

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

**The Honorable Dwight Evans (D)**

203<sup>rd</sup> District

Philadelphia County

1981 – 2016

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**Heidi Mays (HM):** Well, good afternoon.

**The Honorable Dwight Evans (DE):** Thank you very much. Good afternoon to you, too.

**HM:** I'm here today with State Representative Dwight Evans, who represents the 203<sup>rd</sup> legislative district from Philadelphia County. He served from 1981 and will be ending his career after the end of this session in 2016. Thank you for being here with me today.

**DE:** Thank you for inviting me.

**HM:** I wanted to begin by asking you about your childhood and your early family life and how you feel that that may have prepared you for public service?

**DE:** That's a very good question. Probably when I think back about my childhood, I think it probably was like most kids who was growing up. I am one of a family of seven; I have three other brothers and I have a sister. My father's name was – he's no longer alive – Henry Evans and my mother's name is Jean Marlene Evans, that's my mother's name. I have an older brother named Henry and a sister by the name of Linda and two other brothers, one, Dwayne Evans is the next one and then the other one is Gary Evans. So, it was seven of us. I was born in North Central Philadelphia, that's exactly where I was born. My older brother is about five years older than me and, basically, he was a person who I very much looked up to. He was the person who sets the tone and I sort of followed his lead. My father was in the military. He was in the Korean War and once he came back from the Korean War, he worked for a company called

Quaker Storage Company. My mother was a waitress and a secretary. So, my mother and my father were the people who basically set a certain tone in the household. You had to eat dinner at a certain time, you had to go to church; those were the things that they stressed. My mother was a real hard charger; today, they call them “tiger moms.” That’s the way my mom was; she was relentless about behavior, how you conduct yourself, the things that are important. She basically set that kind of tone. Then there’s my grandmother which was her mother, Kathryn Odoms, and there was my grandfather, Bernard Odoms, which was my mother’s father, and they really also set the tone. They set a real tone with all of us. My grandfather was kind of a self-made man; he did a lot of mechanical type of things, he took care of things, he was always very supportive. My grandmother was a seamstress. She always worked, she’s very proud of being in a union; that’s the kind of person that she was. Then my mother has three other brothers. Two of them went to Central High School – Central High School’s a very prominent high school in the city of Philadelphia – and one of my uncles played basketball. The nickname they called him [was] Bones Odoms. He was a person who was very renowned in playing basketball in the streets. My other uncle was a police officer; he rose up to be a detective. His name was Donald Odoms. They were in the military, and then my other uncle was Elvin Odoms. All three were in the military. My grandfather was in the Navy. So, my grandfather was in the military, my three uncles in the military, and my father was in the military. So, all of them, were individuals that played a lot in terms of this country and the security of it, and so as you would say describing as I was growing up, there was a lot of sort of order in the household. They were individuals who basically set a certain tone and you had to conduct yourself in a certain way. So, that’s one aspect that affected my behavior was the tone that they set. The second part of it is when my mother and father moved to a section called Germantown in Philadelphia. They moved from

north central Philadelphia to Germantown and being raised up in Germantown, that's where I went to elementary school; I went to a school called Robert Fulton Elementary School, it was the first school that I went to. Then the church I went across the street was called Providence Baptist Church; that was the first church. My mother would have us go to church every Sunday and it was long church hours; I didn't understand that but it was very, very long church hours that my mother had us go to church. So, the school I went to and the church I went to was on the same street, on Haines Street, in the city of Philadelphia. So, it was that aspect of church, it was the aspect of school; those were basics. From there, I went to a junior high school called Roosevelt Junior High School. As a matter of fact, it was named after Teddy Roosevelt, that's the junior high school I went to. I went there for seventh grade. My mother and father separated when I went to eighth grade. We moved to West Oak Lane, where she currently lives right now in Germantown. So, we moved there off of my mother and my brothers and my sister, we all moved there and I kind of, that's where I kind of begin to grow. I went to another junior high school called Wagner Junior High School. Louis Wagner who was active in the Civil War on the Union side, that was the name of that particular school, it's the school I went to. I just went there for eighth grade. The next school I went to was Morris E. Leeds. That school was predominantly white. That's when school really got serious with me, when a teacher by the name of Mr. Abrams said, "If you're going to be serious about academics, you got to get serious about algebra." That was the first time that I went to summer school during that particular time. So, it was ninth grade there. And then I went to Germantown High School, and Germantown High School was named for its section, just would say it's predominantly Germans who lived in that section, and Germantown High School would have been 100 years old but it shut down after 99 years. I went to Germantown High School from 1968 to 1971. After going to Germantown

High School, and before going to Germantown, I worked. I got a job at the age of about 14 – I sort of lied about my age – I worked at Rolling Hill Hospital, which is at Elkins Park on Township Line, that's the hospital that I worked at. I worked in the dietary section pushing food cart trucks in order to push them up to the patient's floor. But what's interesting is I became a supervisor as a young teenager at Rolling Hill Hospital. That was around 1969. I worked 3 to 7, Monday through Friday, and I worked 10 to 8 on Saturdays. I remember I always was there at work on time, it was always very important to be at work on time and I used to have to take three buses in order to go to work. I remember I used to take something called the L Bus that left from Stanton and Haines, and then I took the 26<sup>th</sup> Bus that took you to a section called Five Points, better known as Fox Chase, and then from Fox Chase, I got on a little green, farm-like bus, school bus, I got on the bus and it would take us to work. So, I worked with a group of teenagers at that particular time and those teenagers were individuals who basically – what we did was push the trucks up to the floor of the hospital, we delivered the food to the rooms, we would bring the trucks back down, and we would kind of clean the food, the garbage and stuff, and clean the trucks at the end of the night, that's what we'd do. But one thing I do want to go back to, Robert Fulton Elementary School, there was a couple of favorite teachers that I had. My second grade teacher's name was Miss Jackson; my third grade teacher was Miss Howard; my fifth grade teacher – one of my favorite teachers – was Miss Burl; and my sixth grade teacher was a gentleman by the name of Mr. Easley. Those four teachers affected my behavior a great deal in elementary school. Those were the ones who played a big difference with me in elementary school. A gentleman at Providence Baptist Church in Sunday school made a big difference, named Mr. Lancaster. So, Mr. Lancaster in Sunday school, those four teachers in elementary school, Mr. Abrams in ninth grade, and then I went to Germantown from [19]68 to

[19]71, as well as worked at Rolling Hospital. And I didn't realize probably then that was effectuating my behavior to ultimately move me to the discipline to be in politics.

**HM:** Wow.

**DE:** I know. That's a lot, isn't it?

**HM:** That is a lot.

**DE:** Believe me.

**HM:** So after you graduated high school, what did you do next?

**DE:** After I graduated high school, I worked at a place called Snyder Door Company. It's on Cheltenham Avenue and I remember I got the job through Germantown High School. I was an assistant shipper and I worked at that particular garage door company – it no longer exists – I was assisting the shipper who was in charge of the procurement. I worked there for about a month and then one day I got two checks during the same weekend. I didn't understand that but what I finally realized was I was being laid off. So in 1971 I got laid off, which forced me to think more and more seriously about school. That's what kind of forced me to wind up going to the Community College of Philadelphia. So, between 1971 and 1973, I went to the Community College of Philadelphia, but I went all year round. Normally it takes two years to complete community college; I did it in a year and a half. I went to school winter, fall, spring, and summer

