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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Victor Lescovitz (D)

46th District

Allegheny, Beaver, Washington Counties

1980-2006

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Heidi Mays (HM): Good Morning.

The Honorable Victor Lescovitz (VL): Good Morning.

HM: I'm here with Victor John Lescovitz who served from the 46th Legislative District which was parts of Allegheny, Beaver, [and] Washington Counties, and he served from 1980 to the present [2006]. Thank you for being here today.

VL: Thank you very much for the interview.

HM: Can we start off by asking you what kind of influence did your family have on your early life?

VL: Well, one of the reasons I think I had an interest in politics was that my parents were involved in government. From an early age, I knew that government service was very important. My father, in World War II [1939-1945], served in Africa and served in Europe and my mother during the war was “Rosie the Riveter;”¹ she worked on airplanes for the war. So, it became instilled in me that government service was very important. My father, then, after the war, went into the postal service; he was a U.S. Postmaster in the borough which I grew up in. And my mother actually worked for over 30-some years as a Postmistress, working at the U.S. Post Office. So, government service was always important to my family and they instilled that into me. And during all those years of

¹ Cultural icon of the United States signifying the six million woman who worked in manufacturing plants producing munitions during World War II.

growing up my parents, as I said, were governmental employees so we kind-of got involved in politics a little bit; although he was prohibited from doing that, he knew a lot of political people. We went to Washington D.C. quite often, stopping there, going to vacation to the Eastern Shore and we would meet with our U.S. Congressman [and] some Senators. So, I kind of got interested in politics and knew a little about politics from a very young age, because my parents really believed that it was important to serve in government. And from that service that my father was involved in community activities; so was my mother. We were involved in the school system. So, it really started off from them, not necessarily in politics, but I got a good chance to meet political people; U.S. Congressmen, U.S. Senators. And as a young person going through grade school and high school, having an opportunity to go to Washington D.C. to the Capitol, go and see everybody in Congress, tour the different buildings in Washington D.C., I started to see the love of really government service. And that's how I started off in [and] it was instilled from a very early age in my family.

HM: Well, being exposed to all those people, do you think then you started having political aspirations for yourself?

VL: Well, actually what happened, in college, one of the interests I had, again, was in public service. And I took the Civil Service test, while I was still in college, to become involved in postal service; I wanted to be a Postal Inspector. But, in college I was [at] a liberal arts school, Washington and Jefferson, and I met a lot of interesting people. Most people at our college were either pre-Med or pre-Law and I didn't last very long in pre-

Med, so the Law kind of interested me. From there, again, I came still interested in things like the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], the Central Intelligence Agency, the Postal Service Inspection, and I became really interested in trying to become involved in some type of Agency. And I met a number of people through our college through the fraternity system, the sorority system, that had parents involved in that type of service. I actually started off with being interviewed and went to Washington D.C. for the Central Intelligence Agency as an agent. [I] Went through the process of three interviews and very closed meetings for the Central Intelligence Agency, which I was very interested in foreign service. What actually happened though is, even though I am a Democrat – my family [have] been long time Democrats; when I became 18, my father just took me up to the courthouse and registered me as a Democrat. So that's how, you know, I became a Democrat – but, the people that I ended up knowing were Republicans and one was one of the counsels, the attorneys, for Richard Nixon [U.S. President, 1969-1974], at the time. He was one of Richard Nixon's 12 attorneys; he was a big Republican and he lived in McLain, right next to the Kennedys. So, I had an opportunity to go there and meet some of those people. But, what happened was, in 1975, I guess it was, President Nixon got into a little bit of trouble and with that my interviews with these high level people in the Central Intelligence Agency kind-of went out the window, because they were afraid of the political process. So, my application for the Central Intelligence Agency, kind-of, was put on hold. But, I was still interested in that field. So, working with my United States Congressman, who I knew for a long, long time, Congressman [Thomas Ellsworth] Doc Morgan [1945-1977] – who was head of the International Relations Committee – and that's where the central intelligence came in, I was interested in a foreign service.

[He] said, “Why don’t you still come to Washington D.C. and try to get on with another Federal Agency.” So, I went to Washington D.C. after college. I started off as a Federal Officer with the United States Capitol Police. And the reason I stayed with the United States Capitol Police was the training was really interesting. I went through the FBI Academy at Quantico, Virginia. I went through the Federal Law Enforcement Academy in Glencoe, Georgia. So, I spent about a year in training. I decided to stay with that organization because it paid more. I had some interviews with FBI, with the Treasury Department but, government service back in the [19]70s, when you started off in your early 20s, the salary was around 5,000 dollars or 6,000, 7,000 dollars a year. At least the Capitol Police was in the teens. So, I was going to graduate school at American University – and I knew that to survive in Washington D.C. – so, I stayed with the United States Capitol Police Force. And actually, the training that I went through really would have transferred to any other Federal Agencies. There are actually about 50 different Federal Agencies that have Federal Officers. It’s not just the FBI, it’s just not the Treasury Department, the Department of Labor, the Department of Welfare; they all have Federal agents. So, I felt it was a good stepping stone, a good chance to put my feet on the ground and see where I wanted, what Agency I really wanted to move into, because I was very interested in that type of intelligence. And as a youngster in my early 20s, you know the “shoot’em up bang, bang” mentality of a job was very interesting and exciting. So, I just continued that for about another year or so, but I really got involved because my U.S. Congressman – although he was retiring at that time period – I worked on Capitol Hill and it was just phenomenal. I mean, even though I was a Federal Officer, I still had the opportunity to meet a lot of people, a lot of U.S. Congressmen from all over the place;

California, Connecticut, Georgia. I also had an opportunity to meet with some U.S. Senators. I had friends that were with the [Gerald] Ford Administration [1974-1977]. I used to run around a little bit with Gerald Ford's daughter, with a bunch of friends. So, kind-of politics grew on me there. And that's really where my interest in politics began, is from Washington D.C. and it shifted away from wanting to be a Federal Agent to really a service in the political career. And one of the other reasons is at age 21 or 22 to become a Federal Agent, most of them – in fact the FBI is still that way – they won't take you before you're 28 or 29. So, I wasn't about to wait for seven or eight years making 6,000 dollars a year in the FBI or some other Agency to become an agent; that's a long time to go broke. So, I stayed where I was on Capitol Hill and I just enjoyed seeing these individuals working in Congress through the committee process, through the hearing process, the political process, in the elections and it was just very, very exciting to me. And that's really where my interests became and shifted from one career to another career.

HM: So, you completed your Master's Degree?

VL: Yes, I completed my Master's Degree, actually at the University of Pennsylvania out of Philadelphia and through the Wharton School and it was very rewarding. I always felt it was important to continue on in education. As I said, when I went down to Washington D.C., my first year was really being educated at these Federal Law Enforcement training centers. So, I always felt it important that I continue to go to school to learn something new. And I completed my Master's Degree at the University of

Pennsylvania. I also, when I received the political bug, I left Washington D.C., moved back home, because I met my now wife at the – she has a Master’s Degree from the University of Georgia as a blind-aide – in Georgia when I was in training down there. And we decided we wanted to get married and I just couldn’t afford to live in Washington D.C. being married, so I said I going to move back home, try to continue my interest in politics, but while I was in college I also received teaching certification in Sociology, and I also went back and received teaching certification in Mathematics. And what I found out was I could live well at home, even being a teacher, as compared to living in Washington D.C. working for the Federal Government; I was financially better off. And when you think about starting a family, you say, you know it’s important that you have a quality of lifestyle. So, I moved back from Washington D.C. to home, but I did continue my education, as I said, through California University for teaching certification in Math. I finished my Master’s Degree at the University of Pennsylvania, but I felt education was always important and I wanted to continue that. And that’s really – moving back home teaching a little bit, I taught physics and mathematics. I substituted also in Social Studies. So, I wasn’t sure if I was going to go into teaching full-time, but that’s when the position came open for State Representative. Unfortunately, the individual who served before me passed away in December of 1979 and that seat became open. I was very fortunate to be selected by the Washington County Democratic Committee and the Beaver County Democratic Committee to replace my predecessor. And we came here to Harrisburg and I was selected by the Democratic State Committee to be the nominee for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in the election in March 11th of 1980. So, that’s how it started out, but in reality my interest in politics started in

Washington D.C.; knowing people, meeting people. And when I came back home, even though I was teaching and still continuing on with my education, when that position came open I said, you know, “I’m going to take a shot at that and run.”

HM: Do you remember the first race?

