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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Robert Allen (R)

125th District

Berks, Northumberland and Schuylkill Counties

1988 -2006

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Raymond J. Whittaker III (RJW): I'm here today with the Honorable Bob Allen who has represented the 125th Legislative District, which over time has encompassed parts of Berks, Northumberland and Schuylkill Counties. Representative Allen has started his career in 1989 and is finishing his career here in 2006. Representative Allen, thank you for being with us today.

The Honorable Robert (Bob) Allen (BA): Ray, my pleasure.

RJW: I'd like to start off and ask you about describing your early life growing up and what influence your family may have had on your future career as a public servant.

BA: Well first of all, I was raised in a small village, or borough, called Mechanicsville, Pennsylvania, just east of the city of Pottsville. I had a sister, and still do have a sister, Mary Anne, who is six years younger than me. My parents were in the funeral business and I grew up in that business. Over the years, I attended a three-room school house that had the first, in 1957, had the first TV in any public schools in Schuylkill County, but also had outside toilets. So, that was a little bit of a difference: very progressive in one way, very unprogressive in another way.

RJW: Did you always have political aspirations growing up?

BA: Well, my political aspirations started, believe it or not, just by chance. Directly across the street from me lived the Republican Committeeman in Mechanicsville

Borough and in – and I’m going to date myself here –in 1956, when Adlai Stevenson¹ was running against Dwight Eisenhower [President of the United States, 1952-1960] for President Eisenhower’s second term, the day before the election, the Committeeman came to me – Mr. Evans, Mr. Sam Evans – still remember him very well. He was an older gentleman, then, and he said to me that he would give me fifty cents to distribute literature to the six hundred homes in Mechanicsville Borough. And I delivered all the literature for Dwight Eisenhower and after that time period came about, I went home. And my father said, “Well, what were you doing this afternoon?” And I said, “I was out delivering literature for President Eisenhower for his election tomorrow.” I said, “Mr. Evans gave me fifty cents,” which, in 1956, was a lot of money. And my father said, “Well Bob, that’s a lot of money. I think you should return twenty-five cents of that to Mr. Evans.” He made me go across the street, but thank goodness, Mr. Evans wouldn’t take the quarter back (*laugh*).

RWJ: (*laugh*) What influenced you, then, to become a Republican?

BA: I think the family tradition. Mechanicsville Borough, to a large extent, was probably at that time seventy/thirty [percent] Republican. My parents were in business together and along with my uncle and my aunt and they were all Republicans. I probably followed that tradition. My grandfather, who I’m named after, was a Southern Baptist and, believe it or not, was a Republican instead of a Democrat. In 1956, you would have been a Democrat if you came out of the South, but he had moved North with the railroad

¹ Governor of Illinois, 1948-1952; Democratic Presidential Candidate, 1952, 1956 and 1960; U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, 1961-1965

companies and he had accepted the Republican philosophy. And that's why, I guess, I became a Republican.

RJW: Could you describe your education and then your career and experiences before coming here?

BA: Yeah. I was very fortunate. I went to a three-room school house, as I said, from first to seventh grade; two classes in each room. A school that had only ninety students in it. I had three excellent teachers, especially my sixth and seventh grade teacher which was a woman by the name of Myrtle Moyer. And then, I went onto the Pottsville School system; graduated from Pottsville High School. In 1963, from Lycoming College, [I] graduated with a degree in Business Administration, and then went on to Pittsburgh School of Mortuary Science to get my degree in Mortuary Science in Pittsburgh. [I] came back and went into the family business.

RJW: I found something; that you were also Deputy Secretary under the Thornburgh Administration [Richard L. Thornburgh, Governor of Pennsylvania, 1979-1987].

BA: That's sort of an interesting situation and it's one of the things that I've learned in my life. Myrtle Moyer, who was my teacher in that sixth and seventh grade class in Mechanicsville, always taught me that you sometimes you have to lose something to win something. And in 1982, I ran for the House in a seven person Primary. [I] was not the Republican endorsed candidate. [I] won that Primary and then lost to the Democrat

candidate Bill Baldwin [William E. Baldwin; State Representative, Northumberland and Schuylkill Counties, 1983-1988] in the fall because the Party was divided in seven different ways. That was 1982. I always had supported Governor Thornburgh and that goes back to the history of going to Pittsburgh. When he was in Pittsburgh as the Federal Prosecutor, I was in Pittsburgh going to school. I did get to meet him and then I came out and supported him in his campaign. And after I lost the 1982 election, he offered me a position in DEP [Department of Environmental Protection] here in Harrisburg. It was DER, [Department of Environmental Resources] at that time.

RJW: Yeah. Well, you talked about your first election. How about your first campaign as a winner?

BA: As a winner? It worked out that in 1988, the present holder of the seat, Judge Baldwin, who is now the President Judge of the Schuylkill County Courts, decided to run for that position as a judge and he was victorious. I then ran as the Republican candidate in a little different campaign. Matt Ryan, [Matthew J. Ryan; State Representative, Delaware County, 1963-2003; Speaker 1981-1983, 1995-2003] who was then the head of the Campaign Committee here for the Republicans in Harrisburg and the former Speaker, sent me a campaign manager by the name of Steve Dunkel. Steve Dunkel was running a campaign of not only my own, but of Russ Fairchild [Russell Fairchild; State Representative, Snyder and Union Counties, 1987-present] who was running against Snyder and Union County, at that time. They were both open seats. Steve Dunkel was a master politician. [He] still is today, works as a lobbyist for PSEA [Pennsylvania State

Education Association]. He made Russ and I walk in competition for week, after week, after week in the hot sun, all through the summer. About October 15, we were exhausted and he kept on challenging us back and forth. He would call me one day from Harrisburg and he would say, "Russ has hit three hundred more doors." At the same time, he was calling Russ Fairchild and saying, "Bob Allen hit three hundred more doors than you. He's ahead of you." He came to us on October 15, and he said, after they had done another survey, "Believe it or not, no matter what your opponent does now, he cannot beat you because you are so far ahead of him." And it worked out that way. Both Russ Fairchild and I came down here in the same class. We had a great deal of help from Representative Merle Phillips [State Representative, Montour, Northumberland and Snyder Counties, 1980-present] who had the District that just split ours and was right in the middle. He gave us a lot of guidance. I have to give a lot of credit, not only to Matt Ryan for sending Steven Dunkel in, but to Steve Dunkel and Merle Phillips for helping Russ Fairchild and Bob Allen come to Harrisburg.

