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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Daylin Leach (D)

149th District

Montgomery County

2003-2008

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Jesse Teitelbaum
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Jesse Teitelbaum (JT): Good afternoon. I am sitting here with Representative Daylin Leach from the 149th District of Montgomery County. Daylin, thank you for being with us.

The Honorable Daylin Leach (DL): I am thrilled to be here, Jesse.

JT: What I'd like to do is start out by asking you some questions about your background. Why don't you just tell me a little bit about your family life?

DL: Who wants to know? No I'm kidding.

JT: Tell us about, you know, first getting started, where you grew up, and maybe a little bit about your early career life.

DL: Well, I grew up, I started, in Philadelphia. We actually lived in North Philadelphia when I was first born, moved to Northeast Philadelphia, if people are familiar with that area. When I say we, it was just my mom and I. I didn't know my dad. My mom and dad were married but they got divorced immediately prior to my being born. It may not have been official till afterwards and then he fled or whatever; I never met him. So, it was just me my mom and my grandmother early on, and then my grandmother got a neuro-muscular disease, so my mom quit her job and so, for the first couple years of our lives, or, my life, we were actually on welfare. And I didn't have siblings or anything; it was just the two of us. Cheerful interview so far, right? But, no, it gets better, because eventually my mom went back to work. She's an artist and made a living as a commercial artist for much of her life. And so, when she went back to work, I went

to school and was able to do that because there was a state-funded day-care center, subsidized school lunches, things like that that really helped me and that gave me a real appreciation of what the difference the government can make in the lives of people, and that's something that stayed with me today and sort-of informs a lot of the policy decisions I made.

JT: So, that was pretty much the starting point of how you became into being a Democrat?

DL: Well, the way I became a Democrat, actually, it was interesting; that had a part in it, but more than that, I grew up in the [19]60s, the 1960s, where there was a lot of civil rights turmoil around the civil rights movement. And I would watch, you know, black folks getting sprayed with hoses or beaten at a lunch counter or something, and I would talk to my mother about it, my grandmother early on, and I would say, you know, "What's going on?" And they would explain to me the sides of the civil rights conflict and I became very passionate about being on the pro-civil rights side of that.

JT: Sure.

DL: And at the time, that was more of a Democratic position to be, which I, sort-of, learned early on; in fact, remains that way, I think. And so, it stayed with me to this day. In fact, when my wife and I had children, I wanted to name them after my favorite Supreme Court Justices, so we did that. Our first daughter is Brennan. And then when our son came, I wanted to name him Marshall, after Thurgood Marshall, but she sort-of felt the Supreme Court thing was not the way we wanted to keep going. So, we went in a different direction. I did get to name a cat, Thurgood

however. But, that made a huge impression on me, the whole specter of justice versus injustice and so, you know, it was something I've retained and it's the reason I became a Democrat and it's the reason I've worked very hard for the Democratic Party, as imperfect as it may be, since then.

JT: So, how did you then step into taking a run for office?

DL: Well, we're fast-forwarding a bit, Jess, but essentially, I was very active in politics from an early age, passing out literature in the [19]72 campaign for George McGovern, in Allentown, which was not a McGovern stronghold, unaware where the McGovern strongholds were around here, but it wasn't there. And I was amazed at 11 years old how, sort-of, nasty people could be sometimes in politics, and it's something I'm still amazed by actually, but so, I did that. I got involved in the [Ted] Kennedy campaign in 1980. I was, you know, I went to law school, worked for the Walter Mondale campaign. It was a real string of successes as you can see. But, then I became president of the Pennsylvania Young Democrats in 1990; President of Lehigh Valley Young Democrats in 1988. We have one of the most active chapters in the country. Hundreds of people would come to some of our meetings. We had national speakers: George McGovern, my buddy; Paul Simon, Senator Paul Simon, not the singer guy.

JT: Sure.

DL: And so, then I was elected based on the strength of our efforts in Lehigh Valley up to the State President of the Young Democrats. And then I actually took a little bit of a break. I moved

away and I wanted to get involved in Philadelphia politics and it wasn't very welcoming. It was, like, you know, if you're not born, it's like, the attitude I got was, "Who sent you? Why are you here?" So, I decided to focus on my career as a lawyer for a while, met my wife, and we got married, and – this is a true story; when we were gonna get married, we wanted to move out to the suburbs and find a place with some land, and so I literally did some numbers crunching on various trends to try to find a place in the suburbs – which were heavily Republican at the time – where a Democrat could have a chance, someday. And I, like, colored in the precincts that would be areas the Democrats could do well in, and I said to my wife, "You could find a house anywhere you want in the yellow, okay?" which is what she did. So, we moved to Montgomery County and I wanted to get back involved in politics, where I called some of the folks there and I got involved with Senator Connie Williams [State Representative, Montgomery County, 1997-2002; State Senator, 2003-2008] and Allison Schwartz [State Senator, 1991-2004; U.S. Congress, 2005-2010]. I became a speech writer, a debate coach for those folks, and some others, and then, suddenly, Dick Tilghman [State Representative, Montgomery County, 1967-1968; State Senator, 1969-2002], who had been our Senator for 35 years in Montgomery County and Delaware County, was re-elected narrowly in 2000 and then immediately announced, almost immediately announced, he was going to resign. So, he resigned. There was a Special Election to fill his position, which Connie Williams won unexpectedly. And I remember going to Connie's victory party and saying to people, "Wow, so who's gonna run for Connie's seat?" you know? Because, I only lived in the district three years at the time; it didn't occur to me that I would be the person. I knew I would like to run for something someday, but I didn't think that would be my time. I thought there was someone whose turn it was, you know. But, I went through the interview process and they selected me and I actually lost the Special Election to

replace Connie, but I beat the person who beat me in the rematch in November, which was extraordinarily difficult to do. And I've been reelected twice since then. Now, I'm running for the State Senate and hopefully, by the time this airs, I'll, you know, I'll have dictatorial power of some sort somewhere. But so, politics has really been an integral part of my life from very early on.

