sobbed and sobbed because he actually felt that the mayor was impaired.

Then I realized no one was believing me (TD laughs), when I told them that he wasn't impaired. They probably figured, "You're just covering for him." So summer ended. And the mayor came back the day after Labor Day. I walked into his office. I had a desk there. He was thinner. He was grayer. But he looked good. We had an emotional meeting. After that first question, I said, "Mr. Mayor, who's going to handle patronage?" He said, "I thought you could."

And that's the way it went. I just kept patronage. I had my responsibility for the mayor's scheduling. I really didn't have the total scheduling at that time. I worked up front. My office was there. But I wasn't scheduling his appointments. Kay Spear was still scheduling his appointments. The departure from that came when the mayor decided that he was going to run again, which I thought was the fight of his life. He had many great fights. Beating Kennelly was the first one. Beating Adamowski was a tremendous fight.

But coming back after a stroke, defeating a young alderman that was endorsed by the Chicago Sun-Times, that was a real departure. The Chicago Sun-Times endorsed a challenger against an incumbent mayor, to try and steam roll the whole process. When the mayor won that, that, to me, was the fight of his life. But when he decided that he was going to run, we had a campaign meeting. I was there. I was involved with his campaign, along with Michael Daley, his son. The mayor had tremendous confidence in Michael.

He was chairing the meeting. The mayor was always his own finance chairman. But Michael was watching the finances. But Michael then said, "In all appointments, all scheduling, they will go through Tom Donovan." That was the first I'd heard of it. The mayor didn't tell me that. No one told me that. So, starting with that, I did all of the scheduling for his campaign, which made sense. And then it tied in with the word that I approved and handled all of his scheduling in the office. When you stop and think that I wasn't supposed to handle patronage, and that I was his assistant to do everything else, it all came together.

That's because if you handled the mayor's appointments, you had to know why people wanted to see him. If half of the people that wanted to see him, or a quarter, or a third, or twenty per cent, were people who meant something politically in some way or another, you should know how important they are, what they mean, and what they want. No one should ever go into the mayor's office without the mayor knowing what they're coming in for. So it fit in that way. Also, I could tell him what they were interested in and what we could or couldn't do, based upon my knowledge, which then made it easier for him. So it worked. In my mind, it worked. And he must have thought it worked because we did it until the day he died.

We had a system in place where he had two women working out there, Kay Spear and Katie Quinlan, who were very nice people. They were very loyal and good workers. The correspondence would come into the office. They would go through the mail and sort it. Then they would send out the mail. And the mail that should be his, they would keep. I would take the mail and I would look at it. I would build a day lag into it, unless there was something he should see immediately. Then I would call and get the answer for him, the opposite of pros and cons. So I would take a four by six card and I would write, "Mr. Mayor, this is so and so. We can do this or that." And I'd give him, basically, a little synopsis of what could be done which, instead of me going in and giving him the mail, him giving it to me, going back and coming again, it shortcut the approach.

And it worked. In the end, the mayor would just tear up the cards and we'd get the work done. So that was the way we'd do things, mostly, in the mayor's office, in that point and time. And as I said, the mayor was, in my mind, very even keeled. One day he came in and he said to me, "Where is all of this correspondence going?" I said, "Well, Mr. Mayor, if you tell me to cut down a tree, I cut down a tree. I don't need to give you a note back saying that I cut down a tree." He said, "Well, I don't know what's happening to all of this." So I could tell that he was aggravated over something. And I'm thinking to myself, "I'm just going to have to give you an answer back on everything, because I'm doing all of this."

He worked shorter hours for a while, after he'd had the stroke. With me being there, he worked, let's say, from eight o'clock in the morning. He'd go to mass. He'd work through lunch, then he'd go home, and have lunch. We'd send paperwork back and forth.

And it worked pretty well. So he went home and he called me at probably two thirty or three o'clock. And he said, "Tom, forget what I said this morning. You do a hell of a job." That was not normally him. Normally, the mayor didn't ever have to chastise you. You knew if he was happy or not. If the mayor had a strength or a quality that I really have to point to as his dominant quality, it's that he was a teacher. He was a master at teaching, without you knowing that he was teaching.

With the opportunity that I had to work for him and with him for eight years, I could not have gotten that education or training anywhere in the world, at any university, for any length of time, in any degree, in any discipline, whether it was a Ph.D. in humanities, or whatever. I could not have gotten it. It gave me the personal opportunity to not only work with him firsthand, but it also gave me the opportunity to survive and be successful in environments that I could not have survived in and been successful, had I not had that training.