RJW: Great story. So, why the House of Representatives? Why not any other office?

BA: Well, I held the Mayorship in Pottsville from 1976 to 1982. I think that was a great training tool for me. I was the youngest Mayor ever elected in the city of Pottsville. It had been previous Democrat Administrations there for twenty-five years and that challenge and learning process made me want to move on. When I was in high school and had the political blood running through me already, I had the feeling that if I could become the Mayor of Pottsville by the time I was sixty, that would be a great thing.

Then, I became the Mayor of Pottsville by the time I was thirty and so, that goal had already been reached. The challenges of the Mayor's job were really great, but then I wanted to move on to do something else. Unlike a lot of people, when I came in 1989 to start my role here as a State Representative, I had no other goals. I loved this job. It's been a great job. I didn't want to become a State Senator. I didn't want to become a Congressman. I just loved the job of State Representative because it kept you to the base of the sixty thousand people and you had daily action with those people. I felt, through my staff, who's been great help both at the state level here in Harrisburg and back in the District, that we'd been able to achieve and help people with little things and that's more important to me than legislation. Helping people with their social problems, with anything that they need, any type of assistance they need; that is a key and that was a key to my career.

RJW: So did you have a District office then in your—?

BA: In fact, I ended up having three District offices and as my District changed – it changed to a great degree. I had a District office in Pottsville which I've always maintained. I've had a District office in Hegins, Pennsylvania, because at the time I was elected, I represented western Schuylkill County, the City of Pottsville, and Northumberland County, the southern part of Northumberland County. So, it was key to have an office in the western end of the District, close to that Northumberland County area. I had a District office also in Pine Grove. As my District changed and times changed, I picked up an area in Berks County, lost Northumberland County area, and

then I had an office located with Dave Argall [David G. Argall; State Representative, Berks and Schuylkill Counties, 1985-2009; State Senator, 2009-present] and Senator Rhoades [James D. Rhoades; State Senator, Berks, Carbon, Lehigh, Monroe, Northampton and Schuylkill Counties, 1981-2009] in Hamburg.

RJW: Well, describe for me the 125th Legislative District. What types of people live there?

BA: It is a rather unique District in that I would say seventy percent of it is agricultural; twenty percent is the city of Pottsville, which is an urban area, and then there is the ten percent area that is mining, coal mining. Individual hard rock coal miners, anthracite people who work in independent mines. The last of the old breed. Really tough people, really hard working people and that is a great variance from most Districts. Most State Representatives either represent a suburban area, an urban area, or a farming area, separately, but my District is rather unique and, is still unique, in that it covers those four major areas. It runs from Klingerstown to northwestern Schuylkill County to Leesport in central Berks County, and that's a long ride. It's a seventy mile ride and there are no throughways going through Leesport and Klingerstown, so you have to ride the back roads.

RJW: Can you describe – you did a little bit, already –but, the relationship between yourself and your constituents? How do you reach those different dynamics of people?

BA: I think by seeing them on a regular basis. I ran a circuit ride program for most of my political career where I would go out every month, besides having the local offices, and they could come to and meet with me and I could go out and meet with them on a Saturday. I would hit each little village or town for thirty or forty minutes, so the constituents didn't have to drive to me. I would drive to them and it was very effective.

RJW: What type of constituent requests are most common in this type of area?

BA: Right now, because of 9/11, the urge to get birth certificates and identification certificates to get passports and everything that people need. That's the main – we probably do maybe thirty or forty birth certificates a week. Because I'm located in Pottsville, I not only do – and Pottsville is the county seat of Schuylkill County – I not only do birth certificates for my District, but when the people are going to the courthouse to get their passports, the Representatives from – and people from the Goodman [Neal Goodman; State Representative, Schuylkill County, 2003-present] District and the Argall District also come to my office. And Senator Rhoades does not have an office in Pottsville, he has his main office in Mahanoy City. So, anything they need, they naturally drive – at the price of gas today – the shortest distance and they come to my District. No matter where they're from, we serve them in Schuylkill County.

RJW: I know there's been some significant projects, economic development-wise in your District. Can you talk about those?

BA: Yeah. Yes, I can. That's probably my proudest achievement in one specific area. I have been very involved with economic development and probably was the – this was my lead in the delegation, representing the Schuylkill County Delegation. Each of us had a different role. I was very involved in the development of High Ridge Park which is a large, twelve hundred acre park on Route 81; the Interstate route in Schuylkill County. We have five major facilities there now [and] have another one coming which I can't release the name of. But Sears has over three hundred people in a warehouse there. Lowes Corporation was the first corporation to come to the site. They have roughly around six hundred and fifty workers. The Wegman Corporation out of Rochester, New York, a dynamic full marketing chain that's very up scale has three hundred and fifty workers. And the Wal-Mart Corporation just built a frozen food distribution center that's in the process of hiring now and when they are finished, they'll have over seven hundred workers. So we have about twenty-two hundred workers in that area. The reason that's so important to Schuylkill County is that when I was a young man living in Mechanicsville Borough, approximately twelve to twenty percent of the people in my county – because it was a coal county and coal was down – were unemployed. There are a lot of parents of the boys and girls that I went to school with that didn't have jobs or their mother's had to go out into the silk mills and the garment industry to work to support the family. That unemployment rate, which was twelve to twenty percent at that time, has now dropped because of the work of a lot of good people and economic development to 5.4 percent. It's a tremendous change. They're good paying jobs and we even got the Yuengling Brewery in Port Carbon to expand and create more jobs there and

keep that product on the market. I'm not doing an advertisement for Yuengling but I do like their Lager.

