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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Richard Geist (R)

79th District

Blair County

1979 – 2012

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Jesse Teitelbaum (JT): My name is Jesse Teitelbaum and I'm sitting here with Representative Richard Geist, Republican from the 79th District in Blair County, who served from 1979 to 2012. Thank you for being with me today.

Hon. Richard Geist (RG): Glad to be here.

JT: I'd like to start out by asking you about your background. Tell me about your early life and your early education.

RG: I was born and raised on a little small farm in Allegheny Township, outside the city of Altoona. I went to a one-room grade school which I probably have up in my office – a Joe Servello print – and I went on to the Altoona School District, Roosevelt Junior High School. We had our choice then of either going to Hollidaysburg or Altoona because the township was very small and they paid whatever money we had to pay to the district to do that. Because there was a shop bus that ran by our farm, I was able to go to school in a blue and white bus with the shop guys. It turned out to be pretty good. My first time I ever ran for office was eighth grade in Roosevelt. I went from a class of about 36 students in the whole one-room school to 15 hundred kids in a big junior high school and ended up being all school vice-president in eighth grade. Next time I ran for office was to run for the State House; I never set out to be in elected office.

JT: Nothing in college?

RG: Well, no. I never ran for anything. I went back to the Altoona Campus; I was in the two-year engineering program, because it wasn't four-year then, and I worked a couple different jobs; I used to work for Ansley and Lewis and I would go to Pittsburgh at four o'clock in the morning with a Volvo 544, hook that up and tow it back to the district and then go to the campus to school and you know, it's pretty amazing when you have all that energy, you know? You get up early,

you work, go to class, then work at a gas station in the evening and still have time to pursue a social life and you don't even think anything about it, you just do it. So, when I graduated from Penn State, I went to work for A&P Engineering in Pittsburgh, designing the A&P stores because my father had been with A&P as a supervisor in the bakery. I went in there, probably ahead of the whole curve for anybody, and we had 660-something stores in the central division. I worked there for a while and then I got a letter from the President of the United States inviting me for an all-expense paid tour of Southeast Asia. So, I went home and it didn't work out going in, because I actually enlisted and I had taken another job with Atlantic Richfield designing minimarts before anybody – they weren't even popular then. They were going to a concept to put in convenience stores in gas stations and my training with A&P made me very valuable. But, I was walking down the street in Altoona and I saw the Gwin Engineers sign and it was three o'clock on a Friday afternoon and I was moving on Monday, back to Pittsburgh. I went in and talked to them and they made me an offer. Those hinges of history; otherwise I wouldn't have stayed in Altoona. My dad was very ill, had been ill for a long time, and I came home and really lived with my mom and dad and tried to help take care of things. I started out as a structural designer for Gwin Engineers, which later became EADS. I worked my way up through the company; I think in 11 or 12 years I had 11 or 12 different titles. I was a Kellogg Fellow in the Public Affairs Leadership Program and finished up that whole thing and then Cliff Jones and some other people decided I should run for the State House and I turned it down. Two and a half terms later they came after me again and we said yes and the rest is history. I got real lucky; won an election and had no idea what I was doing; no clue.

JT: What would you say would be your influences in shaping you to become a Republican?

RG: My grandparents were both active in the city in the 8th Ward, on my mom's side. They were real active in the Republican Party. The Pennsylvania Railroad, they wanted their people to be Republican and that influence, and so, it just came downhill to me. I mean, I was never anything else but.

JT: You said that after you were approached first to run for the State House, declined, and then ran a few years later?

RG: Yeah the same Cliff Jones – the same group of people: Stan Over, who was a president of our company, they were going to try really hard to elect Dick Thornburgh and they wanted to build roads and fix broken roads and bridges. With my background, I became a pretty good choice. I was very lucky and won by 586 votes and was a freshman member of the Transportation Committee. Rudy Dininni [Rudolph; State Representative, Dauphin County, 1967-1990] was a wonderful Chairman and took me under his wing. Next thing you know, I'm attending all the State Transportation Commission meetings and carrying Rudy's vote. Never once did anybody ever tell me how to vote – not once. That was a wonderful learning experience for me.

JT: Do you remember the first campaign?

RG: I remember it like it was yesterday.

JT: Very different than subsequent campaigns?

RG: Well, it's totally different because, you know, you've got to sell yourself and I knocked on 10,800 doors where there were people home; 38 hundred where they weren't and I went back and saw every one of those. I wore out a couple pair of shoes and everything else. I got really

fortunate. I wouldn't say that I really won; I would actually say the guy that was there before lost. It was a combination of a lot of things and it was a good Republican year.

JT: Did you enjoy campaigning?

RG: I enjoyed the people part of it. I really hate the backwater of politics.

JT: Okay.

RG: I think it's ugly; it's really mean and I just don't like it at all. I can tell you that in my career, I've never been a political knife-fighter, I've never attacked members of city council or the county commissioners or other local elected folks. I've listened while they've attacked Harrisburg and find it kind of humorous but, you know, it's been my style.

JT: Can you describe for me the 79th District, both in geography and the makeup of people?

RG: First of all, I just went through my fourth redistricting.

JT: Oh, okay.

RG: So, when I first started it was not the whole city at all. The Juniata section wasn't part of my district, and so it had a real tendency to lean Democratic and I was a Republican and very lucky to win the seat. The next reapportionment brought in Juniata and one small sliver of Logan Township. The next redistricting brought in all of Logan Township and won a little, wee piece of Allegheny Township. This redistricting made it a really good Republican seat, because all of Allegheny Township will be in it except the foot-of-ten section. So, it's been ever-changing since I came in. The demographic of the city has changed immensely. I believe when I first got elected, there were 65 hundred people working in railroading and today there's about

1,000. The manufacturing base was really, really good in Altoona and that's basically really gone away. So, I was really active in industrial development and doing those kind of things.

