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Interview with Thomas C. Hynes

10 March 2010

Location: UIC Historian's Office, 815 W. Van Buren St., Chicago, IL.

Present: Thomas C. Hynes, Dr. Timothy Lacy, and Jason Marcus Waak

Corrections made by Thomas C. Hynes, 25 June, 2014

Jason Marcus Waak: The date is 10 March 2010. It's about ten a.m. and we're sitting with Thomas C. Hynes. Mr. Hynes, if you could just state your name again for the record. And then, give us a brief background on where you were born and raised, and your educational background.

Thomas Hynes: My name is Tom Hynes. I was born and raised in Chicago on the southwest side. Do you want to know about my background?

JMW: Yes. What neighborhood are you from?

TH: I grew up in the Brainerd neighborhood and went to the St. Kilian's Parish. I lived there all of my life, or from the time I was six months old until I got married in 1964. I've been in Chicago ever since.

JMW: What is your educational background, where you went to grammar school and high school?

TH: I went to St. Kilian's Grammar School and Quigley Seminary, which I attended for three years. Then I went to Loyola University. I graduated in 1959 from Loyola. I majored in political science and history. I went to Loyola Law School. I graduated from law school in 1962.

JMW: What did you do after graduating from law school?

TH: First, I went into the U.S. Army for six months. Then I spent five years at a law firm, Jenner and Block, in Chicago. I left there and went to John Marshall Law School as a professor of law. I spent three years at John Marshall Law School full time and another six years part time. I ran for the Illinois State Senate when I was at John Marshall.

JMW: That was in 1970? That was the first time that you ran, and you won?

TH: That was in 1970. Correct. I took a leave of absence from the school in 1969 to go to the Chicago Park District as the First Assistant General Counsel because the Chicago Park District....Well, let's put it this way. They had some rough seas as a result of all that had happened during the 1968 convention. There were lawsuits. And they were trying to beef up the legal staff. So I went in as the First Assistant General Counsel for a year. Then I ran for the State Senate and was elected to the Senate.

JMW: Was that during Ed Kelly's time at the Chicago Park District?

TH: Ed Kelly was the First Assistant General Superintendent. Tom Barry was the General Superintendent. Tom Barry left a year or two after I did. Ed Kelly succeeded him.

JMW: Okay. When did you come to know Richard J. Daley?

TH: Well, I had met him on many occasions at different meetings. But I never had a serious conversation with him until 1967, when I ran the southwest side officer for his re-election. In all of the encounters up until then, he knew who I was. I also got involved in 1964 in some of Lyndon Johnson's activities that Mayor Daley organized.

JMW: It was just kind of in passing.

TH: Yes. So in 1967, I was very involved with his campaign for re-election at the neighborhood office for the whole southwest Chicago area. It was a group called Chicago

67, which was mainly a young people's effort to support his re-election. So I was the head of the office that covered the southwest wards. It was headquartered in the Nineteenth Ward.

JMW: So, when would you say you became politically active? Was it in 1964, with the LBJ campaign? Or was it before that?

TH: No. It was before that. I was active in Kennedy's campaign as a volunteer. That was in 1960. No one in my family was ever involved in politics. I just had an interest in it.

JMW: So it was Kennedy that really drove your interest in it?

TH: Well, that certainly was a part of it. I was a classmate of Neil Hartigan in law school. We became very close friends. He was always in one campaign or another. He dragged me into a lot of them (TH laughs). But I enjoyed it. It was there. It was always in my gene pool and I didn't even know it.

Dr. Timothy Lacy: Did you meet Neil Hartigan while you were working for the Chicago Park District? Or was it before that?

TH: We were classmates in law school.

TL and JMW: That was Loyola.

TH: Yes. The reason I ended up at the Chicago Park District was because Neil was an administrative assistant to the mayor. And the General Counsel to the Chicago Park District had retired. So did the first assistant. And they had a very small, staff on top of that. So the mayor named Neil as the General Counsel of the Chicago Park District. Neil talked to me about going over there as the first assistant which, initially, I was not inclined to do. But I did. As it ended up, I was very happy that I did.

