

Professor Floros:

My father was a high school government teacher, and when he retired, I got him a cheap sign that said, "Old teachers never die, they just lose their class." It was probably not the most thoughtful gift I could have given, but my dad had a good sense of humor, so he just laughed. The retirement of some educators is a ho hum event, but the UIC Department of Political Science is losing two of its brightest stars to retirement this year, and it has me reeling. I don't know what UIC looks like without today's guest, Professor Dick Simpson, and neither does anyone else on campus. Professor Simpson has taught at UIC for 55 years. He started at UIC before UIC was UIC when it was still Circle Campus. Over his career, he has mentored thousands of students, served on hundreds of dissertation committees, led the Political Science Department, simultaneously served as the Chicago Alderman for the 44th Ward, written dozens of books and reports, and what is probably his greatest achievement, hired me. Professor Simpson also gamely agreed to be my first interview on The Politics Classroom when it was still a live radio show, and he is frequently quoted in news articles and featured on television news shows about Chicago and Illinois politics. He is exiting UIC with the publication of a new book, Democracy's Rebirth: A View From Chicago, which I can't wait to talk to him about. So for the final time in the spring 2022 semester, let's get started in The Politics Classroom, recorded on April 28, 2022.

Music Intro: Three Goddesses by Third Age

Professor Floros:

You're listening to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC radio. I'm Professor Kate Floros, and you can find me on Twitter @DrFloros. If you want to find links to some of the publications of today's guest or previous guests, check out The Bookshelf section of the show's website at ThePoliticsClassroom.org. I started my show with a snarky quote that I gave to my dad about old teachers never dying, but rather just losing their class. But I think a much better quote to reflect the career and contributions of today's guest, Professor Dick Simpson, was coined by Marion Wright: "Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it." That sentiment definitely applies to Professor Simpson. Dick, welcome back to The Politics Classroom, and thank you for 55 amazing years of service to UIC.

Professor Dick Simpson:

Thank you, Kate. I'm glad to be here with you again. I'm glad I was the first guest, and now I've followed a few years later and got to do this again.

Professor Floros:

So before we begin, I do want to acknowledge the retirement of another Titan in the UIC Political Science Department, Professor Chris Mooney, also a multi-appearance guest on The Politics Classroom. Maybe that's the problem. Maybe I should stop inviting colleagues onto the podcast. <laugh> So I actually thought that you would be here at UIC forever. So what made you decide that this was the year to retire?

Professor Dick Simpson:

Well, there were a couple of things. First of all, I do have a heart condition, and I was taking treatments for it, and it became harder to walk long distances. I was beginning to request classrooms in BSB so I wouldn't have to walk so far. And it was also seemed to be just the time. There's a certain point at which you seem to have done what you can do with the profession, and it turned out to be a better year than I might have guessed to retire because of the book that just came out. Two others are in the pipeline and will come out over the next year. And I've finished a series of things with particularly the American Political Science Association about teaching civic engagement, and we're now doing a webcast with them on the crisis of American democracy, which essentially parallels the book, although it's done in a different format. So, everything seemed to come together. I just taught my last class a few minutes ago at UIC. It just turned out to be time.

Professor Floros:

Okay. So I can't imagine that you're just going to sit on a beach somewhere to enjoy your retirement. In addition to being a professor at UIC and a former Chicago Alderman, you are an ordained Minister and an advocate for the homeless, as well as a chronicler of corruption in Illinois. So you've already talked about the web series with the American Political Science Association. Two more books coming out. Do you have any other post-UIC plans or you're

going to be busy for the foreseeable future and you just won't be here on campus with us?

Professor Dick Simpson:

Sort of, yeah. I am working with some political campaigns currently and will be next year. I've given up some other positions. I'm no longer President of the Society of Midland Authors, and I am no longer on the board of the North Side Housing, which provides services for the homeless on the North Side of Chicago. I've scaled back in some areas, but I still consult and work with political candidates, community organizations, social justice organizations. Our Church gives away \$100 to \$200,000 a year to social justice efforts, and I'm on the committee that guides those investments in social justice. So I think I'll probably find a little something to do.

Professor Floros:

Okay. So I definitely want to talk about your book. I'm not going to ignore that, but I would also love to hear about your experiences at UIC and the growth of UIC from when you started to now, if you don't mind.

Professor Dick Simpson:

No, I'm happy to talk about it. I came, as you suggested, in 1967, 55 years ago. In August of that year, as we were starting up those days, we were on a quarter system, and we really started a little after Labor Day. But when I first came, it was Circle Campus. We were not affiliated with the medical center at all. Hardly knew it was over there unless we got sick.

Professor Floros:

Right.

Professor Dick Simpson:

And in addition to that difference, it was a much smaller campus. I can't remember. Let's say it was 5000 students, I don't quite recall. But it was a very small campus. Most of the buildings weren't built yet, like Behavioral Science Building didn't get built, so I think it was '76.

Professor Floros:

Oh, wow. Where was your office?

Professor Dick Simpson:

It was in University Hall.

Professor Floros:

Oh, wow.

Professor Dick Simpson:

All of the departments, maybe not all the Sciences, but I think all the departments were in University Hall.