JT: So, would you say that railroading and other blue-collar ideas were the main issues of the people in the district?

RG: I think the district is very conservative and it has a very, very ethnic work ethic. It's a wonderful, wonderful district.

JT: What were some of the major projects that you were able to help bring into the district during your time in the House?

RG: I've been able to deliver hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of checks and projects; that's my job; to represent my district. It all started my freshman term when we were trying to get track credits because Conrail had just been formed out of the bankrupt railroads. The main line of the railroad, which runs through Altoona and Harrisburg here, was not in good shape; it needed a tremendous amount of maintenance. We were deeply involved with legislation that would allow them to have state tax credits if they put that money back in the rail. That was such a hotly contested issue that it went to a conference committee and it was two-two, got four votes which we needed, and then it was approved by the House and Senate. That was a real boon for my district because, I think, the first year Conrail put an additional 59 million dollars in track work and the next year was 150 million and it went on from there. That became a wonderful thing for the district. First term, I was able to be instrumental in delivering the first piece of I-99, which was actually built just outside of the city. We had no money and it was just the half of a section, but it was symbolic of what was to come. So, as a freshman I was making all the tough votes for Thornburgh and translated that into concrete.

JT: You've had a district office the entire time?

RG: I've had a district office since day one. The first one was a volunteer office that was in the engineering company and a wonderful lady named Myrna Green, who grew up with my older sister, and a wonderful lady; we had a tremendous amount of walk-in business, it was unbelievable. The need was great.

JT: Okay.

RG: That expended to where, when I retired, here we had five full-time people and two part-time people. We could've used two more full-time people.

JT: Really?

RG: Constituent work is that big and there's that many problems. It's a shame, but it happens. Whether it's PennDOT or Department of Revenue, I mean the stuff that we unravel – and our people became really, really good at unraveling problems and solving them; it's pretty amazing.

JT: So, district offices and having office hours is quite important within the district?

RG: I think it's an absolute must and I know that there's people who campaign against it now and say that it's a total waste of state dollars, you know, with the internet people can do anything. Well, that's absolutely false. I will tell you it's a people business, and you're in the people business and if you can't service them and solve their problems, then you're not doing your job, and by golly, I will tell you the legitimacy is out of sight.

JT: I think one of the things that kept coming out when we were conducting research on your district was the Tour de 'Toona that you had started and, unfortunately, is not going to be running anymore.

RG: It's done. It's done now, unless somebody revives it.

JT: Right.

RG: I got into the bicycling because I crashed an Ultralight and I was almost killed. I had my right knee snapped off and both cruciates [ligaments] rebuilt and an aviator's fracture of the right ankle and my right hand was torn off and rebuilt, and a bunch of other injuries. I spent a lot of time in a wheelchair then on Canadian crutches that I couldn't even hold onto, I was strapped into. I started riding in therapy, a fitron bicycle, which you pump oil and they can change the length of the crank arm so – my right knee was in a cast for a year and had to be broken a little bit at a time and it's pain you can never describe. I was bound and determined that I was going to walk again. So, I had a wonderful physical therapist named Linda Dunmire and I would do anything for her in the world I could. But, she was amazing and I was walking you know, with one platform crutch and then later, like, hopping along and I would ride the bicycle every day and finally I bought a touring bike – a nice touring bike for out in the street – and my good friend Baron DeShawn, we're still best buddies, and I started riding obsessively. You know, they'd say ride for half an hour and I'd go out ride four hours. I entered my first bicycle race, and I finished fourth in my age group. I was just so impressed with it. I mean, it was amazing. And at the award ceremonies, I found out that the three guys who had beaten me all were recovering from heart attacks. So, I was really proud to be able to race, proud to finish, and a couple of those guys became very good friends. It's amazing what the human body can do if you push it to recover and I'm obsessively nuts. When I crashed, two weeks before I crashed, I just found a medal in the back of my desk – I had been a competitive weight lifter. They had a fund raiser for the high school football team; it was an open bench press contest and I benched 370 pounds in that contest and 180 pound body weight. Two weeks later, I'm fighting for my life in Duke

Hospital, so I mean, it's kind of really weird that I have no idea how that medal got in there, but it had been in my desk for as long as I'd been here.

JT: Yeah, I'd like to go now to –

RG: You want to finish the Tour de 'Toona?

JT: Oh yes, I'm sorry; please.

RG: There was a city councilman named Karl King, who was retired and a guy that had an insurance agency downtown, really good guy. Karl wanted to do something in the dog days of August because you could fire a thirty-aught-six [.30-06] down the main street of Altoona and you never had to worry about hitting anybody. We came up with this idea to have a bicycle race. None of us knew anything about a bicycle race, especially putting one on. So, we raised a little money – I raised the money – and we had a race and if I remember right, about 80 people came. We raced men and women together and paid out the money and we thought, hey this is a pretty good idea. So, the next year we did the same thing and I went after sponsors.

JT: Okay.

RG: We did very well. I mean, when you're passionate about something, it's not hard. We ended up having the biggest race, cash-wise, in Pennsylvania. Wonderful race; we split men and women and it went extremely well downtown. The United States Cycling Federation, on the other hand, did not like the fact that an unsanctioned race was doing that. We had no sanctioning or nothing else, so they gave people that won money in Altoona a very hard time with their license.

JT: Oh, okay.

