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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable T. J. Rooney (D)

133rd District

Lehigh and Northampton Counties

1993-2006

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Heidi Mays (HM): Good afternoon.

The Honorable T.J. Rooney (TJR): Good afternoon.

HM: I'm here today with Representative T.J. Rooney, who represents the 133rd Legislative District from Lehigh and Northampton Counties. He has served the Pennsylvania House from 1993 and is currently serving, which is the year 2006. Thank you for being with me here today.

TJR: Thank you for asking me to be here today.

HM: We appreciate that. I want to begin by asking you about your childhood and your family life and how that prepared you for political office?

TJR: I grew up in a political family, or a family that was very much involved in politics and, unlike a lot of homes where discussion of religion and politics was kind-of taboo at the dinner table, that was routine in our family. I became acquainted with politics, if you will, very early on. My uncle¹ served in the Congress from the 15th district in Pennsylvania for a number of years. Prior to that, he served in the State Senate and then was elected to Congress from 1963 and served until 1979. So, I was born in 1964, so obviously, with an uncle serving in that capacity and having a family that had a deep love

¹ Fred Rooney served as a Democrat for the Pennsylvania State Senate from 1959-1963 and a U.S. Representative from 1963-1979.

of public service and government, I was one of those weird little kids that paid attention to this stuff growing up.

HM: When would you say you thought you had political aspirations, yourself?

TJR: Probably the election of 1978. My uncle was defeated by a guy who was a complete nit-wit. Previously, my uncle, in the last election, had won by something like 40,000 votes. At the time – you know, and it’s still the case, although we haven’t had anybody from the Lehigh Valley since that time that spent the requisite amount of time in Washington [D.C.] working the system, getting to know the players. So, consequently, he had risen through the ranks of the Congress. One of his best friends in life was Tip O’Neill², who was a former Speaker of the House, and Fred had become Chairman of a couple different committees, so his seniority was both a blessing and a curse. It was a blessing in the sense that he was able to deliver for the District in ways, again, that have been unprecedented since his tenure in the Congress ended. But the curse was, you know, something that I realized in a smaller but similar scale, and that is, time away from home exacts a toll. Whether that be on the family itself, or whether it be fostering this notion among your constituents that you’ve “lost touch,” or in his case, he “went Washington.” The rumblings that I’ve heard once in a while was that I’ve “gone Harrisburg,” if you will. So, that’s the blessing and the curse that he realized and lived and that I, to some extent – again, smaller scale, different realm – but, realized many of the same experiences in that respect that he did. Again, long answer to a short question; I

²Thomas Phillip O’Neill, Jr. served as U.S. Representative for thirty-four years representing two Congressional districts from Massachusetts. He also served as Speaker of the House from 1977-1987.

was born into it and 1978 was the year that I decided – so, I would've been what? 14 years old – it was when I decided that government and public service was something that I'd like to pursue.

HM: Could you describe a little bit about your career and your experiences prior to coming to the House?

TJR: *(laugh)* Rather divergent experiences. Prior to my election, I had worked in an insurance business, and if you don't think that's rotten, I don't know what is. I mean, I had a great opportunity. A very, very kind, nice gentleman provided me an opportunity, but the insurance business just bit. I mean, I really didn't have a whole lot of interest in it. But at the time, I was married, I had two children both under the age – well, when I was elected, they were both under the age of two – So, we had rent to pay and kids to feed and so, that was my experience immediately preceding my election. Prior to that, I had done a number of different things. I had moved to Pennsylvania, depending on who you asked, in 1988. There was some issue with my residency, many years later that some idiot that I ran against brought up my residency two years into my term in office, so it didn't make much sense, but it resulted in an Attorney General investigation. Yada, yada, yada; all politically motivated. So, I moved to Pennsylvania in 1988 and prior to that, I was born in New York. I lived on Long Island until I was 14 and then moved to North Jersey where I lived in Essex Falls and went to school in North Jersey prior to coming to Pennsylvania.

HM: Why did you run for the Pennsylvania House?

TJR: Well, the honest answer: it afforded me an unprecedented opportunity in that it was an open seat. My seat had been held previously by Paul McHale [State Representative, Lehigh County, 1983-1991; U.S. Representative, 1993-1998; U.S. Asst. Secretary of Defense, Homeland Security, 2003-present], who had resigned during his term in office to go to the Gulf War³; the first one. Upon his resignation, a Special Election was held. His wife ran in the Special Election and won the seat⁴. During that period of time, he returned from his service in the War and decided that he was going to run for Congress, which meant his wife wasn't going to seek re-election, which meant the 133rd District seat became open. So, it was, you know, it's funny; when I first moved to Pennsylvania, I was not real familiar – I wasn't familiar at all – with the State House, the players, any of that. My brother ran for Judge in 1989, which is really what prompted my move to Pennsylvania, helping – who are you going to help, if you can't help your brother, you know? And I really thought very little about the State House. I got to know some of the Representatives and quite frankly, I thought many of them were dolts. So, I painted the whole Institution with one brush, and that was a silly thing to do. Obviously, I've enjoyed every moment of this tremendous opportunity and experience. And my original impressions of the State House weren't wide-eyed and cock-eyed optimistic; I just thought, at least the ones that were in our area, at the time, were less than adequate.

³ This war was also known as the Persian Gulf War, First Gulf War and the Liberation of Kuwait. From 1990-1991, Coalition forces led by the U.S. attacked Iraq after they invaded the small country of Kuwait in August of 1990.

⁴ Katherine McHale, State Representative, 1991-1992, Lehigh County.

HM: So, helping your brother run for Judge, was that your first experience in elections and campaigning?

TJR: No, not really. In New Jersey, when I was in high school, you know, we started the Young Democrats and all that kind of stuff. So, I was involved in one particular campaign. It was Congressman Joe Minish,⁵ who served in New Jersey in Essex County. So, he had Newark and the Oranges and I resided in his Congressional District, and Congressman Minish – it must have been [19]82, because the reapportionment had kicked in and the Republicans had gerrymandered his seat – it was really during the time, the infancy, when Republicans, across the country, were trying to unpack Districts where you had large concentrations of minorities to dilute the influences of the minority vote, thereby giving a Republican a better opportunity to win in these seats. And, Joe Minish was a great guy. He served with my uncle, I guess, the entire time my uncle was in Congress, and as much as I liked him, I felt bad. I mean, here was a guy who had served with distinction for so many years and he got absolutely hosed in a gerrymander. So, for the last couple of weeks of the campaign, I drove him around and stuff like that. So, no, my brother's was not in anyway my first, but it was probably the most important that I had ever toiled in, in any sense or capacity, up to that point.

HM: So, could you tell me about your first campaign?