For example, I was the president of the Chicago Board of Trade for eighteen years. There was no president before me or after me that lasted more than three years. Well, you can't work with thirty seven hundred people for your boss every day, unless you had someone who taught you how to work with people. I think that the mayor was a tremendous mentor to so many people. And I always look back at that. There's probably not a day that goes by that I don't say a prayer for the mayor. I think that much of him. He was just the type of person that gave so many people this type of opportunity. He never expected anything in return, except to do a good job, do it honestly, and with integrity. That was the mayor. That was the way I worked with him on a daily basis. That's how I'll always remember him.

JMW: Since you spent so much time with him daily, can you give us an idea of what the typical day was like for the mayor?

TD: Well, the mayor's typical day started out with mass in the morning. He would normally go to mass at St. Peter's in the morning. Then he would walk back to city hall. There were times he might bring someone back with him, who would ask him for something. "Mr. Mayor, my husband is out of work. I've got eight children. I don't know

what's going to happen to our home." He'd come waltzing in and bring someone with him. He'd say, "Tom, see what you can do." He never told me to do anything. It would always be, "Tom, take a look at this. Tom, see what you can do."

To me, that meant do it, unless there was a reason not to do it. If it was something out of the ordinary, if it was definitely wrong, don't do it. If it was something that required coming back to him and saying, "Mr. Mayor, I'm not sure if you know exactly what this entails,' or, "Let me just tell you the pros and cons on this." But the way he did things with you, he always gave you the latitude to do what was right or wrong. And he had that expectation.

But a typical day would be starting out at St. Peter's and then walking back to City Hall. He'd come in. He'd stop at the wash room, wash his hands, and comb his hair. Then he'd come in and sit down at his desk. The mayor was never one who drank coffee at his desk. He never ate at his desk. City Hall was for business. He had a schedule where he ran appointments fifteen minutes to half an hour. He had a very heavy schedule every day. He was such a brilliant man. He almost never wrote anything down. He remembered what people wanted. He knew what he had to do to follow up. The most he might give you was a piece of paper that they had given him.

He worked until approximately noon. He would go out for lunch almost every day. Usually, lunch could be with his family, with his boys. It was a good chance for him to get together with his sons. A lot of times he would do it over at Democratic Headquarters. They would set up a table. They had salads in there. Many times, I'd join him. Then we'd come back and he'd have his afternoon schedule. He'd have an evening schedule. There were always different banquets, events, wakes, or things that he had to do in the evening. He did much more of that before he had his stroke. After he had his stroke and his surgery, he tried to do less in the evenings. But he still had to do things.

To digress, at one time during the campaign, I scheduled him to meet with the Crossing Guards Association. And he said to me, "Why am I doing this? All of these people work for us. They're our people. Why am I doing this?" I said, "Mr. Mayor, there's a woman named Ramona Schiffer who ran the association. Mr. Mayor, these crossing guards talk to every mother every morning. They're the best people in the world to see." I could tell that he really didn't want to do it. I said, "I'll go with you." I only lived about

two blocks away from him. Now, me going with him meant nothing. He still had to go (TD laughs).

So I went over to his house. I met him and I was waiting for him in this limousine. He got out to the car. The first thing he did was that he pulled down the jump seat in front and he put his feet up. That was to tell me, "I have high blood pressure. I'm elevating my feet. You've got me doing this tonight." (TD laughs) Well, we went to this association meeting. And these crossing guards were there. They tore the place down for him. You know, they were hugging him and they loved him. They talked to everyone and they were the nicest people in the world. When we came out of there, he said, "You were right. That was a good event (TD laughs). But those were the types of things that you did with him.

But he had a heavy schedule every day. That's because everything in the city revolved around the mayor. If someone wanted to build a building, they wanted to announce it at the mayor's office. If they had a chance to come and announce it, that meant that it looked like it was a go ahead. They announced it. That meant that it moved quickly through the process. And they could get things done quickly. When you're developing something, time is money. You could lose money by getting the delays. It was important that the city departments were responsive. We did a lot of that.

Then there were the political days, when he wore his other hat as the chairman of the party. This was when we would go into an election period. Election periods entailed slate making, the primary, then the lull, and then the general election. That was every two years. And the mayoral election was fit in between. So there was such a demand on the mayor's time that only someone, who was a very strong man, physically the mayor was very strong. He was very healthy. He walked faster than anyone. You actually had to practically run to keep up with him.

He was so bright that it didn't take much to explain things to him. He picked up on everything real quickly. And a lot of it was that he had done so much of it before himself. If you knew the mayor, you knew his background. His background was that he went to ten or eleven years of night school. He worked in the stockyards. He told me that he started one morning at five, the next morning at six, and the next morning at seven. So he worked long days and then went to school. Then, when he got into government, it wasn't all peaches and cream. He wasn't an instant success. He was the secretary to the

city council. He got beat for sheriff. I was a little kid and I remember, "Daley for Sheriff." And he lost for sheriff.