Professor Floros:

Oh, wow.

Professor Dick Simpson:

But we had some other of the lecture centers and some small - we didn't have all of the units that exist like Burnham Hall and the rest, I don't think were built in. But somewhere we had the library and we had the cafeteria over in what's become Student Center East. It really was designed as urban grunge. We had the walkways that were up in the air between the buildings. Problem was the place where the concrete came together leaked. So students walking underneath, or faculty for that matter, walking underneath after the first few years after the rubber sealant began to break down, did indeed have leakage. So it was not great. The student body was diverse even back then, but it was mostly African American and whites.

Professor Floros:

Okay.

Professor Dick Simpson:

There were some Latinos, certainly all kinds of white ethnic groups, but it wasn't as diverse a campus as we have now.

Professor Floros:

The proportion of African American students, though, was much higher than it is today.

Professor Dick Simpson:

Yes, it was two or three times. Well, at least twice, maybe three times higher than what we have today. And that was particularly with African American males, where you really see the big difference. It was a time of turmoil. This is the '60s. So in '69, '70 after Kent State, we actually closed the campus.

Professor Floros:

Really?

Professor Dick Simpson:

Yeah. We closed down the campus with demonstrations and protests because of the killings at Kent State and opposition to ROTC being on campus. We've been in a very climactic faculty meeting with the administration. I'm talking two or 300 faculty members, which is a pretty large proportion of how many faculty we had then. The Chancellor and others in a big room in SEC, if I remember right. In fact, we voted then to open the campus about a week after the protests. I was on the committee, both the closed campus and the committee that argued with the faculty to open the campus, just to give a sense. Yes, we've had Union strikes since, but we've never had anything like when the students and the faculty would join together to close the campus in protest to the policies of the Vietnam War and the role of the University.

Professor Floros:

So when you say you closed campus, that was not an official thing. That was everybody walked out and protested.

Professor Dick Simpson:

There were no classes. Everybody left. I guess there were some administrators in University Hall somewhere. I mean literally closed it so that the campus was vacant for one or two weeks. I can't remember whether it was one week or two weeks.

Professor Floros:

Okay

Professor Dick Simpson:

But that just as an indication of how significant the feelings were running and how significant the issues at the time. So that was the early stage of UIC.

Professor Floros:

So when you arrived, that was the first year that Circle Campus was open, wasn't it?

Professor Dick Simpson:

It opened in '65, '66.

Professor Floros:

Okay.

Professor Dick Simpson:

But it's still not really. It was fragmented. It moved over from Navy Peer.

Professor Floros:

Right.

Professor Dick Simpson:

And so, depending on how you think of it, one or two years after Navy Peer closed.

Professor Floros:

Okay, well, so its initials were UICC, which I always thought was University of Illinois Circle Campus. But when I was looking on the Internet, I found other names. University of Illinois Congress Circle and University of Illinois Chicago Circle.

Professor Dick Simpson:

It was University of Illinois Chicago Circle.

Professor Floros:

Okay.

Professor Dick Simpson:

It was named after, strangely enough, with the Jane Addams Interconnected Circle there where all the highways come together. So we were named after a traffic pattern.

Professor Floros:

Why was that the decision? Surely they could have come up with something better.

Professor Dick Simpson:

No, not necessarily. It was pretty descriptive. As I think you know, there was a huge battle in the formation of the campus. Urban renewal cleared out the Italian and Greek and some other ethnic group areas in what is now the space where we are; moved Hall House and created the open area think of it as just bulldozed. Urban renewal in those days was pretty brutal in terms of what it did to neighborhoods, and it happened in other places. It happened in Lincoln Park. It happened on the South Side, and so on. So they bulldozed the area despite the protests of the people who lived in the area. And the design was by Skidmore and Owens architectural firm. Walter Netsch was the chief architect.

Professor Floros:

So who do we blame for hiring them, given how ugly the campus is?

Professor Dick Simpson:

Well, it was a positive statement of time. In other words, they were trying to find an architecture for what a University campus should be without the fake ivy buildings and stuff that you get out in the boonies with campuses. So it was a bold architectural experiment. There were parts of it that didn't work. So we spent 50 years redesigning it to make it better.

Professor Floros:

Okay.

Professor Dick Simpson:

But anyway, yes, we were Chicago, University of Illinois Chicago Circle.

Professor Floros:

Okay. And was the campus at that point independent of the University of Illinois in Urbana?

Professor Dick Simpson:

No, we were always part of the U of I System.

Professor Floros:

No, I don't mean system.

Professor Dick Simpson:

Yeah, but we were free from Urbana. Urbana wouldn't put up with little Navy Pier operation, pretending to be a University from Urbana's point of view. And unfortunately, Urbana has never quite caught up from that original conception.

Professor Floros:
Yeah

Professor Dick Simpson:

But we've had so many, particularly after the merger of the medical school. But even before we've had such important scholars and made such important contributions that we pretty much have left behind, we pulled on our big boy pants and became a real place. And we do other things better than places like Urbana, like teaching the UIC students who themselves have gone on to significant careers.

Professor Floros:

We definitely need to resend that memo, I think, to Urbana so they get the message as well.

