

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

**The Honorable Kent Shelhamer (D)**

109<sup>th</sup> District

Columbia County

1965-1976

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Raymond J. Whittaker, III  
March 27, 2007

Transcribed by: Erin Miller

**Raymond J. Whittaker, III (RW):** I'm here today with the Honorable Kent D. Shelhamer, who represented Columbia County in the 109<sup>th</sup> District, who represented from 1965-1976. Welcome, Representative Shelhamer.

**The Honorable Kent Shelhamer (KS):** Nice to be here today.

**RW:** I'd like to start off by asking you: could you describe your childhood and family life growing up and how that prepared you for your life in public service?

**KS:** Well, I was born to a thrifty Dutch father who had gone through the Depression, and he felt very strongly about politics, and so I kind of grew up in a family that thought about politics and its application to government, and that's probably what really gave me my initial interest in what I became.

**RW:** Was your family always involved in politics?

**KS:** Yes, I've been married about 54 years, and I have five children.

**RW:** Oh, wow. How did you become a Democrat? You said your father was always a Democrat.

**KS:** I was a Democrat because my father was a Democrat, and my mother was a Democrat.

**RW:** Can you talk about your educational background and maybe some of your work experience prior to the House?

**KS:** I had the privilege of going to a rather small high school compared to today's high school. I say "privilege" because I had the opportunity in a smaller school to play varsity sports at all level: basketball, baseball, and soccer. We couldn't afford football. I graduated from a rural agricultural school with an agricultural background and got the agriculture key, which made me very proud in those days. From there I took several short courses at Pennsylvania State University. It was during World War II, and then after that time I, ultimately, was drafted into the service. I went into the service, was in ETO [European Theatre of Operations] during the latter part of World War II.

**RW:** Oh.

**KS:** Came home, and, like most servicemen, couldn't wait to come home, and I didn't have any great interest in women before that time, (*laugh*) but I discovered women during my military service and couldn't wait to go home and get married, and I started in – taking over my father's farm, who wanted to retire. I was the youngest of four children. I had three older sisters, and I'll tell you what: (*laugh*) it puts you in, sort-of, a minority status. Raised with three older sisters, always sort-of, tattle tale on everything you do. So, I was able to take over my father's farm, and he sold it to me at a very attractive price, and he wanted to retire and travel, and so I was off and running right after World War II in the business of farming and basically fruit growing. I grow good things to eat, basically.

**RW:** Well, how did you transition from being a farmer into running for the House of Representatives?

**KS:** Well, my first try at anything being elected or standing before election for the people was becoming auditor in my local township, which was very easy to do, and in those days, the Democrats and Republicans in my township sort-of got together. Now, most people in the community didn't know that, but we got together, and we tried to run what we thought were the best people, regardless of their politics. During one of those discussions, some of the people pointed out they thought I might make a good candidate, and so I did run for auditor and served a couple terms. I'm kind of an activist, actually. Then I became involved with my kids in school. I was starting to raise a family, trying to pay off my mortgage, and like everybody, complaining about their taxes and the way schools were being run. We were in the process of many jointures, and I became sort-of disenfranchised or unhappy with the school system. Finally, a gentleman retired and I saw the opportunity, and so I ran to be a school director, and I served for twelve years as a school director. I helped put together our major jointure, which is still going today and is probably one of the strongest jointures in our area. We're a jointure between the two towns, Berwick and Bloomsburg, and in those days it was basically all farm area. Today, it's suburbia –

**RW:** Oh, wow.

**KS:** – and it has been a growing area, and we’ve put together a very good jointure, and from the jointure, I got my nose involved in school business, and I keep hearing all this thought about, “Well, Harrisburg is making us do this and do that,” and I said, “Baloney, it can’t all be true.” And so, when I got the opportunity to run for the Legislature, I did run for it.

**RW:** Well, let’s talk about your first campaign, then. You ran against an incumbent who was here for one term, and could you describe how you got started with your campaign and who helped you?

**KS:** Well, my first campaign – and things were different then than they are now. We had a fairly strong Democratic Party in Columbia County in those days. We had an excellent Chairman, a very progressive Chairman, and he was always looking for new candidates, and when I did finally agree to run for the office, I had a ready-made organization, really, to help me run. What we didn’t have in those days was any money, and we sold hams. I remember back in those days in that first campaign, to raise enough money to have our first sort-of rally. We passed a hat around the Executive Committee to get money to get it going, and politics were not always looked on as a most favorable occupation, and some of my friends tried to talk me out of it, well-meaning friends, but once I got started, I think they saw that it was a – they would – in their mind may be a necessary evil, or whatever. I looked on it almost from a standpoint of evangelism. I felt very strongly about some things. I was an activist, and when I got involved and felt strong about it, I wanted to see it put into action, and that’s really a reflection of my legislative career all my life.

**RW:** How did your campaigns change over your many terms? What were the similarities and differences as it went on?

**KS:** Well, surprisingly enough, I had done everything in my earlier life and not knowing I was doing the right thing to become a public official. I was Vice-Chairman of the Boy Scouts in my area. I was a School Director, and I knew everybody in the school area – and by the way, I was a chairman, in those days, of Transportation, so you get to know everybody on that one. I was very active in my church as a churchman. I belonged to many fraternal and civic organizations. I had done all the things that a potential candidate should do without knowing them, and that was very helpful to me. And my first campaign was against an incumbent who, surprising enough, had changed politics to defeat the incumbent in that day.

**RW:** Oh, okay.

**KS:** And we had a interesting campaign. The issues in those days were what was called the Scranton-Ripper Bill, which had been very harsh on the working man, and, of course, I used that as much as I could to cultivate as many votes in the labor union that we had locally that was strong in those days. The gentleman I ran against [Amin A. Alley; State Representative, Columbia County, 1963-1964] was a very fine young man. He was an attorney. He prided himself on having a perfect voting record, and supposedly, he was undefeatable, but because of the many friends I'd made in the organizations I belonged to, it gave me a built-in, really, voting base, and many of those people were members of

the other Party, the Republican Party, and they voted for me in spite of the fact that I was a Democrat, so I was successful. The second campaign I ran against the same gentleman again. We had two issues which hurt me in that campaign. I lost about 400 votes from the first campaign. In the first campaign I won by about 1,200, and the second one by about 800 and-some votes, and the two issues that cost me votes were the pay raise which we had had, which I had voted for and I should have known better, (*laugh*) but the salary in those days, I believe, was 3,000 dollars. It was a far cry from this today.

**RW:** Absolutely.

**KS:** And I did not run away from that vote. I stood up to my constituents. What can you do? I did it. You either say, "I was a fool," or, "Yes, it was right," and I said, "Yes, it was right," and I said, "I didn't vote necessarily for my salary," as some would have me believe. "It's going to be for the person you want to elect in that position –

**RW:** Right.

**KS:** – In the next election." So, I did have enough staunch friends who stayed with me during that election. The other issue that I did make a mistake on, and I want to publicly admit that now, was a parochial school vote. I had many fine Catholic people who supported me who were very disappointed with me having voted for that, and I shouldn't have voted for that. As I look back on it now, I see is a major mistake. But having come from being a School Director, my thoughts were with the public schools at that point. I view it as a mistake, and I should have known better, but those two things did cost me

some votes, but I was successful in spite of that. And several times after that, I was able to run uncontested. I had a couple elections that the Republicans didn't have a candidate to run against me. I remember one of my old friends, my old political friends, in the Democratic Party said to me after my third election, he said, "Kent, I want to say something to you. I want to predict that from here on out, you'll no longer have any strong candidates. You've had your strong ones." I had three strong ones, and he was correct because after you run awhile you tend to build up a momentum, and it's very difficult to beat an incumbent.

