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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Richard A. Kasunic (D)

52nd District

Fayette and Westmoreland Counties

1983 – 1994

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Transcribed by: Jessica Zook

Raymond Whittaker (RW): Good morning.

The Honorable Richard Kasunic (RK): Good Morning, Ray.

RW: Today we have the opportunity and the pleasure to speak with Senator Richard A. Kasunic, who served with the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from 1983 through 1994, representing the 52nd Legislative District which included parts of Fayette and Westmoreland Counties and the 32nd Senatorial District from 1995 through 2014, which included parts of Fayette, Somerset, Washington, and Westmoreland Counties. Senator, thank you for joining us today.

RK: It's good to be here.

RW: I'd like for you to start off and talk a little bit about your early life, your education, and some of your occupations before running for the House of Representatives.

RK: Before we get into that, if it's okay with you, I'd just like to say that it's been an honor and certainly a pleasure to serve the people of the 52nd District of the House of Representatives and also the 32nd District in the Senate. The people bestowed their faith and trust in me and took a chance on a young man way back when and I'm really grateful for that opportunity that they'd given to me. I've had a loving family, a lot of friends and supporters out there that I owe a lot to and it's just been a privilege to serve those folks and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. But getting into my childhood, I grew up in a coal mining patch. Now, a lot of people might not

know what a coal mining patch is, but those of us who grew up in Western Pennsylvania certainly know what a coal mining patch is. My father, my grandfather, my uncles, everybody back in the day worked in a coal mine and we lived in the company town, grew up in the days of the company store and such. So you know, it was a great community, it was a community that was just like everywhere in America at the time; if somebody was in need, if you needed help or whatnot, the neighbor, the friends, and family of course was very close there because they all worked at the same facility. There was always those willing to lend a helping hand. My childhood was great. We had a lot of kids in the community and, you know, there was always something to do, and that was before computers and all the technology, so you had to be out there making your own fun and doing your own thing with the other members of the community. I think that in a way that helped me a great deal because it taught me how to get along with others, how to communicate, and also learn how to stand up for yourself. It helped me move forward through my childhood. But, like I said, it was a great time growing up in the [19]50s and the [19]60s; it was a better and more peaceful time in terms of what we see today in terms of kids that are having problems with drugs and, obviously, the shootings and all the other issues that are out there. You might've had a scuffle with somebody in the neighborhood but within the hour, you were best buddies again. Those friendships and that bonding still lasts til today that were created back then so, as I said, it was a great time to grow up. I just wish my son and others could have seen that in growing up in that same type of thing. You shared, you know? I can remember as a kid we would collect pop bottles and you could get two cents for a bottle and we'd scrounge around til we found five bottles which gave us ten cents and we'd be up at the store cashing those bottles in for a bottle of pop and we all shared that one bottle of pop. It might be four of us, might be two of us, might be six of us, but we all shared. I think it taught you a lot

in terms of, if I had something, it was yours too. But growing up there was great. We had the neighborhood school I went to, Monarch Elementary School – that was the name of the community I lived in – graduated from Dunbar Township High School, which is a small school; we had 111 kids in our graduating class. From there, I went to Robert Morris, which was a junior college at the time in Pittsburgh, got a degree in business administration with a management major, then I transferred to Youngstown State University in Ohio and got my Bachelor of Science degree there with majors in business administration and management major and accounting and economic minors. When I finished college, I spent some time in the service; I was a member of the Pennsylvania National Guard, so immediately after college I served six months active duty with the Pennsylvania National Guard in Fort Ord, California and Fort Bliss, Texas. My dream through all of that was always to come home, because I loved my hometown, I loved Fayette County, and while listening and hearing other people wanting to move or go to a different area of the country, my dream and goal was always that I want to come home and I want to work there, I want to live there, I want to raise my family there in Fayette County, because the general feeling and the warmth that everybody had there and I had for that area. I was very fortunate to be able to do that. During that period of time, some of the jobs that I had after college and such – I worked at Anchor Hocking, which was a glass factory in South Connellsville; I worked there for a few years. And in fact, I worked there in the summer months while I was going to college, so they provided an opportunity for me to make some spending money and whatnot. I worked there; it's a factory that made bottles, baby food jars, ketchup bottles, mustard bottles, anything that came in glass back in the day was produced there and it provided an opportunity for many people in that region to have a good quality job and it was a life-sustaining job. From there, while I was trying to get a job in my field, at that particular time

things were pretty tough and companies were downsizing, mills were closing and such, so I had a very difficult time at first trying to open a door. So, it was always, “What experience do you have?” and whatnot. Well, as somebody just coming out of college and the service, you don’t have any experience. So, a job came open at the Fayette County Courthouse as an office manager for the county commissioners and so the opportunity was extended to me and so I jumped at it thinking that this is a great opportunity, I will be able to build my resume here and this will hopefully open some doors in industry in terms of becoming a plant manager or something down the road. I wanted to put my education to work and so what developed there was what was going to be a short stay ended up being an eleven year stay working for the county there, moving on to the assessment office. In fact, I became the chief assessor over the years. While I was there, obviously you’re at the hub of the county, the county seat, and the hub of the political activity and whatnot, so I got engaged in terms of the Democrat party, in terms of helping with elections and so on and so forth, and at the same time got to meet many people and that was kind of the beginning or the basis for me getting involved politically and wanting to serve the public. So that takes me to –

RW: You have an interesting story about how you were motivated or inspired to run for the House seat initially.

