

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Jerry Birmelin (R)

139th District

Monroe, Pike, Susquehanna, Wayne Counties

1985-2006

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Transcribed by: Raymond Whittaker

Heidi Mays (HM): Good Morning.

The Honorable Jerry Birmelin (JB): Good Morning.

HM: I'm here today with Representative Jerry Birmelin who served the 139th Legislative District which encompassed parts of Pike, Susquehanna, Wayne, and Monroe Counties from the years 1985-2006. Thank you for being here with us today.

JB: Thank you.

HM: I want to first ask you, what kind of influence did your family have on your early life and your future career as a public servant?

JB: Probably not much. I think I went my own way. Other than a brother who had served on a school board, which was after I had become elected, my family didn't experience a whole lot of political involvement. They weren't too concerned about things like that. I don't even know if my mother and father voted to tell you the truth. I just know that it was a subject of great interest for me when I became a high school student and that's why I pursued that course.

HM: Well how did you become involved in politics?

JB: Well, I was a teacher for ten years, off and on, and I taught History and Government. And I incorporated a lot of current events into my history courses because my high school history teacher had done that and I had always been interested in that. My first real awakening in the political realm was when the Kennedy/Nixon race was held in 1960 for the Presidency and that sort of got me started in this area of interest and it just continued. I began, as I said, to be a teacher, teaching History and Government and I told people that I got the political bug in 1980 when I first ran and have had it ever since. And essentially it was a question of whether or not I wanted to just teach about what was happening in politics or if I wanted to do something about it and being more of a hands-on person, I decided I'd rather do something about politics, than simply teach about it. So, I ran in 1980 and lost. I ran in 1982 and lost. And in 1984, I was ultimately successful in winning in November.

HM: Would you say you always had political aspirations?

JB: No, probably not until around 1980. That's why I say the political bug bit me. I was very interested in politics, but hadn't thought of running myself until about 1980, but once I thought about running, then it was a sort of a consuming desire for a few years.

HM: What influenced you to become a Republican?

JB: Well, here's the interesting thing: I ran in 1980 as a Democrat. And I was a registered Democrat before that, primarily, because my mother-in-law wanted me to

register as a Republican. And I said, I'm not doing what my mother-in-law wants me to do, so I registered as a Democrat. I was younger; I was also maybe caught up a little bit more in the liberal issues of the day. And so when I ran in 1980, I ran as a Democrat. I soon discovered that because of my positions being as conservative as they were, that the Democratic Party really didn't want me to be one of their candidates. And so I, in 1982, switched over to the Republican Party, which was much more in line with my political philosophy at that point and time and still is. And ran in 1982 and lost. And then in 1984, I was successful in being elected as a Republican.

HM: Thank you. Could you describe your career, you talked about being a teacher and your experience before coming to the House and how did that impact your role as a Legislator?

JB: I think it gave me a little better appreciation for the political system and for our government. I was into government and politics and I think that as I would examine what government was doing in all different levels, Federal, State, and Local. I felt that, unfortunately, many of the things that were done were not being driven by a political philosophy. They were being driven by political pragmatism; by, in many cases, just simply the desire to be in control by one Party or the other and I thought that's probably not the best way to run our country, especially when you get on the national and state level. It's not so partisan on the local level, I don't think. But, I just felt that the philosophy that I had about why government should be doing what it should be doing was what motivated me to run to be a part of that.

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

JB: *(laugh)* It's not a good answer. It was, in 1980 when I got that political bug I was talking about, it was the lowest office on the ballot. So, I said, "I'll start at the bottom", which really wasn't the bottom of the political scale, but in 1980 it was because the last ballot position was State Representative. So, I said, "That's what I'll run for."

HM: Okay.

JB: That's not a good answer, I know.

HM: Well, did anyone help you get started?

JB: Yeah. I had some friends that, you know, encouraged me and they must have gotten some of the political bug themselves too, but didn't want to be candidates. And they encouraged me to run and they said they would work for me and they did and that's how I got started.

HM: Could you describe the aspects of your first three campaigns, I guess, and how they differed with your other campaigns?

JB: Well, the first campaign, as I said, I ran as a Democratic candidate; I got washed away in the [Ronald] Reagan tidal wave. My opponent, the Republican [William W.

Foster], didn't really do a whole lot; he didn't campaign a lot, he didn't have to. He was well known and I wasn't although I worked hard, I did a lot of door-to-door, I didn't have much money and I didn't have any name recognition. So, in 1980 was my real learning experience and the thing that helped me the most in 1980 was I made a lot of friends who would then, and at a later time, help me again. The 1982 campaign was one in which, by this point I had converted over to the Republican Party which I felt was more appropriate, but they had changed my District through re-apportionment and the 1982 election was new Districts and where I had run before I was no longer running again. That small portion of Wayne County that I lived in was re-apportioned into a Democratic controlled District in Lackawanna County. So, when I ran in 1980 I ran as a Democrat in a heavy Republican District¹ and 1982, I ran as a Republican in a heavy Democrat District. I, obviously, wasn't able to figure that out until 1984, when the guy [William Foster] that I had run against and lost to in 1980 announced his retirement. So, it was an open seat in 1984 in the 139th. I moved, literally, about 10 miles to be back in the 139th District and was successful in getting elected in 1984.

HM: Do you like to campaign?

JB: Some things I like about it. I've always enjoyed the contact with people and the opportunity to talk with them in small settings or one-on-one. I felt my experience as a teacher helped me to learn to get along with people and to listen to people as opposed to just trying to talk to them and have them listen to me. There are some things that I don't particularly care for and never have cared for, for instance, parades. I always have felt,

¹ Lost to William W. Foster 15,731 to 9,772 in General Election

kind of out of place sitting in a car waving at people and wondering why they would care to see their State Representative sitting in a car. I wouldn't care to see that, so I don't know why other people would. And there are some situations where you may be in large groups where there are 300-400 people and you're part of that event and you're not really contributing to it so – I wouldn't say it's a waste of time, but – it's kind of one of those things you got to do in politics, but it's not really enjoyable.

HM: Can you describe the make-up of the 139th District?

JB: Right now the 139th includes about a 1/3 of Wayne County, 2/3 of Pike County, and 2 townships in Monroe County. The phenomenon that I've had to experience is that I've had the fastest growing House seat in Pennsylvania the last 10 years. When the reapportionment was done in 2002, I had 20,000 more people than I was supposed to have; normally you have 60,000, I had over 80,000 and it was still growing. Pike County, which is one of the three counties I represent, is the fastest growing in the State. So, I've had this continual change and influx of people in my District who, primarily from the urban and suburban New York City area, don't have the foggiest idea who their Legislators are or county commissioners or their Congressman sometimes. So, it's very difficult to reach the public and to serve them when they are move-ins and they're growing at such a large number and there's a lot of flexibility and an influx of new people. That's been a challenge to do that.

HM: Well, what makes your District unique?

