INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Ruth C. Rudy (D)
Centre and Mifflin Counties
171st Legislative District
1983-1996

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Heidi Mays (HM):  Good Morning, I guess.  (laugh)

The Honorable Ruth C. Rudy (RR):  Good morning, Heidi.

HM:  Thank you for agreeing to have us in your home today.  I’m here with Representative Ruth Rudy, who served the 171st Legislative District from portions of Centre and Mifflin Counties, from the years 1983 and 1997 [sic: 1996].  Again, thank you for having us to your home today.

RR:  Well, you’re welcome.

HM:  I wanted to begin by asking you to describe your childhood and your family life and how you feel that influenced your decision to enter public service?

RR:  Well, I grew up the youngest of ten children, and I grew up on a farm that I was born at and raised on near Millheim, Pennsylvania.  So, I sort-of had a rough-and-tumble childhood, so-to-speak, being the youngest of ten children, and my mother died when I was nine, so I often said that I was raised by a committee, because mainly my older sisters were the ones who told me what I had to do, what I couldn’t do, blah, blah, blah. So, it was a different type of a childhood, I think, than what most people my age had gone through.
HM: Well, I was wondering if you could describe your educational background, your career and your experiences before becoming a Member of the House of Representatives.

RR: Of course. After I graduated from high school, I went to live with my brother in Cleveland, Ohio, my oldest brother, and I attended a tech school, I guess it would be called. It was called Carnegie Institute, and I got a degree as a Radiological Technician. So, it was a two-year course and I did get a degree in that, and then, of course, after that I got married and worked and other things. But then I did start to Penn State University after I had three children, so I went to Penn State for approximately two years. I do not have a degree from that, and I wrote a book and I’ve left that out of my bio on the back of the book, which irks me, but, anyhow, I do have some credits from Penn State University also. And then, before I became a Member of the House of Representatives, I was a County elected official.

HM: So, that was your first experience in politics?

RR: Well, not really, not being a County elected official. Actually, I was always interested in politics from the time I took a history class, probably in about sixth or seventh grade, because I realized that someone who would be a leader, or an elected leader, could influence the world, could change the world, and I realized that at an early age, so I always wanted to be some type of a leader, but coming from a farm in Central Pennsylvania and being a woman, it was like wishing that I could just all of a sudden go to the moon or Mars. But, I became involved in politics by actually running my husband
for a County-wide position in 1971. He ran for Centre County Prothonotary, because they needed somebody to fill the ticket, of course, and he ran for that. And then in 1972, he was elected Democratic County Chairman of Centre County. So, that was our first foray into politics. I became a Precinct Committee woman and just moved on from there and in 1975, I ran for Centre County Prothonotary and Clerk of Courts and was successful.

HM: So, what was that experience like, to run for a County-wide position?

RR: Well, it was very interesting. I had run for, what they used to have delegates to mid-term conventions, I had run for that in 1974, because I was hoping to be able to run for a County-wide position in 1975. So, that gave me a little bit of information as to what you should do as a candidate, et cetera. But, until you’re actually involved in a campaign, you do not know what it’s truly like. Somebody sitting on the outside looking at the candidates in different campaigns have no idea what that candidate is going through. Because one day you are up and one day your are down, you hear something good about yourself, “Oh, that’s wonderful,” the next day you hear somebody saying, “I heard so-and-so saying this-and-that about you,” and, of course, immediately you’re down. But, it turned out to be a very educational experience and, of course, I was successful and it was a lot of hard work. I did a lot of door-to-door, I went to all the carnivals, festivals, all types of places where people congregated, handed out my literature and talked to them.
HM: Was any of your family involved in politics?


HM: Okay. So, why did you decide to become a Democrat?

RR: Well, actually, when I first registered – you had to be 21 years of age when I first registered. When I first registered I was a registered Republican, because I was wise enough to know in that day and age that Centre County was a Republican County and if I ever wanted to do anything in politics I would need to be in the Republican affiliation. But, along came Jack Kennedy and I guess I became mesmerized by him and I changed my politics in 1960.

HM: And you’ve never looked back. (laugh)

RR: I never looked back. I’ve been a Democrat ever since and I’ve always run uphill as a Democrat in a Republican County.

HM: So, why did you decide to run for the House of Representatives?

RR: Well, for one thing, there was a new District created, it became the 171st District, that was actually a District that came out of Philadelphia, and they made a new District and I was living right smack dab in the middle of that District, because it contained a
portion of Centre and Mifflin Counties, and there was no incumbent Legislator living within the District at the time that I said I was interested in running. Of course, I had to convince a lot of people that I would make a good candidate. But anyhow, in the meantime, Representative Cunningham [Gregg L.; State Representative, Centre County, 1978-1982], who was having trouble in the suburban areas of State College and the District that he was in, decided that he was going to go to a more conservative District, which is, of course, the 171st District. So, he moved within his Legislative District to the new District and ran in the new District, and so he ended up being my opponent. When the seat was open, I must say I was not the number one choice to run for the position of the Party people as well as people in Harrisburg. But once Gregg Cunningham moved into the District, that seemed to dissipate, because I don’t think anybody else wanted to run against him.