JT: Excellent. What about campaigning? Did you enjoy campaigning?

DL: Yeah, there are parts of campaigning I love. I actually really love door-to-door. I find it, you know, I mean, most people are very nice and it's interesting and you get to, I mean, in my district we have these huge mansions, and so I get to go on people's properties where usually you would get arrested or chased with a weapon of some sort, but I have a legitimate reason, you know, I'm knocking on the door. But, I just liked talking to people and I just enjoy the, sort-of, Zen-quality of just walking down the street, knocking on doors. I like that. I love speaking. I'm a, you know, ham and I like speaking publicly and I like debating and I like all, I like the strategizing. The only part of campaigning – and the writing; I do all my own writing for speeches and things like that – the only thing I don't like about the campaign, or the most difficult part of campaigning for most people is fundraising. For those who don't know, we have to call people for hours every day, strangers, in most cases, and ask them for money. And that's a, I mean, at the beginning, my whole body, sort-of, revolted against this and I would just like, and when I finally asked the person for money I would squeeze my head because I was so stressed by it. But, eventually you get numb to it, to the point where now I'm like, you know, “Can you give me 1,000 dollars? No? Okay.” “Can you give me 1,000 dollars?” You get in a

groove after a while. But, it's very hard to do. It's one thing to call people and ask for money, which is very difficult to do. But, if you're calling for the Cancer Society, at least you're like, you know, it's the Cancer Society. When you're calling, saying, "Make the check to Daylin Leach for," whatever; it's a much different dynamic, I find. And I'm not one of those people – I'm told there's a few people who are really, who love it. I never got there. I think most people I talk to find that the most difficult part of campaigning. But as for the rest of it, you know, I really enjoy it. It becomes sort-of all-consuming and, you know, especially if you're in a close race, which I was when I was first elected, I was the underdog, you know, you go to sleep every night grinding your teeth, you're ruminating on whatever nasty piece of mail they sent about you that day, and, you know, it's just a major relief when the election's finally over. More a relief when you win, of course.

JT: Of course.

DL: Than when you lose.

JT: Tell me about your district.

DL: Well, the House district is the 149th district. It's Lower Merion, most of Lower Merion, all of Upper Merion, all West Conshohocken, all of Bridgeport. It's a very diverse district. We have some of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the country in places like Bryn Mawr and Haverford. And we have some blue collar working folks in places like Bridgeport and West Conshohocken, and so forth. So, you know, we have a racially diverse district with South

Ardmore, having a large African-American community, and parts of Rebel Hill in Upper Merion and other areas. So, it's really a fascinating place. It's got four colleges in it, which I'm a big fan of higher education and some really good schools. We got two major hospital centers: Bryn Mawr and Lankenau. And we have the nation's largest mall when measured by retail space. People talk about the King of Prussia Mall. People talk the Mall of America, but that's got an amusement park and an ice skating rink and all kinds of other, you know, stuff; whereas, the King of Prussia Mall, man, retail space, more than anywhere else. You can have anything you want at the King of Prussia Mall except a coffin, I'm told. So, it's a fascinating district. We have all kinds of problems that are sort-of not unique to our district, but our district has in great quantities, like traffic is a huge problem, because we're a growing area, and we have Schuylkill and the Turnpike in my district and it's a lot of that, and [Route] 202, and so that's constantly a battle. Because of our proximity to those highways and Philadelphia, we have a lot of building going on, so open space is a big issue. So, you know, these are the sort of problems that we try to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

JT: So, not just a diversity in the constituents themselves, but in the environment as well.

DL: Oh yeah, absolutely. We have all kinds of different neighborhoods. Upper Merion is a very interesting neighborhood because there's no town. It's essentially the Mall and a lot of houses, okay? Whereas Lower Merion is also very – because, people in Upper Merion think of themselves as Upper Merion people. Lower Merion is very different; there's a lot of individual towns in Lower Merion. But they don't really exist. Okay, they're like Bryn Mawr, for example; there's no borders of Bryn Mawr, there's no Mayor of Bryn Mawr. Bryn Mawr is only

a post office box. But we have, you know, lots of little towns that have sort of an identity to people much more than – I mean, in Upper Merion, people say they’re from Upper Merion. In Lower Merion, people say, you know, “I’m from Bala Cynwyd” or “I’m from Ardmore,” much more than they say “I’m from Lower Merion.” So, there’s a different psychology there. West Conshohocken is a very interesting area. It’s an older community, but they’ve had massive, massive new building in the last 10-12 years. Big skyscrapers on the river and so, the community’s changing a lot. Bridgeport, we have a lot of new housing coming in and there’s issues relating to that. So, it’s a very interesting district to be part of and, you know, the Senate district is, sort-of, more of the same. That would include Norristown, which is a, sort-of, historically been an economically challenged, sort-of, almost urban area, but it would also include places like, you know, Radnor, and Haverford and we would get another large mall. So, we would have the King of Prussia Mall and the Plymouth Meeting Mall, which is revitalizing. So, there’s a lot going on.

JT: I’m going to jump around a little bit.

DL: Sure.

JT: But, with regards to your district then, do you think that you would be able to serve your constituents better, or more effectively, as a Senator than you have as a Representative?