JB: Probably the one thing that I think makes it unique is that it's filled with gated communities. The gated communities of Pike County, in particular, but Monroe and Wayne to a lesser extent are such that you have communities within communities within communities. People will come to Pike County and buy a home or rent a property that is within some place called Hemlock Farms or Lake Conashaugh or Lake Wallenpaupack Estates or something like that that basically, that becomes their community. They don't realize that they're in a township or that they're in a borough. They don't realize the county that they're in. I wonder sometimes if they realize they're in Pennsylvania, because their whole focus is in on that little gated community. And so you ultimately have instead of maybe 40 types of townships or boroughs, you wind up with 140 communities. And they unfortunately tend to think only of those smaller communities. They don't think of the larger community that they belong to. And so that's been hard—it's hard to reach people when they're in a gated community because there is a gate there. The problem with the gated communities is that it doesn't give them a sense of where they're living and their neighbors, other than that smaller community. I don't know how many other Legislators experience that, but it's very difficult to reach into that gated community to let them know who you are what you can do for them in terms of constituent service, but also to get their input on legislation. And not only is it a gated community, heavily gated community, it's also a bedroom community. Since we are so close, particularly in Pike County, to New York City we have the phenomenon where a lot of those people don't see much sunlight in Pennsylvania. They're on the road at 5:30 in the morning; they don't get back until 7:30-8:00 at night. They're traveling back and forth spending a lot of time on the road. Unfortunately, their children are alone a lot, at

home; these “latchkey” kids. And sometimes the parents just work in the suburban New York City area; they leave Monday morning and don’t come back until Friday. So, you have that phenomenon where their main focus is their job; to a great extent it consumes their lives and they don’t really have an appreciation for or an involvement in the community as a larger entity.

HM: So, how do you reach these constituents?

JB: By mail mostly.

HM: By mail.

JB: They do have mail. And they have email. And our Legislative Service here [at the Capitol] has been pretty good at preparing emails for us. So that when an issue comes up, for instance if we need to notify people about the deadlines for registering to vote we, send out what are known as “email blasts” which go to as many people that we have email addresses for, as we can. And right now, I think, in my Legislative District that number is somewhere around 5,000. So, that helps. We can do mailings; that gets to be more expensive, emails cost very little. We do try to notify the different communities through the newspapers of events that are happening or things that we think they should know about. And we also do some public service announcements on the radio and on television, but that, too, can be expensive so they’re very limited in what you can do.

HM: Do you have a Web site?

JB: Yes, I have a Web site; it has been (www.jerrybirmelin.com). It's no longer any good after November 30th, 2006. I don't recommend that people use it. But, that has helped too because I put it on all of my literature. I give away pens with it on. I tried to let people know. And we get some emails that way. Probably, I would say, about 30-40 emails per month come in as a result of my Web site.

HM: Could you explain how you felt at your first Swearing-In Ceremony?

JB: It was a little overwhelming. If anyone's ever been to the first day of Session, it looks like a greenhouse. There are potted flowers everywhere and so it's almost like a jungle and you're trying to wade through the jungle to find your seat and get Sworn-In. And it all goes by rather quickly and some family and friends are there and they're taking photos and it doesn't really sink in to you that you're actually a State Representative until you come back in later January, the desks are clear, the laptops are there, and you're down to business.

HM: What were your first impressions of the House?

JB: [My] First impression of the House was this is an Institution, that when we are in Session, goes 100 mph and when we're not goes about 10 mph. And at 100 mph it's very difficult to keep up with because you have to be a "jack of all trades," so to speak. You

have legislation dealing on such a variety of issues from during the course of one day, let alone from day to day, that it's very difficult, especially for a new Legislator, to really understand and appreciate what's been going on. And you tend to rely a lot on the wisdom and the experience and the counsel of others who have been here longer than you to try to guide you through. And I would say it takes probably two or three years for that to happen; where you can actually feel comfortable with the title and with the responsibilities. Not that you always catch up and that you know everything, it's just that you have a better idea of how to find out what you need to know at that point in time.

HM: Well, who helped guide you through the process?

JB: Well, the people that sat around me on the House Floor, primarily, I had a few friends as well that I knew that I was philosophically in tune with; who I would look to in guidance because I knew that I wanted to vote the way they did because I felt the same way about issues as they did. And that doesn't take you long. In December, after you're elected in November, you spend several hours with other freshman who have been elected at the same time as you and you quickly find out which of those people are with you on issues and then when you get into the full body you find some other people. So, while you will depend maybe on the people who sit around you for the mechanics of the process, you will depend on your friends who you philosophically agree with on how to vote; you know what will be a "yes" and what will be a "no." And it has a kind-of clumsiness to it, but it actually works fairly well.

HM: Well, who would those people be?

JB: The people that I sat next to? Representative Elinor Taylor, [Elinor Zimmerman Taylor; State Representative, Chester County, 1977-2006] who is retiring with me this year. Another gentleman was sitting to my left, but he was a freshman so he couldn't give me a whole lot of advice. But, I had known a couple of Legislators ahead of time. I knew Representative Paul Clymer [State Representative, Bucks County, 1981-present]. I knew Representative Joe Pitts [Joseph Pitts; State Representative, Chester County, 1973-1996; US Representative, 1997-2008] and Peter Vroon [State Representative, Chester County, 1975-1992]. And those three gentlemen, who I agreed with almost all the time on the issues, were really a good source of counsel for me.

HM: Well, since you have been here for many years, did you help anybody?

JB: I don't know if I've helped anybody or not. I've given my advice, but you know what they say about free advice: it's worth what you pay for it. And I think that the way I have been helpful is to the new Members who came and sat next to me; I've been able to help them in some regards. But, I think because of the position that I've taken-and it's a fairly conservative one on the issues-those who have agreed with me on those issues have come to me and ask for advice, particularly the pro-life issue which I'm the Chairman of the House Pro-Life Caucus. So, I have a lot of Members who are pro-life also and they come up to me and ask me about that issue, but then they also extend that conversation into other issues. So, I would say that I would probably have been a positive influence on

maybe another 20 or 30 Legislators, and may have been a negative influence on some that I don't know about.

HM: Can you explain the role of camaraderie through intra-caucus, inter-caucus, and individual relationships?

JB: Yes, I think that sometimes, unfortunately, Legislators think it's us against the world. And so you find someone who you agree with on issues and you are friendly with and that helps you through those times, because we all feel at one point or another that there's some crisis in our political careers; either back home or here in the Capitol. And having a friend and somebody who's been through it before or at least can commiserate with you is helpful. To know that you're not alone in your feelings and how you voted and how you wanted to see an issue handled differently than it was. I think that helps you quite a bit because you don't want to get on the phone and start calling people back home all the time saying, "Hey, what should I do about this or that." You tend to look to the people here that you work with, day by day, and say, "How are you handling this? How are you voting for it or I got this letter; I got this negative input, how would you do it?" So, you find-and, in my case, which may probably be typical-you have five or six people that you can go to and you ask them for help or you ask them what they think and they usually give you pretty good advice.

HM: What would you say your first office was like in Harrisburg?