**HM:** Very interesting.

**RR:** Because he was a very suave individual. I’ll put it that way.

**HM:** So, after he entered the race then you had more support?

**RR:** I think I garnered support as time went along, because he was a very polarizing person. I don’t know if you know any background on the incumbent Gregg Cunningham, but he was one of the strongest anti-abortionists – he was not pro-choice, we’ll put it that way, along with another person from Philadelphia, Steve Freind [State Representative,
Delaware County, 1976-1992. Steve Freind and him were constantly co-sponsoring legislation, trying to remove the choice factor in the state of Pennsylvania and that irked a lot of people. He did other things that irked a lot of people. There were no shades of gray in his life; everything was really black or white. So, that would be a good way to describe him.

**HM:** Did you like to campaign?

**RR:** I enjoy campaigning. I enjoy meeting and talking with people, but some of the backstabbing that goes along with campaigns, I don’t enjoy that, and that happens in all campaigns.

**HM:** Do you remember how much it cost to run your first campaign?

**RR:** No, I really don’t, but if I recall correctly, it was the most expensive race in the state for a Legislative race, in the state, in 1982. I think, compared to today’s prices, it would probably be a drop in the bucket, but I think it was like 75 or 85,000 that was spent on that race. And, of course, the money started to pour in to me from all over the state, as well as – we had a motor home at that time which we sold to finance my campaign. So, that shows you have to put your money where your mouth is. So many people enter campaigns and then hate to spend any money, but we were willing to do that and, of course, it paid off in the long-run.
HM: So, you either like to fundraise or you don’t. How do you feel about fundraising?

RR: It’s very difficult to fundraise. You have to literally ask people for money. Sometimes you feel like you’re begging, but if you don’t do it and if the candidate doesn’t do the calling and the asking, it’s very difficult to receive it.

HM: Despite the fact that the 171st had a Republican majority of voters, you won pretty handily in your elections. What do you attribute that to?

RR: I think a lot of hard work, keeping in touch with the people. As I had told you previously, I attended everything that I was ever asked to attend if it was humanly possible to do so. Sometimes I might go to several functions in one evening and I know I went to three picnics one time in one night and never ate at any of them (laugh), but that was what I did; I tried to interact as much as I could with the people and defer to their wishes.

HM: The seat is now held by a Republican.

RR: Yes it is.

HM: Any chance that that will change any time soon? Or is he doing a good job?

RR: Well, since I was in the House of Representatives, there’s very little of the Mifflin
County portion in the District any more. It’s mainly Centre County, which is much easier for that Representative to maintain, because he doesn’t have to attend County functions in both Counties like I did, et cetera, et cetera, and I do believe it is more Republican yet than what it was when I was a Member of the House. So, it’s going to be very difficult to win that seat, but I would never say never. I think it’s possible if the right candidate comes along, because I think the person that’s in there right now is too conservative for the District.¹

**HM:** Do you help steer candidates into running, perhaps?

**RR:** I have never really quit politics. I’m a member of the Democratic National Committee right now and I have always been involved in campaigns. In fact, I’m running the County Commissioner candidate right now, John Eich’s campaign for County Commissioner. So, I have always been involved and we had a huge picnic gathering in our front yard for both County Commissioner candidates just this past summer, and the summer before we had a huge gathering for, now, U.S. Senator Bob Casey, right out here on our front lawn where your car’s parked now.

**HM:** *(laugh)* So, you had some successes.

**RR:** Yes, yes.

**HM:** So, you just need to bring it back.

¹ Kerry Benninghoff (1997-present) is the current Representative of the 171st District.
RR: You need to get the right candidate for one thing and then work hard for that person.

HM: Well, you talked about some of the changes through reapportionment, with the moving from Mifflin to more Centre County. What were some of the other changes, perhaps, that have occurred in the District since you were a Member?

RR: Well, the biggest thing was the reapportionment of the Counties. While I was a Member they reapportioned it the opposite way, that I got more of Mifflin County, which was very disturbing to me because I knew immediately the minute they put more of Mifflin County and less of Centre County, where I’m from, into the District, I would get an opponent from Mifflin County and, sure enough, the next two times out I got an opponent from Mifflin County, and the last time that I was in a race it was a very strong opponent from Mifflin County.

HM: What about the people and where do the people work, I guess, from this District?

RR: Most of the people in this area are employed at the Pennsylvania State University. In the present District, I would say the largest percentage of them are employed at the Pennsylvania State University and other small industries that are in the State College area and, like, the area that I live in here, out in the country, they’re bedroom communities; people just live there and sleep there and then, of course, drive somewhere else to work.
And surprisingly, a lot of people come over from Mifflin County to work in Centre County.

**HM:** So, any special issues or concerns that, perhaps, your constituents would bring to you? Did they have a recurring theme or were they all very different?

**RR:** They were all very different because my District was so diverse. I had the intellectual community that surrounded Penn State University. I had some of the East Halls in my District, which were Penn State students, and then I had this very rural area out here in Penn’s Valley, as well as the northern portion of Mifflin County, which includes an Amish community in what they call the Big Valley area of Mifflin County. So, it’s very diverse and varied.