He was in the general assembly. He was the minority leader in the Senate. He was the Director of Revenue for the State of Illinois. He was the Cook County Clerk. Then he was the Mayor of Chicago. Whatever it took to make things happen in the government, he knew how to make it happen. He was the one who created the structure for the City of Chicago. He's the one who created the Public Building Commission for us to do all of this building in the schools.

Those were his ideas. And he had the strength and the ability to make them happen. And I don't even think. I know it. A major reason that he could make this happen was the power of the two offices, the mayor's office and the chairman of the party. It was the ability to elect people, and to elect people that also understood what government meant. It was that combined strength that allowed him to be as successful as he was.

JMW: You said that he was quite strong. He was as strong as an ox. As mayor and with such a grueling schedule how did he stay fit?

TD: Well, he always walked. He told me that he did exercises at home. Naturally, I wouldn't know that. The mayor was a very private man. I mean, I had been in his home a number of times. But his home was his sanctuary. But he attributed a lot of his strength to his early time in the stockyards, and his ability to walk and be the type of person that he was. He was stout but he was solid, very solid.

JMW: I know that he liked to fish. We got a lot of fishing stories from Ed Kelly. I know that fishing was one of his big past times.

TD: The mayor loved to fish. My fishing story of the mayor would be this. When we would prepare the budget for the City of Chicago, the budget is the executive branch's budget. The mayor prepares the budget. The people prepare the budget. Then it gets turned over to the city council. At that point, they would like to say that it's their budget. But the truth is, the mayor is still the dominant figure. They would never change his

budget. They may tweak it a little bit. But in the end, it was his budget. We would have budget meetings with all of the department heads. So we would schedule them first thing in the morning, because they were the most important. We wouldn't schedule them later in the day, because then the day could get out of hand and you could lose it.

So we would start our budget meetings at nine in the morning. The mayor would come in after mass. He'd get in at about eight thirty. He'd get a chance to look at his papers or that. Then we'd bring the departments in. The departments were all sizes. One department could be a commission or a deputy that would come in. Another one could be the Department of Public Works. The commissioner could be of six bureaus. Or it could be the Department of Streets and Sanitation commissioner with six bureaus. These men would go through their presentations.

I'll digress. I'll talk to you about the budget hearings. Then we'll get back to the fish story. To his credit, the mayor had a great way about him. He would never embarrass somebody in front of anybody. So if he would have a department head in there and people making their presentations, he would ask them questions. You could tell if he wasn't happy or whatever. But he would never chew someone out or berate them in front of someone. If he had a point to make, he would make to someone afterwards alone. It was a great quality in the man. He taught me that and I never forget that. It's a great quality of an executive.

I remember we had a young person in. He was in the Department of Public Works. He was a new deputy. He was so scared that he couldn't talk. He stuttered through everything. He looked like he was going to collapse. And everyone just sat there listening to him. The mayor listened to the whole presentation. The department head never interrupted. The mayor just said, "Thank you." (TD laughs) When it was over, I felt so sorry for the person. I never saw him again. I think that the department head put him in another place. But the mayor's way was that he knew this person was dying a thousand deaths. He was just petrified. Of course, there was no reason to be.

But some people can't get up to speak in front of a group. Some people have stage fright. But we had our budget meeting one morning. And I always knew where the mayor was because we didn't have cell phones in those days. But we always called the detail. It would be Gene Nolan, who was the head of the detail at one point in time. So I was

always in constant communication with the detail. I knew when he was five minutes away and where. That's because he had the radio in the car. But we didn't have cell phones.

So one morning, I couldn't find the mayor. He didn't call me. He didn't call them. There was no mayor. It was nine o'clock. I couldn't get the detail. So at nine thirty, no one was there. I sent all of the departments back. They were already a half hour behind schedule. At about ten o'clock, the mayor came in. He went fishing that morning. And he was in the greatest mood. He caught a Coho salmon. He came in and he was talking about the coho that he caught. Then he said, "Get the departments back." (TD laughs) We got all of the departments back. And that was the best day to present their budgets. That's because with anyone who came in, he wanted to tell them about that coho.

So he then said to me, "Tom, we're going to cook the fish. We need to get a group of people together and we'll do it." I think he did it at the hotel that the Democratic Party was in. I think it was in the Bismarck Hotel at the time. He said, "We're going to cook the fish." So he started making this list. Well, the coho was probably this big. And the list was growing and growing and growing (TD laughs). So I called the manager at the hotel. I didn't say, "Get us another fish." I said, "Make the necessary provisions." (TD laughs) So we had that. But it was great.

With the mayor, it was his way of sharing things. And it was a camaraderie that he had with people. So he had this lunch where we had the fish, so to speak. He had political people. He had department heads. He had friends like labor leaders and old timers that grew up with him. There was the labor movement, like Bill Lee and these people. These were his peer group. But he could mix everyone. So where I was thirty some years old, there were some that were seventy. You know, everyone was equals. You got to know each other and everyone treated each other well and with respect because of him. It was just his way of people getting to be a part of something.