RG: They said to us that we couldn't do that anymore; we couldn't do that, and I said, "Well, we'll have the race anyhow, but we'll make the checks payable to John Doe and it doesn't matter." So, we had it back and forth and we went down and met with the United States Cycling Federation in Reading, Pennsylvania, and we thought, okay we'll do a sanctioned event and I wanted to grow it. I thought we really had a home run based on who was coming to race and from where. We had a wonderful lady named Lisa Voight, and that would be the actor Jon Voight's niece, her dad was a professor at Penn State, but she worked in Colorado. I loved working with Lisa and we built the race into the Tour de 'Toona Stage Race. Now, a little bit of humor here – and I'm a fairly conservative Republican – and we wanted to grow the race big and there were a lot of men's races in America, a tremendous amount, and there was next to nothing for women; I mean, next to nothing. I said, look, you know, everybody in our family was an athlete and all the women played basketball and stuff, not the three-on-three and over-the-line, they played men's rules – same court, tennis was the same. My premise was; women can race the same courses as men, I didn't care if it took them a day. It was really funny how it all came about. The rule book said that they were limited in distance and climbing, how many vertical feet of climbing they could do. I said, "This is BS" because a lot of women I ride with can drop me anytime. So, we went ahead and planned that we would be the first race in America – big race – with equal purses. Well, the racers, the men racers, didn't like it at all and they had some choice words for me and I can remember telling one of the biggest names in the sport, "Hey, people get paid millions of dollars to lobby me. It's not going to work coming from an amateur like you." We were really between a rock and a hard place, because we needed the Federation officials to do the race and if we were breaking the rules, they couldn't do the race. So, we were at, what they call, a Mexican Standoff, right? Jerry Lace was head – at that time – was head of

the United States Cycling Federation and a wonderful guy and I called Jerry up in the morning and said, “Jerry, I want you to know that I’m going to do a press conference and a press release this afternoon, talking about us having all this money for equal for women and that you guys are putting us out of business,” so I said, “You might as well get ready for all the calls because you’re not going to be popular.” He called me back in about 20 minutes and he said, “We’re going to look the other way. Go ahead and have your race.” So, we raced women and they did a fantastic job; they were wonderful. We had a super field; we had the very best women of Canada and the United States. We had some Australians and a lot of New Zealanders. We started building international fields, which then changed the name of the race to The International Tour de ‘Toona. We built it to a seven-day event stage race; it was actually the biggest stage race in the world for women for three years. We had all the professional men, every guy that raced in the Tour de France raced our race; all the Olympic medal winners raced our race. In [19]92, we did the U.S. National Championships and Olympic Trials at the request of the Federation. We had a great Olympic Trial and we had the Jaffa Mosque and the whole town got into it. We were probably the smallest community to ever do this. We had beaten out 17 communities that went after it; Spokane had had it for two Olympics before us, the Utah Sports Foundation, which put on the Olympics, and Columbus, Ohio, which had a really large cycling community with a lot of wealth. There’s 17 communities and it got narrowed down to the four of us. I had a campaign slogan, “Too Often, Too High, Too Flat.” I think there were 44 votes; we got 43 and a half to put the event on, because everybody had raced Tour de ‘Toona and they knew what we did and the trials went off great. We had an Olympic Ball with black tie. We put all the winners in tuxes and it was just fabulous; it was great for the town.

JT: Sure.

RG: That kind of – coming from Western Pennsylvania, people in sports are revered. High school sports are used; when I was in high school, there was nothing bigger than our football team. Our city would put about 11 thousand, 12 thousand people in the stands for every high school game and we played an unbelievable schedule. We lost one game in three years when I was in school, and that was to Little Indiana and they had three guys in the backfield that all three went on to become All-American fullbacks. So, you know, nothing that people understand it, that when you have a community that has that kind of mentality, they embrace athletes. My biggest worry was could you embrace an athlete that didn't have a sport with a ball attached to it. And the answer was yes. I still hear from so many of those people who raced. When we were doing the Olympics and Olympic Trials, we had Linda Brenneman, who came in to do commercials, and she looked like she came from central casting – beautiful gal, wonderful personality, and a whale of a bike rider. One year I had Rolex as a sponsor and they gave a big-time watch for the Saturday road race after 100 miles, and she came across the finish line, instead of throwing her arms up, she was going like this, pointing to her wrist. We had Lance Armstrong, who was very difficult to work with, but an athlete then, it was just, he was a phenomenal athlete. Darren Baker was a Pennsylvania guy from Chambersburg, a professional rider; went on to be great as a professional. And, Bobby Julich. Bobby Julich is just one of the nicest guys God ever put on Earth and when he came in, you know, these are funny stories, but Bobby, they told me from the Federation, "Now Rick, he doesn't talk much. He's real quiet and he's shy," and we had all these guys in there in their Olympic sweats and all that kind of stuff and they're good looking kids, right? And I had Bobby up at Keith Junior High School and there's three sections in the auditorium and they had it filled, seventh, eighth, and ninth graders and I had Bobby Julich out there leading cheers with these sections, "USA! US!" we had those

kids so fired up that school was a wreck the rest of the day. One quick funny story is; my cousin's daughter who was in eighth grade, she and her girlfriends fell in love with Bobby Julich and they were just all over me about Bobby Julich this, Bobby Julich that – I was kidding about having all those groupies and so, my cousin's daughter called me and she said, "Is there anything we can do? We want to do something, all of us," I said, "Okay," I said, "Now you can prepare for this, you know that all those guy racers, they shave the hair off their legs," – not for aerodynamics but so road rash heals much better – and I said, "Maybe you guys can be the leg-shaving group," and she was convinced that she was going to shave Bobby Julich's legs. So, about a week later, they were asking me what kind of razors to buy and all this stuff, I said, "I don't know. You're going to have to ask your moms," and stuff. So, about a week later, her mother called me and said, "You've got to stop this. You have got to stop this." She said, "They believed you." So, I had to tell them that they couldn't do it; they weren't of-age. To this day, she now has kids of her own and everything and she still busts me about shaving Bobby Julich's legs. But we had wonderful times, we drew wonderful crowds, we hosted people from all over the world, we had great cooperation from every governor that was involved. I got Governor Ridge out riding a bicycle and campaigning on one and we went all over the state together which started the Ridge Rides. It was a wonderful time and I hope that somebody else comes along, and young, steps up and wants to work every weekend and every available hour to package something like this, because it's good for the state, it's good for the country, and it brings a lot of tourism money in.