**HM:** Did you always have a District office?

**RR:** Yes, yes I always did. That’s one of the things that I set up immediately. I had a District office in Centre Hall and then once I got more of Mifflin County, I also set up a District office in Lewistown. I had the Borough of Lewistown for awhile, in Mifflin County, which is the largest town in Mifflin County.

**HM:** Well, I’d like to move to actually becoming a House Member.

**RR:** Okay.
**HM:** Do you remember how you felt the first time you were in the Chamber taking the Oath of Office, being Sworn-In?

**RR:** I was *(laugh)* overwhelmed and awestruck, I guess. It was awe-inspiring just to look at the ornateness of the House of Representatives and also to look at the paintings on the ceiling and everything. It is awe-inspiring.

**HM:** Do you remember your office in Harrisburg? Do you remember where your office was?

**RR:** I was in the South Office Building\(^2\) and when I was first elected I shared a secretary with another Member, with Bill Baldwin [William E.; State Representative, Northumberland and Schuylkill Counties, 1983-1990], who I believe is now a judge in Schuylkill County. But, we shared a person and, of course, as time went along I got some more staff people and I had only one person for one half day each day in my District office in Centre Hall, and so I used a family member, who probably people thought it was nepotism, but he wasn’t getting paid, to be in the office in the morning, so somebody could answer the phone. But, then of course, as time went along I got more staff. But, I think when you need the most staff is when you have the least; when you’re first elected. I don’t know how it is today, but I know what it was like when I was first elected; you had the least amount of staff when you actually needed the most.

\(^2\) Now called the Speaker K. Leroy Irvis Office Building.
HM: Did you have any mentors when you first came to Harrisburg? Did anybody show you the ropes?

RR: Not particularly, no. I can’t say that any Rep[resentative] did. And it was sort-of difficult, because when I was first elected I was one of only nine women in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, out of 203 members, so as you can see it was mostly men. And the other Democrat woman at the time when I was first elected was Ruth Harper [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1977-1992], from center Philadelphia. So, with myself coming from a very rural District and she coming from center Philadelphia, there wasn’t too much that we had in common. So, it was difficult to find someone to show you the ropes and teach your different avenues. But, I soon became friends with Bill Lloyd [William R., Jr.; State Representative, Somerset County, 1981-1998], who I think was one of the most intellectual individuals that was ever, probably, was in the House of Representatives. He knew every bill, he read every bill, he understood every bill and he usually spoke on the floor of the House about every measure and so, I became friends with him and would discuss different pieces of legislation with him.

HM: You mentioned the number nine being the number of women whenever you were first elected.

RR: Yes.
**HM:** How did those numbers change from the time you were there?

**RR:** Well, I think when I left I think there were 20-some women. I’m not sure of the exact number when I left the Pennsylvania House of Representatives after 14 years in office. So, they did increase, but they did not increase proportionately what they should have to get parity, you know, with the men. And the other thing is, when I left there was only one woman that had ever achieved any Leadership status, and of course, she was a Secretary, what you would think of a woman’s job doing. She was a Republican and I have never seen a woman in Leadership on the Democratic side.

**HM:** So, how do you feel about that?

**RR:** I think they’re missing the boat. There should be some women in Leadership, but it’s like everything else; unless you have the power and the pull it’s very difficult to obtain, because it’s a good old boys network down there and I’m sure it still is a good old boys network that the men stick together, they definitely do.

**HM:** So, how do we get more women candidates to run for the House of Representatives?

**RR:** Well, I think we have to groom them early. I think we have to reach down into the pipeline and start to groom them for office, long before they decide to run. They have to become well-known in their communities, they have to be sort-of a household name, I
would say, in the District in which they are planning on running and teachers, many
times, are a good place to start, because teachers have name recognition, and that’s what
you need in the long-run is name recognition that people feel good about.

**HM:** Good answer. (*laugh*) Was there camaraderie in the House of Representatives
when you were there?

**RR:** Among the good old boys there was. (*laugh*) There wasn’t too much camaraderie
among the women because, as I just explained to you, of the diversity between myself
and Ruth Harper, and it was very difficult to become a comrade with the Republicans
when you knew that they were watching every move and trying to see every little misstep
that you might make. So, I purposely didn’t even try to – of course, I was nice and talked
to the Republican women, but I never tried to go out for dinner or anything with them.

**HM:** Okay. During your tenure, you served with Mr. Irvis [K. Leroy; State
Manderino [James J.; State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1967-1989; Speaker,
1989], Mr. O’Donnell [Robert W.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1973-
1994; Speaker, 1991-1992], Mr. DeWeese [H. William; State Representative, Fayette,
Green and Washington Counties, 1979-present; Speaker, 1993-1994], Mr. Ryan
[Matthew J.; State Representative, Delaware County, 1965-2003; Speaker, 1981-1982,
1995-2003], who were the Speakers of the House.
RR: Yes.

