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INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Sheila Miller (R)

129th District

Berks County

1993-2006

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Heidi Mays (HM): Good morning, I'm here today with Representative Sheila Miller who represented the 129th Legislative District from Berks County from 1993 to 2006. Thank you for being here with me today.

The Honorable Sheila Miller (SM): Well, it's my pleasure.

HM: Thank you. I wanted to begin by asking you about your childhood and your family life and how that prepared you for public office.

SM: Well, really, my childhood prepared me for a career in agriculture and farming and not really for a career in politics. But, because the two came together in my career path, I guess to a degree that helped me out. Mostly by building a good work ethic and giving me a familiarity and a love for farming and agriculture which over the years directed my path to first getting a career with USDA, United States Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service, which then lead me to a writing career with *Lancaster Farming*, which is a nationally circulated farm newspaper. And through those doors, I met legislators in Washington [D.C.] and in Harrisburg and that opened the door for me to become the Director of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee. I did that for almost a decade before running for office. So, I guess that childhood on my family's commercial beef farm really did, in some directions, pave the way for me to eventually become a member of the House, but quite frankly, my family was not very political. They did not really get into governmental matters except for Sunday lunches where my

dad and my sisters sparred about, you know, different political issues. But I just basically sat there and listened when I was a kid.

HM: I heard that you are a distant relative of Dwight D. Eisenhower¹, too.

SM: Actually, I am. So, in a way some of my ancestral roots did help me out a little bit but yes, my grandfather was related through his family to Dwight Eisenhower. I guess he was the only other elected official in our family. He served on the school board back in the early 1900s for a number of years when they were still a one room school house and, you know, but he was the only one that held public office.

HM: Did you ever think that you had political aspirations?

SM: No and I always tell my fourth graders that I absolutely hated Problems in Democracy when I was in high school (*laugh*). It was a course that I managed to get through and get an A in, but I absolutely hated the subject. So, if anyone would have said to me when I was in high school, “Oh, some day you are going to be serving in the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania,” I would have said, “Not on your life. There is no way I will ever do that!” But, as I’ve told my daughter, Emily, over the years, never say never because you are not sure what you are going to be asked to do in the future. What happened was, in 1992 the former Legislator who held the 129th seat, John Davies, [State Representative, Berks County, 1975-1992] announced his retirement and a number of folks from my farm community said, “Sheila, you have been doing this job for a decade

¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower served as the 34th President of the United States from 1953-1964.

in the Senate. We need your expertise, we need your experience. Why don't you consider running?" So, my husband and I did the unheard of thing of thinking about it for about a month and then finally, we said, "No, I really should do this to pay back the public for everything that we have been blessed with," and I have always told farmers, "Get involved; don't sit on the side lines." And so, I guess they were paying me back by saying, "Okay; practice what you preach; get involved; do it." So, I took off my policy making hat, put on a political hat and ran for office.

HM: So could you talk about that first run?

SM: Oh yes, it was grueling. It was the best answer to Weight Watchers that anyone would want to have. I think I lost about 30 or 40 pounds in that year, in 1992. But [I] started off with a seven-way Primary. Myself and six men running for the seat, which I actually find encouraging because it meant that there were a lot of people and a lot of talent that the people could choose from and all of us were different; coming at it for different reasons and different backgrounds. Fortunately, you know, I was the winner. I did not leave my job in the Senate in order to do this. I worked in the evenings when I would get finished with my job in the Senate and on weekends and I basically wore out two pair of shoes. [I] Went to visit as many constituents, future constituents, as I could; to tell them why I was running and what I would try to do for them. There were only a couple of things that I told folks that I would absolutely do for them. One of them was work hard, pretty basic and, you know, that's my background. I'm, I guess, a workaholic, but the other one was to try to complete a major highway that had been

promised to Berks County for decades, and was never done. The other one was to continue working on farmland preservation and then finally, local tax reform. Out of those four promises to the people, there is only one that we have only skimmed the edges on and that's the property tax reform. But it was a grueling Primary, but one that was very educational for me, because I had never run for office before, so this was a learning curve, how to circulate petitions, all of the paperwork that you need to complete for the Department of State; all of the forms that you have to fill in. And the campaign – creating a committee and getting a treasurer and all of that was something that I said “You know, how do I have time to do all of this?” But, we knew we had to do it. At the time, my daughter was in first grade so, along with farming, which my husband and I continued to do, plus raising my young daughter, you know, I added all of the campaign to that mix of work requirement. Plus, continuing to work full time in the Senate because I felt an obligation to not shirk that responsibility also. [I] Managed to make it through the Primary, as I said, and, you know, won fairly—not huge in the margin, but enough when you are considering that there are seven of us running and then I had the awesome task of running against another woman in the November Election. For Berks County, that was historic and never before had two women before run for a House seat; vying against one another. And my opponent was Judith Cranice, who eventually became our County Controller. So she did, after losing that election, go on and hold a county row office for a number of years. I can't quite remember how long, but she has retired before me. *(laugh)* But again, she was very prepared, very thorough. She did a lot of research before the debates so she was quite formidable as an opponent and kept me on my toes, in order to stay one step ahead of her. But again, I was very happy to win that election and

then became, of course, the State Legislator for the 129th and to have held that seat for seven elections.

HM: Did you like campaigning?

SM: I hated campaigning. The only good thing about campaigning was I did get to catch up a little bit with my mom because she would tag along with me as we would go door to door to door every Saturday and in the evenings. The one story that I will share: we went to one home and an older woman came out and my mom was kind of standing behind me on the sidewalk. This woman comes out and says, “Oh, all politicians are crooks. You’re a crook and, you know, I don’t want to talk to you.” And my mom took it personally and she steps out from behind me and says, “My daughter is not a crook and you can’t call her that (*laugh*).” So, I had to just calmly turn my mom around and say, “Let’s walk, Mom, it’s okay. You don’t have to worry about defending me at this point.” But, those are just some of the little memories that you have and that you take away from all of that. The nice thing and the amazing thing is how welcoming most people are when a complete stranger comes to their door and says, “Hi, I’m Sheila Miller. I’m running for the 129th seat in the House of Representatives.” And they will stand there and spend time speaking with you. Some on cold rainy days actually invited me into their home to warm up. They appreciated the fact that we came out and actually took the time and were interested enough in their opinions to come out door-to-door. Subsequent elections, I didn’t have time to do the door-to-door when I was campaigning and, you know, met people throughout the year rather than on the campaign trail, but it was

amazing. The one thing that I think I might still do is – I was amazed at the number of different types of door knockers that people have. So, I could become an expert in that and might write a book about that; from the ornate to the very simple. In Berks County, when you see a lot of people's doors and you're knocking on them, those are certain things that you start looking at and start noticing. And who knows, maybe I'll write a book.

