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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Linda Bebko-Jones (D)

1st District

Erie County

1993-2006

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Heidi Mays, House Archivist
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Transcribed by: Nathan J. Robinson

Heidi Mays (HM): Good Morning.

The Honorable Linda Bebko-Jones (LBJ): Good Morning.

HM: I am here with State Representative Linda Bebko-Jones who represents the 1st Legislative District from Erie County. She was seated in 1993 and is currently serving this 2006 legislative Session. Thank you for being here with me today.

LBJ: Thank you for having me, Heidi.

HM: I wanted to begin by asking you to describe your childhood and your early family life and how that prepared you for public service.

LBJ: Well, I came from a very political family, even though, when I was little, I didn't know it was a political family. My dad was a Committeeperson in my Legislative District and he was always campaigning for someone. He would send me out in my wagon with flyers and say, "Now, you put these in doors, not mailboxes." He was real, oh, adamant about that. And he would just say, "This is a man," or, "This is a woman that can really help the people in our District." And, that's how I really began, not knowing what I was really doing, but handing these flyers in people's doors. And as I got older, I realized that my dad was really involved with the community. It was, you know, in the old days when Committee people, they really took their job seriously. You know, my dad would go to all the homes in the District, see what people needed and tried

to help. That's how. My dad has been my role model and I came from a family of six, and for some reason, I was the one that really got into this.

HM: Well, why did you decide the Democratic Party?

LBJ: I always joke with people that – you know, I'm also a Catholic – that when I got baptized, right after I got baptized, there was this other fountain in the church and I automatically became a Democrat. There was just no doubt (*laugh*). And because, as I grew up, I realized the difference between the two parties, and I know what my dad was doing was just so incredible that you had to be a Democrat in order to push those issues and do what he did.

HM: Could you talk about your career before coming to the House and how did that impact your role as a Legislator?

LBJ: Well, I had the opportunity to work for a US Senator and a State Senator. So, I've actually been in State government for twenty-four years. And I was the first woman elected to this seat: the 1st Legislative seat. And, I came from the social work side before I got elected. I was a drug and alcohol counselor and my goals were just always focused on social issues. So after working for two Senators, I decided that you can be an advocate for issues for so long, and in order to really make a difference, you needed to be at the table. So, I decided, "Hey, goodbye, guys. I'm doing it now." That's how I ended up running for this office.

HM: So, how did you become personally involved? What motivated you to run?

LBJ: I think, probably, the drug and alcohol issue. I had first-hand – the difficulties, especially women were having and especially if they were making that transition from, maybe, prison. Most women were incarcerated because of bad checks or, it wasn't anything violent. And, we have several different homes in my District that deal with women and children. Erie was one of the first to have one of these homes where they could take their children, you know, with them. And, I'm a recovering alcoholic of twenty-six years, so that issue just brought me here to say, "If I'm going to make a difference and I'm going to fight for more funding and more programs, I need to be at the table." So, I think every Legislator, when they're running, there is some issue that brings them to that point. Whether it's economic development, the environment, something, and in my situation, it was drug and alcohol.

HM: Could you describe your first campaign?

LBJ: Oh.

HM: *(laugh)*

LBJ: I lost my first election. It was an open seat. The incumbent had retired and a former police officer was running, and he had run against the incumbent the year before.

But, being that it was an open seat after that, I couldn't resist. It was an opportunity. I ran with five men on the Democratic side and one man on the Republican side and it was really difficult, that first election. I was looked upon and – even from women, you know, “Why do you want to do this? This is a man's job.” And, the more I heard that, the angrier I got, the more I was going to prove a point. So, unlike men, during that election, any debate, anything, you know, the media would focus on what their goals were and so forth. With me, “Do you know you have a runner in your nylon?” Yes, now this was back in 1990. It just was bizarre. It was just bizarre. But, with all those Democrats in the race, we kind of thought, third, maybe, or last. But, we made it to second. So, we were just so excited and that night, everyone, that's where the ‘LBJ’ came in. Everyone was screaming, “All the way with LBJ,” and they're pouring champagne. And the media says, “Linda, do you know you lost?” (*laugh*) And I go, “Yeah, but we did it! This is my first run – all of these candidates.” I said, “We are really happy about it.”

HM: So what about the second time around?

LBJ: After that loss, there was no way I was going to do this again in my mind. No way, because of everything that happened in that campaign. But, then the incumbent just wasn't doing his job and I had more and more people calling me and telling me, “Linda you have to do it again. Linda you have to do it again.” And, I said, “No, I'm not going to do that.” And, my husband, one day I came home and he said, “I think you should do this.” I said, “Are you crazy? After what we went through?” And he said, “But, I think you can beat him, one on one.” That was in the Primary; fifty-seven votes and here I am.

HM: Were those two campaigns different from subsequent campaigns?

LBJ: Pretty much the same. In the Primary, you know, I'd be out on the streets and I'd be telling people what my goals were, what I wanted to do, and people would say, "Oh, Linda, I've seen you on TV, you got your hair cut." "Okay, you like my new haircut. "What was I talking about?" "Oh, I don't know, but you know, another thing is: don't wear red lipstick. We don't like you with red lipstick." That was in the Primary. We worked 24/7. I went door-to-door Election Day. I didn't stop. And, fifty-seven votes – and then the Primary was another difficult, because the same Republican ran the same time I did, and he ran a very, very negative, you know, race against me. There was this debate about having an abortion clinic in my District and his prime targets were, the only business that I'm going to bring to my District was this clinic because I'm pro-choice. He was pro-life. And it was brutal, but I beat him by a thousand votes, so that was it. The rest is history and any Republican that ran against me, you know, I cleaned up (*laugh*).