TJR: Yeah, it was a trip. I ran in a Primary against the guy [Richard J. Szulborski] who had been a City Councilman in Bethlehem, who, at one time, had been engaged to my

⁵ Joseph Minish served the United States Congress from 1963 to 1984.

sister. Fortunately, she dumped him and then I waxed him, you know, on Election Day in the Primary, which made all of us feel pretty good. So, it was just a two person Primary and it was probably the first and only time that I really knocked on doors. I mean, I did it. Like I said, I was in the insurance business. My employer, Tommy McHale, was a great guy and he gave me the latitude to work until noon everyday and then I would just be a door monkey from noon, you know, until it got dark. So, that was my Primary. And the district has always been good. I mean, obviously, we made it a little better in the 2000 reapportionment, in terms of Democratic performance, but it was still competitive. I mean, it wasn't like a slam-dunk. So, we ran a good campaign, really kind-of an old-school campaign. We always had a political office – recent years, it never stopped. I mean, I kept it going year-round for a number of years – but, we had an office. We had a lot of the “old timers,” if you will, who were instrumental in helping my uncle those many years, who were involved in my brother's effort. So, it was neat. It was kind-of like, it was exciting. Obviously, it was challenging. It was all new. So, I didn't know really what to expect; and, you know, 14 years later, it was, you know, it was fun. It really was, in many respects.

HM: Do you like to campaign?

TJR: I've tried not to say it before, but I will; I love the politics and the campaigns far more than the legislative stuff. I mean, since 1998, all I've really done, quite frankly, is focused on the politics. I ran the House Campaign Committee before I was elected Vice-Chairman of the Party, and then subsequently, Chairman of the Party. So, my first love is

campaigns and the political nature. The legislative realm is something I respect, but I spent an inordinate amount of time focusing on the politics and not so much on the legislative side of things.

HM: Can you tell me how your first campaign, you know, compared to subsequent campaigns?

TJR: Well, (*laugh*) you know, it was one of those things. It was one of those campaigns where it was all so brand new. So everyone wee-weed themselves a couple of times a day. You know, a piece of mail hit or, you know, somebody's neighbor said I was a schmuk. Yeah, you know, it was all that kind-of stuff. As you go farther along, you tend not to, you know, respond or react, but everything was a crisis. Everything was a catastrophe. Every day, the world was falling in and it probably took me two or three cycles to get used to that aspect of it.

HM: So you learned to weather the criticisms and the –

TJR: Oh my God, yeah. Oh, it's (*laugh*) been a long, in that sense, a long 14 years. I've always tended to take, you know, pretty high profile stances on some pretty divisive issues. Whether it be a woman's right to choose, which I wholeheartedly support without many of the restrictions that are in place today; gun violence was the primary issue that has motivated me during my time here. I think we live in an insidious society where the stranglehold of the National Rifle Association has over this Legislature is despicable.

People across the state have been clamoring, not in the year 2006, but for many years, for common sense firearm safety. So, I took the lead on that, along with my colleague and friend Dwight Evans [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1981-present] from Philadelphia. So, you know, there were certain things, legislatively, that really got me motivated, but at the end of the day, the biggest motivating factor was just trying to beat Republicans.

HM: Can you talk a little bit about the money that was generated in campaigns and did that change at all?

TJR: Oh my God has it ever. We spent what we thought was – and it was, at the time – a lot of money. I probably spent somewhere in the neighborhood of a 100,000 dollars in my first campaign and in races that we are targeting, today, for State House seats, we're spending 500,000 dollars. I can imagine watching this in 10 years when a campaign for the State House is going to cost, you know, three quarters of a million to a million dollars. As nutty as it is, it is what it is, and I haven't heard an idea yet that would kind-of take that aspect of politicking – fund raising – out of the pictures. *(laugh)* It's always been an issue. It will always be an issue and, you know, you got to get used to it.

HM: You talked about helping your brother campaign. Who helped you?

TJR: Oh, God, a lot of people. I mean, clearly, my family was hugely important and instrumental. A dear friend of mine, Mike Schweder, [J. Michael; State Representative,

Northampton County, 1975-1980] who had served in the Legislature, was the guy that, every time somebody would, like I said, poop the bed, Schweder was the guy I would go to and, you know, kind-of get centered again. But, so many people and, like I said, we had a staff; an unpaid volunteer staff that was probably, you know, on any given day, there were probably 20 or 25 people, mostly over the age of 80, but nonetheless, they were great, committed, dedicated folks. I was, obviously, most appreciative of that, but clearly, my family was most supportive and most comforting, if you will, during a period of uncertainty, just because it was all unknown.

HM: Well, you are the Democratic Party Chairman for Pennsylvania and you have been since March 2003. What is the status of the Democratic Party in Pennsylvania?

TJR: Well, (*laugh*) I am pleased to report it's much better and different than it was a few years ago. I was elected Chairman, wholly, I think, based on the support that I enjoyed from Governor Rendell [Edward G.; Pennsylvania Governor, 2003-2011]. While I was Vice Chairman of the Party, the Governor was running in a contested Primary against, hopefully soon-to-be, Senator Bob Casey [Robert P., Jr.; Pennsylvania State Auditor, 1997-2005; Pennsylvania State Treasurer, 2005-2006; U.S. Senator, 2007-present] and I, at the time, like I said, was Vice Chair and the State Committee had gone full steam, lock, stock and barrel, and endorsed Bob Casey's candidacy. I stepped out of line, if you will, and supported the Governor's campaign which immediately got me thrown out as Vice Chair and that was the beginning of the tide turning for us. Prior to the Governor's election and subsequent state-wide judicial elections of 2005, we were

“zero forever.” I mean, we couldn’t deliver a pizza in this State and the good news is that, in that period of time, we’ve won far more than we’ve lost. Literally, I think we were zero for 19 in state-wide judicial races. The first year we took over we went three for four. I’ll argue, to my deathbed, that we won that other race. So, those rat bastards stole it from us in the courts, but having said that, we’ve continued on. We delivered the State in 2000 for Al Gore⁶, and then, of course, the Governor was elected in 2002. We delivered it for Kerry⁷ in 2004, and if all goes well, in 21 days from today, we could have a good day.⁸ That just further enhances the Party’s standing. It was always thought to be a kind of black hole; nobody really wanted to invest in it and, without disparaging any of my predecessors, but with good reason. I mean, it takes a lot of things to do it right, but having a Governor who is committed to it is the most important thing that you can have. So, listen, I’ll be the first to admit that there are things that I’m given credit for which I probably don’t deserve, but I figure that the leveling out principal is that I (*laugh*) have taken a lot of crap that I probably didn’t deserve, too, so it’s all good and this Party is strong and getting stronger and if we have a good day in three weeks from today, we could really have something to talk about.

HM: Well, how involved are you in these up coming elections?

TJR: Involved; varying degrees. The primary function of the State Party is to run what’s referred to as the coordinated campaign. That’s the campaign that takes into the account the Governor’s race, the United States Senate race, the races for Congress and

⁶ 2000 Democratic Presidential nominee; Vice President of the United States, 1993-2001.

⁷ John Kerry, 2004 Democratic Presidential nominee; U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, 1985-present.