RK: What happened there was, as I said, there I am at the county seat, the hub of everything that’s happening and we already mentioned that the economy was on a downturn in Fayette County once the mines closed back in the [19]50s – the mines started closing and whatnot and then the mills start having problems and other industry and whatnot so, you know, the economy

was steadily going downhill for years and years and years and unemployment was going up – One day, I was sitting in my office in the courthouse and I got a call from one of the county commissioners and they said that there was a company wanting to see some property in Fayette County that the county owned – it was the county industrial park – and would I escort the folks out to the site so they could take a look at it and everything. It happened to be Miller Brewing Company and they were looking at building a brewery somewhere within their doughnut, so to speak, and Fayette County sat within the middle of that doughnut. So, I took them out, showed them the property and they were impressed with the property, because it is [a] beautiful piece of property: flat, you know some 300 acres, level land, you know, whatnot. So, they started asking questions: “Where’s the roads? Where’s the highway so we can move our goods and product in and out of the county?” It’s like, “Well, we just have this two-lane highway here, Route 119 on one side and on the other side, Route 857,” two-lane, winding, curving roads and everything, so you can see the eyebrows starting to rise. “Well, what about the water and sewage and whatnot?” “Well, we don’t have water here yet and sewage but that’s in the plan.” And so, immediately I could see what was happening and obviously they didn’t pick the site for the lack of an infrastructure. That kind of angered me that they didn’t want to come to Fayette County because of that reason, so I start thinking, “Well, what is anybody doing about taking care of this situation, this problem?” All of a sudden the light bulbs went on, “We need a road; we need a four-lane limited access highway. We need water, we need sewage.” And, nothing seemed to be done, so I got to thinking about it and the more I thought about it, it was like instead of complaining and grouching about it and being negative about it, why don’t you roll up your sleeves, why don’t you get involved and do something about it instead of thinking somebody else should do it or waiting for somebody else to do it, why don’t you do it? So, that then led me on

the trail of running for state representative with the platform that I was going to do what was necessary to get a limited access highway built in Fayette County and that I was going to stress infrastructure in terms of water and sewage and promote economic development. We took off with that and certainly that was a great campaign and that was the thing that we ran on. It was myself and some friends. We didn't have the help of the hierarchy of the party; they opposed us, but we worked hard and kept delivering the message and whatnot and I lost that first election by 150 votes. That encouraged me; people were listening to me, they heard my message, we took on the establishment and almost won. Next time we're going to kick the door down and that's what happened in terms of the following election. Then in 1980 I ran and lost by 150 votes and then the following election for the General Assembly I was victorious on it. But, the other thing was that a lot of people like to point fingers and look at things this one, this didn't happen, that didn't happen, this one was against me whatnot. I used to get up in the morning, I'd look in the mirror and say, you know, if you would've knocked on seventy-six more doors, you could've won this election. But it was a great experience.

RW: What did you do differently in that second election that ultimately put you over the edge?

RK: Well, I think what happened was that the momentum just was building and continued to build. The person that was the incumbent that I ran against changed parties because he was upset that he didn't get enough help from the Democrat party and whatnot because of the close victory, and so he switched parties and decided to run for the Senate which opened the seat up and, basically, I was the favorite to win that position. There was a couple other people in that race, but we'd already established from two years prior our base and we had tremendous support from

the township officials and borough people and school directors and tax collectors and whatnot because we just developed those relationships over the years and that's what actually, then, propelled me throughout my career; that was always a base that I had that just stuck with me forever.

RW: How has the district then changed from the time that you grew up til now, the House or the Senate district; how has it changed in geography, infrastructure, [and] demographics over that period of time?

RK: Over that period of time I want to say, you know, that unemployment was very high. When I took office, the real unemployment figures, they were probably twenty-six, twenty-eight percent because of all of the downturn, as I mentioned before, in the economy with all the industry was leaving the rust belt and we losing and some of them were relocating to other parts of the country, some of them were relocating offshore in other countries and some were just flat-out closing their doors. So, what we were trying to do was rebuild this. So, we developed a new economic development agency in Fayette County called Fay-Penn Economic Development Council, which has been quite successful in developing sites and marketing the county and bringing jobs in. It's not where we want it to be yet because it took thirty, forty years to get to that situation, you just don't climb out of that hole overnight, but we have been progressing. We got that highway built so we do have that limited-access highway – Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission built what we refer to as the Mon-Fayette [Expressway] – so, we now have that in place. We have most of the municipalities that have taken on water and sewage programs through programs like PennVEST and Clean Water monies that were available in many of the

budgets and things. Some of them who went from over my period of time in the legislature from virtually having no sewage whatsoever that now the municipalities are completely sewered. Most of them are probably at least to the point of fifty percent of the municipalities being sewered and whatnot, which adds to the quality of life, certainly, and if a business or industry is looking at coming into Fayette County now we can say we have site-ready facilities here. We, in many cases, have buildings already erected because what we found out over the years is when a company comes knocking on your door, they want to know how soon they can move in and if you tell them a year, they're looking somewhere else because somebody else does have a site-ready project going. So, we've come a long way along those lines in terms of that whole situation, in terms of addressing the needs that will be able to market and help the district for many years to come and for the next generation; we've put them in a good position at this time.

RW: How about the constituency? How often and what types of issues have they brought to your attention, whether in the district office or up here in Harrisburg?

RK: Well, I'm sure you heard this from other folks that you've interviewed over the years, we do everything. People come to our district offices, especially, they're in need and they're troubled and they're having problems with the bureaucracy, they're being told everywhere they go, so they come to us to help cut some red tape to try to deliver the message to plead their case for them. It may be something like a driver's license; it may be something like a birth certificate. It may be with business and industry coming to you about getting permits in a timely fashion or getting approvals to move forward so they can get started on their projects. Senior citizens come to us with help for property tax rebates and for pharmaceuticals. It's just a constant flow of

traffic and it's never the same and that's what's so interesting about it, because even after thirty-two years when you think you saw it all or you learned it all, somebody comes with an issue or a problem that you never dealt with before. It's very rewarding to be able to help a senior citizen get over their problem, because when they come to you, the biggest problem in the world might be – to them – that birth certificate or to enable them to get that property rebate check back so they can pay this year's taxes or help through the drug prescription program for seniors that they can get their medication or like you said, a business or industry when you can call them back and say 'Hey, look we took care of that problem. Your permit will be issued tomorrow,' or "Hey, we talked to the Secretary, we're going to sit down, we're going to meet with them to talk about these things so we can get this ironed out so we can get you up and running and you can put those fifty or eighty people to work that you're planning on hiring." That's the satisfaction you get in this particular job, or when you're standing up on that highway cutting the ribbon. Or, a waterline where fifteen families who had bad wells or contaminated wells, or no water at all – they had to truck it in – you're standing there with that last shovel of dirt covering that hole up or cutting a ribbon there, you know you helped provide good potable water for these fifteen families. It's very rewarding.