Professor Dick Simpson:

Putting the medical campus together with the east campus was really quite a battle in itself because Urbana was a little worried that we would become too grand. They like the idea of being the flagship University, and they are properly nationally and internationally famous. But my own view is that we have overtaken them. In that sense, there are some of our people who are better than theirs, some of theirs are better than ours, depends on the department, it depends on the person. But I don't think anybody can beat us as a teaching University. I think in the state of Illinois there are some of the others, like Western, are very good. But I think given the student population we work with, our first mission has always been teaching and the fact that we're Research 1 University and that we regularly make contributions to worldwide knowledge. I do like Stanley Fish's notion: we're the kind of University that produces the knowledge that the other universities teach, which is literally true. I've got textbooks that have been used all over the country. It's very common for our faculty to produce both monographs, journal articles, and textbooks that become the fountain of knowledge for other places at other thousands of universities in the country and the world. We've graduated scholars who teach their home countries are all over the place, and they are now the leading scholar in Thailand or wherever.

Professor Floros:

Is that why we didn't have a law school for so long? Because Urbana didn't want us to?

Professor Dick Simpson:

There was, to use the technical language, a gentleman's agreement by all the law schools, but certainly Urbana was involved in it, that we would not have a law school because it would take away students from all of the other law schools, the DePauls and Northwestern and so forth. University of Chicago. So there was a cabal of law schools that were preventing us, and Urbana was certainly a part of that. They didn't want us to have a law school and compete with them.

Professor Floros:

Well, we have a law school now, renamed the UIC School of Law, previously the John Marshall School of Law, and I think we're doing okay. So last thing before we talk about your book, can you talk a little bit about how you balanced your teaching and University responsibilities while you were a Chicago Alderman? Because you talk in your book about creating mechanisms of participatory democracy in your Ward, which I can only imagine was ridiculously time consuming, but you still had a full time job as an educator at UIC. So can you talk a little bit about how that balancing act worked?

Professor Dick Simpson:

Yeah. So for the first four years, maybe even six that I was Alderman, I was still full time at UIC. The last either two or four years I began to scale back. We were on a quarter system, so I went to 80% time, and then I went to 60% time because it did get to be overbearing. And that was one of the sides of the ideological reasons to not stay in office forever. The stress of trying to be both a professor and an active Alderman. I led the opposition bloc against Mayor Daly and Mayor Bilandic, so it was not just a backbench kind of role. So it did take a lot of time, certainly more than 80 hour

weeks. And I was young, I guess, as part of it. So I wouldn't be able to do it today, but I could do it then.

Professor Floros:

Well, that's amazing. One of my former students keeps trying to get me to run for office in the 11th Ward, which is the Daley stronghold. He wants to help unseat all of the Daleys and their relations, although if they continue to be indicted, I don't have to worry about beating them at the ballot box. But there's no way. A, I don't have the personality for that, but B, I wouldn't have any idea how to do that.

Professor Dick Simpson:

Well, I have a book for you, *Winning Elections of the 21st Century*. Exactly how to do it.

Professor Floros:

No, not how to win the election, about how to balance.

Professor Dick Simpson:

Yeah. Well, you do take on a lot of responsibilities, so you'd have to scale back some of the Union activities and those kinds of things.

Professor Floros:

Yeah. And probably the podcast.

Music interlude: *Baby, I'm Coming Home* by Ryan Saranich

Professor Floros:

This is Professor Floros in *The Politics Classroom*, a podcast of UIC Radio. I'm speaking today with UIC political scientist Dick Simpson. So you've recently published a book, *Democracy's Rebirth: The View From Chicago*, which looks at challenges to democracy at both the local and national levels, and you lay out possible solutions to reinvigorate democracy in the United States. So I wanted to just go through some of the issue areas that you talk about and maybe talk a little bit about the problem and how you see possible solutions. So one of the things you talk about is getting money out of politics. That the Citizens United decision from 2010 that basically just allowed the flooding of money from unions, corporations, people into the electoral process.

Professor Dick Simpson:

Yeah. And I did it in a number of bad ways.

Professor Floros:

Okay.

Professor Dick Simpson:

It already affirmed earlier the corporations are the same citizen as you are. So backdoor, they can give as much money as they want to the political system. And corporations have a lot of money. In addition, wealthy people have the billionaire race going on for governor in Illinois at the moment shows how much money talks. But in addition, they opened up the opportunity because of the way they dealt with PACs, political action committees. They allow dark money into politics. That means you don't even know where the money came from, much less the fact that there are no limits on campaign contributions if you know how to manipulate the system sufficiently. And lastly, with follow up decisions, they've made corruption to be only if it's actually a bribe, a quid pro quo. If I simply give you money because I know you have a certain ideological position, or even if you end up passing a specific law that helps my company make millions of dollars off the government or be able to market some bad products, even if you did such a law, as long as I've not given you an envelope with money in it and you've agreed to pass that particular law, it's perfectly legal contribution. That is. I can know that you're going to be helpful to me, but I just can't have a conversation with you that the government can record that says that. It's a pretty all time high bad decision for the American people because it undercuts democracy very severely.

