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**University of Illinois at Chicago  
Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections  
Oral History  
Senator Richard J. Durbin  
September 8, 2014**

**Interviewer: Marie Scatena**

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Q: Thank you, Senator, for being here.

Durbin: Good to be with you.

Q: It's September 8<sup>th</sup> at 9:15, at UIC, the third floor, Richard J. Daley Library, and Senator Durbin, thank you so much again. My name is Marie Scatena. We're going to be talking for 30 minutes about your memories of Richard J. Daley. Could start by saying your name, and when and where you were born, and a little bit about your background?

Durbin: Richard Joseph Durbin, born in East St. Louis, Illinois on November 21, 1944. Grew up in that town and went off to Georgetown University. Graduated from the School of Foreign Service, and in my senior year went to work as an intern for Senator Paul Douglas, fell in love with politics, came back to Illinois, and he rescued me from another summer working in a slaughterhouse in East St. Louis. I went to work on his campaign, and early in the campaign met a man named Paul Simon, then a state senator. We campaigned together for Douglas, struck up a friendship which culminated three years later in my being hired, out of law school, to work on Paul Simon's staff in Springfield as parliamentarian of the Illinois State Senate. That was in June of 1969.

Q: Thank you. You have a long and distinguished career. I am wondering what your first awareness of Richard J. Daley as a political figure, and maybe your first impression of him as well.

Durbin: Of course I'd heard the name. In the '66 campaign we all knew the Daley organization. We knew that they went through a slate-making process and chose the candidates who would ultimately be the Democratic slate. And I knew that because working for Paul Simon, he had been slated for lieutenant governor. That wasn't his first aspiration. But he was slated for lieutenant governor. His ambition was to run for the United States Senate, and ultimately to succeed Paul Douglas.

And so we knew of Daley's power, we knew about the machine, the organization. I'd seen evidence of it when I went to work for Simon. But it was kind of a legendary status. He was in the pantheon of Democratic leaders in our state.

Q: Would you say as a young person you were aware of Daley? And could you cite maybe an instance where you thought oh, this is someone who's got a lot going for him?

Durbin: I would say my first—of course I knew the name, and being from downstate, 300 miles from Chicago, I kind of grew up in a different political world in downstate Illinois. But we certainly knew the power of Mayor Daley in Chicago.

I think the first visual memory goes to the '68 convention. I was a law student in Washington, married—at Georgetown Law School—and my wife worked for Vice President Hubert Humphrey. And we had a baby at the time, and as a consequence, we followed the Humphrey campaign on television.

And I was so excited about the Chicago convention, and then of course it turned out to be a public relations disaster for the Democrats, for Humphrey, and Mayor Daley was the centerpiece of that convention. So that's the first time I started to see him. I'd heard about him through

friends and others who worked with him, but that's when I first remember visualizing the mayor at the convention.

Q: And so you experienced the convention via television?

Durbin: Television. I was out in Washington—a lowly law student with no money, a wife and a baby. No way was I going to come out here for a convention.

Q: Do you remember your impressions of that convention?

Durbin: My heart sunk. I thought Humphrey had a chance. I'd been at his announcement. I supported his candidacy. And I just thought how in the world will we get this behind us in just a few weeks before the election?

Q: Do you have any memories of watching Daley and the city and thinking about what could have made this better, made that situation more tenable?

Durbin: Well, remember, I mean, it's kind of hard to describe to someone who didn't live through it. This was a time of great upheaval and turmoil in America—a Vietnam war that really guided us into that presidential election, starting with Eugene McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy, and all of the things that led up to it—the assassinations. It was just a horrific year, 1968.

Humphrey ended up being the nominee. The party was divided over the war. We'd barely gotten through. We were in the midst of the civil rights era. So it was a volatile period in our history. And we had hoped, because we certainly wanted to beat Richard Nixon that we would have a good convention and come out of it as a unified party. Sadly, we did not.

Q: I'm thinking about the idea of party unity that you worked so hard to maintain at that time. From your vantage point in Washington, did you feel like this was a fractious moment in the Democratic Party, or did you feel like, well, we'll just get through this?

Durbin: No, I couldn't see where we would go from that point. But I was a brand new political scientist, if you will, trying to figure out the Illinois scene from afar. I had worked for candidates out in Washington, but I hadn't really worked on the ground, but for that brief period of a few months in the Douglas campaign in '66. And I knew some of the players, and most of them downstate, and I just—I was fearful we were not going to be able to get through that, and sadly, we didn't.