all year round and I graduated in 1973 out of community college. Then I ultimately transferred to La Salle, La Salle College at that time, which is in the northwest part of Philadelphia. The reason I went to La Salle, was because I got a letter from Temple and from Villanova, but I went to La Salle because of its size; it was about four thousand young people at that particular time – you're talking about between 1973 and 1975 – and it's important to understand what was going on during that time, because there was the Vietnam War, I voted for the first time in 1972, they allowed 18 year olds the vote and I voted in 1972. I voted for George McGovern in 1972. Richard Nixon won, 49 states to one, but, at the end of the day, two years from that time, who knew Richard Nixon was going to turn out to be a crook in 1974? But in 1972, it the first time I voted and I was 18 years old. But when I was in La Salle, I was very active with the Black Student Union, with something called the St. Tommy More Law Society, just dealing with hunger, issues of that nature. I was extremely active at La Salle University between 1973 and 1975. So, the aspect of school and environment played a huge effect on my behavior. But, remember the backdrop is you got the Vietnam War going on, you got the Civil Rights aspect – in 1968 Martin Luther King is shot and killed, in 1968 Malcom X also dies around that particular time, 1964-65, you got the Voting Rights Act, the Civil Rights Act, and in 1964, Reverend Leon Sullivan founded the OIC (Opportunities Industrialization Center) right there at 19<sup>th</sup> and Oxford. I kind of grew up in that section; my aunt was located at 19<sup>th</sup> and Oxford. I was 10 years old when Reverend Sullivan started OIC and I probably didn't realize how much of an effect that had on me at that time, because in north central Philadelphia there was a lot of commerce activity taking place. You have an area which is now called Cecil Moore Avenue, but at that time it was called Columbia Avenue. You saw a supermarket called Best Market, there was a movie theater called the Pearl Movie Theater. So, as a kid when I grew up in north central Philadelphia, there

was a lot of economic activity occurring in that community. So, in 1968 there were riots in north central Philadelphia. I remember my Aunt Rosie said to me, “Boy, stay off of those streets,” and I remember going down at that time Columbia Avenue picking up nickels off of what was Columbia Avenue and where I was picking up nickels, somebody had broke the meters and the nickels were laying all on the ground at that time. So, I think [19]64, [19]68 working at that particular time, moving to Germantown – and I didn’t realize I was only, I was born in 1954, 1964 would’ve made me ten years old; 1968 would have made me 14 years old and I was working at Rolling Hill and making a minimum wage of \$1.10 an hour, I think all of those things was affecting me as a kid but I couldn’t probably have articulated to you then as I can now look back on those times.

**HM:** What was your major at La Salle?

**DE:** My major at La Salle was English. I was trying to decide if I wanted to be a journalist or if I wanted to be a teacher; I was unsure of what I wanted to do. I just felt like I needed to go to college and I needed, at that time, I needed the aspect of college education in order to position me for an opportunity. I was fortunate enough to graduate college in three and a half years. As I said to you, I did a year and a half at community college and then I did La Salle for two years, so that was three and a half years that I finished school and I paid for it all myself. I mean, I worked throughout. I was probably an average student when I was in school. I probably didn’t pay as much attention as I should have, but what I loved most was history, philosophy – I loved the aspect of history and philosophy – those are the things that I was attracted to. Understanding what was taking place in the world was something I was very much concerned with, because I

grew up in the time and the era, as I described to you earlier, about Dr. Martin Luther King, Reverend Leon Sullivan, those individuals who, I realize today, but didn't realize then, of how much of an effect they had on me in terms of my own outlook and my own behavior.

**HM:** So, what made you decide to run for the House of Representatives?

**DE:** It's a rather simple proposition. In 1975, a gentleman by the name of Ryan Pugh introduced me to the Philadelphia Urban League. [The] Urban League had been around for a long period of time and I started out as a job developer. But, if you look up the word "development," generally, it is a word that means you create, but I didn't really create; I was sort of like a job finder. My job was to place people who were in prison into jobs after they come out of prison. So, what I would do is I would look at the newspaper and try to locate jobs and then match them up with the individual. But, I discovered in 1975, [19]76, I discovered that the jobs were not there. So, there were the individuals, but there weren't any jobs. So, I worked at the Urban League and I worked my way up to be director of a program they had called, The Centralized Intake Program. That was a program under something called Man Power at that time, because Jimmy Carter was President, and they had something they called the CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) Program, and The CETA Program was funding the Urban League. So, I was what you call a project director. I was about 21 years old, I was making \$18,500 – is exactly what I was making – I had 13 people working for me at the Urban League and the location I was in was 1317 Filbert Street; that no longer exists, it's a criminal justice center now in the city of Philadelphia, but, I worked at the Philadelphia Urban League, 13 people working for me, \$18,500. So, I worked from what you called the job developer to being

project director of that particular program. That was very important. But, one thing I'd like to go back to, I also was a substitute teacher. I did that from 1975 to 1976, before I worked at the Urban League. There was a gentleman by the name of Albert Sessions who was the principal at Leed's Junior High School. So, you can imagine Leed's was a junior high school that I had gone back to; I was a student there and here I was a teacher. My picture used to be on the wall in the class of 1968 – I don't think they have those pictures on the wall anymore – so, I went back to Leed's, I taught school. I thought I wanted to stay in teaching, but for some reason I didn't stay in teaching. So, I worked at the Urban League from 1976 to 1979. But the moment that drove me to politics was – it drove me because, at that time in Philadelphia, there was a mayor by the name of Frank Rizzo, who was rather onerous to the residents of the city of Philadelphia, and I'd gotten very active in politics. How I got very active was, there was a gentleman by the name of Bill Ewing, who ran for State Senate in 1978, and I was a volunteer working in his campaign. He lost his campaign, I hate to say, but the bug kind of bit me. The bug in 1978 bit me so, take the combination that I'm working at the Urban League from 1976 to 1978, I'm involved in Bill Ewing's campaign, Frank Rizzo was trying to change the charter for a third term; there was a lot of hostility. So, I remember going to my boss and saying to him, "Can I get a leave of absence?" He sort of laughed at me and said to me, "Well, you can't get a leave of absence. We don't do leave of absences." I remember saying to him, I met with him on a Wednesday, I said to him, "At the end of the day, I need you to give me all of my money for retirement and everything, I'm going to resign," and I remember going home to my mother and she said to me, "Boy, are you crazy? How could you quit your job?" I graduated from college in [19]75, I had worked a decent job making \$18,500, and I was resigning my job to run for the State House. And why was I running for the State House? I was running for the State House because something

Whitney Young said, who was head of the National Urban League, he said, “One person can make a difference.” That’s what he said; “One person can make a difference.” What happened was I wanted to be where policy was being made. I wanted to be in a position to shape the outcomes of activities, and that “one person can make a difference” had affected my behavior. Working at the Urban League, trying to place ex-offenders in jobs, teaching in the public school system, the environment of Reverend Leon Sullivan, Dr. Martin Luther King, Fannie Lou Hamer in [19]64, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass – I grew up in that generation of activism which was something that was extremely important. It’s something that you had to value in terms of what I was doing. So, it was all of those factors that were coming together. There was a gentleman by the name of Hardy Williams [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1971-1974 and 1978-1982; State Senator, 1983-1998], who’s a former State Rep[resentative] and State Senator who had run for mayor in 1971, an African-American who had run for mayor in 1971. That’s the very same year I graduated from high school. So, he ran for mayor, I voted in 1972 for George McGovern. So, I voted for George McGovern, Hardy Williams running for mayor – all of those things happening was a conversion in my head that I could just not sit on the sideline and I wanted to be involved and I wanted to make a difference. So, after quitting my job, I quit the job and I decided to run for office. I ran for office and it was five people in the race; it was three African-Americans and two non-African-Americans. The district was an interesting district; never had an African-American ever been elected. The district is West Oak Lane, East Oak Lane – it was what you called the 10<sup>th</sup> ward and the 61<sup>st</sup> ward. It was 50-50; 50 percent African-American, 50 percent non-African-American. What I did is knocked on five thousand doors. I remember somebody in my campaign, a woman by the name of Flo Burnley who’s no longer alive, crying because she thought I was going to lose. I just went out there and I

outworked everybody. The day that I announced was January the 10<sup>th</sup>, 1980, and I announced from a woman's house by the name of Ora Love. I announced from her particular house on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1980. The election was April the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1980, was the Primary. The reason I remember so distinctly is because that was the Presidential Primary; Jimmy Carter and Ted Kennedy – Ted Kennedy was running against Jimmy Carter and Jimmy Carter was an incumbent and Ted Kennedy was running against him. So, that was the kind of activism that I was involved in and I wanted to be where policy was being made, because I wanted to make a difference, I wanted to make things different than what they were.