Now, at all times, everybody there knew their relationship with the mayor. If you were Bill Lee, you knew him as Dick, someone that you came up with. But you always knew him as the mayor. At all times, he was the mayor. At all times, he had the respect of the mayor. I never addressed him any other way, other than, "Mr. Mayor." And there were some people that called him, "Mayor." But the truth is, he commanded that respect

without trying. It was the only city in the world where, when the mayor walked into a room, the audience stood up.

And I never realized that. I took it for granted, until I was at an event. The person who was chairing it was Brent Musburger, when he was on t.v. with football. And he was a Chicago sportscaster, I believe, at the time. It was for the champions of the little league. When the mayor came in, everyone stood up. Brent Musburger said, "I speak all over the United States in a lot of different cities. But I have to tell you that Chicago is the only city where, when the mayor comes in, everyone stands up." I always became emotional when I thought about that, the respect that goes with that, and to have that. And he had that all of those years.

That year, the kids who won in the little league were a black team. And you went with the mayor to some of these events. So he went to one of the games where they were playing. The black kids didn't have uniforms, and the other teams did. He called Colonel Reilly. He went like this Colonel Reilly. Do you know who Colonel Reilly was?

JMW: Yes, he was the City Director of Special Events.

TD: He went like this to Colonel Reilly. He came over and whispered something. The next game, they had uniforms. He was just that kind of guy. You know, I've been interviewed for a number of books written on the mayor. And I haven't agreed with some of the things that they've written. There was a book written called, "Pharaoh." I was interviewed for it. When the book was written, I got the book. Whenever there's a book written and I'm quoted, I always look at the quotes attributed to me. And if they're accurate, I may read the book. If they're not accurate, I'm not going to read the book. If they're inaccurate about me, how can I trust the rest of the book? When they interviewed me on "Pharaoh," they quoted me accurately. But they put it in an entirely different context. They put it in the context of racial politics, as though the mayor was a segregationist and a bigot. And that was not the Richard J. Daley that I knew. So I never read the book.

JMW: Well, talk about the mayor and race then, if you could, just any thoughts that you have.

TD: Well, I have strong views on the way that the mayor ran the city and race. That's because I only knew him as someone who treated all of the people the same way, whether it was people who came in to see him at his office that had nothing to do with politics, or people who were involved in politics. The patronage system is one where today, it's a dirty word. But then the patronage system was one that really gave you the closest measure of equality in the distribution of jobs.

Now, I said earlier that the mayor didn't pay as much attention to patronage as people think. And he told me not to pay as much attention to patronage as I did, because he knew the amount of time it was taking. But it also was the basis of his strength of having a political organization and support. As long as things worked well and he was happy, he probably felt that he didn't to put in as much time to it. But I put a tremendous amount of time into it.

So what happened was that when I would get a work order, some patronage work, departments had to submit work orders, requests for people. You would have to send people into them. They'd be interviewed. They would send you back a request for people. They would send you people. Then they'd send you a work order of a requisition. Then they'd get a work order with my initials on it. You wouldn't go to work. If you were able to get the city records, you won't find one person for ten years who went to work for the city without my initials at the bottom. That's the way it worked.

Was everyone a political worker? No. We shared jobs with unions. All of the professional people were hired non-politically. I mean, we hired doctors. We hired lawyers. We hired engineers. If you were fortunate to get one of those and was active politically, that was wonderful. But you were going to run the city. First and foremost, you ran the city with the best people. So we would hire political people. And I would get a request for, let's say, four hundred laborers for summer. I would give twenty five per cent to the unions. And I would have three quarters for the wards.

So, let's say I had three hundred. I'm ball parking these numbers. Let’s say I had three hundred fifty left for the wards. I might give each ward six and hold fifty. I'd hold

fifty for the special requests, the better wards, and the people. What if the mayor needs a laborer or someone? That's the way that you would do it. But in my giving out those three hundred and six to each ward, that covered the whole city equally. When we laid off at the end of each year, I'd call each ward and say, "Give me six names." And that's how you laid off. So what could be fairer than that?

Now, when you got into other level jobs, they weren't commodities. They were all equals. Truck drivers did all of the trucking. Truck drivers gave truckers. We know that's not necessarily true. Some people work harder than others. But a truck driver is to be a truck driver. A glazier is to be a glazier. An electrician should be an electrician. They should all be able to do what is required of them by their skill, and what they can do under their union rules. So you assume they're the same.

When you get into people looking for jobs, now you're looking at applications and resumes. The committeemen would send you all types of letters. It doesn't mean they're getting hired. It was up to us, the City of Chicago. So I would send someone for an interview. The department would send me back an evaluation. I can't think of many times in ten years where I said to them, "I think you should hire someone," that maybe they didn't want to. And when I ran the Chicago Board of Trade, I did it the same way. I would say, "If I send you a candidate, and all things are equal, mine gets hired. If mine is not as good as the other one, don't hire them."