HM: And when Thornburgh\(^3\), Casey\(^4\) and Ridge\(^5\) were Governor. Could you give us a little insight as to the differences between – and the similarities, I guess – between these gentlemen?

RR: The Speakers of the House?

HM: Yeah. Since you served under so many, there was such a change, I think, in the Leadership while you were there.

RR: They had different mannerisms in conducting the House, but I think they were all very knowledgeable individuals; in depth thinkers. They were not just there to obtain glory. I think they truly believed in what they were doing and they put in a lot of long hours trying to guide the House in the right direction.

HM: How do you feel that they contrasted or what was the push-and-pull with the Governor’s office at the time?

RR: Well, I served under Republicans as well as a Democratic Governor, just one Democratic Governor, and I must say, being a Democrat it was much better to be serving under a Democratic Governor. I could get my bills through the House of Representatives

\(^3\) Dick Thornburgh, Republican Governor of Pennsylvania from 1979-1987.
much easier. I did get one measure that was signed by Governor Thornburgh through the House and while I was in the House I don’t think any measure was signed by Ridge of mine, but I was only in the House two years under Governor Ridge.

**HM:** How do you feel about being a freshman Member and then, people talk about seniority; do you think that has a play into the House of Representatives?

**RR:** Well, I think a freshman Member has a lot to learn, so they must sit back and sort-of watch and find out how things are done, so they become more familiar and more experienced in doing things. But, I do think the fact that you have to be there 14 to 16 years on, usually, to become a senior Chair of a committee or something is too long of a period of time, and then once somebody becomes a Chair of a committee they’re in for the rest of their legislative life, and it doesn’t open too many doors. And you have some people who are not very good Chairs. But yet, because of their seniority, they’re allowed to sit there and that’s basically what they do is sit there.

**HM:** Do you feel you had to work harder being a woman than some of your male counterparts?

**RR:** Oh, I think so, and the nature of my District, being a Democrat in a Republican District, made me work harder and I think people look closer and scrutinize a woman much more than what they do men and I think you have to work practically twice as hard
and I think a lot of men tolerate a woman in the House of Representatives but I don’t think they give them the respect that they should have. Not all of them, but some.

**HM:** Well, how hard was it for you to balance being a Representative with being a mother and a wife?

**RR:** Well, it was very difficult in the beginning. I remember after I was first elected, I tried to take my husband along to as many gatherings as what I could in the evenings and then everywhere we would go, people would say to him, “How are you doing? How are you making out being home alone?” and I had a 16 year-old daughter at home at the time I was elected and, of course, he stayed home with her too. “How are you doing?” and I used to think, no one ever asked [me]; I was the one that went to a clear different environment. I was the one that was in a strange place. I had to find a strange place to live, a strange place to get around, everybody was different, I did not know anybody and they were concerned about him and how he was making out, in the same familiar environment that he was in the whole time he was, of course, my husband, while I was in the Legislature. And another thing that used to get me, when we would go to areas where I wasn’t known, like perhaps to a function in Harrisburg, and someone, another Rep[resentative] or somebody would say, “I would like you to meet Representative Rudy,” they would stick their hand out towards my husband automatically. They never thought that I might be the Representative and that happened quite frequently after I was first elected. As I was in the House longer, it happened less and less.
HM: How did you handle that?

RR: I would say, “I’m the Representative.” (laugh) “Oh,” was usually the retort.

HM: Did you commute or did you stay in Harrisburg?

RR: I stayed in Harrisburg, normally Monday and Tuesday evenings, sometimes Wednesday evening. Many times I would come home Wednesday evening if session was over earlier, even if I had a committee meeting on Thursday back down in Harrisburg, because I only live 80 miles from Harrisburg, so I buzzed back-and-forth. But, I always went down on Monday mornings.

HM: So what would you do on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday?

RR: In my District office. I was in my District office, of course, catching up on all the paperwork that came into the District office, making constituent calls, doing everything like that. I was very busy, even on the days that we were not in session in Harrisburg. And on the days that we were in session in Harrisburg I always seemed to have massive paperwork that needed to be taken care of.

HM: I don’t think the people realize the work that goes on, you know, on non-session days.
RR: The constituent work is what keeps the Rep[resentative] in office. I think that’s what kept me in office, the constituent work and doing a good job on constituent work.

HM: You had been on numerous committees. Could you tell us a little bit about some of the committees you served on and did you have a favorite?

RR: Well, I ended up being Vice-Chair of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, and of course, that was because of the District that I live in and I enjoyed that committee because I knew a lot about agriculture because I was born and raised on a farm and my husband and I were farmers for about 11 years and I still live in the middle of a farm, but, it doesn’t look like it, but I do. So, I’m very familiar with the agricultural and the rural affairs portion of the House of Representatives. And I used to work for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. So, I was very active in that and I worked for years to get on the Education Committee and I finally got on the Education Committee and because of my proximity to Penn State and the fact that I represented a portion of the Penn State University, and so that worked out very well. I enjoyed being on the Education Committee. And I was on the State Government Committee as well as the Local Government Committee, and I guess they put me on the Local Government Committee because I had been involved in local government prior to being a Member of the House. But, I tried to get on some other committees, like the Appropriations, and they would not put me on those committees and the reason – and this is the Leadership that I’m talking about – the reasoning they gave was because they didn’t want me to have to make tough votes that could be transcribed into a tough campaign against me later on because of the
vulnerability of my District. Which is probably true, but I don’t think the Business and Commerce Committee would have given me tough votes, or the Appropriations, but I guess the Appropriations Committee would have.

