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## Four ex-governors kick off political science conference

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Former governors of four states in Springfield Thursday for a national political science conference said that academics have much to offer government leaders, especially now.

But, said former Illinois Gov. Jim Edgar, it has to be put in a way that's understandable.

"Any help that a public official can receive from the academic world, I think, could be very positive," Edgar told reporters before a two-hour panel discussion at the Old State Capitol, "but it's got to be delivered in a manner that's ... relevant."

"You need to hang out with public officials" and maybe become part of the political process Edgar said. Plus, he recommended, when they give advice, academics should "keep it short."

Edgar, the Republican governor of Illinois from 1991 to 1999, was joined by former Vermont Gov. Madeleine Kunin, a Democrat who served from 1985 to 1991; former Maryland Gov. Parris Glendening, a Democrat who served from 1995-2003, and former Ohio Gov. Bob Taft, a Republican who was in office from 1999-2007.

Their panel kicked off the 10th Annual **State Politics and Policy Conference**, a three-day national event being held at the University of Illinois Springfield.

Kunin said she thinks educators must teach students about the real world.

"There's a tendency to say, 'We love policy, but we don't like politics,'" she said, "and politics is really the means to the end."

"The biggest challenge for young people today, and maybe not just young people, is to believe in the political system and that it works," she said. "It's so easy to learn the negative. Witness the trial going on today (of former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich). But we don't hear about the people who actually achieve things."

Taft raised the issue of the increasing influence of the federal government at the local level. He said "Washington is driving the train" even in connection with local schools.

Taft said he got his start in state government working for the Illinois Bureau of the Budget under Gov. Richard Ogilvie, who signed the first Illinois income tax into law.

"Ogilvie had great courage," Taft said. "He knew that he was taking a big political risk, but he also knew that in order to properly fund education and other important state government services ... it was needed."

"I would say that Governor Ogilvie really inspired me to pursue a career in state government."

Glendening taught political science at the University of Maryland for 27 years before being elected governor.

He said there isn't really such a difference between the academic world and the "real world."

"I would maintain if you're a good teacher and a good researcher, other than vocabulary and so on, there shouldn't be a great difference," he said.

He agreed that governors have hard choices to make in tough economic times. In six of his eight years as governor, Glendening said, Maryland had a budget surplus.

"Almost every morning, when I get up and look at the papers or watch the news, I feel a great sense of relief," he said.

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