

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

**The Honorable Thaddeus Kirkland (D)**

159th District

Delaware County

1993-2016

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**Jennifer Ott (JO):** Good afternoon.

**The Honorable Thaddeus Kirkland (TK):** Good afternoon.

**JO:** I am here today with Representative Thaddeus Kirkland, a Democrat, who has represented the 159th district in Delaware County between the years 1993 and 2016. Thank you for being with me.

**TK:** It's a pleasure being here with you today. I look forward to the conversation.

**JO:** Good. I would like to ask you some questions about your time in the House, but before we get to that, could you describe your childhood and your family life, and how that prepared you for public service?

**TK:** Oh, my childhood. My childhood was a fun-filled childhood. I'm number seven of eight siblings. My parents, my mother and my father, matriculated from the south. My older brothers and sisters, I am the seventh of eighth, as I said, my older brothers and sisters were born in the south, South Carolina. My brother and I, my baby brother and I, were born here in Pennsylvania. Very family-oriented, we did everything together. My father was a pastor, as a matter of fact, he founded a church that I now pastor, back in the early [19]60s. We were very much into our community, very much into our family, and very much into our faith.

**JO:** Nice. Could you talk a little bit about your educational experiences?

**TK:** Sure. I am a graduate of Chester High School, home of the Chester Clippers. I graduated from high school in 1973. I loved athletics; I played basketball for the high school, did a little cross country for the high school. Unfortunately, we didn't have a swimming team, but I love swimming. I loved everything about my high school experience, and after graduating from high school, went on to Cheney University, the oldest historically black university of higher learning in the country. I graduated from Cheney University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications, and I went on to Eastern Theological Seminary. I attended the seminary for a few years, and I am also a graduate of Widener University's Leadership Academy.

**JO:** All right. What did you do as your profession before switching to politics?

**TK:** Before I got into politics, I was a community services coordinator for Crozer-Chester Medical Center. Not only was I community services coordinator for them, I was also an HIV and AIDS counselor. My brother, who had been working in the field of HIV and AIDS, introduced me to the HIV and AIDS counseling possibilities. At first, because of the stigma and the negative talk about HIV and AIDS, I was reluctant to get involved. But, as I learned more and more about it and became a counselor and began to work with persons who not only were infected with HIV and AIDS or those persons who were not infected, but educating young people about HIV and AIDS, It became very clear to me that not only was this a field that I enjoyed, but it was very helpful to other people. Being a counselor for youth with Crozer-Chester Medical Center gave me an opportunity to go out into the field and talk to young expecting mothers; that was my job, dealing with young ladies who were pregnant, making sure

they had the right type of nutrition, making sure that they kept up with their doctors' appointments, and such. So, I was far away from the political realm in my previous life.

**JO:** Yeah, a human service is a tough job. What made that shift to the political world?

**TK:** Well, trust me, it wasn't me, but what caused the shift is my attendance of school board meetings. I would go to school board meetings or visit some of the schools in my district, visit my daughters' schools, and I wasn't pleased with some of the things that were going on; the lack of equipment, the lack of opportunities. It seemed as though the school district was cutting back more, and more, and more on different curriculum and different courses. And so, I used to go to school board meetings and voice my opinion. Sometimes, I would voice it in a manner that drew a lot of attention, let's put it that way. But in my quest to bring a quality education to the city of Chester and Chester Upland School District, persons began to notice my passion and my commitment to education and they approached me about running for this seat. Prior to me running for this seat, Bobby Wright, Robert Wright [State Representative, Delaware County, 1981-1992], was the holder of the 159th Legislative District seat. Bob went on to become a Delaware County Judge, and so it was a vacant seat and out of the blue—I mean, I recommended a number of persons to run, but the folks kept coming back to me. So, here we are 24 years later.

**JO:** Yeah, that's quite a journey. So, what was your experience during your first campaign?

**TK:** Ah, I remember a lady by the name, her name was Edwina. And she worked with Representative Curtis Thomas [W. Curtis Thomas; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1989-2018], I did not really know him at the time, but they came down. She explained to me, you'll know when you've really worked hard, you'll know when you've worked to the point where you can be victorious when you lift up the bottom of your shoe and there's a giant hole in the bottom. In other words, meaning, you have to hit the pavement, you have to knock on doors; you have to go to where the people are. And so, my first experience was one that was just on the road, constantly on the road, constantly meeting people, constantly learning, and constantly reaching out and listening. It was a great experience, even when you ran into some opposition; at least you have an opportunity to hear what the people are thinking. And so, it was a great experience, and, yes, I did wear my shoes out; I did actually have a hole in the bottom of my shoe when I finished my first campaign.

**JO:** That's impressive. Did campaigning change from the beginning of your time in office to the more recent elections?