**HM:** Very interesting.

**RR:** Yes, so that –

**HM:** That would not be something that would come up in a history book. *(laugh)*

**RR:** *(laugh)* No, but that was the reasoning that was given to me, which I seemed to accept.

**HM:** Yeah. Did any interesting legislation ever come through your committees that you became involved in?

**RR:** There was numerous pieces of legislation that came through the committees and, of course, I was the prime sponsor of a number of pieces that became law. I don’t know if you’re interested in any of those or not.

**HM:** I was just wondering if anything – well, we’re going to get to your personal –

**RR:** Oh, my own personal – okay.
HM: But I just didn’t know if any one piece of legislation came through your committee just stood out in your mind.

RR: At this time I just can’t recall anything. I’m sure there were a lot.

HM: Well, you were a Member of the Select Committee to Investigate the Problem of Teenage Pregnancy, the Select Committee to Study Autism and the Select Committee on Higher Education. Can you explain to us why committees such as these are formed and what is expected of these types of committees?

RR: Well, the Select Committee on Autism was formed because I had a person come to me and wanted help in trying to get some type of educational benefits for their child who had autism. And I have a great-nephew that is autistic also, so I became very interested in it, and that’s how that came about. Now they do have special schools. At that time, when this came about, they did not have special schools in many areas of the Commonwealth. They might have had them in more major cities, but they did not in the area in which I lived. And the Teen Pregnancy came about because I sponsored a resolution to that effect – I was the prime sponsor of a resolution, asking for an investigation into Teen Pregnancy, which, of course, has been a major problem throughout the Commonwealth the whole time I was in the Legislature and, I’m sure, it still is. And one of the things that I was trying to do was help someone who might get
pregnant as a teenager to continue their schooling so they could continue to become a contributing member of society, rather than being a drain on society.

**HM:** So, these were very specific issues –

**RR:** Yes.

**HM:** That you felt needed a little bit more attention.

**RR:** Yes, definitely.

**HM:** Okay. Now I’d like to talk a little bit about your specific pieces of legislation.

**RR:** Yes.

**HM:** The first one, you were the prime sponsor of potty parity legislation. Can you tell us a little about this?

**RR:** Well, what this –

**HM:** Because we all thank you for it, by the way.
**RR:** *(laugh)* The legislation actually did become law after a lot of notoriety and this-and-that in the newspapers, but I think it is a something that has been necessary for a long, long time, because if you’ve ever attended an event in an auditorium or at a stadium or something like that, the women’s restrooms are backed up much, much longer lines than what the men’s restrooms are. And it’s because just of the anatomy of a woman; it takes them longer to go to the restroom, and so there needs to be more restroom facilities for these women in places where people congregate.

**HM:** Did you take any kind-of criticism for that?

**RR:** I think I took more, what would you say? Ribbing, good-natured ribbing than, perhaps, criticism. Perhaps deep down some people thought I was crazy. I don’t know. But, I think it was more good-natured ribbing.

**HM:** Well, like I said, we, as a woman, I thank you. *(laugh)* One bill, House bill 913 that was defeated in committee, was known as the Balloon Bill. Do you remember that?

**RR:** Yes, I do.

**HM:** Okay. It was to prevent launching any more than ten helium filled balloons into the atmosphere and polluting the earth. Can you explain why you sponsored that bill?

**RR:** Actually, there was a third grade class from the Centre Hall Elementary School that
was concerned about that, and I don’t know if they were studying the environment or not, but they were talking about Leatherback turtles eating the balloons in the ocean and they actually came down to my office in Harrisburg and talked to me about it, and then when I was the prime sponsor of the bill I had a ceremony in the Rotunda where this class came down and they were the backers of the bill.

HM: So, it was good for children to see the legislative process.

RR: Process – unfortunately, the bill never became law because there was a lot of opposition from people who sold balloons, a major one right in Harrisburg.

HM: Well, it was good for the children. What other major pieces of legislation were you the prime sponsor of, or an integral part of their passage?

RR: Well, this three strikes and you’re out measure, I was the prime sponsor of that, but it ended up being amended into another measure. I think it was amended into the Judicial Conduct Board. I think that’s what it became a part of that bill, and so it did become law, but it was something that I had started, because I remember traveling all over the state and talking about that three strikes and you’re out measure. And there was another one that I think was a bill that benefited a lot of people was as it established a loan forgiveness program – I was the prime sponsor of that – for teachers who taught in distressed rural or urban school districts. It not only gave the teachers a chance to pay back their student loans, but it also benefited the children in those districts, because I
think they got a top-notch, quality teacher in their area to inform them. That was another one. And I was trying to think of any other ones. I was the prime sponsor of a number of bills that became law; one established a Rural Leadership Program in the Commonwealth through the Pennsylvania State University. There had been a Rural Leadership Program in the Commonwealth that had been going on for a number of years, but they were not funded correctly and they needed proper funding, so this established funding every year for the Rural Leadership Program, because everybody knows we need leaders in rural areas, as well as urban areas. And I almost forgot, the one that probably comes to mind the most, required insurance companies to pay for screening mammograms and I, of course, being a breast cancer survivor myself, I never, when I introduced that bill, ever thought that I would benefit from it, because, of course, my breast cancer was picked up through a routine mammogram.