JB: A dump. (*laugh*) They were in the process of doing a lot of remodeling around here when I came. They were building the East Wing; it wasn't finished yet. They were looking for places to put me. My parking spot was three miles down the road; not really but, it was out in the weather. The office that they gave me was small, it was dirty; the wallpaper was peeling off. It was in what is now known as the Ryan Office Building, which is beautiful now; it wasn't at the time, in 1985. But, I was there for a few months and then they moved me into what is now the Irvis Building, which was then called the South Office Building and that was a step up. But, then when they finished the East Wing – which was probably within three or four years of my being elected – then it was like being in a castle because the East Wing was all new. It was beautiful, new furniture everything; it was very nice. So, I've only had nice offices since the East Wing was completed.

HM: What would you say – what legislation or issues would you say are your most important?

JB: Well, as I mentioned earlier, I am Chairman of the Pro-Life Caucus in the House and that has been, for me, for 22 years, the one critical issue that I have felt very strongly about and have worked on. In 1984, when I was elected and then we started meeting in 1985, I joined the Pro-Life Caucus. I worked with Representative Steve Freind [State Representative, Delaware County, 1976-1992], who was then the Chairman, doing whatever I could do to help him to advance the cause of pro-life legislation. So, over the years, that's been the main focus. The second focus I've had is on criminal justice. I

wanted to be on the Judiciary Committee-was appointed to that Committee in my second term-and have continued in it for 20 years. I was the Sub-Committee Chairman on Crime and Corrections. I toured 20, 21 of our State Prisons. They always let me out, fortunately. And I had the great experience of seeing our prison system and how it operated up front. So, that was a great experience for me. I've always had an interest in Criminal Law. I'm not a lawyer, but I take the perspective that government ought to be very precise and concise and specific about what is of violation of the law and what its penalties are. And through my work in the House, over these 20 years, I think I've helped to improve some of the legislation through the amendment process. I had a couple bills passed myself. And have felt that our criminal justice system, although it's fairly good in Pennsylvania, it still has room for some improvement, particularly in the prisons where I think we oft times put people in but don't really make them any better by the time they come out. Not that that always possible, but I think there are things that we can and should be doing to improve the lot of prisoners and the terms, when they come out, maybe they won't re-offend. So, that's been the focus of my legislative career and I've gotten involved in a few what I call minor issues, but I try to focus on the criminal justice and the pro-life issues.

HM: You've served on many committees, as you have mentioned.

JB: So many that I don't even remember them any more.

HM: Right. Most notably, right now, you're the Chairman of the Children and Youth Committee.

JB: That's correct.

HM: What issues come before you as Chairman?

JB: Well, the issues that tend to be assigned there are dealing with the Child and Youth Services of each county and day-care issues. We have gone into a couple of healthcare issues, for instance we had a bill come through our committee from the Senate that was providing for a mandatory option for hearing tests for infants. Apparently, infants can be tested within the first day or two for their hearing. And we passed a law that said that any birthing place, generally a hospital, has to at least make that available to the parents to say, "Hey, we can do a hearing test for you." So, that was good legislation to do that. We've occasionally gotten into foster care issues. We've occasionally got into adoption issues. It's a rather narrowly focused agenda that the Committee deals with. One of the best things that, I think, our Committee does is we have public hearings and we bring in guests who will explain programs and services that are available to Pennsylvanians for their children. And then our Legislators can take that information and use it in their District Office to help their constituents. So, I've always viewed the committee process as not simply one that passes bills onto the larger House, not only passes bills, but also tries to help its Members understand and appreciate the services that are available for

parents and their children in Pennsylvania. So, we've had that balance, I think, between education and legislation.

HM: Did you have a favorite committee?

JB: Judiciary was my favorite. That's why I stayed on it for 20 years. And I always said that if I could ever get to be Chairman of the Judiciary Committee I would have taken it, but the opportunity never presented itself.

HM: You talked about the amendment process-how is it used and how is it effective?

JB: Well, it's effective in two different ways from a strategic viewpoint. Number one, if you're in the minority, that's about the only way you're going to get a bill passed, is if you make an amendment to another bill. The opposition Party – when they're in control – don't like to make their opponents look good, so they don't want legislation with their name on it. They're not as opposed to an amendment because an amendment is part of a larger bill and whoever the sponsor of the larger bill is, gets the credit. So, if you're in the minority and you understand the amendment process you can get a lot of legislation passed. And I was able to do that when I was in the minority. The second way that the amendment process is very helpful is that you may have something that's controversial, and quite frankly, pro-life stuff is controversial. So, we never assumed that because we introduce a bill that has a pro-life perspective that it's going to become law on its face. We almost always have to amend it into some other bill. And so the amendment process

works for what you might consider to be legislation that's controversial because the first time Members get to vote on it it's on the House Floor. It's not in a committee; things can be killed in committee rather quickly. They can be dead on arrival when you introduce it for that matter. So, the amendment process works for Members who have obstacles to overcome. It actually benefits the minority more than it does the majority.

HM: In 1997, you were named to an IMPACCT committee. Do you remember that?

JB: Tell me more and maybe I will.

HM: A task force. It was to study government agencies and define ways to reduce costs to improve government efficiency. Do you recall that committee?

JB: Yeah, and I think they just put my name on there because they wanted a lot of names.

HM: Okay.

JB: I didn't really have a whole lot of input into that. They did ask me what I thought about, and I gave them some suggestions about ways that I thought money could be saved; government could be downsized. But, unfortunately, the results of the IMPACCT study was that most of it was ignored.

HM: Okay. In 1999-2000 you closed a loophole in a law that made it a first-degree misdemeanor for a person to take any type of weapon that could be used for an escapee into a penal institution. How did you find that loophole in Title 18?

JB: Well, as I indicated earlier I was Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Crime and Corrections, the Chairman of the Committee-every time there was a prison escape asked me to do the public hearings on it. That particular legislation was a result of an escape from the Huntington Prison where people who worked in the prison helped the escapee. And we found out afterwards that the only thing they could do to them was fire them. We felt it was a criminal act to help a prisoner escape prison and the law was silent on whether or not you could do anything about them criminally; now, they could fire them. It was a nurse, who was in love with the guy, and it was another guard who claimed that he didn't know what he was doing or what he was carrying into the prisoner because he was bringing gifts from afar into the prisoner; which actually were tools that he used to escape. So, this all came out in the public hearing that I was the emcee for. And so when we found out that they couldn't do anything to these wayward employees, other than fire them, we thought we need to make this a criminal offense. You can't just say, "You're fired." Now, unfortunately we couldn't do anything about those two people because you can't pass a law that affects something that pre-dated the law-see the old ex-post facto standard-but, it will apply to anybody in the future.

HM: How involved were you in developing a solution for school property tax? That's one of the main issues that the Legislature is facing right now. And what makes this such a difficult issue to solve?