RJW: *(laugh)* You mentioned being part of the Schuylkill County Delegation. Could you say who were the other members that served with you and what other issues you covered?

BA: Yeah. Believe it or not, I served with some great people and am serving with some great people now. In the 123rd district, E.J. Lucyk, [Edward J. Lucyk; State Representative, Schuylkill County, 1981-2002] who was a Vietnam Veteran and a Democrat colleague of mine, did an outstanding job on veterans' issues. He was very progressive, protecting veterans' rights. He was a Bronze Star winner and he was the epitome of protecting veterans' rights; Vietnam War veteran, great person, great individual and the greatest crossword puzzler I have ever seen. He was so bright and very intelligent and a great athlete when he was in high school, but he did a lot of good things for the veterans across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The second one is the person that replaced him. Neal Goodman who has been here for the last four years and was a staff member on the Democrat Committee before that. Neil is a very progressive person [and] has worked a lot with me on economic development issues. And then, Dave Argall, who is the Majority Whip for – just re-elected and I'm very proud of him. Dave has been a great person for the environmental community, but he has been a great leader in our Caucus and I have a great deal of respect for him. The other – on the other side of the aisle, Senator Rhoades, across the hall, has been here twenty-eight years now, I

believe, representing Schuylkill County in the Senate and he's done a great job as the Education Chairman.

RJW: Well, let's go back to talking a little bit about campaigns. How did your first campaign compare to your campaigns later on? Were there any differences? Similarities?

BA: Yeah, I think the great change has been the media. The involvement of the media and Schuylkill County is a hot bed of politics and always been that way. Schuylkill and Delaware County were infamous for their war boards. The Party boss' running the machine. I was probably the "break out" from that, the first break out from that because I was probably a very independent Mayor. [I] worked with Democrats as well as Republicans on issues because I had to because the city of Pottsville registration-wise was Democrat. The campaigns, I think, were smaller-time rallies. You would end up going to each municipality throughout the District making speeches that were covered by the local radio stations in 1989 and the local newspapers. Now, because the advancements in TV, most of the coverage is gone to political ads. The radio stations and the TV stations and the newspapers, if you're lucky, will cover you the last week of the campaign and that's a major change that I've seen grow over the past eighteen years. The media - and I'm not saying this in any negative way - but the media now is more worried about collecting the dollars from the advertising than they are presenting the news.

RJW: So, you had a fairly good relationship with the media while you were in office?

BA: Yeah. I've had a great relationship with the media. I'd been very forthright. Sometimes they didn't like what I said. They editorialized, you know, against some of my positions, but they were – they have always been generally fair to me and I have no complaints.

RJW: Well do you remember what your first impressions were of the House when you came here for the first time?

BA: Oh, I'm going to tell you something that I'm going to lead off my goodbye speech with on Tuesday. The day before I became a Member of this House, I knew what seat assignment I had. I went up to the House Floor and I sat in that seat for twenty-five to thirty minutes. [I] looked at that great mural on the front wall and looked at the people who had been Members of the House that were on that mural and realized how lucky a guy I was to be in a position to serve. I sat in that chair and I thought it would be wonderful if I could serve here three or four terms and I was praying that that would happen. I was very fortunate enough to serve for nine terms and I'm going to comment a little on that in my retirement speech because that Swearing-In that first day was very, very emotional for me. I hope the retirement speech isn't going to be as emotional, but I'll still be feeling it inside.

RJW: Were there any Members that mentored you, early on, when you came here?

BA: Yeah, I think I've already mentioned that Representative Merle Phillips was a big key. He's been my friend here for eighteen years. There was another gentleman, a fellow by the name of Sam Hayes [Samuel E. Hayes, Jr.; State Representative, Blair, Centre and Huntingdon Counties, 1971-1992; State Secretary of Agriculture, 1997-2003] who was the Majority Whip. The lead line on that is that Sam Hayes was always telling freshman Members, "If you don't know how you're going to vote, follow my light and you'll always be right." And it was right because Sam Hayes' District and my District were similar in so many ways. So, he was a guiding light or guiding star to me during that time period. And I would discuss issues with Sam Hayes and Merle Phillips and a few other members. Karl Boyes, [State Representative, Erie County, 1981-2003] who was a good friend of mine, who I had worked with during my time at the Thornburgh Administration as a Legislative Liaison and Deputy Secretary. No, they gave me a lot of good hints of the direction I should go.

RJW: Now, being here, as you said, for nine terms, have you had the opportunity to mentor anyone else?

BA: I tried to suggest to people only. I'm a pretty sit-back, laid-back guy. When I see somebody I think stepping over the boundaries a little bit, I try to pull them aside and talk to them and explain to them that maybe they should understand that sometimes their views – they may feel very strongly about – but there maybe somebody on the other side that may feel totally different on the issue. And neither one of them may be totally right.

RJW: Now, getting into your legislation a little bit. Since you served here such a long time, how do you work with both Democrats and Republicans to resolve legislative issues – the idea of consensus?

BA: Consensus is the whole key here. That's what I think every Member has to learn when they come here, originally. For the first time, they have to step forward and say to themselves, "Well I'm not always going to be right." We just talked about that a little bit earlier. Or, "I'm not going to get everything I want so I have to compromise." The Members who are most successful here are the people that are willing to work with compromise and understand it. I have a great deal of respect for all two hundred and two other members of this House. I've had some absolutely, tremendously tough, political philosophy fights with some of my colleagues, but I always left it on the Floor. Probably ended up going out to dinner with them the same night and we never held a grudge. I think that's very important. Myrtle Moyer, who was that teacher of mine in sixth and seventh grade, I can always remember one thing she said and she was a great teacher. I learned so many things and so many values off of her. She said, "Remember Bob," – and she would say this to the whole class – "remember that your adversary one day, maybe your friend the next." So, just remember how to treat people and do that and that's a big key.

RJW: Could you comment on some of the Party Leadership that you have served under and served with throughout the years?