DL: Well, the difference between being a Senator and a Representative, there’s a number of differences. Number one, it’s a four-year term, so you can spend more time actually doing the

job, which I think benefits all your constituents, then campaigning so much. Also, you get to vote on some things the House members don't get to vote on, which, for example; confirmation of judges or, you know, whatever it is. But, in terms of actually being in your district, the Senator has just more opportunities; they have access to more resources, they have a larger platform to talk about issues, they can be more of a player in a regional kind-of way, rather than being seen as a narrow parochial person for a particular township, they, you know, represent entire regions. I would represent the entire Main Line; I would represent the entire western suburbs of Philadelphia. So, I'd, you know, be able to speak with one voice on that. You know, there are nine state House districts that touch my Senate district.

JT: Sure.

DL: So, it's much more difficult to, sort-of, get heard. So, I'm looking forward to the opportunity. There's some challenges. I mean, one of the things that's challenging is the Senate district is so, it's large and there's no good way to get from one place to another. Like, if I'm in Haverford and I have to go up to East Norriton, there's no good way to get there. It's a lot of back roads, or you try to get to 202 and it's like a parking lot. So, there's some frustrations there. But, you know, I'll adjust, I'll be fine.

JT: Good for you. Getting back to the House, when you first won the seat in the House, what were your first impressions, say your Swearing-In Ceremony or your office in general?

DL: Even before that, my first impression, my first thing I did when I was elected, I was invited by the Leadership to come up to a Democratic caucus meeting –

JT: Okay.

DL: – as a Member-elect. So, I came to the caucus meeting and I walked in the caucus meeting and five minutes after I walked into my first caucus meeting, I'm still looking around and what's going on, there was a fist fight between two Members. I'm like, "Geez, what have I signed up for here?" But, you know, one of the things you're impressed by right away, and for those who haven't been here, is the grandeur of the building. It's an amazing place to come to work. We have the nicest capitol in the country. We have some of the nicest legislative chambers in the world. And so, you walk around this place and you're like, "Man, this beats my old office in Norristown." So, you're struck by that and that's sort-of, at least to me, sort-of made me take a breath and gave me a sense of purpose that was a little bit bigger than you would ordinarily have, because you're surrounded by all this history. You know, Ben Franklin was the Speaker of the House of Pennsylvania, and all this grandeur of the physical location. And then, you know, you come in as a freshman and you want to save the world, of course. When you get here you realize the world is reluctant to be saved, and everything that happens, or most things that happen, happens sort-of at a glacial pace and incrementally. You know, "I wanna end poverty. I want everyone to get healthcare." Well, those bills are hard to pass.

JT: Sure.

DL: What you might pass is a little bill that slightly extends the coverage for seniors on prescription drugs, or you might pass a bill, you know, to get mammogram screenings for women 40 to 50 years old; that's a bill I worked on, or you might get, you know – there's incremental progress and you learn that, and you learn to push the ball forward and try to stop it from slipping back, and that's a big thing. I would also say that one of the things I learned early on is, I mean, you have a huge learning curve; you do dumb things. Just a real quick anecdote: when I first got here I was on the Judiciary Committee and the Chair of the Judiciary Committee had a bill on the Floor, but there was a flaw in the bill. And I was actually right on this because he [*inaudible*], but I got up and I'm like, "This bill has this big flaw. Look at this. This is bad. This is a bad piece of legislation." I gave this eloquent speech, you know, and I sit down and someone comes up to me and goes, "Are you out of your mind?" I'm like, "What do you mean?" He goes, "That's the Chair of your Committee. Okay, you're not going get a bill moved through that Committee for the rest of your life," you know? The smart thing to do would have been to go up privately and say to the guy, "Look there's a little – would you be willing to, you know?" but I didn't know that, you know, I thought this was great debating society. And there was other things, you know, there was a couple bills I had early on when we were in the minority – we're in the majority now – where I would go up to someone like an eager puppy dog to the majority chair and I'd be like, "Hey, can you run my bill?" And he would look at me, like, a couple times it was a pretty good bill. So, like a week later, a Republican would introduce the identical bill, word-for-word, and that's the bill the Committee Chair would run, you know. I'm like, "What? What about my bill?" I didn't understand the sort of hyper-partisan nature and how petty the partisanship is here. So, there's a million stories I could tell of how I did dumb things and had to learn as I went but, you know you, eventually, you get, sort-of, the hang of it.

JT: Sure. You served on a number of Committees, some for one session, one year, some for the entire time you were in office; the Environmental Resources and Energy Committee, also serving as their Secretary in [20]03-[20]04. Some obviously –

DL: That’s a bogus title, incidentally.

JT: It’s a bogus title; Secretary?

DL: Yeah, utterly worthless.

JT: Is it?

DL: Yes,

JT: Why do you – ?

DL: Because you don’t do anything. You have no duties.

JT: No?

DL: They give titles like that to freshmen so they can put it on their letterhead and get reelected. Which I didn’t know, you know. When I first got here, I’m like, “Daylin, you’re Secretary of

Energy Committee.” And I’m like, “Oh, wow, they must really see my talent.” You know, then I’m, like, six months into it, “Do we do anything as Secretary?” “No.”

JT: No note taking?

DL: No. No, they have a stenographer, or not, but I mean, no, we have absolutely no duties. Totally bogus position. There’s no additional pay or anything.

JT: Sure, sure.

DL: Just a title, but it’s one of the things I learned here is there’s a lot of that sort-of, you know. I’m also apparently Chair of a couple Sub-Committees that never do anything either. So, you have to learn where the real levers of accomplishment are, and being a Secretary of a Committee is not one of them.