HM: I'm going to get to that in a second.

LBJ: Okay.

HM: How much money did you have to raise in your first campaign and do you know what you had to raise in your last campaign? And, did it go up exponentially?

LBJ: You know, being a first-timer, it was just amazing. I had a friend who was in her late forties. She came from a political family, but they were very hurt on elections, said she'll never vote again, daht de daht de daht. She said, "The only time I'm going to vote, Linda, is if you run for office." So, I gave her her little card. I said, "I'm running for office." My volunteers were: my family, elected officials, a lot of constituents that – and I believe it was maybe twenty thousand dollars, because we did have to pay for some things. So, I had like, elected officials – we had a pizza party. My mother made all the pizzas and we had boxes. You could get them baked or unbaked, and if they were baked, an elected official delivered it to your house and on the box, it said, "LBJ Delivers." So, it was a fun thing because most of the people involved in my first campaign were people who were never ever involved before and they realized what it cost and what you need to do. If it wasn't for my mother, lending me the money every time I turned around, going, "Mom, I have to do one more mailing, just one more mailing," you know? So, it was scary because that's why I was surprised my husband wanted to do it again, because we did have debts from that first election and when we decided, "Okay, I'll do this again," I can honestly tell you, that if I would have lost that election, we probably would have been living in public housing because we maxed out – because, again, you're running against an incumbent – we maxed out all our credit cards. It is very difficult to get any contributions when you are running against an incumbent. But, one of the things I tell people when I am recruiting them for this office is: number one, if you cannot invest in yourself, why should I invest in you? And, number two, it has to be in your gut, your heart and your head that you truly believe that if you come down here, you can make a

difference. It doesn't matter if it's a big difference or a little difference, but if you don't have that – if you are just running because you woke up in the morning and said, “Gee, I think I'll be a State Rep[resentative],” you're not going to have that adrenaline pushing. And, for that election, it was both very scary for me and my husband because we knew what the end result would be if I lost, and it would have been really tragic, really tragic.

HM: Well, I had done a little bit of research on your District and I think it's been a hundred years since a Republican has held your seat.

LBJ: Yes. Eighty-five, I believe. Somewhere around there.

HM: Yeah so, I'd say you probably have a lock—at least the Democratic Party has a lock on your seat.

LBJ: Yeah, so far, you know, we do. It's like three to one. And within the last couple of years, my District has changed quite a bit. I have a great deal of Latinos and African-Americans, Hispanics. It used to be just a Polish District and then after redistricting, that kind of changed too. And everyone my first time around, “Well, you're not Polish, you don't have a ‘ski’.” I mean, if you were not a Polish person, you don't even think of running for this District. But, I am Polish and I am Slovak. My mother was “Sobaleski.” Now, to put all these names, we felt, “God, people are going to think I was married and divorced twenty times.” So, what I did was, I did a column in our local newspaper every week talking about my Polish heritage so that people would know that I am Polish.

HM: Well, I'd like to talk a little bit more about your District. Can you describe the people and their issues, the geography? And what makes the 1st Legislative District tick, really?

LBJ: Well, I consider my District as kind of a poor District. Maybe the average income is about thirty-five thousand [dollars]. I have a lot of refugees in my District and their big concern obviously is, you know, getting jobs, housing and health care. I always looked at my District as my extended family because no matter where I went, I could be at a red light, and they stop me, and so forth. And I think, you know, that's because I have always been accessible, you know, they come to my house and they come—wherever they can find me, they find me. And, those are really the issues with my constituents and my seniors with the PACE [Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly] program, and the rent rebate, and now we have the new Medicare laws. I mean, we have to help them. A lot of my District is widows and these women never wrote a paycheck in their life, never paid a bill in their life. All of a sudden their spouse dies and I mean, they'll come into my office with paper bags, you know, with just all this paper. And I have the best staff in the world – the best staff. They have been with me all fourteen years and no one has worked harder than my staff, and I drive them crazy, believe me.

HM: Did you do any special projects back in your District?

LBJ: Let's see, when the CHIP [Children's Health Insurance Program] program first was available, we held two signups you know, for people to come in the office. Most of my folks don't even have automobiles and my office has been on a bus route. They can get off right in front of my office. "The Lift Program" will also drop them off and so they – I look at some of them today and you know, I am happy and I am sad because they are sad that I am leaving. They are concerned that, who is going to do all this for them? So, we launched that program to get – because most of my constituents had no clue. You know, moms, single moms were working two part-time jobs, no benefits for either herself or her children. So, when this program began, we partnered with Blue Cross and we did an afternoon of signups and an evening of signups.

HM: Can I ask you about – you also ran for Mayor, I think.

LBJ: Yeah, I did. It was –

HM: While I am talking about campaigns, what was that like? Because it is the fourth largest city [Erie, Pennsylvania], right?

LBJ: *(laugh)* And, again, yeah, there again was six Democratic candidates. And, if you recall, the present Mayor was under indictment. And, my sister, who is now passed, she always, always wanted me to run for Mayor. And I thought about it, thought about it, thought about it. I said, I have nothing to lose. I just got out of running and got re-elected, you know? If I lose the Mayor's race, I still am a State Rep[resentative]. And

my goal was, I think, when I looked at all of this; I wouldn't have to travel to Harrisburg anymore, I would be at home. But then as the Mayor, you are really under a microscope every single day. As a State Rep[resentative] from Erie, my constituents know that I am here in Harrisburg from Sunday to Wednesday, sometimes Thursday. So, you don't get those hits. Even though we do interviews from here, it's not the same as doing it from there. And, I enjoyed it. I really did. The present Mayor and I work very well together. It was a fun thing dealing with all these guys and all the debates and so forth. And, I did beat the indicted Mayor because he decides he is going to run anyway, so I kind of felt good about that one (*laugh*).