**RW:** Now, you did run again in 2003 for the Senate?

**KS:** Yes.

**RW:** What can you tell us about that campaign?

**KS:** I did run there, and unfortunately, I was not successful for a couple reasons. First, I was running against an incumbent. Second, I was running in an area that was far larger than the area I had before, and more – most importantly, I was running 25 years later, or 30 years later, and many of the people who had supported me died. Unfortunately, I couldn't go get their vote wherever they were, okay? *(laugh)* So, that's the reason that we did lose those races.

**RW:** So, what do you think the major differences were between running, like you said, geography was a big issue. What were the big issues from running a Senate campaign and running a House campaign?

**KS:** Well, first, you have to be far better organized. You're working on a far bigger area. It's like four times as big as your own local area. You're not known as well in those areas. That's the strongest point, I think, that you can get in running for a campaign. If you can get to have people know you in some way other than in a political way, if you're a straight arrow, you will garner a lot of support, and that happened to me. When I ran in the Senate campaign, I was running with people I had never knew before, and I was new to them, and It was easier for them to vote for the incumbent than it was for a newcomer.

**RW:** Well, who prompted you to run?

**KS:** And there were those who thought I was too old.

**RW:** Well, that's – who prompted you to run, or was that a decision that you made?

**KS:** No, I was cultivated to run. The Senate campaign called me. They were badly in need of a candidate, and I really didn't want to run. I had no aspirations at that time. I should have run for that spot back when I was leaving the Agriculture Department and the Governors were changing Party. The spot was open, and then Lieutenant General Ernie Kline [Ernest P. Kline, Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania, 1971-1979] said to

me, “You ought to take a look at the Senate seat. Don’t ignore it. It’s a seat I think you’d like.” And he said, “I still have a few old friends up there. I’d be happy to help you if, in fact, you want to run.” I should have taken him up on that. That was a mistake in my life, and that is: when the opportunity arises, I did seize it earlier on in my life, and in that case, I did not seize it, and it cost me dearly.

**RW:** Well, let’s go back and talk about your District a little bit in Columbia County.

What can you tell us about your district, the 109<sup>th</sup>? Like, what type of geography was it?

What kind of people were there? What kind of jobs did they have?

**KS:** Well, the county is small towns and rural areas. It’s a very conservative county. It goes back for hundreds of years. If you look at the Civil War – during the Civil War my county was probably the only county in the United States that was occupied by Federal troops because they were not in favor of the Civil War. They were not in favor. They were called “copperhead Democrats” in those days.

**RW:** Right.

**KS:** And the Democrats were just as conservative as the Republicans, and that’s probably where my so-called conservative philosophy probably came from. I never believed in giving the Capitol Dome away. I’m one of those people who always believed that if you receive any state money through welfare or other thing, you owe the state something, and you ought to be willing to work. If I had had my way, I would have started a work program and said, “You know, look, if you’re able-bodied and you’re able

to work, there are jobs that should be done. Pick up the trash on the road, shovel snow in the winter, do any number of jobs, but you shouldn't get a free hand out without giving something back." Now, that's rather controversial. I realize that, but that's always been the philosophy I came from, and many people who qualified for welfare programs from Columbia County never took it because they were ashamed to take it. They were far below the poverty level, and that's – and somewhat still today, although that's changed substantially in the last 25 or 30 years – so, the area was very conservative. Everybody knew everybody else. One of the things that probably helped me, also one of the most was, I was a businessman. I'm a fruit grower by trade, and in those days everybody canned. I had the predominate orchard in that part of Pennsylvania. I grew apples and peaches and nectarines, and everybody, in those days, canned peaches. They got to know me in a business fashion. I sold to many businesspeople in stores, and I can remember my first campaign going in to deliver fruit into a store, and the store manager, who would be a Republican, would take me by the arm and take me over and say, "Mrs. Smith, I want you to meet Kent Shelhamer. He's been our supplier of fruit for many years, but now he's running for the Legislature, and I can recommend him highly," and you can't beat that kind of, you know, endorsement. It's the best there is. It's more than all the money can buy you, and that's the reason why we ran a very cheap campaign. We didn't have much money, but you had the support of people who weren't looking at you from a political angle.

**RW:** That's great.

**KS:** And you know what? The shame of it is the same thing is true in those days is true today. People are looking for good, honest people. From the Federal Government down, they've lied to us. All you have to do is look at the things going on. Iraq, all the things going on, and they consider it okay to not tell people. I believe you should be open. I'm for the open laws. I'm for having the press find out what's going on. They can either be your best friend or your worst enemy, and I believe when government and when politics is played properly, it's a very honorable and straightforward game.

**RW:** Well, what changes did you see in your District over the period of time that you served and maybe even to today? How has it changed over that time?

**KS:** Well, of course, the change has become not in a [*inaudible*] far more sophisticated, and of course, the building area and the sprawl that's going out. At one time, I lived between – in those days I lived between Berwick and Bloomsburg. There's probably about maybe thirteen or fourteen miles in between and there was nothing between the farms. Today it's all metropolitan area. I have a housing development right up against my farm now, and so good farmland is becoming very scarce, and also, the people who come in today are coming more from the cities. You have to remember, [Route] 80 goes right through my county. On 80 it's only two miles into – two hours into New York City, and so a lot of those people commute. That's surprising. Nothing you would see, you know, you wouldn't have seen many years ago because the roads weren't as such, and the people that are coming in are different than many of the old timers who were there before, because the older people were far more conservative, far more self-sufficient than the new people. Under the – in the old days, one person basically worked in the

household. Today, it's unusual when you don't have at least two people, both the husband and wife, and so the wife must prepare differently for her family than she prepared in my days because in my days they did all the cooking. Today they'd rather buy a lot of fast foods, and they feed their families differently than what – than how I grew up.

**RW:** How did you reach your constituents when you served in office? What was the best way that you got your message out?

**KS:** The best way that pushes you in for office?

**RW:** How did you reach your constituency in the county? How did you make sure they knew what was going on?

**KS:** Okay. I did something, which I thought was excellent, and I was very fortunate to be able to do what I did. There were two major newspapers in my county: the *Morning Press* in those days and the *Enterprise*. The editor of the *Enterprise* was a man who didn't live terribly far from where I lived; a couple miles. He also knew me through the Boy Scout program and through my business basis through the Berwick area, which was stronger than Bloomsburg, although I had some business in Bloomsburg as well. I was able to work with him, and I wrote an article every week called, "Representative Kent Shelhamer Says," and what he did was he abbreviated R-e-p Kent Shelhamer, and many people objected to that because they said, "You're calling him Republican Kent Shelhamer." (*laugh*) They didn't understand the abbreviation. But, I found it very

challenging to write to them the things that were happening in Harrisburg. I picked out a lot of things that was interesting to him across the board. Some things were in committee and some things were out on the Floor, but the best way to educate your people is tell them what's going on. There was another guy who really I followed after him, and he wrote a column here out of Harrisburg, which was for sale, and his name was Mason Dennison, and that's an old name here in Harrisburg, and the news people would know. Much of my writing was the same similar thing. I talked about what was happening in the House of Representatives and how those laws would affect the people, and I would say to them, "You let me know what you think about this," and I developed a great communication back-and-forth between me and my constituents.

**RW:** So, let's talk about when you first started in the House. Did anything surprise you when you first came to the Capitol?

**KS:** Very much so. You have to understand the basis under which we came. Those of us who come from small – in those days, every county had a Legislator. That was before the one man, one vote deal.