Q: Well, speaking of campaigns—and I thank you for taking the time in the midst of a campaign of your own—the campaigns that Richard J. Daley conducted, from the time that you really became aware of him, '68 and through his death in '76, do you have memories of those campaigns?

Durbin: Oh, I sure do. The year was 1970, and Mayor Daley, after the '68 convention, after the loss of Humphrey, decided that in the 1970 slating of candidates by the Illinois Democratic Party, Cook County Democratic Party, he was going to make a special effort to do something, and that was to reach out to young people. He felt he'd lost them, college students.

And so he did something which was pretty bold. He chose a candidate for a state office, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, which no longer exists under the new constitution, but it was the head of the schools of Illinois, he chose as a candidate a professor of history from Northern Illinois University named Michael Bakalis.

And Bakalis was a handsome young Greek American, a professor who taught on campus and was interested in Democratic politics. And Daley spotted him and thought this is an answer to what I need. I'm going to convince young people in Illinois that our party is friendly to them with the Bakalis candidacy.

So there were three people running in 1970. You had Adlai Stevenson running for senator, you had Alan Dixon running for treasurer, and Michael Bakalis running for Superintendent of Public Instruction. Bakalis happened to be a friend of Paul Simon, my boss and then the lieutenant governor. He started his campaign, and Simon encouraged him, and when he was slated, introduced him to downstaters and helped him along.

By June or so Bakalis was despondent. He didn't feel like his campaign was raising any money, making any impact, and he was afraid he was going to lose. So Simon turned to me on his staff and said I'd like you to go to Chicago and run Michael Bakalis's campaign for Superintendent of Public Instruction. I'd never run a campaign in my life. I'd worked a few weeks as an advance man and press person on the Douglas senate campaign. But I said I'll give it a try.

So July 1<sup>st</sup> I moved up here to Chicago, after the end of the legislative session and took over the Bakalis campaign, managing this tiny little campaign with half a dozen people running a statewide effort. And that was a great education for me, an opportunity to get to know Mike Bakalis, whom I respect very much, and to manage his campaign. The campaign was just barely, barely getting along. We weren't raising any money, nobody knew Bakalis, nobody knew the office, and he was out doing his level best, campaigning away.

And so it was probably in August of that year that he finally said that's it, we've got to have a meeting with Mayor Daley. I've got to tell him that I need more money, that I'm just not having much luck. So we assembled a group, a small group, to meet with Mayor Daley in his fifth floor office. And here I was all of about 24 years old, maybe 25, and fresh out of law school one year, and I was walking into the office, the fifth floor, you know, holy of holies of Mayor Daley as a downstate kid from East St. Louis.

And in that meeting were Mike Bakalis and John Kennedy, his treasurer. Those are the three I remember for sure. And we sat across the table from Mayor Daley, and I got to meet the mayor, went into that office. And it was a meeting I remember so much about because Bakalis talked about his campaign. And Mayor Daley always called him Michael. Michael, how is the campaign? Well, Mayor, I'm going across the state, and we're doing this, and we're meeting people, and we're meeting ward committeemen and township committeemen, and we're working with all the organizations around the state.

And so the mayor was sitting in his chair, saying very little, sphinxlike. I hear that used often about him. He said so little as he sat there and just listened and listened. And then Bakalis got to the punch line. And our problem, Mr. Mayor, is we just can't raise the money that we need for this campaign. Now, back in those days, the money was small by today's comparison, but we weren't raising much.

And so there was this moment I'll never forget. And so the mayor said to Michael Bakalis, Michael, I thought that since you're the first Greek American candidate in the history of our state that many of our Greek American friends would be proud of your candidacy. And Bakalis said to him, 'Well, yes, Mayor, many of them are proud of my candidacy.' And Mayor Daley then said, is Angelo Geocaris proud of your candidacy? And Mike Bakalis said, oh yes, he's been very proud of my candidacy. He'd been a major contributor and helper.

And then he went through a list of Greek names, and there's one I remember. All of these Greek names represented people who were high up in business or in appointive or elective office, and had some connection to the Greek-American community. And he said, is John Kringas proud of your candidacy? John Kringas, if my memory serves me, was on the Property Tax Review Board, had been elected to that. And Bakalis said to

Daley, 'No, he has not been proud of my candidacy.' And the mayor nodded.