VL: Oh, there’s no question I remember the first race. In fact, when I decided to run for State Representative, I remember a U.S. Congressman, I think it was Phil Burton [1963-1984] from California, and I talked to him about it. You know, I was interested in running for Congress at some point in time or State Representative and he said, “Son, if you want to be a Congressman, first of all, you better raise a lot of money.” He says, “But, State Representative what you have to do is you need to go out and meet people. Go to the different clubs; go to the different churches and really it’s an election process where you’d almost call it door-to-door. And a process where you have to spend a lot of time doing the grunt work.” And that’s really – I learned from that Congressman, his suggestions, on really how you run a first race. I was nominated, I think in late January of 1980, so I only had about six weeks to run a campaign; six to eight weeks. And the individual who I was running against, she almost beat the former Representative, who passed away-the year before. So, she was a viable candidate. She had a lot of money. She almost beat an incumbent who was there for 16 years. So, I knew I had a tough race ahead of me. And naïve; I really didn’t know how to run an election. I just knew that in our particular counties the committee system was very important; the Democratic Committee system. And the committee people were very important to try to help you

win an election. I didn't have a lot of money, in fact, I raised all the money; we had 10 dollar fundraisers, fire halls – I was very fortunate to have the support of the Unions in Western Pennsylvania. One of the problems I did have though is that I knew in that Primary I was going to have two other opponents. One was from Beaver County, so I knew even though the Democratic Committee people and the people in Beaver County had to kind-of support me in my Special Election, they were kind of holding back because they had their own candidate they were going to run in less than, I guess it was about five weeks after my Special Election. So, I was a little bit afraid of that. But, it was a process where, it was in the winter time, and I went door-to-door. And my District was a very, very large District. It went almost 75 miles from one end to the other. It was a rural area made up of a few small boroughs and smaller townships, so it was very difficult to go door-to-door. But, I spent all that time really going door-to-door in the places that I thought I could reach people. And of course, you couldn't rely upon what we called "street lists" at that particular time. So, you didn't know really who was at what door, whether they were registered to vote, whether they were Democrat or Republican; you just went to become visible. And I just spent a lot of time going door-to-door. I would stand out every Friday night at a different bank because Friday nights, banks were open late. I stood out in front of little grocery stores. I went to everything I could possibly go to and that's really how my first election came about. But, I was very fortunate in the fact that the Unions, which were still very strong at that time, really came out and supported me especially in Beaver County; Beaver County was a very strong labor area. And my District was about 58 percent Washington County and about 42 percent Beaver County; so it was basically split. But, labor support; they did a

tremendous job for me. They did mailings for me. They did phone banking for me. At that time, Beaver County was still a mecca of the steel industry. We had J&L Specialties; J&L Steel had 10,000 to 12,000 employees; Republic Steel. Cold Industries had 5,000 to 6,000 [employees]. I mean a lot of steel workers in Beaver County and the Unions really helped me out. If it wasn't, I think, for the Unions in Beaver County, I probably would not have been elected. I was elected by 62 votes, so it took a lot of work, because I was running against a person who had just run. Fortunately for me, their campaign was not run well. She decided to be quiet, don't do anything; try to keep it quiet in the fact that she didn't want anybody knowing there was an election except to Republicans. So, she didn't do any mailings, except to the Republicans. And I think that helped me out, because she didn't go out and really try to get Democratic votes; she just concentrated on the Republican votes, keep the election quiet. And I won the election. I had two parties that evening. I was in Beaver County and I had a truck that had signs on the side of it. I was running around from poll to poll. And I was in Beaver County at our headquarters, which was a Union headquarters at the Penn Beaver Hotel. And Harrisburg called me, I think it was former Representative Charles Laughlin [State Representative, Beaver County, 1973-1988] called me and said, "You won by 62 votes." And ironically, I think he had won, maybe six years before, by about that same amount of votes. So, I think it was a good feeling for him to have somebody win. And then I came back to my other party and we celebrated that first election. But, it was difficult in the fact that I didn't have a lot of knowledge on how to run an election; I was just doing it off the cuff. I didn't have any real money, so we didn't do any – we may have done one small mailing in Beaver County, but I don't think we did – the Unions did a lot of mailings for us. We,

you know, put up signs, but it was a lot of grunt work, myself, and a lot of support by committee people and the Unions. But, it was a process also, as I said, the Democratic Party – I had a lot of old timers who were committee people and they worked very hard. I mean, they went out the weekend before [and] passed out my material, they worked the polls. So, I had a lot of good people back – those were still days of politics where committee people still were known in the community. They knew everybody that came to the polls. So, they were able to talk to them on an individual basis to make sure they were voting for me. And that really, really helped me win my first election was having the support of a lot of older people who still were involved in politics, because they believed in the Democratic Party and its beliefs. So, I was very fortunate to have support from a lot of good people.

HM: Well, how hard is it, five weeks later, you had the Primary election?

VL: Well, one of the things that I really believe helped me out was my opponent wanted a recount. And of course, I didn't know anything about a recount, but I knew enough that you had to have legal counsel there, in Beaver County and in Washington County; we went through the recount process. So, that actually helped me out because the next two weeks, I received a lot of publicity through the recount process. And so, I got a lot of free publicity in the next two weeks which really helped me out in the election. One interesting note is they opened up every ballot box except they didn't want to open up one of them, in this one precinct in one township in Washington County. So, our legal counsel says, "No, we're going to open up all of them, if we are going to open them."

So, we opened up and that one ballot box they didn't want to open up, they were accusing me of going into the polling place, which I never was, and it was a process where we found out later, actually another Republican Legislator did stop by that polling place, but didn't go in. So, we were wondering what was going on. There were only 50 to 55 votes in that particular precinct and we couldn't figure out why they didn't want us to open up that ballot box. And I think I had won that by 20, you know, 30 to 25, or something like that. When they opened up the ballot box and there were only two people on the ballot – it was a paper ballot, so you only put an x – and when we opened it up and we counted the votes, I actually won the precinct something like 45 to 10. And we were wondering what was going on there. And basically, they were trying to steal the election. I mean 55 votes; it's kind of hard to miscount 20 votes when there are only two people on the ballot. And that was my first indication that really sometimes there are people who may try to do something to win elections and not be fair. So, it kind-of opened up my eyes. But, one of the things is that recount really helped me through the publicity and the newspapers. And I was 26, so I had a lot of sympathy support from the news media. So, that got me a lot of notoriety and actually the next, the Primary election, which was held in April, I think, of that year, April twenty-something – which was really six weeks, two weeks after I was sworn in – I started to at least get support from a lot of other groups out there. I was able to raise some money. I at least did one mailing. You know, it was a mailing where we had to go into Pittsburgh, we bought the envelopes, we had self-addressed all the envelopes, did the mailing. We had just basically white paper printed up on what my positions were. So, it was an election where we really did it on our own and did one mailing. But, again, I think that Special Election helped me out, because I received a lot

of notoriety in the community and I won the Primary election beating a candidate who ran in the Primary the previous year and a candidate who was a strong Mayor in Beaver County [and] I beat both of them. I think it was over two or three to one. So, the Special Election really helped me out because I received a lot of publicity and I started to receive some help from other groups. But, from that Special Election up until my last election up here a year and a half ago, basically, I've done everything myself. I really, really haven't had a committee. I put up all the signs myself. My father or other, you know, friends, close, very close, friends would put up signs for me. I really never engaged a committee like a lot of people did. Of course, I had friends and committee people who took signs for their homes, but I basically did all the work myself. All my mailings, I handled myself, so compared to a lot of people, I had a very hands-on approach. And then after that Primary Election, the woman who ran against me in the Special decided she wasn't going to get beat again, so she dropped out and one of my Primary opponents ran as the Republican, but I won like two or three to one in that first year. So, it was difficult; three elections in one year. At that particular time, it was a lot of money, but I was very fortunate to raise enough money during that time period to fund the campaigns to win the elections.

HM: Well, since you're so hands-on with your campaigning; are you going to miss it?

VL: Not really. (*laugh*) It's a lot of pressure when you do hands-on work, because I'm an individual who doesn't like to ask people to do things for me. I've learned that process through the elections that I've asked people to help me financially through

campaign contributions, but I'm an individual that if you do me a favor, I got to do you a favor back. And, you know, I just don't want to feel obligated to anybody in that process. There are a lot of good people I know that would have helped me out. I did have one good friend and he passed away a couple years ago – and his wife were very close – in my election, actually helped me get the nomination when I first ran. And we became very close friends after that. They helped me out a lot in the fact that a lot of moral support. They did a lot of, you know, helped me with the signs and things like that. But, I kind of always felt that I wanted to know what was going on, because if I was going to get beat, it was my fault, not anybody else's fault. So, I basically did everything myself over these 27 elections I had. Ironically, I think I only maybe four or five times that I've not have any opposition either in the Primary or the General. So, out of 27 elections, I had opposition at least 22 times. So, that's 22 campaigns that I had to do myself. But, again, it was a position where the committee people were still very strong all through the years. However, things have changed. I mean, elections certainly have changed over those 27 years. My district has changed dramatically, even though my district for about 22 years stayed basically 55/45 Washington/Beaver. Beaver County has really changed a lot, because of the steel mills closing down. A lot of jobs were lost; thousands, tens of thousands of steel worker jobs. So, a lot of Union positions, the Union support, has kind of dwindled. However, most of those people were able to retire, so they still were strong advocates of Unions. And I was very fortunate to have the support even though people retired of the Unions and the beliefs of the people in the Unions.