**RW:** Right.

**KS:** So, you had a lot of people who came here from very small counties. Now, my county is big enough for one Legislator. In fact, today it's too big for one Legislator, but in those days I was the Representative from Columbia County. We were rural Legislators. We didn't really understand the process. We came down here hoping to

learn with an open mind, but all of us from a background that gave us a feeling of what was right or wrong, a strong feeling in most cases. Some of the best Legislators I ever knew came from very small counties, even much smaller than my own. But I remember coming in the Democratic Caucus, and the year I came here was in [19]65, and that was the second two years of Governor Scranton's [William Warren Scranton, Governor, 1963-1967] term. I got to have a great respect for Governor Scranton. I thought he was a great guy, even though he was a member of the other Party. I thought he had a lot of charisma. He had a way of remembering everybody's name; once he met you, he never forgot your name. But I remember sitting in the Democratic Caucus – and this was the first year that we, the Democrats, had been successful, and they had been in the majority for some years, and so Philadelphia was the strong, predominate Party there. There was like 35 or 38 Members from Philadelphia, and they were like about 22 from Pittsburgh, and they kind of felt like we were poor relation, like “Who's this guy from the hicks— this hick from the sticks?” Well, we didn't always go along with the things that they wanted us to do. And so, one day the Democratic Chairman – I think his name was Mr. Smith , from Philadelphia – came into our Caucus, and he gave us a downright, you know, shoot 'em up, bang 'em up speech about why we should get in line, and who were we? We were nobody. We were up where the bears and the deer were, and Philadelphia and Pittsburgh were the power. And what really upset us was there were some very fine people from Philadelphia we got to know: lawyers, attorneys, educators, and they would run in, and they would say, “I'm here, Mr. Smith. I'm here, Mr. Smith.” Well, that was very degrading to us because we were elected, we felt, by the people, not by a machine.

**RW:** Right.

**KS:** I guess if we had been elected by machine, we might have done the same thing, okay? (*laugh*) But, his speech so alienated us it turned us off, and what we said was, “Maybe we come from a small area as Democrats, that’s true. But, the fact of the matter is, is that neither Philadelphia nor Pittsburgh if they go unanimously for a Governor can elect him. You must have some of the small areas. You need us.”

**RW:** That’s right.

**KS:** “We’re the cream on the milk. We’re the icing on the cake, and when you have us, you have a Democratic Party now. It’s different where – it’s true. We’re different, but on the other hand, your Democratic Party, if it’s going to rule in the State, must include some rural people.”

**RW:** How did you feel in your first Swearing-In Ceremony?

**KS:** On the what?

**RW:** Your first Swearing-In Ceremony?

**KS:** On the first income tax?

**RW:** On the Swearing-In when all the Representatives are there.

**KS:** Well, that was surprising because many of us looked around in that day. We looked around, and we saw a lot of these people had flowers, and we said, “Gee, they didn’t die. What’d they have the flowers there for?” We didn’t know it was a common occurrence, not so much later until we – so we really, were kind of naïve about the Swearing-In, but we felt we were a part of something very important, and more important, we wanted to make that something better, and I think that was the trend, and I think that’s a trend of many Legislators who come in. It’s a view of trying to leave the place better than when you came.

**RW:** Who were your mentors? Who helped you along when you first started here?

**KS:** You know, it’s kind of surprising. As I look back on my legislative career, we had a Speaker, and we used to laugh about our Leadership, our rural guys, (*laugh*) because we had a Speaker who was Jewish<sup>1</sup>. We had Lee Irvis [K. Leroy Irvis, Allegheny County, 1959-1988; Speaker, 1977-1978, 1983-1988], who was the Floor guy, Leader. He was a colored Catholic. We had – the Whip only had one arm<sup>2</sup>, and the Caucus Secretary<sup>3</sup> only had one leg, and we said, you know, when we go back home, “Things aren’t so good in Harrisburg. We sat under a Jewish Speaker. We have a colored Catholic for a Floor Leader and a Whip who only has one arm and a clerk who only has one leg.” But the fact of the matter is, as I look back on it, Herb Fineman, who was our Speaker, was the most intellectual Leader we could’ve ever had, and while what I think about where he stood on many issues, although he was far more liberal than I was, and although he had other

---

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Fineman; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1955-1977; Speaker, 1969-1972, 1975-1977.

<sup>2</sup> James Predergast; State Representative, Northampton County, 1959-1978.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Wargo; State Representative, Lackawanna County, 1949-1984.

issues that were important to Philadelphia, which were not important to me, necessarily, because I was interested in things in my county, I learned more about governing and about the General Assembly in general from Herb Fineman, the Speaker, than anybody else in the Legislature, even though we were different because it's possible to glean some nuggets from a wise man. You don't learn much from turkeys.

**RW:** That's a great point. Did you help any others along the further, the more years you were in office? Was there anyone you helped?

**KS:** What?

**RW:** Was there anyone you helped along the further you got in office?

**KS:** Yes, I think all of us tried to – as the new people come in, tried to work with them, particularly from the rural areas. One of the things we did while we were here, we soon felt that each one of us being individuals could not get very far unless we got together, and so we formulated a kind of a rural Caucus, and this was about by the second term we were here, so forth – or third, and second, third – and we felt that we were not getting enough information out of our own Caucuses. In fact, sometimes the Caucus actually misled you because the person who was explaining this bill in our Caucus only told you what he wanted you to know, and unless you had the background law which you were amending, you didn't really know what was going on. And so, many of us were Chairman by that time, and we became Chairman – I became a Chairman the earliest probably anybody ever became a Chairman almost in the House, in would be in my third

term because there aren't many farmers in the Democratic Party, okay? (*laugh*) And I became Chairman of the Agriculture Committee. We had a group that got together: we had the Chairman of Agriculture with the Chairman of one of the Education Committees; we had Chairman of Fish and Game; we had the Chairman of Judiciary; we had the Chairman of Law and Order. And what we would do – each week we'd go home, we would look at next week's calendar, and we would each get the bills that were coming out of our committees, and we would meet for lunch in my office usually, and we would go over to Caucus ourselves first. Now, regular Caucus didn't start till like two o'clock, the Democratic Caucus and same with the Republican Caucus, but we would spend an hour or so going over and familiarizing ourselves with the bills that were coming up, and we knew them better than the regular Caucus did.

**RW:** That's good.

**KS:** And so it was a real plus because there always were a few surprises in there, and you don't like rude surprises – they may cost you some votes. Worked out very well, and also, saying just about a lot of reading because the only reading I had to do was then what was in my committee, basically, or affected a rural area. The same was true of the guy with Law and Order. The same was true with the guy on Fish and Game, okay? It was a great help, and when we'd go in the regular Caucus, sometimes some of our Members would want to – when a bill was explained, somebody would say, "There's more than that. There's more than that." It became somewhat upsetting to some of the Caucus officers.

**RW:** (*laugh*) I'm sure. Well, you hinted at it a little bit, but can you talk about the camaraderie within the House and the social scene that was created here?

**KS:** Yes. One of the nicest things that I remember ever happened to me. The first night I spent in Harrisburg I came to Harrisburg to be Sworn-In. I knew I was going to be here for a couple days. I checked into the Penn Harris down here, well, it used to be here across the corner of the street. After we'd been Sworn-In, and it was too far for any of my people to come here – I was here all alone, and I was like many other Legislators just like me – I went out that night, and I sort of roamed the streets of Harrisburg, and I didn't know what to do. Didn't have television like you have much now, and finally, I was looking for a place to eat. I looked in several places, and none of them really suited me, either too big or too expensive or didn't fit what I thought I should find, and finally, I walked into what used to be the Alva, and I don't know if the Alva's still there or not, down at the train station. I went in. In fact, it was the restaurant across from the Alva. I went in, and I saw some people, some men sitting back in the back of the restaurant. There weren't many in the restaurant. It was on a, I think it was a Monday or a Tuesday night, and I went in, and I sat down at a table all by myself, and there weren't many people there, but there was a table back there with some men at it. I sat there, and pretty soon, I could sense somebody standing beside me. I looked around, and here stood a strange man. Turned out it was Marty Mullen [Martin P. Mullen, Philadelphia County, 1955-1982]. (*laugh*) I didn't know him in those days. He says, "Say, aren't you one of the new Legislators?" And I said, "Yes, I am." [He] said, "Well, what are you doing sitting here?" He said, "Why don't you come back with us?" Now, those guys were all from Philadelphia, and it was kind of interesting, because they just took me in like I was,

you know, one of the brothers, and that's the kind of thing that I give a description because that's the kind of thing that took place in the House. You might have had your differences with each other during the day, but at night you were all friends. And that's something that I found out that when I went to become a Cabinet official, I was then the honcho, and my subordinates were sometimes, I felt, afraid to approach me, okay? I was always put on that kind-of pedestal. But you didn't have that same close feeling with them that you had in the House. When you were in the House, you knew you were among friends. Yeah, you may argue. You never lied to a friend. You never misled a friend. You weren't backward about telling them where you came from, what you believed in, but it was the feelings you had very few other places.