HM: Again, we thank you. Yeah, I had just a few other ones too, and you may want to talk about these or you may not think that they’re important, so it’s up to you.

RR: Alright, sure.

HM: We had one, House Bill 42, that authorized appropriations for neighborhood crime watch programs.

RR: That was the very first bill that I got through the House of Representatives, and it was under a Republican Governor, so I think it was pretty good.
HM: Yeah.

RR: It was the only bill I got through the House in the Thornburgh years, because, as you know, they don’t bring the opposite Party’s measures to the forefront, when you have a Governor of a different political persuasion than the person who is in office. But I did get that measure through and it was the very first bill that I had passed and that became possible because the Supervisors from Brown Township, which is in my Mifflin County portion of my District, asked me if they were a second class township and if I could introduce legislation and it became law.

HM: That was Act 159 of 1986. Now, you have House bill 1574, known as the Dog Law, “further providing for service fees and grants for joint municipal dog law enforcement agencies, providing for damages caused by coyotes.”

RR: Yes. That was something that my involvement in the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Affairs brought about, because there was a need to give indemnity for coyote damage in the state of Pennsylvania. And when I first introduced it, that was something that people said, “Aren’t coyotes out West? I didn’t know there were any coyotes in Pennsylvania. Why are you introducing such legislation?” They were unaware of the fact that the coyotes were steadily moving east from the western portion of the United States, and I think there was someone in Greene County, which is of course, in the clear southwestern portion of the state, had a number of sheep killed by coyotes and there was
no way they could receive reimbursement from the dog law office, like they do for other animals that something might happen to, so there had to be some provisions made for coyotes, and that’s why I introduced that and it did become law. And, of course, now coyotes are all over Pennsylvania, not just in the southwestern portion of the state.

HM: And that was Act 63 of [19]88. Something else was House bill 1068, which “provided for the offense of flight and avoiding apprehension trial or punishment and for the offense of scattering rubbish, empowering arresting officers to seize and take possession of certain vehicles and further providing for the discrimination on account of guide dogs.”

RR: Okay, the part that was my portion of the bill dealt with guide dogs. And that, again, came about because of a constituent within my Legislative District, had a guide dog, she was a paraplegic, and she had a guide dog that helped pull her wheelchair, or whatever implement she was using, to get around and, of course, the guide dog used to pick up things for her and do all types of things for her, and she tried to take it into the Nittany Mall, which is a large mall close by the State College, and she was not allowed to take it into the Nittany Mall, so she came to me with her story and, of course, I introduced her legislation and it became law. So, guide dogs were given the same privileges as seeing-eye dogs, because seeing-eye dogs could go into the Nittany Mall or any other restaurant or establishment, but not guide dogs. But now, they are allowed to and there are a lot of people who have guide dogs, I think more than what we realize.
HM: And that was Act 47 of 1990. Yeah, here’s your Rural Leadership; that was Act 65 of 1992.

RR: Okay, that was the –

HM: Yeah, the establishment of the Rural Leadership Training Program.

RR: Loan Forgiveness Program. Oh, no, it was the establishing a Rural Leadership Program.

HM: Yeah. House Bill 699, which became Act 56 of 1993; “Implementing a Constitutional Amendment on judicial discipline and further providing the Commonwealth portion of fines.”

RR: That created a Judicial Conduct Board, but I also think, and I could be wrong in this, that that was the bill that the three strikes measure was amended into. And, of course, I was the prime sponsor of the three strikes measure, even though I think it was amended into a different bill that became law.

HM: That I’m not sure.

RR: I’m not certain about that either.
HM: We have Senate Bill 100, which you amended House Bill 884 into the Senate bill, so the District Justices or Judges of Minor Judiciary could order parents to attend proceedings involving their children.

RR: Yes, that might be the one that created a Judicial Conduct Board. I’m not quite sure. It’s been 11 years, or longer, since I worked on these and I’m not sure which one created what. But that came about too, to allow parents to go to minor children’s meetings before a District Justice Magistrate.

HM: It seems so common sense.

RR: Yes, it makes common sense that they should be able to, but before that I think they were excluded.

HM: Some things that we had down that, you know, I don’t know if you ever were disappointed in any pieces of legislation that did not become law. I’ll open that up to you first.

RR: I can’t think of anything, but I’m sure there were many pieces that I was disappointed in that died in committee or else died at the end of the session.