⁸ November 7, 2006 is the date of the General Election for the United States.

then, farther down ballot, State House and State Senate seats. My experience up until this point, we haven't run a really effective, coordinated campaign in a long time and it's difficult to when you don't have a Governor; it makes it that much more difficult. In a Presidential year, the candidates come in, spend money in your name, and leave you holding the bag. We're still paying bills for Kerry and so, this was the first opportunity where we had commonality of interests among the candidates. You asked; how much am I involved? *(laugh)* You know, fairly involved is probably the fairest way to describe it. The coordinated campaign, my Executive Director, who is one of my best friends, Mary Eisenhower, has done a phenomenal job of putting it together and you can imagine like wanting to pull your hair out. You know, like if your kids spill something or your dog takes a dump on the carpet. Somebody is dumping on her carpet three times a day.

HM: *(laugh)*.

TJR: So, you know, it's really a challenge, but it's worthwhile at the end of the day if we are able to run the board which an optimist would say we will, is real important. So, am I involved? Yeah. I do a lot of that. I do a lot of, you know, trying to figure out, along with the wonderful folks that we have, targeting and that kind of stuff, but then I do a lot of other – I mean, especially now, in these last months, a lot of speaking on behalf of our candidates and our Party, both in states and a lot of *(laugh)* national interest in this stuff as there has been. So, most of my days, again, for especially the last month of the campaign, are doing interviews; either print, radio or TV stuff.

HM: Will the State House go Democratic?

TJR: We've got a shot. I mean, if you'd asked me that question four months ago, I would have said – I won't insult your intelligence when I say, "no," but there is, yeah – the answer is yes; we absolutely have a shot. It's going to take a special kind-of day. At the end of the day, we still need eight seats to pick up the Majority. We have more than enough candidates that are talented enough and that's the good news. Maybe we can talk about that in a little bit. Just the good news and bad news, the way things are evolving here, but the good news is, we have young, attractive, articulate, candidates across the board. Recently, in Special Elections, Tommy Blackwell [Thomas W., IV; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 2005-2008] from Philadelphia, [and] Cherelle Parker [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 2005-present] from Philadelphia, epitomize what's right and what the future of this Party is all about. Flaherty, [Sean; State Representative, Allegheny County, 2006] out in Allegheny County. We've got Chelsa Wagner [State Representative, Allegheny County, 2007-present] running against that boob, Diven [Michael; State Representative, Allegheny County, 2001-2006], who we are going to take out. People like that, (*inaudible*) their last cycle. Mike Gerber [Michael; State Representative, Montgomery County, 2005-present], Josh Shapiro [Joshua; State Representative, Montgomery County, 2005-present], so the bottom line is that we are replete with opportunities, but, at the end of the day, we still have to pick up eight. The difference in campaigns for the State House now – and say when I was elected and certainly prior to the years I was elected – is that the House was always subject, going back into the late [19]70s – in 1978, for example, House Democrats went into

election day with 118 seats. I think they came out with something like 97. I mean, unbelievable. 20-seat plus turn over. You don't see that really anymore, because these campaigns are so expensive, they become insular. They take on a persona, if you will, of their own. You know voters have – well, it's not like, "Well, I'm going to vote for Thornburgh [Richard "Dick," Pennsylvania Governor, 1979-1987] and therefore, take out everybody else. People just go in and they know, "I'm going to vote for Rendell. I'm going to vote for Casey. I'm going to vote for the Republican for Congress. I'm going to vote for the Democrat for the State House, the Republican for –." People are all over the place, so again, long answer, short question; eight seats is a lot of seats, but in this cycle, if everything lines up right, it's not impossible.

HM: How were you able to balance your responsibilities as Chairman and your responsibilities as Representative?

TJR: *(laugh)* Some would suggest not so well. It's been somewhat difficult. I decided, early on, when I was put in a Chair spot that, unlike in the past where I was much more vocal, I spoke much more frequently on the Floor. My fear, and I don't think it was illegitimate, is that anything I would say or do, legislatively, would be viewed in some political context and there is no escaping that and I understand that. I mean, it's always been that way and especially telling, like in the late [19]90s, when I was running the House Campaign Committee, but very passionately involved in the fight against gun violence; anytime I would say anything, "Well, you're just trying to," you know, "trying to put this Representative on the hot seat in Southeast," you know? So, I really, kind-of

stepped back my public pronouncements on issues of the day for the knowledge that it would just be construed. You know, if I were to take one position and it was opposite from where the Governor might be, then it becomes a news story that nobody needs. So, in that sense, I've taken a step back, at least publicly. Now, the good news is I've been able to do more behind the scenes, you know, whereas I was out there making speeches and, you know, getting attention, I was still banging my head against the wall. Now, I pretty much shut up and am able to get things done, so it's a trade off, but one that's, you know, unavoidable and worthwhile at the same time.

HM: What special insights did your Chairmanship provide you with?

TJR: It certainly showed me how nutty a lot of people are. I mean, not that I didn't know that beforehand, but holy smokes, you know? But, it also provided me with far more positive insight and getting to know folks and traveling the state. My God, this is a diverse state. It's certainly large in terms of geography, but it's very, very diverse and it takes a special person to be the candidate in a successful statewide campaign. You know, it's not just lining up our 16 counties against the rest of the state. It's a lot more nuance than all that and so, the experiences have been tremendous. The frustration that I've experienced is how people are inclined to either stir for no good reason. We have people challenging this Chairman or that Chairman and I understand that and, locally, it's all very important, but at the end of the day, it doesn't help beat one Republican. Some of the internal pissing matches that we go through are just not productive. You know, I often say it; folks, when they want to talk about somebody doing them dirty in Venango

County, okay, we'll address that, but what are you going to do to elect a State Representative in that District? So, it's provided me with really interesting insight. I mean, and certainly the good things about the job far outweigh (*laugh*) the not so good things, but my Lord, it sure is eye-opening. Some of the stuff that people come up with will knock your socks off.

HM: Well, we're going to bring it back to your District now. Can you tell me a little bit about your District and especially the people and their issues?

TJR: Sure, well, from 1992 to 2002 it had to have been one of the most eclectic Districts, whereas I represented some very, very affluent areas of Upper Saucon Township in Lehigh County. I represented half of that Borough of Coopersburg. Rather well-to-do. The irony of it all is that you could get in your car and drive three miles and go from, you know, abundant luxury to abject poverty. So, it was always an interesting District in that sense and it was – quite frankly, I liked the old District better; the new District, which does not have Upper Saucon and Coopersburg, but does have all of Whitehall and all of Copley – I had parts of Whitehall before, but none of Copley – It is more homogenous than the old District was. I liked the old District better because it was more of a challenge. Now, granted, I also spent more time there, but you would be able to look at and hear from people that had such divergent views and perspectives on whether it was the issue of the day or whether it was the world, in general. It was really kind of fascinating. Whereas, like I said, this district is more similar than the old one was.

HM: So, reapportionment was the change?