**RW:** Well, what changes in the House, either in the way it operated or structurally, have you seen over the years?

**KS:** Well, many things change. When I first came here, we didn't have any offices.

**RW:** Right.

**KS:** There was no place to – the only people who had offices were Leadership, and we had a – up in the cloakroom, was a cloakroom up on the second floor. We all had a little, thin locker about that wide and about five or six feet high, and the locker – you had the same – I sat on the, in those days, on seat 72 most of my time. The locker was number 72. My Post Office box was number 72, and a strange thing happened in that locker every week; there was a bottle of whiskey in that locker – and I'm a teetotaler; I don't

drink. But, the bottle of whiskey kept going down. (*laugh*) Somebody was drinking it. I never knew who it was. I never touched it, but it was kind of interesting. What we used to do in those days when we would have letters to write, after the Floor of the House was cleared after a Session Day, we would sit at our desks on the Floor of the House, and that's how I really got to know Bill Scranton pretty well. Most of the guys – everybody would go home, and there would only be two or three of us in the House, and I'd be sitting there writing out in longhand so I could dictate it the next day without making any mistakes to one of the girls that we drew from a bank, like, of secretaries. And there's a few steps from the back of the House up over into the Governor's Office, and I couldn't – many times, Governor Scranton would want to go from the House over to the Senate because the Senate was then Republican, and I could always tell it was him because he was very fast right down the steps. He came running real fast. He would come in the House, and almost inevitably, he would come over – I was one of the few in the House – and talk to me. And he always knew your name, which was important as you know. A person's name is the most important thing going about you, and he was always interested in you. One of the things, also, that really made me feel strongly in favor of respect of Governor Scranton, was how he treated us. My first day in Harrisburg, or the first week in Harrisburg, the second day, Governor Scranton invited in all of the new Republican Legislators that he had for breakfast into the Governor's Reception Room over in the second floor – and I assume it's still there, like it always was then – and we Democrats felt kind of bad about that because we weren't invited. We heard about it, but we weren't invited, but the interesting thing is the next week, he had a second breakfast, and he invited the Democrats, and the crux of his remarks in that breakfast was really this: what he said was, "Look, we're in different Parties. I'm a Republican, and you're a Democrat,

but I'm your Governor, and I want you to know that my door is always open to you. And, if you've got a problem that you think I can solve, don't be hesitant about coming and bringing it to me." Now, I've never heard that from any former Republican or Democrat since, but that's the mark of a real man.

**RW:** That's great. Well, what do you think about the changes that have occurred in the House now with all the computers and the cell phones? How do you think that helps them?

**KS:** Well, it's great, but there are times I think the House has too much staff; that may surprise you. I remember I was the Chairman, and we were the first one to get a staff, and a secretary, and finally, everyone has staff now. The problem with that is this: there are still a few old Legislators that I served with still serving. Not many, okay? And even current Legislators – I see them, and sometimes, I'm interested in a piece of legislation, and I say to them, "Hey, what's going with House Bill so-and-so or Senate Bill so-and-so?" And a guy will say to me, "Hey, see my staff guy. I don't really have," – the staff guys know more than some of the Legislators know sometimes, and in my day, you had to do your own reading. Maybe you could get together like we did and have a group. Each one take a section of your reading, but we at least we read every bill and knew what was in it. We didn't take anybody's word for what was in that bill. Today, I feel, if I were being critical, basically, I think they've got a lot of great things, which have really helped them, but if I were to be critical, is that the staff does more than what they should do, and the Legislators should do more of the grunt work because that's where you learn what it's all about.

**RW:** What about seniority? What have you seen when you were here that the seniority issue played?

**KS:** Well, when I was here, things were arrived at differently by seniority than in the Republican Party. The Democrat was different. In the Republican Party they did everything by seniority. Now, it has its strong parts and its weak parts. The Democratic Party did things different than that. They appointed who they wanted. Didn't matter what your seniority was. Personally, I like that system better, but both of them have strong points and weak points. The strong point of the Republican seniority system was the man was well-versed in what he took over and knew well. The weak part was I had a friend in the Republican Party who was a teetotaler who became chairman of the Liquor Committee. He didn't want any of that. You follow what I'm saying?

**RW:** Yeah.

**KS:** That's the weak part. Now, I lucked out in that system because I was one of the few from the rural areas. I was one of the few who was articulate enough to press my issues on the Floor. When the Chairman of the Ag[riculture] Committee was defeated, everyone – even though in the Ag[riculture] Committee there were many with more seniority than I had – everyone said, "Give it to Kent Shelhamer because he can best handle this issue." The Speaker picked who he felt were the best qualified, not necessarily with the most seniority. I really think that's the best system, because there was nobody in my Caucus who knew agriculture better than I did, and the same thing is

true of the other areas. Didn't matter what the area was. You wouldn't want a person in the Judiciary Committee who didn't – who really wasn't – who probably wasn't a lawyer, although there can be some without being a lawyer, but who didn't know the system well. You follow what I'm saying?

**RW:** Right.

**KS:** Well, the educational system. So each one of them, and I'm not sure that same system still prevails today or not, but each system has its strong points and its weak points. As it turns out, it worked well for me, and so I like that system.

**RW:** Well, what do you think about being considered a full-time or a part-time Legislator? What are your feelings about –?

**KS:** I think you should be a full-time Legislator. I don't think you should be a part-time Legislator, because that's one of my complaints at lawyer Legislators. I remember when we did no-fault in the House of Representatives. Every lawyer Legislator was against no-fault until we got about halfway through the debate, and then one of the other lawyer Legislators up in the front hollered back to the back of the lawyer Legislators, "Never mind, we can vote for it. There's more adjudication in this bill than there was in the old bill. We should all go for no-fault." They were interested in what they were going to do in the court. That's a bad system from lawyers. Now you see, the Constitution took care of that in some ways when it said you could not resign from the Legislature and be appointed a Cabinet official, or to a Judge. So, it was partially taken care of in the

Constitution. But, the fact of the matter is it's very difficult for a lawyer Legislator to not think as a lawyer. The fact of the matter is, when I was first elected, I had a lawyer friend of mine volunteer to say – he said, “I'll go over any piece of legislation you might have if you don't know it.” I soon was able to tell him, “Hey, I have the best of lawyers down there. I can go to the Legislative Reference Bureau who will tell me – these are specialists in this area, which maybe you're not even.” You follow what I'm saying? So, you don't really need a lawyer Legislator. If I were going to be critical, it would be that one area. There aren't many of the other occupations represented in that extent, but I really never felt lawyer Legislators – there used to be a pet saying in my – in the Democratic Caucus. If you had two lawyers together discussing an issue, you got three opinions.

**RW:** (*laugh*) Let's talk about some of your issues then. What were some of your major pieces of legislation that you worked through?