Professor Floros:

So basically, if you don't say, "I'm giving you this money in order for you to pass this legislation or to do this thing," and the government records it, then it's okay.

Professor Dick Simpson:

Yeah. They have to prove that it was a quid pro quo exchange, that I'm giving you this, like, money, and you're giving me that like a law or a license. Think of a liquor license, calling the health Inspector, or like Alderman Burke, I will give you your driveway permit and allow you to have a Burger King business in my Ward if you will only hire my law firm to do your taxes.

Professor Floros:

That is really terrible. One of the things that I've never understood about the argument that money is speech, which is tied up in this, right, that we can't limit campaign contributions because that's limiting speech? What I've never understood about that is if the United States is supposed to be this place of liberty and equal justice for all, even though we know that's never been actually true, how can money equal speech be consistent with that? If you have more money than me, that means you have more speech than me? I've never understood how that idea of if you have more money, you have more speech can be squared with the founding ideals of the country.

Professor Dick Simpson:

Well, it does get wrapped up with capitalism in the sense that you can earn as much as you want and be a billionaire. And it's fine. It is all intertwined and confusing, which is the reason to get towards the solution side of it. We began back in the 1920s saying that businesses and labor unions could not directly contribute to political candidates because we didn't want them to buy the election. But we really have to move to public financing limits on contributions. And requiring real disclosure of all contributions is the complete package to be able to make campaign contributions part of democracy. And so what that means is that you set up a system, and it is already in place in a number of places, New York City, in place in Maine, in Minnesota and so forth. It's a simple matching system and you take small contributions up to \$250. So most people can make some contribution. Maybe it's \$25, maybe it's \$250, but it's still relative. You're not going to buy a politician who's having to raise \$10 million with the \$25 contribution.

Professor Floros:

Sure

Professor Dick Simpson:

You don't need to raise the maximum amount like Pritzker and the people who are contributing to the other Republican candidates and tens of millions of dollars. You only need to raise enough to be able to get your message out. And that varies by candidate and office what that amount is. Any of the systems work if they provide enough money. The other option you could do it the other way is you could literally provide free television, free direct mail, anything that makes it possible for significant small contributions to be enough to fund a candidate to get their message through, which is not true today, basically. If we don't want to have an oligarchy controlled by the wealthy, either the corporations or the wealthy individuals, we have to move to some form of campaign finance. And public funding is the single big step that has to be taken. Other things like disclosing the information, all of it helps make it a more even playing field.

Professor Floros:

So if we had public funding, does that mean that we would then not have super PACs and PACs or that would only deal with contributions to the candidates themselves.

Professor Dick Simpson:

They would be triggered by the individual contributions. You could still allow PACs. There is a limited federal elections of \$5,000 contributions from PACs. Super PACs comes from the Citizens United decision. And you have to unscramble the bad judicial decision before you can control super PACs. But in a real sense, give you an example. When I ran for Congress against the strongest congressman in the United States, Congressman Dan Rostenkowski, who later went to federal prison for corruption, I was able to raise \$250,000 with no PAC money and only individual contributions.

Professor Floros:
Okay

Professor Dick Simpson:
I did it twice, but it wasn't enough. If I had 100,000 more dollars the first time, I would have been congressman and Rostenkowski would still have gone to prison for what he had already done, but he wouldn't have been congressman at the time.

Professor Floros:
Okay, if the Supreme Court has decided that corporations are people, that money equal speech, wouldn't laws that tried to rein in campaign contributions be found unconstitutional then because they've established these ideas? Do we have to wait until we don't have these people on the Supreme Court anymore for this to actually happen?

Professor Dick Simpson:
No. With public funding, the way it's structured is you get the public money if you play by certain rules. So if a candidate wants to completely avoid the rules because they're a millionaire or a billionaire, they can still do that under the current Supreme Court decisions, but they can't get the public funding. And I think it's important for your listeners to think about how much elections cost. So let me just go through a few figures.

Professor Floros:
Okay.

Professor Dick Simpson:
I won't even dwell on the fact that it takes a billion dollars to run for President. Literally, in most States, you can run for governor or Senator for \$20 million. In Illinois, the governor's race last time was more than 100 million on each side.

Professor Floros:
On each side?

Professor Dick Simpson:
On each side. I know to run for Congress, you need to raise from five to \$10 million, depending on the situation. To run for Mayor Lori Lightfoot last time raised \$5 million. This time, if she runs again, she'll have to raise \$10 million. To run for Alderman it is a minimum of in most situations, there are some exceptions, but it's basically a quarter of a million dollars to run for Alderman. Okay. If you're going to run for 11th Ward Alderman, you better start raising money right away and so on. I mean, that's just ridiculous. When I ran for Alderman, I know it was 100 years ago, but I raised \$25,000 in the first campaign and \$35,000 for my re election and won both cases. Things have changed and they're completely out of whack. Again, you don't need the absolute most money. You only need enough money to get your message out successfully. And so you can lower those numbers drastically and still get your message out.

Professor Floros:
If a candidate accepts public funding but their opponent does not, is the expectation that if it's enough that there's some minimum level, that if the publicly funded candidate can get above it, that they can still win even if they're outspent three to one?