TJR: Yeah, reapportionment was, you know, good in the sense that, I mean, this District is literally fool proof now. Some argue that I have proven that once or twice (*laugh*) but it's a seat that we're not going to lose. So, I'm proud of the fact that I drew it, I mean, not so much for me, you know, because I'm on the way out, but one of my best friends is succeeding me and, you know, he'll have that, theoretically, as long as he doesn't screw it up. (*laugh*) But so, it was, yeah, it's been a neat ride.

HM: Do you feel like you connected with your constituents?

TJR: I do, you know, and that's kind-of the crazy thing; I enjoyed a very, for lack of a better word, privileged up-bringing and, you know, I was blessed with two great parents and my dad worked hard and realized, in many respects, the American Dream. So, I was able to avail myself. It afforded me the luxury of moving sort-of seamlessly through the District. I didn't feel out of place at Saucon Valley County Club and I didn't feel at all out of place at the Puerto Rican Club at Third Street in South Bethlehem, you know? So, that's the greatest blessing I probably have been bestowed by my family, because they were like that. I mean, while my dad was, you know, a successful New York executive, he never forgot where he came from. So, that was instilled in me all my life. I will never forget being out to dinner one time and, you know, my folks were always exceedingly gracious to the servers and I don't even know what brought it up but, you know, no

sooner did I get the words – my mother’s like, “Listen, you dumb ass, just remember the person serving you could be me or your father. So, just remember that.” You know, that kind of value that was instilled at a very early age, helped me politically. I mean, it helped me in probably so many different realms or respects, but it certainly did help me politically being able to move and not feel. That’s why I liked the old District better. I mean, it was different and so it was neat.

HM: Well, a way to help out is sometimes projects. Were you able to help with any special projects in your District?

TJR: Yeah, no doubt, and in hindsight or in retrospect, I probably should’ve done a better job harping about it. I see how so many politicians are just so, so full of shit. It drives me nuts and I always said when I first got here, there was one particularly egregious Democratic Member, and I said to myself, “My God, I do not want to be him when I grow up.” That probably has a lot to do with why I’m leaving now, but fortunately, I’ve been able to come on my own terms and leave on my own terms but *(laugh)* yeah, it’s, you know, there have been a number of projects that were, I mean, early on, in my first term, we were working with Senator Jeanette Reibman [State Senator, 1967-1994], to secure five million dollars for Lehigh [University] to build a performing arts center. They initially said, “Oh, it’s going to be a wonderful use for the community.” Most things are not so much – they kind-of *(laugh)* – I don’t know if the community is using it as much as they said when they were begging for five million bucks but, you know. The biggest project of late, probably for the last six, eight years,

has been the redevelopment of the Bethlehem Steel site what was once home to – I mean, my father pushed a broom there in the summertime before he went through Lehigh and, you know, that site is a 126 acres of vacant buildings, many of which are historically significant. Well, we had gone through a number of developers who expressed interest in the piece of land, only to say that their interest was to knock everything down and build, probably, some half-assed strip, well, not strip mall, but one of those big box, you know. The last thing we need (*laugh*) is like a Target or Wal-Mart or one of those joints so, with the advent of gaming, that presented a whole new set of opportunities. So, I, like many people, anxiously await December 20, 2006, when the licenses will be awarded. If, in fact, we're successful – our plans are met with favorable approval from the Gaming Commission – there will be a billion dollars worth of development on that site in the next, five, six, seven years and that is something I would be most proud of. But again, there are a lot of other – I mean, the greatest satisfaction I always got was just helping some poor Joe or Jane that was absolutely getting screwed by some half-assed bureaucrat, whether it be here or in some tax office somewhere, you know, and helping them resolve their issue because, you know, we are a lot like cops. And I don't mean it to disparage police or firemen (*laugh*), but in a sense, people only come to us when they have a problem. You know, I can't recall once – somebody came in and said "Jesus, T.J., you're doing a hell of a good job," and I got nothing else but good and, you know. It doesn't work like that. I'll never forget, it must have been Columbus Day or something, I was in Philadelphia and the phone rang, early. It was this woman who's husband had a brain tumor and all they wanted to do was get him to a – they were going to take a trip to Hawaii, but for some reason, they didn't have a passport. You don't need a passport to

go to Hawaii, but there was some circumstance like that and, quite frankly, there was nothing we could do. It was a Federal – it involved a passport for some reason. Maybe it was Mexico. They were going to Mexico, that must have been it, and so, by noon the next day, and again, all the Federal offices were closed, it was outside of our realm, but by noon the next day, the guy had his passport and was able to go on his trip. You know, the last trip he ever took. So, that stuff was as, if not to me personally, more important than, you know, building some performing arts center for some ungrateful large university that happens to be in my District (*laugh*). You know what I mean?

HM: Well, I'm going to back up just a step; because my next question is, do you remember how you felt during your first Swearing-In Ceremony?

TJR: Oh, yeah. Just incredibly honored and the great thing was, I was able to have my folks here. You know, I experienced a lot of personal changes in the time that I served. I've lost both my parents and my kids, like I said, were one and two, they're now (*laugh*) driving, you know, so that's kind of freaky weird. So yeah, I was able to have the people that I loved the most with me and to be brought into that Chamber, and it never looks better than it does on Swearing-In Day. You know, the desks are full of flowers and stuff and it's packed to the rim with people. Everybody's feeling good. Obviously, there are a bunch of other people at home watching it, who had, perhaps, run and are not feeling so great, but there is a great feeling in the Chamber, those days. You know, the first one was just an incredible experience.

HM: What was the first time that you were down, as an elected official, on the House Floor like for you? Were you prepared for that?

TJR: Yeah, yes, and I was asked the question back then. I recall being asked the question and, you know, again, because I had some perspective, I didn't feel like a fish out of water or anything like that and plus, during the time with my campaign, I'd built some relationships and friendships that last, today. I mean, Mike Veon [Michael; State Representative, Beaver County, 1985-2006] is one of my best friends in the world, forget about being a colleague with whom I've been privileged to serve. But, getting to know Mike and Bill DeWeese [H. William; State Representative, Fayette, Greene and Washington Counties, 1976-present; Speaker, 1993-1994] and certainly Dwight Evans was a good thing, because if I did ever find myself with some conundrum or some, you know, I needed some guidance or help, I was able just to turn to them and you can't get much better advice from guys like Veon and Dwight.

HM: Do you remember who you sat next to on the House Floor?

TJR: The first term, I sat next to Representative Frank LaGrotta, [State Representative, Lawrence County, 1987-2006] who is also leaving this term, and maybe Representative Karen Ritter [State Representative, Lehigh County, 1987-1994] from Lehigh County, who I believe was – or maybe Frank Yandrisevits [State Representative, Lehigh and Northampton Counties, 1985-1990]. One of them was to my right. So yeah, I think for

the first term those – it was either Yandrisevits – I know it was LaGrotta, and then either Ritter or Yandrisevits.