And we went through a list of five or six names, speaking in this cryptic way about whether or not these people had helped Mike Bakalis. The word money was never said, the word donations was never said, contributions never mentioned. And then, at the end of the list, there was this odd moment, which I'm told happened to many, where the mayor, facing us at his desk, reached down and opened a drawer at the bottom of his desk, looked inside of the drawer, said thank you very much, stood up, shook hands, and we all stood up, shook hands with him and walked out of the door.

And as we got in the corridor, Bakalis said to me, what was that all about? And I said, I don't know. I mean, he never said he'd raise us a penny, and who knows?' He said, oh, man, we are sunk. He said, I was hoping to get a commitment from him to give us some money, and he didn't do it. I don't know what to do next.

We had a campaign office just two blocks away from City Hall, and it was in a building that's since been torn down, where Block 37 is now. And it was a building where Mayor's Row, the restaurant, was on the ground floor, owned by Angelo Geocaris, and we had an office upstairs. And it was an old, old building.

And I was the campaign manager, and I, being a downstater, got up early and arrived early. And the next morning came up to our office on the eighth floor and there was a man standing at the front door. I'd never seen him before. And he was carrying a wax bag that you get at a bakery for doughnuts, in those days. They used to put doughnuts in wax paper bags. And he was standing there with a bag of doughnuts at the front door. And he said, do you work here? And it said, you know, Bakalis for



Superintendent. And I said, yeah. What's your name? Durbin. And what do you do? Well, I'm managing his campaign. Oh, good, I want to talk to you.

So I opened the door, I went inside, and I said what's your name? He said John Kringas. I said oh, nice to meet you, Mr. Kringas. He said I've got a check here for Mike Bakalis's campaign, and some doughnuts for you guys. And he says we'll try to help you. Turned around and walked out. So from not having enough pride in Bakalis as a candidate one day, he became the man holding doughnuts in a bag and a check in his hand the next day.

Now fast forward. We get a little money. We're kind of barely above water, but we're not doing too well. Now it's September, and it's after Labor Day, and we're getting kind of panicky. So we start getting calls from people in City Hall saying we need to talk to you about the campaign. It turns out they were running polls, and it turns out we were doing pretty well in the polls. We didn't know it. We couldn't afford a poll.

And we were running against an incumbent Republican, Ray Page, who was a former high school basketball coach in Springfield, and the incumbent Superintendent of Public Instruction. And he'd been through a string of scandals involving misuse of funds in his office, and we didn't know how potent they were, but they were playing in the Chicago media, and it turns out that Page was in bad shape. We didn't know it, and I don't know if he knew it, but Daley knew it.

And so Daley called us in, and I sat down with a fellow—his first name was Earl, and he was a press secretary for Mayor Daley—and he said the mayor wants to help the Bakalis campaign. And I said great. And he says

he wants him to go on television. Go on television? I mean, we barely had enough money to buy bumper stickers and yard signs. So I said okay.

And so he said he'd like to spend \$100,000 on television. I don't know what the number would be today, some multiple of that—\$100,000! That was more than we'd raised in the whole campaign. And this was going to be for television in the closing two months. And we've got the person who's going to make the TV ads. Uh, okay. I mean, our minds are just wandering, where are we going with this?

And the man turned out to be Henry Ushijima. Does that name ring a bell to you? Henry Ushijima was a filmmaker. He was the filmmaker that Mayor Daley called in at the close of the Democratic Convention in '68 to produce the film entitled "What Trees Do They Plant?"

And Ushijima, who worked out of his basement in Evanston, did this documentary film that was supposed to resurrect the image of Mayor Daley against all the protestors, and now he was going to do the TV ad for Mike Bakalis. So I went up and met with him and we set up a day for a filming of this TV commercial. And then I went up and we had the editing of the ad and it went on the air, and as fate would have it, we won.

And so my next memory is election night. And I'm with Bakalis, and we're called over to meet with Mayor Daley. If my memory serves, it was in the Bismarck Hotel, which was like the center of Democratic politics, now the Allegro over on Randolph. And it was election night. And so Mayor Daley met with us, Bakalis and me, and he had others in the room, I'm sure, but I just remember the three of us being there.

And he was kind of a patriarch in terms of teaching this young college professor, history professor. And I remember he said, Michael, remember, you must be humble in victory and courageous in defeat. And he said, it

appears you're going to win tonight, and I want you to be humble as you make the announcement about your victory this evening.

He says I remember losing one of my early races for Sheriff of Cook County, and I came home late at night and I was so distraught. My mother waited up for me. And I came in and she said, Richard, I'm not unhappy with your defeat because if you had been elected Sheriff of Cook County, you would have had to have been party to the execution of prisoners, and I would not want that on your conscience, so this may have been a good thing in your life that you were not elected sheriff.