JB: My involvement has been through the Commonwealth Caucus which [are] House Members who generally take a very conservative bent on issues; it's a bi-partisan caucus. And we have developed a plan over the years, it's about three years now, where we could totally eliminate school property taxes by expanding the sales tax to items that are not currently taxed, but reducing it from 6%, which it is now, probably down to 5 percent or 5 ½ percent. We just have never been able to accumulate enough people in the House to support it. We, generally, can only get 70-75 people when we've put it up for votes on amendments that we've run or the bills we've run. So, unfortunately, that plan hasn't got enough popularity right now to become law. The second half of your question was?

HM: Why is it difficult to solve?

JB: Oh, it's very difficult to deal with property tax because while everybody would like to get rid of the school property tax, or almost everybody would, the alternatives for supplanting that loss of income is a real bone of contention. And we found that out with our plan because if you say we want to expand the sales tax and one of those things that we expand the sales tax to is financial services, for instance, we hear from all the financial services people. If we say that we want to do it to food and grocery stores; we hear from all the grocery store owners. It's just wherever you push the tax to, those

people scream bloody murder and don't want it to affect them. So, that's the problem. How are you going to substitute it? It's not getting rid of the school property tax, it's what its substitute is that creates all the hubbub and that's why you have a difficult time doing it. And even with our plan, we've had to make accommodations over the last three years to try to take care of some screaming segment of society, for instance, the doctors. Originally, our proposal included a sales tax on doctor's office visits; which are typically \$50, \$70, \$80. Well, the doctors didn't think that was fair because when you go into a doctor's office and you know you pay a \$50 fee, if you're paying it through your insurance, the insurance is only going to give him so much. The insurance may not give him the \$50; the insurance company may give him \$35. And then they have to take the 6 percent out of his \$35, not out of the insurance company; they don't pay it. So, accommodations like that become very difficult in trying to keep the whole thing intact. If we could do away with the school property tax and find some way to have it not be objected to, it'll pass in a moment, but we haven't found that yet.

HM: You were very active in your District especially involving the resurgence of Prompton State Park.

JB: Correct.

HM: Why was this revitalization important to your District?

JB: One of the things that you will know real quickly when you visit my District is that it's very rural. The largest town in my District is less than 5,000 people. So, what we have to offer economically to our people to a great extent is tourism. The Prompton Dam, which was built was a flood-control dam in the early 1960's, has created a lake that is 2 ½ miles long. It's very narrow; it's only maybe a ¼ mile wide but, it's very long and it's excellent for boating and fishing. And there's never really been much done with it. So, some local people came to me and said, "You know, we've got a great opportunity here to promote this, to bring people into the area, to try to help promote eco-tourism, particularly because it's a natural type of activity." So, we decided that we would form a local group called Friends of Prompton Park; unfortunately I got selected as the President of that (*laugh*) because I was State Representative I suppose and had an office and nobody else did and I could do all the mailings and stuff and organize the meetings. And we created the organization; we have done major work on what is known as the "Trail System." They have literally tens of miles, I think it's like 30, 31 miles, of trails through this lake area; it's all surrounded by woods. There are not 50 homes in the area. And the benefit of that was to be able to let local people who advertise on their Web site say, "Come to Wayne County. Here's a lake with 30 miles of trails. There's boating, there's fishing and etc., etc." So, we were responsible for promoting the area, the park area. We built a pavilion, a picnic pavilion. We put in a parking lot. We made sure that there were port-o-johns there for people. We've also sponsored events. We've tried to get people there. We've had bird-watches. We've had wild nature walks and we've had hiking. Just trying to promote it, generally, so that it's a part of what is available to people who come to the area.

HM: Were there any other District projects that you were involved in?

JB: Oh, a lot of minor ones. Fixing up historic properties for instance. We just completed one in Honesdale; I could throw a rock from my office to it. Honesdale is noted for being the beginning of the canal, the D and H Canal, which ultimately brought coal from Lackawanna Valley into New York City and Philadelphia. And back in the 1800's, Honesdale was the beginning of that and so they had this huge pond/reservoir that was man-made and the wall is still there where, at least on one side of this pond, the boats were docked. And that wall was starting to fall apart so I helped them by getting a grant to restore the wall. But, I've done other things in the area. I wouldn't call any of them major, but they were important to the people that you helped them with. I helped with the local railroad. They have a train-line that runs an excursion that needed help; we were able to help them with some extra lines and things of that sort. Those things are hard to remember over a 22 year period of time. But, like I said, a lot of things you do as a legislator are very important to the few people that you're helping with. But, the rest of the public probably doesn't know too much about it.

HM: Yeah. You also did a lot of work regarding children whether it was for foster kids or protecting them from abuse or obscene materials. Why is helping children, seemingly a top priority to you in your legislative work?

JB: I think it springs from my pro-life prospective. I think every person, should be at least, a valued human being and should be given the best start in life they can. Part of it's also my own history; I came from a broken home. My parents, more or less, left me to my older brothers to raise me, which they did a pretty good job actually, all things considered. And I'm a grandfather and you know the most valuable thing I have in this life is my family. And I try to do for my grandkids the things that weren't done for me when I was a kid. But, by extension I'd like to see also that every kid, every child in Pennsylvania has an opportunity to have a good/normal family life and enjoys all of the things that we, in Pennsylvania, can provide for our children in a way that helps them to grow up and be healthy and productive citizens. So, I guess children have always had a place in my heart. And as I said earlier that probably is a result of my perspective that you are a human being from conception and you ought to be protected and we at least hope that you find yourself in a loving home.

HM: You've been involved with several controversial issues specifically –

JB: No. *(laugh)*

HM: – specifically abortion and the definition of marriage. This was covered very widely in Media outlets around the State and beyond. Why did you offer these amendments at this point in time and why – ?

JB: That was two years ago when I offered the amendments on the family; the marriage definition. I think they are as needed today as they were two years ago; they were actually needed more than that. In the late 1990's we passed the Defense of Marriage Act. And that was fine until we had a Governor [Ed Rendell] who then began to negotiate contracts with the state workers providing for "same-sex" benefits; which in a real sense tries to redefine what marriage is because historically we've only given state benefits to state workers who were married in the traditional sense. And he was trying to, through his negotiating process, redefine marriage and to provide benefits to people who were not married. It was actually to the point that it was ludicrous in that if a man and a man called themselves partners, they could get benefits. But, if a man and a woman who lived together weren't married they couldn't get the same benefits that he wanted to offer to a same-sex couple which just blew my mind. And I feel very strongly that marriage is between one man and one woman and that's what is has always been historically for thousands of years by every major religion. And that the trend to try to redefine that was wrong. So, the Defense of Marriage Act, I thought, needed to be fortified by the amendments. It actually turned out to be one amendment, boiled down from about fifty. And that one amendment would have done several things, but, the most important was that it clearly defined marriage as being between one man and one woman and that the State could not offer benefits to somebody else other than that. I felt that was an issue that if you were going to change that situation it ought to be done by the Legislature, not by the Governor through a labor negotiating contract which is, as I said earlier, boggles my mind that he thinks he can do that. Now, at this point in time as we sit here today, they have never received those benefits because there is a State Agency that has to put