HM: Well, could you talk a little bit about your relationship with the Erie County delegates?

LBJ: It has been a wonderful relationship and I know you hear on the federal level how, "We are all going to work together, forget about partisanship." But, in the Erie delegation, we truly have, and in this last term, the guys named me the 'Deaness.' We always had the 'Dean' of the delegation, and that goes according to seniority, so, when I had the seniority, then the guys decided, "You know? Oh, okay, well we have a 'Deaness.' The northwest has always – if it had something to do in Matthew Good's [Erie County, 2003-2008] District, John Evans's [Crawford and Erie Counties, 2001-present] District, Curt Sonney's [Erie County, 2005-present] District, and even though they were Republicans, we would sit down. We would have monthly meetings and look at the big picture of how this is going to benefit northwestern Pennsylvania, not just me

as a State Rep[resentative]. And, obviously, there were issues that we didn't always agree on. We didn't even touch them. But when it came to the city of Erie, the county of Erie, we worked very well on different projects: just like the new casino that is going to be up and running pretty soon, and that's not in my District, but all of us worked very hard to get that casino in northwestern Pennsylvania.

HM: Well, you did talk about whenever you were thinking about maybe being Mayor, how it would be nice to be at home?

LBJ: Yes.

HM: You are the farthest away from Harrisburg as a Representative.

LBJ: Absolutely. Yes, a six hour drive. And that is the only thing I am not going to miss, and there aren't too many ways to get here. And a couple of years ago, I slid on black ice and ended up in a ravine, and it was very scary. And I started, after that, taking a staff-person with me and I told them, "You know, you are going to come with me because I don't want to die alone." And he said, "Oh, that makes me feel good!" And so, you know, that has worked out very well and even to this day – and that happened two years ago – every time, I want to put my political sign on the place where my car went into the ravine. You know how you see the crosses and the flowers and all that stuff? And, even today, every time I go by there, I just, I cringe. I cringe. And, to fly from Erie to Harrisburg is ridiculous. It is four hundred and some dollars, one way. We no longer

have that direct flight. We sit in Pittsburgh and – I have control. When I am driving, I have control of when I am going to get here. When I am flying, I don't have no control whatsoever. And I just thought it was very unfair to charge the taxpayers for flying. I mean, they elected me to do my job. They didn't elect me to make it easier for me.

HM: Whenever you were first elected, did anything surprise you whenever you came to the Capitol?

LBJ: Well, you know what's funny is when I won, a lot of people said to me, "Oh, this is going to be a piece of cake for you because you worked for a State Senator, you know the system, daht de daht de daht." And, I said, "Well, yeah, it probably is." But when I got down here, it was a total different role. And, it took me probably a good year to get out of my staff mode to legislative mode. I think one thing I can say, as I end my career, is that I always remained in that staff role. You know how you always hear, "Don't forget where you came from," and I never did. I can honestly tell you when I am sitting here with you, I still can't believe that I am a State Rep[resentative]. You know, as I said to you earlier, I was one of six kids. My father had a bar. One of my jobs every day before I went to school – because, like our house was here, the bar was here, and my grade school was here. Well, I had to go in every morning and sweep the floors, wipe the tables, all that stuff, then I would go to school. And as, you know, a young kid, and I'm just looking at all of these different bottles of booze up there, I thought, "This would kind of be neat," and I got one of these big glasses and put a little bit of every kind, and I

drank it down, and went to school. And so, I thought I was the happiest kid in town, but as years went by, I found out that I was not. But – what else?

HM: You were talking about remembering that you were always a staffer.

LBJ: Yes. One of the things I committed to when I came down here was, “I am not going to treat staff like I was treated sometimes.” So, the first thing I did when I came down here – every day, I would meet a staff person from the Caucus, go to their office, find out what they did, so I could put a face to the name. Because, you know, you have your writers, you have your researchers, you have all those folks. And, I have always – everybody comes to my office. All the staff come to my office, sit in my lounge, and we talk and so forth. And they are just, you know, without them, we’re nothing, and their information better be correct, because we go out there and we quote all this stuff and if it’s not – so I found that by doing that – especially like writers, you know, they have about six or seven Legislators that they are responsible for. So, I found after a while because they have a pile of stuff like this for Legislators, if mine might be in the middle or even on the bottom, all of a sudden it comes out on the top just because you form those relationships, and just because of me coming from a staff perspective that that happened. And, I am going to miss them so, so much because you know you get to be personal with them, their families. We have lost some staff members, they have lost their families, and we are just like a family when that occurs. We’re there for them and that’s how it should be.

HM: On a personal note, you are the only Representative that wrote me a “Welcome to the House” note whenever I first started. Thank you. *(laugh)*

LBJ: And, *(laugh)* that was another thing, you know, like we have staff awards once a year, you know; twenty years, thirty years, forty years, whatever. I always have written personal notes, thanking them for their work, and they all have said to me that they have never ever gotten a note from a Member and I said, “You have to be kidding me. For thirty-five years of service, not even Leadership?” You know, they have the luncheon and so forth, but I – especially someone with thirty-five years, and you’re not going to thank them for what they did? And I was just – and I think that was part of my ‘staff’ thing too, you know? All of us would do certain things. And everybody wants to be recognized. Everybody wants to be welcomed into a new organization because there is a lot of anxiety there. You don’t know what to expect, so you get a couple cards welcoming you, and you kind of say, “You know what? There might be an opportunity that I can meet her and we can get to communicate and I can find out more of what you do, and you can find out more of what I do,” and it kind of eases that anxiety. Because I remember as a staff-person, you know? You just, “I don’t know if I can do this. I don’t know.” Everything is unknown to you. And if you don’t have some support from somewhere, you’re just going to say, “You know, I’m not going to do this. I’m not going to do this.”