**HM:** So, you knocked on five thousand doors.

**DE:** Yes, five thousand doors and then I won the election by two thousand votes on April 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**HM:** With five people running.

**DE:** With five people running. I came in first. The incumbent came in a distant second. Then, another person came in third and two other people came fourth and fifth and it was unheard of that I had achieved something like that. I was 25 years of age when I won the Primary on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. My birthday is May 16<sup>th</sup>, so you figure April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1980 [was when] I won and then I turned 26 years of age in 1980, that's when I turned twenty-six. I was twenty-five when I announced, but I turned twenty-six of age at that particular time.

**HM:** So, who would you say was important in your first run? Did you have a lot of people that were involved?

**DE:** I think it was a lot of people. A couple people, a gentleman by the name of David P. Richardson [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1973-1995], who's in the State House, who got elected when he was 23 years of age in 1972, which was a presidential election. He was a neighboring legislator, in what you'd call the 201<sup>st</sup> legislative district. He got elected in 1972, that's when he got elected. There's another person who was right next to me in the 200<sup>th</sup> legislative district by the name of John White [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1977-1981]. He got elected in 1976. So, Dave Richardson in 1972, John White in 1976, and both of them, who were older than I was, had kind of broken the mold; it was sort of like a political independent movement. They were not elected by the party; they were elected outside of the party. David P. Richardson used to wear a Malcom X piece around his neck. He wore dashikis, got the hair, he wore that. Everybody knew him; he was always standing up for the right, the wrong, the poor, black people – he always stood up. So, he was one person that I saw. Then there was John White, who was sort of the opposite. John White had worked at the Urban League, the Urban Coalition. He was a person who was more of the traditional, even though he's outside of the political process. So, you had Dave Richardson on one side, John White on the other side and they were influences for me. So, at that time, there was Dave Richardson in [19]72, John White who lost in [19]74 and came back and won in [19]76, and then there was another person by the name of Congressman Gray [U.S. Congress, 1979-1992], who ran in 1976 and lost by 399 votes, who turned around and came back in 1978 and won for the United States Congressional seat. He beat an African-American by the name of Robert N. C. Nix [U.S.

Congress, 1958-1979], whose son ultimately became the Chief Justice of Pennsylvania. Robert N. C. Nix was the first African-American for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. He got elected in 1958. I was four years old when Robert N. C. Nix got elected and then Congressman (William) Gray was an intern for Robert N. C. Nix, and then he got elected in 1978. So, you can see Robert N. C. Nix, Congressman Gray, Representative Richardson, Representative White – all of those individuals, and during that time, there was a gentleman by the name of Cecil Moore who was a city councilman, who got elected as well as a woman who got elected during that time, Dr. Ethel Allen; she was a Republican in north central Philadelphia. So in those [19]70's and in those [19]60's, all of these people were influences on me. There was a gentleman named Georgie Woods, who was a disc jockey at a station, WDS, he used to play some interesting music at that time. I mean, Georgie Woods was in the forefront. He was very active, so Georgie Woods was a person. C. Delores Tucker, who became Secretary of State under Milt Shapp, she was another one. So, C. Delores Tucker, Cecil Moore, David P. Richardson, John White, Bill Gray, Robert N. C. Nix and Reverend Leon Sullivan. I didn't realize how much of an effect they all collectively had on where I am today that affected my behavior, in terms of when I came to Harrisburg. And then when I came to Harrisburg in 1981, it was K. Leroy Irvis [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1959-1988; Speaker of the House, 1977-1978, 1983-1988], who was the Speaker of the House, who was another person who affected my thinking at that particular time. So, I mean, to have an African-American become Speaker of the House in Pennsylvania in modern time, in itself, said a great deal about where we are.

**HM:** I'd like to ask you another question. You talked about Dave Richardson being of one political mindset and John White being of another; where were you in that mix?

**DE:** I probably was in the middle.

**HM:** Okay.

**DE:** I probably had the activism that Dave Richardson had, very active in that respect, but I had worked at the Urban League, similar to where John White had worked. So, I had a little mixture of both. I knew you had to be, what I call, inside and outside player and it was that combination that made a big difference on my philosophy and my view and the need for activism, the need for social justice, the need for equity, the need to make the system fair. And the fact of the matter is, though the constitution is one of greatest documents in the world, the reality, it wasn't living up to what the words were that, you know, all men are created equal. Obviously, it didn't talk about women. Obviously, for African-Americans, it wasn't until the 13<sup>th</sup>, or the 14<sup>th</sup>, or the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment that, in a sense, was the rebirth. I mean, just as John Lewis led the charge across the Pettis Bridge in the 1963 speech of "I Have a Dream" by Dr. King, all those things was adding value to something that didn't exist for African-Americans, and it was that kind of collision that all was coming together that I was benefiting from; all of those people and their experiences. I did not necessarily realize it, but it was having an effect on me and my thinking and the kinds of things that I think about today and where we are.

**HM:** You've been involved in many campaigns since your first election. Do you like campaigning?

**DE:** Yes.

**HM:** You do?

**DE:** The reason I do is because it's a great process, I mean, it's the best process. You take a person like myself who, in 1980, ran for State Representative. The only qualification was that you had to just be a citizen and 21 years of age; I was 25. I ran for Lieutenant Governor in 1986. You only had to be 30; I was 31. I ran for Governor in 1994. You only had to be 30 and a citizen of the state. It didn't say anything about education qualifications. And when I ran for Lieutenant Governor, I was the third in history of any African-American to run. C. Delores Tucker, I think, was the first one. I think there was one other African-American. I was the third one. And then for Governor in 1994, never had an African-American ever run for Governor, pre-colonial, post-colonial in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. When I ran in 1994, never had an African-American ever run. I always like to tell a little story: I was up in the northern part of Pennsylvania and I remember bumping in with some African-Americans at that time, and they said, "We'll be for you in the General." Now, I didn't understand what they meant, but the reason they were saying that was because they we were still Republicans because of the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln. So, they had never seen a black man running for Governor and that was in 1994. I came in second in a six-person race; unheard of in Pennsylvania. And the first time an African-American had ever run for that particular position. But I was very proud. And the reason I said I like the campaigning was, if you have an agenda and you want to drive your agenda, campaigning is a vehicle to drive your agenda. I had an agenda about inclusiveness, involvement, and the importance of people being involved. So, those campaigns running of

Lieutenant Governor in 1986, and running for Governor in 1994 put me in a position to really be reflective of the inclusiveness of this state. Look, I've been born in this state, my entire life is in this state, my family's been in this state; I'm a Pennsylvanian. I just traveled the state talking to people about the importance of participation. So, the campaigning was no more than a method for me to drive an agenda about inclusiveness and involvement and that's basically what it did when I ran for those two races.

**HM:** Could you talk a little bit more about your district, especially the changes maybe that you've seen through the years?

**DE:** The district is a great district. I mean, I've been in that district since 1964. My mother still lives there. It's row home, sort of residential, it's in the city but it defines the outskirts.