RW: Talk about the size and scope – differences between a House seat and a Senate seat. You're covering a much larger area, much larger constituency. Talk about the advantages or the problems that may occur with the difference in size.

RK: Well, obviously the difference in itself is the size of the district. I went from fifteen municipalities that I represented in the House to two counties and parts of two other counties.

So, it's a larger area. When I was in the House, if there were events or meetings going on, I could go from one to the other. I could be from one end of my district to the other end of the district at most in a half-hour's time, so I could attend the meetings, you know, I was there. When you're in the Senate, all of a sudden it's like all of a sudden you have to pick and choose because my district would run from California, PA and Charleroi, PA in Washington County clear to New Baltimore in Somerset County – an hour and forty-five minute drive. Or, I could stand on the mountain in Wellersburg in Somerset County, look down over the hill and there's Cumberland, Maryland. So, it was a little more difficult in terms of scheduling and making sure that – you didn't want to ignore anybody's problems, so it was a scheduling difficulty at all times and then of course, the difference between the House and the Senate, when I was in the House, there's two-hundred and three members, you have to convince one-hundred and two to help you out or to be a part of your issue or your cause, in the Senate, there's fifty; you only got to convince twenty-six. So, it's a little easier in the Senate simply because you're dealing with a lot less people and I think my time in the House obviously really prepared me then to be able to have that smooth transition into the Senate, because when I come to the House obviously that was a learning experience; never did this before, didn't understand the full complexity of everything, and so it was a learning curve, it took some time and everything.

RW: That was my next question. What were your first impressions of walking into the building and serving?

RK: There were times when I would sit there and listen to debate – and this is early on –and I would think to myself, “What am I doing here?” These people are all brilliant, especially Jim

Manderino [James; State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1967-1989; Speaker, 1989] and he was the leader when I came here. When I got elected and came here in 1983, the House turned Democrat at that time. Our class, our freshman class, put us over the top and we came in as the majority and Jim Manderino was the leader. I used to sit there and listen to him and he was so brilliant, I mean, just totally an amazing individual. He would be there debating and speaking and he would be talking about things that happened twenty years ago and he would be talking about line items in the budget verbatim, just boom, boom, boom, and I'm sitting there thinking "Wow! This is over my head!" Little did I know what I was watching or seeing there, because after that I had the opportunity to serve with other leaders and whatnot, and not that were not adequate and they were not good, but there was only one Jim Manderino. That was just – sitting there watching and, of course, observing and learning and listening to him and some of the other senior members of the House here – Matt Ryan [Matthew J.; State Representative, Chester and Delaware Counties, 1963-2003; Speaker, 1981-1982, 1995-2003) was another great orator. Just learning your lessons by sometimes the best thing to do is to listen versus trying to be the guy that knows it all, right? I learned from them, learned my lessons well, and when I went into the Senate, it wasn't like I switched gears or anything else, we just moved in and that I think, that experience that I had here enabled me as a freshman Senator to become a part of the leadership team over there, being elected in my third year, my first term being elected to Policy Committee.

RW: Talk about the differences – sometimes people fail to understand how the process works; bills get introduced to committee, a lot of things are done through the committee process here. Talk about your time on the committees whether in the House or the Senate, or a comparison of

both, and how important the committee process is and being involved; you are a minority chairman in the Senate and what that role involves.

RK: Well, certainly the committee process, as you mentioned, nothing happens without going through the committee first and bills are assigned to committee by the Speaker and obviously by the President Pro Temp in the Senate and that's where the work begins on a bill. There's no difference in the House or Senate; you have a bill, you introduce it, it's assigned to committee, now you got to convince the majority members of that committee that this is a good piece of legislation that's going to benefit the people of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; you got to be able to sell that idea. So, it's actually being able to learn how to communicate and work with both parties, because if you're not going to work with the other side of the aisle, I don't care if you're Republican or Democrat, sooner or later you're going to need somebody over there to give you that vote to put this over the top. So, you've got to develop those relationships and one of the most important things is to develop trust and respect of your fellow colleagues. You are truthful and you're not just coming in here and making things up or lying or whatnot because we have seen that. We have seen some of that in the past and once that happens, once you lose that trust and whatnot, then nobody really wants to listen to you or have anything to do with you. But for the most part, I think everybody has established that trust and the willingness to cross the aisle and work together. And, it works both ways in the House and the Senate; it's no different. The difference, I think, between the House and the Senate is that in the House, what they do is they leave Harrisburg; committees will leave Harrisburg and they'll go to Erie or they'll go to Pittsburgh, Scranton, Philadelphia, and various parts of the state and especially, they'll go to those areas where maybe this bill is affecting a certain area of the state or whatnot, so they'll go

into those areas and whatnot and they'll work on Thursdays to have those hearings and whatnot and to make sure that the people do have their say. In the Senate, mostly, it's not often outside of the Policy Committees; everything through the committee process is done right here in Harrisburg and it's generally done Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. So, you know, there's a difference there. Other than that, the process works the same way in terms of developing relationships and friendships and building that trust with others so that when you speak, people understand that you're being upfront with them.

RW: You brought up that you are serving with the Senate Policy Committee; you have served also in leadership as a Caucus Chairman. Talk about running internally for a position versus running in your district.