JT: Okay.

DL: But, yeah, I’ve been very lucky, I’ve been on the Energy – the Committees I most wanted to be on, the three Committees I most wanted to be on when I got here I’m on, and I’m grateful for. I don’t know what it’s gonna be like in the Senate, but the Energy and Environmental Resources Committee, the Education Committee and the Judiciary Committee. Those were the three Committees. And I’m also on Local Government, which that is an important Committee. I

didn't fully realize that when I got here, because it sounds sort of dull: "Local Government."
But, you do have a lot of land use issues that I think are very important.

JT: Sure.

DL: And also I'm on the Gaming Oversight Committee, which was also interesting in its own way. So, I don't know what I'll be on in the Senate. I only have five more legislative days in the House, I'm told, so we'll see. But it's, the Committees have been very interesting.

JT: Good. Any informal caucuses that you're on?

DL: Yeah, yeah, the Autism. My wife is a psychologist, worked with kids on the PDD [Pervasive Developmental Disorders] Spectrum, and I want to do what I can to help, you know, with parents who are dealing with an autistic kid. I know how difficult that could be and also how helpful early intervention can be.

JT: Sure.

DL: So, I'm on that. I'm on the First Responders, because I have a lot of fire departments in my district and ambulance services and police departments and even more in the Senate obviously. But, I mean, a small town like Bridgport has two fire departments, you know, they hate each other – no, I'm kidding. And there's Sweetland and Sweesburg and West Conshohocken, there's little fire companies all over my district. So, I wanted to see if I could help them because,

you know, it's very difficult for them; they're volunteer fire companies, they save a ton of money, in terms of, as opposed to having to pay for them, and they're having a lot of trouble recruiting people, because the older guys are moving on, so, to the extent I could be helpful to them, I do that. And that's it because I found soon, there's a lot of committees you could join – I mean, not committees, caucuses; informal caucuses – but, I soon found that I was spending, you know, 80 hours a week on the job and still behind on everything, so I wasn't trying to find new stuff. Then I was appointed to the TAP [Tuition Assistance Program] Board, which was something new. And then you know, other things came up: board of directors in my district, the Bryn Mawr Film Institute, the Jewish Community Center, I mean, your day can fill up very quickly. You've got to learn to pace your self and learn to sort of – one of the hardest things I had to learn when I first came here was to say, “No, I can't go to everything. I can't be on everything.” But, I'm sure the Senate will be even harder. But, I have young kids and would like to see them occasionally, so you have to sort-of pace yourself.

JT: How was your relationship with the media, whether it be the Harrisburg press or in you district?

DL: It's fine. I mean the local district is fine.

JT: Did you have a newsletter?

DL: Yeah, I do a newsletter, but we also have local newspapers or weeklies and then we have the [*Philadelphia*] *Inquirer*. The thing about the *Inquirer* is it's so big, its coverage area, that it

doesn't really cover us individually that much, unless we get in trouble or once in a while I'll have a bill they'll talk about or something like that. But, it's not like some of my friends have papers in their district that cover their every move; it's not like that. I could go six months without being mentioned in the *Inquirer* because there's so many Rep[resentative]s in the area. And it is frustrating sometimes, not just the *Inquirer* but the TV stations, whatever it is, because sometime I think we do something really important and I issue a press release or I have a press conference and don't get coverage. I mean, I have the opposite problem that some people have. Some people get too much coverage, but my immediate market is such that I don't really get that much and so, but locally, I'm on the Lower Merion/Upper Merion channels all time, I'm in the local weekly papers all the time, so, that's something. It's harder to sort of – and it's really, you know, one more thing; it's really harder to predict what the press is going to pick up on. I'll do these things I think are really important, total crickets, you know? And then I'll introduce this little tiny bill on giving energy meters to libraries so they can loan them to people when they go buy appliances, to buy energy-efficient appliances, and I'm, like, getting calls from newspapers across the state. I'm getting interviewed by KYW about it. And I was happy for it, but you know, I was just shocked that that bill generated that much interest. It seemed like a small thing, but maybe it was a thing people could relate to. I don't know. So, the media is always interesting. I have a press conference in half an hour, so we'll see if anyone comes.

JT: Now, technology has been changing a lot over the last decade or two, especially with the House. The House has seen laptops for each of the members on thier –

DL: The Senate does now too.

JT: The Senate does too?

DL: The Senate just started that, yeah.

JT: There's also the Legislative Data Processing Web site. All of these technology advancements that have been seen. Good thing?

DL: Yeah, for the most part.

JT: It's a good thing?

DL: For the most part, yeah. I mean information is good, usually. There are certain legitimate zones of privacy that I think we have to protect. We want legislators to be able to have a conversation about, for example; let's say I'm moving a bill that's controversial and there's some discussion of, well, maybe there has been some compromise. I should be able to speak to my allies and say, "Should we agree to this?" "No, not that, but maybe we can go this far." "Okay, well don't tell them that. We'll tell them we'll start here and we're willing to go here if we have to." Those sorts of discussions need to be private. And so, not everything we ever do should be available to the world. But certainly, in terms of what money we spend and things like that to the extent that people can get that more easily, that's great.

JT: So the live-feed cameras that are now in the House, just –

DL: Yeah, I like those. I'm glad they're there. I wish the U.S. Supreme Court would have those but they resist. That's a good thing on balance. The down side, and there is a down side, is that some people just play to the cameras. Now, for my first two terms, PCN did not appear in my district. You couldn't get PCN in my district, so I could never be accused of playing to the cameras. I was always just wordy for its own sake. But some people, you know, get up whenever there's a non-controversial bill just to say, "I'm for this, I'm for Apple Pie Week" just for the folks back home and it slows the process down a little bit, but on balance it's a good thing.