TL: Well, Neil related an interesting story about how he was called in and had his interview with Richard J. Daley. And that was a moment for him where he had known about the mayor. But then, the mayor was kind of identifying young people in his orbit that he thought had potential for involvement in political activity down the line. I'm bringing this up because I'm wondering if you ever had one of those sort of heart-to-heart talks with the mayor? Maybe it occurred when you became the Assistant General Counsel.

TH: I did have a conversation with him. But I also knew his son Rich well. When I was finishing up my year at the Chicago Park District, there was a contest for the Illinois State Senate in our area. There was no rush of candidates to fill the Democratic spot because the incumbent had beaten the Democrat by a very sizable margin in the prior election, almost twelve thousand votes.

So Ron Swanson was the incumbent senator. But no one was really pushing hard for the Democratic nomination. I don't know what possessed me. But I threw my name into the hat to try and get the Democratic nomination. That would have been in the 1970 election. But the slating took place in November of 1969. So I put my name in the hopper. After that, I had a conversation with the mayor.

TL: That was your first real, sit down conversation with him?

TH: Yes. It was relatively brief. I'd gotten to meet him during the 1967 campaign. I met him afterwards. But again, it was not in depth.

JMW: Can you talk about the make up of the Nineteenth Ward, its boundaries, and beyond the Nineteenth ward, I mean the whole southwest side of Chicago, like the party apparatus, the neighborhood, the ethnic makeup, other than the Irish?

TH: You want to know about the Nineteenth Ward?

JMW: Yes.

TH: Well, the Nineteenth Ward is basically three communities, which are one. But they each have their own name. There's Beverly, Morgan Park and Mt. Greenwood. It's an integrated community. There are a lot of professional people there. A lot of policemen and firemen live there. It's really a beautiful neighborhood. At one time, Beverly was the wealthiest neighborhood in the entire Chicago metropolitan area. Kenilworth was second. Some big, big money lived on Longwood Drive. But it was also very Republican.

JMW: And that was why Swanson had so much success?

TH: Well, yes. The district ran over into Roseland. In Roseland, there were big sections of Republicans in that area. The Nineteenth Ward was a Republican ward, basically. It was just like the Forty First Ward tends to be right now. Ron Swanson lived in Roseland. So that was the center of his political base.

JMW: Okay. So you served eight years in the Illinois Senate. The last two years were as the president. Can you talk about that time, and what your relationship with the mayor was during that period?

TH: In 1970, I was elected. In January of 1971, I was sworn in. Then I left in January of 1979. So I was there for eight years. He passed away in December of 1976.

JMW: That was about the time you became president of the Illinois Senate.

TH: Yes. I became the president right during the next session, which was 1977. So I was sworn in in January of 1971. So I was there for a five year period before the mayor passed away. His passing was a cataclysmic event in Chicago. He was such a dominant figure and a dominant personality.

JMW: That was eventually going to be one of my questions. I can ask it now. What was the political scene in the Democratic party, in the wake of his passing? How would you describe that era? It's not really chronological, but since we're there.

TH: Well, there was obviously a giant vacuum. But people tended to come together. Things got worked out. The county chairmanship went to George Dunne, who was well respected. His successor for mayor was worked out. There was a lot of behind the scenes activity, so on and so forth. The one place where there wasn't peace and quiet was in the Illinois Senate, where I sought the presidency. The contest lasted six weeks.

JMW: Who did it involve?

TH: I had two opponents. Terry Bruce was a downstater. I had twenty four votes, a clear majority. Ordinarily, it passed within the caucus, with whoever got the majority. So Terry Brewster had eight or nine votes. I don't know how many he had. Harold Washington ran as a candidate for the Black Caucus. So it lasted six weeks. There were one hundred eighty six ballots, which was a world record (TL laughs).