HM: Okay. Was there any aspects of your job that you enjoyed the most? What did you enjoy the most about being a State Representative?
RR: Well, probably the feeling that, perhaps, somewhere deep down that I mattered and that I was helping people. And I enjoyed the interaction with people most of the time, if it was a nice interaction.

HM: Do you feel that some of your – I mean, obviously, whenever talking to you, you have a common theme, “Oh, that piece of legislation came about because of a constituent concern or letter.” So, do you feel that most of your legislation occurred that way?

RR: I think most of the legislation occurs because somebody somewhere wants it. I don’t think it’s because somebody gets a brilliant idea on their own. I think it’s because some organization, some governmental agency needs to correct a problem and that’s the way I think most legislation comes about. And, of course, they go to the proper person to tell them about the problem, so they would introduce the measure and many organizations help write legislation that will correct a problem, or whatever they visualize as a problem.

HM: Well, what aspect did you not like about being a Representative?

RR: The backstabbing that goes on. Some of the campaigns were very vicious. It was wearing on a person’s body, so to speak. It was stressful, and also some of the late night sessions were also very stressful, because they would put you out of commission for the next several days. And I had already mentioned, of course, the seniority that was needed
to be Chair of a committee. That was something that I did not like. It was very difficult to obtain any real power in the House with two hundred and three Members.

HM: Did you have a fondest memory of serving in the House?

RR: A lot of the memories were fond. I liked to go to the Governor’s mansion, because we were invited there for certain things. When Governor Casey became Governor, he had a pre-inaugural party that I was invited to that was, I think, very nice, as well as the Inaugural Ball. So, I had some fond memories that came about because I was a Member of the House of Representatives.

HM: Well you had a lot of bill signings too. What were those like?

RR: They were very special, yes, because you actually feel like you accomplished something, when you have the bill signing. And I have copies of those bills yet with the pen with them. I have them in a local museum that is in Aaronsburg. It’s called the Penns Valley Area Historical Society Museum. I kept all that stuff.

HM: I wanted to ask you a little bit about some of the work that you had done in addition to being a House Member. You said that you were involved on the national level.
RR: Yes, I had been a Democratic National Committee Member for 24 years now, and I’m still a Member of the Democratic National Committee. I’m in my 24th year.

HM: Well, what was that experience like for you?

RR: Well, (laugh) it was very interesting. You have to attend a lot of meetings and not only was I Democratic National Committee Member, I served on the Executive Committee for two years and I also was Chair of the Women’s Caucus for two years on the Democratic National Committee. But, it’s I think a very elite club, so to speak, because now there’s only 470-some Members. When I first got on it I think there were less Members yet. And that’s from all over the United States.

HM: Is this where you met Bella Abzug?

RR: Yes, Bella Abzug and I, actually, she was my competitor to become Chair of the Women’s Caucus. She had been Chair of the Women’s Caucus for many, many years. Of course, she was a U.S. Congressperson, and I think the Democratic National Committee people who were the head of it, did not like Bella Abzug because she, literally, was too bossy. Too opinionated I guess, would be, and she was using it as a bully pulpit to just blast everybody, so they wanted to remove her and I became the person who volunteered.

HM: And it was a tight race, wasn’t it?
**RR:** Yes, it was very tight. I’m not sure, but I think I only won by a few votes. I’m not sure what the count was anymore. But, she never really admitted defeat. She never really could get it understood in her own mind that she was defeated.

**HM:** And that was because of a newer technology, of course.

**RR:** Yes, the FAX machine. She said there were illegal FAX’s sent in with votes on them, but it was just like any proxy for anything. I mean, you have to send it in, but they allowed them to be FAX’d in, and I guess they came in at the last minute and she questioned them.

**HM:** Always contesting an election, right? *(laugh)*

**RR:** Yes. *(laugh)*

**HM:** Well, I also wanted to talk to you a little bit about your stylish hats.

**RR:** Oh, *(laugh)* okay.

**HM:** Could you tell us about how you, maybe, came up with the idea? Or, you know, just tell me about them.
**RR:** Well, of course, being a Member of the Democratic National Committee all those years, and even before I was a Member of the Democratic National Committee I was an elected delegate to the Democratic National Convention. So, I was an automatic delegate to the Democratic National Conventions when I became a Member of the Democratic National Committee. So, I went to a number of conventions and, of course, saw all these people in different styled hats and some people think that’s silly, that’s goofy, but that’s part of the tradition of conventions, is that people, not only women but men too sometimes, wear hats that portray the theme that’s going on with the convention or the candidate that they are hoping to nominate themselves. So, of course, the first hat that I ever made and wore was when Bill Clinton was being nominated in 1992, I believe – I think he became President in 1993 – was a watermelon hat and I did that because I picked up a *Newsweek* magazine and it had an article in there about how Clinton was from Hope, Arkansas, the watermelon capitol of the world, and so, that’s what gave me the idea. And I had my mother-in-law – well, I had a hot pad that was a watermelon hot pad, complete with seeds and all that was crocheted, and I took that down to her and I said, “Make me a hat like this,” and so she did and, lo-and-behold, I felt self conscious when I got there and I didn’t want to put that hat on, even though there were people all around me with hats on, and so, I took it in to the convention floor in a bag – and, I don’t think I’d get that through now like that; I’d have to have it on my head – and once I was seated in there I put it on my head and that’s when the action began, because immediately there was a flock of people with cameras around and a man by the name of Richard Byrd came and got me and led me down to the AP [Associated Press] booth, where they were taking picture for the AP –
HM: Do you want to hold the picture up?