HM: Well, I wanted to get back to some of my pre-written questions. Can you talk about how you felt on your first Swearing-In Ceremony?

LBJ: It was overwhelming. And, I wished that my dad was alive to see it and he wasn't. And, we had a bus. I called it 'the bus from hell' because everybody was just so excited so we got this big bus and my volunteers and all of us came down. And to this day – and I gave my going away speech just before we left for election and I had said, "Every day that I sit in that seat, I am in awe." Even though I have been sitting there for fourteen years, I am in awe. Because if someone would have asked me thirty years ago that, "Oh, you're going to be a State Rep[resentative]." I would have been sitting at a bar falling off a bar stool saying, "Oh, yeah, man, I'll be President, too, someday." It just was awesome, and every day I just looked at William Penn,¹ and I'd just say, "I bet you never thought, never thought a woman would be sitting in this seat." So, that feeling is still there with me, you know, even though I have one more week, I still do the same thing. I go in my seat and I am in total awe of this Institution.

HM: Did you have any mentors whenever you first started?

LBJ: There weren't that many around because mainly, you know, for a state position, they were all men. And you know, it was, "Okay, honey, you want to be a little State Rep[resentative]." My mentors when I first was getting serious about this was former Mayor Joyce Sebakio and former County Executive Judy Lynch, and Judge Stephanie DiMitrovitch because in 1992, they were the first women on the local level to win and to really do a push on having women running for public office. So, they were incredible

¹ Ms. Bebko Jones is referring to a mural by Edwin Austin Abbey entitled "The Apotheosis of Pennsylvania," which is behind the Speakers Rostrum in the Chamber of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. The mural features William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania.

mentors to me and they still are. Two are retired, you know, one is a Judge, but you know like I said, my dad was always my inspiration, but when you talk about, you know, mentors and in this position, those three ladies were it.

HM: What was it like to be a freshman Member?

LBJ: Oh, it was so wild. And, I'm a very organized person, okay? And I found out – I wasn't here too long – that if I don't learn to be flexible, this ain't going to work, okay? And that's both in my District office and in my Harrisburg office, you know? You have your schedule, okay? And, I am one of these persons, "Okay, everything that's on my schedule for that day, I do. Check it off, check it off, throw it away, okay?" I get down here and there ain't no schedule. There ain't no time; there ain't nothing, okay? So, I think that was the hardest thing, is if you are not flexible, you are not going to last here because everything changes and I think you know that just when we're in Session and we're – "Okay, we'll be back on the House floor at three [o'clock]." And we're back at seven [o'clock], okay? So, I think that was one of the toughest things for me to get adjusted to because I'm one of these daht, de daht, de daht.

HM: How were you treated as a female Member?

LBJ: Well it's funny. The guy, the incumbent that I beat, as I told you, was a former – he was an undercover police officer, okay? And he was a big guy, a big guy. And I come down here – the guys thought I must be this, "Whoa. I beat this police officer."

So, they are kind of looking for this big person, and I come down here and they go, “You beat—?” And I said, “Yeah, you got a problem with that?” “No. We just thought you were bigger.” On the day that I got Sworn-In, there were seven cushions in my seat and I said, “Well, isn’t this interesting?” And they were trying to prove a point so I could see over my desk and see the Speaker (*inaudible*). I said, “Okay, fine. I’m not elected yet. I’m not legally Sworn-In. So, after I was legally Sworn-In, I took one cushion and the other and threw them right in the hall, there on the House Floor. And I went up to them and I said, “Look, let me tell you something: I worked as hard as you did to get down here, maybe even harder. The party is over.” And that was one of the first things. Then the guys would, you know, pat me on the head, and they’d go, “Now, you just listen and you’ll learn. If you have any questions (*inaudible*) so,” because they thought that any woman that won in 1992, they were lucky. They just happened to win. It was a fluke because that was the biggest year. That was the year of the woman, that year. I had the biggest class. So, I said, “Okay, we’re going to play this game.” So, I would come in and I had my suit and I had these blouses with little bows on them, you know. So, after I had the feel of the land, who’s who, what kind of District they represent, and why I might be angry with their votes on something, after I learned, you know, all of that, then all hell broke loose. After six months, the bow-blouses came off and I can tell you, I’ve never had a problem since. And, they called me some choice words down here, but I know they mean it in love. My job is not to pacify Leadership or my other colleagues. My job is to represent the people back home. So a lot of them were, you know – and I know they are sincere when they say they are going to miss me and I say, “I’m not going anywhere

because I'll be on different boards. I know how the system works really well. I'm going to be calling you. I'll be your worst nightmare as a voter." They go, "Oh, no."

HM: Well, I wanted to ask you about camaraderie. You have kind of alluded to it. Is there camaraderie in the House?

LBJ: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I stated that in my going away remarks. You know, we can be on the House Floor, Republicans and Democrats, and battling away on different issues that we don't agree on, but when it's all said and done, we can all leave, go out to dinner and that day is over. You know, because we fight for what we believe in, what our Districts are all about, and, again, tragedy has hit so many times since I have been here, and it doesn't matter if you're a Republican or a Democrat. I have never seen two hundred and three Members just come together and help with that tragedy.

HM: Can you talk about your most important pieces of legislation that you have sponsored? Some may not have gotten passed, but what were your issues?