TL: It sounds like a papal election (TL laughs).

TH: It was unbelievable. But afterwards, the place worked. I was able to bring together all of the people that were involved, both the ones that were supporting me and the ones that weren't. In fact, some of the ones that didn't support me are some of my best friends today. So it has resolved itself.

JMW: I don't ever remember asking this question, but since you mentioned downstate. Within the state house, what was the feeling towards Richard J. Daley? What were their thoughts on the powerful Chicago mayor? It sounds like he was able to keep the peace, even in Springfield. Then, in the wake of his passing, you had this kind of greater debate. So what was the downstate feeling towards him?

TH: This is just off of the top of my head. I would say a combination of awe, admiration, and respect. When he would appear in Springfield, which was not very often, it was an event. So I'd say that even those who, for political reasons, or for whatever reasons it might be, might oppose his legislative agenda or the agenda of Chicago, they might try to divide the state between downstate versus upstate. Even the strongest of people in those positions have nothing but respect for him yet. I mean, just over time, he built such a base of respect.

JMW: I know that you're a big advocate of school funding. So that brings up what you called the rare appearance of Richard J. Daley. I believe it was his son, Richard M. Daley, had encouraged him to come down there in the middle of being at odds with Dan Walker, involving school funding. Do you remember that?

TH: I sure do.

JMW: Okay. Can you talk about that, or maybe the other times when he came down?

TH: Well, his son Richard M. Daley, did encourage him to make an appearance. I mean, there was a major gap in education funding. There was an intense dispute about what the level ought to be. Governor Walker wanted a very conservative approach. The schools were in bad shape and in need of additional support. So it became a contentious issue. The Chicago Board of Education was among the school districts that were in real trouble. The mayor was calling for an increase in funding. He was urged to go to Springfield.

An effort was put together. A coalition was formed to support the funding. It was probably the most significant, wide spread, broad based coalition during the eight years that I was there. I also urged him to come down. He asked me what I thought about his appearing. And I told him that I thought it was a good idea. I thought that he could have a significant impact on it. There was a risk of loss. But the issue was important enough that there really wouldn't be a loss. It was something he could add weight to that no one else could.

I remember having a meeting in Chicago with him and Cecil ParTEE, who was then president of the Senate, and the Democratic leadership of the House. We were talking about the strategy of the campaign to get the additional funds. And we talked about all of the things that had to be done. One of the things was to prepare and present the position of the coalition as to how and why the state could afford this money. And the Mayor asked me to make that presentation.

I was kind of taken aback. At the time, I was the chairman of the Appropriations Committee. So we put together a presentation. It was well done. With the Governor and the Republicans in opposition, the effort failed by one vote. But I believe that it was well orchestrated. Like I said, his appearances in Springfield were rare. He made this an important thing.

JMW: Do you remember what any of the other issues were that brought him down there, other than the school issue?

TH: No. But he was there by telephone or through meetings in Chicago.

TL: But the school funding issue, that was in the 1970 to 1974 period, right?

TH: I think it was in 1975.

JMW: We'll research it for the transcript.

TL: I was trying to think of Dan Walker's term.

TH: Well, Dan Walker was the governor from January of 1973 until January of 1977. He was elected in the fall of 1972, beating Paul Simon in the primary and Richard Ogilvie in the general. It was shocking, to say the least.

JMW: Michael Madigan, as well Dan Rostenkowski, talked about the Illinois state leaders and the Chicago delegation in Washington, D.C. They would come in on Fridays

or at different points and meet with the mayor. Did you have those same sort of meetings with the mayor and talk about certain issues, from representing the senate, whether it was monthly, weekly, or something?

TH: Well, that was the tradition and practice. But I was not in the leadership prior to his passing.

JMW: Oh, that's right.

TH: But I did meet with him anyway, on a somewhat regular basis, about various issues. But I was not part of what you just described. I was not part of the leadership team until I became the senate president in 1977. Then, the same kind of custom continued.