JT: Good. With regards to your legislative career, getting into that a little bit, you were a very big voice with regards to ending gerrymandering. In 2007 you had mentioned that voters are not longer picking their politicians, politicians are picking their voters. Your idea had failed to pass during the Bipartisan Commission in the 2008 session. Will you still be continuing to fight for this issue?

DL: Oh yeah, and maybe the failure to pass there was a blessing, because the next redistricting is 2011 and politicians are very reluctant to give up that power on such an existential issue as to whether they'll still have a career based on the way their district is drawn. Whereas if we do it so it takes effect after the following redistricting which is in 2021, seems like a long time, but really, it makes it much more likely to pass because most of the politicians, most of the Representatives and Senators here think, "I'll definitely be the President of the United States by then," and they feel it's less of an existential threat to themselves. So, I'm fine with that, as long

as it gets done, because if it doesn't get done, it's a terrible situation where we continue to – it's a cycle that's self-perpetuating, because people who can't lose in the General and can only lose in the Primary, where the most ideological voters vote just to appeal to their base and won't cross party lines. We see less and less, fewer and fewer moderate politicians. It's really destructive to our politics, aside from the fact that elections don't matter in much of the state anymore. So, I'm gonna continue to push for that and maybe the additional breathing room will help with that.

JT: Good, good. Another issue that you were very strong about was medical malpractice and fighting against caps. Was this an issue that –

DL: It's more complicated than that, actually.

JT: Okay.

DL: The problem with caps is that they have to be approved by the voters and that never happens. In other states, the most recent being Wyoming, they always lose, because it's easy to come with a commercial, because caps apply to all torts. So, you have some woman who lost her daughter to a drunk driver saying that they don't think the drunk driver should have to pay or be held responsible, and it's hard to fight that. What I've been involved in is stuff that's more, I think, will be more effective. The most effective thing we do with malpractice is MCARE relief and right now we're in the middle of a battle over extending it, which will hopefully be resolved by the time everyone sees this. But, every doctor has to have two malpractice policies: a primary and paying in the MCARE fund. MCARE fund is often the more expensive of the two.

We passed a 25 cent per tax increase on the cigarette tax to pay for MCARE relief. I think that's done far more for doctors than anything else we could do and, hopefully, we'll be able to get that extended in the next few days.

JT: Good. Some more health issues that you had some concerns with: mitochondrial disease that you had tried to bring awareness to.

DL: Yeah.

JT: Were they specific, from, say, some constituents?

DL: Yeah, they were from constituents. And what happens is I have two – I don't do a lot of resolution; a lot of people do a lot of resolutions – I do four, essentially: Armenian genocide, recognizing the Armenian genocide, recognizing the birth of Israel, and then two relatively rare diseases: mitochondrial and familial dysautonomia and the reason I do those two, I mean because one day, I have these constituents have these horrible situations and I was aware of them and I'm getting these co-sponsorship memos for Heart Disease Awareness Week, and I'm like, you know, no one's in favor of heart disease, but people are pretty aware of heart disease. We don't need an awareness week, really. What we really need is awareness week for things people aren't aware of. So, these diseases are called boutique diseases, they don't get the funding they need in terms of research, because they're not as – what do you call it – common.

- **Editor's note: Due to time constraints at the time of the interview on September 22, the second half of interview was completed on another day. The proceeding was taped on September 24, 2009.**

JT: During your time in office what were some of the issues that you were very strongly promoting with regards to legislation?

DL: First, it may be a little jarring that I'm now wearing a different shirt and tie than five seconds ago during our last question, but that's all part of the process here in Harrisburg.

JT: Thank you.

DL: No, a lot of things were important to me. The environment was probably my top priority. I am on the Environmental Resource and Energy Committee. I've had the opportunity to pass some good environmental legislation. Healthcare is very important, particularly the fact that 800,000 Pennsylvanians don't have access to healthcare and, some people say, "Well, you know, uninsured people can go to the emergency room." I get that email a lot. That's actually untrue. I mean, if you're hit by a bus they have to stabilize you, but they don't have to give you a liver transplant or chemotherapy or dialysis or physical therapy or psychological treatment or anything. You just don't get that if you're not insured, unless you get some luck and in a charity situation. So, expanding access to healthcare has been big. I've been very involved a political reform issue called gerrymandering reform or redistricting reform, which is very arcane, probably more than you want to hear about now, but essentially it's enough to make our

elections more competitive and open. And then education; I have two young children in school. My daughter just started her second grade, the little guy's in kindergarten. And so, we want our schools to be the best and give them every opportunity. So, those are four issues I've been big one. I've been on some civil rights issues; civil rights are very important to me. It's why I got interested in politics in the first place, during the civil rights movement. So, I've been fighting to expand civil rights to not only the, historic, racial and religious groups, but also based on sexual orientation and other forms of discrimination. I want to do what we can to eliminate that. And, you know, not only access to healthcare, but public health issues, like I've been active with the smoking ban, the indoor smoking ban, so employees don't have to breathe poison in order to keep their jobs. So, there's been a lot going on and there's always new issues coming up that you didn't predict you'd be a part of, but one circumstance or another, whether it's the committee you're on or just the needs of your constituents or just the angle of the issue that you didn't even anticipate, draws you in. And suddenly, you find yourself very active in an issue that was – I'll give you an example; I have a bill now, an issue I got involved in, to prohibit the widespread distribution of antibiotics to healthy farm animals, because that causes people to be exposed to these antibiotics and creates more drug-resistant strains of disease. So, that's a thing I'm working on now which, you know, if you told me anything about farming a few years ago I never would have predicted I'd be involved. But, it has broader ramifications and I became interested in it. So, things are always sort of coming your way.