Philadelphia was consolidated in 1854. West Oak Lane was an area that was somewhat like a suburb right within the city of Philadelphia; it's row homes, it's singles, it's twins, and it's residential. It's an area that was predominantly Jewish first before I moved in, and in [19]64 when I moved in, it was predominantly African-American. Working class people, middle class people, people take care of their homes, work in the neighborhoods, and it's a neighborhood where the people are fantastic. Look, they have given me a chance for 18 terms. I mean, the people in that area have elected me for 36 years; every other year from 1980 to 2016 they have given me a chance. They watch me; I played at Simons Recreation Center, baseball, basketball, football, so I was raised up in that rec center. I went to the schools, I went to Wagner, I went to Leed's in that particular area, and I went to Germantown High School from that location. They have a great park – Arbury Park is a great space there. Stenton Avenue with businesses on it,

Ogontz Avenue with businesses on it. It's easy access to Center City, it's about maybe 20, 25 minutes from the center of the city. And then you can jump on the turnpike through 309 and take the turnpike coming west to Harrisburg. So, to me, I'm a little biased. It's one of probably the best locations. And then there's East Oak Lane. East Oak Lane is kind of larger houses, twins, single houses. I mean, a good fabric; very active. It's called East Oak Lane and there's a lot of history about East Oak Lane. There's a great library over there on East Oak Lane that was a part of the Carnegie Library System, and then there's a section called Melrose. It's divided between the city of Philadelphia as well as the suburbs. It was predominantly Jewish, there used to be a synagogue in that particular location. The people there were very receptive to me, very supportive of me. It was a section that was for me in the Primary when I ran in 1980. A gentleman named Norman Sokolsky, he's no longer alive, but he was the one who was a leader for me in that particular area. So, the district I love it. I still live there today; I love the people in the neighborhood. So, from Simons Recreation Center, got Rowen Elementary School, Samuel Pennypacker – there's a school named after Samuel Pennypacker who was Governor of Pennsylvania at one time, he was a Republican governor – so, you got Samuel Pennypacker, you got Kinsey Elementary School, which is no longer Kinsey, it's shut down, and Samuel and Rowen. They got Finletter Elementary School. Used to have Cardinal Dougherty, which was a Catholic School, which was one of the largest catholic schools in the city of Philadelphia; it's no longer there in the district. So, you got great schools, great people. St. Athanasius, I got to tell you about that one, it's a very big Catholic school there in West Oak Lane. A lot of people have come through St. Athanasius. It's a school, you know, it has some good schools. It's basically residential, not too much large manufacturing or commercial. There was only one factory there that wound up ultimately shutting down. They used to make little patches that you sew onto

your jersey called Penn Emblen, that's no longer there, that's the only place. But basically, Stenton Avenue and Ogontz Avenue are the two main commercial locations in that district.

**HM:** Is there anything that makes your district unique?

**DE:** The people. The people are good, I mean, people say that probably anywhere, but I'm saying to you that they were people who were very much involved; very active in block organizations, taking care of their properties. Most people say that about anybody, but I just thought I know in my 36 years of representing the people, they were always very supportive of community activities that we had. They knew the importance of taking care of their neighbor and the community. They were very much as, I'm their brother and sister keepers, people that I found and I mean, as I said, I lived in that neighborhood since 1964 to currently living in the neighborhood. As I said, I mentioned some great rec centers that it has in there, great schools they have in there, and it's just a neighborhood where people realize what's important. But what's interesting is, it borders Montgomery County, so if you go on the outside of Cheltenham Avenue, you have are in Cheltenham. So where it's located is, it's 25 minutes from Center City, and it's less than five minutes from driving outside of the city. It's a section that's right up in, what we call, the North West. There's Limekiln Pike which leads you right up to Bucks County, so you can leave and go right up to Bucks County and go right to Montgomery County and it's, like I said, it's right in the northwest part of the city of Philadelphia.

**HM:** So, you're elected. How did you feel coming to the House Chamber for the first time?

**DE:** Overwhelmed. I was ready to leave within a few months because the process was very partisan, which I was foreign to. I didn't understand that, because I really came to get something done. The Republicans were in charge of the House, there was a Republican Governor, and I found people to be far more partisan than I thought they should be. My first two chairmen, one was a guy by the name of Chairman Miller [Marvin E., Jr.; State Representatives, Lancaster County, 1973-1990] from Lancaster, and the other one was named Lee Taddonio [State Representative, Allegheny and Westmoreland Counties, 1973-1982], who was from western Pennsylvania. I didn't really know them, but Miller was probably the one who was more receptive to involvement and to people being involved and I worked with him closely. I was on the Urban Affairs Committee and I was on Consumer Affairs in 1981. Those were the two committees that I was on, and they were, I mean, it was good, but the Republicans were in charge. I thought there was too much – how do I put it? – Partisanship. I remember going to K. Leroy Irvis and saying to him, “Maybe I made a mistake in coming here.” He sat me down and he said, “Look, you got to be patient. It will take time.” So, I took time and I thought about it and one day, I remember the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, allowed me to ask questions, and I remember questioning a gentleman by the name of Wally Baron, who was the Secretary of [the Department of ] General Services. I was very aggressive about asking questions about compliance regarding small businesses, particularly African-American, in terms of state government, and I remember the chairman wound up shutting me down because he thought I was a little too aggressive in asking my questions. I remember that experience and I said to myself, I was going to never let that happen to me again, because I was going to become chairman of the Appropriations Committee. I didn't know at that time, in 1982, of how much of an effect that would have on me. I think that – how should I put it? – Irvis wound up convincing

me, and he wound up putting me on the Appropriations Committee in 1982. I ran for reelection, I had a Primary in 1982, and I beat the person at that time and then he put me on the Appropriations Committee. So, what I did is I started to master all of the numbers. I started to understand everything you could about the Appropriations Committee. I really was driven by numbers. I understood the importance of numbers, so like from 1982 to 1990, I just mastered. But in 1986, I ran for Lieutenant Governor. So, I think it was the combination of the dedication to the process and the subject matter and then running for Lieutenant Governor. I came in third, but what running for Lieutenant Governor did; it basically elevated me, right, among my peers. Running for Lieutenant Governor and then mastering the political process. So, being appointed to the Appropriations Committee and then in [19]86 running for Lieutenant Governor, it was that combination that brought it together. And then the things that I was doing in my neighborhood, by starting ORC (Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corporation) and I'll talk to you, you want to talk about that, the community development corporation; it was that kind of combination that was helping shape me as a legislator.

**HM:** Well, you started talking about committees. So, did you enjoy – I'm assuming maybe the Appropriations Committee?

**DE:** Oh, that was – Remember something when I said in the beginning? I wanted to make a difference. What I learned quickly was in mastering the numbers you could drive policy outcomes, right? That's what you do; you master the numbers and you can drive outcomes. I understood if I mastered those numbers, that I could drive outcomes, right? Because the Appropriations Committee was like The Committee – that's the committee that Ben Franklin

was the chairman of; it was called the Way and Means Committee. But what I didn't tell you is the Pennsylvania Hospital, the one that Ben Franklin discovered; he put up two thousand pounds and gets the matching with private money, that's the hospital that I was born in. All of my brothers and sisters were born in the Pennsylvania Hospital, at 8<sup>th</sup> and Spruce. That's the same place where my grandmother named us with the names; Dwight, Dwight Eisenhower was President of the United States. So, it was my grandmother who named me Dwight, and then Ben Franklin was the one that did Pennsylvania Hospital, that was the hospital that I was born in, and I was born the day before the Brown vs. Board of Education decision came down on May 17<sup>th</sup>; I was born on May 16<sup>th</sup>. Thurgood Marshall led that charge. So, Thurgood Marshall, Benjamin Franklin, Pennsylvania Hospital, all those things was things that helped. So, I could see through the Appropriations Committee if I understood things that I could shape outcomes and make a difference in communities by mastering the Appropriations Committee and the information. So, you figure, I was on the Appropriations Committee in 1982. So, from 1982 to 1990, 1990 is when I ran for the chairmanship of it, but for eight years, I was in all of those committee meetings, all of those hearings, I was understanding everything you could use in understanding about this state.

**HM:** You talked about relationships. You talked about K. Leroy Irvis; were there any others that you would consider to be a mentor to you?