JMW: So you were meeting with Mayor Bilandic, then?

TH: Yes.

JMW: Okay. Can you talk about what some of the issues were that you'd talk about with Richard J. Daley? And then, if you want to, talk about some issues that were near and dear to Mayor Bilandic's heart at the time.

TH: Well, my meetings with Richard J. Daley were often a combination of things. They were matters that I was interested in that might affect our neighborhoods.

JMW: Yes.

TH: But he was incredibly responsive. One thing about him was that he really cared about what some people might call the little things. He was one of the hardest working people that I've ever run across. I mean, there were just so many amazing things about him. I was elected in November of 1970, the first week of November. On Thanksgiving Day of 1970, at about seven a.m., the phone rang. My wife and I were both asleep. It

woke us both up (TL laughs). My wife answered the phone. Who was it but the mayor. He was just calling to wish us a Happy Thanksgiving (TH laughs). She almost had a heart attack. And so did I (TL and JMW laugh). It was like, “What?”

TL: It felt like big brother was watching you, but also you were flattered, both at the same time.

TH: I’ve got to tell you. There was no big brother feeling at all. We were just totally flattered. You think of all of the things that he had on his mind that he was trying to do.

TL: One of the things on his checklist was to call you and wish you well for your victory.

TH: Yes. It was an incredible thing. Obviously, I’ve never forgot it because I’m telling it thirty some years later. It’s more than that. It’s forty years later.

TL: You said that he was interested in the small things in the neighborhood. Can you give us some examples? If you had a street corner problem and needed some more policing, was he willing to help out there?

JMW: Potholes?

TL: Yes. What kind of small things was he interested in?

TH: It was whatever it might be. Whether it was with the schools that were overcrowded, streets, economic development, it didn’t make any difference, if the city could help, or if he was interested in trying to do it. He just cared about people in the city. Nothing was too small for him. If it was important to the people, it was never too small or too big. He was an amazing man. He was honest. His personal integrity was incredible. His work ethic was impressive. I mean, when you talked with him, you knew he was paying attention and it was important to him. I had nothing but admiration for him. He was just an absolutely spectacular figure in my mind.

JMW: What are some of the most memorable issues of your time in Chicago and Illinois politics. And where did Mayor Daley stand on those?

TH: What are the most memorable issues?

JMW: Yes. What were your most memorable issues during your time with Chicago and with the State of Illinois? And where did the mayor stand on those things? There was school funding.

TL: What was something that you worked hard on that you invested in, like a particular issue or a bill, that you cared a great deal about, and sort of your relationship with the mayor, in that regard?

TH: Well, the whole school issue was a major thing. I was involved in school finance, from the time I got there. So that was a major thing. I interacted with him on it. It was important. But I don't have a list of specifics from other bills and matters that I was interested in that he helped us with.

JMW: Mr. Hynes, can you talk about UIC and the mayor's relationship to the campus? It was obviously up and running by the time you were beginning to get to know the mayor. Can you talk about what it took to get the campus built? Do you remember anything about that?

TH: Yes. I do recall some conversation about that. But it was also pretty obvious that it was extremely important to him and what he went through to see that it was accomplished. So yes, it was a big thing, in terms of his vision for the city. He really poured himself into it. It was pretty clear to everybody.

JMW: I have a little, personal fascination with the crosstown expressway (JMW laughs). It was one of those interesting things that never got done. What were your thoughts on

why it didn't get built? Were you in favor of it? What might have it done for the city of Chicago? In any way, did you help push it, in and of itself, or on behalf of the mayor?

TH: Well, I supported the crosstown expressway. I still do. Anybody that looks at the highway road map of Chicago and Cook County, they can see that there's something missing. Anybody that rides the Dan Ryan Expressway, the Kennedy Expressway, or the Edens Expressway knows the importance of it. I think there's one answer to it-politics. It became a political football. It became a big issue in the Paul Simon/Dan Walker race. Dan Walker took the position that he was against the crosstown expressway because there were a lot of groups that had organized against it. They were protesting it.