LBJ: The one piece of legislation that I did get passed was the Stalking Legislation [House Bill 3, Act 28 of 1993], and this all began with teenagers, and they were all friends. And, one girl really liked the other – one of the boys in the group – and another girl liked that boy. And, you know how, when you're teenagers, when you are kids, how you all hung around together, boys and girls, you are all friends, you go to football games and all this stuff. That's how it all started until one girl just went really crazy and she

started stalking this girlfriend at school, at work, her home, and we had nothing in the books. We went to the District Magistrate's. Stalking wasn't considered any kind of – “So what? So someone's following you. Big deal” type of thing. It ended up, one of the kids in the group called the mother that morning, identified herself as the principal of the school and they wanted her to come in. They wanted to talk to her. So, the mother didn't think anything of it. And, before that, the parents went through every legal thing; they did all the right stuff. In the meantime – and they lived in the rural part of Pennsylvania – the principal really didn't call, but the mother leaves and wakes up her daughter to go to school, and she says, “I have to go to school early because the principal wants to see me.” In the meantime, two individuals – the two girls and the boy – broke into this girl's bedroom and slashed her neck until she bled to death. They are both in prison now. As a matter of fact, the one girl in my area is serving her time. And, that just literally, just grabbed me. And I said, “Here's kids, and there was nothing we could do to prevent that.” So, I introduced the legislation, and it was at a time when Governor Casey [Robert P. Casey, Governor of Pennsylvania, 1987-1995] was sick, and Mark Singel² was the Acting Governor at the time, and Mark Singel signed that piece of legislation. I couldn't have been happier, and I had the mother of the daughter there and the only people that objected was the police, and I did go to our local police, educated them on the bill. Because that's – every time a bill is passed, it is up to the District Attorney to go to the police station, “Here is another bill, daht de daht de daht.” The police were kind of upset with me and told me I was making more paperwork for them. This is not such a big deal, just like PFA's [Protection From Abuse] when we did them. The police didn't like that

² Pennsylvania Senator, 1981-1987; Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania, 1987-1995; Acting Governor of Pennsylvania, June-December 1993.

either and we changed that law, which is a lot better than what it was. So, I did my *(inaudible)* all three shifts. And the way its done is, they have like papers on the walls, and “Here’s the new legislation.” I found that police officers were just signing their names, but not reading the legislation because they just thought – because it isn’t an easy topic to deal with: domestic violence. And it is becoming more and more with children against their parents than ex-husbands or former boyfriends or whatever. So, it’s always, you know, a matter of paperwork, it takes a long time, that is very emotional and I understood that. But, I also told them, as police officers, they are responsible for the safety of their community. Even though they might have thought, you know, “big deal.” So, that I am very proud of.

HM: I think you also brought many other social issues to the forefront by introducing them to the House, at least in the form of resolutions. Such as: AIDS, “Crime Victims’ Rights Week,” “Domestic Violence Awareness Week,” “Women and Addictions Awareness,” mental illness and sexual assault. Would you like to comment on any of those? I mean, every year, it looks like you were out there reminding people.

LBJ: It’s, yeah, and you have to. It has to be consistent. And what I found was: no one really pays attention until it happens to them or a family member, then all of a sudden, they join our pack. And I think that’s part of human nature. But, these are diseases we are talking about that don’t need to occur in the lives of Pennsylvanians. So, I’ve been you know, very proud to do that, both here in Harrisburg, and at home. I mean, we had thousands at Capitol rallies and I also work with MADD [Mothers Against Drunk

Driving] and the Students Against Drunk Drivers. They all come down to Harrisburg, these students and they just amaze me because, you know, the media likes to label our young people all the time. You know, if a young person brings marijuana to school and gets caught, they are on TV every day, “See what’s happened to our kids? Look at how no-good they are. This one had a *(inaudible)*.” And, I found out, when we are honoring young people for something, even in my District, the press never even shows up. They make it look like all of our kids are bad. No, there’s a percentage, just like there’s a percentage of Legislators that get in trouble, a percentage of everything. But, our kids, when they would come down here for the rally because I had the keg legislation, and they were phenomenal and you know, for young kids – and to take this heat from a lot of their peers, talking about drinking and driving and binging. You know, you can’t even feel safe with sending your child to college today because of what’s out there, what they get away with. So, I was very proud to make some changes, you know, in those pieces of legislation.

HM: Did you ever get frustrated?

LBJ: *(laugh)* Every single day. I had, and as I said earlier, I was the type of person that is very organized and everything that is on my schedule for that day, I do; check it off, throw it away, and start the new day. I think the most frustrating thing is this, and I stated this earlier, oh, you know, we are going to go into Session at three [o’clock], and we go in at seven [o’clock]. I truly believe that if there were women in power, just like we are

going to see Nancy Pelosi³, and I'm going to be watching her closely because she is another one of my – she is just a great lady. I was able to meet with her several times at conferences. But, if women were in charge, we would be down here working Monday to Friday, eight to five or nine to five, just like everybody else does, in the light of day, we would get things done. But, in a male-dominated General Assembly, there is no time – they don't operate by a clock, okay? And, sometimes, I think, because they just don't want to go back home. So, what's the big difference, you know? We could deal with these issues – I find in committee meetings – now we might have been debating and debating, you know? Let's let this bill out. The guys would go, "You know, I just think we need to study this more." And at one meeting, my Chairman got me on this; I says, "You know what? We've been studying this issue for a damn year now. Get off the pot and vote!" Women, I find, are so different. Okay, we can sit down [and] discuss that issue; should it be left out? Should it be moved to the Floor, or whatever, and take a vote. Bills sit in committees for too – just like, any bill that doesn't pass by next week, you start all over again. I truly believe that if women were in charge, we wouldn't have that. We wouldn't have what you call this, "sigh and die," at the end of a legislative session because we would take care of this stuff. If we say, "We're breaking. We'll be back at three o'clock." You can bet your ass we'll be on the Floor at three o'clock, not seven [o'clock]. That's the frustrating part for me. And I know some of my women colleagues, you know, they go, "This is just such a waste. We could be doing this. We could be doing that." And the guys, it's like – and believe me, I'm not criticizing them. I love them all. They have good intentions, but I still believe that they can be retrained. And, I tried to do that for fourteen years. So, I made a little bit of progress even though there's a

³ US Representative, California, 1987-present; 60th Speaker of the US House, 2006-present.

lot of resistance and I can probably not say how I made the progress in getting them to deal a little bit better with legislation (*laugh*).