that into play and they have to establish the guidelines for it and they've never done that. So, while it's in a labor negotiating contract that's been in effect for several years, it hasn't actually happened; hasn't occurred. This organization, this group of people that determine how these things get done, have not approved it. And it's my understanding they don't have the money for it either. So, while he may have done that, it hasn't actually been accomplished. We also, through that marriage language, ended what is known as common-law marriages. We just felt that, in this day and age, you don't need to have common-law marriages anymore. And while the amendment that I had proposed was never ultimately voted on, we did away with common-law marriages in a later act; that was one of the less controversial things about that. That was a controversial measure. I will say this for the gay rights crowd: they know how to generate emails and they have a very willing accomplice in the Media. I did several interviews [with] newspapers. I did interviews with talk show radio. And ultimately almost all of them came out and said this was a terrible idea. Some even got to the point of personal insults to myself and to those that supported me. And the issue died and that was two years ago. Now, it was revived again this year with the proposal for an amendment to the State Constitution to do what I was trying to do through the legislative process back in, two years ago. And that's stalled too. So, as we sit here today I'm not sure that Pennsylvania politicians have the guts to vote on this; they do in the House, but there's another body here that doesn't have it. So, that's where we sit and it'll be hard to tell you what's going to happen. I don't want to predict the future, but it's not an issue that's going to go away.

HM: You talked about the media, what role do they have in Pennsylvania politics?

JB: The Media? I have two different relationships with the media. *(laugh)* The media that I have back home I have a great relationship with. If they have an issue they want to talk to me about they call me up or they drop in my office and we talk about it. They print what I say, they don't editorialize, and I think they're doing a good job of journalism. The larger media, I think, in Pennsylvania does a terrible job. They editorialize all the time in their so called "news articles." The ultimate illustration that I give people is that back in 1989 when we were debating the 1989 Abortion Control Act, which did become law and is law today, I was quoted as speaking on the House Floor and they called me a "ya-hoo." Another person who also debated the issue was called a "yokel." Now that's in the "news article", that's not in the editorial. Now, if they want to call me a "ya-hoo" or a "yokel" in the editorial, that's fine, but don't print a news article where you're talking about what the debate was about and it says, "A yokel got up and said," and "Another ya-hoo got up and said," that's a classic illustration of how liberal and how unprofessional, I think, newspapers have become. And that particular illustration was in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. I've seen the same sorts of things in *The Harrisburg Patriot*, in *The Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, [and] *The Pittsburgh-Post Gazette*; throughout the State. I think the News media, the print media particularly – it's not so much the TV media – but, the print media has lost professionalism to the point where they want to editorialize and persuade people on their way of thinking through the news articles and through the editorials. And getting back to the illustration of the Marriage Amendment that I passed, it was interesting that I would talk to a reporter, for instance from *The Post Gazette* or *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and I would answer their

questions and to the most extent they were fairly objective about it, which I was surprised that they didn't editorialize as much as I thought they would. But, then they would come out with the editorial and talk about how I was a "knuckle-dragging Neanderthal" and a "moron" and a throw back to the 1800's. I mean personal insults, to newspapers, is the way they think now they can convince people of a point of view, which I think demeans the process and demeans the newspaper and turns people off. And it's probably one of the main reasons why newspapers are losing circulation, I think. They're out of tune with people in Pennsylvania; the big media. As I said, I have no problem with the local people; the papers that have a circulation of 10,000 for instance. I mean, they tend to do a good job and they tell things as they are. But, the larger the newspaper, the less inclined they are to print the facts and the issues and the more inclined they are to try to influence the public.

HM: What do you think is key to getting legislation passed?

JB: Know the process. A lot of great ideas die because the person who has the great idea doesn't know the process. You can criticize the Legislature for being slow and cumbersome, and it is. And you can criticize the people who are there for worrying about their own turf, et cetera, and so forth. But, if you know the system, if you know how to work the system, you can get things done. Some people just don't know how to work the system or don't put the effort into working the system. Let me give you a quick illustration; Senator Vance [Patricia Vance; State Senator, 2005-present; State Representative, Cumberland County, 1991-2004], from the Camp Hill area, was a House

Member last Session, and she and I both agreed that there was a need to change the law dealing with foreign adoptions. When you adopt a child in another country, let's say you go over to China and you adopt a child and, that happens a lot, because it's difficult to adopt in the United States. The government of China will say that this adoption is final, there are no strings attached, you don't have to come back in ten years, you don't have to report to us; you have this child, it is yours. People were coming back to Pennsylvania and depending on the county that you lived in they were told they had to re-adopt a child which is a cost of somewhere between \$7,000 and \$10,000 when it wasn't necessary. Some counties said yes. Some counties said no. So, we found out that there were several counties in Pennsylvania that were telling people they had to re-adopt when they really didn't need to. So, Senator Vance and I drafted legislation last Session, it's really what we call a "no-brainer;" it made sense to say to the counties that there is no reason for people need to re-adopt. You shouldn't have to do that if the adoption was final in another country. It took us three years to get that done. We just got it done in the last few weeks. Now, that's an easy one and it took three years. Imagine how some issues like eliminating property tax become so difficult. But, we know the rules. I mean, Senator Vance is a, she's a very savvy legislator. She knows what's going on and so do I, of course. And with all of our effort combined, her in the House and her in the Senate and me in the House and working together, we finally got this thing done and there was minor opposition to it. So, it can become a very difficult process. And I think the people who are most frustrated by it are the people who don't know the process or who aren't willing to do what it takes to make the process work for them; which includes going into people's offices and asking for their help and making sure that every "t" is crossed and

every “i” is dotted and you keep pushing. You got to push, push, push. If you want legislation passed you have to be the prime pusher of it. It isn’t going to happen by accident. You don’t introduce a bill and watch it go to committee and all of a sudden next thing the Governor is signing it. It doesn’t happen that way; you have to baby it all the way through the process.

HM: Well, how frustrating is it whenever a bill, that is a good bill, doesn’t get the deserved attention or go anywhere?

JB: Well, very frustrating, if it’s my bill. *(laugh)* I don’t worry too much about other people’s bills although, obviously I do support other people’s bills. So, it can be frustrating. I’ve always given people the illustration that it’s like traveling down the highway. If you wanted to go from, on the Turnpike, from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh it’s 300 and some miles. If you stay on the road and don’t get off, you’re fine, but there are always exits along the way. And you could imagine each exit as being an obstacle: Exit #1 is a Chairman of the Committee that doesn’t like this bill, so he’s not going to vote it out of Committee. Exit #2 is the Majority Leader, **[End of Side A]** doesn’t like this bill and he’s not going to let you vote on it. Or Exit #3 is this special group, doesn’t vote your bill so they’re trying to derail it. So, to get from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh without having to be forced off any exits is very difficult because getting a bill passed from, let’s say it’s Philadelphia introducing it and Pittsburgh’s the Governor signing it, there are a lot of obstacles to overcome. A lot of people don’t want you to make that trip and they will get in your way. Some will cooperate with you to make it happen, but a lot of people

will try to stop it from happening. So, opposition to any legislation, even “no-brainers” appears and sometimes derails legislation. So, if you know the process, you know how to overcome those or at least, in most cases, you do.