JT: Tell me about some of the frustrations that come with the territory, specifically when you are part of the minority party in the House and trying to, you know, get your bills and your legislation through.

DL: Yeah, I've been in the minority, I've been here six years. First four years I was in the minority, last two I've been in the majority. It's much more fun to be in the majority. When you're in the minority, ninety percent of your job is coming to work and voting no on stuff that's gonna pass anyway. You can give a speech. And I used to look at my job that way; I used to say, "You know what? My job is when we pass bad legislation, it's to get up on the Floor and give a speech as why it's bad legislation and create a record, make a case that maybe in the future holds sway, so this bad thing doesn't happen uncommented upon. But, for the average lay person who thinks – and I used to think this before I was elected – that this is a group of folks, we get together, I raise my hand and say, "I have an idea," and everyone else would say, "What is it, Daylin?" and I tell them, and they're like, "That's a great idea," and they clap and pass it, like "Mr. Smith Goes [to Washington], it's not like that. Unfortunately, first of all, it's a very partisan atmosphere. It's more-or-less a collection of individuals than it is two teams. And it's like, you know, you fight for your team often. Now, every once in a while you break ranks, or whatever, but it's hard to do and there's consequences often and more often than not, it's sort-of an us and them mentality. And one of the reasons is the power of being in the majority. Now, if you're in the majority, you control the committee chairs. The committee chairs dictatorially decide what bills come in their committee; when they run, what they say. Once bills are out of committee, they go to the floor. The majority party, typically, dictatorially controls what bills come to the floor what day, when, you know, so if you're in the minority and you have a committee chair who's not a bi-partisan kind of guy, and you say, "Can you run my bill in the Education Committee," he might just say, "No," and that's pretty much the end of it. So, whereas you're in the majority and the majority chairman is a member of your caucus, you can

go to him and say, “Hey, can you have this bill, it’ll make me look good in my district,” which is the last thing the other party wants to do, he’ll say, “Sure, I’ll help you out.” So, it’s much easier to get legislation considered and moving. There are two ways around that, where a minority person can have some success, and I actually had some success. Number one is the amendment process; you can offer amendments on the floor. The majority has a lot of tools for stripping amendments and reverting other printer numbers and stuff and try to keep amendments off, but there is some play in the system there. And then, less effective is something called a discharge resolution, where the majority of the House votes to force a bill out of committee onto the floor for consideration, but that never passes. It’s theoretically a possibility and the reason it never passes, even if it’s a popular bill that most people support, the committee chairs all oppose it because it undermines their power. If you can get a bill to the floor without the committee chair’s approval, then what good is a committee chair? What good is being a committee chair? So, committee chairs often vote against the discharge resolutions for bills where they would probably support on the merits, but there’s protection of the institution and the procedures. So, that doesn’t really, certainly not since I’ve been here, I think it’s been decades since a discharge resolution’s been passed. You have the amendment process, but certainly being in the majority is better. So, that’s one of the frustrations is moving legislation. Another frustration is, obviously, in the House we pass a lot of stuff, it goes to the Senate, they completely ignore it. They’re under no obligation to consider anything we send over, nor are we for them, but they have less stuff they’re interested in passing, and so, there’s not a very good working relationship between the House and the Senate. So, even if you work like a dog to get a bill passed, the Senate just, never even looks at it. Okay, so that’s a frustration as well. One of the frustrations of the job is dealing with your own people, your own advocates, because advocates, I’ve had this

experience, advocates tend to be purists. They want 100 percent because that's what they're paid to do. Anything else is a gross injustice and a misalignment of the universe. But if you're actually gonna move legislation, often you have to compromise. And then your own people are yelling at you, "Why are you compromising? I wanted a 100 percent pure bill." And so, that is a huge frustration and one that people may not anticipate. And the, you know, the usual, you write a bill and the opposite side, their advocates, say a bunch of stuff that's not true about your bill. That's frustrating. Day-to-day this job has an awful lot of frustrations, because especially, most of us come here wanting to save the world and then you get here and realize the world is a very difficult place to save. So, what you eventually come to is a sort-of a homeostasis where you understand the system and you understand that the goal is incremental progress forward and trying to stop going backward and pushing forward. It's not huge leaps in most cases, all of a sudden. And it's almost always a compromise, especially now we have divided government. So, you know, there's a lot of frustrations, but there's a lot of rewards as well.

JT: There's obviously some bills come with controversy. Do you think controversy has a major impact on some of the legislations, or the legislative process? For example: House Bill 288 in 2007-08, regarding hospitals and healthcare facilities. The controversy of that particular bill, does that impact legislation greatly? Is there a lot more discussion that needs to be done?