These groups represented themselves and not too many more people. But they got a lot of publicity. Dan Walker jumped on it as an issue. It became a snowball. It became, in some quarters, a litmus test for whether you were an independent thinker or not. Tragically, if you look at it, it was part of the original plan for the expressway system. It makes total sense. You take all of these trucks and you divert them around. I mean, it's just unbelievable. Then, I have to be a little careful here because I'm not totally certain of all of the facts. I heard you say that it gets away from you. That happens to me more and more (TL and JMW laugh).

TH: Oh, it was huge! And so, it was dead in the water the entire time that Dan Walker was the governor. There was no way he would allow the state to participate. Without the state in a project of that size, you can't get the federal funds. So he effectively killed it for that period. But it was still there.

TH and JMW: Once he was done.

TH: To me, it didn't make any sense. I just thought that that thing was so important to complete the system. It may be that the opportunity is gone forever, with the economic crunch going on right now. Sometimes people can do what appears to be independent, good government politics, but turns out to be the opposite. Anyway, that, to me, was a serious mistake.

JMW: So I'll thank Dan Walker the next time that I'm stuck in traffic on the Kennedy or the Dan Ryan.

TH: Yes. Thank him.

TL: Are we going to go with anecdotes next?

JMW: Yes. Could you tell us any anecdotal stories? We get a lot of stories about fishing trips and trips to the ball park. Do you have any interesting stories?

TL: Or Sis Daley and family stories?

JMW: Yes. Do you have any stories that you'd like to share?

TH: Well, I was at their home on a couple of occasions. It was a very pleasant experience. They were warm and friendly. I think Mrs. Daley had the respect of the citizens of Chicago in a very unique way. She was, first and foremost, a wife and mother. Secondly, she was the first lady. She combined both of those in a way that was not very easy to do. So she was a very special person. I had a very good relationship with her. She was always very encouraging. She was always warm and friendly. She raised a great family.

The mayor and Mrs. Daley were as close as any two people could be in the bond of marriage. Do I have any anecdotes? I suppose there are many that I can recall. Well, let me give you one that comes to my mind. When I was a freshman senator, there was a package of criminal law bills that were being promoted by the state's attorney. Two of the bills were clearly unconstitutional. In my mind, they were outrageous. So I voted against them in the Senate Committee.

I started getting a lot of steam out of this one Democratic senator from Chicago. He was telling me, "These are party bills. Why would you vote against the party's position on criminal justice?" I said, "These aren't party bills." So I left there. And I was

not a happy camper about the whole thing. It just so happened that the next day, unrelated to this, when I went back to Chicago, I had an appointment to see Mayor Daley. He took care of the matter that I'd scheduled the appointment for. I said, "Mr. Mayor, do you mind if I take another minute here and bounce something off of you?"

So I described those things to him. I said, "I'm being told that these are Democratic party bills. I don't understand that." He said, "I've never heard of those bills before. They're not Democratic party bills." I said, "Okay. That's all I want to know (TL and JMW laugh)." So I voted against them again. The bills died. The next week, I went back to Springfield. And the same guy said to me, "Hey Tom." I said, "Yes. What's up?" He said, "You were right. These aren't good bills (TH, TL, and JMW laugh)."

TL: There were no leaks or hints that he had got the word, round about, from Mayor Daley?"

TH: No. He made it real clear.

JMW: He set the record straight (JMW laughs).

TH: Yes. They weren't Democratic party bills and they weren't good. But he was on top of things in a way that was very difficult to do. I mean, just like that seven a.m. phone call. We're talking about someone who had an awful lot going on. On a personal side, he would call me from time to time when I was running for the Senate. He would call. Sometimes, I'd go down to see him. He'd call and wanted me to come in and give a report on where the campaign was. Sometimes he'd call to just encourage me. As I said, nothing was too big and nothing was too small.