HM: How did you work with both Democratic and Republican Leadership to resolve legislative issues?

JB: Occasionally, you have to sit down and talk to them and say, “Hey, I know that you may not like this bill, but I’m here to tell you that we’re going to do it. So, if you’ll cooperate and I’ll cooperate with you, we’ll try to make it a better bill that you may be able to live with more so than otherwise.” Generally, you tend to work with your Leadership group much more closely than you do the other Parties’; particularly if your Leadership group is in the majority, which has been the case for me in the last 12 years. So, you have the opportunity to talk with them and ask them to put a bill up for a vote or whatever. And then the other side’s Leadership, generally, doesn’t support your legislation unless asked and often times not even when you are asked, but you go to the individual Members. So, being Republican, I would ask Democratic Members for their support, individually. And if you do that and you can do it successfully, you’ll get lots of votes to get your bills passed.

HM: Moving onto technology and traditions of the House. How did you and the House of Representatives deal with major events that affected the way that Pennsylvanians lived such as the Iraq wars, September 11th, natural disasters?

JB: A lot of those things are out of our hands. State Legislators have very little to do with the war in Iraq or 9/11. However, some of those things filter down to us. For instance, in the war in Iraq, we have beefed up our State support for veterans. We have passed legislation that helps them to not worry about their jobs when they leave, to not worry about their finances; that gives them some financial help, gives them counseling, gives them some tax breaks, things of that sort. So, that's a national issue, but we did have a response on a state-wide level. 9/11 is a similar scenario in that because the nation now is much more defensive about protecting our borders and preventing another terrorist attack, we, in Pennsylvania, have passed legislation that is tightening up things like illegal skinning of license plates, driver licenses. Things like just security measures. We actually created a homeland security in Pennsylvania which we didn't have before 9/11; so, they are working on coordinating emergency response teams and things of that sort. So, the national issues sometimes in their original impact are national, but then they start to filter down through the State. And we begin to think of some things that we can do on a state level. So, that would be two illustrations I can give you.

HM: How would you compare the technology of the House today to that during your first years in office?

JB: Stone Age to the Modern Age. *(laugh)* One of the things that used to impress me about the early years was that we had a ton of paper on our desk, especially at budget time; you probably could have saved a couple of trees if you had not printed everything.

I actually went up to Bill DeWeese [H. William DeWeese; State Representative, Fayette, Greene and Washington Counties, 1976-present; Speaker, 1993-1994] when he was the Speaker of the House and I was the in the Minority – and this had to be somewhere around 1990-91 – and I said to him, “Bill, I said you know what, we could save a lot of money and be a lot more organized if we had computers on our desktops.” Well, he didn’t do anything with the idea other than pat me on the back and tell me it was a great idea. But, then when Speaker Ryan [Matthew J. Ryan; State Representative, Delaware County, 1963-2003; Speaker, 1981-1982 and 1995-2003], the Republican, became the Speaker of the House, he did follow through on that and eventually we did get laptops. So, the laptops on the House Floor [are] much better than a ton of paper sitting there, and you don’t know which paper is where, and how do I find this? So, it became a better organizational tool, but I think it probably does save us money because even though the initial up front cost on a laptop is not cheap, even when you buy them wholesale like we do, you do print an awful lot of paper and I think it ultimately did save us money. Now, that’s on the House Floor, we’ve also done a lot of technological advances in our constituent service. I mentioned earlier doing email blasts, doing public service announcements through TV and radio which are very effective, but we’ve also updated our computer systems in our District Offices so that we’re all linked together. When I was first elected, the only way you could get a copy of a bill to a constituent was you had to call down to the document room and say, “Hey could you send me a copy of this?” And they literally had these huge revolving bins where they kept all these copies of the bills and if they had one on hand it was great, if they didn’t they had to go copy it somewhere and get it to you. So, it was like a 3- 4 day process before you got it; then

you had to send it to your constituent. But, now we have access to that through our computer system. We can print it out and we can have it in the constituent's hands in a matter of seconds. So, that's been really a big help. And there's probably a bunch of other things we've done that I don't remember because they sort of added them, one by one, and I don't remember every improvement they've made.

HM: Is it a good idea to have a cell phone, a Blackberry so you're always in touch with everybody?

JB: Yes and no. I'm particularly sensitive to this as a Chairman of a Committee because I'm holding a committee hearing and people's cell phones are going off, while I'm trying to conduct a hearing which I find very aggravating; almost to the point of being rude. But, I understand the people feel they need to be contacted. My attitude towards the cell phone was that I'll turn it on when I need it on and I won't turn it on if I don't and I don't want people tracking me down every minute of the day. But, with the newer versions that cell phones have, all these other functions, it's not just a cell phone-they keep their calendars there and you know take messages and things of that sort. I guess it's a good idea as long as it doesn't create other problems.

HM: Could you describe your District Offices and how do they – you have I think a few don't you?

JB: Well, actually I have one District Office in Honesdale in Wayne County, but every Friday I go to a different location; usually it's a county office or a township building. And I advertise those office times that I'm there and I'm there from 9:00 o'clock to noon, no appointment necessary. I've found them very helpful to reach my District. When I first was elected my District was almost 100 miles from one end to the other to drive it. Now, it's gotten much shorter; it's only about 50 miles now from one end to the other. But, I still do those visits on Friday mornings and sometimes I sit there for three hours and nobody comes, but most of the time there's two or three people that come and they have a problem and I'm able to help them with it and they might not have bothered to do that if they had to drive to my District Office. So, and it gets me out in the District, helps me to see what's going on in terms of the roads and the buildings and events that are going on.

HM: What role does seniority play in the House?

JB: Big, real big. Seniority is the basis on which Chairmanships are handed out. And I was here 16 years before I became a Chairman so I had to wait a long time to be the Chairman of a Committee. So, senior Members get the Chairmanships and generally, senior Members get the Leadership roles although you don't have to be a senior Member to get Leadership. But, nobody's going to vote for you for Leadership until you've been here for a few terms; just doesn't make sense. So, seniority does help a lot. I'm not sure it helps you a whole lot in getting legislation passed, other than you're dealing with other

senior Members when your bill goes through a different committee and you want help on it. But, it does make a difference in terms of the Chairmanship and Leadership.

HM: What type of relationship do you have with Lobbyists?

JB: Pretty good. I've always viewed Lobbyists as people who had a point of view they wanted to share with me. They're not the evil people that the press makes them out to be; maybe a couple of them are, but most of them are there to do a job to represent the people that are paying their salary. And the people who pay their salary have a legitimate interest and a right to influence legislation because if it effects them. Why shouldn't they? And if they can afford to hire somebody to be a presence here for them, so be it. And that doesn't mean that I do whatever a Lobbyist tells me to do. It doesn't mean that Lobbyists are in a position to get things done that they shouldn't be getting done. But, they bring to the attention of Members issues that they didn't know about, often times. So, I've always viewed Lobbyists as good educators to me on a particular subject. And I've had many of an opportunity where Lobbyists come in and say, "Hey, Jerry can you vote for this, that, or the other thing?" And I say, "No. Come back next time and we'll talk about the next issue." And I think if your up front with Lobbyists, tell them why you can or can not support them, they're alright with that. They're still doing their job, but and they understand that not everybody's going to agree with them. But, I think a Lobbyist is really an important function of the Legislature because we can't know everything about every bill. It's hard to believe, I know, but we just don't know everything about every bill. Most good Lobbyists will give you the pros and cons of

what they're for or against. They'll say, "Hey, here's why we're for it, but here's what people who are against it are going to tell you." And they're pretty honest and accurate about that. And then you make the judgment call as to whether or not you think you can support or not support their particular interest.