HM: Did you have any mentors when you came to Harrisburg?

TJR: Yeah, no doubt. Well, the greatest mentor I ever had in my life was my father. I loved him dearly, and whose loss I took hard. Mike Schweder, who I mentioned, who had previously served here is one of my absolute best friends today. Our families travel together, hang out together, all the time. And then Mike Veon, more so than anybody else, you know, he was a friend and a mentor. And of course, again, I have always enjoyed a great relationship with Bill [DeWeese] who, when I was elected, was the Speaker. I mean, I came into the Majority and I've, you know, we've a pretty decent shot this time and I'm leaving, but that's alright. And Dwight Evans, there are very few, if any, finer people that I've ever – forget about the politics stuff, just as a human person. You know Mike and Dwight and Bill, but Mike and Dwight, in particular, are as good as they get.

HM: You served on many committees during your tenure.

TJR: My attendance wasn't so hot, but yeah, I did.

HM: Well, we're not talking about attendance. And you were a Chairman on several different committees, session after session. Did you have a favorite committee?

TJR: Yeah, Consumer Affairs. I served on that my entire tenure. Again, those issues, other than what I told you about gun safety stuff, but consumer issues, whether it be telecommunications or we deregulated electric utility industry with some success, I would imagine. So yeah, the Consumer Affairs, by far was. I was on the Insurance Committee. Like I said, I had served in the insurance business previously, but, you know, like the business itself, it's sort of dry white toast and whereas Consumer Affairs – there are actually times when we'd be in committee or on the Floor offering an amendment that really did show whether or not you were able to be on the side of people, not just say you're on the side of folks. You know, and there are a million different things you can point to, and I won't, but the lines were pretty clear, I mean, whose side you were on and, you know, I think, by far, that was the most satisfying committee on which I served.

HM: Well, you talked about your children's ages when you were first elected, but you didn't mention yours.

TJR: *(laugh)* Yeah.

HM: You were 28?

TJR: I was 27.

HM: Okay.

TJR: When I was elected.

HM: Okay.

TJR: You know, this has been the greatest 36 years; no, I'm just kidding.

HM: *(laugh)*

TJR: Now, I'm 41 and, like I said, I knew when I got here, there was this one guy that I pointed to and I said, "Son of a bitch, I do not want to be him when I grow up."

HM: *(laugh)*

TJR: So, it helped. I was seriously contemplating not running two years ago for various reasons, but I knew after the last election that this was the last term and it's great. I mean, I think for me, it's the perfect time to get out. I get out, I still have my foot in it with the Chairmanship and [I've] already admitted that *(laugh)* my first and true love is politics more so than some of this silly crap we debate upstairs. So, it's the perfect time to get out, to do something different, because I need to do something different. It's to the point now, when you hear the same speech being given by the same person for 14 years and you don't want to jump out of your skin and throttle him or her *(laugh)*, there's

something wrong and I've gotten to that point. I've enjoyed the privilege, the honor to serve here, but it's like a good party, you know (*laugh*), you got to go home sometime and I'm looking forward to turning a new page.

HM: At 28 years old, or 27 years old, were there advantages or disadvantages? Did people look at you like you were too young?

TJR: I'm sure some folks did.

HM: Or was it your energy that just carried you through?

TJR: Yeah, I'm sure some people thought I was a young snot and some people probably think that I'm a middle age snot, now, and that's alright. The good news was, yeah, I had this unbridled energy and enthusiasm. I'd run through a brick wall if I thought it was going to help some Democrat or some constituent getting hosed. That's good. The bad news is, I made a decision early on, that if I was going to do this, I was going to try to do it right. In my estimation, doing it right was just not sitting here making an occasional speech, going home, telling everybody what's wrong with it; I wanted to do something more than just – So that required, it didn't require, but it caused me, in the pursuit of being able to do something more, to spend a lot more time away from my family and that is something that my kids probably aren't so happy about and probably, many times, felt neglected. Thank God I have a great wife, but the good news: unbridled energy, enthusiasm, I'd run through a brick wall. Bad news was that I wasn't home a lot and that

takes a different kind-of toll, which I'm trying to, not make up for it—it's not like I threw the kids out of a moving car, but, you know what I mean. I mean, I feel – .

HM: Yeah.

TJR: As I've gotten older, I've seen the toll and again, (*laugh*) I don't want to give the impression that the kids are out smoking weed in (*laugh*) the backyard –

HM: Right.

TJR: – and burning down the neighbor's house, but, you know, there are things that, you know, afford you and many things it just takes from you, this occupation.

HM: Some of the other things; did you belong to any informal caucuses?

TJR: Yeah, I was, like, a member of the Irish Caucus, I think. The Policy Committee was always fun, early on. That would give us trips to different places. We wouldn't have to spit for, but yeah, I mean, and outside and again, I'd be the first to admit, in the last couple terms, I haven't been nearly as participatory as I should have been in the committee stuff. So, I sure as heck wasn't going to participate in the Fireman's Caucus or something because, you know, I was busy doing other stuff.

HM: Right. You are or maybe you were involved in the Emerging Technology Task Force?

TJR: Yeah, I was appointed to that by Governor Ridge [Thomas; Pennsylvania Governor, 1995-2001] and it never met.

HM: Oh, okay.

TJR: *(laugh)* It was a heck of an honor at the time. Honest to God, we didn't have one or maybe they met and they just didn't tell me, which is fine too, but yeah, the Emerging Technology; I have no idea what that was.

HM: Well, we had talked now about the technology and the changes in the House that you've witnessed.

TJR: My God. It's like going from the Stone Age to, you know, and I can't imagine – it's funny. It's actually funny that you mentioned that, because I was thinking about it yesterday. How, when I got here, I mean, nobody had—well, I shouldn't say nobody had computers, but they really weren't utilized and we've gone from really zero to a 100, in the sense that—and again, thanks to Veon. Veon is the one that put this money, that got this money appropriated and spent it wisely and now, I mean, I was down this weekend, this past weekend, my BlackBerry⁹ was down and I had to send it back here. I thought I

⁹ Wireless hand-held device introduced in 1999 which supports e-mail, text messaging, internet faxing, telephone, web browsing and other wireless services.

was going to have an epileptic seizure. I didn't know what to do. I've gone from, you know, literally not being at all familiar with the computer to being just totally dependant on a computer-like device.

HM: So, has that helped you stay connected to constituents?

TJR: Yeah, the BlackBerry and before that, we had the GoodLinks¹⁰. Yeah, it's a good news, bad news thing. You know, the good news is that you're on top. You can always be on top of stuff and I think constituents are somewhat impressed when they send you some e-mail on Friday night at 9:30 in the evening and you respond to them at 9:35. You know what I mean? So, there's a great benefit to that. So, the good news is that you are never out of touch. The bad news, (*laugh*) is that you're never out of touch and now, with the advent of the BlackBerry that contains the phone, you're really screwed because you can't say, "Oh well, I had my BlackBerry," you know, you have them both in one device, so it makes it harder to hide sometimes.