TL: Sometimes in the biographies, and there are basically two that are pretty well known. There's "Boss," by Mike Royko. Then there's another one that came out maybe four or five years ago called, "American Pharaoh," which was about Richard J. Daley. In those books, they have the tendency to portray him as autocratic. Right? They portrayed him as

someone who was dictating what they were going to do and how they were going to do it. That's one of the reasons I thought of that.

It's because when you were talking about those meetings you had with the mayor, that would be where the conspiracy theorists would say, "Oh, well he was funneling the message to you in those meetings." But what I found to be nice, and probably more accurate, about the portrayals was that you were actually trading ideas with him. You were definitely a participant and he was asking you about your opinions on matters. And you got a chance to make your requests and pitches to him about different ideas. I think that goes against the whole image that's out there of the autocratic mayor. I'd open that up for your comments.

TH: Well, I think you're absolutely on point. You're implying that he did listen, and he did. First of all, anyone who doesn't seek the advice of other people is making a big mistake. He was not one to do that. He sought people. And he sought a cross section of opinions on issues before he would come to a conclusion. The school aid was a perfect example. That meeting that I described that took place in Chicago, it was give and take. It wasn't like he walked in and said, "Here's what we're going to do, boom, boom, boom." He wanted to know what everybody in the room thought. And out of it came the consensus as to what ought to be done.

TL: It wasn't like he was just listening and it was a black hole.

TH: Not at all. I mean, he listened. I would go in, for example, as I said, when I had other items on my agenda from the legislature. But when I would see him, which was fairly regularly, before he passed away, he would often ask me about things that I would bring up. There were things that he wanted to know my opinion about a, b, and c. What he was doing was to basically get a broad base of opinions on the subject before he made a decision on it. He was a great leader and had tremendous power. He was an honest man. But yet, he was a real person. He was not someone off in the distance that didn't deal with regular people. He did. He listened. And he also had a great sense of humor. He just

got a kick out of a lot of things. Some of it was displayed in public. But a lot of it was displayed in private.

TL: Was that because of his blue humor? Or was that because of him being less public about his humorous side?

TH: Yes. It was because of him being less public. It was not blue humor. But even when he had the illness....

JMW: Do you mean the stroke in 1972?

TH: Yes. He continued to work from home. He even called me over there and wanted to talk about an issue.

TL: Was that to Michigan or to Chicago?

TH: That was to the residence on Lowe here in Chicago. That astounded me that he continued to work. He continued to stay on top of things. He cut out a lot of extraneous things. But he kept working. He was absolutely an extraordinary man.

JMW: Based on popular portrayal, and Tim mentioned two larger biographies, what is fair and what is unfair that you've seen, or rather heard?

TH: Well, there are a lot of both, I guess. Some of his abilities as a leader and some of his accomplishments, they've been recorded, written about, and what have you. But I think he's been unfairly criticized for a lot of things. You brought it up before. He was somebody who listened. He didn't knee jerk come to conclusions. Like all of us, he listened to a lot of people before he came to a decision. So a year later, he wouldn't have to re-think it. But he listened to people. And I think, in good faith, he did what he thought was right. Trying to run a city like this, and trying to keep a political environment such as

the one we have here in Cook County, is beyond the capacity of virtually everybody I ever knew.

JMW: Did he ever give you any advice that sticks out in your mind?

TH: He gave me a lot of advice. But there's nothing that sticks out in my mind.

JMW: So he was very encouraging?

TH: Definitely. He tried to respond. Sometimes, what you were trying to get done didn't get done. He tried. It was a terrible event when he passed away.

JMW: Well, I guess the last question that I have is this. If there was one thing you could leave us with about Richard J. Daley that you haven't already told us, what might that be?

TH: Well, I think I've probably already told you. In case I haven't, I'll just say that he was a great leader, a great person, and a kind and generous man. He was someone who cared about the city.

JMW: Okay. Well, thank you very much for sitting with us.

TH: It's been my pleasure.

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