HM: Is there anything that you think makes your District unique, or is it more representative of all of Pennsylvania?

VL: It's really representative of all of Pennsylvania. My District, whether it's currently or even before, basically I would call it rural, but you know it was a mix; it's a complete mix. As I said, we had a lot of steel mills in my area. Midland, which I represented for over 20 years, had Cold Industries; they shut down. There were over 6,000 people working there, now it's a specialty steel plant and there are maybe about 600 or, I'm sorry, 400. I have the first nuclear power plant in the world, it was in my legislative District; Coal Fire plant in Washington County. I had coal mines which are shut down now; deep mines and then surface mines. A lot of farms; I had two agricultural fairs in my area. My District surrounded the Pittsburgh International Airport, so I had a lot of individuals who worked at the airport for the airline industry. And we had some newer areas of suburban areas that commuted in and around the city of Pittsburgh. My district is only about 25 to 30 minutes from downtown Pittsburgh. So, it was just a mix; a mix of suburbanites, really not any urban areas, except for some small boroughs; farm areas, manufacturing industries. So, I really think it was a mix of Pennsylvania which made me here in Harrisburg, legislatively, try to represent that. And I think that my views and my legislative district helped me understand the Commonwealth of a whole, because you know you had urban concerns in some of these smaller communities, there were a lot of jobs lost from the steel industry, you had the rural areas and the farmers, you had the suburbanites who commuted into the city of Pittsburgh and you now we have a lot of

high tech industries in my district. So, it's really a part of Pennsylvania I think, or it was a situation where really look at Pennsylvania as a whole; that's what my district was.

HM: How hard is it to balance working with your constituents and their concerns and working on the legislative issues here in Harrisburg?

VL: It wasn't very difficult because, as I said, I was able to mix. I mean, I was involved in farming issues; I pushed through the drought legislation to help the farmers. I had power plants in my area, as I said, nuclear power plant, Coal Fire plants. We had some problems with hazardous waste sites in my area; garbage dumps. So, I learned from the problems back in my district and a lot of those issues, really, were state-wide issues. So, you know, I had to learn a lot about the power industry and de-regulating the power industry, the electric industry and the gas industry. Basically, because I had people who worked for those industries. So, I had a feeling and said we had to keep this industry strong, because there's a lot of people that work at those power plants; construction-wise and actually in the power plants themselves. The farming industry has kind of dwindled down, there's, oh, I think we've gone from maybe 25 dairy farms down to maybe like 3 or 4 in my district, because the dairy industry is really a difficult job; its seven days a week, 365 days a year. I've toured many farms in my area; it's really a difficult job. And the pay really hasn't changed; I think it's anywhere from 11 dollars to 14 dollars per 100 gallons of milk. So, I had to learn a lot about the agri-business. We had some smaller, other types of farms and, you know, though the county fairs in both counties I learned a lot about the agri-business. I also learned about, with the new Pittsburgh International

Airport, I was there for the ground-breaking and the opening. A lot of people who worked the airline industry; of course U.S. Air is having its difficulties now. So, legislatively I learned from people in my district; talking with them, going to visit different businesses, going to their homes. The same thing with the steel industry and the coal mining industry; gone on many tours in deep mines-long wall mining as compared to the straight wall mining. Surface mining, knowing that, you know, they take the coal and then I guess, years and years ago during World War II, they didn't re-claim a lot of the coal mines. But, really the surface mining today actually helps the area, because they dig up the old mines, take out the acid mine drainage and clean the water and clean the area. So, I learned a lot from my district being so a variety of businesses and people working in businesses have helped me legislatively here when we dealt with the coal mining industry, when we dealt with the steel industry or airline industry or agriculture industry. I had people in my district who worked in those fields and helped me understand the legislation even more. A lot of professional people, insurance agents, realtors, were very active in my legislative district to come and talk to me about their issues. So, I felt very comfortable in dealing with the legislative issues in Harrisburg, because I had a lot of support back home from people in those particular areas: hospitals, doctors, nurses. And I think that helped me out legislatively down here. You know, my district wasn't one where it was just a small area in a city; it was just a microcosm of a macrocosm. So, I was very fortunate to have a lot of that back in my district that I could pull support from, pull information from to help me legislatively here.

HM: So, you have your experience in Washington D.C. and being around the Capitol. So, now you're elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, what was it like coming here as a Representative for the first time?

VL: It was really exciting. You know, I'll never forget coming down and I received a package that had 46th district on it. I was so excited that I, you know, I was able to take back, like it was a paper briefcase that had the 46th district on it. And it was just very, very exciting. One of the difficulties of the first day, we were Sworn-In, then we took our seats and you had to start voting on issues. I mean, I didn't even know what these bills were all about. But, it was an exciting time and I was very fortunate that a lot of Members here, serving as chairmen and chairwomen of committees, really helped us through the process. And our Caucuses were very strong at that time; everybody attended the Caucuses. And I found out quickly, that you had to attend the Caucuses to understand really what the bills were about, because you couldn't open up a bill that was 40 pages long and understand it and then have 10 to 12 amendments offered to it on the Floor of the House and didn't have time to read it and really understand the process. So, you had to rely upon the people who worked for the particular committees to really brief you. And as I said, it was a very strong Leadership Caucus process in the early years. And because things changed dramatically, I mean we didn't have all the rules we have today: 24 hour notice for amendments, computers and things like that; everything was paper. So, you had to rely upon going to Caucus and having somebody explain the bills to you and the amendments to you. So, it was exciting; it was a learning process, but it was very helpful to have individuals – just like in my district – helping me with

understanding issues on a state-wide basis. I was very fortunate those times to have individuals here in Harrisburg, committee-staff, committee Chairmen, sub-committee Chairmen, Leaders, explaining the bills to you and really explaining how it affects your district. I mean, this is, you know, if you are a strong supporter of education or of teachers or of Unions or of the coal industry, I mean, they explained how these bills dealt with those particular groups in Caucus. So, you knew if you voted yes/no on an amendment or yes/no on a bill, you had an opportunity to be able to go back home and explain why you did it, if those groups questioned you. And, I think it was a process that really worked a little bit better, because you really had a lot of input and understanding of how those bills really affected the people in your district, so you could defend it a little bit better. So, it was exciting and I was very fortunate that it was a process where we had that explanation and people here in Harrisburg helping you do that as compared to today: it's just changed dramatically.

HM: Is there any one person that helped you as a mentor?

VL: Not really. They were all good; all the Chairmen were very, very good. Jim Manderino [James; State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1967-1989; Speaker 1989], who was the Democratic Whip at the time, we were in the minority for my first term – actually, the Special Election, that term and the term after – he was very good, in the fact that he was from Western Pennsylvania, so he kind-of took you under his wing and said, you know, “Watch what you’re doing here. Don’t do this. Don’t do this.” So, he kind-of helped a lot of us who were new from Western Pennsylvania, because he

didn't want you to make mistakes. And he was very good about explaining to you how this can affect you politically. You know, "Don't vote for this. This is a bad bill for you because," you know, "your constituents who were steel workers aren't going to like you voting for this Workers Compensation Reform Act. So, don't do it." He'd pull you aside and explain this why it's not good for you to do that or, you know, this is okay, don't worry about it; this is good for you, because it's going to help you in your legislative district. He was very good explaining, to me as a younger person, the benefits and the reasons why I should or should not support particular pieces of legislation. So, I would say Jim Manderino was probably a mentor in that way that he knew the state as a whole. Even though he was from Western Pennsylvania, he could tell a Member from Philadelphia this is a good idea for you to vote for this bill, but it's not a good idea if you are from Dubois. Or it's not a good idea if you're from Scranton, because this isn't good for your area. Jim knew the state as a whole and knew each individual legislative district and understood the issues so well that he was able to explain to individual Members why or why they should not support particular pieces of legislation. And I think that's really what helped me out in the beginning, was having individuals like him or he would direct you to the appropriate committee Chairman/staff person or governmental relations person who could explain the issues to you.

HM: What was your office like whenever you first started?