BA: Yeah. I already commented on Sam Hayes because I followed his light; because it was always right. He was a great Whip and that was his job, to keep people in line. I have the utmost respect for Matt Ryan, as Speaker of the House and Leader. I hope I served him well because he was a brilliant man, a fair man, and he had the perception of knowing when to act in the right way, which is a key and a gift that most people don't have. Ryan and I had some philosophical differences and I can remember one or two days when I was not going to vote the way he thought the Caucus should vote, that I was summoned to the office. He would do it very subtly and he would say, "Now, I'd like you to look at this point, this point, this point and that point." Matt Ryan never said, "You're going to do this." He said, "I'd like you to think this way and think of how this is going to affect the Caucus," and most times, and especially in my early years, he was very right. But, he always had the tolerance to understand that I had to vote my District sometimes, when you would normally not be in line with the Party.

RJW: Did you ever run for a Leadership post yourself?

BA: I did in – I guess now I'm dating myself – 1998. Don Snyder [Donald Snyder; State Representative, Lehigh County, 1981-2000] from Lehigh County whose a good friend of mine, now, and I ran for the Whip post. Don Snyder won in a very, very close election. I'm not going to – let's say it was within two votes. I thought, at that time, that was a situation that might have turned my career in a negative manner because I lost. I'm very happy that I didn't win that post at that time. There's another comment that I would like

to make. I was very fortunate when I came into the House. I sat next to John Perzel [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1979-present; Speaker, 2003-2006] for four years while he was beginning his ascent to Leadership. See, one sixty and one sixty-one were on that Floor and we were sitting right next to each other and the first day of regular work – I can remember the first day I came in, John Perzel came in with a stack of letters this high. Must've had two hundred and fifty letters and they were addressed to his constituents and he was writing personal notes on them and I said to myself, "This guy is crazy. You know, how can he possibly write a letter to every constituent?" But that showed, that also showed the foresight that he had and the leadership abilities he had. He knew what he had to do, representing Philadelphia and basically being a Republican in a Democrat district. He knew what he had to do to work hard and to have the feeling. John Perzel and I are very close political allies. And during my Primary election, which I lost, some people pinned me against the wall because I was close to John Perzel, but I'm very proud to say that John Perzel and I have been friends and allies, politically, here in Harrisburg. And we will be friends and allies until I end up going to the great beyond.

RJW: Well let's look at your legislation. What legislation or issue do you feel were your most important?

BA: Well, I think, as issues, the 1995-1996 PACE [Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly] Bill was a very key bill [House Bill 544, Act 134 of 1996]. It was the reauthorization of PACE and that program and it was an idea that we needed to strengthen that program. I have a large senior citizen population and that's why it was a

big key, but you can talk about little things, too. I had a bill called The Small Potato Bill [House Bill 2008, Act 37 of 1996] and you'd say, "Now, why would Bob Allen get involved in a bill that was titled, 'The Small Potato Bill?' Well, I have the second largest potato producer in Pennsylvania in my District. In every other state in the country, he could sell his potatoes in packages of less than five pounds, but he could not sell them in Pennsylvania in packages of less than five pounds. If he did, if he wanted a package of – a small package of three potatoes that was three pounds of potatoes, it was against the state law. This was hurting his market growth and competition in Pennsylvania. So, I worked with the Agricultural Department and people in the Agricultural Committee and we finally were able to achieve, and we got, the Small Potatoes Bill. So, now you can sell packages of potatoes at any weight you want as long as you meet the agricultural standards. I guess the other achievement that I like is the one that just passed, that the Governor just signed several days ago, and that was the Workman's Compensation Reform [House Bill 2738, Act 147 of 2006]. It was the first time we could ever get the trial lawyers and the Pennsylvania Chamber of Commerce in the same room together to work out a bill. They did a tremendous job of doing the first draft and then bringing it to the committee. The Vice Chairman of the Labor Committee on the Democrat side, Todd Eachus [State Representative, Luzerne County, 1997-present] just worked his – along with me, as I was the Chairman of the Republican side of that labor issue – we reached reform. It's going to speed up cases, workmen's compensation cases, throughout Pennsylvania and helps two groups of people; the employers, because it speeds up the cases and they know that time is money to business people and they need the cases resolved quickly; and also, the people that were either going to get the entitlement

through workmen's compensation or weren't. They are going to find out a lot quicker, and they're going to find out a lot quicker today whether they're going to get their settlement that they think is needed. It's a great bill. It's the first workman's compensation bill in Pennsylvania history that ever passed unanimously in the House and the Senate. So, I think that's a good bill when that happens with a record of workmen's compensation reform over the last sixty years.

RJW: Another notable Act that you passed was the Shaken Baby Syndrome Bill [House Bill 2196, Act 176 of 2002].

BA: Yes.

RJW: Could you talk a little bit about that?

BA: I was going to leave that to last, but this is one of the situations where a constituent brought this problem to me. A woman by the name of Sara Minnich from Tower City came to me and said that there was a problem in their family and that they had a child, one of their grandchildren, who was suffering from Shaken Baby Syndrome because of an incident where one of the family members shook the child and caused a problem and caused major damage to the child. We believed, and she believed, that this was an education problem in Pennsylvania. That most parents or people that are surrounded with babies didn't have an idea that if you took a child between the ages of birth and two years of age and were shaking the baby very hard, it could physically harm the mental and

physical dexterity of a child. Because we were able to get this bill passed with a lot of good cooperation from everyone, we now have a program in each hospital in Pennsylvania. It educates the mother, the father and any of the other relatives that are with the parents, that before they leave the hospital, it is explained to them how important it is to understand that you cannot shake the baby's head or grab the baby by the arms and shake. It also gives the parents the opportunity to explain it to the babysitter that if the child is crying for a long period of time, that they cannot – to try to make the baby stop crying – that they cannot shake the child because that can cause internal damage for the rest of the child's life. It was a great challenge. We had a great deal of cooperation from Penn State University and a few of the doctor's at the Hershey Medical Center. They came to testify in front of the committee. It took about eight months to get the legislation through, but it was a great success and has been a great program and, believe it or not, according to the records now in Pennsylvania, Shaken Baby Syndrome has been reduced by about seventy-five percent. So that's a big step, but that was all from one proud constituent; Sara Minnich, [of] Tower City, Pennsylvania, stepping forward and doing that and that made the big difference.