HM: I've been told that you share a birthday with several Representatives.

JB: Yeah.

HM: Such as E.Z. Taylor, past Representative Howard Fargo [State Representative, Mercer County, 1981-2000], and Minority Leader Bill DeWeese.

JB: Which is the most interesting one. Yes. Oh, and also Tom Quigley [State Representative, Montgomery County, 2005-present] who is currently a Member.

HM: Oh great. That's quite a popular day. What was that like knowing that all these other Representatives share the same birthday?

JB: Well, I was shocked that I had anything in common with Bill DeWeese.

HM: *(laugh)*

JB: Bill DeWeese is off to the left, I'm off to the right and neither one of us apologizes for it. He's a year younger than me, I might point out, but it is kind of strange. And we've gone out and celebrated our birthdays together. That's one of the interesting things about politics is you can stand on the House Floor and fight each other on an issue and you can go out to dinner and celebrate your birthday with that person. So, it's part of that camaraderie thing. The House is, to some extent, a big fraternity. We can fight like cats and dogs sometimes over issues, but as long as we don't make it personal, we can still respect the other person, we can still have a laugh with them and share experiences. And that's why I say Bill DeWeese and I are so far apart politically that it is kind of interesting that we have the same birthday.

HM: Could you talk about the Republican/Democrat activities such as softball and basketball games, tennis matches? Where you involved in any of that?

JB: Yeah, tennis and basketball. When I was first elected in [19]84, I was only 35 years old and I was in much better shape than I am now. And I found some other guys that liked to play tennis, some were Democrats some were Republicans, and often times in the spring you would get off the House Floor at 3 or 4 o'clock and you'd want to do something and you didn't want to just sit around, you know, sit at your desk and vegetate. So, we would go out in the local tennis courts and have a real good time playing tennis. We used to play, well they still do, I guess, but I used to play basketball every Tuesday night. They would get the court over at the Harrisburg Area Community College and Members were invited to come over and we would sometimes have 20-30 guys come out.

We'd used two different courts and just pick up games and whoever were the better players got picked and the guys that weren't so good sat and watched for awhile. But, that was not a partisan thing; that was just a good time out. Good exercise and kind of things that you have good memories of.

HM: What was it like presiding as Speaker Pro Tem?

JB: I've enjoyed filling in as the Speaker for a couple of reasons. Number one, having been a teacher, I always liked the idea that I was in charge and being in charge as Speaker is much more difficult than being a teacher. If the House Members acted that way when they were kids in school they would've gotten thrown out of school, I think. It's hard to keep the mob under control, but I do enjoy it. I find that it helps me to be much more sharp, mentally, because you have to listen to everything everybody says. If you're sitting on the House Floor and another Member is at the microphone talking about an issue, if you want to listen, you listen, if you don't you turn to your neighbor and you start talking or you pick up a newspaper and read it or whatever. But, you're a Speaker, when you're up there you have to know everything that's going on. You have to know what everybody's saying and you have to keep track of who's supposed to speak next and whether or not they're out of order and you also have the Parliamentarian standing to your left and he's whispering in your ear about what to do next. The gentlemen who's stands to the right of the Speaker is telling you who's the next guy that's going to be speaking at the microphone and so and so is asking for recognition. So, you're like a traffic cop in a lot of ways. But, you're trying to keep 200 Members on track going in the

same direction. So, it's a very challenging position, I enjoy it and that's probably one of the things I will miss when I'm not here anymore is the ability to fill in as Speaker. And since we the Republicans went into the majority, I've probably filled in there probably 70-80 times, quite a bit. One other interesting aspect of this is Bill DeWeese and I have the same birthday, we went out to dinner once when he was Speaker and I said to him, "Bill, I'd like you to let me be Speaker for awhile as a birthday present." And you know he did that. And that's a rare thing, you know, Speakers usually only pick people to fill in for them who are of their same Party. And Bill and I are not of the same Party, but because we had the same birthday, the next day he let me go in and fill in as Speaker for the first, like, 15 or 20 minutes and I thought that was a real hoot.

HM: Did you ever consider running for another public office besides the House?

JB: Yeah, I've thought of running for Congress. I would not run for anything else at this point in time. The office of the U.S. House of Representatives I think would be very challenging. It would be a step up from what I'm doing now. It would be a much larger District, a lot bigger constituency; more time involved and more difficult job I think. But, I'm at the point in my life now where I'm ready for that kind of a challenge. If that would occur, an opening in my Congressional District were to happen, then I would seriously consider that.

HM: What aspect of your job as a House Member did you like the most?

JB: The work I do back home. The fact that you can help people, you can solve problems. People walk in my office all the time with a problem and most of the time walk out with a solution. And that's not just me, but that's my staff. I have very capable staff and people who I depend on to do a good job and they do a good job. But, we're very happy and pleased with the job that we do back home. That, to me, is the most satisfying part of the job.

HM: What about the least?

JB: *(laugh)* The least fun time is when we're in Session and seeing some of the things that happen here, some of the bills that are voted that I feel very strongly are not the right thing to do and I'm in the minority and it happens anyway. That's hard to swallow. And I think most of the people who quit after a couple of terms are people who have never learned to handle that part of the job because everybody looks like a hero back home if they do their work. And we work hard at constituent work, but to be successful down here means you have to be sort of like a baseball player who hits .250, he realizes he's getting out $\frac{3}{4}$ of the time. He's only winning $\frac{1}{4}$ of the time with one hit out of four at-bats and sometimes it's even less than that as a Legislator. It may be maybe $\frac{1}{10}$ of what you vote for actually becomes law and the other nine things you voted against didn't. So, you have to learn to accept the fact that you are one of 203 in the House, 253 of the House and Senate combined, and you're just not going to have a whole lot of success sometimes because other people don't see things the way you do. And you can't let that frustration defeat you. You have to learn to accept that you're going to lose, maybe

frequently, and still continue to do what you want to do. And then when you look back at your career you say, “Here’s what I got done or here’s what other people got done, maybe I didn’t care for, but here’s what I got done.” And you can take some pride in that.

HM: When you recount your experiences in the House, do you have a favorite story?