RR: And this is what appeared then all over the countryside.

HM: It says, “A Slice of the Good Life.”

RR: Yes. Of course, that’s what we were hoping that Bill Clinton would give to us, was a slice of the good life. And, of course, it has a Clinton button right on the side there. But, that ended up in the Smithsonian Institution and that’s where it is, in the Museum of Natural History, in Washington DC, and I personally took it there, along with my husband, two of my grandchildren, my mother-in-law, who made the hat, and her husband, my step-father-in-law.

HM: Well, what were some of the other hats that you designed?

RR: Okay, well then after that, I did a hat almost every four years that I went after that. When Al Gore was running I had a sprinkling can and that also made the AP. It was not in as many newspapers as what the watermelon hat was. The watermelon hat made the front page of the *New York Times* – I forgot to mention that. But, the Gore hat made quite a splash *(laugh)* and I had a sign on it, “Gore Sprinkled with Good Ideas.” And then the last convention that I went to, I had a map of the United States on it, and I’m not quite sure what I had on the top of it, or, what information the top of it said, but it was a
top hat, it was a big tall top hat, and that too hit AP section, because our local newspaper picked it up, but I’m not sure; it was a reference to [John] Kerry.

**HM:** Okay. So, are you planning for next – ? *(laugh)*

**RR:** I hadn’t even thought of next year. And I will be going as a delegate next year, because I’m still a Member of the Democratic National Committee.

**HM:** Okay, well you’ll have to put your thinking cap on. *(laugh)*

**RR:** Yes, I’ll think about that next year, because the watermelon hat came about, about two weeks before the convention.

**HM:** Okay. Well, I also understand that you received a U.S. patent for a hairspray face shield.

**RR:** Yes. It’s a shield that protects your face from hairspray. Yes.

**HM:** Well, how did - ?

**RR:** I sold that for a number of years. I actually ran out of them – I had 25,000 of them made originally – I ran out of them and sold them on the internet and so I did not get any more made. *(laugh)* But, I thought it was very interesting and very productive.
HM: It sounds very interesting.

RR: Yes, I have the original patent receipt and everything in the Museum, down in Aaronsburg, in Penns Valley Museum.

HM: Very neat. So, why did you retire from the House?

RR: Well, I, of course, ran for Congress, and that was in the Fifth Congressional District in Pennsylvania at that time. I knew it was an uphill battle from the moment I announced, but it was an open seat. The former Congressman was retiring, Congressman Clinger [William Floyd, Jr.; U.S. Representative, 1979-1996] was retiring and, of course, there was a battle immediately on the Republican side for a nominee and I did not know who my opponent would be, of course, when I announced that I would be the Democratic person. And I did have competition on the Democratic side until shortly before the filing deadline. I had two people who were running and both of them withdrew; they never filed to be running. So, I ended up being the sole person on the Democratic ticket. And talk about raising money. That was one of the most involved experiences I’ve ever had raising money, even though I raised about 800,000 dollars, I still was not successful. And he had about two million, my opponent, who is the present Congressman in the District6. And, believe it or not, he has never had serious competition since then. But, it’s a very strong Republican District.

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**HM:** Yeah. So, what are you doing now?

**RR:** Well, I just handed to you a book that I had just put together. I am a community columnist for a local newspaper, *The Centre Daily Times*, and I write columns for them probably, maybe, four, six times a year and I had requests for these columns after they had appeared in the newspaper, so I got the bright idea on my own to combine the columns into a book. So, I made a book this summer and put it together and, at the present, I’m pushing my book. It’s called, *Reflections of My Life in the Valley*, because I had always lived in Penns Valley, except when I went away to school in Cleveland, Ohio.

**HM:** Very nice. So, can you tell me, how do you think you’ll be remembered, your time in the House?

**RR:** Well, I don’t know. I hope to be remembered that I really tried, that I really tried to help people; that I tried to make a better place, in eastern Centre County and northern Mifflin County, for people to live.

**HM:** Do you have any advice for new Members?

**RR:** I would say be yourself, be true to yourself. Never lose your ideals no matter how tough it might get. When I was in the House somebody got me a picture of an Elephant
trampling people and it said, “Don’t let the bastards get you down,” and that’s the type of mentality you need to keep, because otherwise, it can be overwhelming, immediately. It can be overwhelming.

**HM:** Do you have any advice that you would give to new female Members, different from – ?

**RR:** *(laugh)* Different from? Just keep in mind that even though you’re female, you’re just as good as those men. In fact, most females work twice as hard and they’re twice as good as the men. They’re more devoted, more dedicated, so just don’t ever think that you aren’t as good as the men.

**HM:** Thank you very much.

**RR:** You’re welcome. Is that it?

**HM:** That’s it.