JT: I was going to say, I'm sure it probably brings in a lot of money for the tourism, especially in the area.

RG: Well, it did and we had surveys that we had Penn State do, surveys and we kind of knew – you don't sell a ticket, so you had to be able to survey in different ways. I was always in the media van in front of the race and I would always look at license plates and then I would look if it was a Pennsylvania plate, if they had a car dealer identification on it. So, we knew that a huge percentage of our people that came from Virginia, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, and they would come and they would stay a week. And where they stayed, you don't know, but you know you see them every day and you know that they're spending money. So, Penn State came up with a formula for how much they spent and all that, and I think the lowest was 4 million, and that's a lot of money in an area like ours. And you know what's nice about that money? It stays. You don't have to educate their kids, nothing else like that, and that money circulates in the community. I chaired the Tourism, Recreation, and Industrial Development sub-committee and Commerce Committee when I first came so I had a good idea what we were doing there.

JT: Great. Great project too.

RG: Oh, it's wonderful.

JT: Wonderful. Let's go back to your first term.

RG: Oh, I remember it like yesterday.

JT: What were your first impressions of day one, your Swearing-In?

RG: My impressions go back just a little bit before that. We had some seminars for newly-elected guys and we got preached to a lot and I was assigned a mentor, Harry Bittle [R. Harry; State Representative, Cumberland and Franklin Counties, 1968-1982]– just a wonderful guy and I had him here for my going-away speech and Sam Hayes [Samuel E. Hayes, Jr.; State

Representative, Blair, Centre and Huntingdon Counties, 1971-1992; Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, 1997-2002], of course, took me under his wing when Sam was in leadership. I had a moving experience; I came down to Harrisburg for one of those meetings and it was over and I went up the back steps into the Floor of the House. Now, there weren't guards, everything wasn't locked up then; you could've stolen the Capitol and nobody would've cared. I sat back on the Democratic side, in the back row, and it was just getting dusk and light was coming through the stained glass windows. That room is immense. I was sitting up there and I really had one of those moving moments. You know, you got elected to govern. I'm sitting here thinking my whole life was centered around a campaign which you're so involved with and now you're charged with a mission. I thought, "Wow, you better really learn what you're doing," and that's when the engineering mind kicked in. I must have sat up there for an hour and mediated, I mean, about what did I really get myself into, should I quit and not get Sworn-In, or, how do you cope? There were some really big names in the House then, and how do you get along? I just figured my vote counted the same as anybody else's vote and I'd do the best I could with it. I was bound and determined to work as hard or harder than anybody that'd ever served. And I tried to do that. So, it was days and days and days of prep. I read every book I could get my hands on on Ben Franklin before I came in, because I wanted to understand the concept; the concept of representative government is kind of unique. The General Assembly of Pennsylvania is very unique all over the world, and so I really studied and I wanted to find out, how do you reach consensus? There was no formula, there were no books on it – none. I mean, there was all kinds of stuff on how a bill becomes law, right? There was nothing that filled in the blanks. So, I took a crash course and spent as much time as I could talking to the guys that sat around me. Warren Spencer [State Representative, McKean, Potter and Tioga Counties, 1963-1984] was

Chairman of Judiciary then – and he had been all shot up in World War II – what a wonderful guy. And our current Speaker’s dad was Snuffy Smith [L. Eugene; State Representative, Clearfield, Indian and Jefferson Counties, 1963-1986] and he had flown bombers over Europe in World War II and survived all of his missions and he was Chairman of Business and Commerce, and I was on Business and Commerce, and I would pick these guys’ brains every day. Nick Moehlmann [Nicholas; State Representative, Berks, Lancaster and Lebanon Counties, 1975-1990] was from Lebanon County, a Yale Law School graduate and just one of the nicest and best guys I ever met. The General Assembly was really different then than it is today. I will tell you it is vastly different. So, I learned as much as I could and I really got wrapped up and I was really anxious to get in the business of writing and creating law. Now, why you do that, you have to be a little nuts, but I did it and that was my favorite part in 34 years was creating good law.

JT: Right. You had served on various committees during the time that you were in the House. Probably, the one that comes to mind when your name is said is the Transportation Committee.

RG: I started out on Transportation, came out of the industry when I came in and, man, I thought I knew a lot about transportation until I got on the Committee and I started realizing the politics of transportation and the politics of all the modalities. It was, once again, an unbelievable learning experience for me and I had wonderful people to work with and good resources, I will tell you this. Once again, I wanted to be the very best ever in Transportation and that took hours and hours and hours. I think the very first bill that I worked on was the legislation on the tax credits for Conrail. Working on that, I think I wrote 23 amendments on one of the bills for trucking including a tri-axle – the tri-axle is a workhorse out where I live and there was a bunch of regulations that were being promulgated to reduce their capacity to 58

thousand pounds and limit the weight by axles and the front axle. We took them all on and actually won on the Floor. That was my first Floor debate, really. It was very interesting, because it had nothing to do with pure logic, once again; it had to do with what we had to do to get 102 votes. I learned a lesson from Sam Hayes then that if you have the votes, keep your mouth shut. That's served me well for a lot of years.

JT: Now, with regards to committees, when you're a freshman, are you assigned committees or do you get choose with your interests?