HM: Well, let me ask you this: there is a lot of opportunities now with this last election – well, the Primary and the General. Do you see any women rising up? Maybe to Leadership posts, both in the House and the Senate?

LBJ: We do have, we have Kathy Manderino [State Representative, Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties, 1993-2010] is one that is going to be running for Leadership and she was in my class. And, I ran for Leadership twice, by the way, to prove a point and it was only my second term, and Leadership had their whole slate, and I had hats that said “LBJ.” And I always remember “feed them”, that works. I gave them all candy bars, did this whole nine yards. And I first asked any senior woman Member if they had any intentions of running. “No.” And they had been here like sixteen, seventeen years, and I was only here for four. And I said, “I just think we need to send a message, that it’s okay – because I am tired of this seniority crap down here – that it’s okay if women run for Leadership. We need to open the door for that.” So, I did. Obviously, I lost both times, but the first time there were three of us running, and so the two guys that were fighting for it needed my ninth vote, so I was in power for like forty-five minutes. So, that kind of felt cool. You know? Some of the women are – they think – you know when I came down here and anything that we had to go to the Leadership, I was always the spokesperson. They would say, “Oh, you go because you know how to get the message across.” Now, I don’t know if they were afraid to go to Leadership to complain about

things, that their life would be miserable, or they were looked upon as whiney women. You know, “Hey, you wanted to come down here. This is the way it is. This is the way the atmosphere is. Deal with it.” Well, I wasn’t one of those. If there was a problem, I went right to my Leadership, screamed, yelled, carried on, and he was excellent with me because he’d rather give me what I want than to hear me screaming and yelling at him. So, I used, you know, whatever tools that men have used and in a different way. And when it came to legislation, and especially when it was legislation on AIDS, drug and alcohol, domestic violence, you know? The media was so – besides here and at home – if it had anything to do with economic development and taxes, they would go interview one of my male colleagues back home. Now, if it had anything to do with AIDS, domestic violence, they would come and talk to me because that is how they classify that because, after all, women know nothing about economic development or about business, you know? We only raised the family and worked and balanced budgets, but, you know? That’s how they would interview us and I had friends in the media, young females, that always got the job and I said, “Hey, let me ask you something, you know? How is this decided, that you would interview me.” Just about the same way as we as Legislators, they’ll look, they’ll go, “Okay, Mary, you’re going to go interview LBJ.” And you have nothing to say about it. The female reporters are treated the same way. The male reporters are the ones that go see the male Legislators for economic development, taxes, and so forth. And that still sticks today. But, it’s just interesting, you know, how it truly works down here, but the guys – I would always have a hard time getting them to co-sponsor one of my bills that, to them, just didn’t seem okay? So, what I did is what the guys always did, you know? I’d go up to them, “Oh my God. That tie is so – I mean, it

brings out the blue in your eyes.” “Oh, you think so, LBJ? Really? Oh!” And they’d go, “Oh, my daughter got me this tie for Christmas, and I’m just wearing it because my daughter got it for me.” And I said, “Oh, no.” And then the guys that would start wearing like bright color shirts with their – you know it was always black suit, white shirt, black tie, red tie, blue tie, that’s it. So, I would just, “Ooohhh!” because, you know, the guys needed to be pampered. So, after I would do that and they’d go, “Okay, now, LBJ, what’s this bill about?” And I had them. I had them eating out of my hands from there. And that’s how the men have treated it for women all this time. So I kind of found a way to reverse it, even to the point where they got a new haircut. It got ridiculous, but I had to do what I had to do to survive down here.

HM: What do you think the hardest issue is before the Legislature right now?

LBJ: I think the hardest issue is this property tax issue. You know, we’ve been talking about it for so long. Governor Rendell [Edward G. Rendell, Governor of Pennsylvania, 2003-2011] has campaigned on it. We’d better produce it because I know my last campaign, property taxes and health care were the two biggest issues that I heard from my constituents, and to this day we still don’t have it and we’d better see it. Just like on a federal level, even though the Democrats have taken control of both Houses, I hope they realize the responsibility that they have. Not that they just – you know, yeah, people wanted a change, only the Democrats are in charge. They’d better sit down and think of how they are going to change it. And those were the two biggest issues that I have always, always heard about. Two pieces of legislation that are still pending in committee

that I was hoping would get done before I left, and so now I am looking at my replacement as being prime sponsor, and that is universal health care [House Bill 2722 of 2005-2006]. We have gotten a wonderful response on this piece of legislation. The other piece of legislation is the open records adoption bill [House Bill 555 of 2005-2006], and I think we have another prime sponsor on both sides of the aisle that will continue my fight for that. So, that makes me feel good.

HM: During your fourteen years of service, you were a member of numerous committees. Can you tell us a little bit about your committee experience and which ones you enjoyed the most?