**TK:** Oh, yeah, and it changed for a number of reasons. Number one, the funding and financing for a campaign; it just costs more now to run a campaign. Back then, it was more personal, one-on-one, like I said, meeting and greeting. Now, you have TV and you have radio. Back then, you had to get out into the field. Now, you have to raise so much money in order to be competitive. At that time, it wasn't so mean-spirited. The negative stuff that you see today, not only in the presidential races, but in just about every race now, everything is so negative,

negative; it's not talking about the candidate himself or herself, what do you bring to the table?  
That's what we did in my early years.

**JO:** Do you enjoy campaigning?

**TK:** I used to. No, no, I do, I do. When I say I used to, I was a lot younger then, and I had a lot more bounce in my step and my knees didn't hurt as much, but I still really do enjoy campaigning. It's an opportunity to get out into the public and really talk to the people and really listen to the people. I've always enjoyed campaigning. I can't campaign like I used to because of the physical restraints now; I'm older, my knees hurt a little more, but I always find myself up to the challenge when it comes to campaigning. I can honestly say that I've never had a bad experience campaigning.

**JO:** That's good. Do you remember your first Swearing-In Ceremony, or have any others that stick out in your memory?

**TK:** I remember my very first one. I'll never forget my very first Swearing-In, because when I raised my right hand, I asked myself, "My God, what have I got myself into?" I never ran for office before, I was never an elected official, and when I raised my hand at the Swearing-In, I said to myself, this is real. Now what? But, fortunately, I had some great mentors.

**JO:** Was this your first time in Harrisburg, your Swearing-In, or had you been to the city before?

**TK:** I had been to Harrisburg years and years – this was my first time in the Capitol, but years and years ago I had been to Harrisburg, but it was my first time being in the Capitol. Matter of fact, the funny part was when I was here, when I first came to the Capitol, I went to my office, and I was parked in the garage, and I forgot something in my car. I went downstairs to the garage to my car, and, of course, I was walking around lost in the garage for about an hour. This is a very big place and very impressive place. I'll never forget my secretary was like, "Where were you?" And I said, "Walking around in the garage for about an hour trying to find out how to get back here."

**JO:** I doubt you're the only one who had that experience. So, tell me a little bit about your district.

**TK:** My district, the 159th Legislative District, is considered a waterfront district, working class district, a mixture of races within my district; it's not all African American, not all white American, not all Latino, it is a mixture of races, which I am very pleased with. It is a district that has more Democrats than Republicans, but it is a district that I have been able to navigate and work closely with all the elected officials, and I'm very proud of that. As a matter of fact, for many a year, I was the only Democrat, and I represent 10 municipalities, including Chester, and so, for a long period of time, I was the only Democratic elected official in my district. I kind-of pat myself on the back with that because I was able to work with those elected officials and continue to be the legislator even up until today.

**JO:** What are some of the issues that are important to your district and the constituents there?

**TK:** One of the main issues is education. We want to make sure that all of our children have a quality education. We continue to fight for that. The other is job creation. We want to make sure that there's an opportunity, especially for our young people, to obtain real employment, not only in their community, but wherever they might go. So, employment opportunities are always a main issue. And, of course, the unfortunate thing is dealing with gun violence. I've been trying since I've been here to find ways of removing guns from our streets, getting the guns out of our young people's hands, because we lose too many potentially great minds by way of violence far too often. Those are three of the top issues that concern me, and that I'll continue to work on even after I leave the House.

**JO:** Has it been hard to balance being in Harrisburg and in your district when it's geographically so far?

**TK:** It has not. The reason it has not is because I have a good staff. If you have good people working with you and for you, they cover the blank spots in your work schedule. So, it has not been hard. The only hard part—well, sometimes the difficult part is the travel, but at the same time, if you use your travel time wisely as quiet time, it all works out.

**JO:** What has been the impact on your family? You have several daughters and many grandchildren now, I believe?

**TK:** Yeah, many, many, many. Twelve.

**JO:** Wow.

**TK:** Twelve grandchildren.

**JO:** Is it hard to balance that?

**TK:** Well, it becomes – it's not hard, but you regret some of the things. When I started as a legislator, I remember my youngest daughter – I'll say Shannon must have been about seven or eight – because I remember her standing, I'm washing dishes one day, and she's standing on the stool, and she's helping me wash dishes. And as the years went by, Shannon now has her own two children, and I'm sitting there and I'm thinking back, wow, I missed a lot of that. I missed a lot of her growing up. I missed a lot of my other daughters growing up, but the sacrifice that I made in missing them growing up, that's why I'm so fortunate to have such a person as my wife, Susie, who basically held down the camp while I was gone. The sacrifices that I've made, I think, paid off in the long run, because I honestly believe that my district is a better place not just because of the work that I have done, but because of the lives that I've touched and that have touched me. And so, yeah, it was a sacrifice. Was it worth it? Yeah.