RK: It's not unlike campaigning back home for your House seat or your Senate seat. It's the same thing; you're building relationships, you're building friendships, you're bonding with people and building that trust and obviously establishing the fact that, I don't want you voting for me just because I'm your friend; I want you to vote for me also because you feel that I'm capable of doing the job and I'm going to put the time and effort into this to make sure that we – our caucus – understands the issues and what's going on out there, what the pulse of the general public is. Who's for this legislation? Who's opposed to this legislation? Why are they for it? Why are they against it? It takes doing your homework and being able to establish that willingness to go the extra mile, to put in a few more hours every day and every week so that when you come back here on Monday and in terms of my position now as Caucus Chairman, when I sit down there and we're in caucus and I'm explaining the legislation that we're going to

vote on today that my caucus has a real understanding of what's in this bill and how it's going to work and being able to answer the questions that they may have. But, it's the same thing in terms of the politicking and then hand-shaking and building relationships – it's the same way, only a much smaller scale.

RW: Let's talk about your legislative accomplishments. Let's start first in the House; what are some of the issues that you personally authored in the House as your own legislation that passed?

RK: One of the things that eventually passed, but it took years and it actually carried over to my time in the Senate, was the Turnpike Expansion bill, back in 1985 when we created that, and we go back to my desire to build a limited-access highway in Fayette County. When they first started talking about the Turnpike Expansion bill, Fayette County was not included in that. It was going to come down the Mon-Valley from Pittsburgh down Mon-Valley to the California area and probably, at that point, that was the plan; not to go any further south, not to cross the river or anything else. It was going to build that highway to Pittsburgh for the folks in the Mon-Valley to easily access the city and the jobs and whatnot that were there. So, when that came about and the talks started being generated about it, then I was stepping up and I was talking to folks like Jimmy Manderino, Leroy Irvis [K. Leroy; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1959-1988; Speaker, 1983-1988], and those folks about, "Hey, I need something in Fayette County too. We have the same dilemma; we have the same problem that the folks in Mon-Valley have. In fact, we've had it longer, because our mines closed long before the mills in the Mon-Valley closed so we need help." So what we were able to do was to get Fayette County included in that Turnpike Expansion bill. That was one of the first things that I wrapped my

arms around and got my teeth into in 1985 when that was passed, that was part of that. One of the other things was the PennVEST program, which once again, talked to you earlier about the need for water and sewage in my district, in our entire county for that matter, and the lack of it. So, that was something that was really important, because it was enabling municipalities and municipal authorities and such to do was to – here’s a pot of money you can apply for and guess what? Not only do we have a favorable rate – we got a one percent interest rate, which because of the poverty and the things that existed in our county, all of our municipalities qualified for the one percent interest rate – so, that was an enabling project right there to allow them to tap into a very low rate and there was also grant money included in that. So, those are a couple things early on that I worked on. I wasn’t the prime sponsor of those bills, but the fact of the matter is, I cosponsored them and was in there battling and fighting to make sure this all happened and took place. Now, a couple of the bills that I authored that became law was a site-development that I talked to you earlier about. We had a site but we had no development there, so we were in a situation there we needed to develop those sites and, obviously, the county coffers weren’t overflowing with cash and everything, so it was very difficult for them to do anything and, of course, we had the newly formed Economic Development Agency there and they were just growing things too. So, to enable them to be able to, you know, now tap into a resource here in Harrisburg, to go out and actually develop those sites to put in the utilities, to put in the roadways and whatnot and have a real industrial park, just not a field out here, you know, something that looks like an industrial park, that was something very important to me here in the House. I’m trying to think, there’s another piece of legislation that we had passed and I –

RW: I know you worked on the Bituminous Coal Act for a long number of years; that carried into the Senate.

RK: That was one of the things in terms of accomplishments in the Senate that I'm most proud of is that we rewrote – when I say 'we,' obviously, I was the prime sponsor of that and we worked with DEP [Department of Environmental Protection], we worked with the coal industry, we worked with the United Mine Workers of America to author the best deep mine safety law in the country and it's still renowned as the best in the country. That all came about because of the accident took place at Quecreek, if you remember that. It was a tragic situation that turned into a miracle when those miners were pulled from the bows of the earth. At that point in time, once again, it was like, hey, they didn't have the proper mapping – there were so many things that were involved that were the cause of that accident and we have old abandoned mine sites all over southwestern Pennsylvania and even in northeastern Pennsylvania. It's like hey, we got to do a better job at this; we got to find safety tools, safety measures to be able to protect these people to help them escape or if they are trapped, we got to have facilities down there that they can retreat to so they could have a safe place. We worked tirelessly for months and months and months and finally came up with the bill that I said is touted as the best mine safety law anywhere in the country. I'm very proud of that because of the fact that my family heritage comes from that industry. In fact, my brother still works in a coal mine. We still have a family member there.

RW: Another piece of legislation you worked on, I mean, you worked on the Chain of Drug Sale; that was a piece of legislation.

RK: That was a House bill. Of course, the idea was that as the chain – you have Mr. Big up here and clear down to the street level. The idea being that we had to do something and my feeling is that if somebody overdosed or died because of drugs, that we could reach clear up here and get everybody who was involved in that death from the people who brought those drugs into the region to the street level dealer, that all of them would be responsible for murder if somebody did it and a drug overdose or something happened to them in the course of this whole chain of events that took place. One of the other things was also the Job Retention bill. Back in the day when we were trying to rebuild Pennsylvania and rebuild our regions and so on, we were always talking about marketing Pennsylvania to firms to move in and whatnot. What was happening, and I realized this, was that what about the folks that had been here through the good times and now also are still hanging on through the bad times? They stayed here, they believed in our region, and they were employing people and they needed some tools, they needed, in order to retain jobs, they needed training programs, they needed new equipment to upgrade their plants and facilities and such, so it was like if we can't keep the people that we have here, why would anybody want to move here, right? It was almost like they were being forgotten, so a light bulb once again goes on so, hey, we got to do something to promote and help these people who are with us. If we get that bill passed it would help them with training, with machinery and equipment and just upgrading their technology and such which obviously was a very important piece of legislation. Now we talk about more so about retaining jobs and keeping jobs, but back in the day it was always, "Who can we attract? Who can we bring in?" Everybody was looking for that home run thinking that some big plant was going to come and we were going to attract and get them here and we're going to create five thousand new jobs. You know, the realization was that that just isn't going to happen; we got to deal with these people who have one-hundred

and fifty, two-hundred jobs in these small facilities, some small manufacturing plants and foundries and whatnot that were still operating here. So, there's a couple pieces of legislation that I'm very proud of to have authored and have become law.