RJW: A resolution that you seemed to offer as a theme throughout most of your career, has been Unity Day. What can you tell us about Unity Day?

BA: I am a conservative, but I am a moderate conservative and I come from a community that has a great difference and variance of ethnic backgrounds, racial backgrounds, religious backgrounds. We have a mosque in my district. We have numerous Catholic

churches. We have a synagogue in my home town and the variance of ideas and concepts by different people – I really believe this is what America is all about. This is what Pennsylvania is all about, since we are the Keystone State and that’s why I offered that Unity Day resolution every year. Ethnic groups from throughout Pennsylvania, from throughout all the United States, have settled in Pennsylvania but nowhere more strongly than in the northeast area of Pennsylvania; in the coal regions where different miners from all European areas – we now have a larger Latino population that is coming to our area and that’s the idea of Unity Day. Tolerance; tolerance is the key word; tolerance of others.

RJW: Well, I would like to know your thoughts about some of the hot ideas going around the Legislature, like the property tax reform and the gaming legislation. What are your thoughts about those?

BA: I voted, I was the only one from Schuylkill County – of the whole delegation – that voted against gaming. My principle was not that I was against gambling, per se, but I thought it was going to be a disaster and it’s taken – they were supposed to be up and running a year and a half ago (*laugh*). Last week, the first casino opened. It’s been drudgery. I commend the Gaming Board. I think the members of that board have done a tremendous job, but it has been a terrible task and we have not adjusted to that program as well as Las Vegas has and the state of Nevada. Maybe if we would have taken their program directly and instituted it, since they’ve been in the business for over sixty or seventy years, it would have been alright. That area, I think the new Legislature will re-

visit, re-visit, and re-visit, changing the laws. The property tax situation, especially in my area, and I can speak to my area. I had Sam Rohrer [Samuel E. Rohrer; State Representative, Berks County, 1993-present] who had a philosophy of spreading the cost out through a sales tax bill in my area and in my District and we had a big turnout. We had over five hundred and thirty-seven people there. Discussions went on. It was not successful when we voted in this present House. I think that the Legislature will be re-visiting this next year. I think the Governor and the Legislature have to sit down and compromise on this issue. I think Governor Rendell [Edward G. Rendell, Governor of Pennsylvania, 2003-2011] has an idea that he has to sit down and maybe his program and ideas and maybe some of the Legislators can be melded together and then we'll have a successful program. It's absolutely necessary and it's critical for people in northeastern Pennsylvania because of the number of senior citizens that we have.

RJW: I don't believe one single issue brought together more heated debate and media attention than the Hegins Pigeon Shoot which resides in your District. What can you tell us about that?

BA: There is nothing that I can remember that has created more stir in my District or the Districts located in that area or heat and debate on the Floor of the House than the Hegins Pigeon Shoot. Since I've been here, it has been voted, I think sixteen or seventeen times. I defended the Hegins Pigeon Shoot since I was elected to office and probably if I had not won those votes by defeating the ban on the shoot, I probably wouldn't have been here, especially the first two or three terms. I'm a member of the NRA [National Rifle

Association]. I believe in hunting. I believe that you should allow people in areas of the state to do what they want and not take away their personal rights. The Hegins Pigeon Shoot has been going on since, well, has been going on since 1935. They're not doing it in Hegins Park but they're doing it in Valley View Park, right now, three miles down the road on every Labor Day. I have supported my animal rights programs and bills in this Legislature, but I think this is one area that they've really stepped over the boundaries and are really trying the first step in banning hunting in this state. I am an avid sportsman, believe in it, and I've defended it. So have all the other members of the Schuylkill County delegation. In fact, I can relate one story when Representative Lucyk and I were on the Floor and it was coming up for another vote and he said, "You can get up and talk on it. I'm not going to talk on it today because I don't feel it's necessary." And I said, "Fine." "Everybody in my Caucus," he said, "knows how I feel on it. I spoke in Caucus about it." Then the sponsor of the bill got up and by accident, and I say by accident, called everybody in Schuylkill County barbarians. Well, he leaped to the microphone (*laugh*) and his carotid arteries were (*laugh*) almost coming out of his skin and he went into one of the greatest tirades or positive tirades as far as I was concerned that I've ever seen. We were probably going to win by four or five votes at the most. The last time it had been ninety-nine, ninety-nine. We won, I think, about one hundred fifty-two to fifty-two and that taught me a lesson and it teaches everyone a lesson on the Floor. When you get up and you are debating, make sure you're not going to insult anybody's constituency and unfortunately the person who did that on the Floor of the House lost the vote tremendously that time. As of the shooting of this piece right now, there is a bill in for another vote on the Hegins Pigeon Shoot and, believe it or not, I don't

think we are going to see it this session. Most Members would come to me and say, “Bob, why do they continue to do this? Why? Why? I’m voting with you, but why doesn’t this issue go away?” So, this last week on the voting docket in the Caucus it was mentioned that there is the possibility that there is another pigeon shoot amendment and the only thing you heard across the whole Caucus was a groan. *(laugh)* “Here we go again. Another four hour debate on a pigeon shoot that doesn’t affect me one way or another if I live in Westmoreland County, or Montgomery County, or Erie County.” And I don’t think we are going to see that vote this time. We’ll let it to the new Representatives to solve that problem.

RJW: Another important local issue that you had was the AMP and AlliedSignal situation in 1998. I wanted to quote a news source that said that it was one of the most difficult votes you ever had as a Legislator. Why was that?