**JO:** Good. Do you consider yourself as having more of a legislative focus or more of a district focus?

**TK:** A district focus; I'm a people person. I think, in the long run, people need almost immediate results; they need you there, they need to see you, they need to hear from you, they need you to listen to them. Most of the time, I think, most of the persons that we represent, that all of us represent, they're not focused on the legislative side, they're focused on, what can my legislator do for me right now, at home? Will my legislator be at the graduation? Will my legislator be at the town hall meeting? Will my legislator be at the fair or the festival? Will my legislator be at his or her office when I stop by with my complaint or my concern or my birth certificate? I think that is what most folks are looking at, not so much legislation. Yeah, I'm a district kind of guy.

**JO:** What kind of legislative funding are you proud of securing in your district? It's had a lot of growth and changes over the years that you've been here.

**TK:** Well, we've secured the legislative funding for Harrah's Casino coming, we were part of that. We secured the funding for our soccer stadium being built. It's now Talen soccer stadium [Talen Energy Stadium] being built in my district. We've secured some funding for the PECO plant that was once a closed plant, but now is beautiful office space. We've secured some funding for some facilities in Monroe Energy and facilities in Marcus Hook. There are a number of areas that we were very, very successful in helping, along with our schools throughout the 159th Legislative District, being able to secure funding for them, as well. We were the original person to secure – or legislator to secure funding for 291 Highway, and I remember negotiating with then-Governor Ridge [Tom; Governor of Pennsylvania, 1995-2001]. It was funny because this was a 68 million dollar project, and my leaders at the time wanted me not to support a gas

tax, and I told them, “If I can secure the funding” – because they took away my funding for 291 – “If I can secure funding for my highway, would you guys be okay with that?” They said, “Well, if you can get it in writing.” I guess they didn’t believe that I could get it, and I went to the Governor, he called me in his office and he wanted my vote, and I said, “Governor, I need my money back for my Highway 291.” And we went back and forth and back and forth and finally the Governor agreed, and I said, “Can I get that in writing?” And he wrote something, and I presented it to my leadership, and they said, “No, that’s not it.” He wrote something else, I presented it to my leadership, and they said, “That’s not it, either.” He finally wrote something else, and my leadership said, “I can’t believe you got it.” I said, “I got it.” We were very, very proud of that and it was a laughable moment because the leadership, they were stunned. They were like, “How did you do that? You’ve only been here a couple of years.” We were very proud of that. That was a good moment.

**JO:** I want to move on to talk about some of your relationships here in the House. Did you have any mentors, and if so, who might they be?

**TK:** Wow. When I got here, and like as I said before, it was just a wild moment and a shocked moment, what do I do now? The best thing that ever happened to me, my seating assignment was right beside David P. Richardson [David P. Richardson, Jr.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1973-1996]. David had been in the House for a number of years prior to me coming here, and David was not only a legend here but a legend in Philadelphia. David pulled me under his wing and told me, he said, “Watch me.” He said, “Vote as I do. Listen to me,” and he says, “but always remember,” he said, “you’ll know when you arrive.” He said,

“Vote your district, always vote your district no matter what.” We were doing one piece of legislation and David was very supportive of it but it wasn’t helping my district. And when my vote went up “no,” David looked at me and said, “What’re you doing?” I said, “Voting my district, Dave.” He said, “Okay, you’ve made it, you’ve made it.” So, David P. Richardson was my mentor. I had other mentors as well, like, he’s now [State] Senator Hughes, Vincent Hughes [Vincent J. Hughes; State Representatives, Philadelphia County, 1987-1994; State Senator, 1995-present] was a great mentor. He basically took me under his wing, worked with me, showed me the ropes in dealing with the legislator and dealing with Members as well. Curtis Thomas is another one. Louise Williams [Louise E. Williams Bishop; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1989-2015] was a mentor, and Harold James [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1989-2008, 2012]. These are all persons that I work with, very proud to work with them. They helped me go through legislative processing and grow into the person that I am today.

**JO:** Have you taken on a mentorship role for anybody over the years?

**TK:** I have not taken over a mentorship role here in the House. I will be talking to some Members as I exit the House, in particular members of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus, of which I was once chair. I want to pull them to the side and talk to them about the importance of working together. I have not taken on a mentor role with any of them. I have taken on a mentorship role with my successor, my potential successor [Brian Joseph Kirkland; State Representative, Delaware County, 2017-present]. I’ve been mentoring him for the last 11 years. He has worked with me, for me and for the House in my legislative district office. That’s

why I recommended him to be my successor, and I will continue to mentor him. Outside the House of Representatives, I have been a mentor in one young man's life particularly, and I've always said this, how important it is for persons who have a position or in some type of position of authority to reach back, grab a young person, at least be in their lives for the next three to five years, because what usually happens, if it's three to five, it's for life. I have a young man by the name of Fred Aubrey Green that I met when he was in fifth grade. Fred is now 22 years old, I think, and Fred works in city government along with me. He was going a very dangerous path back in fifth grade, and I just kind of took him under my wing, and now he's doing pretty darn good for himself.