VL: Actually, my office – I was one of the first ones in the South Office Building.² There were three of us that all were elected in the Special Election. Bob Donatucci [Robert; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1980-present] from Philadelphia, Nick Maiale [Nicholas; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1980-1992] from Philadelphia, and we had a big office, one room, and one secretary. So, we had one secretary for three House Members. And of course, my issues were different from those guys from Philadelphia, so we basically didn't discuss legislation. But, you know, [we had] a lot of paperwork and you have one secretary trying to help you do all this stuff. I think we had two people in research and two people that were public relations people; Barbara Barcheck and Rusty Cowen. They were our two writers for the entire Caucus. And I still have my first Newsletter; it was all black-and-white piece of paper that I sent out my first year. But, we had individuals to help you write letters to respond. And as I said, the Leadership kind of helped you giving you advice on how to respond to constituent inquiries; how to respond to questions from groups who wrote to you and said you know, "We want you to support this piece of legislation." Or, "We want this," or "We want that." You had support staff, but it may take two or three weeks to get the information back to you and if you had one secretary – I had Ann Foreman, she was my first secretary – that would type up the letters and mail them out. Of course, you really didn't have much in the way of expenses. I had a district office. I only had 3,600 dollars a year to pay a home staff person; 3,600 dollars a year. Now, who do you hire to work five days a week for 3,600 dollars a year? You had to provide, you know – I had a friend who gave me a typewriter and some chairs, and a desk. So, that's how my office started out. Even in my district office in my first few years were like that. I was fortunate that

² Rededicated the "K. Leroy Irvis Office Building," in 2006.

were some people that were willing to help me out and for a small amount of money. And those first few years were kind of lean. I think they did increase the staff to like 5,400 dollars the next term, maybe. I'm not sure if it went up that high, but no benefits. So, it was a situation where you came to Harrisburg for three days and you went back to your district and you physically had to be in the office yourself, because how could you expect somebody to be there and answer all the phones and do all that work for 3,600 dollars? And since I had a split district, I also went one day a week into Beaver County. The borough gave me an office down there free of charge for one day a week. So, I had to staff that myself. So, it was lean times in the beginning, but again, I think it was a situation where I learned a lot. We get back to education; it was like I was going to school every single day, because you had people that called you and you, yourself, had to do all the work. You had to do the research; you had to make the phone calls to the Agencies to find out the answers to questions. I was getting about, I think, I had three daily newspapers I was reading and four or five weekly newspapers to keep up on what was happening in my district; who was graduating from school, where the spaghetti dinners were, what was going on. So, you know, I was doing a lot of reading also in the office at that particular time. So, I think it was helpful, because I had to do all the work myself; that it just made me a better Legislator and a person who was able to sit down and understand the issues. Even though, we may not have agreed on a particular – maybe someone who was interested in eliminating Unions, for example, or for doing something with education or insurance that I knew I wouldn't support, but it gave me a better understanding, because I was able to sit down with them one-on-one and they would explain their issues to me. I may not agree with their solution to their problem, but I

understood they had a problem. So, that helped me in the first few years of my service, in the fact that I had to do everything myself. I 'm just very fortunate to learn a lot in those few years.

HM: Being from Western Pennsylvania, did traveling, coming back-and-forth on the Turnpike, ever pose any problems for you?

VL: No, it never did. I think I was caught one time in 27 years on the Turnpike where there was an accident for four hours. But, to be honest with you, it's four hours each way and sometimes you come down Sundays and go back Thursdays; sometimes you leave at five or six in the morning on Monday to get down here by nine o'clock. And sometimes you had to be back home, as I said, for my district office. So, I'd leave here at seven, eight, nine o'clock at night, snowing, ice, fog, because I knew I had to be in my office Thursday morning, because I didn't have any staff people or I had one staff person. So, traveling was a little bit difficult, but one of the nice things, I think, it gave me some time for myself. And even today, even though we have cell phones and Blackberries, I don't give my cell phone – not everybody has my cell phone number. So, I like it as a quiet time. I know a lot of people do work on the Turnpike; they make their phone calls and things. But, I kind of like my time, away from everybody. You know, whether its four hours coming down or four hours going back, it's kind of a relaxation time period. But, I put a lot of miles on a vehicle. Sometimes, in many years, I was putting as much as 50,000 miles a year. Doing a lot of traveling state-wide, a lot of traveling within my district – as I said, it was 70-some miles from one end to the other. So, you just go and

visit one person on one side of your district and come back you put 150 miles on in one day. But, traveling never really bothered me. I've been very fortunate, I didn't have any accidents; I didn't receive any tickets. One of the things I have learned about traveling is: don't speed. I think there might have been once or twice in my career where, you know, I have tried to hit it over 80 [mph] to get home quicker or get here quicker. And what I've found out is you save about 15 minutes and it's not worth it. So, now I just put it on cruise control and drive and that 15 minutes isn't really worth it, even in my district. I try, everybody maybe goes over a few miles on the speed limit, but I put a lot of miles on a vehicle every year and I found out speeding is really not where it is. I came to the resolution years ago that, you know that I'm not a brain surgeon, so it's not necessary for me to speed to the hospital to save someone's life if I don't get there in 10 minutes. Or I don't have my finger on the button of the nuclear warhead so, you know, we're just not that important that we have to speed to get somewhere. You know, it's sad that if you do show up to some place a little bit late, but it's just not worth speeding. And I found that we're just not that important to danger our lives, to danger the lives of others. And like I said, I travel so much and I see people pulling in and out, doing crazy things on the roads that you really learn to drive defensively and take my time. As I said, everybody goes over the speed limit a little bit, but I am not an individual and I don't know too many people that have to rush to save someone's life. And that's the only reason there would probably be some need to speed. I mean, if you were an ambulance driver and you had to get somebody to a hospital or something like that, I could see where you have to go over the speed limit. Put on a lot of travel time, but I've been very fortunate. But, a lot of times it's been icy, middle of the night two, three, four, five in the morning. I've gone

home many times to get there at five/six in the morning, because I knew I had meetings the next day. Fog, snow, rain, but, as I said, I think there was just one time in 27 years that I was stuck on the Turnpike for about four hours and that's not bad.

HM: With all your commitments back home and being in Harrisburg several days a week, how difficult is it to balance your family life with your legislative career?

VL: I was very fortunate in my family, my wife, knew of my interest in politics and government service. Her father was the Chief Counsel for the Core of Engineers in Southeastern Pennsylvania; was an FBI agent before that. So, she knew a little bit about government work. I don't think politics really thrilled her. She never liked the nitty-gritty political process of going around and shaking everybody's hands all the time and saying you know, she was always friendly, but I don't think she liked the nitty-gritty political process. But, my family life was, I think, pretty good. One of the things I learned is people want to see that you're human. So, even when my children were one and two years old, I took them everywhere. I mean, we went to the spaghetti dinners; we went to the bingos, my kids handed out dabbers and different things. And even in the off years we, you know, you go to church functions or different events and I always brought my family with me. Because, I think people should realize that you are not a king, you're not a queen or a prince, you're an average Joe. And they see your kids squirming at the table eating spaghetti or pancakes, they can relate to that. And I wanted people to see that I was just the same as everyone else out there. And my family took part in that and they enjoyed it. And I think it made me human with people to have my family involved

in the political process. I think it was difficult for them because, I mean, some years I was gone 40-some weeks a year, three days a week. I served on two different National organizations, so a lot of times I'd come home and have to go on a trip to California or Florida or Boston or somewhere else. So, I missed a lot of birthdays. I missed a lot of anniversaries; I think I was home for our anniversary three times out of 28 years. So, you missed a lot of that stuff. But, one of the things I also did was, especially when my children were up until the age of like 9th or 10th grade, I took them to a lot of places. My children have been to over 25, 26 states in this nation. They've been to Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Canada. I took them on a lot of trips so for them to, you know, experience it. So, at least four or five times a year they would go to conferences with me; once in the spring, once in the fall and at least a couple times in the summer to different National organizations. And as like any parent, you know, you tour Betsy Ross's³ House in Philadelphia or Bull Run⁴ or Paul Revere's place in Boston or California, of course, they struggled when they were young; New Orleans. "Oh, why do we need to go to that museum for?" They never really understood, you know, it was kind of fun taking them to those things. So, I think compared to some individuals who did not permit their families or did not have their families go to those things. I feel rather fortunate that my family was willing to do a lot of that. I mean, we traveled quite a bit, at least twice a summer to conferences [and] at least two and sometimes three times a year for long weekends in different parts of the country. And I think my wife enjoyed it. I'm not sure how much my kids did except for jumping into the pool in the evening, but they didn't particularly like all the steak dinners you had to go to and dress and stay quiet. But, I think that was a

³ Woman who is said to have sewn the first American Flag.

⁴ Battlefield in Virginia; site of two famous Civil War battles: one on July 21, 1861 & August 28-30 1862.

part of the process that kind of made it good. And in the summers, they would come here to Harrisburg. We used go to Hershey Park at least two or three times a year. So, I tried to take my family as many places as I could with me in my job and I hoped they learned a little bit. Like I said, they were fortunate enough to visit over half of the states in this nation; they've been to the White House, they've been to the Prime Minister's home in Canada and they've been to the Governor's home in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. So, they've experienced – they may not remember – but, they've experienced a lot. And you know, they met Congressmen and Governors and other legislators from Senators – I think that kind-of helped out a little bit is I try to spend as much time as I can with my family and bring them into the process. The political side, you know, of course there were problems. I mean its pressure. Every time you have an election, you're, you know, it's like any other job at home; you can snap at your family, you can have a little bit of pressure there. But, I think all and all it worked out well.

HM: You served on a lot of committees since you've been here. Did you have a favorite?