**DE:** I mentioned to you Dave Richardson was in the House; John White wasn't in the House that long. I think it was a combination of Dave Richardson's activism, K. Leroy Irvis' sort of statesman-like leadership. Jim Manderino [James J.; State Representative, Westmoreland

County, 1967-1989; Speaker of the House, 1989], called the Rock of Monessen. He was a true Democratic leader. I watched his behavior, I watched K. Leroy Irvis, and I watched Dave Richardson. Those three people are probably people that affected me more than anything as a person, as a legislator, and as a leader. Another person I met and he was a Republican, was Matt Ryan [Matthew J.; State Representative, Chester and Delaware Counties, 1963-2003; Speaker of the House, 1981-1982, 1995-2003]. Matt Ryan is somebody who I observed and learned a great deal from him as a leader. So, all of those people, all pieces of them, sort of affected my behavior and the things that I was doing, and my thinking in their own ways. I mean, Irvis was the person who could give a speech on the floor and suddenly people who may have been 'no' suddenly was 'yes.' Nobody was going to out-talk Dave Richardson; Dave Richardson would talk for hours and give that kind of effort on the Floor. Matt Ryan was kind of the art of the deal. He understood that, you know, we got to work together and I watched him carefully. And then Jim Manderino, I mean, no one was more committed to his working people than Jim Manderino. I mean, he was a master and he was a mechanic of the legislative process. He knew the rules inside and outside. So, if you take someone like him and then you take someone like K. Leroy Irvis, and you put that kind of combination together, they are better and stronger together and that's what I saw. I observed that because remember, I came here in 1981, and I watched them. K. Leroy Irvis left in 1988, Jim Manderino died in 1989, so you have to understand that that period of time, I'm up and coming, right? I'm up and coming; I'm on the Appropriations Committee, but I'm not the chairman. I don't get elected to chairman until 1990. And, it was all of that coming together. I ran for Lieutenant Governor in [19]86, that combination came together. What's interesting is, when it came time for me to run for chairman of the Appropriations Committee – because that's the only chairmanship that you have to get elected by

the Members; you don't get there by seniority – I ran in a race, it was four people in the race. I think it was three from Allegheny County and I was the fourth person and they all had more seniority than I, so I had to figure out a way to get elected. The first thing that I did was to consolidate the votes from Philadelphia. I had to consolidate the African-American, I had to consolidate the non-African-American, and two key people to that, one was Dave Richardson, and another guy by the name of Bill Rieger [William; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1967-2006], who was leader of the Philadelphia Delegation. They were like my foundation. They helped me basically get elected in the Delegation, so I became the candidate for the Philadelphia Delegation. Once I became the candidate for Philadelphia Delegation, I then had to go to Allegheny County and there were some key people out there. A guy by the name of Dave Mayernik [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1983-2002], Representative Mayernik, he was very key to me getting votes from Allegheny County. Then I had to go to the Northeast Caucus, a gentleman by the name of Fred Belardi [State Representative, Lackawanna and Wayne Counties, 1979-2006], was also very much key for me. Kevin Blaum [State Representative, Luzerne County, 1981-2006], very much key. Then there was another guy from Franklin County by the name of Jeff Coy [Jeffrey; State Representative, Cumberland and Franklin Counties, 1983-2004]. Jeff Coy was very good. So, Jeff Coy, Kevin Blaum, Fred Belardi, as well as two people from the west, Representative Mike Veon [State Representative, Beaver County, 1985-2006] and Representative Bill DeWeese [H. William; State Representative, Fayette, Green and Washington Counties, 1976-2012; Speaker of the House, 1993-1994], Veon from Beaver County and DeWeese from Greene County. So, you can see how it all came together; consolidate Philadelphia, and then go and pick off strategically other people around, and I won on the first ballot with 55 votes, unheard of. First time an African-American had ever won the

Appropriations position. I mean, K. Leroy Irvis had won the Speakership, but never in the history of Pennsylvania, pre-colonial, post-colonial, and over the 300 years it existed, had ever an African-American ever been elected as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. And understand, the Appropriations Committee is the committee responsible for once the governor introduces the budget, the chairman of the Appropriations Committee is the one who is responsible for navigating the budget through the process. That's the one who basically has the responsibility to make sure you get the budget through the process; that you conduct the hearings, you make sure you put the pieces together and those are the things that you make sure that you do. So, I took that very serious about being the chairman of the Appropriations Committee. So, when I got elected, I worked very hard to make that happen. One person that I would like to tell a story about was a woman by the name of Phyllis Mundy [State Representative, Luzerne County, 1991-2014]. Phyllis Mundy, who was a legislator here for many years, used to be from the League of Women Voters. I remember when I ran my campaign strategy, I promised myself I was not going to take anybody to lunch or dinner; I wasn't going to do it. I was going to win it on the basis of ideas, and Phyllis Mundy was a person who, coming out of the League of Women Voters, I knew that would connect to her. So, she was very strong. So, it was that kind of coalition that was put together that I got elected in November of 1990 as the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, which is a leadership position.

**HM:** You had talked about the other leaders that you had watched the leadership teams of Irvis and Manderino –

**DE:** Correct.

**HM:** And how they worked together.

**DE:** Correct.

**HM:** Now you're in leadership.

**DE:** Correct. Well, that –

**HM:** How was your leadership team?

**DE:** Well, I thought we had one of the best leadership teams with Bill DeWeese and Mike Veon, Freddie Belardi, Kevin Blaum, all of them. I mean, DeWeese was from Greene County, Mike Veon was from Beaver County, Kevin Blaum was from up in the Scranton area, and Fred Belardi was from Luzerne. They all were a great team. We were a younger generation, sort of like the young guns, and we all had learned a lot from Irvis and Manderino, and we all came together, literally for a decade. We were very much in that leadership for a decade and we learned, we worked East, West, Northeast – we worked closely together. We had the benefit of Bob Casey being Governor. He got elected in 1986; I think he got reelected in 1991 or 1990. So, that leadership team, in my view, was one of the best. We were more of a modern version of Irvis and Manderino; we were younger, but we learned a lot from those two in our different styles and approaches. It was our different styles that sort of brought us together to do things. I mean, one of the most difficult challenges we had in 1991 was, there was a huge deficit and we

went 34 days past the deadline; we passed the budget on August the 4<sup>th</sup>, 1991. We had to raise one of the largest tax increases in the history of the state at that time in 1991, but we pulled it off. But what more than what we pulled off, in 1992 we got reelected, not just as leaders, but as a caucus in the majority, which was unheard of. Then in 1992, we passed that budget before the deadline. I was very much committed, personally, to never having that embarrassment happen, what happened in [19]91, so, in [19]92, we passed the budget on time. In 1993, we really pulled off a masterpiece; we passed a budget 35 days before the deadline. A lot of people don't know it; if you go back we passed it around Memorial Day. I don't think anybody's passed it since, around Memorial Day. If you look it up, you'll see that we pulled off a budget in 1993, and then in [19]94, we lost a majority after [19]94, but I say to you in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, I thought we worked extremely well as a team. But, we had tools to work with. I mean, we had what we call, let's say legislative prerogatives, better known as WAMs (Walking Around Money), and was a part of the tools we had. We had RCAPs (Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program) that we used as tools, but we also had relationships. I mean, Bill DeWeese would do his thing with the Members, and Mike was like the technician, and I was the person who was sort of like the idea person, and we all worked together. Fred Belardi did a very good job as the Caucus Administrator, ensuring the administration of office space and how things were done. I think that though we were tough and rough, I think that we liked each other and I know that people liked us. So, we really had a very good time when we organized during that time.