DL: Controversy obviously means there's opposition which is point number one. But, controversy means often, it often gums up in legislation another way, which is that it doesn't matter if people are for or against it; a lot of people don't want the controversy for its own sake. I've had people who supported bills, supported them, that I was introducing, say, "Why do you

have to run this now? Why do we have to do this? Because, if I vote yes I'm gonna make this group unhappy, if I vote no I'm gonna make this group unhappy. Let's just vote for Woodchuck Week. You know, we'll all vote 'yes' and it'll be Woodchuck Week next week and Woodchuck Awareness Week for people who are unaware of woodchucks, and, you know, we all go out to dinner. It's a much easier lifestyle." When you're pushing controversial legislation, and I had my emergency contraception, I had a death penalty bill, I had death with dignity bill, which allows assisted suicide in Pennsylvania with court approval like they do in Oregon, I mean I introduced a lot of controversial – because, that's why we're here, to solve big problems. Now of course, they don't always get solved. But, just – one of the first things, the questions I get, when I talk about a bill often is not, "What is it? Does it do this or that? Or is it good or bad, this way?" it's just, "Is it going to be controversial?" That's what they want to know. Before they even know, a lot of the people don't want controversy. I actually kind of like controversy. When there's a very unpopular thing that I support I often write an editorial about that. Go out on a limb and, like, if you're gonna do something which may be unpopular, a lot of people, at least, hide, you know, like, they do it and leave and hopefully no one will notice them, whereas I sort-of own the issue, write editorials about it, go on talk shows. I get a lot of hate mail as a result of that. But, I mean again, that's why we're here. So, hopefully I'll have the fortitude to continue to do that into the future. It's never easy and I'm not perfect. There were times I've hidden, you know, because I try to pick my battles, but not everything – I encourage people to be a profile in courage, and not everything I do is a profile in courage, but I think it's like what I said earlier about the incremental progress; we should work on being a little more courageous, a little more bold, keep the ball moving forward.

JT: So, were you upset when you had to take your blog offline?

DL: You know, I don't know. I had mixed feelings about it. And I had been blogging. I blogged from the Denver Convention and frankly – and I'm supposed to continue about the campaign, the problem is I don't have any time. So, from a time management prospective – but I do enjoy writing about this experience. Maybe someday I'll write a book.

JT: Excellent.

DL: I'll keep your viewers notified of that development, should it occur.

JT: As you're getting ready to leave the House, is there some legislation or some issues that you still would like to have seen get through?

DL: Yeah, a ton. There's a ton of things, but in the Senate I think I'll have to the opportunity to continue that fight. The same issues I've talked about: education, healthcare. I mean, we have a costing out study that says we're dramatically under-serving our school districts at the state level. We need to fix that. More people, in a perfect world, everyone, more people every year covered by health insurance. That would be good. Reducing a bit every year the amount of carbon we're putting in the atmosphere, pollution, and cleaning up a few streams, and cleaning up some abandoned mines. You know, just making progress along the way, and then hopefully one or two times in the course of my career there'll be a big victory where we do a huge thing. I mean, I think actually the smoking ban's gonna save a lot of lives. I think the breast cancer screening

bill I passed is gonna save lives. So, I mean that's all good. And so it's just, every day is a battle to do one more.

JT: Of those that you mentioned or maybe even ones that you didn't mention, what do you think is the hardest issue that's before the legislature right now?

DL: Hardest in the sense of politically the hardest is, ironically, redistricting reform because we're asking people to give up their own power. When you're asking people to vote for healthcare you may be asking them to do something they don't philosophically agree with or you may be asking them to vote for something that would be tough to vote for, because then they get some flak for it, but redistricting reform, actually asking people to give up personal power to guide their careers. That's a hard thing to ask someone to do. So, I think that's the toughest, because it goes against everything we're hard wired to do as a species and we really got to reach deep down inside ourselves and say, "You know what, even if this results in me some day losing my job because I don't get to draw the lines to make sure I keep the perfect district for myself, it's still good for the people that do this" and so I'm hoping, maybe naively, that can prevail eventually.

JT: Of your time in the House, what was the thing that you enjoyed the most?

DL: I really enjoyed, I love floor debate. I also enjoyed the camaraderie. I had friends on both sides of the aisle, very conservative people. I started something called the Bipartisan Dinner Caucus and we'd go out to eat. Because when I got here people went out to dinner at night,

because they're hungry, but it was like a junior high school dance with the boys over here and the girls over here. I mean you go into a restaurant and there would be a table of eight Republicans and seven Democrats and nine Republicans and ten Democrats. It's like, you know, I mean, it's almost embarrassing. So, I started the Bipartisan Dinner Caucus, once, I'd say once or twice a month when we're up here we'd have dinner and it's four Democrats, four Republicans, or whoever it is, and I've really enjoyed the friendships I made and, as a result of that and as a result of my service here, I just enjoy the people. Some of them are crazy – just between us – really crazy. But, a lot of them are very smart, hard-working, thoughtful people with a good sense of humor and they're just fun to be around. Plus, it's a beautiful building so it's fun to come here to work every day.

JT: What about the least?

DL: What do I like the least?

JT: Yes.

DL: Well, you know, one of the things in the House, one of the reasons I'm running for the Senate, is that we have two year terms. Which means, you get elected and then six months later you have to start running again essentially and, you know, it's very difficult. One of the things that's been most difficult for me is I have young children and I'm frequently away from home when I should be there. I do everything I can to see them every minute I can and I bring them to all kinds of events that it's inappropriate to bring them to, because it's the only way I'm gonna

get to see them, like the Chamber of Commerce Awards Dinner, I mean, you know, it's not a five-year olds favorite way to spend a couple hours. So, that's been very difficult. We have to spend a lot of time fundraising which, I don't know if you know anything about that process, but it's a horrible, humiliating process. But you have to do it. It's basically calling a lot of people you don't know asking them to send you money. It's every bit as fun as it sounds. But people are very helpful, many of them. But it's still – I don't want to ask people for money, I just want to do my job, but it is part of the job. So with the Senate I'll have to do it less often, so that's good. So, what I like the least is anything that distracts me from the job. I like to focus on policy and moving policy and debating policy and understanding policy and things that distract me from it are difficult and things that keep me away from the family are difficult and so I'll, you know, hopefully I'll have a bit more of a balance in the Senate.