RW: What was your relationship with the Senate when you were a House Member and now conversely with the House now that you're a Senate Member?

RK: Well, I had a great relationship with the Senate. There was a sense of camaraderie back then that I don't see existing today to be honest with you. There was interactions; we'd go over to the Senate some time for lunch, you know, a group of us, somebody would have lunch, "Guys, come on over." And you know what happens there; you're sitting around, you're talking, you're discussing things, you're learning what's going on in the Senate, what's going on in the House, you're interacting and next thing you know you're working with a Senator – and a House Member – trying to get something accomplished on both sides of the aisle. Since I've gone to the Senate, most of my colleagues from the House aren't there anymore that I served with, so I miss that. A lot of folks who have gone and whatnot but you know, I had some great relationships with some of the folks that I had come with, like Representative Tony DeLuca [Anthony; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1983-present], Representative Pete Daley [Peter; State Representative, Fayette and Washington Counties, 1983-present] and such. We all came in at the same time. They're still there and we still converse and talk about things. But, back when I first came up here, there was a great sense of being together and stuff. Monday nights, when I first came up here, at this time of year, we'd be playing touch football; springtime, we'd be playing softball. A group of us would get together, maybe in the evening, go to Hershey

Park or just, you know, do things together. And, I'm talking about groups; not just a couple people. There would be twenty people or more.

RW: On both sides of the aisle.

RK: Yeah, yeah, both sides of the aisle. You know, I can remember the House playing the Senate in the softball games, you know?

RW: Why did that change?

RK: Once again, you develop, for me, you develop friendships and relationships and it was then easy to call a Senator up or for them to call us or even call one of your own colleagues and sit down to talk to them once you established these friendships and these bonds just like it was back home in the day when I was growing up, it was the same thing. What has happened? What's changed? Everybody seems to have become an individual now; everybody's kind of doing their own thing and it's kind of sad because I, for one – maybe a lot of other people wouldn't agree with me – but I, for one, miss that. I miss that.

RW: Being that you served over thirty years, you've seen a lot of reforms take place. You've voted on a lot of tough issues over those times. What are some of the reforms that you've seen happen and do you think those reforms have gone far enough in the way House rules are, how business is run here?

RK: Well, I guess I wouldn't say it's ever going to go far enough because there's going to continue to be issues and problems and situations come up over the years; there's always going to be a need [for] attention. I think just the fact that in this day and age with the technology and everything that's going on has – for example, laptops on your desk; when I come here, myself and another House member shared a secretary, we shared the phone. I mean, it's come so far, so fast and all for the better, all for the better. You know, the changes, the TV cameras in the Chambers now, great idea. Let the public know what we're doing and see how government is working. There was a time, and I can remember, some of old timers they were so against the cameras on the Floor of the House or in the Chamber of the Senate and I was like, "Why?" Those are all good things that happened and I think just tighter control on everything in terms of expenditures and things that obviously, in some cases, were running awry and whatnot and needed to be reined in, but that's not to say everybody's up here abusing something or whatnot. Things happen and sometimes, obviously, it's very unfortunate, but most of the people up here are very sincere and they're here because they're sincere about serving the public and providing a better way of life, a better quality of life for the people that they represent. Just like in any business or any industry, no matter where you're at, there are issues and there are things that happen and you're not going to stop everything but there can be measures put in place that certainly can help curb some things that have gone on.

RW: With the advent of technology, how has that changed the way – with email, with social media – how has that changed the way that you help your constituents or they have access to you?

RK: Well, what it's done, in all honesty, is speeded things up; before you'd have to get on the phone, you'd never get who you wanted to talk to and you'd have to wait for the phone call to come back and then you'd have to wait and whatnot and today, it's just a matter of just email or text or whatnot and it's speeded up the process in terms of getting things done and getting more accomplished, in all honesty. You don't have to wait weeks for a reply, or months. If you need something, if you need to look something up, it's right there at your fingertips, right at your desk. You can do a lot of your own research.

RW: You've witnessed a lot of turnover recently as some of your colleagues, a lot of it stemming from the 2005 pay raise. You served long enough you've had to see a lot of those come through. Why was 2005 different? Why did it create so much criticism and fervor from the public?

RK: I think what happened – the General Assembly misread the general public once again. That was a time, especially – and I'm speaking from my region, from southwestern Pennsylvania – we haven't recovered yet, we haven't recovered. The rest of the nation was doing fine but we were still lagging behind and such; the average income in my district was nowhere near what I was making as a Senator at the time and, this is just a guess, but I'm going to guess that the average income probably might have been about twenty-some-thousand, twenty-eight thousand dollars a year for an individual and probably only thirty-some, maybe, for a family, thirty, forty [thousand dollars] for a whole family and at that time, we were making seventy-six thousand dollars maybe? I'm not sure what it was. But at any rate, I was far and above that average income in my area and I was well aware of that. In good conscience, I could not vote for a pay-

raise based on the fact that people were suffering, people needed jobs, they were unemployed, they were hoping for a chance, and quite frankly, I was one that said that we shouldn't be doing this, people aren't going to be happy with this. A couple members came back to me way after the fact and said, "You were right," but these were some of the members who voted for it and ultimately had to answer for it.

RW: There's a lot of important events that occurred over the last thirty-two years of your service. One of the more tragic events was September 11th and Flight 93 crashing in your district; how did that affect your district and your service personally and what have you done to memorialize those victims over the last few years?