HM: Can we talk a little bit about your legislation that you felt was your most important?

TJR: Sure.

HM: Would you like to share what you feel is you're most important? You talked about gun violence.

¹⁰ Like that of the BlackBerry, but with different hardware.

TJR: Yeah, I mean, we fought that fight for a long time and knowing full well that we weren't necessarily going to pass anything, because we all know how to count votes, you know. And you know what the culture is like, but it was very worthwhile. I mean, that was a worthwhile endeavor, because one of these days, this Legislature will pass some common sense firearms safety kind-of stuff. But many of the things I proposed were things like, if you have a gun and you have a kid living in your home, you got to keep the gun locked and secured. But, it's like anything else, we tell you to drive 55 or 65 miles per hour; you don't have to but, God forbid that your gun is used in the commission of a crime or a bodily injury would occur, and we see it everyday. We saw it this past weekend where a little three year old goes into the night stand – it happened in Philadelphia this past weekend – finds a gun and accidentally – you know, a kid doesn't know what it is and, boom, the kid's dead. I think the owner of that firearm should be held responsible and it's been done in other states. In Florida, for example, the first year it was implemented, unintentional death by firearms among kids went down 50 percent. So, you know, and again, I'll be the first to admit, I am not a sportsman; I have never hunted; I fished once and that sucked, so I never did that again, but I don't disrespect hunters. You know, if you want to go out and sit in a tree and shoot a squirrel, man, that's your beeswax; I'm not going to take your gun away. You can sit in the tree as long as you want, until you fall out of the tree, as far as I'm concerned, but when you come into my neighborhood and you bring a gun – if the state's going to say that you have to – what we have is a pre-emption clause that says the municipality, Allentown, Bethlehem, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, can't pass gun laws that affect only those jurisdictions because

of the pre-emption clause that we have. So, Philadelphia did, one time, pass an assault weapons ban, it was overturned in the Legislature using that rationale. So, I never had an interest in taking anybody's gun away. I just had an interest in trying to, you know, protect people. Because, again, we talked about how divergent this state is, how diverse it is. So, therefore, the truths and the realities are different. I know full well that Danny Surra [Daniel; Clearfield and Elk Counties, 1991-2008] up in Elk County, you know, uses his guns for a very different purpose than somebody who is, you know, selling them out of the trunk of their car on the street corner in Philadelphia to people who are going to do bad things with them. So, if we would just understand the cultural differences, and have – the way this thing will get solved is when people – people will never stop suspecting one another of nefarious ideas or deeds. But once that occurs, once people are able to sit down and say, "Listen, man, you can have your guns. You can go out and sit in a tree and shoot at whatever in the hell you want to shoot at, as long as it's not at people," but yet, you have to let us have some reasonable – whether it be gun tracing mechanisms, whether it be one gun a month initiative, whether it be keeping kids and firearms separate and apart and safe. Hopefully, one day that will occur and I believe it will. I just hope it doesn't take a horrible tragedy like many we've seen in this state, most recently the killing of five Amish girls¹¹ and many in critical condition. You know, I hope it doesn't take, you know, some God awful act like that to bring this about.

HM: Well, the House just met as a Committee of the Whole.

¹¹ A lone gunman entered a one-room Amish school house located in Nickol Mines, Lancaster County on October 3, 2006 and shot ten girls. Six of the ten died and the gunman committed suicide on the scene.

TJR: Yeah. *(laugh)* Again, that was – .

HM: You're not impressed? *(laugh)*

TJR: No, you know, I'm not and I really didn't participate. The reason I was inclined to was because of Dwight and the battles that we fought, but at the end of the day, for me, it was a disingenuous process. We met as a Committee of a Whole. You vote yea or nay, but it's not recorded, so it doesn't become law of the land if it were to pass, so, you know, the choice between standing up there and arguing with some nitwit like Daryl Metcalfe [State Representative, Butler County, 1999-present] you know, about the camel sticking his nose in the tent. I wouldn't stick my nose in any tent that guy was ever in and I sure as hell wouldn't take his gun. Other than if I want to – I wouldn't shoot him with it, but you know what I'm saying. So no, for me, that wasn't like the day to be a Legislator and get all jammed up about.

HM: Well, you sponsored some of these pieces of legislation every year. How frustrated are you?

TJR: Well.

HM: Or are you?

TJR: I used to get a lot more frustrated than I do now. I'm frustrated that we still see these senseless acts being committed and nothing really being done about it to curtail them but also, in 14 years, if you don't become a realist along the way, then I think there is something wrong and there are people, believe you me, there are people here that ask the same questions, give the same speeches, you know, multiple times a year. You sit there and you wonder, you're like, "Brother, don't you get it?" It's not that you should put away your passion or set it aside or have it diminished in some way, but you understand the way the deck is stacked. Quite frankly, one of the reasons I was so intent on electing more Democrats over these years was to do that. Listen, being in the Minority – in the Minority Party in this Chamber or any other Chamber in government can be very, very frustrating. So, the way I figured I could ease my frustration was to beat Republicans and, you know, with varying degrees of success, we've been able to do that, but we haven't gotten a Majority in this House yet, but the day will come.

HM: Well, I noticed that I think your first two sessions that you were elected, you had bills that were signed into law. You haven't had any, I don't think, since?

TJR: No, no, I haven't.

HM: That would be the turning point where the Democrats lost the Majority.

TJR: Sure, I mean, clearly, they weren't going to – two things that fit into that: number one, when your role – and mine has been really for many years – is to stick your finger in

the eye (*laugh*) of the Speaker or the Republican Leader, it makes it that much more difficult to get stuff. Now, the funny thing is I've had any number of bills passed they just didn't have my name on it. I literally had a computer lemon law – it was funny as shit, I almost fell out of my chair. A great guy from Montgomery County, a Republican guy, great guy took, literally, he didn't change – I had them up in the Reference Bureau, I said, "Tell me how this is different than my bill?" "It's not." Medical records, photo copying, it's the exact same thing so you know what? Again, at the end of the day, I could've jumped up and down and whined and moaned and complained, but you know what? It got done. The fact that it didn't have my name on it, sure it's one less thing I can stick on the wall, but knowing full well that we brought these issues to the Floor and action was taken on them is better than, you know, nothing.

HM: Well, you answered my next question; how do you counter being in the Minority and you just answered it.

TJR: Yeah, you can, you know – and that's where Mike Veon is so wonderfully gifted and talented. We had a lot of fun and we were able far more since Governor Rendell was elected, but, you know, we are using the amendment process. We took advantage and availed ourselves of every opportunity to use our status as the Minority to advance amendments and it's, I mean, people say, "Well, it is all about politics," and damn right it is. You know, many of these guys, sanctimonious as they may be – you know, the thing that always drove me nuts is that you would go around the state campaigning with candidates and what their opponents would say in their District and what they did in

Harrisburg were completely different. I mean, in the Lehigh Valley, we had a number (*laugh*), there have been a whole lot of folks who say one thing at home and do another thing here. So, being able to call them out, make them put up the tough votes was one way I was able to glean some satisfaction, while serving in the Minority.