RG: Well, later in life I had the pleasure of being Chairman of the Committee on Committees which assigns people to committees. I know that leadership had an awful lot to do with me as a freshman, putting me on Business and Commerce and Transportation. They were the committees that could really help my distressed district. When I came in here, do you remember the Misery Index that was the total of the unemployment percentage and the inflation number? Well, the Misery Index at Altoona was horrible. They were the best committees that I could serve on. We had third committee, they stuck me on Urban Affairs and I felt like I was in Philadelphia, not Altoona. But, I had wonderful committees and had good chairmen, good mentors. I will tell you, it made my freshman term much easier. Now, I almost didn't run for a second term.

JT: Oh, really?

RG: No. This is a strange story, but I took a real big cut in pay to come here. My wife was teaching third grade and we lived a brethren lifestyle, no debt – you know, that whole business. I had really been thinking about, okay, I said I would run, I won and I was going to leave, but we had 102 votes. So, when I broached that with leadership, they didn't like that idea at all. To put

it mildly, they were not happy because I have a district that's really very hard to keep. It's not a Republican seat and all that kind of stuff, and so they had a meeting down in the Speaker's Office and I went down I told them all why I was not going to run again and they – put it mildly and a lot less four letter words – they said, “You have to run, we want to control the majority, you have to run, you have to hold that seat.” I said, “I don't have to do anything.” And it came around, they said, “Well, what would it take to hold your seat?” Off the top of my head, I ticked off a whole long list of things that would have to be done. We were in a little office down in the basement then, there were eight of us in there, very small room, very small. There were two senior members in there – Tony Cimini [Anthony J.; State Representative, Lycoming County, 1975-1988] and Bill Mackowski [William; State Representative, Cameron, Clearfield and McKean Counties, 1977-1988] and Bill and I became very good friends and officemates later and Matt Ryan [Matthew J.; State Representative, Chester and Delaware Counties, 1963-2003] came in with his Irish up and he told everybody in t

he office, he said, “You guys get the hell out of here. I got to talk to Rick in private.” And I thought, oh, this is worse than going to the principal's office. The principal came to me. He pulled a chair up and came back and he said, “You can't quit, you got to run.” I said, “Matt, I've served my time.” I wanted to get out of here. So, he pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket and handed it to me and he said, “Are all these the things that you need to get reelected in that district?” and I said, “Well, if I had them all, yeah.” And he said, “Well, the Governor and everybody's decided and all the powers that be, that these things will all be done.” Now, I wasn't negotiating, I will tell you flat out there was no way I was negotiating. I'm still honest about it, if I was negotiating, they probably would've caught on. The question was, “If we do all this, will you run again?” And I said, “Well, I'd have to because these are just wonderful things

for the city of Altoona.” And by golly, Governor Thornburgh, who was an excellent Governor, he was wonderful to work with, they made it all happen. I ran. I knew I would be targeted; it was another brutal race, almost bare-knuckle politics, full-contact. I was lucky and won by 58 hundred votes. That was really pleasing because we just really worked. It was 60, 70, 80 hours a week and it was always that the whole time I was here. That was humbling, right? But the salary then was 18,720 dollars and it was not exactly a poor man’s sport. One of the things that you see going on now is a move to make it be the sandbox of the rich again or the special interests and I really don’t like that at all. I don’t think that’s really what Franklin and those guys had in mind when they set up representative government.

JT: Sure.

RG: I could do an hour lecture on that for you. When I almost died, I was learning to fly an Ultralight and I was going to buy one – I was almost killed in Edenton, North Carolina; thank god they had a wonderful stabilization there and took me to Elizabeth City. Doctors don’t like to lose battles, so they flew me over to Duke on a Coast Guard helicopter, then I spent a wonderful month at Duke in traction, not knowing whether I was going to lose my right hand. I went through many, many surgeries. Wonderful guys; I became very good friends with my doctors and therapists and others. While I was laying in that bed, Terry Sanford was the head of Duke at that time, and he had one of his guys who was a neat old guy and he would come every day with my mail and all that stuff, because I was getting all this stuff from Pennsylvania and media requests and all that and I don’t think anybody had any idea how bad of shape I was in, they kind of withheld information. Best thing I got was a cherry chocolate cake from a restaurant here in Harrisburg that we frequented every day for lunch; that was just absolutely wonderful. To this day, there’s nobody that could bake a cake like Faye Necklace. But, laying in that bed, I don’t

know whether it was induced by all the drugs I was taking or what, and I came up with an idea about creating wealth and how do you go about creating wealth, how do you go about creating real technology jobs, and how do you go about saving manufacturing jobs with advanced technology? At that time, I'd been investing in a lot of technology companies and doing very well, by the way. So, this idea came to me and I broached it. At that time, I was on the MILRITE Council – Make Industry and Labor Right in Today's Economy – and there were five labor leaders, five leaders of business and a member of each Caucus and the Governor. I had this, I thought it was a really good idea. I mean, I was really convinced and when you're laying there and you have nothing else to do, I mean, I worked a whole compound matrix out on it and how to make it work. I came home, I was in a wheelchair and I remember meeting with Cliff Jones and Bobby McIntyre. Bob McIntyre is one of my heroes in government. He was a vice chairman of the AFL-CIO, he was an IBEW guy, and at that time, I wasn't exactly the union's favorite so, I went over my idea with him and talked about creating the Advanced Technology Job Creation Act. Now, if you remember how bad our economy was then, the idea that you would do a bill to create wealth was so oxymoronish when government was about creating jobs, in the end we only had worn-out brooms. We brought it to a full MILRITE Council and Tom Murphy [Thomas J. Murphy, Jr.; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1979-1993] was a House Democrat. Now, Tom Murphy and I have a claim to fame – we never lost a bill we put up together – never. Murphy went on to be three-time mayor of Pittsburgh and I spent 34 years here, so it's pretty odd that the two of us would do that. We did a lot of stuff in housing, also. But, they really liked the concept, we wrote it up and only two names on the bill, so you know it was not the greatest idea when people didn't jump on, and it was Tom Murphy and I. The bill passed and we got up and running and Governor Thornburgh, bless his heart, came up with a