RK: As you speak and you're bringing that up, I'm going back, I'm sitting here getting chills right now just thinking of that tragic event that took place that day and, certainly, Somerset County was greatly affected and it rocked the people there. There were issues in Somerset in terms of why did that happen here? A lot of people, in their mind [saying], why did it happen here? Why didn't it happen somewhere else? There were some people thinking, what did we do wrong to have this happen on our soil? But, if you really think about it, it was the first battle on terrorism took place over the skies in Somerset County, something that I think we should really acknowledge and think deeply about, because the war didn't start over in the Middle East; it started here on our soil and we fought back. Americans fought back over the skies in Somerset County; they took control of that plane, they weren't going to let any further carnage or damage take place in [Washington] D.C. or wherever that plane was headed for. The theory is, it was heading for D.C. for the Capitol Building and such, but those passengers of that plane were

heroes and they saved many more people by giving up their own lives. I think those of us in Somerset County like I represent – I don't live there – but I represent, take pride in the fact that Americans stood up for the first time and that was the first battle and we won that battle. But for some time, it had an effect on the folks there in terms of what happened that day and how it happened, it happened in that county. In fact, there were people who had a very difficult time dealing with the situation. I have a story about that myself in terms of me; I was in Alaska back in the bush on a hunting trip with no communications when all of this happened. The outfitter that we were with had a satellite telephone that wasn't very good, so we weren't picking up things. We knew something bad had happened in America; we didn't know what. And as hours and time and even a day went by before we really knew, because there was all sorts of things coming in that America was invaded. They even had Anchorage being invaded, some of the people that were on there and some things that were being said and talked about. Of course we're stuck out here like half a dozen men living in tents and no communication, not knowing what's going on other than something very bad happened and its like, "What am I doing here? Why did I make this trip? I should be back there." Once we found out what had happened in Somerset, it was like that really got to me that I should be home with my people, with my constituents, I should be there and I'm stuck here, I can't get out because no planes are flying; they're not letting anything come in and out, especially those bush pilots because they were concerned about the Alaskan pipeline being sabotaged, so that even took a little longer before they lifted all of that. So, I was stuck there for better than a week, because we couldn't get out and people, they were stuck all over parts of Alaska. So, we finally got out of there, I got out of camp on a bush plane to Fairbanks, rushed right to the airport, got a flight to Anchorage. So, I'm thinking, this is not going to be too bad, I got this flight already; I'll be home by tomorrow. I get

to Anchorage, I can't get out of Anchorage; I'm stuck there. So, I'm sitting there – the counter is literally right in front of me – I'm standing there because the folks promised me the first plane anywhere where there was a seat to the lower forty-eight they were going to get me out of Alaska. And my thought then, if I could just get out of there, if I have to rent a car, I'll rent a car and drive home; I got to get back to Somerset County. So, at any rate, I'm not showered or anything, so you can imagine what a sight I was. It was so bad that when I really realized it, I kind of fell asleep there and I felt somebody tapping on my shoulder and I looked up and here's this little old lady there. She looks at me and asked me if I was homeless, if I needed a shelter or place to stay and it was like, oh my gosh; how terrible I must appear and look here with a beard, but it was something. Finally, they got me to Fargo, North Dakota. So, now I'm in Fargo, North Dakota and I'm stuck there because I can't get out of there and there's no cars to rent, so I finally get another flight to Minneapolis which that's –

RW: Not very far.

RK: Not very far, right. Then finally I get to Minneapolis and then Minneapolis to Pittsburgh and then when I got on the ground at Pittsburgh, I actually could have kissed the ground. I then immediately went home, cleaned up, got up there to the site and all of that and joined in all the vigils and the churches. I mean, it was just an outpouring of support and people wanting to help to do anything that they can. It affected the folks of that county. It long affected, you know? The memorial that's built there now, it's kind of sad that it took so many years to get to the point of actually constructing. I mean, those people lost their lives; they fought the battle. That should

have been done immediately. That memorial should have been done very quickly; it drug on too long, in my personal opinion.

RW: What types of issues are the toughest ones to vote for or even what are the legislatively tough issues facing Pennsylvania right now?

RK: Well, right now the budget that's going to be coming up next year, obviously I won't be a part of it, but I think next year's budget, there's going to be some very difficult times. There isn't much more to cut; everything's been cut to the bone and the sad part about it, in my personal opinion is, the cuts have not helped, even too drastic, haven't helped at all. Meanwhile, cuts in education and the loss of jobs; we have overcrowding in the classrooms now, we've lost probably twenty-thousand jobs in the field of education – I'm concerned, did we lose a generation of children because we didn't adequately take care of them? A lot of advanced classes were eliminated, tutoring classes were eliminated; we talk about being prepared for jobs in the future and competing in a global market and at the same time, we've failed our children here the last several years. That's very disturbing to me. Economic development programs that were put in place to promote growth and development and whatnot have been slashed and burned; we're not doing anything along those lines. Job growth is slow to a snail's pace, so now we're going to be faced with what are we going to do next year and there's probably going to be some issues out there and one of the things probably facing this next legislative session is whether they want to raise taxes in order to reestablish some of the cuts and to provide the education. A lot of kids aren't going to college anymore because of the cost of tuition kept going up by leaps and bounds over the last four years. The bleeding has to stop somewhere and if

we're going to be competitive, you know, if Pennsylvania is going to be competitive in this nation and worldwide, then we got to develop the programs that are going to provide to make us a leader like we were back in the last century. Pennsylvania led the world in terms of production, in terms of goods and products; we were there, we have fallen. The question we have to ask ourselves, do we want to get back there? Do we want to, once again, be a major player in terms of manufacturing? Eventually, we can't continue to be the consumer – and that's the nation, really – we can't consume all of the products if nobody's making money and don't have the ability to buy things, well, what's going to happen? So, I think we need to get back to manufacturing things; we need to start taking more care, pay more attention, to our own country and our own state here to develop and grow. The important thing that we all want to do and what I'd love to see happen – I had the opportunity, as I told you, to come back home and make my way. I wanted to live here, I never wanted to leave and I was fortunate. I had the opportunity to grow up here, to live here, to raise my family here, and to retire here and I'm not moving when I retire. Pennsylvania is home; Dunbar Township, Monarch, that's where I live, that's where I'm going to die. That's my home. I want every child to have that opportunity to stay in Pennsylvania, stay close to home. I want them to have those opportunities to have a choice, not be forced to have to leave. I want them to have the opportunity to be able to stay here. I hope we can provide that. We got a lot of work to do, I think it can be done, I think it can be accomplished if we provide those opportunities, I think a large part of our younger generation would love to stay here. Every time I go to a school, I always ask the question “How many, if you're given the chance, given the opportunity, how many of you would like to stay here in Pennsylvania or stay in your hometown? And invariably, the majority of them put up their hand,

they want to stay here; they want to be close to family, their friends, so as I said I had the opportunity, hopefully they have that.