VL: They were all very, very good. I mean, I started off on State Government and we did Reapportionment and Conservation and Appropriations and Transportation, Business and Commerce, and Tourism, and Education. Probably, in my younger days, the most interesting committee was Education, because we were in the majority back in the 1980s and we did a lot of hearings. I mean, we had a Chairman and a sub-committee Chairman that really went out and wanted to hear what people had to say about issues. I mean,

every bill and every – it didn't have to be a piece of legislation – but, a subject matter. [We] toured all the state universities, a lot of private colleges, a lot of high schools and community colleges. We did a lot of meetings state-wide and went through a lot of hearing process. And, I think, I learned a lot about education; from Basic Ed[ucation] to Higher Education. And that was probably one of the most interesting committees to be on, because we spent so much time traveling around the state listening to people's concerns. Whether it was Philadelphia and the issues they were having in some of their school system, or whether it was a rural area and the problems with busing and the transportation costs or higher education; dealing with research dollars, community colleges. That was probably the most interesting committee to be on because, again, just like in my career, I enjoyed listening to people and trying to understand their concerns. Because it gave me a feel of trying to at least comprehend the issue and trying to come up with a solution, if there was a particular problem. Again, I may not have agreed with all the solutions that they came up with, but it gave me a better understanding. There was, we called – I don't know if you know Terry Madonna, he's the political guru now from Franklin and Marshall – he'll tell you there were seven of us Democrats – I think I'm the only one left – that were the ones who actually passed the legislation to keep it for the State System of Higher Education. Before, there was Slippery Rock College and California College, and we made them a university system. And there was seven Democrats that stuck together to push that legislation through and make all of our colleges now universities and having a university system. And he'll tell you what struggles we had to go through just to learn the process, to learn the issue on why we should do it, why we should have a university system not a separate college system. So, I

spent a lot of time in the Education Committee learning a lot about the community college system which is a great system here in Pennsylvania; whether they're offering community-type courses: flower arranging or gardening, or whether they're offering algebra or freshman English. The community college system is a great system we have here in Pennsylvania. I wish we had a community college in every county, in all 67 counties, because whether it's community-based education or whether it's putting in your first two years before you go on to higher education, it's a good system. But, I learned that because we spent a lot of time going around the state listening to the issues of people in higher education. And the same thing in basic education; going through the TELLS [Testing for Essential Learning and Literacy] test and all these other testing, teacher certification and teacher tests, going through the school code line by line, recodifying the school code. I enjoyed it, because it was a committee where I learned a lot. And I think that's what made it the, probably, one of the best committees I served on because the Chairman and the sub-committee Chairman wanted you to understand the issues, because they wanted to understand the issues. You know, they just didn't want a bill to come up and legislation come in and you have no idea why they were pushing those issues. And I think they really wanted the process to work, that they wanted the public to know that there were people here that, you know, were to listen to them and were to help them come up with solutions if there were particular problems. So, I guess probably the best committee I served on.

HM: Well, you've been Chairman of many committees as well; what has it meant to you to serve as Chairman and do you have a favorite committee as Chairman?

VL: Oh, probably, Business and Commerce was, even though I was in Democratic Leadership [as] Policy Chairman and Tourism and now Local Government; and I was Vice-Chairman of Appropriations Committee back in the early [19]90s when we had problems with passing a budget on time which is not unusual. But, as I said, I served on a lot of different committees: Transportation, Appropriations, Insurance – did recodification of the Insurance Code – and probably Business and Commerce Committee. And the reason I think I enjoyed chairing that Committee the most, it was my first committee Chair. Back in the early [19]90s we were in the majority and I just came out of that process, as I said, through the [19]80s of the participation of the public and the participation of the committee members, and served as Vice-Chairman for Appropriations and I did the Capitol Budget and a number of other bills and I learned the budget process and went through all the hearings on the budget and learned a lot and listened to people and why they wanted appropriations, why they needed this. And I had a background, as I said from the congressional side, that (*cough*) – Excuse me – I wanted to continue that process; I wanted involvement. So, I had very good staff and I made it a point from the very beginning that the Members were going to learn just liked I learned. You aren't going to come into the Committee and I wouldn't say, here's your bill and we're going to pass this legislation. I really, at that particular time, thought the whole legislative process was changing from, in the early [19]80s, of a Leadership totally control to, through the mid-[19]80s, of a committee process working; a lot of hearings, you discussed the legislation. I wanted to continue that process as Chairman of the Business and Commerce Committee/Business and Economic Development Committee,

and have our Members have the opportunity that I did to understand what we were doing in the Committee. I took an example from the congressional process and had mark-up sessions. We also were in a process where Governor Casey [Robert; 1987-1995], at the time, you had to dot every “i” and cross every “t.” [I was] A little bit disappointed in a lot of the Governor’s since then, at least two, three of them, but they really don’t watch the legislation. We put bills in different statutes and different codes. Casey was a stickler. Casey wanted to make sure everything was perfect; that you were putting legislation in the proper statute and the proper code – you didn’t mix and match. So, it was helpful to me in the fact that we had to study every piece of legislation, line by line, because if there was a mistake they caught it. I mean, their attorneys up there were fantastic. So, I had a good staff and I spent a lot of times on a lot of complex issues. We did legislation like creating limited liabilities, limited liability companies, limited liability partnerships [Act 126-1994]. So, we spent a lot of time in understanding how the corporate structure worked within law firms and CPA firms. When you’re dealing with legislation, you’re dealing with CPA’s; you want to make sure everything is there. And lawyers, you know, can’t agree on anything, but it was very interesting in the fact that we would have mark-up sessions and they would all come in the rooms together and I had my committee members there – Democrat and Republican - and we would discuss the legislation, line by line, and go through on why we had to do what we had to do. And I also did the Banking de-regulation code [Act 51-1994] and that was a very complex issue, because you’re dealing with banking corporations, whether they’re here in Pennsylvania or outside of Pennsylvania, so we had a lot of experts come in. And we spent a lot of time discussing the legislation, line by line, making sure every word was

correct. We also did the mortgage bankers and mortgage brokers law [Act 15-1995]; a lot of business issues. And again, it was a situation where I just didn't say, you know, "I discussed it with the different groups and here's the language." I had my Members come in and we all discussed every piece of legislation. We did the reuse of industrial sites legislation; was done with environmental laws. So, it was a committee really dealt with a lot of business issues, banking issues, economic development issues, and I spent that time period of trying to change the process in the way that I learned it, in the way that I wanted other Members to understand the actual legislation. Why we were doing the legislation, why we were writing it this particular way, and giving them an opportunity to say, you know, "I don't agree with that," or "I do agree with it. Can't we do it this way?" So, I think that was probably my, as a Chairman, because I was so active in trying to make other Members understand. And really, if you asked some of the people who served with me on that Committee, they'll say, you know, that they really learned a lot. And I think the governmental relations people or the lobbyists who were there appreciated it because you brought all the parties involved in and you discussed it. And so, I think that was probably the best Chairmanship I had, because it was so active and I just thought we were moving in the right direction of the committee process as I always felt the committee process. And we had a Leader, Ivan Itkin [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1973-1998] at the time, who let the committees do that. So, he knew when my legislation came out of committee, it was agreed to, it was written properly, and he could move; he didn't have to spend all day or weeks going through the legislation and having all these groups come in and say, "Don't do this Ivan, do this." He didn't have to change anything. When it came out of my committee, it was ready to go on the Floor just like in

Congress where the sub-committees work through the process, the committee Chair works through the process. When those bills come to the Floor they're ready to vote because they spent months and sometimes years going over the legislation. So, it was probably my best Chairmanship.

HM: You listed a lot of highlights in your legislative career. Is there any one that you would list as a greatest accomplishment?