much better name called the Ben Franklin Partnership. That's been a staple, it's been copied by about every state in the country, and it's created thousands, I mean thousands, of high-paying technology jobs across the state. If you have a crowning achievement, one of them, that would be it. At the 25th anniversary, they honored myself, Dick Thornburgh, and Walt Plosila – Dr. Plosila, who went down to set the same thing up in Virginia. I got to meet a lot of the people whose deals I had read, who went on to build companies and sell them and all what capitalism is about, truly. It made you feel really good and a lot of that took place in Blair County and Penn State became a leader in it. They didn't come embracing it, there was a little battle at the beginning and once again, Bob McIntyre and Cliff Jones, two of my all-time heroes, when Penn State didn't really get on board, there was not a great deal of happiness with them, Bryce Jordan had just taken over as president and they request that he come down and meet with the MILRITE Council, and he came down, he didn't bring any aides, he came himself and he came in and with his Texas accent he said, "Now, boys," he said, "I know I got problems." And he said, "I know how to fix them." He said, "You just give me a chance and we'll be the best at this." He went home, and at that time they had written articles in the *Centre Daily Times* because I was talking about an industrial park – research park – at Penn State and they thought I was absolutely nuts, and they were looking for a tall tree and a short rope and Innovation Park started after that with Bryce Jordan and the rest is history. Some of the best start-up companies and ideas have been spun out of ideas that were at Penn State, and I just hope that that continues and gets bigger and bigger. So, I mean, those are the kind of things I got deeply involved with and after I came back, I spent a lot of time in a wheelchair and then on crutches for a long time. That's how I got into bicycling, of course.

JT: But the entire time that you were recuperating, you didn't change your mind and say, "I'm done, I'm not going back?"

RG: No, I don't know what kind of spirit you would call it. I really wanted to walk again and walk without a limp. I had one therapist who gave up on me and I hadn't given up on myself, so I met with the head of the hospital and I said I would like to be the person that says I can't do it anymore, not somebody else, you know. And when I know down in here I can't do it, I'll tell you. I mentioned her before, I started working with Linda and I said give me somebody tough and boy, they gave me the toughest. She should've been a Marine drill sergeant. We had a good relationship and I thank God for that. So, I push myself, just like I did on the job, I push myself extremely hard when it comes to stuff like that.

JT: Sure. And you've always wanted to come back to the House, when you were recuperating?

RG: Yeah, I fell in love with the House. I've had opportunities, I got recruited to run for Congress a couple different times, even from the top leadership and I wouldn't run against Bud Shuster. I was recruited to run against my Senator; he was in leadership and I wouldn't do that. So, I just decided I'd make the best career I could in the House.

JT: During the time that you were here, you had sponsored numerous bills.

RG: Hundreds.

JT: Yeah, 23, 24 of them became Acts – a lot of them dealing with transportation issues and highways. If you had to pick the top one, two, three Acts that you're most proud of?

RG: Well, one bill for sure that everybody in Pennsylvania loves is – and they have no idea that it was mine – is the automatic shut-off at the Sheetz store. I wrote the legislation that created

that. I would think that when you look back at it, there are a whole lot of them, but there are a couple that really saved a lot of lives that were really, really in the public's interest. Teenage driving, the bill that we passed there was not a popular subject, having parents and guardians being responsible to sit for somebody for 50 hours – it wasn't a big, you know? One of my arguments on the Floor: would you rather spend 50 hours with a kid or be a pallbearer? Because we were just killing teenagers like you couldn't believe in Pennsylvania. We've modified that bill; Katharine Watson [State Representative, Bucks County, 2001-present] took it over after a while, it became hers. There are thousands and thousands of teenagers in Pennsylvania who are alive now or not maimed because of that legislation and the training that they got. We wanted them to be competent drivers. You know, in all the hearings we had on those bills, you know the toughest was on kids of the one group testified? Other kids.

JT: Really?

RG: Yeah they knew. They had told us then that the dollar punishments weren't anything but taking away somebody's driver's license, that's a terrible punishment; well it was when I was in school, anyhow. We incorporated a lot of the ideas that we got from teenagers.

JT: Do you think that distracted driving is still a problem in Pennsylvania?

RG: It's always going to be a problem no matter what law you write. Yeah, it's like the 55 mile per hour speed limit; that was the most disobeyed law in the history of Pennsylvania. Everybody voted with their right foot and they certainly didn't vote for 55. That was something that Jimmy Carter put in as a "gas savings measure." It's just unenforceable; if you do it, selective enforcement because everybody was breaking the law. Those kind of laws are just different. But, we wrote really meaning legislation and an awful lot of it and out of all the bills I passed,

the recent one, the Public Private Partnership is an immense piece of legislation. It took a long time, over 12 years, to finally have the power of the idea get signed into law and I think it's going to be an unbelievable home run for the state of Pennsylvania, just as it's been for Virginia. Virginia just opened up – by the way as we're recording this – yesterday they opened up the northern lanes on 495. That was a two billion dollar plus project. The money that was spent on that project – one project – is greater than the whole construction budget in Pennsylvania. So, we think that those kind of projects will be home runs in Pennsylvania.

JT: Nice. Do you think that the Federal Government benefits or impedes legislation when it comes to Pennsylvania roads?