**KS:** One of the first pieces of legislation that I had when I first came to the Legislature was, of course, agriculture areas. When Governor Shapp [Milton J. Shapp, Governor, 1971-1979] came to be Governor a couple – some years after I was here, he appointed a gentleman from Western Pennsylvania to be Secretary of Agriculture. Now, he had never been in government before. I am convinced that he had every good intent of helping farmers; he tried the best he could. The problem is, he didn't understand the system, never having been involved in state government. He was also rather liberal, and we had a provision in agriculture that says you – we took money from the, then, racetracks for agriculture research. That amounted some years to 400,000 dollars for

agriculture research. Now, agriculture research doesn't just help the farmer. It also helps the consumer because it provides cheaper food. So, what he did was he wanted to do something for farmers, and he decided he wanted to take some of the agriculture research funds and provide medical examinations for farmers. Well, that upset us because we lost a couple hundred thousand dollars the first year that was going to go for health examinations, and it was my contention that if there was a farmer out here who was indigent enough to qualify for free examination under welfare, he should go there and get it, but you shouldn't take agriculture research money for it. Well, the then Secretary, who was a Democrat as I was, had a dialogue, and he didn't agree with me. We came to a parting of the ways, but we still remain good friends. He was a great guy, and I liked him, except all too often he didn't realize what he was doing. And, I introduced a bill. It was called, if I remember correctly, House Bill 1343, and what that bill did was it added four more people to that group who made that decision where the money was spent. What I really did was stack the committee and you have to be a little critical to add the right people. You can't just add four people. So, I added the four most important people I could think of: the Minority and Majority Chairman in the House and the Senate. Well, naturally, they're going to be all for this. They aren't going to oppose it. So I had, in a way, a built-in start on this thing to go. We passed a bill in the House. It was a bill that I was the prime sponsor of in a Democratic House. It went to, then, I think it was, the Democratic Senate. The Senate passed it. It went to the Governor, and lo-and-behold, I couldn't believe it, the Governor vetoed it. Well, I thought about it for a while, and I didn't know much about vetoes, and I said to myself, "There ought to be something I can do," and finally I decided I would try to override the veto. Now, this happened: I was running against this, you might say, a Democratic House and a Democratic Senate and a

Democratic Governor. I was able to garner enough votes to pass the House. It was a little slimmer vote in the Senate, but we passed the Senate, and we did override the veto. Now, the interesting part of that veto is, not only did we change how the money was to be spent in the future because we injected the Legislature into it, which it should have been in the first place. I happen to be one of those who thinks the Legislature should make the laws, not by rule and regulation. The Legislature should make laws. But also, the interesting part of that veto was when we overrode it, I was told by the Legislative Reference Bureau that was the first hostile veto ever in the State of Pennsylvania to be overridden, and the interesting part is it was done by a farm boy up in the north part of the state with a farm bill. You would have thought it would be done by some big, very important thing. You follow what I'm saying? It wasn't, so sometimes small things do affect how things happen, but that was the first hostile veto. There was one other veto prior to that, I think in the early [19]20s, by Governor Brumbaugh [Martin Grove Brumbaugh, Governor, 1915-1919] or whatever his name was in those days. He had made a mistake in vetoing a bill, and so the easiest way to resolve that mistake was to ask the Legislature to override his veto, and they did it. But mine was the first hostile one, and I've kind-of always prided myself on that because I'll tell you what; I spent a lot of hours, night and day, figuring out how to do that.

**RW:** Well, you also worked on a pesticides bill –

**KS:** Yes.

**RW:** – which was one of the first ever in the state.

**KS:** I am a fruit grower, and many fruit growers thought I was a traitor to them at first, but my point is; this is something that's going to happen. If you look at things happening in our state today, you have to look ahead. You can't be looking at what is happening today in the Legislature. If you really want to be effective, you can't wait until something important happens and then try to reverse it. You have to get ahead of the curve. I have said sometimes it's like hunting. If you want to be successful at hunting, you look out at the horizon. You don't look down at your feet because that's where the game is, and I felt that somebody eventually would write a pesticide bill, and I felt it should be a bill that should take into some consideration the people who are going to use those pesticides, not just the protection – and I want to say this about pesticides and conservation: there are no better stewards of the land than our farmers in Pennsylvania today. They are interested in conservation. They're interested in making sure that pesticides are not abused, and you must remember that if somebody makes a mistake with a pesticide, that reflects on every person using pesticides in the state. It's just like a Legislator; if a Legislator makes a mistake and does something dishonest, that reflects upon every Member of the Legislature. That's the reason, I guess, why I voted for every investigation that was coming down the line. A lot of times we wanted to have a Caucus position against that, and I said, "No way. Let's shake the tree and see what falls out." Now, that's a little difficult when your own side's being shaken, but the other side of the coin [is] if there's a dishonest guy in my side, he should go.

**RW:** Well, very notable work was you reduced the General Appropriations budget by 150,000,000 dollars, and then – ?

**KS:** That was an interesting one. You know, when it comes to cutting General Appropriations bills or budgets, it's never been done before successfully. You have to see what premeditate that in the first place. What premeditated that was when Governor Shapp was first elected, he was elected on the premise that we needed an income tax, and it was pretty well accepted that was the only place we could get tax to run state government. So, he had to come with a series of bills that he tried to pass, and they were all declared unconstitutional. Finally, in the last one, he did get one. Yeah. Now what that bill did [was] it developed a lot of money. Well, when you give money to a Governor, he spends it all too often, and what we saw in those days was the budget, the GA budget, which is the General Appropriations bill to run the state for a year, was rising by 20 or 25 percent in some areas. Now, most of us – or at least I felt – that was no way to run a state. I agree there were problems out there, but you don't solve problems by throwing money at them. You solve problems by good programs, well-thought-out programs. How are we going to spend the money, and what are we going to get for it? I'm back to my premise that everybody should do something for the state, if you get something. So, we tried for a couple years. We weren't successful. We tried to cut for a year or two before that, and every time something happened that we couldn't get general support. There only was about 12 people in, what we called, the rural or the Conservative Democrats' Little Caucus, who met in my office and went over the budget. But, many other people would join us, not because they agreed with us, but because they were afraid if they didn't vote with us back home it would cost them votes. So, what we did was, we finally came up with the idea; we looked at all the failures we'd had before, and basically, the failures occurred because the person who was running that amendment

tried to save his own pet projects. I came to the conclusion; you can't do it that way. I mean, you only can be hit on the head so many times, and you soon learn, and you find out. So, I came to the conclusion that we would slash across the board the same percentage. That included agriculture.

**RW:** Right.

**KS:** While we slashed the budget, everybody got more money. Now, leave me explain that. Some places in the budget, some parts of the budget went up 20 percent. We slashed that to eight percent, but they still got more than – if today, a budget was to give everybody eight percent, it would be a gigantic budget. So, what I'm saying it was not a bad budget; it was a very good budget. We slashed it by 152,000,000 dollars. We were successful. One of the nicest things that happened to me that budget in that debate, and I basically carried that debate on the Democratic side. After the debate was over, by that time I had made friends with Governor Shapp pretty well. Of course, the Governor was very upset at what I was doing, and the Governor called me up, and he said, "I want to compliment you." He said, "First off, you made a big mistake today in what you did, but I want to compliment you because," he said, "there was not one slur or one bad word in what you happened" because evidently some people had told him that I was anti-Jewish. That's not true. I got to know Milton Shapp very well, and I liked him. We were very personal friends. But there were – you always have enemies out there who don't like what you're doing, and they will say things about you which are not true to hurt you. You follow what I'm saying? Some interesting things happened while that budget was going on, was another first that I probably accomplished and which may never happen