RW: Why is the time right now for you to retire from public office?

RK: I think it's just come to the point where age – I'm sixty-seven years of age. If I ran again I'd be seventy-two years of age, so I think everybody has to kind of look at things and make the determination of when it's time and I've often heard people say that they knew when it was time and I knew it was time, that I was ready to move on to the next phase of my life. I worked since I was in the seventh grade. I worked since I was in the seventh grade, so if you look at that, that's quite a few years. I want to be able to relax, enjoy my life, spend some more time, try to make up with some little time with my family and my friends that, for the past thirty-two years being here in Harrisburg or being on the road, I wasn't able to do some of those things and I missed a lot of things with my family and they suffered because of my absence and things. So, I want to enjoy my family and friends, just relaxing, reminiscing, and volunteering. I want to be engaged in things back home in terms of, you know, I'm involved with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society; I chair their fundraising events back in our region. I'm involved with the Relay for Life, the American Cancer Society. I'm a member of the Fay-Penn Economic Development Council. And, with my knowledge, in terms of transportation, having served on Transportation Committee for years and also a member of the PennVEST Board, I think I could add something to our regional transportation group and also to the water authorities, sewage authorities, just the information and the knowledge I have I think could be beneficial. Hopefully, they'll see fit to allow me to be a part of all of this and to be more actively engaged in helping

out, just volunteering, giving something back. So, I'm not going to just quit and not do anything but while I can, I want to be able to share the knowledge that I have.

RW: What will you miss about serving?

RK: I'll miss the people and the friendships that have been created over the years. I'll miss the opportunity to be engaged in the budget process in terms of finding money for economic development, for hospitals, for water and sewage projects, things like that. I'll miss that action, I really will. I'll miss the constituency. This job has afforded me the opportunity to meet so many people from, you know, the President of the United States, the heads of state from some other countries, the senior citizen center to folks all around the state and some around the country for that matter; I will miss all of that. I've been the benefactor of being able to do this. Where else but in America could a person such as myself, coming from meager, humble beginnings in a coal mining patch, right? What other country in the world could you rise up and be able to become a member of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth or a Member of the Senate of Pennsylvania? It can only happen in America and I've been blessed, I'm very fortunate. I thank my grandparents constantly for their vision in terms of leaving Poland and leaving Croatia, getting on a boat, not knowing the language, not knowing what they were sailing into, taking weeks to get here just to have the guts and the courage to come here for a better way of life for them, their children and their offspring, their grandchildren. Had they not chose to do that, I would have never been afforded this opportunity, so I'm thankful for that every day of my life. I'm thankful for the wonderful family that I have and all the friends that I've made, so I will miss that interaction, of course. But I'm also blessed; I've never had an issue or problem with

getting up and going to work the next day. I loved going to work, I enjoyed it. There were stressful times, there were times like you said with some of the tough issues like tax votes and some of the other issues that were out there and whatnot that you had to make or not make, but there were stressful times and whatnot but in all and all, when I look back at it, I enjoyed it and I loved every minute of it and it was a great opportunity, great experience that I had. I'm very fortunate.

RW: Any regrets or disappointments that you're leaving behind?

RK: You know what, there are. We all have some regrets and things and, you know, there's some things that you'd like to see accomplished that you didn't get done and I was one of those guys early on, I thought every problem could be solved. You come to me with a problem; I'll solve your problem. I'll call the folks at whatever Agency, whatever Department, the Governor's office – whatever needed to be done – sit down and reason with them, talk to them, and we'll get these things taken care of. So, the hardest thing of all that was finally realizing that you can't, you can't solve every problem. You're going to be told no and probably be told no more often than you're told yes, and finally accepting that and being appreciative and happy about the things you were able to accomplish and being able to let go of some of the disappointments. One of the biggest disappointments I've had is just over the past four years or so, I introduced a piece of legislation concerning acid mine drainage and the blowouts and the problems that it's creating. When the gas and oil industry moved into Pennsylvania – well, they didn't move in, they just came in a bigger way; it's been here forever – but, when they came in with the Marcellus Shale and the fracking issues, a lot of people were concerned and had issues with the

fracking problems and the fact that they were taking clean water out of our rivers and our streams and whatnot to be used in this process. So, for many, many years I've been trying to think of ways how to use that mine water. How can we turn that which is a liability right now, how can we turn that into an asset? One day somebody will get this done and they'll figure it all out. We've got a reservoir throughout Pennsylvania where all of these old sites, they're filling up with water, they're blowing out and they're contaminating and they're polluting rivers and streams still to this day long after an industry is gone. So, these mine pools are filling up, so what do we do? We got to figure out a way how to use it because there's not enough money out there to actually go in and clean them up and treat it and whatnot. So, we came up with the idea that if we can take this mine water, let the gas and oil producers withdrawal the water from the mine instead of withdrawing it from the Mon River, the Yough, or the Ohio, or the Beaver River or the Susquehanna or whatnot, if we can get them on board to take this water and clean it, treat it, use it in their process and then clean it and treat it again and release it back into the streams, much better water quality in fact, drinking water standards is what the bill called for, what a great thing for Pennsylvania. We talked to the DEP, they liked the idea; we engaged the coal companies, they embraced the idea; we talked to the oil and gas industry, they embraced the idea. So the next step is the environmentalists, right? I'm thinking this should be very easy, because aren't they all about clean water? Aren't they about doing something about acid mine drainage? Guess who opposed it? The environmentalists opposed it because they're saying I was absolving the gas and oil industry of the liability. Well, the only thing we were absolving them from was the water that remained in the mine. Anything that they took out, they would be responsible and liable for, but for whatever reason, the environmentalists didn't like it; they wanted them to be responsible for all the water which wouldn't be fair. And why would I, as an

industry, why would I want to take on the responsibility of one-hundred million gallons of water when I'm only going to use a million or two million or whatever? So, I mean it was logical that they would think that way and they only wanted to treat what they used, which that's how we wrote the bill and we thought that was fair, but unfortunately now the bill didn't pass and the mine water still exists and will continue to have blowouts and such. But someday, somebody else will pick that cause up and we'll figure out how to turn that liability into an asset. It will happen.