BA: Well, the situation was that there was going to be a merger. There was a great chance that jobs were going to be moving out of my District into other Districts. That merger – you never know once corporations merge whether it’s going to be for the positive or the negative for your area. I have been fortunate that when that took place, even though AMP moved out of Tower City, they moved down the road a few miles, my workers are still working in that plant, in fact in a much newer plant and much more constructive. That was a very tough issue. It’s also a tough issue because when mergers take place, I don’t think government should be involved, but it’s a very tough thing when you’re going to see people in your District lose jobs or how you are going to vote on that

issue. I think government should stay out of business and business should stay out of government, but that was a tough issue. Very, very tough.

RJW: Well, since you will be leaving at the end of this Session, is there any thing you would like to see passed or that you may pass onto someone else to get passed?

BA: I would. We're working on some UCC [Uniform Construction Code] reforms in the House on the building codes. Probably the worst bill that was ever passed five and a half, six years ago, was the Uniform Construction Code which made all municipalities fall under the same law. A friend of mine who serves on the Labor Committee with me, Dan Surra, [State Representative, Clearfield and Elk Counties, 1991-2008] who is one of the few people to vote against it, continually reminded the committee members and all the Members of the House when any UCC bill would come up how stupid everybody else was when they voted for that bill. We've gone through phases of that bill. I have a bill in the Senate right now in that last three days that is probably going to come back across and we're going to probably be voting Monday or Tuesday – it's House Bill 881 [Act 157 of 2006], and we'll see if it passes or not. We'll see if it even gets out of the Senate to get here, but I think we are going to be revisiting the Uniform Construction Code until the Legislature goes out of business because every municipality has a different idea on how they should allow their building codes to be. And I, in a discussion with Secretary Schmerin, [Stephen M. Schmerin, Department of Labor & Industry] just this morning, we both agreed that the state went too far in their allocation of the program and I had voted for it, so I can take part of the criticism there.

RJW: Well, is it frustrating, at times, when you've had, especially, a primary bill that doesn't get the deserved attention that you think it should?

BA: I think so, but I think its part of the process. I've seen some Members put a bill up; it takes eight to ten years to get it passed. I have a lot of respect for people who even have different philosophy than me. One of the gentlemen who I have a great deal of respect for is Denny O'Brien [Dennis M. O'Brien; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1977-1980, 1983-present; Speaker, 2007-2008]. Probably, philosophically, his District in Philadelphia and my District in Schuylkill County are probably so far apart, but he has a cause, a pet cause, which I think is a great cause. It's helping children with autism and he was on the Floor today, before I came for this interview, and until I started to realize how many problems there were with autism, I didn't understand the importance of the legislation and more of the funding that this administration and previous administrations hasn't given. I support him. I know it's going to be an on-going battle for him, but I think, in the long run, he will be successful.

RJW: Could you describe some of the important issues or aspects of your committee work? Especially your Chairmanship?

BA: Yeah, I'll give you a few insights of being a Chairman. A Chairman's job, I think, , today, to be a good Chairman or to try to be a good Chairman, is to be fair and balanced. I've been accused by some of my conservative colleagues on my side of the aisle of being

too fair or too open with the Democrat Members of the [Labor Relations] Committee. When the Democrats controlled the Committee, almost always only Democrat bills came out. When Republicans controlled the Committee, only Republican bills came out. When I became the Labor Chairman, I realized that all good thoughts, and I realized this a long time before, don't come only from Republicans or don't only come from Democrats. So I tried to open the committee up and to take the best bills and best thoughts from both the Republican Members and the Democrat Members which we could reach a consensus on. I was not going to vote a bill, or try to vote a bill out of committee that was going to fail to get out of committee. Some of my colleagues pushed very hard on the Republican side to get the Right to Work Bill out of committee. Philosophically, I probably am in agreement, but when I went to the sponsor of the bill, I said, "You have to get the other Members to vote, the other fifteen members of the Republican side to vote with it." He could only get seven or eight Members and none of the Democrat Members were going to vote for it. So, I knew it wasn't going to pass, so I wasn't going to bring it up. Now, he became very frustrated, but it was his job to put the coalition together that was necessary. We had some things on the other side that were things that I, as the Chairman, they were very liberal and I couldn't vote for and I wouldn't. As the Chairman, I had the prerogative of not bringing them up, but I must say that we were very fair. We did get Democrat bills out of committee – Representative Goodman, Representative Ramaley [Sean M. Ramaley; State Representative, Allegheny and Beaver Counties, 2005-2008] – that became law and got out of the House and through the House and I can't –once it gets out of the House, I can't control what the Senate is going to do about it. I have had very good rapport across the aisle with Senator Scarnati [Joseph B.

Scarnatti, III; State Senator, 2001-present; President Pro Tempore, 2007-present] and Senator Gordner [John R. Gordner; State Representative, 1993-2003; State Senator, 2003-present] who have both chaired the Labor Committee while I was there. I've great rapport with the Republican Leadership in the Senate. I consider myself a very lucky person to have the committee. It's been a great challenge to me and I think we've tried to do it in as a bi-partisan manner as we could.

RJW: You were also a Sub-Committee Chair, on two occasions, with the Economic Development and Financial Services and Banking. How does that differ from being—?

BA: Well it's a big difference. You're on the other end of the spectrum. I have to explain, to be very fair: when I became the Labor Chairman, [the] Speaker of the House came to me and said to me, "You're a person of moderation even though you're a conservative and understanding the position we are in, would you please take this Committee?" And I said you know, "You want me to be the Labor Chairman?" He said, "Yeah, I want you to be the Labor Chairman because I think you can hold the tone of the committee down." And we were able to do that. Before I became the Labor Chairman, I was on the Economic Development and Commerce Committee which is my bailiwick, which I liked. Job creation was a big key to me, especially back in Schuylkill County, and I developed a great deal of rapport with the banking industry, a great deal of rapport and creating jobs with working on the Commerce and Economic Development Committee. Those Chairmanships were key to bringing jobs to Schuylkill County because to create wealth and building, you not only need bankers to help in the

construction, you also need people who, in the local area, want to spur and build growth. And to do that, we had to put those together. I liked to do that and I didn't care; I worked on projects across the state with different Members and it was a very, very interesting time period in my life, you know, to serve on that committee. Then a total change: leaving Economic Development and coming over to Labor.