again, and that was while we were trying to cut the budget, the Democratic Leadership was trying to break us up so that we would not cut it so that we'd have a vote to pass the budget the way the Governor wanted it. So, we were called up to the Governor's Office, my little group, three or four times, and I remember walking through from the rotunda over to get the elevator under the Governor's Office with my roommate, who was an attorney, and I said to him – his name was Bob Wise [Robert C. Wise; State Representative, Lycoming County, 1965-1974] – and I said, “Bob, you know, if ten years ago someone had told me someday I would be called to the Governor's Office, I would have felt like I was walking ten feet tall,” and I said, “Today, I been up there twice already today. I'd rather take a personal beating than go up there.” (*laugh*) Because it was always tough, and when you went up there, the scenario was always the same; you went up to the reception room, and the Governor always made you wait. You never got in to see him right away; you always waited. You cooled your heels for 10 or 15 minutes, and then he invited you in. Now, I don't know what he did in that 10 or 15 minutes, but I always felt it was kind of a contrived thing. Anyway, we had been up there like three or four times, and the then Legislative Secretary was Ralph Tigie. I no more got back to my office than the phone rang, and it's Ralph Tigie, and Ralph said to me, “Kent, the Governor wants to see you again. He wants you up in his office,” and I said, “Ralph, I'm not coming.” He said, “What? The Governor called you. You're not coming?” I said, “That's right.” So he put his hand over the receiver, and I could hear him talking to the Governor, and he said to the Governor, “He said he isn't coming,” so Ralph comes back to me, and he says, “Well, why aren't you coming?” I said, “I been up there three or four times today, and if the Governor wants to see me, he's coming down to my office.” Ralph again put his hand over the receiver, and I guess he told the

Governor that, which is something. The Governor must have said, “He’s kind of impudent, isn’t he?” And Ralph comes back to me. He says, “He’ll come,” so I said to my secretary, “Hey, the Governor’s coming down to see me, and when he comes, I want you to keep him out in the outside office for 10 or 15 minutes. You tell him I’m busy.” So, we had arrived at that plan, so the Governor came, and she set him down out in the outside office, and I sat inside (*laugh*) thumbing my thumbs up and down till I thought the appropriate time was up, and then I went out, but the Governor’s eyes just twinkled; he knew what I was doing. The interesting thing is, though, the Governor was a lot better then than what I thought he was because while he was sitting there one of my guys walked in, rural guys, and seeing the Governor there, he sat down and talked to him. He bought his vote for a bridge! (*laugh*) So there’s been some interesting things take place in my tenure, and I thoroughly enjoyed my time here.

**RW:** Well, what would you say was your hardest issue that you combated in the House, whether it be that you sponsored or that you voted for?

**KS:** The hardest issue that we probably faced sometimes was voting for taxes. Yeah. There are times when you have to vote for taxes. When you’re in the Majority Party, you got to develop the votes. You have to be responsible. You can’t always vote no. All of us have played games. I think every Legislator in there – there isn’t a virgin in the bunch who hasn’t done things they shouldn’t do because it’s easy to vote against the tax when you’re not in the Majority. The view is, let the Majority side carry the taxes. There’re times when you have to do it. Then, you have to go home and explain why you did it. I don’t know; there weren’t many really difficult times. There were times I didn’t want to

vote for things, but you have a responsibility when you get up, when you become a Chairman of a committee. There are times you have to vote for issues that you wouldn't vote for if you were a regular Legislator, because in a way you're a part of Leadership, and a Chairman has a great power if he wants to use it. When you're a Chairman, certainly all your bills move, and you can go to other Chairmen and move bills out of that committee because there's a great respect between Chairmen. You follow what I'm saying? The Chairmen themselves are a great bunch of chiefs, so you have to understand how the system works, and sometimes you have to explain back home to your people why you voted for an issue when your general populace didn't want it, but you can't have it both ways. You can't have guns and butter both. And, if in fact, you're going to sit in an important position in the Legislature from back home and represent them, there are times when you have to support your Party to take the things back home you want. I think maybe Abraham Lincoln<sup>4</sup> said it best of all when he said, and I've always kind of liked him and quoted him. He was asked one time did he, when he was a Legislator, did he always vote the way he wanted to vote? And he said, "No. Only about 90 percent of the times" did he vote right, and right away, one of the newsmen jumped on him and said, "You mean 10 percent of the time you voted wrong?" He said, "I voted wrong 10 percent of the time to get what I wanted 90 percent of the time for my constituents." And you have to understand that. Sometimes most people do. You get some who never do.

**RW:** Well, let's talk a little bit more about your committees. You said you were a Chairman of Agriculture. What other committees did you serve on, and what were your roles?

---

<sup>4</sup> Republican; 16<sup>th</sup> U.S. President, 1861-1865.

**KS:** I served on Fish and Game. I'm trying to think what else I served on. I never was on the Appropriations Committee. I really never wanted to be, because it takes so much time. When we were Chairman, we were only allowed to be on one other committee. They didn't want you spread out too thinly, and it was a good suggestion. No, it was more than a suggestion; it was a rule in Democratic Caucus. It was good because if you ran your own committee properly, if you did your homework the way you should do it, you had more than what you could do. It required an extra day in Harrisburg. When everybody else went home after two or three days, you could always count on you being there an extra day to do committee work. So, there was some problems with being a committee Chairman. It's not all love and kisses, but I always liked the chance to do things, and if you want to do that, you have to be responsible to people back home.

**RW:** Well, the media is certainly a big force in politics today. How did you deal with the media in your time?

**KS:** I was very fortunate, I think, in dealing with the media, because I never had anything to hide. I always could pretty much tell it the way it was, and that's the way it should be. Sometimes it can be a real advantage. The media many times interviewed me. I invited my own media down to the legislative process, so they could see what I did. That's the best politics you can do, because until that interviewer's had his nose rubbed in it, he don't really know what does go on in Harrisburg, and not many people do. You follow what I'm saying? And once you look at the gigantic system – some would say bureaucracy that we have here. I prefer to care – a great machine that operates

down here that should grind our laws very finely with the grist to make certain what comes out of here. That's the reasons why it's important to have two strong political parties. That what comes out of here is the proper thing. But the media was basically always good to me. I don't think I was ever misquoted. I tried to be as fair and as upright as I could because what they reported could either make or break you to a great extent, so you better keep your nose clean. You follow what I'm saying? I've always been one to say that the media should have access to all Legislators. I went to Rome for a food tour one time – trying – In my time, when I was Chairman of the Ag[riculture] Committee, the Chairman of the Senate committee – in fact, other Members who were not even chairman – went; they took money from their Committee to go. My own editor said to me, when I said I was going, “Who's paying for your trip?” I said to him, “I am.” He says, “You mean you're not getting any government money?” I said, “No, I'm not. I'm not only paying for my trip, my wife's going with me. She's paying for her trip, we are, and we got to buy our own food.” Well, the editor's report in the paper was, “Kent Shelhamer's getting the money out of his own apple bin,” that I was paying for it with my own thing, and that's the way I think it should be. The other guys, they got theirs paid for and as far as I know, there never was any complaint, and I never criticized them for it. I could have done the same thing. I didn't think it was right.

**RW:** Well, how about lobbyists? How did you interact with lobbyists during your time?

**KS:** I never had a problem going out with a lobbyist for dinner. I never took money from a lobbyist before an issue was voted on. We never got a lot of money in those days from a lobbyist. There weren't money like there is today. That's one of the things that I

see that has an opportunity for problems. Too much money – that’s what happened to Watergate; too much money where there’s power can easily corrupt. I happen to think there should be accounting made. I don’t personally think you’re going to buy a vote for a meal. Sometimes you learn the most about an issue from a lobbyist. You learn more about it there because nobody knows more about it than what he does. You follow what I’m saying? So it’s sometimes healthy to go out with a lobbyist. On the other hand, I can unequivocally say, no lobbyist ever bought my vote, and I never gave him a vote because of what he did for me.