**JO:** That's nice to hear. What's been your relationship with the media, and is it different in Harrisburg than in your home district?

**TK:** Terrible – no, no, no. The media, you know, the media is what the media is. Let's deal with the media here first; my relationship with the media here has been a very positive one. You know, I just believe in the truth, no matter what the truth is; if it hurts, it hurts, if it's gonna help you grow, it helps you grow. So, my relationship with the media here has always been a very positive one. Even when there are times when one reporter came at me when I was in the garage and talked about a possible negative story that was coming out about my past life, before I became a legislator and all that stuff, and I simply told the individual, "You gonna write what you're gonna write, as long as my past stays behind me, I'm okay." So, on the whole, my relationship with the media has been a very positive one here. Media back home will always be media back home. They love you today, they hate you tomorrow, they love you today and they

hate you tomorrow; it is what it is. You're always gonna be in the public limelight and you just have to accept the ups and downs. As I said, my background is in communications, minor in journalism, and I know what sells and what does not sell. I know what to expect, and, hopefully, they know what to expect from me. The media has a job to do, I have a job to do, our relationship has been sometimes cold, sometimes very warm, sometimes it's just in the middle, but it has always been a working relationship, never a relationship where there was any disrespect from myself or the individuals.

**JO:** Do you think that partisanship is impacting the work you do more and more, or has it stayed pretty consistent throughout your time?

**TK:** Well, mine has stayed very consistent. There was a time when we were very bi-partisan here, when folks, we just worked together, we just worked. I mean, that's why I love my earlier years as a legislator because when we argued on the House floor, it was never really an argument; it was more or less a debate. And afterwards, we would look at each other, whether it be Democrat, Republican, black, white, Hispanic, and look at each other and say, "Okay, who's buying lunch after Session?" We would all go out, and we would have camaraderie, we would joke, we would laugh about how we were going at it on the floor with each other. It's different now, It's different now; it's too personal, it's too partisan, it's too personal, too separate, and it's almost like there's a line drawn in the sand and folks don't know how to erase that line and work with one another. I see more and more of that now, and I guess that's the painful part of being a legislator now, is that we don't have the Rodney King attitude; can't we all just get along?

We're here to do a job, but we should never take stuff personal when it comes to dealing with our fellow colleagues.

**JO:** You briefly mentioned being part of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus. Can you talk a little bit about your role was and what that organization does in general?

**TK:** Sure, sure. Well, one of the highlights of my legislative life was being selected as chairman of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus. Down through history, no one outside of Philadelphia has ever been chairman of the Caucus. Because of my commitment and my hard work within the Caucus, I finally, when I ran for chair, I won, and I won two terms and it was because I had the support of the members of the Caucus, and they saw something in me which afforded me the opportunity to lead the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus. What that Caucus does, it does not just focus on the cause of African Americans but more on the cause of the persons who are impoverished, focuses on the cause of job creation in poor communities, focuses, once again, on the causes of better education for everyone, and it raised the awareness about issues of urban communities, issues of gun violence, and other things. It brought that to the table. We were educators of other Members of the House about what actually goes on, not only in our communities, but in poor urban communities. So, It was a great experience, it's a great Caucus, and that's why, before I leave, I will have some parting comments and hopefully be able to mentor, because there are a member of young members within the Caucus now, hopefully be able to mentor them and encourage them to work together, because you get more done when you work together.

**JO:** Did you also have a role as chaplain at the national level?

**TK:** Yeah, yeah. Oh, wow, I forgot about the national, yeah, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. Not only was I chaplain, but I was the vice president also for a number of years. Matter of fact, up until about three or four years ago I was vice president. The National Caucus, we would put together legislation that would help caucuses throughout the country. That was a very exciting time, working with other national leaders within the Caucus and being in a leadership role, it was a great responsibility. It offered the opportunity to do a lot of travelling and to not only raise issues, but to get some things done.

**JO:** I want to move on to some of the issues and legislation that you've introduced throughout the years. We've talked about a couple of times gun control. Why has this been so important, and what are the challenges in addressing this sometimes controversial topic?

**TK:** Well, it's important because of the generations that we're losing in our inner cities. In the legislation that we introduce, very common sense legislation, for example, you know, the one gun a month that we've worked on. One of the things that I've introduced, also, was if a person does not have a license to own a gun, then they should not be able to purchase ammunition. I found that to be odd when I talked to my law enforcement personnel, they said, anybody, anybody can walk into a gun shop and say, give me a box of shells, and there's no questions asked. I said, now, in order to get married, you need a license, in order to fish, you need a license. You need a license to drive. You need a license for everything under the sun, but you don't need a license to purchase ammunition. I didn't get it. So, I basically said, not only are we

arming the criminals, now we're telling them they can come in and make sure that they have enough ammunition for their weapons. This was a type of legislation that we were trying to push. The problem in doing so was that Pennsylvania is a big NRA [National Rifle Association] state or Commonwealth; there are a number of hunters here. I don't want to take away from anyone's hunting rights or ability to own a weapon, but, heck, Bambi doesn't run through my streets. I don't think anyone's hunting Bambi or a rabbit or any other animal with an AK-47 automatic weapon. These are some things that we were trying to get people to understand, not trying to attack their right as gun owners, but trying to get them to understand our right to live in peace and harmony at home.