RJW: Now you've been in the minority early on and the majority for the last few terms. What role does the amendment process play?

BA: I think the amendment process plays a much bigger role now than it did in the past. I think, in the early years of being in the – when I was in the minority, the chances of getting an amendment passed were very little. And a lot of people out there probably wouldn't understand when they hear this, sometimes you can take a whole bill and make it an amendment and insert it into another bill or you can take that amendment and gut the bill and put your whole bill in. Most of the times, it's just supplementing and adding. I like the process, but I think it can go overboard. I've sat on that House Floor when there had been eighty or ninety amendments on a bill and really, you knew that once the bill passed, even if thirty of those amendments went in, the chances of going from the House to the Senate and coming back in any shape or form, were very, very poor because they were going to change it in the Senate some way. And vice versa, if they sent us a bill loaded down with amendments, we would change it over here.

RJW: And it would have also been in that time period – been through quite few budget processes.

BA: Yes, Yes.

RJW: It's always a tumultuous time in the House.

BA: Tumultuous time, the worst was 1991. I have a lot of stories I can tell you about that but I must say, that there's a gentleman in the House by the name of Gaynor Cawley [State Representative, Lackawanna County, 1981-2006], from the Wilkes-Barre area; probably should have been on TV with Jonny Carson. One of the greatest personalities I've ever met. One of the funniest guys I ever met and the only thing that got me through the 1991 budget crisis, which lasted until mid August, was his ability when we were breaking the Floor to go back in the smoking room and watch the Gaynor Cawley show as he would sit there and tell joke, after joke, after joke. He turned people who were, you know, really down because it was a long drag out process, he could change their sense of humor and you could go back on the Floor and start to deal with things again. That 1991 crisis caused a major tax increase in Pennsylvania. It was probably the most devastating thing to the economy. I don't blame it on anyone. I don't blame the people who voted against it or for it, but it was a situation where we were over spending. I think in the future, the year 2006-2007 has been a pretty good year. I worry about the 2007-2008 budget which is coming, when I will not be here, because of the tremendous amount of

Medicaid funding that is going to be necessary. I think the Governor and the House and the Senate have a big job in front of them and there's a big challenge there.

RJW: Well, throughout your tenure, could you comment on some of the changes that you've seen in the House and in the processes?

BA: I think, first of all, and I sit here at sixty-one, okay, a lot different than I sat here at forty-three. I think there are a lot more younger Members. They have a lot of great ideas. There were a lot of bright people when I came here. There are a lot of bright people, they're only a lot younger, now. When I came here at forty-three, I was probably one of the younger people here, believe it or not. Now at sixty-one, I'm leaving [and] I'm certainly one of the older people here. I think younger people have great ideas; these people are very articulate. Sometimes they're a little overzealous, but that's youth. I was the same way. I did some wild things when I was Mayor when I was thirty years old, but it doesn't hurt, as long as they learn from their mistakes. If you don't learn from your mistakes, well, you know, how can I say that you won't prosper very long in politics.

RJW: How about the institution of technology and laptops and cell phones and BlackBerries? What has that done to the process?

BA: When I went to – in 1983 – to DEP [Department of Environmental Protection] for the first time, or DER, whichever you wanted to call it, I went into my office that day in the Executive Suites and they had a so-called new PC. Well, right now, if you look at

that that PC, you would call it barbaric, you know, or Stone Age. The things that they've done with technology. The placing of laptops on the Floor, taking away all that ridiculous paper that we had to put up with, all that technology is great. The only thing I worry about it: every once in awhile, there's a glitch that happens and somebody misses something or somebody doesn't insert something in the right place, and then we have to go back and over it. But the amount of knowledge you have to know as a State Representative today is five-fold from when I came here, because the world has speeded up. The one thing I try to explain to high school students, when I go in the classes, is it's no longer competition between Philadelphia County, Erie County, Allegheny County, or Luzerne County. You're not in competition with Pennsylvania. You're not in competition with the forty-eight states. You're in competition with the world. So as economic development processes have to work, government needs this technology, but so do businesses, and we have to be as progressive as we can to create jobs and keep good jobs here.

RJW: What does that do for constituent service? Being that you can always be contacted at any moment?

BA: I think it's better for the constituent, but I think sometimes the constituents also become dependant on their E-mailing you instead of making personal contact. I've always liked personal contacts. I receive a lot of E-mails. I'm more of a telephone return man. Normally, I try to use the tone of people's voice to pick up how they really feel. This is really a hot button issue with them or whether it's just, "Oh well, the neighbor

down the street asked me to E-mail you, too;” you know, when you get one of those five or six hundred E-mails from the same area. But that’s why I like the personal contact, and after about five or six phone calls of those four hundred E-mails, I can feel the tone of, “Oh my goodness, he called me back and my friend asked me to E-mail him, but I really don’t know what this issue is.” You know, you get those feelings.

RJW: Well, you’ve alluded to it earlier on in the interview when I said about 9/11 and Pennsylvania has had a lot of recent flood crisis’s and things like that. What role does the House play in those types of situations?

BA: Well, we have to step to the plate. Recently, even take this summer, there was a large rain storm that came right up the East Central part of the state. [It] affected Lebanon, Dauphin, Schuylkill County, up into Luzerne and further up into Columbia County in the Susquehanna and Schuylkill river basins. And FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] and the State Legislature took steps to fund necessary things that local communities could get back on.

RJW: Well, could you explain your relationship with lobbyists, then? I’ll change some gears here and talk about some of your reflections.