Professor Dick Simpson:
Yes, it is not true that the candidate who spends the most money always wins the election. Quite often, not too often, because you're running against incumbents, so Congress has a 95% reelection rate if they run. You notice this time around, some 25 of them have decided not to run because they're not going to win. But in general, the reelection rate is pretty steep because an incumbent has publicity, has already known how to win the first time, has a staff usually that can run the campaign for them if they just move over to the political side and then has already figured out how to do this. They've been through this track before. They've got a lot of advantages going into it. But if you had two non-incumbents running, the cat that spends the most money is not necessarily the winner. Now, if they're out spending, you ten to one and they're buying all television ads and you can't even send out direct mail pieces, then you're going to lose.

Professor Floros:

Right. Okay, let's move on to voting. You talk about many sins of voting, the worst, I think, being redistricting and how that is currently run in most States, that bake in the advantage for the political party in charge. So can you talk about the creation of independent commissions to do redistricting and how that would increase the amount of democracy in the country or in a state?

Professor Dick Simpson:

Well, the reason it would increase democracy throughout the country. And I can't give this to you off the top of my head exactly on statistics, but there are only about 25 or 30 congressional races that are contested outside the primaries that as people fight in the primary. The race that's going on currently in the first congressional district is between a bunch of candidates running in the Democratic primary. It doesn't even matter whether the Republicans put a candidate on the ballot or not. There's no Republican who's going to win this all African American Ward on the south side of Chicago

Professor Floros:

Is this Bobby Rush's district?

Professor Dick Simpson:

It's Bobby Rush's district.

Professor Floros:

Yeah. Okay.

Professor Dick Simpson:

And there are other Danny Davis's district where UIC is the same way every time someone runs against Danny. And it doesn't do any good, particularly on the Republican side.

Professor Floros:

I am now in Danny Davis's district. I was redistrict into his district, so I don't know. He better watch out. I might be snapping at his heels soon.

Professor Dick Simpson:

Yeah, he'll take that into account. So redistricting, first of all, it protects incumbents. Secondly, it is for partisan advantage. And third of all, it has racial consequences, which is why the fight and the city Council is so bitter at the moment between different racial groups wanting the difference of essentially one seat. We did have an independent commission outside of the city government do a redistricting map, which was superior to either the Black map or the Latino map that are in contention in the Council. Some adjustments were needed in certain wards to make sure the community fit together right. But they held hearings all over the city. They allowed people to testify, and then they drew the boundaries. Independent commissions work in multiple states in the country, but at the moment, the great majority of states do gerrymander their districts, and they do it in ways for partisan advantage most of the time. And sometimes racial advantage; they do it too blatantly for racial advantage, the courts will usually throw out the map and then draw their own. Courts don't like to get involved in political matters, like where district lines should be. So it is a problem, and it becomes a systemic problem, because when you have a district that's only one party, that means that the most extreme voters in the party primary, think Trump Republicans, for instance, or Bernie Sanders Democrats, are going to be the ones that control the primary election, and that means you're going to get extremes in Congress with more polarization and no compromise and therefore gridlock and nothing done, which makes the public infuriated. They want this problem like immigration solved. I mean, think of all the DACA students on campus and others. There's no reason that the immigration problem shouldn't be solved except politics.

Professor Floros:

I mean, this is the common theme. We'll talk about a couple more issues, but the problem seemed to be structural. And in order to make changes, the current people in power have to agree to change the structure. And that doesn't seem like something that they're willing to do. People always ask me, like, can't they reform the Security Council so that they take away the veto? Sure, they could, but all the countries with vetoes would have to be okay and not veto that, right? So I feel like that's the situation we're in is that the system as it is set up and as it has evolved, works for the people in power.

So why would they make changes that would weaken their power?

Professor Dick Simpson:

For a very simple reason. One of the things I try in the book is to give examples of real life situations in Chicago and how we either have or haven't been able to overcome them.

Professor Floros:

Okay.

Professor Dick Simpson:

So I'll go back to the Harold Washington administration back in the 1980s. Harold Washington appointed an ethics Commission to figure out why don't we have some ethics laws and some good government ordinances that would control some of the corruption that we're facing and the other problems that are beyond just the simple corruption of bribery kind. And the Commission came out with a report. Here's what we should do. Harold signed an executive order that could implement some of it, but it couldn't implement all of it because it can only instruct administrative officials within the realm of the laws that exist. So they weren't able to pass an ethics ordinance. Come 1987, which happens to be the year in which the Mayor and the Alderman were going to be elected. Alderman David Orr puts essentially the Commission report in ordinance form into the Council. They had not had enough votes to move anywhere before. And because it's an election year, the aldermen have to vote. Are they in favor of ethics and good government or opposed to ethics and good government? The ethics ordinance passed. It was the first one in Chicago's 150 year history, but it passed because of timing, and it was pretty clear the voters would vote out most of the people who voted against an ethics ordinance. Some of the Ward committeemen Alderman were so powerful they couldn't even be voted out, even though the public thought that we should have an ethics ordinance. So when I advise groups, I often advise them to put up legislation at key points and to mobilize public opinion so that the politicians in power know that if they don't do X, they will be voted out of office. It's a little bit like governing corporations. When I was Alderman I figured out how to block redlining in Chicago, you simply control how corporations make profits. And since you're a government, you can easily do that. In our case for redlining, what we did was pass an ordinance that said we will only invest city money in the banks that don't redline, and all of a sudden all the banks got very socially conscious and suddenly they're giving loans in Woodlawn and North Lawndale and places like that. So with government, you can get it done. In some way structural problems are the easiest. And I'll give you an example. I list a whole bunch of structural changes like the Electoral College. Well, one way you could fix the Electoral College is to amend the Constitution, but you generally don't. That's such a hard process. It's not going to work. So what they have done is an interstate compact between States. Once they get to 270 electoral votes between them, they will all pledge to only give electors to whoever won the popular vote in the United States, not in their state. In the United States, the general popular vote. That's a workaround perfectly doable. I think they're about five States, six States short of what they need to sign the compact and get rid of the effects of the Electoral College, although we'll still have something called the Electoral College. So structural problems are you got to have enough of a support base in the electorate to force the politicians to do what you want. But it's not as difficult as some of the other problems. I mean, even income, racial inequality are solvable. All you have to do is essentially raise and change the tax rates and then you build up the middle class and the working class and the rest, but with social programs and education program, make education free and so forth, because you're tax rich and you can do it. But we don't have the consensus pulled around at a pointed way where we can actually force things like that. That takes a broader coalition of support over a longer period of time.

Music interlude: Baby, I'm Coming Home by Ryan Saranich

Professor Floros:

Welcome back to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. I'm Professor Floros, and I'm speaking today with political scientist Professor Dick Simpson. Another thought that I was having as I was reading your book was so many of the problems in America seem to come down to white supremacy. Maybe that's overstating it. But if you think about the Constitution itself, the Electoral College and the Senate, which is another thing you say

Professor Dick Simpson:

Is it's just undemocratic? Yeah, a little detail.

Professor Floros:

But those compromises, or maybe not the Electoral College, definitely the Senate, was so that the Southern States would sign the Constitution. Right? And it gave extra power to small States, even though, yes, there were small States in the north, too. But it's just like, why is that? So that the federal government couldn't end slavery easily or economic programs once the civil rights victories of the '60s, you could no longer keep African American kids from swimming in public pools. Well, we don't want to fund public pools anymore. Why do we care about religious schools? It's so that we could go to segregated schools in a legal way. I mean, it just seems like everything comes down to that. And I don't know how you build the multi-racial coalition that you talk about building for the election of Harold Washington. How do you do that when you have this big chunk of the population that has outsized amounts of power to say no? You know, you're right. We need to. We need to fund public services. We need to allow everyone equal chances of voting, et cetera.

Professor Dick Simpson:

So I end up making 25 recommendations, and one could make others. It doesn't really matter if you disagree with proposal three or proposal seven, if you get the general sense of what the 25 were trying to do. But to get them through, you have to have a social movement for democracy, somewhat like the civil rights movement. That is, there has to be a broad base really demanding the change and absolutely firm in their demands. But that, in turn, also requires that we know something about democracy. I've often joked with my UIC classes, well, democracy, that's a pretty good idea. Maybe we should try it, because we've never really quite gotten there.

Professor Floros:

Right.

Professor Dick Simpson:

And that's a two part aspect that has to change. The Athenians were convinced 2500 years ago that the only way you taught democracy was by practicing democracy. You went to the Pnyx in the assembly and you took your votes and decided whether to go to war with Sparta or whatever. You learn pretty soon how to discuss things, how to deliberate, how to vote, and what the consequences were if they made a bad decision as a government. So we need to, first of all, have more participatory democracy locally. And in Chicago what that means is having neighborhood government. And I go through a long thing about how that would actually work. At the national level we need deliberative democracy. So of all the experiments of deliberative democracy, I think the best one has been by a group of political scientists who got a bunch of Congressmen. I think it was nine or maybe it was 15 to agree to have a special kind of interaction with their constituents a decade ago. And what they did was they chose a random sample of the constituents. They then invited that random sample to participate in a specific meeting with a congressman. The random sample had to be at least 100 people from across their congressional district. And the meeting went on about 35 minutes. It was about hot topics like immigration and real bills that were pending in Congress. And the congressman would explain in a few minutes what the particular legislation was and what he was thinking, or he/she's thinking about the bill and would get the responses of the constituents who were representative of the broader congressional district. And both, certainly the political scientists were pleased, but the congressmen and the constituents who participated all thought this was a good exchange. They would do it again. They thought it was useful. It's an example of the kind of way there are a bunch of other ways of doing deliberation. We take as a model the Constitutional Convention for people who have read about it at all. They gathered for several months. They talked about things that came in with the Virginia and other plans to begin with, and then none of them could get enough votes to get adopted, and they'd make compromise that would satisfy a majority of delegates, and then they would change it again. And they came out with something that no one came in with in the beginning because they deliberated, they talked to each other, and they understood what the demands of the different constituencies and districts were. And we think the Constitution is a pretty good document. It lasted 250 years, and it seems to cover most things. It can be improved upon, which is why we do the amendments. But as a basic framework, it was a good idea, and it came out of deliberation. So what we want to do is construct a deliberation between constituents and representatives because the representatives have a real problem. Congressmen represents 750,000 people. There is no way for them to know what the interests and concerns and views of the constituents are. And the constituents show up with prejudices that is literally prejudgments. I like strawberry ice cream. You like vanilla ice cream. Trying to convince each other is not worthwhile. So we just go into our corners and have our ice cream. We need to have a