JB: Well, I have a favorite memory. I don’t know that it’s a good one for the public, but in 1991, when we were in an impasse over the budget we were going into August and people were getting testy, it was hot, they didn’t want to be there. The State, we weren’t getting paid, some State workers weren’t getting paid; it was a difficult situation. And Governor Casey [Robert P. Casey, Pennsylvania Governor, 1987-1995], at the time, was trying to promote a big tax increase to get the budget passed. Well, we were in one particular night and we had a photographer that worked for us, for the House Republicans, who was taking pictures on the Floor and they were allowed to do that, but he’s not allowed to take pictures of the voting board and some of the Democrat Members thought he had done that and they were getting all upset. So, the story was that he said he wasn’t taking them, but he saw that they were getting quite upset with him so he started to walk from the Democrat side over to the Republican side and one of the Members chased him, literally, was chasing after him because he was going to take the camera and rip the film out and all that kind of stuff. As he was coming down the side aisle along the wall Representative Dennis Leh [State Representative, Berks County, 1987-2006] gave this House Member, who was chasing our photographer, a hockey hip-check. Hit him

into the wall and almost knocked him to the floor-he kind of stumbled and went down-and pretended as if it was an accident. In the meantime, the photographer made his escape out the back of the hall of the House. And so, I always thought that was kind of interesting that that sort of thing would happen.

HM: In 1997 and 2004 you were honored with the Guardian of Small Business Award by the National Federation of Independent Businesses. What do awards such as this mean to you?

JB: The National Federation of Independent Businessmen is an organization that represents small business people; mom & pop organizations. I've always had a pro-business voting record/pro-business attitude towards legislation and, to me, that's just your friends thanking you for being who you are. They recognize the fact that I did what I said I would do. And I guess if there's anything I could say was probably, I believe, the hallmark of my 22 years was I always did what I said I would do. I didn't double talk. I didn't rat out anybody. I wasn't a hypocrite. You might not have liked what I said, but I did what I said I would do and I stand by it. And I think when you get awards like that, and I've gotten other awards from other organizations, it's basically an affirmation that you stayed the course; you said you would do such and such and you did it.

HM: What do you believe are your greatest accomplishments?

JB: Helping the 1988-89 Abortion Control Act [Act 47 of 1988] be passed. Helping the Fetal Homicide Bill [Act 44 of 1997] become law. Helping, just recently, the “Birmelin Amendment,” [A1568 of 2002] which restricts abortion activities in Pennsylvania through the budget process to become statute. It had been a part of the budget every year for the last seven years, but we finally made it statute this year. Helping with the foreign adoption things. I had an interesting bill that was called “bottle-club bill.” [A4826 to SB 1024 of 1996] A few years ago the bottle clubs, which are not liquor licensed establishments, were also having live nude dancing. And we had instance after instance all over the state, of neighbors who were complaining about the fact that these men were going into these establishments, getting liquored up, going out into the parking lot smashing bottles and creating all kinds of problems and some of which we can’t say here in public. So, what we did was I passed a bill that said that you can either bring your own bottle for drinking or the nude activities, but you can’t have both in the same place. So, it really put a damper on their activities. *(laugh)* I think in most cases they reverted back to bring your own bottles and forgot about the nudity. But, since we passed that bill we’ve had virtually no complaints about these places. So, it’s one or the other, but you can’t have both. And that was my legislation that did that and I was surprised how effective it was.

HM: Since you’ll be retiring at the end of this Session, is there any legislation that you’d like to see completed before you leave?

JB: At this point probably not. I still have a couple bills that I think should become law and if I don't get the job done then I'm going to ask somebody who succeeds me to do that. But, I think what we were able to accomplish within the last two weeks with the foreign adoption bill and with the restrictions on appropriations for abortion related activities as opposed to family-planning. I think they were the two biggest things I wanted to get done before I left here and we got them done. So, I guess I'm on cruise control now for the last few months. *(laugh)*

HM: Upon retirement, what are your plans?

JB: Well, I really don't know. I'm 57, I'm too young to just "retire," retire and not ever work again. But, because of a lot of long service in the House, 22 years, plus I was a teacher, et cetera, I have over 31 years in the pension system. I have enough through the pension to live on. So, I'm unique in that aspect that I can just sort of do what I want to do and not have to do what I have to do. So, if something comes along that interests me, something that I think I can contribute to and that it will make a difference in society. I'm not interested in a job just for the money but, if I could do something that makes a difference for what I consider to be a better society that we live in, I'll probably seriously consider that.

HM: Do you think you'll still remain active in politics?

JB: No, unless I run for Congress. I would at least want a break from it. And I've been fortunate, I only had two opponents after I got elected in [19]84. I've only had two campaigns where I had somebody running against me and only one of them was a really serious candidate. So, I haven't had the real hard campaigns that a lot of guys go through and have to put up with all the negatives that they deal with. So, I've been pretty fortunate that way. But, it does wear on you. There comes a point in time when you just don't want to get up and go to that dinner and spend the night away from home again or get in the car to go to Harrisburg because you know you're going to be away three or four days again. There's that point in time where you just want a break from it and I think I'm at that point and that's one of the reasons why I decided not to run again. I just felt that if you can get "Legislator burnout," that I was on the edge of getting that. So, I'm young enough to do other things and old enough to know better than to do the wrong things.

HM: My last question: do you have any advice for new Members?

JB: Yeah, and I wrote it down too. I want to make sure to get this quoted right, because I think this is the smartest thing I ever said to a new Member. I would say to a new Member there are two equally big mistakes that you can make: taking yourself too seriously, but not taking your job seriously enough. I've seen too many people who come down here with the inflated egos; they get what I call the "God complex." They think, "Oh, you know, people love me back home, I'm elected, I'm a State Representative, blah blah blah. You know, I'm wonderful." And they take themselves too seriously. On the other hand, sometimes they don't take their job seriously enough.

They don't study the legislation, they don't know the issues, they don't care how they vote, they're not doing their work back home that they get elected to do, and I think that's an equally important mistake to make. I'll put this all in perspective with a story that I share with people; when I was running for office, I was gone a lot. My daughters who were then somewhere around 10-15 years old knew what was going on, but they weren't really involved in it. And my daughters and my wife would come home at the end of the day and they'd get the mail and they'd see all this campaign stuff and whatever. And all my mail was addressed to Jerry Birmelin. Within the first week after I won the election in November of 1984, my daughter who is 10 years old at the time, is getting the mail everyday and all of a sudden I'm getting these letters of congratulations and the title is "the Honorable Jerry Birmelin." So, for about a week she's picking up the mail and she's seeing all these letters. So, we're sitting at dinner one night and she says, "Can I ask you a question Dad?" "Yeah sure." "When did you become honorable?" It's not me, it's the job. And that's what I try to tell people. Be honorable because the job is honorable. It's not so much about you, it's about the position you hold. And my daughter just deflated me like in ten seconds like nothing else could. But, that's the truth of the matter. You don't become "honorable;" either you are or you aren't, but the title is such that when you hold the position you ought to treat it honorably. And I think I've tried to do that and I've been fairly successful in doing that. And that would be my advice to new Members.

HM: Thank you very much.

JB: You're welcome.

HM: This concludes our interview.

JB: You did a lot of research on me. (*laugh*)

HM: We try. (*laugh*)