HM: Did anyone help you get started with your first election?

SM: The only thing I could say is that I have to give a lot of credit to my former boss Senator Ed Helfrick [Edward; State Senator, 1981-2003; State Representative, 1977-1980], only in that he encouraged me. He really didn't give me any pointers to—how to run a campaign or anything like that, but he encouraged me to go ahead and go for it and contributed a little bit to my initial campaign fund, but was very understanding. And when I would have a question about “Oh, should I be saying this or doing that?” and, “What do you recommend?,” he basically always just told me to be honest with yourself and with the people and don't tell them something just because you think that is what they want to hear. Tell them what you believe and that's what I have always tried to do.

HM: What do you think is the most difficult challenge facing female candidates today?

SM: Oh, (*laughing*) do you just want one?

HM: Okay.

SM: Oh goodness, women candidates I think have a multitude of challenges. Number one, and first and foremost, is the fact that most of us really hate asking for help and we have been taught to do it all ourselves and we're self-sufficient and that's usually how we've gotten to where we are and the opportunity to be in Leadership positions. So, asking for help is very difficult. Raising money is also very difficult and I have heard from my male colleagues that it is also difficult for them, but I think, for us, it's just a little bit more of a challenge to do that. Networking is sometimes hard and it's also hard to find volunteers. So, I don't understand necessarily why that happens, but if you look at my male colleagues, when they run, a lot of their support groups and people stuffing the envelopes and things like that are women who are getting involved in their campaign. I just don't see it reciprocated when it's a woman candidate. Throughout the years, I've tried to encourage, mentor, as I could, you know, young women on how to do it, but it is still a daunting task. I give a lot of credit to those like Elizabeth Dole² who run nationwide and do well, but it takes a lot of hard work.

HM: Raising money is certainly an issue in campaigns. Do you consider yourself a good fund raiser?

SM: No—no I am probably the worst fund raiser there is. My family is Pennsylvania Dutch; we don't spend money. Fortunately for me, I've never – I probably have spent

² Born July 29, 1936, Elizabeth Dole was elected to US Senate in 2002 to represent North Carolina. She is also the wife of former Senator and US Presidential candidate Bob Dole.

less in seven elections than most people spend in one and I credit that to the fact that, throughout those two year sessions that we're in before we have to run again, you know, I just work really, really hard and don't shirk my responsibilities. So, I never had to really go out and raise hundreds of thousands of dollars. My initial campaign, I think, the total for both the Primary and the General Election, in 1992, was twenty two thousand dollars. After that, I spent less than ten, you know, for the Primary and General. The rest – not each; not all six after that – but, you know, less than ten per election. That's almost unheard of, but again, I have always gone out, been very visible, done my job, you know, followed through with constituent work. We have tons of files to shred in my district offices because of the amount of constituent services and calls that we got from people from, not just in my District, but even outside of the area. Friends, relatives would say something to them, "Well, call Sheila Miller." Well, of course, you say, "Did you contact your legislator?" And many times they hadn't. So, then we pointed them in the right direction, but if there was one particular case that I had expertise in, you know, we would try to help them as much as we could, but always telling them to go contact their legislator.

HM: In your own words, could you describe the 129th district?

SM: That—it's probably the best district in the entire—Pennsylvania (*laugh*)—of the entire Commonwealth. It's a mixture of agricultural land and old farms and suburbs and, I guess, I was going to say suburban but suburbs and also some old residential towns along some major corridors. We're seeing a lot of growth, right now, in the area. A lot

of people moving in, which is why in redistricting, my geographical area actually shrank in my district. It's the largest legislative District, geographically, still in Berks County and again, a beautiful District. It starts at the top of the Blue Mountain and goes all the way down to Lancaster County; west Lebanon County and then just almost to the edge of the city of Reading. So it's a huge area, but again, a lot of interesting areas in it. A couple really unique things like the Corp of Engineers' Blue Marsh Lake is totally within my legislative District from the head waters down to the huge damn that protected the city of Reading in this last flood. I also have Conrad Weiser Homestead which is a State Park that's run by the [Pennsylvania] Historical and Museum Commission. And so, a lot of beautiful areas; a lot of natural areas: the Appalachian Trail on the Blue Mountain. And, as I said, close to my heart, a lot of agricultural land. We lead the area of—Berks County leads the nation in preserving farmland and, I think, my side of the County, the 129th District, probably has the most farms preserved. After that, it would be Oley Township. We might be running neck and neck there, but we had preserved quite a few farms.

HM: What is the political makeup of your district?

SM: Oh, you know, people always ask me that and I am not a numbers person. So, I can't tell you what the registration is because number one, it's not important to me. In my political career, I never worried about how many Republicans there were or how many Democrats or how many Independents. I just did my job. And I always tell people, you need as many Democrats voting for you as you have Republicans because

there are some people that are not going to like what you stand for or what you do, regardless of their political party. So you'll have to ask Leadership what the background is, but I think that, at this point, it is a little bit more Republican than it is Democrat, but in my area, it is conservative Democrats from back in the you know early 1900's when people registered that way, their families registered that way. And another unique thing is Berks County is, in many families, the husband will register in one party and the wife in another party. I found that very curious as I was campaigning in 1992. Well, why? They always tell me, "So, we get the literature from both candidates." So, in the end, they'll decide who they are going to support, but that way, they're both getting—you know, they're getting whatever information is being mailed out. So then they make a joint decision. They don't cancel their votes out, but you can't just say that that family is Republican or that family is Democrat. So, it's a little odd in Berks County, I guess.

HM: That's very interesting. Have you noticed a change in your district since you started, first started?

SM: Oh, absolutely. My district is changing with a lot of people moving in from Philadelphia, New Jersey. It's not necessarily the people who have lived there for generation upon generation, anymore. We have a lot of new development coming in and with that, brings new philosophies, I guess, and new demands and, you know, some of it I don't like. That may have been also what prompted my decision to leave because I don't necessarily see that my views reflect my district's views, as well as they did back in

1992. I guess you'd call me pretty conservative when it comes to my view of the role of government in people's lives and I see a liberalization in my constituency.