VL: Well, again, I think my greatest accomplishment legislatively, was trying to have Members understand and do the process what I felt was correctly. There are a lot of complex issues out there that I dealt with and I think I named a few. I mean, we've done so many really complex issues rather than simple issues and I think it's hard for me to name all of them. The continuing education of the insurance agents, that was pretty complex. Early on, I think I did some domestic violence legislation [Act 10-1986], working with a Republican Member. One of the highlights, I think, of my career is I've been able to work across the aisle in the House and across the other side of the Capitol with the Senate. I have a lot of friends on the Republican side in the House and in the Senate; a lot of friends who were Democratic Senators and Republican Senators. Whether they're the President Pro Temp of the Senate [or the] Appropriations Chairman of the Senate, Democrat or Republican, I think I've been able to move things forward because I've had a good rapport. And they know that I truly, the issues that I've been interested in, that I've done the research necessary and to make sure I understood the issues completely. I think some of my legislative issues, there's a variety of them,

whether they were legislation to deal with funding for particular projects in my own district. I think were helpful for me as a legislator saying I've been able to bring things back home. The South Pointe Business Park in my district, the original legislation took four years; it started under Governor Thornburgh [Richard; 1979-1987] and it reached through Governor Casey. And that's a Business Park in my district; a high-tech business park, 600-and-some acres, thousands of jobs. South Pointe II was another project that went through the Ridge Administration [Thomas; 1995-2001]/Schweiker Administration [Mark; 2001-2003] and finally the Rendell Administration [Edward; 2003-2011]. That's another business park right next to South Pointe I which is creating thousands of new jobs. Starpoint Business Park, again, I had to do legislatively working with my State Senator [J. Barry Stout] on all those issues. Trying to put projects together with the historical society; Meadowcroft Museum is something I'm very proud of. Meadowcroft is a dig site, archaeological dig site, which proves that man was in our area 17,000 years ago. There's only two in the Americas: one in Chile which is maybe 20-some thousand years that shows man was here 20-some thousand years ago and Meadowcroft in my District shows that man existed in North America 17,000 years ago. And I've been working to make that a permanent site [HR 310-1999-2000]. We're getting very close to ensuring that that will be a site which will be preserved for many generations to come. So, I've been involved in legislation which I think has helped my legislative district. The Mon-Fayette and Southern Beltway was an interesting project. That's a three billion dollar highway project and just like many projects you had to wheel and deal. It is a, what I believe, is the future, you know, making sure you have highways. We are a mobile society; people don't just work in the community that they live in. They have to

travel back and forth. You have to move products back and forth. So, when Senator Stout [State Representative, Washington County, 1971-1976; State Senator, 1977-2010] came up with his proposal, actually it's been in existence since 1954, to have a beltway around the city of Pittsburgh, and the Mon-Fayette Expressway we had some monies available to do some of the projects there. But, we really wanted to make this a project, since we couldn't get any Federal funding, that the State was going to do. And back in, I think it was 1990, we came up with an idea to have the Mon-Fayette Expressway and the Southern Beltway Project and to fund it with State tax dollars, three billion dollars, and hopefully get some Federal funding. So, we, Barry Stout, Senator Stout, came to me and said, "Listen, could you help us push this issue through, because I can't get anything done?" And we were in the majority in the House and I was Vice-Chairman for Appropriations Committee. So, it was a time where Governor Casey, we were in late July or early August, and they needed tax votes to pass the budget. Republicans were coming up with about six and we had to come up with the rest on the House Democratic side. And we were getting down to the wire and I said you know, "What am I going to get for my district?" I says, "Everybody else is getting projects through their tax votes and this and the other." That's how things happen. "Oh, I don't know, I don't know," I says. So, I finally said, "Well do you know what? I'm pulling off my vote and I'm pulling off about three or four of my colleagues, so we're not going to vote for taxes." And this was, like, two o'clock in the morning before we're going to make the tax vote for Casey. And I went down to the Speaker's Office, it was Bob O'Donnell [Robert; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1974-1993; Speaker, 1991-1992] at the time, and Governor Casey, and said, "I'm leaving." And I went on Capitol leave. I gave them

a letter said, “I’m leaving and I’m pulling three or four of my Members off and we’re not voting for these taxes.” So, the Governor calls me, Bob O’Donnell calls me, and I’m at home here in Harrisburg. And Dwight Evans [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1981-present] calls me, who’s the Appropriations Chairman, he says, “What the heck are you doing? You just blew up our budget agreement!” You know, they wanted to get this budget done, it was in August. I says, “Well, I’m not going to vote for taxes and get nothing for my district.” “Oh, come back to the Capitol we’ll talk about it, we’ll talk about it.” So, he says, “What do you want?” I said, “I need 40 million dollars a year for this highway project that’s going through my district.” “Oh, we can’t do that – blah, blah, blah.” So, I says, “Well, that’s fine. Then we’ll just wait around another few more weeks until you get some more Members to vote for you taxes.” They finally agreed to do something. So, we had to have – it was Pete Daley [State Representative, Fayette and Washington Counties, 1983-present] and myself and I’m not sure if it was now Senator Kasunic [Richard; State Representative, Fayette County, 1983-1994; State Senator, 1995-present] and now a Federal Judge, Mike Fisher [D. Michael; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1975-1980; State Senator, 1981-1996]; we all agreed, says, “Okay, they’ll give us the money.” But, we had to go up and see Matt Ryan [Matthew J.; State Representative, Delaware County, 1963-2003; Speaker, 1981-1983, 1995-2003], who was the Republican Leader at the time. And he agrees; he says, finally, “I’m beat up.” He says, “Alright, we’ll give you 25 million dollars a year.” Well, I didn’t want 25 million dollars, but I took it. So, we went back down to the Floor of the House and there’s our Democratic Members sitting in our Caucus for like five hours and they’re going crazy on me because I held up the entire vote for these taxes. They’re sitting there;

they thought everything was agreed to. They said, “What did you get?” I said, “I didn’t get anything.” So, we go to the Floor of the House and they finally agreed to give us like 35 million dollars. And there’s a picture of Dwight Evans and myself, Matt Ryan and we’re sitting in the middle of the Floor of the House and we’re agreeing to this language writing it down to put this money for the Mon-Fayette Expressway and Southern Beltway. So, we voted and it goes over to the Senate. Next thing I know, Senator Stout leaves. He didn’t think it was enough money. So, he leaves and then he comes in and grabs me – I was sleeping in my office – and Dwight Evans comes in at like, 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning, and he says, “What did you do? You took care of this and now you’re Senator took off and he wouldn’t do it.” So, finally we came back and everything worked out and they gave us 40 million dollars a year designated funding for the Mon-Fayette Expressway and Southern Beltway. So, that was an interesting project. And I think right now we have over 800 million dollars is spent on that project; 240 million dollars is in my legislative district, which will be completed by this October is the first leg of the Southern Beltway. But, legislatively you do a lot of things, there’s some wheeling and dealing and I think one of the benefits was, you know, I had some Republican friends in the Senate who were willing to work with me on those issues, because I was not considered a maverick where I couldn’t get along with people on both sides. And Matt Ryan knew who I was; he knew I was straightforward, honest. I wasn’t doing something that, you know, didn’t need to be done. I wasn’t asking for the moon, although you know it was a lot of money; 40 million dollars a year. But, you know, and I wasn’t just picking a project that wasn’t going to do something. And it has created thousands and thousands of construction jobs and I think in the long run it’s going to be a

good project for Southwestern Pennsylvania and you're going to see a lot of development. There is already, as I said, South Pointe has created thousands of jobs. This Starpoint project, where the Beltway is going to go very close to, is about 1,250 acres and it's going to create as many as 10,000 jobs. So, legislatively, I had to do some things here in Harrisburg to put funding back in my legislative district for the future. And one of my thoughts has always been, as a legislator, we should look out for the next generation. That's something I learned from my parents is that they wanted me to have a better lifestyle than they did and I believe I want to make things better for my children and the next generation. And that's why I always worked on long term projects. As I said, South Pointe I took us four years, legislatively, and actually took us another eight years before buildings were put in that business park. But, now it's 600-and-some acres of high-tech businesses and it's really a showcase for technology and over 6,000-and-some jobs. Now, I didn't do that in 1982 because who was I going to know, where was I going to be in 1992 when it was really moving forward. I didn't know I was even going to be a legislator. So, I didn't do it for myself; I did it for the next generation. And the South Pointe II project, we just started in 1999 and the first buildings are going up, I think, this year. So, that's almost like six years. So, I didn't do it for me, I did it for the next generation. And the Mon-Fayette Expressway/Southern Beltway from 1990 and its just going to be completed, the first leg is going to be completed this year in October which is 16 years. And I know the Starpoint Business Park probably really won't take, although there are a couple businesses there, really won't take hold for 10 or 15 years. So, I've always felt in my legislative career that I wanted to do something to help the next generation. Not necessarily today, as I think my legacy was that I tried to do the right

thing for the future. And legislatively, that's what I worked on for my district, is for the next generation, because I believe in our area; it's a good area, its good people. It's individuals who if your tree falls down in your yard your neighbor is going to come over and help you clean it up. And I wanted to do something to help my neighbors, my friends and their families and families for the future to stay in our area because I think it's a great area to live in. And I wanted to do something legislatively which will leave that legacy, not necessarily having a plaque in my name – which I doubt I'll ever get on anything – but, a legacy that, you know, I was involved in those projects which created jobs which, in return, created residential housing and transportation projects to keep people in our area and create jobs for their children and their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren.

HM: You were also involved on the national scene through NCSL [National Conference of State Legislatures]. Would you like to comment on that?