**HM:** Well, I'd love to talk to you a little bit about your legislation now.

**DE:** Okay, sure.

**HM:** What do you feel was your most important piece of legislation? You've had how many enacted?

**DE:** Ah, it's a ton; I don't even know the number.

**HM:** We've counted 25, I think.

**DE:** It's a lot, I don't know. You know, that's a very good question. The thing that I think I'm probably most proud of is the Fresh Food Financing Initiative. The Fresh Food Financing Initiative, what's interesting is it started off with public hearings with the Health and Welfare Committee, I think it was, Chairman Frank Oliver [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1973-2010] and Representative Jake Wheatley [State Representative, Allegheny County, 2003-present]. There was a need to try to get healthy food into various communities across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. I remember meeting with the Legislative Black Caucus in my office at that time and asking them, "What are some things that you could do that will be legacy-building and that people will never forget?" You know, they talked about schools and all these other things and I said, "Okay, that's nice, but food is something that transcends philosophical issues." You know, everybody likes food. When you talk about food, people think about families, Thanksgiving, Christmas, holidays; everybody sort of comes together, and, it's not right or left about that. So, what I was able to do was to maneuver and get 30 million dollars set in the state's budget, under Ed Rendell, and there was a gentleman by the name of Jeremy Novak at the Reinvestment Fund. I remember calling over and said, "If I'm able to get 30 million dollars set

aside, can you match it?" He said yes, he could match it. So, I was able to get 30 million dollars set aside for what we called, addressing food deserts. Dennis Yablonsky was the Secretary of what you'd call DCED (Department of Community and Economic Development) at that time, and Rendell was Governor, and Rendell had an initiative he was driving, a stimulus initiative. So, what I did is I piggybacked on that initiative with this 30 million dollar initiative and when I did it, it was over a three-year period; ten million, ten million, ten million. The Reinvestment Fund was the organization responsible for managing it and I did it in conjunction with the Food Trust. The Food Trust was an organization that was responsible for trying to meet the needs. So, between the Food Trust, the Reinvestment Fund, and then one organization called the Urban Coalition. Now, why was that important? It was important for a couple of reasons. First, it was addressing the need about food insecurity, the need about people having access to quality food. It generated jobs; jobs within the stores, construction jobs. As a matter of fact, the United Food Commercial Workers, I joke a lot with Wendell Young, who's the head of United Food Commercial Workers, that it was one of the best organizing tools that you could imagine. And then, from there, it went national. Harvard University recognized it was one of the most innovative ideas in this 50 ideas that they located. They recognized it, the CDC recognized it. But, what I really was excited about is, I passed it on to a gentleman to the White House, and I passed it on because President Obama was elected in [20]08, and the First Lady was talking about an initiative around that time called Let's Move. She was talking about that initiative and I remember passing it over to somebody in the White House and they asked us, a group of us, to come to the White House. They called me and so I went down to the White House and I took some other people with me; a gentleman named Jeff Brown, Pat Burns, they run some stores, the Reinvestment Fund, and others. We went down to meet with the people in the White House.

The White House embraced the idea. You may have heard this term called ‘laboratories of democracies,’ which is describing states. Well, the White House took this idea and then they went national with it, right. They took the very same idea that I had pushed in [20]04 in Pennsylvania and then they went national with this idea about supermarkets all across the nation. But, so much for me is we have a Hunger Caucus that organized, that I suggested to the Hunger Caucus that we have a garden, which we have a garden on this ground now, which came in existence in 2010. Now, where did I get that idea from? I got that idea from – because the White House has a garden and they raise vegetables and fruits. Well, we have a garden that basically the food goes to food banks here in Central Pennsylvania. So, when you look at what happened with the supermarket, the supermarket led up to the Hunger Garden, people working together, 88 projects generated, like five thousand jobs, and it didn’t just stop in Pennsylvania; it went national. It became national policy; Illinois, New York, Louisiana, California, all of those states were watching Pennsylvania as a model. So, I would say to you, that’s probably one policy initiative I would say to you probably more than anything, that has had a huge effect upon an awful lot of people in the country. Not just in Pennsylvania, but all in the country. So, that’s something I’m extremely proud of and I started that thinking back in [20]04. Then there’s the issue about boot camps, the aspect that I worked with a Representative by the name of Lois Hagarty [State Representative, Montgomery County, 1980-1992], the need to try to deal with the criminal justice system. Then there’s the issue about, the issue about predatory lending, which started working with a council person by the name of Marian Tasco in Philadelphia. They had done the initiative there, so what she did in Philadelphia, I just tried to take it to the entire state. She did something in Philadelphia, I made it to the state, and then it led to a national issue, around dealing with predatory lending. President Obama led that charge. So, then the issue

came down about education. I led a charge with Governor Ridge, you know, it was highly unusual, a Democrat and a Republican working together about the introduction of charter schools in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Then there's the mortgage foreclosure law, working along with Mark Singel and some other people. There was a sheriff by the name of Sheriff Koons in Allegheny County, who was using a technique from the [19]30's about houses that were being foreclosed on and I led the charge on the mortgage foreclosure law. Then working with Representative Allen Kukovich [State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1977-1996; State Senator, 1997-2004], on the CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) Program. You hear Hillary Clinton talk about addressing eight million people, well, that started here in Pennsylvania. Allen Kukovich, from Westmoreland County, was the one who had the concept; I was the one who cut the deal with Noah Wenger from Lancaster County [State Representative, Lancaster County, 1977-1982; State Senator, 1983-2006]. We took two cents for the CHIP Program and two cents for farmland preservation, and the CHIP Program is the program with Kukovich that led to be a model that Hillary Clinton talks about today. The CHIP Program came from Pennsylvania. The Food Finance Program came from Pennsylvania. Those are programs that were Pennsylvania in nature that they all went national as a result of starting right here in Pennsylvania. So, those are just a few of the things that I am so proud of that I've had a part about leading the effort and making a difference in terms of outcomes and making a difference in people's lives. It all goes back to what I said to you in the beginning about my motivation for running, which was on the basis of wanting to make a difference, wanting to see outcomes. So, you talk about supermarkets, you talk about the CHIP Program, you talk about the boot camp, you talk about mortgage foreclosure, predatory lending, you talk about all those kinds of things, I like to think I've affected outcomes. Then the issue about the budgets. I have led some charges

on some very progressive budgets in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; Investments in working families, daycare, self-employment, microloans, organic farming, those are just some of the things that I have really, you know, made a difference. So, you talk about charter schools, stadiums, working families, Pennsylvania Convention Center, blight, taxicab legislation, the PAVE (Peer Advisors for Veteran Education) Program, credit counseling, those are just some of the things – and no one does anything by themselves. I don't want you to think it's about an "I" – it is a "We," and it is that we are better and stronger together. That's always been my philosophy. My philosophy has been one based on partnerships, not just Democrats but Republicans, too. I did things with Republican government. When you talk about the Pennsylvania Convention Center, Governor Thornburgh was the Governor, we led that charge. Philadelphia had not had a convention come to Philadelphia since 1948. In 2000, you had the Republican Convention come to Philadelphia and in 2016, you had the Democratic Convention. Harry Truman in 1948 was nominated to be President. In 2000, George Bush was nominated and became President, and in 2016, you have Hillary Clinton nominated. All out of the city of Philadelphia; all out of with that hot summer, with Ben Franklin and the rest of the guys who got together and organized in terms of the Constitution of the United States. That is significant to remember and to recall that Philadelphia and Pennsylvania has been very key to this country's existence and I'm happy to have been a part of what has taken place in further moving the needle through this country and through this state. And this state has been such an asset in terms of moving, not just this country but the world. This has been a fantastic state.

**HM:** One of the issues that I think you were pretty much involved in, too, was crime and gun violence.

**DE:** Yes.

**HM:** That was not something you've talked about. It's still very relevant today.

**DE:** It's still, you know, what's unfortunate is that I was able – [I'll] tell a little story. John Myers [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1995-2012], who is a State Rep[resentative] who is no longer alive, we forced the House to do a Committee on the Whole on that issue. I'll tell you a little story; I remember he was sitting in my office and I said to him, "I need your help." He said "What do you need?" I said, "I need you to go around and get 27 signatures so we can force a Discharge Resolution." I think the Speaker at that time was Sam Smith [Samuel; State Representative, Armstrong, Clearfield, Indian and Jefferson Counties, 1987-2014; Speaker of the House, 2011-2014], and you know, to avoid the driving of that debate, he conceded to having a Committee of the Whole – never happened before. What I wanted to do was raise the consciousness of discussion about how do we have some common sense approach to weaponry. Not that we want to try to take people's guns away from them, but that we need it because of the violence that we have. You're correct; here we are, and this was, I think this was in the early –

**HM:** 2006.

**DE:** 2006. Ten years later, when you look at Connecticut and Florida, Milwaukee, the Amish school, you look at the list, you look at the list. And we are obviously worse off than we were. If one thing I would say to you, I very disappointed that we could not have a constructive

discussion. What I was hoping when I drove the Committee on a Whole on this issue was that we could have a discussion; we could try to come up with rational reasons to try to address gun violence in our society. It wasn't just unique to Philadelphia, although most people thought it was only a Philadelphia problem and most people thought it was only a black problem, and a poor problem. It was not just a black problem or a poor problem, it was an American problem and it was a problem that we needed to face up as Americans. So, I would say to you if there's a thing on the list that probably is the most disappointing, that was probably the most disappointing, that we couldn't have a constructive dialogue and discussion about trying to address it. But, we pushed the mechanism as a Committee on a Whole. It never happened before, didn't happen before that, hasn't happened since. I wanted to have a larger debate on that issue, but that's something that I was not able to be successful with driving in. But, you know, reality has come home because if we look around us, in the United States of America, it has become a very tragic situation.