HM: Do you feel that you have effectively reached your constituents through the years?

SM: Oh, absolutely. You know, my preference is personal contact with my constituents and I know there is a question about pet peeves or some things that you don't like. I think one of the worse things that we did when it's that relationship between a constituent and their legislator is when we introduced the Internet to our District offices and our political offices. The Internet has made contact with your legislator impersonal and, in many cases, anonymous. And I think it's hurt legislator's effectiveness and their ability to talk one on one with their constituency and explain themselves and who they are and what they believe in; also to hear, one on one, from those constituents. I can tell you that in 1992, when I started my office, I told my staff, "Be happy for this first week before the phones get hooked up, because from here on out, those phones will ring and ring and ring and you will never have this kind of quiet time." And that's been the case, even with the Internet and the innovations that we have. Our phones still ring, [and] we still get faxes which was innovative back in the 1990s. You know, faxes were a big thing and we still get some handwritten letters, but very few; very few handwritten or typewritten letters, now, that come in by snail mail, as my daughter calls it. The Internet, while it has helped in speeding up communications, I think it has shortened the patience level of constituents to the point where if they don't hear back from you within a minute, they're upset [and] they're concerned. "What's wrong with you? Don't you have this Internet hooked to you

intravenously, some how?” Again, many times, they will express themselves hiding behind some fictitious name and I think it has hurt that personal relationship.

HM: Could you tell us about the Warren Street extension? I think that was one of your projects.

SM: Yes.

HM: One of the goals that you had mentioned earlier.

SM: One of my goals was to hopefully finish a road that had been promised to Berks County for decades. We had what was called “the road to nowhere” and it truly was. It was just a four lane highway that connected nothing [and] that stretched through the center of Berks County. And it was kind of a joke, but everyone recognized it as “the road to nowhere” and hopped on it to just go that little short distance. We’d become very used to it, but what happened over the years, were a number of governors had promised former legislators, including my predecessor, John Davies, that this road would be completed. Many of the properties needed to finish the southern extension to Lancaster County had been purchased back in the [19]60s, [19]70s, and they just were there, vacant. I know when I was campaigning in that area, I kept wondering, “Well, why are there no homes built here?” You know, there are homes popping up everywhere, why are there no homes there? And, you know, I then learned that this was where a new—that new highway was supposed to be built. [It is a] major concern, major issue for the folks that

lived in the suburbs of Reading, Sinking Spring, especially, and areas that I didn't typically travel because our farms are in Tulpehocken Township, on the complete western side of the county. So the completion of this road had no personal bearing for me, but I knew that it was necessary for my constituents and for the whole county because linking Lancaster County to "the road to nowhere" would allow for truck traffic to pass through and, hopefully, economic development to be spurred in the city of Reading. So, I agreed to go for it and did what I could, of course, to talk to Governor Casey [Robert P.; Pennsylvania Governor, 1987-1995], and at the end of his term in office, he did assure us that the money was there to do the Warren Street Extension and the 222 South piece of that highway. Suddenly, it was a campaign year where we saw Tom Ridge [Thomas; Pennsylvania Governor, 1995-2001] running for Governor, and he came to Berks County as a candidate and said, "We will complete this highway." Well, he was sworn in as Governor and, unfortunately, he couldn't find the money to complete the road. And I kept thinking, "No, he's going to talk to his Secretary of Transportation and find out that yes, the money is there." And we had multiple meetings with the Governor's cabinet and the Governor and we still could not get him to find the money. So, a number of key bills came up, during that time, where Sheila Miller's vote was important. I'd say to the Governor, "Well I am a no vote unless we can get this commitment on this highway to get it completed." And a couple of those messages and eventually I did – when it was time to do the gas tax vote in Pennsylvania – did get his written commitment. At the time, John Barley [State Representative, Lancaster County, 1985- 2002], Representative John Barley, was Chairman of the Appropriations Committee and he was like, "Oh, no, we can't do this, Sheila." I was like, "Oh, but we

have to if you want my vote.” And so the message was given to Governor Tom Ridge and I got frantic calls, one even going to my farm house. My husband calls me on my cell phone and says, “Sheila, what have you done, now, because the Governor is on the phone.” And I’m like (*laughs*), “It’s okay, you know, I am just trying to get this commitment for the road.” And that next morning, I walked into my office and had a letter signed by Tom Ridge, because I told them it wasn’t good enough just for the Secretary of Transportation; it had to be the Governor, himself, committing to do this highway. And I looked at the letter and said, “Wow, this isn’t good enough. This is just saying you’ll complete the Warren Street Bypass, it doesn’t say anything about the 222 Extension.” Well, the Governor’s person who delivered this letter to me said, “Oh no, you’re not asking me to go back and get another letter from Tom Ridge. He’s unhappy about this, as it is.” I said, “Unfortunately, yes, I am. I need the commitment for the whole highway, not just the little piece of the Warren Street Extension.” And so, low-and-behold, he came back a couple of hours later with that letter signed by Tom Ridge and I have it framed and it is in my office. I will always keep it because it’s one of those things that was very nerve racking. I think I had a few ulcers, you know, because of it, but it was basically my saying, “This is important, Governor, and it’s important for Berks County. We have been promised it for, probably, around forty years and it’s never been delivered.” So it was a standoff, and we actually just opened up that highway in June of 2006. Three sections that are in my legislative district are having people travel up and down them now, so it’s a completed work.

HM: (*Cough*) I’m sorry. That must make you feel really good.

SM: It does—it does and I have yet to drive the whole section, but before I leave office I am going to go down there and drive from one end of it to the other. Unfortunately, [I] wasn't even able to participate in the ribbon cuttings, on those events. I tried to get them to reschedule it so that I could make it, but I already committed to doing a couple of other events with each section, and it just never seemed to work out. So, even though I've been credited, and I like to take credit for having helped getting that road done, I was never actually there to cut that ribbon.

HM: (*Laugh*). What would you say surprised you the most about coming to Harrisburg? Well, you were already working with the Senate. Do you think anything surprised [you] as being an elected official, yourself?