**JO:** Education has been, obviously, a central part of the lot of the work you have done. What are some of the challenges that the schools in your district are facing or have faced?

**TK:** The challenges that the schools in my district are facing are multiple, one of them being funding. It seems as though there's never enough funding for our school, and we can't keep going back and taxing an already over-taxed base. And so, right now we have a number of charter schools, so our regular public schools have to siphon off the money from the public schools to help pay the charter schools' bills. So, funding has always been an issue. The other thing is programming. We've cut a number of programs that are vitally needed for our kids to excel: fine arts, music, dance, recreational programs. You can't just ask a child today, you know, just come into the classroom, sit down, do the math, do the science, do these things, but don't mess around and do the fun things. There's no music in your life, there's no band, there's no – these are the things that kept young people grounded and focused and helped them become a

better person within their own schools in their communities. It's very difficult now for you to be surrounded by other schools, by other districts, that are affluent, and they have everything that they need, and you're struggling with the little that you have. I tell our young people every day that they are doing an excellent job with what they have. If they had half of what the other school districts that surround the have, they would just be off the charts. So, these are the struggles that we deal with, and we continue to deal with them because, unfortunately, we have a legislature that has never walked a mile in our shoes.

**JO:** You've been an advocate for after school programs, and that also seems to have been a bit of a struggle. Why, and what would you wish could have been done?

**TK:** Well, I wish they would come to my church – and this is a shameless plug – I wish they would come to my church, because what I realize is, we've tried, legislatively – and this goes back to, am I a legislative kind of guy or am I a district guy – we've tried it legislatively. And I said, "You know what? Go back to the district and do it." Today, we have an after school program at our church, and I'm trying to get other churches to do the same, and it's been in place for the past six, seven years now. There are approximately 40-45 kids from charter schools, cyber schools, regular public schools. We have an after school program that we operate three days out of the week. No type of funding, none; I believe in tithes and offerings. And we've had a number of retired – I don't even know if I should use that word, because a teacher never retires – educators who work that after school program. We have a reading specialist, we have a major colonel, we have all types of persons, a former chief of police; they all come back three days out the week, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, to work with these kids for two and a half hours

three days out of the week, and we have a full kitchen staff that makes sure that when those kids are finished with their work and tutoring, that they're fed a full course meal at no cost. These kids are excelling. There were a couple of children, who were reading – they're in fourth grade – at a first grade level, couple years back, first grade level. We brought in the reading specialist, who volunteers her time. Today, a couple years later, those children are now reading on level and loving it, and loving it. So, my goal is to encourage and continue to encourage other, especially places of worship and faith, to incorporate in their worship services or experiences, after school programming, because it makes for a better individual.

**JO:** Congratulations on that program that sounds very wonderful. You've introduced legislation that called for providing for expungement of criminal records after a certain amount of time.

What motivated your work on that issue?

**TK:** What motivated my work on it was we brought in a casino, Harrah's Casino, and I knew at the time, I said, wait a minute, as they were going over the legislation for the casino, the casino gaming legislation, that persons who have had criminal backgrounds would not be able to work within the gaming industry. Not only that industry, but so many other opportunities that are out there, persons who may have done something in the past when they were 15, 16, 17, 18 years old and they are now 30 and their life has been completely turned around, still run up against that brick wall that says, you know, you did something 10, 15 years ago; sorry, we can't hire you. That person is not the same person today that they were 10 to 15 years ago. So, this motivated me to begin to put together some legislation that deals with expungement of records. Now, was it successful here? Once again, you know, in the House? No, it wasn't successful. So, what did

I do? Back to the district; I have a young man that works in my staff back in the district, and he and I got together, and he put together, Eric Bayne, an excellent expungement program. We started walking people through the expungement process. Guess what? We got somebody expunged, and then it started snowballing, and snowballing, and snowballing. Today, we continue that process in the city, and we've gotten a number of persons – Eric, I've got to take my hat off to him, Eric, who put this program together – and a number of persons have gotten records expunged. We were unable to do it legislatively, but we were able to do it districtly.

**JO:** Your district had a bit of a unique situation for a number of years in which it was classified as a food desert where there is not access to grocery stores and things. What was your experience addressing that issue?