So, I felt that the political system worked very fairly. I also watched the way the mayor treated the ward committeemen. You've heard the name Ralph Metcalfe?

JMW: Yes.

TD: Ralph Metcalfe had his ups and downs with the mayor. Ralph Metcalfe, at one time, was the leading African American ward committeeman. He had a stature with the mayor that was second to none. So when Ralph, in later years, said he wasn't treated fairly, I know better. That's because when he came in on Friday afternoons from Washington and he walked into the mayor's office unannounced, that was the end of the day.

He'd get an hour with the mayor to bring him up to date on Washington. And he'd be the next one in at the door. He would have the treatment that Dan Rostenkowski had.

So I know better in watching the mayor in how he treated the people. In his way of dealing with people, he looked at people as though they were the same. He looked at kids like they were his kids. For example, his getting that team uniforms, and things like that. And that was the way that he dealt with people. He was a fair man. He was an honest man.

JMW: From a UIC perspective, can you shed any light on his relationship with either Milton Rakove or Dick Simpson? They team taught a course at UIC which must have been fascinating. Sort of the polar positions on Richard J. Daley on display.

TD: Well first of all, they were two entirely different personalities, naturally. Milton Rakove wrote the book, I think, "We Don't Want Nobody Nobody Sent." And I was told later on that Bernie Neistein gave him that title. Bernie Neistein was a ward committeeman of the twenty-ninth ward -- considered the west side block. He was a very rough and gruff sounding guy. He was a pretty tough guy. Rakove took a liking to him, I guess. And Milt was a supporter of Democratic politics as they were. He was a believer. Dick Simpson was the opposite. But Dick Simpson was an opportunist. Dick saw that his way of getting what he wanted was being against Mayor Daley.

Whereas an alderman in the city council, he probably voted ninety per cent of the time with the mayor. That's because ninety per cent of the time, things weren't controversial. But there may have been ten per cent of the time when things looked like they could be politically advantageous. Or, from his point of view, he couldn't be with the mayor on that position. And he didn't want to be. So there was no relationship with Dick Simpson. There just wasn't.

You have to understand Democratic politics in those days. There were no gray areas. If you were an alderman, whether you were with the mayor or not, you got your fair share of city services. Your garbage got picked up. Your streets got cleaned. We could care less who the alderman was. They had a ward superintendent there. His job was to do that. And that's the way the mayor ran government. So with Dick Simpson, he was treated like the eleventh ward, when it came to services. That was not a problem at all.

When it came to the politics of it, the mayor would have no brief for Dick Simpson because he would believe that he was a phony. He knew that he was an opportunist and he wanted to position himself to do the things that he would or could, based upon opposition to the mayor. Where in my handling patronage, there were no gray areas either. You were with us or you were against us. If you were with us, you got your share. If you were Dick Simpson, you called Tom Donovan and said, "I need a garbage man," you would get a garbage man. If you were Bill Singer and said, "I want something," you didn't get it. That was just the way it was.

There, it was black and white. It was simple. But everyone knew the rules of the game. No one cared. Singer was an affable guy. He is to this day. When Bill Singer ran against the mayor, he saw me in the hall. And he said, "Tom, if I win, will you stay with me?" I said, "No." Now, I'm certain that he talked to a lot of other people in the mayor's cabinet. Maybe some of thought, "Man, I'd better hedge my bets and now say, 'We'll see'" or something to me. There was no gray area. That's the way it was. I was totally loyal to the mayor.

JMW: It's interesting. You talked about the power of being mayor, as well as the head of the Democratic Party. Since this falls in your era, can you talk about the whole Governor Dan Walker and Mayor Daley divide, and just how Illinois politics looked at that point?

TD: Well, Dan Walker ran as a reformer. And you see the way that Dan Walker ended up. My experience in government and since then has been when people run under the cloak of reformer, usually they do all the things that we were accused of doing but never did. Dan Walker's administration was a bad administration from the start. They thought that they could get away with anything. A number of people that were involved with him went to prison. They had people that played the political side. Don Swinarski went to prison. He was involved with him.

They had a group of Senators down there. We used to call them the "Crazy Eight" at the time. And it was a battle in Springfield, all of the while that they were there. We had the people who were loyal to us. They were very loyal and good. We had good leadership down in Springfield. Dan Walker was the governor. It was just going to be a

war. When Richard J. Daley went to Springfield, well, let me go back. Richard J. Daley knew that he had to beat Dan Walker, because he knew that Dan Walker was bad for Illinois. I mean, he was just not a good governor. And he had to be beat.