RG: The Federal Government has a lot of rules and regulations for all the modalities. If they're providing the money, okay, the rules we live by. But, if they're not providing the money, we still have to live by the rules which jack up cost. I think the best thing that we can do is say stand aside, let us do it ourselves. Pennsylvania had a rich history of transportation funding from the colonial times. Today we have, as a percentage of our gross state product, we spend less on transportation than ever in the history of the state. In some places, our roads, we look like a third world country. We're in bad shape.

JT: Did you ever find the legislation process frustrating?

RG: It is. It's designed to be frustrating so you don't rush to judgment, you don't make really bad decisions, and you can reach consensus. The system was never designed to be perfect; it was designed to be imperfect. If they wanted it to be perfect, they would've made the governor a dictator. The Penn family certainly could've done that, but they didn't. The whole idea of the General Assembly is wonderful. I mean, it's an absolutely wonderful concept. You wonder how

brilliant, how brilliant were those people when they came up with it? You know, we got a bunch of people in that time that you got a King, you got laws; we're out of here. They left Europe and they came here for religious freedom like our church and for others. That they could send their best and brightest to Independence Hall is a pretty amazing, amazing concept. Amazing.

JT: Big difference between being in the majority than the minority?

RG: Oh, it's a huge difference when you control the agenda. But other than that, in Transportation, you have to work with both sides; I believe that to be bipartisan is the only way to go. There's no Republican or Democratic road in Pennsylvania; they're all Pennsylvania highways.

JT: Earlier you had mentioned that being in the House when you were first elected is a lot different than it is now. Specifically, would you say that the camaraderie among the members is different across the aisle?

RG: That's correct. In order to reach consensus, you have to know each other. If you're only averaging six years right now, like we are, you don't get that. How many terms does it take you to be able to read a budget and understand it? You end up with a House that you don't have any control of and special interests have a lot better chance of controlling and powerful staff members have too much control. It wasn't like that when I came in.

JT: Yeah, I think public opinion is that there's hardly any bipartisanship.

RG: We had great bipartisanship on Public Private Partnerships. We had it on the bills that we passed on agriculture, transportation; this time we had four of them. We moved two in the Senate, two in the House – well orchestrated. Stuff that was teething ring issues that ended up

passing both bodies without debate, and I consider that to be absolutely wonderful legislative engineering. It makes you puff up your chest, but nobody even knows what you did.

JT: Was there a typical session day?

RG: Every day was different. When I first came down, Mondays were ceremonial days, Tuesdays and Wednesdays were voting days, Thursday was committee day and that worked out extremely well. And we got about the business lately of “changing the rules,” reform, only to find out that it wasn’t really reform. You put yourself at a disadvantage and if there’s one suggestion I would make to the House right now is to get rid of the 24 hour rule, go to the Senate rules, and don’t amend on second consideration, amend on third. You have to make the process work and that’s what it was designed to do. We have guys who set that up who are much more brilliant than me. I have a room temperature IQ but these guys, the guys that developed it, were really truly brilliant.

JT: Yeah. Would you say that most of the work is done in the committees, then?

RG: Yeah, the real power of our system, and the brilliance of it, is the committee system. Everybody sitting on a barstool is a know-it-all, but when you actually get faced with doing something and doing it right, you need to really work it through in the committee system.

JT: What’s the hardest thing about being a Representative?

RG: The amount of time that you don’t have. It’s extremely frustrating. Your level of frustration you learn to live with; you don’t even know you have it. It was a month after I lost my Primary that all of a sudden I felt it go. I mean, it was like, I felt it go. I’ve talked to other

members who have been here for a long time and it's been the same with them. One of my best friends has been counseling me since the election; just about everything he told me is dead truth.

JT: Oh yeah? Is it hard to relay information about what you've been doing in Harrisburg to the people in your district?

RG: Extremely hard, and with the internet, with all the attacks you get, the constant special interest groups, former people that worked for the House who are now out as attack agents; that makes the job that much harder. I mean, we have some people who absolutely thrive on hate and have no understanding of government, they just have their own acts and they just want to come and cut the place apart. I'm an institutionalist; I believe in the General Assembly, a huge belief in it. It's the best system ever, ever devised on the face of this earth. When you get former staffers who are PR writers that go out and make a lot of money, cutting and condemning the place, it's wrong. I wish you would fight back.

JT: Did you have a good relationship with the media, both here in Harrisburg and in your district?

RG: Yeah, I never really had a bad problem with the media. I will tell you some of the people in the media became very good friends. There's nobody like Al Neri. Al and I became very good friends and I would visit Al in the home – nobody should have the jokers dealt off the bottom of the deck that he did. I would go visit him and I wouldn't be right for days. He has a wonderful wife and a wonderful daughter who's a brilliant kid and I saw some compassion – Tony Romeo visited him every day – KYW. Yeah, good friends; I had friends in the media that I kidded a lot. I always kidded Brad Bumsted about being a liberal, carrying Jane Fonda's photograph in his wallet. There are some people in the media like people in the General

Assembly that are not good and I've watched them passing through and I've watched them with their agendas and I just shake my head and you hope the Institution can withstand it.

JT: We touched a little bit on some of the changes that have been happening in the House, like the internet. Were you in favor of the various technological advances within the House – the laptops on the desks, PCN, the live feed?

RG: Oh, I think that's great. I think PCN, in some ways, is one of the biggest mistakes ever because the minute the cameras were turned on, we all of a sudden had the PCN stars and you lost a lot of meaningful debate. I have no idea how to control that. Maybe in the rules we should change it and have floor managers for bills allotted so much time each and they pick the people that speak on it and then if you want to get up and talk to the cameras, you can have special rules of order and when you're not on the floor, let people stand up there and talk all the want to PCN.

JT: You had mentioned earlier when you first started, mentors like Harry Bittle and Sam Hayes; in your later years -

RG: Dan Beren [Daniel; State Representative, Montgomery County, 1967-1976] was the other one.