process that allows us to talk through what are the reasons for favoring policy A versus policy B, and maybe we'll come up with a new idea that's better than either of us had when we walked into the meeting. So that's the idea behind deliberative democracy. There are lots of different ways to practice deliberative democracy. We've proven with experiments for 30 years how to improve the process. But the key thing in the end is you have to legislate this as a matter of law. The neighborhood government concept, when I put it up for a vote in the City Council lost 44 to four. Patty Bauer said Chicago ain't ready for reform, and at least in 1979 that was true. Maybe now it isn't so true because we've done participatory budgeting and other things. Same thing nationally. We need to find legal ways to guarantee a certain level of deliberation that somehow involves constituents. It can't involve all of us being in government all the time. We need to find a new path, and the new path is done by walking it, not just by writing a theoretical document.

Professor Floros:

I like this idea. What are you envisioning as every bill, everybody goes home and does one of these things. How might that work in a practical way?

Professor Dick Simpson:

So the City Council votes on 2000 pieces of legislation a year. I think Congress for a while was introducing 20,000 bills a year, or at least in a two year session.

Professor Floros:

Sure.

Professor Dick Simpson:

So there's too much. And some of these bills are very lengthy. The environmental protection laws are usually more than 1000 pages and have a lot of scientific stuff in it about how many parts per billion of this or that gas should be in the atmosphere or the water or whatever.

Professor Floros:

Sure.

Professor Dick Simpson:

So you have to structure it to the key decisions, and you have to pick only a certain number of topics that you're going to cover. But it's pretty clear that some issues are probably more important than others.

Professor Floros:

Yeah. But with the complication of something like the Affordable Care Act, that sounds like something that definitely would have been way too complicated.

Professor Dick Simpson:

Not the basics. The basic principles of the Affordable Care Act are simple enough. Should the government have a system where poor people can get insurance in one way or another, it's not too hard to write that out. And to make it just the five or ten principles that are most important to the Affordable Care Act, the amount that it should be set at is a whole different. The minutiae is not what you need the constituent input on. What you need the constituent input on is what is the way this should be done in basic form.

Professor Floros:

But then you run into the issue we talked about earlier, which is money and politics. Right? So going back to the Affordable Care Act, insurance companies and pharmaceutical companies and all of these big money interests lobbied against it. And so, is the idea of having had these deliberative sessions kind of raising the stakes for the Legislator, that if they go with the money rather than the deliberative process, that their constituents will know about it and they will have consequences? Is that kind of the...?

Professor Dick Simpson:

Yeah. They'll get defeated in the next election. I have direct experience. When I was 44th Ward Alderman, my constituents chose members to be part of a Ward Assembly that met monthly, also had representatives from community

organizations. And each month we would meet, they had some committees to do some more in depth work. They would bring forward a proposal that I vote one way or another on redlining legislation or whatever. And out of seven years in which I had the functioning Ward Assembly, there was only one issue, and it wasn't in the Ward assembly. It was in the community zoning board. That was tricky because a particular conservative section of the community was afraid of a possible halfway house that would have been developed on a major street. It was a needed function city wide. It was needed for the community, but they didn't want it in their backyard. Sometimes that there might be one issue that's a little complicated to handle. My rule of thumb for that was I would not allow the Ward Assembly to override my conscience and judgment on a human rights issue. So if they say we should ban all Latinos from coming in the Ward, or Blacks or Poles or whoever I would not have gone along with. Of course, they never did anything that ridiculous.

Professor Floros:

Right. I wanted to talk to you about judges because I had Professor Chris Bonneau on the show a couple of weeks ago, and he has researched and written extensively on judicial elections and the benefits of judicial elections because people would have a voice in who the judges were. But you seem to favor merit selection and term limits for judges. So can you talk about why you think merit selection of judges rather than election of judges is the more democratic or better for democracy?

Professor Dick Simpson:

Yeah. So it differs a little bit where you live. If you live downstate in Illinois, you tend to know... not that many lawyers in your county. You know the lawyers, at least they have a reputation and you know what their reputation is as a good lawyer or a bad lawyer and so forth. So voting on judges there makes some sense because you have some ability to judge them. If, on the other hand, you live in Chicago, it makes no sense at all to vote for judges. There was one advantage. We did make one change. We went to sub-districts, which meant that they're basically racial areas. So if you came from the South Side, you'd be voting for a Black judicial candidate and you could make sure your race was represented on the bench. And since the bench was nearly all white and mostly men, the subdistricts did add some diversity to the court. But an example of why judicial elections is so bad in a place like Chicago is that the Republicans don't put up candidates for the General County Circuit Court broad county wide election because they can never get elected. So you got one party already capitulating. And that's true of most of the sub districts as well in Chicago. Then you've got the other problem that people know nothing about these lawyers who are running. Yes, the half dozen dozen bar associations all make endorsements, but in practice, you got a bed sheet ballot with 100 candidates on it, and 50 or more of them are judges and candidates for judge either for retention or to be elected for the first time. And you get weird outcomes, like women with Irish surnames are the most likely to be elected judge because the Irish vote coalesces in a nice way that kicks them over the top. And if they're women, they also get the feminine vote. So between the two, I'm not sure that's the best judicial qualification to be an Irish woman. Those are quirks. Maybe the Black man would have been a better or the Latino. So just the judicial system in Chicago. Anybody that's actually experienced the judicial system can be aware of how bad it is. And on the corruption site, Operation Gray Lord, which was the best investigation of our courts that has ever been done

Professor Floros:

In Chicago?