This was where the mayor was a political genius. The issue that cost Dan Walker governorship was education, the funding of education. We were on the side of more funding. So we put out a huge petition drive throughout Cook County. And we had heavy emphasis, besides the wards in Chicago which were Democratic, on the north shore. That was very liberal and Dan Walker territory. We went to Springfield. We had all of these petitions. Now, every one of those people who signed that petition were against Dan Walker. Win or lose, they were not going to forget that Dan Walker was not with them on education. So we went down to Springfield. The mayor brought his whole team to Springfield. And he met with numerous members of the House of Representatives and the Senate. He gave one of the most impassioned speeches that I've ever heard. You have to have it in your archives. It's him addressing the Illinois General Assembly. And we lost by one vote. It was a tie on the vote. We needed to carry in a tie.

JMW: Okay. Was this the meeting where his son Richard M. Daley, at the time, convinced his father to go down there?

TD: I don't know if Richie convinced him or not.

JMW: There was one where he lost and I know that Madigan was pushing him. Everyone but his son was telling him, "Don't go." Was that a different meeting?

TD: I think it was a different because I don't think that Madigan was the leader at the time.

JMW: Okay.

TD: This was a different meeting. There may have been another time.

JMW: So this was on an education bill?

TD: Yes. But there probably was another one. No one could have talked the mayor out of going to this. This was his idea (TD laughs). This was his idea to go down there. That time, that whole issue, and that period, is what laid the groundwork for Walker being beaten. And then, Daley talked Mike Howlett into running. Mike Howlett did not want to run for governor. He wanted to run for Secretary of State. And the mayor insisted on him running. He ran. Mike Howlett had a very good name. He was the Secretary of State. It was over. And he beat Dan Walker.

I always felt that knowing the mayor's calendar and the way he worked that, coming back off of a stroke, winning the re-election for mayor, and tailoring his hours, he was working very, very hard. He was working harder than most of the people in the world, even shortening his hours a little bit. When we got to that election campaign, it was back to the way it was ten years earlier. It was long hours during the day, through his evening. It was whatever it took.

We beat Dan Walker. Then Howlett lost in the general election. But I felt that that brought the mayor back into it in a way that really put a lot of stress on his health. That's because he was back to the way it was. He was so intense. It wasn't that he was vindictive. He just felt that Dan Walker was bad. And then naturally, he worked very hard during the Howllett election.

Then Howlett lost to Thompson, who became governor. Then the mayor died in December of 1976. And I always felt that had the mayor got through that day maybe, God knows how long he would have lived. That's because it was December 20, 1976. We had the cabinet meeting. It was going to be Christmas. He was going to take a vacation. And he was going to go to the U.S. Conference of Mayors. So really, the election was over. The budget was done. January would have been a pretty slow month. And if he would have gotten through then, God knows. Even to the day he died, he looked like the picture of health. He looked fantastic on the day he died.

Dr. Tim Lacy: Let's stop here for a second. I've got to change out the tape.

JMW: Talking about 1976, what were Chicago's plans for the Bicentennial? And what were the mayor's plans?

TD: Well, the Bicentennial was a great year. We had event after event. In fact, I remember a parade going down State Street on a Saturday when Richard M. Daley was carrying his daughter Nora in a backpack. I actually remember that day. But we had one event after another. I mean, it was one thing after another. That's because the mayor had a great historical perspective. It was just something. We had Colonel Reilly. He was very good in preparing all of those things. It was just a great time. It wasn't anything where I was involved in any of the planning of it.

JMW: Nixon and then Ford decided that there wasn't going to be any one grand event. It was kind of up to individual cities and states.

TD: Right. That was great for Chicago. That's because just as Richard M. Daley is doing a great job in trying to get the Olympics here, this is where Mayor Richard J. Daley would shine. If you knew Mayor Richard J. Daley, compared to other mayors in other cities, he was the mayor of the country. From the time, I started working with the mayor, the mayor would take a group of us administrative assistants to the U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting. We were not a traveling administration, and the mayor was not a spender.

The mayor was a tight manager of government money. He was more generous with his own money than he was with government money. He was very careful. You didn't work for the mayor because you liked to earn a lot of money. You worked for the mayor because you liked working for the mayor, the government, and having the ability to make a difference, which is government in general. But when we would go to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the first night there is the reception, where everybody gets together. After that, you'll never find everyone in the same room, because everyone does their own thing.

But that night, everyone at the U.S. Conference of Mayors is at the main reception. When Richard J. Daley would walk in, he would not get twenty feet into the

room and he'd be swarmed. All of these mayors would come around from these cities and towns. And these were cities. The towns would be represented in another organization. But they would seriously say to him, "Mr. Mayor, how would you do this?" "How are you handling this?" Or, "What would you suggest that I do?" You could just see the respect that he had for what he had done, what he was doing, and his abilities. And they wouldn't be questions on elections. They were questions on running a city.