**TK:** Well, the sad part is that we ate. Bottom line was we had to go outside and shop; had to go to other areas outside the city of Chester. That was very frustrating, especially when you live in a city that had three supermarkets at the time when I was young. It's very painful, very hurtful, very distressing, you know, to be labeled as a food desert. I was fortunate enough to work along with then-Governor Ed Rendell [Edward; Governor of Pennsylvania, 2003-2011] and secured a six million dollar grant from the Governor to start the process of bringing in a major supermarket train. Unfortunately, when the Governor left office, and I have been trying – and once again I told you I was the only Democrat for a long time – so some person saw this as a threat, I guess, to their political survival, because, whoa, he's finally secured the money for us to have a supermarket and more. So, they kind of blocked it; they slowed everything down within my own community, elected officials in my own community. Then, when Governor Corbett [Tom;

Governor of Pennsylvania, 2011-2015] became Governor, somehow mysteriously that 6 million dollars just disappeared. That was hurtful. We now have a smaller market, but we do have a market fair-and-square, and hopefully other markets coming in the very near future as mayor, because now all of those political walls and barriers have been torn and knocked down. Now, the opportunities for us to encourage and engage with other supermarket chains, the road to that is much easier now.

**JO:** Good. You've introduced legislation and supported efforts to address environmental concerns in your district several times. Can you describe your experiences with those?

**TK:** You've done your homework, huh? Yes, you have. Yeah, we were dealing with – I've worked with environmentalists down through the years, especially when they came to trash-to-steam, we were very vocal on our efforts to make sure we're trying to keep a trash steam plant out of our community. We were unsuccessful in doing so, and so the next step was to make sure that if they're going to be there, that they abide by the rules, that we put safeguards in place to make sure that these facilities weren't harmful to the community and surrounding areas. And so, we were excited about being a part of introducing legislation or being supportive of legislation that would encourage these facilities to do the right thing. It took a while, but now we have in place now, a company called Covanta, and Covanta is now – they are trash to steam – one of the best partners that the city has ever had. Why? Because there are regulations in place that they have not only followed, but they have gone above and beyond the call of duty because we've worked so hard on these environmental issues.

**JO:** What have you and your district's experience been since slot machines and table games have been legalized and has your position on gambling changed over time?

**TK:** I'm broke. No, my position on gambling has not changed. I support the gaming initiative. I support the gaming industry. I'm not the guy when it comes to gaming, gambling; I just don't like losing my money. But I also am concerned about persons who are in poor communities trying to get rich quick. My thinking has not changed, but my support for them has changed because of the benefit that they've brought to the city, especially a city that has been struggling for so many years. They have been a helpmate to the city of Chester. I think they make up one third of their budget. They've been a great help in that. Now, there's a threat to that right now, because of the Supreme Court ruling saying that the distribution of the funds from the gaming may not be proper. So, now we're going back at that, but we're confident that we'll continue to receive the share that we've been receiving from the gaming industry, Harrah's in particular. So, I'm still – and I don't know if you remember it – I still ask the questions, I wash my hands of it, and I give my community what my community has asked for, not what they so desperately need.

**JO:** Okay. How hard has it been to balance your work as a minister while also holding political office?

**TK:** It has not been hard at all. Matter of fact, my being a minister and a pastor has kind of prepared me to be a legislator, be in this office. It has prepared me to deal with people in a different way. It has prepared me to be able to work across the aisle. It has prepared me to even recognize when I have said or done something wrong to one of my colleagues, to be able to go

back and say, “You know what? I shouldn’t have said that, I shouldn’t have done that. I want to public apologize to you for my comments.” It has prepared me to not take everything personally, not walk around with a chip on my shoulder. It has prepared me to be able to wake up every morning and say, “Okay, God’s giving you another opportunity to get things right. Yesterday’s gone, you might have messed up yesterday, but you can get it right today.” So, being a minister, being a pastor has helped me more than I could ever imagine. I am grateful beyond the fact that I went down the ministerial path before I went down the political path because of how it has given me an experience to be able to look at people in a different light and find – you know, some people find the negative in everybody – and find something positive in everyone. So, I’m glad that the pastoral part of me has risen to the top, and I always keep it at the top, even here, because sometimes I have to ask for forgiveness for myself, because even some thoughts, I’m like, you’re not even supposed to think like that, keep it moving.

**JO:** We mentioned that sometimes when you introduce legislation, it doesn’t go the way you would like, but through the amendment process, sometimes you are able to make some changes. Can you describe that process and some success you’ve had?

**TK:** Well, the amendment process, you are able to make some changes and get some things through. I was able to amend a couple of education bills in order to get the money, million dollars or so, needed for my district that was struggling. The amendment process is sometimes, you can attach it to a bill whereby persons are extremely supportive of that bill, and sometimes that’s the only tool you have in order to get something done. Sometimes, they’ll ask you, “Would you be so kind as to remove your amendment so we can move the bill?” Sometimes,

you're gracious enough to say, "Okay, I can," but those things that are so important, such as education funding of my school district, the Members on the other side and our side clearly knew that this was something important, this was something that needed to be done and were supportive of that, as well, so we were able to use that process in order to get the desperately needed funds for our school district.