HM: As you prepare to leave this at the end of this session, what do you think you would like to see accomplished?

TJR: In terms of legislation going in the remaining days? Because I don't think much of anything (*laugh*) is going. I mean, we may screw around with the Gaming Reform Bill and I think we'll do some lobbyist disclosure, but I'd be surprised if we did anything more Herculean than that. My biggest, and again, I wouldn't trade any day of these 14 years, with a few (*laugh*) possible exceptions, for anything in the world. I think I am leaving at the right time. What I sense is, and many of us who have been – and again, there are a lot of men and women that have been here far longer than I, but those that have been here long enough to know, have seen the change and I think the change, quite frankly, is only getting worse. I would not want to serve here in the next term. When you consider the fact that 17 incumbents were taken out in this Primary, many of whom were Republicans, but when you think about it, if you accept it as the premise as I do, that this place has gotten a lot less civil than it was. It used to be, you know – and it sounds slightly cliché because every generation, if you will, talks about it in these terms, but it was true – we'd fight like cats and dogs and go out and have a couple pops and, you know, and then get at it all again. It's not that way anymore, when you consider the fact

that good men – I mean Bob Jubelirer [Robert; State Senator, 1975-2006], Chip Brightbill [David; State Senator, 1983-2006]: good men. They really did care about the Institution of the State Senate and others in the State House, as well. These guys were conservative; there are no ifs, ands or buts about it. They got beat by folks who are far more conservative than I am. Of course, I have an ideological bent about all this, but not for that reason do I make the point. The point is many, many people – and there is going to be a tremendous turnover, as you know, from (*laugh*) having to interview many of us – the turnover is going to be tremendous and I think the folks that are replacing many of the Members look at government, public service and the Institution, in a much different way than we do. And I think this Institution is going to be different for a couple of years before it gets better and my hope is that it does so sooner rather than later. I hope my fear doesn't come true, but my inclination is that it will and it will be far more polarized with the Leadership vacuum in the Senate, a fight for the soul of the Republican Party going on. All of these things, while political, obviously spill over into the Legislative realm, and I'll leave that for somebody else to worry about.

HM: Well, I was wondering, have your issues changed over time? Do you think? Well, I mentioned that you offered the same –

TJR: My philosophy, I don't know if my issues – the issues that we have spoken about, I still believe in as much today as I ever did. My philosophy has changed. When I was elected, there was a group called Pennsylvanians for Effective Government, a right-wing Republican business funded organization, who endorsed me the first time I ran. I

guarantee you they wouldn't do that but I really thought that, you know, the way to achieve success was through this real whole-hearted effort to be bipartisan and that was wrong. That sense or that impression was wrong and it's a mistake I see everybody – I know I'm not the only one. The truth of the matter is that, and I'm sure Republicans will say the same thing, but in my case, Republicans are your friend until they sense there is blood in the water. They will put up with you; they will support you; they'll write you some half-assed check for your campaign until they sense there is blood in the water and that's when they turn on you. So, I think it is good to know who your friends are and the one thing that I have known is that my friends haven't changed since I've been here. There are still a lot of good Republican men and women with whom I have a close friendship and I tend to have an amicable relationship with all, but I won't trust them as far as I could throw them and I don't mean necessarily the person. But listen, when we were talking about fighting over the Majority: if my best friend was a Republican, would I chuck them under the bus? I probably would, you know, and that's a rather crass thing to say, but you know what? If you believe in things and when the differences are so clear, I mean, in terms of what our agenda might be and what theirs is, you know, you got to. It is about obtaining power and once you get it, that's usually where people get jammed up, because they abuse it and that's certainly very, very wrong, but, you know, if you want to make a difference, you got to fight like hell to make sure that you're in the Party that controls the Chamber. Because it does make day and night difference about how things get done and what things get done.

HM: What was the hardest issue you ever had to face?

TJR: The one that put me most out of favor was early on, my second term: it was a worker's compensation issue. It was one of those issues (*laugh*) where everybody on our board was red; meaning that all the Democrats had voted no, except for me. I had made a commitment. At the time, Bethlehem Steel was still a somewhat – I don't want to say thriving entity; it was an entity that its concerns needed to be addressed and we had previously had done a Worker's Compensation Bill that – It was this issue of hearing loss and the benefits provided under that piece of the legislation and it was a big deal for Bethlehem Steel, for reasons I won't bore you with. That was the toughest issue in the sense that it was probably the only time that I was the lone Democrat siding with the Republicans, but I had made that commitment two years before the vote was even taken. Beyond that, I mean, you know, there is nothing I regret. I mean, obviously, the pay raise has been a widely talked about issue. I'd vote for it again tomorrow. I really would. I think that the vast majority of the folks here really work hard. The Republicans and Democrats work equally hard and they deserve to be compensated, at least as much as a first year law associate at some center city firm. So, I would do that again. I don't regret that I – and there is nothing that comes to mind or that I can point to that I feel like I either voted the wrong way or that I didn't do enough to – you know what I mean?

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

TJR: God, with the way things are. Everything is like a, pretty much a –

HM: *(laugh)*

TJR: What's the hardest issue before the – ? I mean –

HM: What are some of the hardest?

TJR: Clearly, clearly –

HM: I'll give you a few options.

TJR: Clearly, the tax issues are something. Government can give Rendell credit, for the rest of his life, for accomplishing something that Governors that had preceded him for decades weren't able to bring about. So, whether or not, you know – and they get a little arcane; the tax policies. But education is huge; it's hugely important and there is a great disparity of thought on how we best educate our kids in our public schools. So, I mean, that's a daunting issue. I mean, those two readily come to mind, but like I said, it's kind of degenerated and I think it's only going to get worse. So, the tough issue today may be the impossible tomorrow before it gets better.

HM: What aspect of your position as State Representative did you enjoy the most?

TJR: What aspect? I guess it goes back to what I said before; just the ability to help somebody cut through the crap to get something done. Being able to pick up the phone

and call some pencil pushing bureaucrat and get them to move and do the right thing because you called, is most satisfying. So, I would suggest that is the most important aspect of the job for me was just being able to get stuff done and, you know, some have told me that I should have talked more about the things we did, but again, I was able to do it on my terms and it just wasn't, you know – and I always felt that it was kind-of wrong to do something that you were expected to do and then turn around and ask that person to like, you know, tell everyone else what a wonderful chap you are. I mean, listen, I always thought that helping somebody like that, they are going to tell more people than I possibly could in a thirty second TV spot or something. So, and it's a lot more impactful coming that way than it is sticking a script in Doris's face and telling her, you know, that kind of thing.

HM: You may have already answered this one, as well, but what aspect did you like the least?