For example, one year we went down to the U.S. Conference of Mayors in San Francisco. Mayor Joseph Alioto of San Francisco was hosting it. They had a special luncheon for the mayor and the mayor's staff. We had probably had about ten staffers and their wives there. Mayor Alioto had his cabinet there, his department heads and everyone. I remember him introducing the mayor. And he said, "Mr. Mayor, I tell our people, 'When in doubt, follow Chicago. Do whatever Chicago is doing.'" I thought that was such a tribute for a mayor.

Mayor Alioto was classy and high class mayor. He was a very successful attorney. He was a well respected man. And for him to say that, it said an awful lot. I remember when we were in one U.S. Conference of Mayors. The mayor of New York was there. He was dancing up a storm on the floor. There was no one around him. No one was going to him and saying, "What do you think? How are you doing?" But here was Richard J. Daley, who was just swamped.

To digress, when we had the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Chicago, Richard M. Daley was chairing it. And I knew what the first night meant. I called him and I said, "Rich, we at the Chicago Board of Trade would like to host the opening night reception for the U.S. Conference of Mayors." That's the picture up there (point to a photo on the wall). I was coming in. I said, "We'll do opening night. We'll have a first class reception. And we'll do mock trading in the pits." That was so we could bring in the mayors to let them trade and teach, which was great for the Chicago Board of Trade. It showed them how we did our business. It's something they'll never forget for the rest of their lives. And we really had a great event. But that was something I learned from being with his dad, just seeing him.

JMW: Okay. Who would you say were his colleagues or friends, as far as other mayors? I mean, was he close with…?

TD: The one that he was closest to was Mayor Henry Maier in Milwaukee. Henry Maier was probably ten years younger than Richard J. Daley. He was a midwestern mayor. He was probably of the same political thought process and political bent. He respected Richard J. Daley tremendously. And Richard J. Daley liked him a lot. Mayor Maier was the chairman of the U.S. Conference of Mayors in around 1974 or so. This was when Richard Nixon was having a lot of problems. It was just around Watergate. And it had something to do with the war.

Nixon came in and the war was still going on. But he had said that he was going to end it. What happens at the U.S. Conference of Mayors is that when you want to speak, you line up behind the microphone. And they line up. Mayor Maier was in the chair. And they were beating up Nixon really good. As I said, Mayor Maier was in the chair and Richard J. Daley stood up and asked to be recognized. Well, you had twenty mayors in line. Mayor Maier said, "When the delegate from Chicago asked to be recognized, the chair will give him special consideration." He recognized Daley.

Daley gave a rip roaring speech defending Nixon. And he said, "I'll be the one to work the hardest to defeat him in the coming election. But until then, he's the president of our country." And it shut off the whole debate. That shut it off. We left for the airport. I actually missed the flight. I was in a car with Kay Spear and my wife at the time. The mayor caught the flight. And I think they were going one hundred miles an hour to make the flight. But the mayor stood up and did that. The next day, Nixon called him and thanked him. And I don't Nixon was ever fair to Daley. Daley believed in supporting the president of the country.

JMW: I wanted to ask about that. It's interesting that you don't think Nixon treated him fair. In a past interview, Alex Seith had noted that when Nixon, while under fire, had come to Chicago. And Daley was the only public official to greet him at the airport. And like you said, he respected the office. Can you talk about how you thought the Nixon Administration was on that?

TD: Well, this is where the politics and the government came together. I don't think Richard Nixon ever got over the thought that Mayor Daley beat him in the election, and actually felt that the election was stolen from him, which I think was the farthest thing from the truth. But they couldn't understand how, in the west side wards of Chicago which were virtually one hundred per cent African American, why Richard Nixon was only going to get three per cent of the vote. That would happen today. Even if President Obama wasn't the president, this is what would happen in those wards.

So he always felt that the election was stolen from. When you looked at the votes in DuPage County, it was the same way on the Republican side. But having lost the election that close, he always harbored that grudge. So, as tapes later have shown, President Nixon put Jim Thompson in. And he was quoted as saying, "We've got this guy in Chicago who's going to put them all in jail." It was something to that effect. Well, that's why I felt that it was never fair. Well, here the mayor was playing it square with Nixon and treating him as the president. And you're right. He was greeting him at the airport, when he got off of the plane, out of respect for the office. I think that he thought that Nixon was playing it more fair than him, that ultimately the tapes had shown. So in my mind, Daley always was a patriot.

JMW: During the economic woes in the seventies, Chicago was solvent. But yet, Detroit and Cleveland were going down the tubes. From your perspective, why was that?

TD: I think one of the mayor's great strengths was his ability to be a fiscal manager. First of all, as I said, the mayor was the director of finance for the State of Illinois. They mayor understood accounting. He created the city budget as it is. The budget of the City of Chicago was an ordinance. It was passed by the city council and was the law in the city for that year, until the next year. The mayor knew exactly what he had to put into place where.

