

**An Interview with Governor Jim Edgar
Volume II (Sessions 6-10)**

Interview with Jim Edgar

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Edgar: As the keeper of the capitol, I was in charge of the security of the capitol. We had the ERA demonstration in 1982—that was the big final push on ERA.

DePue: The deadline was coming.

Edgar: Yeah, the deadline was coming. So Illinois, of course, was one of the few states that hadn't ratified it people thought should ratify it. And we had in the rotunda every day probably the last month, six weeks of the session, hundreds of women, pro and con. And my fear was they'd mix and have a fight. So we had to keep it open so people could walk and stuff, and that was tricky. But then, about two weeks before the end of the session, we had this group of women from Champaign who came over and chained themselves to the Senate door, and they wouldn't leave, and they were just very disruptive. So I had to move them out, and we'll talk about—do we want to talk about ERA now? I guess I'll talk about that—

DePue: Yeah, I think this is good.

Edgar: —and then I'll lead into this other incident. So they wouldn't leave, and it was really disruptive. Again, this goes back—I knew enough about the legislature that somebody chained right to the Senate door, people coming and going, that's just too disruptive. And the Senate was really upset about it, and they wanted us to get rid of them. Then they had a sit-in one time in the governor's office, too, and they wanted us to get rid of them. I said, "Well, you got people there." "No, you're in charge of that." (laughs) They didn't want to take the fall for that. And I remember we were trying to decide, well, what are you going to do with these people, because I said, "They just can't stay locked. I don't care if they're someplace in the rotunda, if they want to chain themselves to one of the statues, but not the Senate door or the House door; that's just too disruptive at the end of the session." I said, "We got to move them." They said, yeah, but you know they just want the PR of us carrying them out. And I said, "Yeah, and I don't want TV showing that." So we decided we'd do it at three o'clock in the morning on a Sunday night. And that evening, I remember—and I could tell around the state this was really beginning to boil, because people knew about this, and they didn't like it. A lot of people, maybe even pro-ERA, they didn't like these women chained to the House; they just thought that was...

And I remember I went over to Boys State—I always did Boys State, secretary of state and governor. And I went over—it was a Sunday night—I went over to speak, and I'd left the staff, and we were going to

get together when I got back, about eleven o'clock. But I went over there, and I remember the boys at Boys State said, "What are you going to do about those women? Get rid of those women." (DePue laughs) I thought, jiminy, it's even filtered into the Boys State.

So we came back, and eleven o'clock, I said, "All right, you can move them over to the Centennial Building. It's the same marble, same kind of marble. (laughs) Just put them on the floor over there, and so they can stay there." Well, at three o'clock, they did it, and they locked the capitol doors. And the media got wind of it, and they were—I remember Ben Kinningham, who used to do—he was a very mild-mannered guy—(laughs) he was just enraged that we had locked the capitol doors and they couldn't get in. I think by that time we actually had them over at the Centennial Building. But we moved them out, and there was no pictures of them being moved, so I felt good about that. And, you know, there was a ruckus about me moving them out in the dead of the night and all this and that, but they got me off the hook because they went then and got blood and threw it all over the House and the Senate chambers. I think it was pig blood or something they got from some butcher.

DePue: Inside the chambers?

Edgar: Yeah, yeah. And at that point, I just hauled—I said, "Arrest them and send them to jail." (laughs) Because before you couldn't arrest them because it was argued they were petitioning their government. I said, "That's fine, but you can't chain yourself." So we couldn't arrest them, we didn't think,

but when they did that, I said, “I don’t care—arrest them and haul them off to jail.” I think they finally bailed out. But anyway, at that point, everybody was on my side. When they threw the blood, they just went way too far.

But I was pro-ERA, and I had Phyllis Schlafly, who was anti-ERA. She was always on me, but when I threw them in jail, she was very happy with me. So I was worried I could lose both sides. In the end, the pro-ERA couldn’t condone blood and the anti-ERA thought I had been firm, so I kind of was walking a tightrope there between both sides and also constitutionally. I thought it was ludicrous that I couldn’t throw them out of the capitol, but there was some question, so the argument was the Centennial Building—the reason we moved them over to the Centennial Building, we said, “It’s still the capitol complex, so we have not removed you from the capitol. You can petition there just as well as the capitol.” That was the rationalization for the Centennial Building versus just throwing them outside. We couldn’t just throw them outside. But when they did the blood, we hauled them off, and a judge held them in jail and finally let them out on bail. So that was my ERA involvement, but that was a little tricky because again, this is one of those issues that had huge headlines around the state about these women chaining themselves, and it was on TV every night.

DePue: Didn’t it get national headlines as well?

Edgar: I think it did, yeah. Of course, we had a woman that got real sick and almost died, that was fasting. The fasters, they were all right. We tried to take care of them. They had a space in the rotunda, and we didn't try to move them out. We did hope they'd eat something so they wouldn't die, but they weren't clogging up like these—and these women in this chain gang was really not a nice group of women—they were foul-mouthed and everything—whereas these ladies fasting, they were very nice. They were pro-ERA. But anyway, that got a lot of headline, the fasting. We were afraid she was going to die. So I was juggling all that.