JT: Okay.

RG: Phenomenal guy.

JT: Did you see yourself as a mentor to any of the younger ones?

RG: Yeah, I really did. I helped a whole gaggle of Representatives. We gave a lot of them legislation that they could claim as their own and I felt awfully good doing that. I paid back a little bit that was given to me.

JT: Good. What would you say is, or was, your favorite part of being a legislator?

RG: Well, the camaraderie; the sense of collegiality. There's no way to ever explain that. The conversations that you have with seat mates; Merle Phillips [State Representative, Montour, Northumberland and Snyder Counties, 1979-2010] was my seatmate for 31 years. He had a wonderful Pennsylvania Dutch sense of humor and my background, it was a good fit. I really enjoyed Merle and our friendship. Yeah, I've gotten to know hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of really good people; very few bad ones, very few. When you serve for a long time, everybody knows who the rotten apples are. It's pretty amazing.

JT: Is there a fondest memory?

RG: Oh, I have thousands of them. I will leave here with a whole filing cabinet full. And you know, I've been talking about writing my book, I talked about that in my remarks it's going to be called "The Caucus." On the outside of it will be a disclaimer that will say, "Many of the stories in here are dead truth, some are outright lies, and some are in-between. You're just going to have to read it and find out." Everybody's been asking me since I made those remarks, "Am I in the book? Am I in the book?" and I keep telling everybody, "You're in the book." So, there will be a lot of people paying me not to write it.

JT: Sure. Will you keep busy in your retirement?

RG: I'm going to hang out a shingle and go back to transportation consulting and packaging projects, actually try to package some P3 (Public Private Partnerships) projects and some really good ones. People have come to me already; we'll see if it's lucrative. If not, I'm not going to work the 78 hour workweeks that I did before. But I like it, I love it, and I feel like I got too much juice left to give it up.

JT: What do you think is the hardest issue, or the biggest issue, in front of the legislature today?

RG: I think it's transportation, pure and simple. You can't have five-thousand deficient bridges and getting worse every day. You can't have eight-thousand miles of highway that must be rebuilt. You haven't touched any new congestion mitigation projects state-wide. You have airports that need tremendous amounts of work, mass-transit, especially capital projects and they're not being funded by the Feds, so the state has to do it, and you need a governor that leads. I think the votes are in the House and I think the votes are in the Senate to pass the T-fact report that the Governor had commissioned.

JT: Do you have any regrets?

RG: Well, yeah, you'll have regrets. I mean, I really, truly, am going through a remorse about not being here this next term to lead the floor fight for transportation. I've done that for three of the revenue packages and I wanted to do it for the fourth and then actually leave mid-term. I hit 100 percent in the pension plan and all that stuff, so the only reason you're staying is because you have a will to get the job done and you don't want to walk away with it being unfinished. I think that's the German in me.

JT: Do you think you'll run again?

RG: Oh, heck no. I've served my time and I've done the very best job I could possibly do. I don't think anybody's ever thrown themselves into the job as hard as I have and I know that's been at the expense of my family and others. I don't think I ever spent a full week on vacation until last year. There was always so much going on and transportation is an unbelievably busy committee and the chairman's on eight boards or Commissions, including the State Transportation Commission. If you're going to do the job and do it right, you got to be in there.

I'm blessed, I've had great staff – Greg Grasa and Eric Bugaile and others who are now with me are phenomenal guys. We did so much heavy lifting over this last term, especially after I knew I wasn't coming back; we wanted to get a lot of the stuff finished that would have carried over and we did that very successfully.

JT: How would you like your tenure as a Representative to be remembered?

RG: “He did the very best job he could for the people in his district.” Your district comes first. If you don't deliver for your district, if there's a pot of money there and you're philosophically against it, you can't be that way; you're a Representative. You got to go after what's best for your district. We're electing a lot of people right now that are not in tune with the representative government; they represent only themselves and they represent a special interest group that's against everything. You cannot govern that way. There is no way in the world you can sign a no-tax pledge and then say that you represent your district because you never know what's going to come up. I mean, you cannot be against everything and still be for something.

JT: My final question to you is: what advice do you have for someone who is interested in running for public office?

RG: Never take a drink; never say anything that you shouldn't that's recorded. The methodology today of destroying people is just unbelievable. I had a yard sign and mailers done against me that I would never believe could ever happen. A picture of a dog going to the bathroom and the sign says, “Thirty-Three Years of Rick Geist Is Enough,” and then having your photograph in the pile of the dog doo – that kind of politics with no disclaimer, having outside groups that spend a fortune on negative campaigning, never about an issue, to send all those mailers out about the compensation of the package of the House of Representatives has nothing

to do with governing. Nothing. You know, both sides have been good at it, but what are we getting? I mean, what do you get as a legislator? You asked the question. I would like to recruit people that have a business background who have governed within the private sector to come in here. I think it seasons them and gets them ready for this place. But when you're a young kid, you've lived in the basement of your parents' home and you put your name up with a special interest group that's nothing but attack and then you get elected and then you come in here, you're totally dysfunctional. You're totally dysfunctional. And then you become a tool of the people that put you here. That's not what this system was designed to be; never was, never will be. I would believe that the House needs to correct equal ilium that and go on to be what it's been for the oldest – the oldest – of State Houses in the country. Biggest mistake we ever made as a State House was creating the Senate – a little humor.

JT: Yes. And on that note, Representative Geist, I want to thank you very much for sharing your stories with me.

RG: Well, we can do this for days of these.

JT: Sure, sure we can. I wish you nothing but luck in your retirement.

RG: Well, when I write the book, buy a copy.

JT: I will.

RG: Alright, thank you.