Professor Dick Simpson:

In Chicago. Okay, convicted 87 court personnel, including 13 judges, for fixing cases, including murder cases.

Professor Floros:

What?

Professor Dick Simpson:

So our system has improved since then, granted, but that's not a glowing endorsement for the fine job electing judges because all the judges were elected and the bailiff were patronage workers and so forth. It isn't a good system. Now, there are problems with some merit selection issues. But if you're choosing for an area like Chicago, merit selection makes a good bit more sense than just a plain vanilla election of judges. And in terms of term limits, one can argue what the term limit should be. I mean, here I am, 80 years old, retiring from the University, and one could say, well, I should have retired at 65 or 70 or some age. But term limits for a judge, that's a powerful position. It shouldn't really be a

lifetime appointment. Maybe if you're talking about Supreme Court judges, although I don't think it even applies there. I would prefer term limits on Supreme Court justices. But you might make the argument somewhere in the federal system about term limits. But for the ordinary judge in the ordinary court, the only issue is it should have the term limit be twelve years. Should it be what's the right limit; probably shouldn't be age. It should probably be how long you've served. Then they can go back into private practice and they can still be a lawyer. They can still... this isn't a death sentence. This is just you've served your term. And I'm in favor of term limits for all elected officials because my experience with Mayor Richard J. Daley, Mayor Richard M. Daley, Alderman Ed Burke and Mike Madigan, they differ. They aren't all corrupt. But I directly fought with Mayor Daley on the Council floor for eight years. Well, for six since then. He died. Then I fought with his successor for a while. But the longer you stay in office, in Richard J. Daley's case, there's no doubt he became a tyrant by the end. And Richard M. case, you might not use the word tyrant. You just say became autocratic, meaning they listen less and less to opposition points of view, are less willing to compromise. Everyone tells them they're perfect. They're a God. They should be. We're so grateful you're Mayor or whatever. Likewise with Eddie Burke. 50 years in the city Council is maybe too long. And same with Mike Madigan, who is the longest serving speaker of all state legislators in the history of the United States. And you can look at the corruption trials around Burke and Madigan and see why maybe giving them too much power for too long is not a good idea. So we try in the corruption book, *Corrupt Illinois*. We go through the different kinds of corruption in Illinois and Chicago just to give your listeners a couple of quick facts to underlying corruption. There have been 2200 corruption convictions since 1976 of public officials in Illinois, 1800 of them have been in the Metropolitan region.

Professor Floros:
Nice.

Professor Dick Simpson:
More than 200 have been in the suburbs and 60 different suburbs. So it's not all the bad city. Chicago is the most corrupt city in the nation or Metropolitan region. Illinois is the third most corrupt state in the country. We do have a few competitors that are sometimes out-distance us in the corruption area. So is corruption a problem? Yes. And the *Democracy Rebirth* book. I go further than just those kinds of corruption where people are convicted of those kinds of things. I end up talking about institutional corruption and ethical corruption. I try and go beyond all the stuff I've done before in writing to get to the whole range of the problem and hopefully the whole range of the solutions that I believe will come about if we can build the social movement to demand them.

Professor Floros:
Yeah, therein lies the rub. Is one of the next two books coming out not how to win an election, but *How to Start a Movement*?

Professor Dick Simpson:
No, unfortunately, the one that's coming out in September is the third revised edition of *21st Century Chicago*.

Professor Floros:
Okay.

Professor Dick Simpson:
And the one coming out a year from now is *Modern Chicago Mayors* from Harold Washington to Lori Lightfoot.

Professor Floros:
Well, since those are already slated for publication, maybe you should get working on *How to Start a Movement*. Okay. Anyhow, unfortunately, we're out of time and I just want to thank you so much, Dick, just for being so invested in UIC students, the institution, Chicago, and just being an example of what an academic can do to make the world a better place. So, thank you for talking to me today and thank you for your amazing career.

Professor Dick Simpson:
Thank you. It's been a pleasure to be with you again. And you'll just have to take over all my duties, Kate.

Professor Floros:

Oh, Lord. Professor Dick Simpson is a Political Science Professor at the University Of Illinois at Chicago, finishing up his 55th year as a professor. I was so pleased to get to speak to him one more time for the podcast. You've been listening to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. I'm Professor Dr. Floros. You can find me on Twitter @DrFloros. That's a wrap for the spring 2022 semester. Class dismissed.

Outro music: Three Goddesses by Third Age