SM: Yeah, I guess being in the Minority was a real change because when I worked on staff in the Senate I was working for the Senate Republicans who held the Majority and hold the Majority in the Senate for decades. I don't even know how long. So, it was a whole change of mind set. I never forget the first amendment that I offered to legislation on the House floor and I got up and I spoke very eloquently about why this was an important change to make to this particular bill, only to have it defeated. And it was almost like a wake up call for me because I was saying to myself, "Wait, how can this be voted down?" Well, it was voted down because it was a Republican sponsored amendment. It didn't matter what it was, you know, what the contents of it were, at that point, and it taught me then that I needed to do a better job of doing my homework. After

that, and in my first term in office, when I was in the Minority party, I was still able to get two bills through the House, through the Senate, and signed into law by Governor Casey. So, I learned how important it was to work in a bi-partisan fashion and that it's not an automatic. You know, just because you sponsor something, especially when you are in the Minority, you have to work twice as hard to get things done. [It's] Not impossible, though, but you have to work a lot harder at it.

HM: Do you believe anyone to be a mentor to you as you started in the House?

SM: I would have to say Elinor Taylor [State Representative, Chester County, 1977-2006] who is the "Grand Dame" of the women in the House of Representatives and I look up to her tremendously. She is just probably the strongest woman I know and yet, a gentle lady. She taught me to basically stick to my guns if I believed in something and to not let the "good old boy" network intimidate me. She served a long time with very few women colleagues and said to me, "I don't want to be treated differently; I just want to be treated equally." And so, that's kind of the philosophy that I brought to this; I don't want to be set apart as different because I am a woman, and we only represent about thirteen percent of the entire House of Representatives, but I also don't want to be over-looked when it's something that I think is important. So, in my tenure in the House, I very deliberately stayed away from committee assignments that are viewed as women assignments. I serve on Agriculture, on Game and Fisheries, on Tourism and Recreational Development. I served on the Labor Relations Committee; again, those that aren't where woman are usually earmarked to go when they are elected to the House of

Representatives. As a matter of fact, I caused a lot of concern to the folks in the Game Commission when I asked to be on the Game and Fisheries Committee. I think that they thought that I was an animal rights advocate and were a little concerned and then they realized, then after they got to know me, I come at that from a wildlife conservation view as a farmer and knowing that we need to manage the wildlife population and also, while I don't hunt personally, I have a lot of hunters in my family and used to raise Irish Setters, you know, for pheasant work. So, it was not that I was anti-hunter – by any means – that I asked to be on that committee, but that was the thought when they saw a woman asking to be on that committee back in the 1990s.

HM: Would you say that you were able to mentor anyone in your tenure?

SM: Well I would have to say I have been proud of the fact that I've helped a number of young women throughout the years. None that I know of have run for elected office, but who have in their own rights gone through school or, you know, through other career changes and have become leaders in their own right. The one mentor - for my daughter. You know, I have to say that I am very proud of the fact that she is really become a leader in her own right. And when I told her that I was retiring, she said "Oh, Mom," she said, "Oh, Mom, that's great and you deserve some time," and things like that because she said, "I know how hard you work." But, she really has learned a lot just from my position, being here. Throughout her youth, whether it was in 4-H or Girl Scouts, she just seemed to percolate right up to, you know, the top; to be the leader, in whatever group she was. And one time, she shared with me that she—when she is in those positions, she

thinks about how Speaker of the House Matt Ryan [Matthew J.; State Representative, Delaware County, 1963-2003; Speaker 1981-1983, 1995-2003] would have handled the situation and then she tries to do the same thing. So, even though she had to share me with 60 thousand people growing up, from the time she was in first grade, till now, she is 21 years old. You know, she has also gained a lot from that experience and she was happy when she was able to vote for me for the first time (*laughs*) and I told her she better would (*laughs*).

HM: As in leadership, along those same lines, you represented Pennsylvania and CLS, Women's Legislative Network. Could you explain this role and your participation in that organization?

SM: They would fire me, I have to say, because, yes, while I was part of that group and did a very limited amount of work for them in organizing a meeting here in the State of Pennsylvania. It's shame on me because I have been so busy with my role here as a legislator and my farm that I continued to actively farm, plus taking care of my daughter, that I really didn't have time to go to many meetings across the nation. I did go to them when they were here in Pennsylvania, but beyond that, I probably was not our, you know, Women Caucus's best representative on that. But I did agree, when Ellen Bard [State Representative, Montgomery County, 1995-2004] retired from the House, to step into that role and unfortunately, Ellen did a far better job than I did. Fortunately for them, Ellen did, but unfortunately for them, they got me after Ellen. (*laughs*)

HM: You have had the opportunity to coordinate the House’s Fiftieth Anniversary tribute to World War II Veterans who fought in Iwo Jima [HR 55 of 1995]. Could you explain how you became involved in this?

SM: Oh, certainly. I spoke to Speaker Ryan after we had had a ceremony for the Battle of the Bulge and those veterans. I said to the Speaker, because he himself was a Marine, “What are we going to do for the Marines? Are we going to have a 50 Anniversary Celebration for them, also?” And he looked at me and said, “You got the job” *(laugh)* You know, I was like, “What? You know, this is only my second term in office,” and I had never organized an event for the entire House of Representatives. But I decided, yes, I would do it because, primarily, my father fought on Iwo Jima. He was in the first wave that hit the beaches at Yellow Beach and, fortunately for me, survived. The stories that he has shared with his grandchildren – he never really spoke about the War with my sister and myself – but he did speak to the grandchildren about it. It was horrific and, at one point, he shared with them how a bullet hit his helmet and zinged off, so that’s how close it was and he actually still has his helmet with the bullet crease right through it. So, we’re very lucky to have my dad here and still with us and still farming, by the way, but it was an important tribute for our Veterans and one that I was personally very proud of.

HM: Sam Hayes [Samuel; State Representative, Blair, Centre and Huntingdon Counties, 1971-1992; Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture, 1997-2003] described the House Floor as a livestock auction.

SM: *(Laughs)*

HM: What would you—how would you describe the House?