**JO:** Good. What legislation are you most proud of having been a part of or having worked on?

**TK:** Most proud of having worked on. I got to say, you asked the question about how I felt about the gaming legislation? I think I'm most proud of working on the gaming legislation, because I made it clear – one of the things we do in the back rooms when you're working on a piece of legislation, I made it clear to the Governor, I said, "This is not important to me. What's important to me is a supermarket. What's important to me is my school district, and if I can't talk to you or talk to the Senate and talk to my colleagues in the House about what's important to me, then you can't really talk to me about this gaming legislation." And so, the conversation began. The 6 million dollars came into play down the road for the supermarket that was supposed to be there and the million dollar funding. So, that all came about because I worked with both the Governor and the Senate and the House, and I consented to be supportive of the gaming legislation. So, I'm proud of that because of what mushroomed from that.

**JO:** Okay. What legislation are you most disappointed that sort of got away from you or didn't come to be?

**TK:** The one I'm most disappointed in is – there are two pieces; one, prayer in schools, because I believe that that will change an awful lot of the environment in our schools today; and the other deals with gun legislation. That was painful, that was hurtful, because I would just hope folks would understand the pain that we suffer in our inner cities sometimes. So, those two things were probably the most hurtful.

**JO:** What is your strength as a legislator?

**TK:** My faith in God. Short and sweet.

**JO:** Easy enough.

**TK:** Well, my faith in God and my family.

**JO:** Okay. What motivated your shift from moving from the House to becoming the mayor of Chester?

**TK:** Well, what motivated my shift; I had no intentions of leaving the House until the 25 years. What motivated it was because there was a void in leadership back home. The number of the elected officials back home kept pleading with me and pleading with me and saying, you know, we want you to come back home, you've been in Harrisburg long enough, we need your help here. I thought about it, I prayed about it, I went to my family about it; I prayed some more about it and I finally made the decision. And the other motivation was that this House has

changed; the attitudes have changed, the relationships have changed. Quite frankly, what has changed everything, I believe, change started to come when cameras were introduced on the House floor, and folks, legislators, began to speak to the cameras. They continue to speak to the cameras and not from the heart. So, that was my motivation to go back home, find persons that I can work with, that I can disagree with, that I can argue with, but that we could all agree that we're here to do the will of the people, we're here to help the folk, and then get finished arguing and look at each other and say, "Okay, who's buying dinner?"

**JO:** I'd like to talk a little bit about your work on committees. You've been on numerous throughout your years here. Which did you most enjoy working on?

**TK:** Oh, tourism [House Committee on Tourism and Recreational Development]. Tourism. Nothing like tourism. Tourism was the number one committee, because you had the opportunity to not only just – I never realized how beautiful and how great the resources were in Pennsylvania until I became not only a member, but chairman of Tourism, which was just one of the highlights of my life. One of my other colleagues, Jerry Stern [State Representative; Bedford and Blair Counties, 1993-2014] who retired a couple years ago, I love working with Jerry Stern. Chairman Stern and I were like a hand in glove and being a part of the Tourism Committee and chairing the Tourism Committee and going throughout Pennsylvania seeing how great the Commonwealth was, was just a joy. This is one time I wish I could just take a camera and just have it on my shoulder and just let the world see how awesome a place the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is; I enjoyed that with my whole heart. One of the things about the Tourism Committee, it's one of the few Committees if not the only Committee here in the House that we

never had an argument or dispute. It was truly a working Committee, a Committee that truly respected each other.

**JO:** What are some of the fun places you got to go as part of that Committee?

**TK:** Oh, the Poconos – and I’m trying to think – and Nemaquin? I think it’s called Nemaquin. I’m trying to remember if that’s the proper pronunciation, but it dealt with mountains and waterfalls, and oh, just beautiful. Pittsburgh, I love going to Pittsburgh. There are so many areas that we traveled to. Philadelphia, when I brought the committee to Philadelphia, some of them had never been to Philadelphia, and to look at some of the sights in Philadelphia. It was just a great experience. The Gettysburg experience in going to Gettysburg and basically hearing the story of the Battle of Gettysburg was just awesome, and we were all awestruck and also painful hearing that story and you wonder why today we continue in the wars when you see what happened here on our own Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

**JO:** Sounds like a fun Committee. How important are Committees to the legislative process?

**TK:** I think they’re extremely important, because you get a flavor of the Commonwealth. You get a flavor of the needs of the folk and these Committees have an opportunity to go into these communities and hear from residents and hear from industry and hear from educators and hear from people of all walks of life, from lawyers and doctors, and all walks of life. These Committees are set up to go out and not only hear from them, then go back without taking knee-jerk reactions and just creating legislation. So, the Committee process, I think, is the glue that

holds the legislature together; it's extremely important. Not just to hold a seat on the Committee, but to be actively engaged and involved in a Committee. To go back to some of the other Committees I was actively engaged and involved in: Education Committee, Urban Affairs Committee. These were Committees where you went places, and you saw things that made you kind of cringe, at times, and then you saw some things that were so successful you wanted to say, "How do I get this back home?" So, that's what the Committees were set up to do, give you a vision, give you a view, and give the folks back home a voice.