LBJ: I enjoyed all of them. And even back home – because I was the Caucus Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs [Committee], and in my District – this was before redistricting – I had the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Home in my District and I just loved going to see those guys. Most of them have no family members [**End of Side A of Tape**] and they’d look at me as their girlfriend or their granddaughter and you would just listen to their stories. And of course, because my daughter was a Lieutenant Commander in the United States Navy, a trauma nurse, I learned so much from her. And that Committee [Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee] was a must for me to be on and I am so glad that my Leadership kept me on that Committee the whole fourteen years. The other committee: the Insurance Committee, and the House Health and Welfare [Committee], I felt those two committees worked hand in hand. And, everyone says we have a health care problem in Pennsylvania and I continue to say we need

insurance reform in Pennsylvania. Not health care. Health care is fine. But, you look at these insurance industries and whether it's health, whether it's automobile, I don't care what kind of insurance it is, it is way out of line. So these two really, you know, for me, worked together on the issues that were near and dear to my constituents and myself.

HM: In your opinion, what are the biggest technological advances that you've witnessed since you've been here?

LBJ: I think one of the biggest ones was our laptop computers. Now, because we have Members here who have been here for twenty-five, thirty years, and I can remember Matt Ryan [Matthew J. Ryan; State Representative, Delaware County, 1963-2003; Speaker, 1995-2003], former Speaker of the House saying, "We're going to have computers." These guys would say, "No! I ain't doing that! I ain't doing that! I ain't doing that!" So, it started out with, like, ten Members on a trial process and then another ten Members, another ten Members, and it's very simple to put computers on our desk because it's a rolling session and so forth. But, as former Speaker Ryan indicated to all of us, this is for legislative business only. And, in the past, we've had some problems, you know? I think that was one of the funniest and the newest, you know, technologies from the time I started here. Just the thought of a computer just drove them over the edge, just over the edge, when you talked about technical things. And I think, also, the improvements we have done just here in broadcasting and folks, like yourself, coming in here and interviewing different lawmakers as they leave this wonderful Institution that we didn't have before. You have to be constantly upgrading everything or you're lost.

BlackBerries, you know, nobody knew what a BlackBerry was. It's those things that do cost money, but we need all the resources, the technical resources, to get our messages across. It's as simple as that. It's as simple as that. I mean, my niece and nephew, I don't know, they were five and six, I'd go down to their house [and] they're on a computer. They know everything. And they are going to need that for the next century, believe me.

HM: Well, we talked about technology. What are some of the other changes that you've witnessed?

LBJ: Let's see. You know, besides the computers and one of the other things too, I think, is allowing the media to be on the Floor. And, generally, you know, they are given permission, a station for fifteen minutes, twenty minutes and it's funny at the same time. And again, I don't mean to be sexist, but it's the men. When the Speaker announces that Joe Johnson from KDKQR will be filming, the guys are doing their eyebrows and stuff. The women, we're just sitting there, "Oh, okay, fine." That's a new one. I have always—and to this point I don't know if I support televised sessions. When I watch the federal government and I see—and most people don't understand when a Rep[resentative] is speaking and there is nobody there. You know, there is nobody there because they are either doing a resolution or they're doing a special thing they want done for the record. People get so confused. "Well, how come so-and-so is here? Don't they care? Daht de daht de daht." Then, some of the things that can be seen are just not the type of things that should be seen. There is a conduct on that House Floor and that conduct should

remain. And I think a lot of times you see some things that aren't so nice. So, I believe in educating the people out there, but yet, I'm still concerned about it. Like, in my District, we don't have PCN [Pennsylvania Cable Network]. Yeah, we have it around the state, but we don't have it. A lot of people have asked me how come I haven't fought for PCN in my District and I said, "Because I don't want you to see what goes on. I'm just being honest with you." Because I think, you know, as a young person that got involved in politics, I looked at, especially Senators, Congressmen, House Members to act in a professional manner and I think as soon as you see them – and, yes, we're all human beings, you know. Like when I would go talk about my alcohol problem and I would be the last person to think that I would be a State Rep[resentative]. Yes, we're all human. We all make mistakes, but, I think, when you're on that House Floor, it's just very important to conduct yourself in a professional manner and we don't see that down here. So, I am just still leery about the PCN coming in my District.

HM: Have you noticed – has it changed? Or has the behavior always been about the same?

LBJ: Oh, it's even worse. I think it's worse since I came down here. If you watch the Sessions, you'll see Speaker Ryan constantly pounding the gavel, "Members get in your seats or leave the House Floor if you're having conversation." Now, when the public sees the conversation, they don't think it's legislative. They think, "Oh, well, they're talking about where they're going to eat tonight, daht de daht de daht." And, ninety-nine per cent of the time, those conversations are legislative. I have done that. I have had to

leave my seat and talk to different Members explaining why I need their support, but perception is everything and when the public isn't told beforehand, they sit there and they go, "What? They're not even listening." And I try to explain to them, both sides have Caucuses, we caucus on this legislation. "Well, if you do, then you should just get out on the House Floor and just vote on it. Why all the shenanigans?" And they're exactly right. And this is where all the wasted time is.

HM: Do you have a fondest memory of serving?