So he said it's good to listen to people who can put your victories and your defeats in perspective. And he said I think this is a big victory for you, for Greek Americans, for young people, and I know you'll do a good job. And off we went to announce our victory.

Q: Oh, what a wonderful story. Thank you. I've never heard that before. That's great. We could go in so many directions. I'm thinking about the time that Daley spent in Springfield, and how valuable that was—or was it?

Durbin: I think it was. And I don't know much about it. That really predated me. And he came in, I believe, elected as an independent, set up the Democrats, and at least for a period of time was a state legislator. I think that experience probably inspired his son to come down and be state senator.

And incidentally, Mayor Richard M. Daley was a state senator and I happened to be his legal counsel when he was chairman of the state Senate Judiciary Committee. We sat next to one another. This was that sad moment in his life when he lost his son Patrick, so he was absent some

part of the time. But we got to be friends, and as fate would have it, later on I became senator, he was mayor, and we worked together.

But I do remember one thing about Mayor Richard J. Daley. Have I got that right? The first Mayor Richard J. Daley, with Democratic [Day] at the Illinois State Fair, which was always a big event.

And he, in those days, would literally bring down train loads of people. They would have a train coming down from Chicago that would leave at 8:00 in the morning and would be taken directly into the fairgrounds. It didn't stop at some train station and transport people. They would go directly into the fairgrounds.

And they would stop the train, and all of these folks from all the ward organizations, the township organizations, would pile out of the train and they would then march around the infield of the state fairgrounds carrying signs, "The 42<sup>nd</sup> Ward Regular Democratic Organization Proudly Supports Mayor Richard J. Daley," you know, and they would march around.

Now most of them had been drinking beer since 8:00 in the morning, and they could barely get around the track, and some never made it off the train. They would do the march, they'd hang around, and within an hour, back on the train up to Chicago. But that was the arrival of the mayor. The festivities, the speeches, and back to Chicago.

But for downstaters it was one of those moments where your mind was just saying what in the world is this? But they were well organized. And if you didn't show up with the right number of people and the right people, I'm sure you paid a price.

Q: Well, his leadership style involved lots of public spectacle. Your story reminds me of the St. Patrick's Day parades and other times when he was in front of the public. Do you have a story that you might share with us?

Durbin: Well, by 1978 I was a candidate for lieutenant governor, and in that race Mike Bakalis was the candidate for governor. And it was the off year election as we went to the new constitution, and Mike couldn't get a running mate. Nobody thought he could beat Jim Thompson. Thompson had just won, had served two years, now came the new constitution, and he had to run in two years in the off year elections.

And Bakalis was slated, he was determined, and no one would run with him. He called me. I'd never been elected to any public office, but I'd served him as campaign manager, we were friends, I'd run for state senator. He asked me to run. I did. And so I didn't win, obviously, but I wandered around the state as the candidate for lieutenant governor helping Bakalis.

And I do remember the St. Patrick's Day parade because it was 1978, and at that point Mayor Daley had passed away. But it was still the grand old St. Patrick's Day parade. And boy, I thought here's my chance. I'll get there a half an hour early and I'll get up in the front row and I will wait, and I'll make sure that my picture appears somewhere. I mean, you were just struggling to let people know you were alive at that point, when you're running for a down ballot office like lieutenant governor.

So I got there early, and I was standing there, and pretty soon there was a crowd forming. And then it was two minutes to 12:00, and then somebody gave the signal, the bagpipes started, whatever the heck it was, and I felt like a lineman for some opposing team of the Bears as the other line came crashing through. The front line came crashing through, knocking me aside. Pretty soon I'm in the fifth row, I'm falling back, and now I'm in the tenth row, and all the bigwigs have all of their helpers getting them up to the front row in the campaign.

So Daley, even his son, used to kind of jealously guard that center spot and make sure that his closest political friends were taken care of to be in the front line, which you'll see in all the parade photographs. And if you didn't happen to make that, trust me, you were going to get trampled and pushed to the back of the campaign. So I remember that, humbling experience as it was.

Q: [*Laughs.*] Richard J. Daley was famously quoted as saying good government is good politics and good politics is good government. Do you have any comments about that?

Durbin: I think he's right. I really believe it. The loyalty to the Democratic Party is worth something, but the loyalty to politicians, who actually improve the lives of people, is much greater. I mean, if you feel like a Democrat or an elected official has really made a significant difference in your neighborhood for your family, in your life, you're going to want to reelect him, maybe even help him. And I think the political organizations reflect that.