**HM:** Yeah. Jumping back in time just a little bit, in 1997, you drafted the City of Philadelphia School District Reform and Accountability Act to reform the district's governance and management. While this did not pass the House, you know, your work with the legislation led you to partner with Governor Tom Ridge and create the Charter School bill. Can you talk just a little bit more about that?

**DE:** It's interesting you say that. Public education is probably one of the best inventions ever in the world, because it's a great idea to ensure that the citizens are being educated and that we all have a responsibility to pay for it. It also helps promote the aspect of democracy for the sake of

the republic, because basically an active citizen is extremely important in the engagement aspect of the democracy. So, education provides that. However, it was created in a different era. It was created in an era when the economy was far different from where we are today, and as a result of the way it was created, basically if you didn't finish school, you could drop out of school and you'd still get a job, because there it was a manufacturing economy. If you were a marginal individual, you had a way of survival. That world is rapidly changing. Why? Because of globalization, technology, competitiveness, it has changed. So, what I wanted to do, which had never been done ever before, I wanted to redefine how public education is delivered. Yes, there always should be public education. There is no debate about the need for public education. But the question is, is it sufficiently being done to where we are today? So, when I introduced that bill [it was] unheard of; no legislator ever introduced a bill that comprehensive because, understand something, the school code was written in 1949. The school code was written in 1949, this is 2016, and when I introduced that in 1997, what I wanted to do is, again, drive the discussion around how we deliver public education. In this particular case, it was strictly Philadelphia, right, the largest city, the largest county, and in some questions about how we deliver public education. But, it opened up a larger debate, because at that time Governor Ridge was pushing his charter school initiative. So, it was a combination of his charter schools, because charter school law really started in Minnesota in 1992, I think it was, it was the first state to do charter school law, and the charter school law is the idea that, basically, you're giving a license to others, and there's still a public school, to see if they can do a better job in delivering on education. Well, I wanted to try to look at all of the elements that were a part of delivering public education. For example, students, parents, teachers, all of the different elements, how we govern, how we manage, and that was a lot. It was an awful lot for most people to understand

about revision, because in 1997, I had been in the political process for 16 years, and there used to be people who'd come to my office, particularly parents, that they were frustrated that the school district was not delivering for their kids. They either wanted to transfer to other locations or move out of the city of Philadelphia. Since I didn't play politics of the political game about being a part of what I call the transfer game, or the game where you force parents to have to lie about where they send their kids, you know, they lied about it, they get themselves in trouble, because they're lying about where their kids have to go because they were not satisfied with the outcome, and then, on top of that, politicians who are elected were not even sending their own kids to those schools and they were manipulating the system and they had extra money and they'd send them to private schools, and they weren't being honest about it. So, here we were in a political process where we were talking out both sides – we aren't talking about the political process – talking out both sides of our mouths about a system that was not working for all of our kids. Now, that's not to be blamed on principals or superintendents, or whoever. I mean, I'm not interested in pointing fingers; I was just interested in how can we design the system that meets the needs that is what I call "kid friendly," and not a fight on what I called the "adult food fight," is what I was attempting to do. I know it was a lot. I mean, what I was attempting to do in 1997, I'm not so sure that the political process can handle that large a discussion of how you redesign delivering education, because in the State Constitution, there is a phrase about thorough and efficient on Education. There's a phrase in the Constitution on thorough and efficient, the School Code of 1949. I mean, so everything I did is I was trying to do my job as a legislator to meet the needs of my constituents. That's another project that didn't turn out as well as I wanted it to turn out, but I can probably say I wound up starting a charter school with some people. The charter school is called West Oak Lane Charter School. It's been in existence for 19 years.

There are 1,108 kids in that particular school. It is union, it is a union school. So, it's union, 1,108 kids in that school, it is a public school. You know, we started that school 19 years – and the reason I started that [is] because I used it as a laboratory experiment; I wanted it to be something where could we duplicate it? Could it happen in other places? So, I'll say this to you, there are some good charter schools and there are some bad charter schools. There are some good public schools and some bad public schools. But the issue is, in this world we live in today from a 21<sup>st</sup> Century perspective, because of globalization, technology, trade laws, we now, like never before, need a pipeline to train the workforce for the citizens. We do a disservice to our citizens when children are left behind and not achieved or raced to the top. We do a disservice. So, in 1997 what I was attempting to do was to have a larger discussion about how our system works, and, I'll be the first one to say to you, money is a factor. It's not the sole determining factor, in my view, but it is a factor; you do need resources. I don't want to say just because you have money that magically it will get you where you got to go, but look, you need to have the right equipment, technology, facilities, you need to have all those kind of things, so I'm not a person that doesn't think money's not a factor.

**HM:** Well, I'd love to know what do you think your fondest memory was of serving in the Pennsylvania House? And if you have more than one, that's okay.

**DE:** I think my fondest memory has been the people. No matter if I've agreed or disagreed with them, I have enjoyed immensely the relationships that I have built, good or bad. I mean, all of them haven't been successful, but they have been rewarding. I mean, every person I've ever met, ever I've dealt with, they have something to offer and you work with them. I knew that this

is a marathon, this is not done overnight. The problems that we have, not just as a state but in this country, there's no instant answer to them because they didn't just happen that way. I knew you had to have a sense of hope and optimism and you have to have a belief that you can make a difference and I've always operated on that basis. So, I don't think here's one particular situation as much as a continuing of the relationships that I've developed with people. That's been very important to me. I've tried to develop relationships, at the end to keep my eye on the ball. I'm here for a purpose. You know, when you take that oath of office, just say I'm going to uphold the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of Pennsylvania, no one is above that. No one is above the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of Pennsylvania; we're just temporary tools in this overall process. Though it is not perfect and we're working toward perfection and we're making sure that people are included, all people are included, and there's a seat at the table, that is a prolonged struggle; that is something we have to work at every day to try to make it a better place. So, I like to think that in my years of being here, I have been most excited about just working with people and just trying to make a difference. Again, I want to stress that's not to say I have agreed with all of them and they have agreed with me, so I'll be very clear. You can talk to a ton of people who probably will tell you they disagree with me and I disagree with them but the thing is I don't give up. It's something about, you never give up, you keep working hard until you try to get to where you want to go and I feel very blessed that I've had this opportunity. I mean, for a kid who grew up in northcentral Philadelphia in Germantown and West Oak Lane, and who met the constitutional requirements of being first and foremost a citizen, and then the second aspect, I was 21 years of age. That's all the qualification is, and I just outworked anyone in my neighborhood to be elected to represent them. But, I thank people for giving me the opportunity to represent them. This is not an

entitlement and I'm not entitled to represent them; I'm only representing them on the period of time that they gave me to make a difference and that's all that I've tried to do. So, I don't profess to be perfect, I just profess to be someone who wants to continue going back to what I said to you about making a difference. I like to think I didn't make it by myself; I made it with coalitions and alliances that I formed with others in order to get things done. I'm very optimistic about the future of this state. I mean, this is really, when you think about 67 counties, 26 hundred local governments, 500 school districts, it's a great state, you know. It's not an accident why it's called the Keystone State. It's not an accident where it's positioned in relating to the 13 colonies. It's not an accident in what happened in 1776 right in Philadelphia. Those things to me are not accidents. I mean, where did it happen? Right in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

There's something about the culture of this state and I think sometimes people in Pennsylvania are a little hard on themselves when they say, you know, we don't have this, why have that?