BA: I would like to state to everyone that I think it is absolutely necessary for lobbyists to exist, or government relations people, whichever term you like to use. I think they give you insight into issues. Sure, you know, unless you’re the dumbest guy on the

block, that when they're coming in, they're citing their point of view, but you also know there is a good chance the person that has the opposite point of view is going to visit your office, too. Then you're going to have to make a decision on where your values are with the best information possible. I think lobbyists provide that information or they at least provide their point of view and you can weigh it against someone else's point of view. That goes back even to the pigeon shoot. The animal rights people have their own groups here. Heidi Prescott is probably the most famous animal rights protester in America today and I have to contend with her. Those types of issues, it goes from every issue that's here; every support group, every health group, every insurance group, every development group, they all have lobbyists. You just have to accept that, but I use it in a positive manner instead of a negative manner. I think the connotation from the press has been blown up that, you know, lobbyists just, they take you to dinner and it sways your vote. Ninety percent of the times I've gone out to dinner or sat down with people, lobbyists, they've never asked me for anything except to listen to their position. And I wouldn't do it anyway, they know that.

RJW: Well, let's see. What aspect of your job as a Representative have you enjoyed the most?

BA: I think the individual meeting with constituents. My kids kid me and call me – my kids, they're twenty-eight and thirty now – but they always used to kid me in my earlier career. They called me the “Hi, how are you, man?” because I would pass somebody on the street, and my mother was insistent – and father – because we were in the funeral

business, that you never passed anyone by without saying hello to them. If they didn't want to say hello to you that was fine. That's one great thing my parents taught me, God bless their souls. They passed on, but they were great. They taught me communication by trying to open up and be friendly to everybody. I like constituents. I like talking one on one with people, a lot more than talking over a phone, and I hate the E-mails (*laugh*) because they show me nothing about the intensity of people and that's how I judge myself. I'm a very intense person. I'm an "A" personality. I try to listen to three conversations when I'm standing at a group at the same time. I'm maybe a little ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder] (*laugh*) and that focus is negative, but it is also a little positive. But I love people and that's the key. I think I can tell you that not one Member of this House do I have any aggressive bad feelings towards. I've liked everyone that's been here and I think everyone that comes here, no matter who they are, has something extremely positive to give to this body.

RJW: How about the opposite end; what did you like the least?

BA: Being up at 5:30 in the morning on the House Floor. Grinding out things that we could have probably settled two days before. I don't think there's a Member in this House that wants to get stuck in a situation where hour, after hour, after hour because you – it's when you get tired, your mind doesn't work, naturally, as well. You're not as sharp. You're not as perceptive and also you're a little more irritable and I think that's when a few nasty things can be said on the Floor. I've tried never to do that but, it's happened.

RJW: You've told some great stories, but what are some of your fondest memories of the House?

BA: I think, I told you the story with – the Gaynor Cawley one. I think my fondest memories of the House will be the comradeship that I built and learning to respect other peoples' opinions and understanding that a District in Philadelphia that is five blocks by twenty five blocks and is a Legislative District versus my District which is sixty-two miles wide and twenty-five miles in the other distance. You have to learn perspective and I – any freshman that comes here, and I talked to one last night, and he said, "What is the biggest thing you think I should learn before I start here?" And I said to him, "Tolerance. Tolerance of other people's point of view, no matter what it is. No matter if you are totally at the other end." And I think that tolerance makes you a good Legislator. I also think it makes you a good person.

RJW: Do you have any regrets?

BA: Yes, I would say I have one regret. Probably that I wasn't as aggressive when I first came here on certain issues. I think that the 1991 crisis could have been solved in a much better way and meeting challenges that we didn't step forward and do. We've done a lot of positive programs, but I think that the State has also waited too long to make adjustments. And that waiting and that time period of waiting has hurt greatly, probably, the poorer people in Pennsylvania. And I'm not a bleeding heart liberal, but I think there

were things we could have done in the mid [19]90's when there were a lot of problems that we didn't do.

RJW: Well, now that you're leaving, what does the future hold for Bob Allen?

BA: The future holds for Bob Allen that Bob Allen will always love politics. That Bob Allen will always love working with people and that Bob Allen will probably end up doing both. I love the political game. I love government and I love working with people and because of that, I do not plan to go back to Pottsville, Pennsylvania, dig a hole and bury myself in it. I will be working there with my local communities for economic development job creation and environmental concerns. I'd like to say one other thing before we close this off. One of my pet projects and one of my greatest accomplishments, and I'm not patting myself on the back, but in southwestern Schuylkill County, there's a dam called Sweet Arrow Lake. It's a very beautiful seventy acre, pristine lake that was going to be destroyed by the State. I worked very hard with Governor Ridge [Thomas Ridge, Governor of Pennsylvania, 1995-2001] to get funding along with the Schuylkill County Commissioners to fund the project to rebuild the dam wall. And what that place has turned into and how it has changed, it is the first County Park. It's over one hundred and twenty acres in size and it is a wonderful place. Environmentally, that has been my greatest achievement, and it's – I am sending out my last newsletter – it's going to play a major role in that.

RJW: So, citing all of your nine terms, what have you learned about the people of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania politics, itself?

BA: Pennsylvania politics will always be changing. We are the Keystone State. We've been the birth place of this nation. We will always have political growing pains and we're going through one of those periods now. I think that this Legislature is ready to accept it's responsibilities in the future. I have all the confidence in the world in the two hundred and fifty-three Members that will be serving in the next term, both in the Senate and in the House, and I have the confidence in this Governor, that he's going to try to do the best he can for the State. For the people, we are now a more diverse ethnically [*inaudible*] community than we have ever been. That's good for Pennsylvania. I think that the more citizens get together and learn other peoples' ideas, traits, family histories, and ethnic diversities, that's great for the state and I hope it continues because the only way the state is going to grow is if we have tolerance and acceptance of our neighbors.

RJW: And lastly, to sum up; how would you like to be remembered?

BA: I would like to be remembered I guess as a person who tried to do a good job for his constituents, for the sixty-three thousand people that I represented. Knowing that, like every human being, I've failed many times, but I've had some successes and I hope they have benefited my constituents and the people I have represented.

RJW: Well that concludes our interview. Thank you so much Representative Allen.

BA: Thank you very much.