



# GOVERNOR JIM EDGAR

## JIM EDGAR BIO

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As the 38th Governor of Illinois, Jim Edgar inherited what was then the largest deficit in the state's history. He made hundreds of millions of dollars in budget cuts. He found ways to deliver services more efficiently and effectively, reducing the state work force by 2,500 employees. He eliminated a backlog of \$1 billion of unpaid health care bills. He provided income tax relief and left an unprecedented \$1.5 billion in the treasury for his successor.

Edgar also reformed welfare through innovative initiatives to move recipients from dependence to independence. He saved homeowners billions of dollars by proposing and winning legislative approval for caps on property taxes. He fought for – and won -- legislation to establish an adequate funding level for each and every school child in Illinois. He and First Lady Brenda Edgar won national recognition for their adoption initiative that took Illinois from the bottom to the top among states in placing children in loving homes.

Edgar was elected governor in 1990 and re-elected by the widest plurality any incumbent Illinois chief executive has received, carrying 101 of the state's 102 counties, including Cook. His announcement that he would not seek a third-term surprised the Illinois media and political insiders who cited poll numbers that indicated he had earned the highest approval rating of any Illinois chief executive and was in a strong position to win again.

His record as governor built on his accomplishments as secretary of state, where he led a crackdown on drunk drivers, developed an adult literacy program that became a national model and won a hard-fought battle to win General Assembly approval of legislation requiring motorists to carry insurance.

As he was leaving office, the Chicago Tribune observed his "instincts and motives were as sound as those of any governor the state has had." The Peoria Journal-Star commented, "Firm, competent, keeping-the-lid on management has been the hallmark of Jim Edgar's two terms as governor..."

After retiring from elective office, Edgar was a resident fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard in 1999.

Since then, he has continued his commitment to responsible and responsive government as a distinguished fellow at the University of Illinois' Institute of Government and Public Affairs. He spearheads the Edgar Fellow program, which brings together emerging leaders from all parts of Illinois to foster the statesmanship that will address major challenges across regional, partisan and ethnic lines.

Edgar also lectures to students at the U of I and in colleges and universities throughout the state and serves on several corporate and non-profit boards. He is president emeritus of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation.

As governor, he made fiscal discipline, sensible management and children his top priorities – although his administration was remarkable in several other areas.

Education funding for kindergarten through 12th grade increased by nearly \$2 billion, or 55 percent, during his administration. Edgar crafted the nationally acclaimed 1995 reforms of Chicago public schools.





He overhauled a dysfunctional child welfare system, tripling spending to protect abused children and hiring more caseworkers to reduce caseload even as he was reducing the number of state employees overall. In 1998, the Governor and his wife were honored at a White House ceremony for their efforts to promote and increase adoptions in Illinois from just 708 in his first year in office to nearly 4,300 in his final year.

In human services, Edgar revolutionized the delivery of programs to families by reorganizing the functions of six agencies, by initiating a program to provide medical coverage to children of the working poor and by establishing sweeping welfare reforms long before Washington acted. As a result, caseloads fell and nearly 200,000 families moved from welfare rolls to payrolls, a 50 percent reduction.

His economic development strategies helped the state through the recession of the early 1990s and positioned Illinois as a national leader in economic recovery. During his administration, the number of Illinoisans working rose by 600,000 and the Illinois unemployment rate reached its lowest level in nearly three decades.

His environmental record was unparalleled in Illinois history. The state acquired more acres of land for open space and recreational use than ever before. For his efforts, which led many to call him the "conservation governor," Edgar received the Nature Conservancy of Illinois' Lifetime Achievement Award in 1998. While steadfastly seeking a healthy environment, Edgar sought to balance that goal with the need for a healthy economy. Under Edgar's leadership, Illinois became a national trendsetter in solving environmental problems at less cost to businesses and taxpayers.

He served in a variety of national leadership roles -- president of the Council of State Governments, chairman of the Education Commission of the States and chair of committees on economic development and education in the National Governors' Association. Edgar also served on the executive committee of the National Governors' Association and chaired the Midwest Governors' Association and the Governors' Ethanol Coalition.

Edgar started his state government career in 1968 as a top aide to leaders in the Illinois House and Senate. From 1975 until 1976, he was director of state services for the National Conference of State Legislatures in Denver. He was then elected to the Illinois House from Charleston in 1976 and 1978. In 1979 and 1980, he was director of legislative affairs for Gov. Jim Thompson, who appointed him as secretary of state when a vacancy occurred. Edgar was elected in 1982 and re-elected in 1986 by the largest plurality ever amassed by a statewide candidate.

Edgar was born July 22, 1946, in Vinita, Oklahoma, and moved to Illinois as a youngster. He was educated in Charleston public schools and graduated from Eastern Illinois University, where he majored in history and was elected student body president.

He and the former Brenda Smith of Anna have two children, Elizabeth and Brad. Elizabeth is the parent of grandchildren Jake Lowe, who just graduated from George Washington University, and Cecilia Lowe, who is a student at the University of Puget Sound. Brad and his wife, Stacey, are the parents of the other three grandchildren, Dakota and Cali Ann, who graduated from the University of Colorado, and Ellie, who graduated from the University of Wyoming.