LBJ: I have so many. The people, like I said earlier, the staff is who I'm going to miss, but I'm also going to miss, you know, all my colleagues, whether I've had battles with them or not. One particular – and a Republican by the way – it was in the winter, and where my office is in the [Speaker K. Leroy] Irvis Building, I could come out those doors and walk by the fountain and just get right in instead of taking the elevator because when you do that, I'm always late for a meeting because you're running into this one, that one, that one. So, I could go straight outside and avoid all that. And, it was a very wintry, icy, cold, winter day. And, I was walking with another colleague and before I knew it, I slipped on ice and hit my head and passed out. I had never passed out in my life. One of my colleagues who is in the same building who was a Republican, still is, happened to be looking out of his window and seeing me fall. He ran down the steps – didn't take the elevator – ran down the steps and there he was, because my friend was so upset, and she goes, "Oh, oh oh! Are you dead? Are you dead? (*inaudible*)" And I had never passed out in my life. And, this guy literally, you know, sat on that ice and snow, waited until I

finally woke up and they called the doctor, nurse or whoever they called and he was just incredible, and I couldn't believe it. This is what I'm trying to stress, you know, you hear the public always saying that – now, Washington [D.C.], that's a whole different environment – but when you hear, oh yeah, it's so partisan here. When it comes to human issues and taking care of one another – now, it would have been very easy [because] he had seen another colleague was with me. “Huh. LBJ passed out.” But, he ran down those steps. And to this day, we just talk about it all. I thank him and thank him every day, he tells me I don't have to. I say, “But I do. But I do.” So that is, you know, one of my most, I guess sincere fondest memories. One memory that was kind of hilarious and that was only because guys were pressing my buttons, but I had a piece of legislation on prostate cancer [House Bill 296 of 2005-2006], and I was debating the issue because, you know, when you have prostate cancer, you can be treated, your insurance company pays for it. Ninety-eight percent of men, after treatment, are found impotent and there is a treatment to take care of that, but the insurance companies won't pay for that treatment. You know, that's like saying, “We as women go get a mammogram and it gets paid for, but then if it comes back positive, they're not going to pay for that continued treatment.” Well, then, what's the sense in having these tests done? And, I guess it was my words that I used on the House Floor or whatever and got them all tuned up, but it was a fun thing. I did get yelled at by Speaker Perzel [John Perzel; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1979-present; Speaker, 2003-2006], who reminded me that we were on TV, and I didn't know what I did wrong. I said, “You know, I know that you're hearing all this stuff from my guys and they're agitating, but, Mr. Speaker, this is a serious subject and I don't know why you have to say to me that

we're on TV and I should watch what I say. So it just goes to show where your mind is, along with the rest of the guys down here because, it is, it's a very serious problem." So, that's one of the nicer ones, one of the more humorous ones, you know?

HM: What aspect of your job did you enjoy the most?

LBJ: Just being with my people, going to all their functions. And, my legislative seat has the most churches of all the Erie Delegation. So I could be going to four spaghetti dinners in one day, and pancake breakfasts, and then when it's Lent-time, all those things. But I love it, because you get an opportunity to hear from those people, face-to-face. And you know, some people, well, after a couple of years they knew they could come to me with anything. Sometimes half the things I heard I wish I wouldn't have heard, but some people are afraid. If a State Rep[resentative] goes into a dinner or something and they want to talk to their State Rep[resentative], but yet, they feel like they're intimidated, that they can't go talk to them. When you're in this sort of social environment, they feel better about it. And, I have enjoyed it. I know my brothers and sisters would say, "How can you be in Harrisburg all week, come home, the whole weekend you're at all these functions and you turn around and you go back to Harrisburg." And I said, "If I wasn't out in the community, I wouldn't know the pulse of the community because that is the only way that you get to know your community; is by talking to the people one-by-one." And, that is generally what I do in the summer when we're not here in Session, is I go around to my different businesses, non-profit organizations, to see what's going on. How are they doing? What are the outcomes of

some of the programs? So, I will miss that, but I'm still going to be on a couple of those boards, so I'll be alive and well.

HM: I'll get back to that in a second.

LBJ: Okay (*laugh*).

HM: What aspect did you not like?

LBJ: I think I said this before the frustration down here that I feel is not needed. If you're going to be in charge down here, you have to have some kind of a system. There is no way we should be doing legislation at two or three or four o'clock in the morning or going that twenty-four hour cycle because all that does is wear and tear on all of us rank and file Members that it gets to the point, "We don't care. Whatever it is, we'll vote on it." That is not the way to do business in Harrisburg.

HM: So, what are your future plans?

LBJ: Everybody asks me that, and even at my going away speech because everybody was [inaudible] back home here. So, to shut everybody up, I said, "I am going to get married and have a family." Oh, you should have heard all that. I plan on first, in the winter, I am going to San Diego. My daughter lives in San Diego and I never get to see her. From there, Arizona, Florida; that's where I'm going to be in the winter. Then I'm

going to come back home. I'm going to remain on four boards that deal with all the issues that we discussed earlier and I'm going to be very active in politics. I told everyone, "I'm not going away. I will be everyone's worst nightmare."

HM: Well, how would you like your tenure to be remembered?

LBJ: Probably that I tried to make a difference in people's lives. It could have been just one person, but I truly made a difference. That's what I came down here to do. It isn't easy. I think, when you first get elected, you have all these goals. You forget you have two hundred and two other people to deal with. But, I would just like to be remembered as somebody that was honest, that truly listened and just truly cared about the people.

HM: Do you have any advice for new Members that would be starting soon?

LBJ: And, I think I mentioned earlier, you know? And now that I know the gentleman that's going to replace me, I've met with him several, several times, and it won't sink in until he actually gets here, just like it was with me. But, it's just like what I told him when he was running, if it isn't in your heart, your gut, your head, don't even think about doing it. Because, if it's in all those three places, you're going to win. Sure, you're going to have problems. You're going to wonder where that next dollar comes from, but if you strongly believe in what you're doing, you'll do it. There's no one else that's going to do it for you.

HM: Thank you very much.

LBJ: Thank you, this was fun.

HM: This concludes our interview.