SM: Oh, well, that's a pretty fitting description that Sam brings his agricultural roots to it also, and I can see it fitting because many times we do feel like we are being driven down a particular chute and, perhaps, on the way to slaughter. Who knows, but it is very noisy. It's improved a little bit but always a busy, busy place to work. I describe it to my fourth graders as a huge mixing bowl because you put a little bit of different backgrounds, different personalities and it's kind of like a tossed salad. You throw it all together and eventually, you come out with something that, hopefully, is good for everybody, but the backgrounds, I think, make the House very interesting. It's also, in my mind, a much more exciting body to work in than the Senate and, of course, my time in the Senate was only as staff. I was not an elected member of the Senate, but we tend to be a little bit more rowdy, I guess, and also a little bit more independent in our thinking. And so, I think, it gives us, as individual House Members, that chance to be that special part of the salad and, you know, to not always just have to blend into one ingredient or another.

HM: Speaker Matthew Ryan appointed you Speaker Pro Tem one day in June of 1999. What was your reaction when you stood at the rostrum?

SM: Well, I was Speaker Pro Tem because everyone else had gone home and that was one of those marathon nights that we were in Session until the wee hours of the morning.

I have to tell you I was a bit jet lagged when I was the Speaker Pro Tem, but still very honored. But [I] did feel very sorry for Clancy Myer, the Parliamentarian [1983-2007], because he had to repeat himself about two or three times with every direction that he was giving me with on how to close out a Session, but that was one of my special memories; just the time that I was the Speaker Pro Tem and was able to close out that Legislative Session. So, it was great, but again, it was more because I was still here in the Capitol and the reason I was still here was because I was waiting, because I had scheduled an appointment with folks to come in the next morning at nine o'clock. I think we finished up the Session at three or four in the morning and till I would have driven back to Berks County, turned around, and come back, you know, I would have been late you know for my appointment. So, I just stayed up and kept working and kept my eyes open somehow, but believe me, once I finally got home, I went to sleep (*laughs*).

HM: What are your thoughts on the seniority system in the House?

SM: The seniority system is good and bad. I, as a more senior member now, seven terms, still am not a Chairman. There are times when I think that it would be better to focus people's talents in the right direction. We obviously have some very, very knowledgeable people who are just elected to the House, but, yet, I don't know that their ability to chair something has evolved to the point where they have the respect or the command of the job, when they are freshmen. I think, perhaps, after two or three terms in office, there needs to be a way of, perhaps, giving some of these newer Members an opportunity. Obviously, when you have a huge turnover in the House, opportunity comes

a little more quickly for Members than it did during my tenure when there were very few retirements and very few people leaving office because of not being elected. So, we have all, in my class of legislators, been waiting and waiting and waiting and, you know, there are pros and cons about being a Chairman. Sometimes, being a Chairman, you can't perhaps get involved in as many arenas in the House and legislative policy making as you would like to because your focus is on your committee, but then again, you are able hopefully to get a committee assignment that you enjoy, that you are interested in and then, you really can direct how things go in Pennsylvania.

HM: Did you have a favorite committee?

SM: Agriculture and Rural Affairs, obviously, was my very favorite committee. And when I was elected in 1992, I think our class had around 30-some new members. I can't remember exactly because I, as I said, am not a numbers person, but I actually had to lobby and fight for a position on the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee because there were that many new Members interested in serving on that committee. So, in that, it makes me very proud and I was also very fortunate to have done that networking with Speaker Ryan, with Representative John Barley, who was in the House, at the time, to say, "I really want this committee. I don't care about the rest. I want Agriculture and Rural Affairs," and was given it and have been on that ever since and am currently Vice Chairman of it. I was also given, for about eight to ten years, the responsibility of chairing the Center for Rural Pennsylvania which is a legislative arm of the General Assembly. We do research and help in the background on creating policy even though it

is not an elected or a committee assignment, but I would—I chaired that, so I felt very good about having influenced some of the direction of rural Pennsylvania.

HM: Did you belong to any informal caucuses?

SM: A number of them, but I think I... The main one that I served on was the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fire Fighters Caucuses because volunteer firefighters are very important in my legislative District. Also, the Local Tax Reform Caucus, which we have been frustrated over the years and have seen a lot of Members come and go. One, Jim Gerlach [James; State Representative, Chester County, 1991-1994; State Senator, 1995-2002; US Representative, 2003-present], who had chaired that committee when he was a House Member, then went onto the Senate and now onto Congress, and we still have not solved the local tax reform issue for school funding. But, a lot of those are good to belong to. I am also a member of the Timber Caucus because, of course, with the Blue Mountain, I have a lot of forestry going on, but when you have all of your other regular committee assignments and, as I said, I chaired the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, the time commitment and the free time that you have as a legislator almost becomes microscopic if you are looking for it and you just don't have time to really participate that fully in those.

HM: Is there any legislation that you are particularly proud of? Or that you feel is important to you?

SM: Well, obviously, on my wall in my office I have six of my prime sponsor bills that have been signed into law. So, all six of those are extremely important. But as I shared with the constituents and the young people over the years, even those bills that I have tacked onto another legislator's bill are important to me; which is why they have to understand that some of the process that goes on behind the scenes, this adding of a germane amendment to another Member's bill is all part of the system by which we can get good bills signed into law in an expeditious time. Yes, my favorite story is how, in 1993, I took office and was Sworn-In on January, the first Tuesday of January, whatever the date was, and I had members of the West Wyomissing Fire Company come to visit me in my West Lawn District Office, not too long after I was Sworn In, and they shared with me a concern that they had for volunteer firemen who are driving the major fire trucks. At that time, there was a vehicle code law that said no one could be driving any vehicle if they had their ears covered with a head phone or any device other than a hearing aide. And if you were riding a motorcycle, you were allowed to have a helmet on. So, they said, "Every time we put on this new dispatch headphone, head gear equipment, we are breaking the law." So, I said, "Let me look into it," and I talked, at the time, with Governor Casey's Department of Transportation Secretary and he said, "Yes, in fact, that's true." And I introduced legislation and saw the opportunity to amend it into a friend of mine from the Senate's bill; Senator Pat Stapleton's [State Senator, 1970-2000] legislation. And he allowed me to – even though I was a Republican freshman in the Minority and he was a Senate Democrat whose bill was moving through the House - he said, "Yes, fine, go ahead and amend his bill." So, by May of that year, I had already gotten a piece of legislation through the House by attaching it to a Senate Bill and on the

Governor's desk. From that point on, my Fire Companies, when they're responding and have their headsets on and listening to the dispatcher, were no longer breaking the law. So, sometimes the wheels of government can work quickly, if you know the system. I don't know how some of these new Members who don't have the background I had in coming to this job ever get to that point; where they are organized, because I had ten years experience getting bills signed into law. It has to be just overwhelming when they come in as freshmen. So, it's good that there is some training.