**RW:** Well, what aspect of your job as a House Member did you enjoy the most?

**KS:** Probably happy hours. That may surprise you that a teetotaler. In those days – I don’t know if it still is now or not – In those days, there was a lot of times when there were cocktail parties thrown that were like happy hours. I remember we used to have a lobbyist for the dairy industry, and he would throw a party. They’d have hundreds of kinds of cheeses up and down a series of long tables, and you could eat your way up and down those things, and on both ends was a bar. (*cough*) Now, I happen to be a teetotaler; I don’t drink nor smoke. But, I never got any liquor there, but they always had Coke or Pepsi, okay? And the interesting thing was on the Floor of the House, sometimes everybody went to them because that’s where the legislation was really discussed many times. That’s where you got in on more bills than any other place. I could hear other Members shouting among themselves in the back of the House, “You going over to Camp Hill tonight to so-and-so’s place?” “Yeah, but I don’t have a ride.” “Go with Shelhamer. He don’t drink. He’ll bring you home safe.” I had more drinkers

ride with me than anybody else. But that's where the business is done, and if you're going to be in the know, you can't walk away from those kind-of places, even though I don't drink. And I don't think everybody is doomed to hell because he takes a drink. I think the good Lord Himself drank wine. It was pretty good stuff, and someday when we get to heaven, we're all going to imbibe a cup. But, that's where many things in the Legislature is done and transpired, and if you want to be in the know, if you want to be in to doing things, that's where you go.

**RW:** Well, how about the least? What did you like least about being a House Member?

**KS:** The what?

**RW:** What did you like least about being a House Member?

**KS:** I've always been a great fan of seafood, and I've always – lots of times the lobbyists'll say, "Well, where do you want to go for dinner?" And there's usually only three or four real good places to go out for dinner, and you pick one of those. You want to go there, you pick the menu what you want.

**RW:** You talked about what you did like, but what did you not like about your time here? Was there anything that was frustrating?

**KS:** What I didn't like about Ag[riculture] was, I took over a Department – It was good, and it was bad – I took over a Department that was down on its back. It had not had any

strong disciplinary action for five or six years. It had a Secretary who didn't understand government. It had a Public Relations man who insisted upon making the Secretary very controversial, and the Secretary was naïve enough to think that made him popular. No, it does not make you popular to be controversial. Yes, you get a lot of news, but its all bad news. So, I had to go there and do things that no Cabinet official had ever done. It was interesting being there because before I went there – and I still think that the Legislature should make the laws, not by rule and regulation – and I was the first Cabinet official to ever voluntarily send all rules and regulations that I did have to make to both the Ag[riculture] – both Ag[riculture] Committees in both the House and the Senate, so they knew what I was up to long before I did it. I wanted to tell them. I think today it may be a law, but in those days, I was the first one to do it. I felt so strongly about the legislative process. But, I had to bring that Department back from where it had been. There were many people who was in that Department who never should been in the job they were in, but because they were politically significant or politically active, and because they were very generous to the present Secretary, they got positions; they shouldn't be there. And what that did to the rest of the people, the full time people who was there, it was a great detriment, because they just, they then did nothing. When I went there, I looked at the people very closely, and I said to my Administrative Superintendent, Director. I said to him, “Why are these people in these positions?” He said, “Well, they were put here by a Secretary who never should have put them here.” So, I formed a Blue Ribbon Committee and reevaluated every one of those people who has come in. We reclassified – out of a reevaluation, I think we had something like 67 or something like that, they didn't know their job, were never qualified for it. We didn't fire them; we simply stepped them down to where they should have been when they came in [*inaudible*].

**RW:** Oh, wow.

**KS:** You know what happened? I got 67 grieves. We went to the hearing; I lost two. And we talked about those two before we did them. We said it was a question of whether we should have demoted them or not. So, I felt pretty good about that. But what that did to the rest of the Department was, you can't believe; the rest of the Department, all of a sudden, said, "Hey, here's a no-nonsense guy who wants people around him who can do things." One of my problems when I went there was people were very lax. They wouldn't come in. I did something else, another first. They would come in a half an hour, 45 minutes late to their job. I went out, my own self, with my clipboard, stood in the front of my Department, and everybody that'd come in late, I'd ask them why they were late.

**RW:** Good idea.

**KS:** I got a griever. Do you know who was my worst enemy? – And it was no reason to be, because my voting record in that area was very good – my biggest griever came from the Unions. The Union Steward was the biggest, what I want to say, worst – was the worst one to come in late; was a woman. And when we went to the hearing, the hearing examiners said to the Union people, "What's your griever?" And they said, "Well, he's embarrassing us by standing out in the front and asking us why we're late." When it came – he heard them through. When it got through, he said to us, "What do you have to say about that?" We said, "Here's the labor contract. Labor contract says they'll be here

at this time, this time, and this time. They were not there.” He said to them, “Is that right?” They said, “Yeah.” Case dismissed. They don’t do that way anymore, and maybe there was a better way I could have done it, but you see, I had all my Departmental heads who were from the old Administration, and they weren’t going to do me any favors by getting everybody – I tried first talking to them, saying “Get your people in on time,” but they didn’t want to crack the whip. And they said, “Who’s he?” In fact, one guy said, “Secretaries come, and Secretaries go.” He was right, but I said to him, “While I’m here, this is the way you’ll do it; you’ll be here on time. Taxpayers are paying your wages.” So, that was my biggest disappointment. I’m a better lover than I am a fighter. I’d rather get along with people. I’d rather use the carrot. I’ve got great results in doing that. While I was there, I lowered my employment 10 percent and raised the work ethics about 25 [percent]. But you have to give them ‘esprit de corps’ to feel good. You have to tell them why what they’re doing’s important. I held staff jobs, and I brought everybody in together, all, the whole Department. I said, “I want you to understand why we do things in this Department, and why it’s done this way, and why your little nook is important, because you’re part of that cog. I can’t do it without you.” The people we brought in were good people. I talked to each one of them when we brought them in. Each one of them had a personal interview with me. Told them what their job was. Told them I’d be looking at them. The old ones who were there knew I’d be looking at them, okay? And it all worked together toward making that Department really sing.

**RW:** Well, your son now works for the Department of Agriculture. Is that the case?

**KS:** Yes, he does work there now.

**RW:** What do you think about – ?

**KS:** Well, he'd probably think I was a little harsh. *(laugh)* He's not attached to Harrisburg now. He's attached to Montoursville. I take it some of them may have fallen back in some of the old ways again and don't come in on time when they should. I understand there are times when everybody can be a little bit late. Look, I'm not a big ogre. I understand, and I think there're times when I've been a little bit late, okay? But for somebody to be habitually late is not fair for the guy who is doing his job there, and it's not, more importantly, it's not fair to the taxpayer.