JT: As you look back at your time in the House and someone asks you specifically about your time in the House, is there a certain story, or maybe a couple stories, that come to mind that definitely want people to know about?

DL: Oh geez.

JT: Whether it's humorous or...

DL: I wish you had prepped me on that question. Stories, I mean there are stories but many of them are, you can't tell, are we on cable? No, I'm kidding. You know, I don't know if I some great specific story, but I can tell you that there were great moments fighting really hard. I'll tell

you a story: I'm a proponent of full marriage rights for gay Pennsylvanians and I spoke out on that, I was the only one to speak out on that, for that, on the Floor. There was a lot of people who opposed the Constitutional Amendment to ban gay marriages, but they did for reasons: "No, we don't need it. It's going to make it harder to enforce protection from abuse orders." Whereas, I was the only one to stand up and say that gay people should have full and equal marriage rights. And so, we passed a bill, despite my efforts, which banned not only gay marriage, but all recognition of any same sex couples, which was really harsh. It went over to the Senate, the Senate passed a different version, taking out everything but the ban on gay marriage and it came back to the House, which would have easily passed if they read it. But I came up with the idea that I bet we can get them not to run it if we're creative. So, what I did was, I said I have great credibility with the rabid anti-gay people because they knew that I was really pro-gay rights from my floor debates. So, I sent a letter around to everyone. I said, "This ban on marriage from the Senate, it's still bad, I'm still against it, but it's much better than the other one because we're not going to pass two anti-gay marriages and at least gay couples will still be able to get state money. They'll still be able to get domestic partner benefits," and, you know, "It'll leave open the door for civil unions and the fact that we considered banning civil unions and didn't could lead the court to believe that we intended to have civil unions." I put all this stuff in there designed to make them go, "Oh my god, we can't pass this. Leach is right." In fact, I was told in the Republican caucus where most of these folks are, they actually had this discussion and they held up my letter and they say, "Leach, he's saying by passing this we're gonna be approving civil unions, we're gonna approving domestic partnership." So, they didn't pass anything. So, I'd like to take some credit for actually prohibiting, single-handling prohibiting, not prohibiting but preventing any Constitution Amendment, which I think would be

an abomination. I mean, to me the Constitution is to expand rights and protect individual rights, not to contract rights and take people's rights away. So, I like to think that my letter actually stopped them from passing that bill. That was one of the moments of great triumphs. There's been a few. Certainly, there have been three in the morning caucuses on budgets that are always interesting. It's, you know, there's always some excitement going on, always some rumors. We live on rumors here, most of them turn out not to be true, but that doesn't mean we don't want to hear the latest one. It's been a good time and I have to right a speech, a farewell to the House speech. I'll start thinking about any stories I have that might be appropriate, so you can tune in for that.

JT: Thank you.

DL: That'll be a huge ratings bonanza –

JT: Thanks. Appreciate that.

DL: – for you. Anyway.

JT: As you leave do you have any advice for those who might be interested in public service, or those even that are newly elected into the House?

DL: Yeah. Again, learn about incremental change. Work with people. Often you can work with people on the other side of an issue. I've come to great compromises on a number of issues

that seemed intractable, three or four I can think of. Form personal relationships with people because that, you know, when you go to a guy, if you're a Democrat and you go to a Republican, or vice versa, and you say, "Jesse, I need your vote on this, or at least can you not speak out against it?" If he's never met you before, or if you've been hostile, it's not gonna work. But if you have a friendship or gone out to dinner, you've maybe joked around with him, asked about his family, you're gonna have a much better chance. I mean, personal relationships really matter. Know what you're talking about. Spend some time learning what you're talking about. Be open to changing your mind. I've changed my mind on a couple of issues as a result of debates or discussions I've had. Try to learn a lot about, I mean you have to learn something about a bunch of different areas, but try to learn an awful lot about one or two areas. If you become known as sort-of an expert, or authority, in a particular area, people will defer to you in that area and they'll come to you for advice or they'll say, "How should I vote on this?" You'll have a lot of influence if you get the reputation of having knowledge in a certain area. Those are sort-of some of the things I would tell a freshman coming in. It's a learning curve, but over time, we all in the first day in sort of like awe and then by the fifth month we all walk in like we own the place. That'll continue.

JT: Any final thoughts?

DL: No, only that it's a great honor, public service. We're made fun of a lot, public servants and politicians, and it's easy to make fun of us; we're self-promotional, sometimes we're full of it, especially during election year, we're back-slapping everyone, and there's a certain caricature that can come out of that. And caricatures are based often on a grain of truth, but that said, the

overwhelming majority of people here are here despite the fact that they could make a great deal of money doing something else, a great deal more money. They're being paid much less. They work very hard; I work 80 hours a week at this job and that's not when I'm running for election. When I'm running for election, it's more. And I'm still behind on everything. This is an extremely hard job. It's an extremely difficult job for people here, in the sense that you're away from family all the time and then every other year, there's someone whose job it is to tell the world what a jerk you are. That's their job. So, that's kind-of weird when you think about it. And they're raising money constantly so they can spend it telling the world what a jerk you are. So, there's a lot difficulty in this job and people who do this job are really a special people, I believe, and It's easy to make fun of us and certainly I've gotten upset at politicians in my life when they've done things I didn't agree with, but I think the people out there should know that, you know, most of you – except for the dude in, I won't say – but, most of you are being well served by hard-working, sincere people and that doesn't get said enough, I think, certainly not in the media.

JT: Excellent. Representative Daylin Leach, I want to thank you very much for participating in our project.

DL: Sure.

JT: And we wish you good luck in everything that happens in the future.

DL: Thank you very much, Jesse.