HM: I was wondering if you could talk about your Veggie Libel Bill [HB 2731 of 1994]?

SM: Oh, *(laughs)* my Veggie Libel Bill. Yes, I was beat up by the newspaper pretty badly on that one. They said that I was killing the news by introducing this legislation. But as a former newspaper editor myself, I felt very strongly that some of the headlines that were happening in 1980s and 1990s were having a serious economic impact on agriculture and the food industry. I took those who did not exercise good journalism, I guess, to task because I said you have a responsibility to report accurately and not to use inflammatorily headlines. And if you do, and it causes economic harm to this industry, then you should be liable. So, it was termed the Veggie Libel Bill and I did introduce the legislation and it was supported by the farm organizations, as you can imagine, but hated by the newspaper industry. Once it was introduced, I have to say that it seemed to cool the heels a little bit of some of the most egregious headlines that we would be reading

and did seem to make them understand that they better do a little more research before they run with a story.

HM: Can you talk about farmer's markets on the Pennsylvania Turnpike [HB 2880 of 1994]?

SM: Oh, sure. That was another one of my bills that I introduced in, and as a matter of fact, never had to have it pass the House or the Senate to be implemented. I just was working with the department of Transportation and the Turnpike Commission and they agreed that it was a good idea. What better way to market Pennsylvania's agricultural products than to put a farmer's market at one of the service plazas on the Turnpike. So, the first one was put out at Sidling Hill and—which is about mid-way across the Commonwealth along the Pennsylvania Turnpike—and I was there to cut the ribbon for that. Then there was another one open near Allentown, out on the Northeast Extension of the Turnpike, and there was one, I believe, since then that has been opened up in the Valley Forge area. Again, a great way to introduce all of the people who travel through our Commonwealth to some of the wonderful produce that we have. Plus, it gives them an alternative to some of the high sugar items that the kids might ask for at the service plazas. Instead, they can direct them towards some wonderfully fresh fruit and things that we feel are, perhaps, a little more nutritious.

HM: Could you talk about House Bill 1992 of 1998 which became Act 127. It was in regard to child abuse court cases and I was wondering if serving on the Select Committee, that same year, to investigate child abuse that same year gave you that idea?

SM: Well, actually, it was the result of that Task Force and it's a very sad story—and that's the one thing that I always tried to point out to people, that legislators do have some things that are comical when it comes into the office, but many times they are very serious. Sometimes, people's lives are at stake and, in this particular case, the life of a young boy, Maxwell Fisher, was already lost because of him falling through the cracks in the Children and Youth Services System when his mother moved from Lancaster County to Berks County. And unfortunately, he was a victim of abuse and as a member of that Select Task Force, looking at this, we were able to read the confidential documents. We had to go into a room, sign in and the documents were locked in there and—to read the background of the court case, horrific, it has had an indelible impact on my life, my thinking about how these young victims, many times, don't even understand the fact that they are being abused. And, you know, they are so dependent on their mother or father—caregiver, that they have no alternatives. They have no where to go and if the system loses them and doesn't support them, then unfortunately, in as was the case with Maxwell Fisher, we lose them and a life lost is just, you know, not acceptable. So, that Task Force brought us together; Members of the House and Senate and we looked at all the issues confronting the courts, confronting Children and Youth Services, which they have an awesome responsibility and many times, their turnover in their ranks, because of the high stress level of the job, is pretty quick. And I could see how, sometimes, mistakes could

happen. What we as a government agency have to make sure of or try to ensure is that we don't make those mistakes and we provide whatever laws we need and whatever support, whether financial or regulatory, that they need in order to do their job so that these young people don't die. My segment of it was actually identified as I was talking to the local courts and the districts attorneys and speaking with the jurists. What more do we need? And they said, "We need to be able to act more quickly," because of the paperwork of having to go to the Court of Common Pleas before you can release this information to District Justices, many times these people vanish and, with them, the children. So, we said, "Let's streamline this. Let's expedite the paperwork and allow for these confidential records to go directly to the District Justices," and so, that's what we did. We changed the laws and other changes were added to that legislation, also, that are needed, hopefully, to prevent these types of abuse victims in the future.

HM: Thank you for sharing that story. Could you talk about your efforts in farmland preservation?

SM: Oh, farmland preservation [is] key to my heart and probably one of the reasons why I am in the Legislature. We are losing farmland at a rate that we'll never be to preserve enough of it, I guess, and that is the bottom line, in my mind. It's being converted to housing developments and to industrial parks at a rate [that] is just beyond what all good planners say is necessary to accommodate our population growth. Sprawl, as we have heard about and read about, is a huge concern for Pennsylvania and while we want economic development, we need to have smart growth and smart planning. Our number

one industry – that is agriculture – needs to be able to operate in a way that, you know, that they can farm and not be the constant target of nuisance suits and people complaining about smells and noise and dust and everything that goes along with farming. So, it is a business. It has to be able to operate in Pennsylvania just as any other business has the opportunity to operate. I, also, understand that there have to be rules and regulations to govern agriculture to make sure that the environment is well taken care of, as well as, that fact that we need to be good neighbors to our non-farm neighbors. But farmland preservation – we lead the nation – in Pennsylvania, it was something that was spearheaded back in the 1980's by Senator Noah Wenger [State Representative, Lancaster County, 1977-1982; State Senator, 1983-2004], Senator Roger Madigan [State Representative, 1977-1984; State Senator, 1985-2004], also, John Barley, when he was a Member of the House of Representatives, and Sam Morris [Samuel; State Representative, Chester County, 1971-1990] who was a Democrat from Chester County, who chaired the House Agricultural Committee and hired at the time, very wisely, a Berks Countian and a friend of mine who's, unfortunately, passed away, by the name of Warren Lamm. Warren was the House Agricultural Committee staff person, I was the Senate Agricultural Committee staff person and we worked very closely in helping the elected officials to write legislation to preserve farmland and to setup a program where we actually purchased the conservation easements for farms so that they will always remain in agriculture. And it's been such a huge success. We're a national standard model for other states. We have had folks from Wisconsin and the Midwest come here to look at our model and try and cookie cutter it to their states. And the state of Maryland – we keep competing on who's first, but we are ahead of them, at this point – but again,

something that if we lose this non-irrigated land in the east and our ability to produce food here, especially in the southeast of Pennsylvania, we will have lost a very important resource and one that we cannot afford to lose for future generations.