VL: Well, I was very fortunate, as I said, told you my children were able to – excuse me – go to a lot of areas with me around the country and internationally. I was involved in the National Conference of State Legislatures for a number years; Chairman of their Economic/Development Committees. And I was on the Executive Committee for four years and helped bring the National Conference Convention here back in the mid [19]90s to Philadelphia, about 6,000 people. And before that, I was involved in the Council of State Governments and its Chairman and we brought a conference also to Philadelphia. But, we really used the new Convention Center there, which I was involved in, and felt it

was important for Philadelphia. And after that conference, of the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Republicans decided to have their National Convention there two years later. So, it kind of really highlighted Philadelphia. But, through that organization and actually through the Council of State Governments – [I was] on their governing board for over 10 years and Chairman of the Eastern Region – I was able to be involved in national issues. We lobbied Congress on specific issues whether they were economic development issues, LIHEAP [Low-Income Heating Energy Assistance Program] issues/funding for LIHEAP, AMTRAK. We took on a lot of national issues and really spent time discussing them. One of the things I learned is that, you know, what I was for and what you know, our concerns in the Northeast were concerned about; Members who were from Nebraska or New Mexico had a different viewpoint. So, it took a lot of compromising. And again, it helped me, I think, here in Harrisburg in the fact that I was able to discuss issues with my colleagues from other States and come up with compromise solutions on particular national issues. One of the things I also learned was the system works; whether you come from a big state like California who only has 80 Legislators, or a small state like New Hampshire that has over 430 Legislators. They have the same concerns, the same problems we do. So, legislatively, solutions are almost all the same for those problems. I mean, they dealt with de-regulation of the utility companies in every one of those states just like we did. So, whether you have a large legislature, small legislature, full-time, or part-time all the legislatures came up with solutions that were very similar to what we did here in Pennsylvania. And those organizations, the National Conference of State Legislatures or the Council of State Governments, we were able to learn from other States on how they came up with

solutions to problems. And it helped us legislatively here, to say, “We’ll mimic what they did in Michigan or in Texas,” when it dealt with specific pieces of legislation. So, I think they were organizations which really helped us legislate better here in Pennsylvania because you know, you don’t re-invent the wheel. But, also they were organizations which I learned a lot about compromise and I learned a lot about LIHEAP – that’s Low Income Heating for Energy bills – that’s not a big issue in Mississippi, but it’s a big issue in the Northeast and the Midwest where they have cold winters. So, it was difficult to explain to those individuals why we needed to lobby Congress to get money for LIHEAP because they didn’t have the same problems we did. Or AMTRAK in the Northeast, you know, the train system. You know, how do you talk to a person from Kansas about why you needed funding for AMTRAK? And we dealt with a lot of issues like the transportation of low-level radioactive waste; how we were going to compact between states. And I just learned a lot because it made me understand what the problems were in those particular states, whether it was farming subsidies for people in Iowa or Kansas or Nebraska or the problems with the environment and the issues of cutting trees down in Colorado or Idaho or in the state of Washington or Portland and their environmental issues there. Or planning issues on the expansion in California with all the housing problems and the difficulties with earthquakes; and, you just learned a lot. One of the things I felt fortunate was I was also able to travel. I was traveling out-of-state at least once a month to different states. But, I also had the opportunity to go to Asia twice, to China to understand the cultures there, to meet with governmental officials, eat a lot of different types of food like spiders and different types of bugs. So, you know, it was cultural exchanges between people and governmental officials in different countries. I

was able to go to Europe. I spent a lot of time in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands and Canada and Mexico; understanding the Latin American problems with trade with Mexico and the difficulties they were having there. But, you know, they're next to us [so] we have to have trading partners in Latin America and South America and Europe and really in Asia. Asia is a big marketplace, especially for China. You know, it's a different lifestyle over there and it's a situation where their environmental quality of life isn't as good as ours. And trying to convince their governmental officials that, you know, you need to do something with the environment and competition; understanding whether it's Mexico or China that people work for a dollar a day. They don't all wear the Mao suits though. You know, they like American blue jeans and they like tennis shoes. Even though you're not supposed to have American dollars over there, you know, you can buy things on the street because they want American cash and they want the American lifestyle. But, it's a different type of, you know, still a Communistic country and there's some problems over there. To try to convince some of their governmental people that, you know that they should be a little bit friendlier with their employees. It doesn't hurt to pay a decent wage because their buying power is greater. And it's good in the long run to have a good environmental policy. We don't want pollution all over the place in your rivers and in the air. But, it's difficult to explain some of those things to some people. But, learning the process of understanding their concerns is only made me a better legislator, but also a better person, I think.

HM: As far as global issues, 9/11 [September 11, 2001] was something that impacted everybody. Could you comment on how that impacted your district?

VL: Actually, the way it impacted my district was financially; that a lot people worked at the Pittsburgh International Airport. I was there when we did the ground-breaking and I was there on the first opening. And we really thought, especially with the Southern Beltway going into there, the highway, and all these business parks that we spent years and years trying to create in and around the Pittsburgh International Airport because we thought it was going to be a big boom. And we were going to build another terminal. So, economically, it has actually slowed the plans that we had spent years and years building for new jobs and new businesses and new construction in and around the airport. So, it's really impacted us in the sense that with the new security systems out there – I don't fly anymore, because it takes me four hours to drive; it only takes me a half-hour to get to the airport, then you have to be there for two hours and its 45 minutes here, so it's impacted me personally in the fact that there is no use in flying from Pittsburgh to Harrisburg when I can be here in 15 minutes difference – but, it's a sense that it's changed our philosophy in what I think the future and the expansion is going to be, really, on a timetable. So, 9/11 has impacted us I think, in my legislative district, economically, as it has slowed the process down of what I believed and what many people believed was going to be an economic boom for the Pittsburgh region.

HM: Did you have a good relationship with the media?

VL: I think I did. I think the news media has been fair. I think there were times where, you know, it was always tense when you're dealing with hot-button issues like pay-raises

or tax increases. But, I think the news media; I know the *Beaver County Times* was a very good newspaper for me, because we met with them like two or three times a year with their editorial board discussing issues. They wanted to be involved; they wanted to know the issues. And I think one of the things with the news media was that they knew I was going to be honest with them. I wasn't going to do the political process. I was going to say that yes we can do this or no we can't do this. That's some of the difficulty I think I've had even politically back home is I learned a long time ago from an old political person and I never took his advice, he said, "Lie 95 percent of the time, you'll get away with it. The other 5 percent, at least the people will say 'Hey, he tried to do something.'" But, I never took that philosophy. I always wanted to tell people the truth and to try to give them the facts. And that's what I did with the news media is; I was going to give them the facts and tell them the truth. And that's what I did back in my district. I mean, whether they were with News Releases or whether they were with controversial issues, I wasn't going to skirt the issue. They says, "Did you vote for taxes?" I say, "Yeah, this is why I did this." Or, "Did you vote for a pay-raise?" "Yes, this is why I did it. I worked a lot of hours." I'm not going to make up something. And I think in that sense, the news media respected me. You were always careful what you said around them and they would always like to try to tell you, you know, they wanted you to make some kind-of comment that was off the cuff. I never did that. I always dealt with the news media; gave them the facts, just like I did with my constituents and told them the truth. I think in the later years, just like it did politically, is that there's a point and time in your career where people don't want to hear the truth and don't want to hear the facts. When we did the Mon-Fayette Expressway Southern Beltway I would send out informational packets

on, this is the process; these are the 10 steps the Federal Government says we have to proceed with. Or if it was dealing with a hazardous waste site or a refuge system, I'd say, "Here's DEP's [Department of Environmental Protection] regulations, here's the process." And sometimes that makes people upset. Just like in even with the news media; when you give them the facts and tell them the truth, they might hear what they want to hear. And I made my mind up years ago that I'm not going to do that; I'm not going to just tell you what you want to hear. And you know, you come in say, "Oh, I have a DUI. Can you fix it?" I'll tell them, "No." Or if they wanted a job with some business or the State, I'd say, "Here's the way you do it. I can't promise you this." So, I think it's worked for me, because I think that's the way, the type of person I am. And with the news media, I think it's worked over the years, but they tend to – just like your constituents – there's a point and time where they don't want to hear the truth, they don't want to hear the facts; they want to hear the controversy. They want to be told what they want to hear. But, it's really never caused me a major problem with the news media. I mean, my local newspaper hasn't endorsed me the last couple times, but basically that's because my district has changed more to Washington County. That probably if my District is still 50/40 Beaver-Washington, the news Media in Washington County would have endorsed me, because they knew they couldn't cause me a controversial problem in the political process. But, once my District went to almost like 90 percent of Washington County, they said, "Oh, I can go after this guy now." So, that's kind, with the editorial board, it's caused a little bit of problems. Plus, the person who ran against me used to write for them so, that's a little bit – .

HM: Did you ever consider running for another office?

VL: I think early on I had a lot of interest about Congress because I came from Washington D.C. And at one time, I thought about running for Congress, but I knew from a political standpoint that I just couldn't do it. I think, maybe, in the early years maybe back in the [19]80s if the Congressional District would have been more in tune to what I could have fit a congressional run for, I may have considered it but, not really. I mean, I think Congress is really the place to be because you are dealing with national and international issues, but I'm very proud of my state legislative career. But, I have no desires to be a State Senator or an Auditor General or Governor. I really still enjoy the national level and probably if we may have had a Democratic President, I may have looked at a possibility of something in the Administration in Washington D.C., because I think what I've learned here and learned how to deal with people on a state-wide issue and on a national issue/international issue I could have provided some of that expertise and help in trying to formulate national policy and international policy. But, not as an elected official; it takes too much money.