RW: What advice would you have for people to run for public office or get involved with state government?

RK: Well first of all, I'd recommend that people do get involved. I don't care if it's school board or if it's your local municipality or county or state-wide or even on the national level – get involved. You have to be involved. Yeah, run, run for office. If you feel you have something to offer, if you got ideas, let's get out there, let's try to move forward. We need good ideas, we need thinkers, we need people who are going to be progressive and think ahead. If you're going to run for office, obviously, the first thing you have to do is, you know, you just don't put your name on the ballot and say "Okay, I'm running for office." No, you have to get out, you have to talk to people, you have to win their faith, you've got to win their trust, but by all means, get involved some way or another. And even if it's supporting another candidate, somebody you believe in, get involved. Your vote is important; it counts. We've seen time in and time out where people always say, "my vote don't count," well, yes it does; I've seen elections end in a tie. I don't know how many one-vote elections, mostly on local levels, obviously, but this

happens. But, you have to be involved in your community, you got to be involved in your state and in your country. By all means, we need new ideas, we need young people to get involved, we need you to care, we encourage you. Just like me; I had some ideas, I saw some things that weren't getting done and then it dawned on me well, it's not going to get done, as I mentioned earlier, complaining and whatnot, roll up your sleeves. If you got a better idea, if you have a better way then roll up your sleeves and do it; don't wait for somebody else. You can make a difference, you can bring change.

RW: What lesson have you learned from being a public servant that you'll take with you?

RK: What I've learned is, in all honestly, that there's so many good people out there. When I say good, I mean, just people who are concerned, who want to do things, who want to make things better, and they want to improve things, and the kindness of people. We always hear about the bad things or something that went awry or went wrong and what is that, two percent, one percent? Whatever it is. What I found out over the years, the sincerity of the people who are in public office and their intentions of doing good, being productive, and making change and whatnot. We might not always agree; I might not always agree with you but the fact of the matter is that this is America and the great thing about it is we are entitled to our opinions and, as elected officials, we're able to pursue those ideas and those dreams and whatnot. So, I think that's the thing that I've seen the most in terms of the sincerity, the kindness, and the interest in making a change and helping people helping others.

RW: My last question: how would you like your tenure as state official to be remembered?

RK: Well, I guess I go back to Bob Casey – former governor Casey always used to say this and I’ve heard him many times – that when you’re done, when you’re in a position such as myself as a former member of the House and soon to be a former member of the Senate, when you had the opportunity to do something and to bring about change, what did you do? Did you cower down? Did you do nothing? Or did you stand up and try to get something done or get something accomplished? When I look back, when I’m sitting in that rocking chair, right, thinking back and reminiscing about my career and I look back I’m going to ask myself that question; what did you do when you had the opportunity, what did you do when you had the chance? When I look back, I’m going to think about the Mon-Fayette Expressway, getting that highway built in Fayette County. I’m going to think about the number of families that I was able to help get water and sewage. I’m going to think about the opportunities that were created through the economic development projects that we did with the business parks and industrial parks, the economic development agency in our region; the money that we were able to bring home for those projects, the ability to bring home funds for health care at all my local hospitals and such. In fact, the road projects we were talking about – the Mon-Fayette – was the biggest road project in America at the time when we were going through that. I put up the votes and did all the necessary things to build that highway. That highway alone in Fayette County was a one billion dollar project. Also, there’s two other projects. One in Somerset County, Route 219; it was dead, it died, they said they were never going to build it. They had the press conference and the district engineer and everybody was there explaining why it couldn’t be done and so on, so it’s now my turn to speak and I got up and I said, “We’re going to build the highway. I’m not accepting this.” I looked at the district engineer, I said, “You’re an engineer; engineers build things. You’re going

to be a part of this; you're going to build this highway. We're going to make sure it's going to happen. I'm not giving up; I'm asking everybody else not to give up here." Within a year and a half, I was able to get funding in place to keep the project moving forward and today a section, a ten, eleven mile section of that highway is being built from Meyersdale to Somerset. So, I'm going to look at that and say, "Hey, you had an opportunity, you didn't give up, you didn't back down and that highway became a reality down the road." Route 21 in Fayette County, a two-lane highway which is probably the most dangerous highway, I'll say this, one of the most dangerous highways in Fayette County. For twenty years, for twenty years I worked at getting funding for safety improvements on that highway. Just recently they're pushing dirt around, they're finally to the point of improving that highway away from a two-lane highway to a four-lane highway with turning lanes and lights and whatnot to make it now, when it's done, it'll be one of the safest highways instead of one of the most dangerous highways in this Commonwealth. Things like that are going to be in my heart and in my mind forever. Like you said, the hospitals; every hospital in my senatorial district I've been able to provide capital budget money for funding to enhance their ability to provide services to the rural part, obviously, of Pennsylvania. It's just been a great experience. Those are the types of things I'm going to miss; not being able to call somebody or be engaged in the process of taking money back home for whatever the idea or whatever the project is. It's been a great experience. I will miss it, but a couple things I won't miss is living in that motel room and traveling down that turnpike especially through my district – Somerset County – when it may be sun shining here in Harrisburg, we're going through a snow storm or ice storm when we hit the mountain there right out of Somerset.

RW: Well, I want to thank you for your time on this project, thank you for your time of service.
I wish you a lot of luck in your future endeavors.

RK: Okay, I thank you. Thanks for this opportunity, too.

RW: Thank you sir.

RK: I appreciate it, Ray.