Well, you know, change happens, I mean, things happen. You got to decide where you are in the context of change. One of my other heroes that I didn't mention was President Mandela, who I had the pleasure of meeting a couple times. He was in prison for 27 years and when he came out of prison, he didn't come out with hostility or bitterness; he talked about reconciliation. If you look at where South Africa went to where we had our own form of a holocaust with slavery and what it did, I mean, you have to have some sense of optimism. Another person I mentioned to you as my hero is Frederick Douglass. I mean, he taught himself. His mistress read to him and it was the sounds of the Bible that he taught himself how to read. Now, he wound up writing four books, became a millionaire, died at age 77. I mean, Frederick Douglass was a person who – Frederick Douglass, President Mandela – they were all patriots of the world. President Mandela in South Africa, Frederick Douglass here, but they were patriots of the world and that's

what you need; you need some form of patriots who are global in nature and understand that we make a difference. So, I don't compare myself to those people, but I've learned a lot from reading about them and understanding. So, anything I tried to do in my years here is try to move that needle to make this a better place.

**HM:** Well, as you're planning on your next career step, you are leaving some people behind who I've had the pleasure of meeting. Is there anybody in your offices that you would like to talk about?

**DE:** Lisa. I will say that name because I thank her a lot. She's been with me for 23, 24 years and she's great and her husband, Willy. And, there's a lot of my local staff too, Kim Turner, Linda Ford, Eric Verne, and Carlton – all of those people. I mean, there were a lot of people to mention. Marian Fox was there; all of these people. And then, you know, there was an unfortunate incident that happened this year that Alexis died, who was Lisa and Willy's daughter. I knew that that was very painful, because I don't know what it's like for a 16 year old to die, because conventional wisdom is adults are to die before the children but, you know, her spirit – she used to always hang out in my office. She was a golden child, we would describe. But, her spirit is still there and her spirit will go with me to Washington D.C. in the United States Congress. So, I must say to all of them that the spirit and the drive are still there. I still have as much enthusiasm, if not more, than when I was 22 years old and got elected in the State House. As a matter of fact, I'm ready for a national, international thing. I'm ready not to let them down; I'm going to need their help. We're all in this together and I try to tell people, you know, we all are in this together. This is about all of us. This is a pretty interesting place when you think, It's

the citizens who decide who goes where. Nobody gets anointed or appointed, right. Then there's a limit to your term. You can either do it for two years, four years, six years, but guess what? At a certain point, you have to leave, right. You have to leave here if they decide. The power's in the hands of the people, from a 1960's phrase, that's what they used to always talk about, that's what I've always believed; power in the hands of people. When I no longer was chairman of the Appropriations Committee, it wasn't the end of the world; it was just that what would I do next? I wound up writing a book called *Making Ideas Matter*. I helped out with Tom Wolfe, who was a very good personal friend; very happy about him. Jim Kenney, Art Haywood, who's a State Senator, Jim Kenney who's mayor of Philadelphia. To still continue moving things along, so, I'm very proud of that and I would stress to all of those people who think I'm going somewhere, I'm not going anywhere. I just will not be here.

**HM:** Right.

**DE:** I mean, I'm wrapping up in my period of time. And, this is a rather interesting time for me to be moving out of the state legislature after 36 years; that's an awful long time. I mean, seniority-wise, I'm the third longest person been around here. I don't think there's many African-Americans, I think there's only one or two in the history of this time [who's] ever been here longer than I've been here and I feel very blessed to have had that opportunity. And, I hope people don't see that I haven't wasted that opportunity in this moment. I mean, again, I know not everybody's going to agree with me, but what I've tried to do is to make a difference, and that's what I do every single day when I wake up; trying to figure out how could I make it different than the way it has been. I just hope people had that sense of optimism, right? Because

you need that, you need that sense of optimism. That's what I've had in the years that I have been here in this legislature. So, I will never trade this experience for anything else that I could have done.

**HM:** What is your advice for new Members with 36 years of experience behind you? What would you tell them to do?

**DE:** Be open. Understand that you don't have all the answers. Be willing to work together. Come here with a purpose; be clear why you're here. There's a good friend of mine who wrote a book, he wrote this book called, *Why Are You Here?* It's a good book, it's only 70 pages, and in the book, he just talks about – a lot of times, I don't think people are clear why they're here. Look, when I first came here in 1980, [19]81 and I took that oath, you know, the oath is a simple oath; you uphold the Constitution of the United States and you uphold the Constitution of Pennsylvania. But first, do you really know and understand what that means? Obviously the Constitution was written some time ago; the Pennsylvania Constitution had some changes in 1968. So, first, you take the oath. Then after you take the oath, it's very important to understand about working together. I mean, you know every idea you have, you're not going to get your idea just because it's your idea. I mean it's just not going to work that way. You have 203 personalities in the House, 50 in the State Senate, and the Governor; they all got ideas too. It doesn't mean their ideas are better than your ideas or vice versa. Sometimes just because you are successful in getting a piece of legislation passed, doesn't mean that you won't have inputs from others; it's a part of it. So, I could tell people that now after 36 years that maybe I couldn't say to them when they started out. It's a great state. Know your district, know your state, but don't

get locked into your boundaries; I'm from 113 or 110, and that's my district. No. It's called the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We are Pennsylvanians. It's not something that, "I'm from the 203<sup>rd</sup> District," that means I should only care about the people in the 203<sup>rd</sup> – that's silly. There are 12 million people in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; 12 million people in the [Commonwealth of] Pennsylvania. If you understand anything about the historical perspective of where Pennsylvania is, in the historical aspect of this country and in the world, right, there's some great inventions, some great thoughts that came out of Pennsylvania, you know, we talk about William Penn, talk about Ben Franklin, talk about Thaddeus Stevens, I mean, those people were very much in the forefront of where we come from as a state. So, they all are very much a part of where we are today. So, my advice to them is have fun, enjoy it, don't take it personal, don't wear it on your sleeve, don't think you have all the answers, and don't think that because something doesn't go your way, that I'm going to take my cookies and milk and go home. You can do that and I can understand why, and maybe you're not made for this. I mean, we got to get our best and our brightest because leadership does matter. I mean, leadership really does matter and it does make a difference. This is almost like missionary work; this is not something for the faint-hearted. This is not something where you can just come here and all of a sudden think – I understand, you know, people have financial pressures and other kind of economic challenges, but when you run for public office and you try to convince people to elect you, put you in position, I think you go there with a purpose, you know, sort of like a purpose thing. In my 36 years, that's kind of what I tried to do; I tried to be very purposeful in the things that I've tried to do with Democrats and Republicans, with liberals, conservatives, tea party, hot chocolate party, whatever you want to call it, I've tried to get along with people.

**HM:** Those are all the questions that I have. I'd like to give you the final word if there's anything that maybe I missed that you would like to discuss.

**DE:** I think more than anything is, to stress the part about citizen engagement, citizen participation. I mean, this can be the greatest republic and democracy in the world, but it can only be when people themselves understand the challenges we face today. You know, we talk about schools, talk about economic development, talk about jobs, talk about public safety, talk about healthcare, those kinds of things, but that we really are in this together. We are not, in my view, can you do anything through isolation, unless you figure out, am I my brother or sister's keeper, can I figure out ways to do some things. So, I would stress more than anything in this is the part about trying to figure out ways to address the challenges we have today. It's going to be work; it's not going to be easy. I mean, that's the one thing I've recognized that it's frustrating at times, and I had become frustrated and I have gotten somewhat troubled at times about things not happening the way I think they should happen, but I'm not a quitter. I just don't give up and I think that's the only part that I would stress more than anything. If you look at my career, in spite of have there been some defeats? The answer is yes. Have I lost some elections? The answer is yes. But at the end of the day, there's a drive within me to say I'm not going to quit, I'm going to figure out a way.

**HM:** Well, thank you so much for the interview.

**DE:** Thank you. I appreciate this opportunity.