HM: Was there one aspect that you absolutely enjoyed as a Representative?

VL: Again, I think learning. It was just phenomenal. I mean, to go down into a 600 foot – underground – to a deep mine and learn about long wall mining and learn about how things processed with conveyor belts instead of the old coal cars: going into hospitals, learning about the difficulties that nurses have with the amount of hours they have to put

in: bringing in the Federal Government and understanding how the funding goes with hospitals and medical research: going to high-tech industries: learning about the steel industry: touring different plants: learning about the pharmaceutical industry by hands-on: going into and visiting those businesses. As I said, dairy farms and other types of farms in the industry learning – I think that’s the main aspect: I just enjoyed learning. Having people come in and discuss their issues with me; reading a lot about issues. It’s like I’ve been going to school every single day. And what was nice about the process is that you can deal with one issue one minute that maybe not so important – maybe somebody lost their driver’s license – and the next minute discussing something about corporate tax law. So, it changed and I think that’s the aspect of this job [that] made it so interesting is I was able to learn a lot about a lot of things. But, one thing I learned was to individuals: you have to listen; everything is important to them. It may be small to the next person, but someone lost their driver’s license; they’re afraid, they don’t know what to do. And listening to their problem and trying to solve their solution is just as important as some environmental impact study in some chemical plant. I’ll never forget one of the constituents called, I think I was at home, and this lady called me up one evening and she was crying and everything. And I was saying, “What’s the problem? What’s the problem?” And she was crying and crying and finally she said, “I have a raccoon in my refrigerator.” I’m saying, “Oh my goodness, what the heck is this, a raccoon in your refrigerator?” I says, “Okay.” She says, “You don’t understand. I have a raccoon in my refrigerator.” And she’s crying and this – I said, “What do you want?” I mean, I was pulling at straws. And it’s kind of funny, but it was serious. And I say, “Do you want a recipe on how to cook a raccoon?” “No, no, you don’t understand. This raccoon is in my

refrigerator. I threw it in my refrigerator.” I say, “Do you want to know how to skin the raccoon?” You know, I couldn’t understand why she was calling me, why she was so worried about this raccoon in her refrigerator. Well finally, after about three or four minutes I got it out of her. And she was an older lady, she lived alone, and she had a dog as a pet. Her dog was bitten by this raccoon. And it was, you know, her dog was her family member. And she was so upset she thought the raccoon would give the dog rabies that she picked the raccoon up, didn’t know what to do with it, threw it in the refrigerator and she wanted somebody to come out and test it for rabies. But, it’s kind of humorous, but the woman was really, you know, emotional about it because that poor dog was her family member. That’s all she had in her life was that poor dog and she was so worried about that dog she didn’t know what to do. You know, she wanted to make sure I could come up and help her out how to solve this problem of testing this raccoon to make sure her dog didn’t have rabies because she didn’t want to lose her family member. So, you know, I learned to listen and I learned that problems out there are important to everyone. Maybe not, you may say, it’s miniscule and it’s not important to you, but that individual at that particular time of the day it’s important. And as a public servant and as a legislator, I learned to try to deal with that one issue because that one person is coming to you for help, they don’t know where else to go, and you try to help that individual on that particular problem. And we are not so big as not to listen and try to help individuals with individual problems. And I think that’s what not only the learning process of learning new things everyday, but the learning process of individual problems are important to people and we are here on this Earth, I think, to help other people. I think in my 27 years, that’s what I want to go out as: is a person who learned a lot, but was willing to listen and

willing to deal with individual problems no matter how small they may be to me or to you, they were important for that person to help them out.

HM: Is there one aspect that you did not like?

VL: I can't say there is. I think the waiting game of the legislative process; I am a little bit disappointed. I hate to close with that type of argument but, we've gone full cycle. As I said, I started off in my career where it was a situation where the Leaders controlled everything to moving forward through the late [19]80s and early [19]90s to really a good legislative process; that we kind of moved back again, legislatively, to a process of the Leadership controlling everything and you don't know what you're doing from day to day. I've always felt the Congressional process was a lot better; where Members were individual Members. That you made the decision yourself, everyone's equal; no one is better than anyone else. You should be given the same staff. You should be given the same amount of money, and you should be able to make your own decisions in the legislative process and I think that's – the only disappointing thing is, I think, we are going backwards legislatively. I like it more of an open process where we know what we are voting on from week-to-week not from hour-to-hour. I just think it makes the process work better. And I'm hoping that over the next five to 10 years that the legislative process moves more towards that again and that individual Members have more input like I had the opportunity of having. Have the opportunity to tour and to have public hearings around the state like I had the opportunity, because I think one of the sad stories is today, people don't know each other on each side of the aisle. We used to play golf, go

out to dinner together. When you're at public hearings, you're living in hotels with Members, whether it's in Erie or Philadelphia. And you know and understand why someone votes the way they do, why they bring the issues up the way they – you may not agree with their solutions, but I mean when you're in the inner city, they have different problems than you do if you're from Bucks County, a suburban county, or from Pike County. And I think that's the disappointing thing I have today is that there's not that camaraderie and not that public process of going out and learning as much as we did in the past. Understanding each individual section of this Commonwealth and each individual person's issues and to better understand why someone votes the way they do and why they bring up the issues they do and you go in and really discuss good solutions to problems the way that we at least started that process in the late [19]80s and early [19]90s. I'm only hoping that Members who come after me have the same opportunity I was able to have and having friends on both sides of the aisle; having an understanding of all the issues really in depth as an individual legislator. I think one of the difficulties now is that everything is at your finger tips. You have computers on the Floor so you could research real quick why this legislation is what it is. You can, you know, pull up things on the computer so quickly and I think that's great, but words are only so much. I think you really have to get into the legislation, get into the issues one-on-one, to tour areas to understand why these issues need to be resolved. You know, it's great to read books, it's great to read paper, great to read on the computer so quickly, but one-on-one interaction, I think, is the best way an elected official can understand and help solve problems.

HM: Do you have a fondest memory?

VL: I think that's my fondest memory is the whole 27 years and the whole process of just having the opportunity. Every minute was different. So, it's hard. I don't really have a fondest memory in the fact that there was one particular piece of legislation, one particular issue; they were all great. And I learned from them. And I think that's my fondest memory, is I've learned so much. I haven't learned everything, but 27 years of learning different subject matters and the fondest memory I think is just trying to come up with solutions and trying to help individual problems.

HM: Are you going to remain active in politics?

VL: Oh, we'll see. I haven't made that decision yet. I want to take a little break. I think politics is the art of compromise so it's not necessarily going out and campaigning for people. So, in that sense I will be involved in politics in the art of compromise of coming up with solutions to problems; whether they will be in the public or private sector or in the volunteer sector. I would, personally, like to do a lot of international relief work. I have a big interest – I know there's a lot of problems here in the U.S., but there's a lot of problems in Africa and South America with all the health difficulties; AIDS. There's just so many – in Indonesia – there's so many international problems that I think what I would like to do is a lot of hands-on politics in helping in relief work around the world and trying to help people on an individual basis, just like I did here. Not administratively. Right now I'm not interested in doing the administrative help. I did all that for 27 years. I liked to do more hands-on, individual help, and if I can come up with

the right package to do the right volunteer work internationally, I think that's where my interest lies now.

HM: Lastly, do you have any advice for new Members that will be starting here in January?

VL: I think my advice is pretty much what I said before is: understand that, you know, everybody put's their pants on one leg at a time. No one is more important than anyone else; we don't have kings and queens and dukes and princesses. And whether you are a Leader, a committee Chairman, or a rank-in-file Member, you're all the same. You're one of 203. And your vote is just as important as any other vote. And from that is that your constituents are all the same as you. And I think my advice is, don't think you're that big of a person; don't think you're an important person. You're an important person in the fact that you have an opportunity to help people. And that's, you'll be an important person if you can help individuals, if you can help groups, and help solve problems of those particular groups. And just don't look out for today. I mean you're not, you know, I think we're put on this Earth to look out, you know, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years from now. Just don't look at solving solutions for today's problems; look at solving solutions for the next generation. So, my advice would be spend some time in learning the process, make friends on both sides of the aisle, learn as much as you can, and be involved and engaged in helping people, not yourself. You're not here in this job to help yourself except helping yourself in learning and being educated. Your job here is to help others; that's why we're put here to serve. Understand that everybody's problem

is your problem and try to come up with a solution. Be truthful, be honest, have integrity. Don't just make up things just to appease people. I think you have to live with yourself. It may make people angry, but tell them the truth, give them the facts and try to do the right thing by people.

HM: Thank you very much.

VL: Okay, thank you very much. I really enjoyed it.

HM: Thank you.