Now here's the problem we have. I can give you examples that I've heard of—for example, there was a man who died in the line of duty as a policeman, a fireman or whatever, and he did not leave much money for his widow. And so his widow was hired by Cook County or the City of Chicago. And she frankly had very few skills. But she had a desk, she came to her desk, she got a paycheck, and they took care of his family because they were not well off.

And some critics will say, well, that's a waste of taxpayers' money, and I'm not going to argue that point as to whether this woman really produced for the money that she was paid. Somebody else would have to be the judge of it. But there was a feeling of loyalty, that if someone had

produced for the city, for the county, for the party, that you would stick with them.

Now that loyalty could go too far, and sadly, in many cases, ended up protecting corruption, which is unforgivable. But that was the nature of the process, the nature of the ward organizations and the township organizations. They really took care of their own. They provided jobs for them. And some of the people they put in those jobs were not competent, and should never have been in the jobs. That's the critical part.

Now let me tell you the other side of the ledger. When Mike Bakalis was elected Superintendent of Public Instruction, I didn't ask for a job. I was with Paul Simon and happy to be there. And I called him after a few months and said how is it going over there now that you've got your statewide office? And he said I can tell you at 5:01 every night the people who I brought to this town who are loyal to my agenda and working hard to succeed, they're still at their desks, and the people who were here, the bureaucracy, they were here before me, they'll be here after me, they're long gone.

So you kind of lose an element of new blood and new ideas and new people if you don't have some input from the political process that can bring these new ideas to your office. And that's the balancing act. You don't want to protect corruption and incompetence with political appointments. But you do want to protect those who really come to it with all sorts of idealism and energy when it comes to public service.

Q: Well, I think we have time for one last question. In terms of legacy, what are some of the accomplishments of Richard J. Daley that you feel like really are significant?

Durbin: Well, I want to put it in perspective, because there are some things that we look back on and we have to put them in historic context. The public housing projects of the city of Chicago may, at one point, have been a modern alternative to slum dwellings, but they disintegrated into horrible urban ghettos. The idea was to separate racially within the city and to try to keep under control what could have been violence based on racial differences.

And so I think his inspiration initially on public housing might have been right, to get people into new, in those days, new dwellings, even high-rise public housing. But also it was to make sure that the black and white problem was going to be contained within certain areas. As that public housing disintegrated, you could tell this was not the answer.

I can recall going to Cabrini-Green just to see it as a congressman, to get an idea of what it looked like. It was horrible. Just horrible. The book by Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here*, tells the story of some of those public housing projects on the West Side. So in that respect, a good idea initially, when it wasn't tended to, I should say, evolved or disintegrated into a pretty sad situation.

I think he brought, Mayor Daley, the original Mayor Daley, brought to the city a sense of pride and leadership when it came to the infrastructure and building the city, and the vision of the city that we're still profiting from. This is a great American city. I happen to think it's the greatest, and not just because I represent it. But managing to balance all of the different elements within the city—ethnic elements, religious elements and the like—I thought that really took a special skill.

Q: You mentioned a book, and there have been lots of things written about Daley. Do you have any critique or comments you'd like to make on something that struck you as particularly right on target?



Durbin: Well, I always got a kick out of Royko. I didn't always agree with him. But Mike Royko just had a great sense of humor and was always speaking through Slat Grobnik and all these characters, and many times with his humor. And no one's ever reached his level, I think, of contemporary political observation in the city of Chicago. He really pointed out the weaknesses in the mayor and his organization.

I always respected the mayor, too, for his family strength. Boy, did he have a great wife. She was terrific. I had a chance to meet her a few times. And the fact—any politician's wife deserves sainthood, I think, for putting up with it, but not just putting up with it, but doing it with class and style and dignity, and raising a family, a great family, in the process. It really spoke well of her and of him.

Staying in the old neighborhood in Bridgeport, going to the old church forever and ever amen, those were kind of earmarks of Mayor Daley that talked about his commitment to the city. And on balance, of course, it's a positive ledger. There are many things you could criticize him for, but we were evolving as a nation, and he was part of that evolution on a lot of issues.

Q: Well, that's a great way to close. I'd like to thank you for your time. Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

Durbin: I think that'll do it.

Q: Okay. Thank you so much, Senator. I really appreciate your time.

Durbin: Good. Glad to do it.

*[End of recording]*