**JO:** Alright. I'd like to move on to some of your memories from here in the House. What were some of the most memorable events that happened here?

**TK:** Some of them I cannot tell you.

**JO:** Those are the ones I want to hear.

**TK:** You know, the most memorable events were the three and four o'clock in the morning sessions, when Members would sometimes get a little bit agitated, and in their agitation, begin to confront one another. They were battling with fatigue and some other things late at night, but it was quite comical at the time. I just remember those late night sessions, and not only late night sessions, sometimes the sessions would go throughout the night, and we would find ourselves still working at five and six o'clock in the morning. They're memorable because, I guess, the leadership was wearing us down on both sides and say, keep them here all night, we'll eventually

get outta here and get something done. That was probably the most memorable and laughable times that we've had here, working throughout the night and into the next morning.

**JO:** Did you have the opportunity to meet any people that you wouldn't have otherwise met if you weren't here in the legislature?

**TK:** Sure. I met Arnold Palmer and that was amazing. I had the opportunity to meet Michael Vick. We had the opportunity to meet Franco Harris. Had I not been here, probably wouldn't have met those persons. I had an opportunity to meet President Clinton [Bill; President of the United States, 1993-2001]. I had an opportunity to meet President Obama [Barack; President of the United States, 2009-2017] and Mrs. Obama [Michelle]. I probably would never have had that opportunity if I were not a legislator. I had the opportunity to work with and meet, as a freshman, Governor Casey [Bob Casey, Sr.; Governor of Pennsylvania, 1987-1995]. These were people who were game changers throughout, not only the Commonwealth, but throughout the world, and having the opportunity to meet these people, I wouldn't have had that opportunity if I wasn't a legislator.

**JO:** Nice. What aspect of being a Representative did you enjoy the most?

**TK:** Camaraderie, camaraderie and the staff. I keep telling my staff, I said, y'all guys will miss me, but I'll miss them, too; the camaraderie and the staff. I love working with legislators here, I did. I love camaraderie, being able to bond and build new relationships, and I love working with my staff, I love having fun with my staff. I never want the workplace to be stiff and regimented

and boring. And so, I would always come in and do something crazy, but I love working with my staff, and I wanted my staff to be comfortable, because I believe if your staff is comfortable and if you keep them laughing, keep them happy, they'll keep working.

**JO:** What did you enjoy the least?

**TK:** The two hour ride. The two hour ride, especially in the winter time and when I had the experience with black ice. That was the most frightening experience I've ever had, and I never want to experience that again, but that two hour ride begins to get old.

**JO:** What's your biggest disappointment, if any?

**TK:** I don't have any big disappointments. Well, I guess, well, yeah, my biggest disappointment, and I don't know if you can call it a disappointment or the biggest hurt for a time in my career here was the passing of David Richardson. I was upset because I felt he was gone too soon and he had so much more to give, so much more to teach me, and he wasn't gonna be around anymore. That was disappointing, that was hurtful, but as time goes on, you know, you realize you keep them in your heart, they don't really go nowhere.

**JO:** My last question is how do you want to be remembered?

**TK:** I want to be remembered as someone who genuinely cared for, not only the Members of the House of Representatives, but for staffers and for cleaning ladies to Parliamentarian to the

Speaker of the House. I want to be remembered as the legislator that when he prayed, he never used the paper. Because I see a lot of persons who come in and pray and I guess they have to have a sheet that they pray from, but I want to be remembered as the person that when he prayed, he prayed straight from his heart, and his prayer was genuine, it was fervent, and it was effectual. If I could be remembered as that person who genuinely cared about people, I'm a happy guy. I'm not hard to please.

**JO:** That was my last question, but I like to give you the opportunity to have any last words or say anything that I didn't bring up.

**TK:** Oh, no. If I have any last words, it would simply be that this has been a journey for me that I will always remember. It has been a very positive journey, for the most part. Any of the negative aspects of the journey I have taken them as a learning experience and tried to do better on my part. This journey has taught me not to be judgmental, but to look within myself and find out what it is that I can do to not only be a better legislator but to always be progressive when it comes to helping others. I would not change it for the world. This journey has prepared me to go back home and rebuild the walls of my very own community, not that other wall, but to help rebuild the infrastructure, the educational system, the family structure. And so, I'm proud of my 24 years here, because it has prepared me for my next role in life back home as mayor and as dad, granddad, and husband.

**JO:** Thank you very much for your time today, and I wish you all the best of luck as you move on to being mayor of Chester.

**TK:** If you had a microphone, I'd drop the mic.

**JO:** All right.