HM: As you prepare to leave at the end of this Session, is there any legislation that you would like to see completed?

SM: Oh, goodness. There is one that I've—it's a homework assignment that a fourth grader had given me years ago and one that I always kept saying, "Well, some day, I'll get to it, some day I'll get to it." So, I did introduce it, but it is basically to designate the Duryea car as our state's official automobile [HB 2731 of 2006]. And what prompted this was we were visiting the Governor's reception room [and] I had the fourth graders with me and they were sitting there looking at all of Violet Oakley's [Pennsylvania Artist, 1874-1961] paintings, and, of course, on one of them, it depicts William Penn [Founder of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1644-1718] and his father giving him a little bit of a hard time. And at William Penn's side is a Great Dane dog. I mentioned that, after Violet Oakley painted this, we actually, in the Commonwealth, made the Great Dane our state dog. What's the connection there? I'm not sure, but it prompted the question from this young man, "Do we have a state automobile?" And I said, "No, I don't think we do." So, I did a little homework, did a little research and tried to find out where the oldest car was made and who made the most. And, as it turns out, the Duryea car, which was manufactured in Reading and Boyertown, Berks County, actually was started in the mid 1890's and was in production in the early 1900's and did act as the model for

Henry Ford in his production, his assembly line production of cars. So I said, “Well that’s perfect. We’ll just go ahead and introduce that,” and Duryea Days is the Labor Day weekend and while I am not able to say I’ll have it signed into law by that time, it did come out of the State Government Committee. So, I am hoping that, perhaps, we’ll be able to get it through the House, through the Senate and onto the Governor’s desk before November 30th.

HM: Have your issues changed over time?

SM: As a legislator, you have to respond to all of your constituent’s concerns and while my background is agriculture and farming, I had to focus on other issues. Just number one, as a candidate, to prove that I didn’t only care about farmers and agriculture, that I did care about all of my constituents. So, I was very cognizant of the fact that I could not appear to be only concerned about one issue and, as such, I did have to learn a lot and become a jack of all trades, a master of none, sometimes. But, I’ll never forget a lobbyist came to visit me to ask me if I would prime sponsor legislation to license marriage and family therapists and school guidance counselors. I told her, “You are asking me to do something that is outside of my field, my background. I know nothing about your issue,” and she said, “We don’t care. We can teach you, but we think you can help us get this done.” So, I was on a very steep learning curve to find out what was the issue and before I agreed to do it, I said, “I have to first find out enough to know whether I agree that this needs to be done,” and so I did go back to her and say, “Yes, I will be your prime sponsor in the House.” [I] Introduced the legislation and, ultimately, between myself and Senator

Jeff Piccola [Jeffrey; State Representative, Dauphin County, 1977-1995; State Senator, 1995-present] in the Senate, we did get that bill signed into law. While you might think groups don't want more government involvement, it turned out that these people did want to have licensure of their occupation so that they could bring some kind of standard and some kind of recourse if someone was out there practicing in a way that was not appropriate. Turned out, we had to comprise, as you do in Harrisburg. We did not get a licensure bill. We got a title protection bill, but it has affected the same types of controls and the same types of educational standards and professionalism that the initial bill was attempting to do. So, I think it was a win-win for everybody.

HM: What would you say was the hardest issue you encountered as a Representative?

SM: I think the hardest issue was the issue of school choice. When Tom Ridge was Governor, he was very much a proponent of school choice. I am lucky, in Berks County, to have very excellent public schools, including the Reading School District in the city of Reading and all of my suburban and rural school districts. So for me, the public education system was working, but as a State Legislator you need to represent the entire Commonwealth and, at least, listen to the concerns of people from Philadelphia, people from Pittsburgh and every place in between. But in my own mind, and having had a grandfather who was a school board director way back when, yeah, I just felt that our education system was fine the way it was. I felt that the way we funded it was fine. Perhaps, as I said, local tax reform would shift the way we fund public schools and take it off of property tax, but I did not feel that opening this up so that students could go

anywhere they choose with a voucher was the answer for our public school systems. So despite much pressure from Leadership, I held fast to that, and as a matter of fact, a number of my colleagues from Berks County who, initially were proponents of school choice, changed their mind and actually joined with me in not supporting it. As you know, that vote disappeared (*laugh*) when it was initially attempted and there never has been a recorded vote on school choice. The issue faded away.

HM: What aspect of your job as a House Member did you enjoy the most?

SM: I liked the policy making because of my background of being on staff on the Senate. I enjoyed the chess game, I call it, of getting an idea into bill form and doing everything you need to do to maneuver it to have checkmate; to get that bill on the Governor's desk. I think that is my favorite part of this job. I also liked the public service, helping people; the opportunity to have, hopefully, touched their lives in a positive way and to me that's good. The thing I absolutely detested about this job was the politics and I am not a campaigner. I do it by necessity because it is all part of the job and I understand that, but I think that it sometimes gets in the way of good government.

HM: You shared in the Pennsylvania tradition of Fastnacht Day (*laugh*).

SM: (*Laughs*) Oh, yes.

HM: Do you recall any other humorous stories that the House participated in?

SM: Well, you know, I was, again, following in the foot steps of my predecessor, John Davies, who had started that tradition of bringing in fastnachts, and, you know, I was never—even though I am Pennsylvania Dutch, I was never a big fastnacht eater and so the first couple times that I did this I had brought either the wrong syrup for the Members to pour over it or whatever. So, I finally got that down to—it's got to be the King's Syrup and, you know, the fastnachts for everybody. The funniest time was the day when it was Fastnacht Day and I had all these dozens and dozens of fastnachts and we had a blizzard, so we could not get to the Capitol. The whole Capitol Complex was closed. So, I had all of these fastnachts and no where to go with them. So, we did donate them to some of the food pantries around the area, but I was like, "What am I going to do with all of these fastnachts?" But, you know, that was the biggest challenge—when we had snow days. And since then, we just have not been in Session on Fastnacht Day. You know, so the tradition, I guess—whoever replaces me, may not have to worry about it because [we] seem [not] to be having Session that particular week, anymore.