TJR: (*laugh*). What did I like the least? The sanctimony, the pontification, the redundancy of said, you know, things and also, the lack of understanding. I mean, I've gotten more jaded as the years have gone on. The way press portrays this place, believe you me, we do enough things to give ourselves a bad rap at times, but the things that the press reward, they reward people who are oftentimes the least effective among us and what I mean by that – and we'll use the pay raise as an example, there's no getting around it – once you achieve a certain level in this Institution, there are certain things you are required to do in order to move the government forward and oftentimes, those things

involve putting up tough votes. I could tick off just in our own Caucus any number of Legislators who would, no more put up a tough vote than they would, you know – that, to me, is a two-fold frustration; number one, that these people are allowed – people that have been here a long time, never put up a tough vote, go home and then are lionized. Editorials are written about what a wonderful – the truth of the matter is they just don't have the stones to put it up, you know? Their life is so dependent upon their next re-election that they just don't have the stones and/or they just can't take the criticism. That's also changing and it's harder to hide around here than it used to be, and that's a good thing, because I want some of these folks flushed out. Whether it be the Republican from the valley who says one thing at home and votes a different way here, or whether it be the Democrat from the valley, who's arse is kissed on the corner of Fourth and New, but is unable to deliver a baloney sandwich for their District. You know, I guess it's about who you are, what you're about [and] how you view the world. And I have probably been a little more (*laugh*) forth-coming than I need to be, but it's what I believe and, you know, if I'm ever completely divorced of this, I might have a lot to say about some people who are viewed one way, who perform a much different way.

HM: Okay, we'll ask you back for that interview. (*laugh*)

TJR: It ought to be real lively discussion.

HM: What was your relationship like with media?

TJR: Good. I always enjoyed, and again, I come from an old school background, if you will. That background was – my uncle is the best. He said “TJ, never trust those bastards,” and he said “Never send out any of those newsletters or have any of those town meetings.” And this is old school. I said, “Why, in God’s name?” He said, “Because then, people ask you questions.” *(laugh)* So, after I got over the, you know, just wasn’t able to compete with that. I’ve enjoyed the relationship with the press. They’ve got a job to do and I think, by and large, they do it well. I mean, believe me, I’ve been on the receiving end of a couple of whackings but, you know what? That’s the price you pay. No, I’ve interacted ever so much with both the State and the National press in my various roles, whether it be during the Gore Campaign in 2000 or subsequent campaigns and titles and all that crap, but no, I’ve had a pretty good relationship with them. They’ve been fair to me, by and large, and hopefully, I’ve been fair to them.

HM: As you think about your experiences here in the House, do you have a favorite story?

TJR: Oh my God, there’s so many. Probably none of which I’d want repeated in 10 or 15 or 20 – for me, it’s been a great environment. I came in at a time when things were changing, make no bones about it, because the guys that were here 14 years before I got here [said], “Ah, it’s a different time,” you know. We *(laugh)* had a lot of fun. I’ve built some of my strongest and best friendships that will last for the rest of my life, as a result of my service here; people who have become like family, who work with me in different capacities. So, that’s been the most fulfilling and rewarding. Just getting to help folks

back home, but to have almost another family, if you will, out here. That is something that nobody will ever take from me and that's all good.

HM: Do you have a fondest memory?

TJR: Oh, God. You know, if I do, I'm sure it's political. I mean, clearly, the election of the Governor in 2002. The most vivid memory that I can recall just sitting here right now was election night, 2000. One of the people – and you talked about people that you respect and the person that [I] inadvertently left out is Al Gore. Al Gore has become a friend and especially so, during that—well 1998, he came in to do something, like I said, it was with Steve Stellar running the House Campaign Committee. I went down to [Washington] D.C. to pitch the Vice President to come in to do an event to raise money for us. It had never really been pitched before, so they all thought I was nuts to begin with, but [to] make a long story short, not only did we get him in 1998 to come in and do it, but I got him in the Lehigh Valley, because that's where all our targeted races were. I said, you know, “You go to Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and people just piss and moan because traffic is backed up because of the motorcade.” I said, “Bring him to Lehigh Valley and people will lineup to watch the motorcade,” and sure enough, they did. I mean, riding in the motorcade from the airport to the first event was a trip; seeing people, just, you know. But the point, again, long answer, short question; [in] 2000, when the networks called the Presidency, was just the most euphoric I was, probably because I had won re-election. You know, he had become President of the United States, so at the same time, it was probably the most euphoric and subsequently most deflating. I remember

being in D.C. the night he conceded. I was not at the residence, but that, boy, that sucked. I mean, we got pretty shit-faced that night. So, it was all kind-of the best and the worst; all in the matter of hours, all on one particular election night.

HM: Upon your retirement from the House in several weeks, do you have any plans?

TJR: I do. I want to be like you. I want to make more money and take less shit (*laugh*) and, you know, I think I got a pretty good handle on it. I have a real good idea what I am going to do. Probably right after the first of the year, work with some folks who do a bunch of different things in both in government and in the private sector that have a presence in New York and in New Jersey and hopefully, will bring that presence to Pennsylvania and do good things.

HM: How would you like your tenure to be remembered?

TJR: You know, that I was respectful of the Institution and its Members. I mean, Lord knows I tried to beat half of them, (*laugh*) but, you know, I did so, hopefully, in as nice a way as you can when you're trying to take somebody's job away from them. But, I was able to accomplish things. That I was here long enough to make a positive difference and years from now, if all goes well, I'll be able to take my kids and grandkids around and say, you know, "We were real hip deep in that. We did that," you know? So, that satisfaction will be there. And if I'm remembered as somebody who was able to get stuff done, that would be a good way to be remembered.

HM: Do you have any advice for new Members?

TJR: Yeah, you know, (*laugh*) don't react to what the news [media] editorialize about. They, the newspaper, have as much of an agenda as your political opponent waiting around the corner. So, I mean, they're not all a bunch of altruistic men and women who sit down with a quill pen and scribe these wonderful thoughts. A lot of them are complete, total assholes. So, you know, don't be influenced by what the press says. Don't be so quick to slit your own throat. I mean, one of my biggest fears is that these guys are going to come in next term and there are perks that go with the office and damn-it, well, there should be. If you are going to spend your time shagging it around the state, if you are going to be away from your family, then you should be handsomely rewarded, and I never was under the impression that somebody was going to throw a party when I came back to the district or a parade, you know, in my honor, but don't slit your own throat. Don't start cutting back on things that are necessary to do your job well, and as unpopular as that is to say, it needs to be said. One of my big fears is that they're going to start chopping at this thing and once they do, you'll only have bones to pick. That won't be good for Pennsylvania; it won't be good for the people involved in it; it surely won't be good for the Institution.

HM: Well, this concludes our interview.

TJR: Great.

HM: Thank you so much –

TJR: Thank you.

HM: – for participating. It's been a pleasure.

TJR: Certainly, my pleasure. Thanks.

HM: That was fun.

TJR: Yeah, it's all good.