Now, what the mayor did was, you said the woes of the seventies. The reason that the mayor could handle the woes of the seventies was because he supported the constitutional convention, which was passed in 1971 or 1972. It gave the mayor home

rule. And the interesting thing about that was that election gave the mayor and subsequent mayors the ability to govern in the City of Chicago. But that election was the election that Michael Shakman came into play, when he filed and lost the Shakman suit, which ultimately has brought down patronage, and to a large degree the demise, if that's the proper word, of the Democratic Party. That's because it's not the Democratic Party as it was in the past. So it was those two things that came out of that.

But if you remember when the City of Chicago, before home rule, really had to rely on property taxes. So it was a question of always managing property taxes, some fees, and things like that. But they didn't have the ability to do the things that they had to. So when the constitutional convention was held, the convention had a number of current stars in it. There was Richard M. Daley and Michael Madigan. These were people who went down there and they were young guys. They weren't players in the constitutional convention. These were the first offices that they were elected to. Michael Madigan and I were talking about this within the last year. My son did an interview and did a paper on patronage. He interviewed Michael Madigan. And it was centered around the Shakman decree.

(Tape 1 ends here)

This ties into Richard J. Daley. Michael Madigan said that all he cared about was whatever he was supposed to do. But what the mayor wanted was home rule in the popular election of judges. That's what the mayor wanted. What the mayor said was the downfall of the constitutional convention. But he supported it anyway, not withstanding it. That's because it took the governor's election from a presidential election to a midyear election. He said and predicted accurately, "We won't elect a Democratic governor for twenty years." And he was right. Michael Madigan relayed that in the conversation with us. So he got the authority to do it. And that's why he could be the fiscal manager that he was. But I think that it's more than that. I think it was the confidence that he had from the business community and labor. It was the ability for both of them to feel comfortable and to work with the mayor of Chicago, knowing that they would be treated fairly. And that allowed people to continue to build. You would build if you knew you had a mayor that said, "Build your building. You'll have our support." And that's confidence. It goes back to what I said earlier. It was people coming into the mayor's office, announcing that they

were going to do this development, and knowing that they were going to have the support and the city services that went with it. That just allowed you to do a lot of things. It allowed you to succeed. If you did that, people worked. Now, let's face it. The biggest thing a person has, aside from their family and health, is their job. They take care of both. In Chicago, you could get a job. That's because the mayor provided the environment for people to provide jobs for people.

JMW: We'll just wrap up with a couple of questions. What would you say were key moments or decisions from your time with the mayor that stand out in your mind?

TD: Well, I think the main thing was not any one thing. Politically, I would say it was something the mayor did that the people would have thought was not a good decision. And that was he could have backed George McGovern at the convention. He knew it and he stuck to his guns. And he didn't do it. The Democrats nominated McGovern. He supported him in the election. We worked hard for him. And they went down. But he knew that it was the wrong way to take the Democratic Party. From there on out, has not succeeded, until you could say Barrack Obama who was a phenomenon and won like this. That's because up until now, they ended up losing both houses of Congress. So, Richard J. Daley saw the direction that that was taking us politically. As far as it goes governmentally, I couldn't point to any one thing. I think it was the man who was the mayor and the government leader doing the right thing and making the right decisions, no matter how hard they were or how painful they were, every single day. He did it. And he always did what was right for the city. I remember one incident on a budget, when we were really wrestling with the budget, and trying to match the revenues with the expenses. Ed Bedore gave the mayor some recommendations. One of them was to tax the exchanges, never know that one day I'd be the president of the exchange and Ed Bedore would be a member of the exchange. And the other one was to put a tax on the vending machines. There weren't many people closer to Richard J. Daley than Pat O'Malley, who was the president of Canteen Corporation. And the mayor knew that night, when he went home with those options, what it meant. When he came back the next day, he put a tax on Canteen Corporation and on the exchange. The exchange came in and it was ultimately

changed to a head tax. But the mayor did what was hard for him to do. He hurt a friend. But he had to do it for the people.

JMW: How did their relationship fare after that?

TD: Pat O'Malley, for about a day, didn't see him. He came in the next day like nothing ever happened. He was a man. He took it. He moved on as though nothing happened.

JMW: Can you talk about the transition, since you carried on to the Bilandic administration? What was it like? What was the pulse at city hall?

TD: Do you want to do that at another time?

JMW: Yes. We can save it.

TD: If you want to do a good interview on that, that will take a while.

JMW: Okay. Then let's end there. And we'll come back.

TD: That's a whole story. And I'll take you through when Daley died, through the machinations then, Bilandic's selection, the election, and what happened then, because that will take us half an hour. You may want it. You may not. But I think it's a good story.

JMW & Tim Lacy: Thank you Mr. Donovan for your time.

********END OF INTERVIEW********