HM: You shared a story with me in your office, I think the first time we met about being in Harrisburg and then having to drive home and being on your farm –

SM: Oh, the snow storm.

HM: Would you mind sharing that?

SM: Oh, the ice storm.

HM: That's another great story.

SM: Yeah, well, we were here for the Swearing-In of Tom Ridge. Well, I guess it was—I am not sure if it was Swearing-In, now, or just his address where he did the address to the State—the State of the State, as he called it. It was, you know, very formal and we were here and all dressed up and I leave here to drive home and we are having a tremendous ice storm. I make it to my farm, only to find that my cows are stranded on a very steep hill and cannot get down the hill to their—the hay feeders and, of course, with cows, they need to eat. So, I got out of my formal suit that I had on for the House Floor business and into coveralls and it was so slippery that for every step that you would try to take up the hill, you would fall down and slide back down. Well, there were cow deposits all up and down this hill. So, by the time I finally got enough what we call barn grip on the ice to help them get down the slope, my coveralls were pretty much chocolate covered and not the kind you want to eat. But, it was one of those things where I looked at my husband and I said, “If my colleagues could see me now.” But, you know, that's the reality of my life because we are active farmers. I do that task everyday. I am well grounded, I guess, by the fact that I'm home on the farm dealing with all sorts of issues, concerns, real world issues for farmers and having to put up with the same kind of challenges that my neighbors do all the time. The end—the happy ending of that story was that my cows learned how to scoot on their bottoms all the way down the hill to the hay feeders. Then fortunately for me as a farmer, none of them broke a leg or injured

themselves but you never know and Mother Nature plays tricks on us and farming is a tough, tough industry.

HM: Thank you for sharing that story.

SM: Sure.

HM: Do you have a fondest memory of serving in the House?

SM: I think, primarily, the opportunities that I got being on the House Game and Fisheries Committee to go out and see bears in the den and hold bear cubs and to learn that they don't smell at all like they do in the zoos; that they are just so fresh and sweet smelling. But, on the one trip that we had to a bear den that was organized by the Game Commission, my daughter was with me, and I think she might have been in seventh or eighth grade, at the time, and she had just gotten braces on her teeth and she had the opportunity also to hold one of the bear cubs as the mother was being – of course, she was being anesthetized, so she wasn't awake. You know, she was just sleeping, at the time, so we were able to hold these cubs and weigh the cubs and everything else. Well, my daughter is holding this cub and it reaches up its little paw, but on the end of that little paw are long curved claws and [it] hooks a claw right through the wire of her braces. So, she is standing there saying, "Mom," trying not to talk, with her lip catching on this bear cub's claw, and as a mom, I'm standing there saying, "Now what do I do?" So, I just very slowly extracted the claw and we were able to do it without tearing the wire or

anything else and the little cub was fine, but I told her to hold him a little lower, then—after that (*laughs*). I was just trying to figure out how to tell her orthodontist how we broke the wire (*laughs*) of the braces that day. The other cute one—again involving my daughter, which my memories seem to reflect—that is when we were also on a Game and Fisheries trip and we banded the first Whistling Swan in Pennsylvania, and we were all standing there and we were all supposed to release our swan at the same time and, unfortunately, this swan—they are very docile when you are holding them and have their wings kind of clipped down with your arms—but my daughter was unable to keep the one swan from extracting it's wing and, of course, she became the one who released the very first banded swan in Pennsylvania (*laughs*). She is still a little embarrassed about that, over the years, but I often kid her about the fact that, “Emily, you know, you really weren't supposed to be the first one to do this.” (*laughs*) So, it was a great experience for her and she really had a good time and I enjoyed all of that opportunity to, you know, see first hand what our Game Commission gets to do everyday. Yeah.

HM: Would you say you had any regrets?

SM: Just, you know, the only regret that I have is time, you know, just the time that it takes. Whether it's this job or another job, you know, that's what it takes and, you know, many people don't understand that [being] a legislator is seven days a week. You know, you are out doing the Eagle Scout Court of Honors on Sundays, you are out with people on a Saturday evening, for whatever occasion it is that they invite you to, and, you know, so it is many times seven days a week. When you are from Berks County, you are close

enough to the Capitol and close enough to home so that, at the end of a legislative day, there are times when you have to go back home and go to a meeting. So, it's a juggling act and trying to maintain enough time for farm, for family, and to still do what you have to do, which is an excellent job, all the time. It's a real juggling challenge and one that, you know, I will never will regret because I think it's important to serve and to pay back, you know, but, sometimes I think, "Oh well, maybe I should have taken a little bit more time with my folks."

HM: Upon your retirement from the House in several months, do you have any plans?

SM: Farming (*laughs*), farming, farming. You know, the nice thing is without having to campaign this year, it's actually given me the chance to go out and get a farmer's tan this year. (*laughs*) And I've been on the tractor more this summer than I've been in fourteen years and I have to say it's a good feeling to get back and farm. I want to re-focus on agriculture because I think there are so many more things that need to be done in farmland preservation for the farm industry. And while I have loved my job as a legislator and helping all sorts of people on all sorts of issues, with whatever time I've got left, I want to re-focus on agriculture and do what I can to help the farm community and not feel guilty about doing it. I want to be able to say, "Yes, this is my job," and whether it's in helping in the private sector or the public sector, you know, my focus has got to be agriculture.

HM: Do you think you'll remain active in politics?

SM: No (*laughs*), I think I am going to walk away, close this door, and say, “You know, that was a good experience but I’ve had enough of it.” But like I’ve told my daughter, never say never because you don’t know what you are going to be asked to do in the future. So, I would say that I don’t anticipate ever getting re-active in the political arena, but I think, in reality, everybody has to be in politics to some degree or another. Even in the agriculture industry, if you ignore what is happening around you, you become a victim to other people’s initiative and agendas. So, you have to stay somewhat involved.

HM: How would you want your tenure as State Representative to be remembered?

SM: I guess as just what I promised the people. That I worked hard, so—yeah.

HM: Lastly, what is your advice for new Members?

SM: Work hard. (*laughs*) Work hard and be honest with yourself and your constituents and, you know, you won’t go wrong.

HM: Okay, well, thank you very much.

SM: Yeah.

HM: This concludes our interview today.

SM: Okay, well that was relatively painless (*laughs*).