**RW:** What do you think your fondest memories are of working in the House or working as Secretary?

**KS:** The what?

**RW:** Your fondest memories. What have you taken with you?

**KS:** You know, a lot of funny things happen in the House. A lot of funny things happen, and they happen under duress or stress. I guess I can tell you one of the funniest ones because you can edit it out if I don't like what I say. We had a vote one night, and I don't – forget what it was on, whether it was on taxes or General Appropriations budget. They're always controversial. Many times, they run late at night. This vote ran until

about two or three o'clock in the morning. They stopped the clock and keep turning it back, and what happens is, either Leadership or a lobbyist greased the wheels with liquor. Now, most guys in the Legislature can handle a drink or two, and it doesn't have any effect on them; that's the way it should be. But when you have 203 Members, you always have some who, one or two drinks and they're off into the wind someplace, you know? We had a guy from down by Cumberland County, I think he was; in that area someplace. He was an older guy, but he never could hold his liquor, and when he got a couple drinks, he got kind of silly sometimes. His fondest project all of his life was, he had a little bridge in his community. He wanted to get that little bridge built with State funds. Every year he'd put it into the budget by amendment, and every year either they'd knock it out or the Governor would blue line it. That went on for years and years and years and became kind of a ritual. Everybody knew what was going to happen. Well, this time his side came up for a vote, and this guy is standing at the microphone. It's about two o'clock in the morning, and he's really in pretty bad shape, and he's weaving all around the microphone, and he's back-and-forth woozy like this, and he says, "Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker," and the Speaker says, "The Chair recognizes the gentleman." He said, "I understand somebody put my project in here." The Speaker says, "Well, is it there?" "Yeah," he says. Well, the Speaker says, "What's the matter with that?" "Well, Mr. Speaker," he said, "I look at the price on it." He said, "Well, that's five or six times as much it should cost." He said, "That's just a very little bridge. Why," he said, "it's such a small creek." He said, "I could probably pee across it." Speaker slammed down his gavel, and he said, "The gentleman is out of order." He said, "I know I am, Mr. Speaker. If I wasn't," he said, "I could probably pee all the way across it." (*laugh*) Oh, of course, there's a lot of humor for the day, but there's a lot of things that go on. I

remember one gentleman getting up, I think it was Blaine Hocker [State Representative, Dauphin County, 1947-1966] on the Republican side, and if I can remember how he started off his speech. He says, “Ladies and gentlemen of the House, I rise today.” – How did he say that? – “Not as just a humanitarian, but as a Republican,” (*laugh*) and everybody laughed because he really, you know, he got his thoughts kind of turned about how it was. Many funny things happen, and I probably should have kept a journal, because you forget about them, you know, from year to year, and you go on to new things, and Members go on. We had a Member in the House in those days who was a fantastic guy from a very small county that, of course, when the one man, one vote rule came, he was knocked out. He was active in everything back home: ambulance, fire companies, everything else. But he had been in a mental institution at one time. He had an interesting story to tell. He was in World War II, and he had been shot down on one of those little atolls or islands in the South Pacific that was inhabited by only Japanese, and they chased him all over the island for about a year or two and never caught him. He lived off of crabs and lizards and anything he eat, and in the ensuing thing it kind-of affected his mind. And when he was finally rescued and the War was over, they sent him to a mental institution to straighten up. There was another funny story about that I can’t include here, but he used to say, “I’m the only Member of this House who can prove I’m sane. I have a paper that proves I’m sane,” (*laugh*) because he’d been discharged from a mental institution.

**RW:** Well, how would you like your tenure to be remembered in the House?

**KS:** I would like very much for my son to be a Member. I think I have many times begun speeches back home by saying, “What I do almost every man in this room would love to go, or woman, would love to go and do. Have the privilege to go and do, to be one of those to be chosen by your constituents. To go and represent your people is a great responsibility and a great privilege.” To be a Member of the Legislature is a privilege, and I think most Members at the time sometimes don’t think of that, the privilege it is. And maybe it comes from those who haven’t gone through all the trouble it takes to be there like the rural areas do, proving yourself along the line, of having to stand for certain things. It’s something that you could only wish upon your best friends, and it’s something that I never knew a person that I don’t think didn’t enjoy it, because with the title also does open doors, and you’re able to do things for your constituents that they can’t do for yourself. You’re like an ombudsman. You understand what I’m saying? And if you got a problem back home, you can get it solved. You don’t go in to see one of the peons who work in that Department. You go in to see the Secretary, okay? And he listens to your problem. You know, I often said, I’m a Dutchman, and I’m a finagler from way back in buying equipment. If I’m going in to buy a new tractor or a new truck, I don’t go to the salesman, because he’s got to go back to the manager to find out what kind of a deal he can give me. I go to the manager in the first place. You might as well deal with the guy who can make the deals, and that’s the way it is in Harrisburg here. You might as well go to the man who’s the head of that Department, because I found him more willing to do something for you than sometimes the employees are. One of the nice things that always has happened to me many times when I was here in both Republican and Democratic times; I didn’t always follow the Democratic line not because I was an Independent necessarily or because I didn’t like them. I did like them,

and I always considered myself a Democrat, but because my people wanted something different. It wasn't always what the Democratic Party wanted. Because of that, many people on the other side got to know me well and know that I voted for what I thought was right. As such, I found that opened doors for me that I never knew was going to happen. Other Cabinet Officials I would go to sometimes who got to know me would say, "Well, I wouldn't do for you what I'm doing for my Republicans." You follow what I'm saying? So there is a real plus in being a straight arrow, in being known as that. Sometimes you get criticized for that: for not going along with the Leadership. You have to know when to fold and when to close, if you understand what I'm saying. You can't always be an Independent. There are times when your Party needs something when you have to give. But there're other times when the Party platform may be to support something which you know is not going to fly. It's just being proposed because it's going to be something to deal with over in the Senate, and I'm not going to sign on to one of those, because my people back home are going to see, "Hey, Kent Shelhamer voted for two extra guys on the train caboose." Well, that's a bunch of baloney. Today, they don't even have cabooses on. You follow what I'm saying? But that's what the Unions wanted. I supported every – what I felt – good blue collar Union bill for the working man. I'm very proud of my record. On the other hand, I never was a patsy for them, either. Didn't vote for everything that they wanted, because some of the things they wanted was a bargaining chip. Wasn't going to go anyplace, and why should I become the paschal lamb for that?

**RW:** Do you keep yourself up to date on politics?

**KS:** Pretty much.

**RW:** Pretty much?

**KS:** I try to follow it and I've already got my guy picked out for the Democratic nominee for President.

**RW:** Oh, good. Do you still talk to some of the Members? Like you said, there's still Members here that when you served you still stay in contact with.

**KS:** Yes, I have a very good friend who's a Republican here. He and I served together on our Fair Board up there. I like him very much. Surprisingly enough, I did some favors for him long before he was ever a Legislator. I did them because they were right things to do. You understand what I'm saying? When somebody came to my door in those days, my wife was my secretary in a way. She did all the things that secretaries do nowadays. I helped – didn't matter if it was a Republican or Democrat. A lot of Republicans came to me and say, "Can you help me get a job?" And if it's a Republican Administration, I'd say to them, "Look, I'm the last guy's recommendation you want. I'll tell you how to do it on your side, then you go do it, follow it out. There is a way to do it." I like very much my House Member [David R. Millard, Columbia County, 2005-present]. He's a personal friend of mine, and I support him. I've supported him in the past. I'm a little careful how I do it, but he gets my vote.

**RW:** One last question. What advice would you give to new Members that are starting?

**KS:** My advice would be to remember you're being given the opportunity of a lifetime. You're being given the opportunity to make the laws under which we live. You're being given the opportunity to decide, well, judge what's right and what's wrong because the House decides what's constitutional, and so-on and so forth. None of those things are going to happen back home. Maybe a lower office will allow you some area of influence, but there's no place in my estimation in the State that will give you more influence than a Legislator who's active and who's aggressive, and I would say that even the Governor can't do sometimes what a Legislator can do if you're an activist, and that's the way I think everybody should be. I hate people who are, you know, lukewarm. If you want to see things happen and if you believe strongly in things and you want to work toward them, that's where you can make the most mileage. What you have to do is, you have to learn the rules of the game. There are certain things you have to learn. It doesn't matter what game you're going to play, whether you're going to play football or baseball or track, you have to learn the rules of how to do it. The same thing is true in the Legislature. You're probably going to have to serve a little while in the vineyard before you're going to get some responsibility, okay? But that's going to be a learning process, and once you've learned, then you're going to be able to put some of the things into effect that you want to see happen, and when those things happen, you're going to feel like you're the greatest guy in the world.

**RW:** I think that's a great place to conclude, and I appreciate you coming in. I hope you had a great time. Thank you.