

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable John Pittenger (D)

96th District

Lancaster County

1965-1966, 1969-1970

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Heidi Mays, House Archivist
August 8, 2006

Transcribed by: Raymond J. Whittaker, III

Heidi Mays (HM): Good afternoon.

The Honorable John Pittenger (JP): Hi.

HM: Hi. I'm here today with former Representative John Pittenger who represented Lancaster County, the 96th Legislative Districts from 1965-1966 and again in 1969-1970.

JP: Actually from Lancaster City. It was a single-member seat in those days.

HM: Thank you. Could you please begin by telling me what kind of influence did your family have on your early life and your future career as a public servant?

JP: Well, I think the influences came from both my father and from my mother. From my father, he was a realist in life. He spent two terms on the Bloomington City Council in Indiana and I think two terms on the Borough Council in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania where he was put mostly, I think, to protect the interests of the college. My mother's influence was more theoretical. She started out life as a Socialist. She voted for Norman Thomas¹ in 1932 because she thought Franklin Roosevelt² wasn't radical enough. But, she gradually came around to see FDR as a great man and my father eventually voted for

¹ 1884-1968-Six-time Presidential candidate for the Socialist Party of America

² 1882-1945-32nd President of the United States [1933-1945-Four Term United States President] Creator of the New Deal program out of the Great Depression of the 1930's and leader during WWII

Harry Truman³ in [19]48 so there was sort of a coming together for the ends. But, both of them had an influence; dad more tactically and mother, philosophically.

HM: Did you come from a political family?

JP: Well, as I said, dad ran for office at local level in two different states. Mother never did; oh she did, I'm sorry, she ran and won a school board election, but down in Oxford it was a year before she died of cancer so she didn't get a chance to fill out her term. She said she hated being on the School Board. She wanted to talk about curriculum and all they wanted to talk about was what kind of grass they ought to seed the baseball outfield with; sort of question she was not interested in.

HM: Did you always have political aspirations?

JP: I think I did. They claim that at the age of five I stood on a wood box in our living room and announced that I was going to be President. I don't remember that and anybody who would remember [is dead]. You can't impeach me on that. But, I've had a bug for a long time.

HM: Did your family influence you and your involvement in the Democratic Party?

³ 1884-1972-33rd US President 1945-1953 Vice Pres. under FDR –Pres. during the atom bombing of Japan, the creation of the United Nations and NATO as well as the Korean War

JP: Well, dad was a Republican and mother was a Socialist turned Democrat so you can make of that what you wish. *(laugh)*

HM: Well, how did you get involved with the Democratic Party then?

JP: Well, when I came here in 1958 to practice law with the Barley Firm, a very Republican law firm, but a very good firm, and I started volunteering, I went up to City Hall and Tom Monaghan was the Democratic Mayor and said, “What can I do?” And he promptly put me in charge of the re-election campaign of the Democratic Minority Commissioner Herb Wogoban. That was fun in a scary sort of way; Herb was an interesting guy. He won the Minority Commissionership, but he didn’t have much influence with the rest of it. But, I became a committeeman and then a Ward Leader, a member of the County Executive Committee, and then I ran for the Legislature in [19]62 and that’s how I got started.

HM: Could you talk about how your education and your previous experience before coming to the Pennsylvania House?

JP: Well, I was in the public schools in Swarthmore for 10 years; a very good public school system. Then [I] went two years to a boarding school, Exeter, and four years to Harvard College, a year at the London School of Economics, and three years at Harvard Law School. So, sort of an eclectic, I guess you would say probably an elitist training and some people think I am an elitist; I don’t, but you can be the judge.

HM: And your job experience before coming to the House?

JP: What's that?

HM: And your job experience before coming to the House?

JP: Well, I had very little. I mean I was in the Army for three or four years and then went to law school and came here to practice law with the Barley Firm and went from there to the Legislature. I got defeated fairly often so that I had to find other forms of employment when I wasn't in the Legislature. And that involved teaching at Harvard School of Education for a couple of years and teaching and deaning at the Rutgers Law School in Camden. And so, it's been a curious life.

HM: What made you decide to run for the Pennsylvania House?

JP: Well, as usual the Democrats couldn't find anybody and I thought I was at least a respectable candidate and it would be kind of interesting. I had never run for office before. I was 32, I guess, and I ran and lost by 2,000 votes and thought well you know that's being a Democrat in Lancaster. And then in [19]64, the Party came back to me and said, "Look, you ran a respectable race and why don't you try it again?" Well, I had the great good fortune to run with Lyndon Johnson⁴ and I've always regretted that I never

⁴ 36th President of the United States (1963-1969); succeeded to the Presidency after the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

had the chance to thank Barry Goldwater⁵ before he died for helping get me started in politics because if he hadn't lost Lancaster by an overwhelming majority, I wouldn't have won. But, I won and then I lost in [19]66 and won in [19]68 and lost in [19]70. So, it's been kind of an up or down. At that point, I decided that being in the Legislature was a mug's game, that two years was not enough job security.

HM: Did anyone help you get started in politics?

JP: Well, apart from my family, a lot of people here in Lancaster were wonderfully helpful. I mean I think John Hartman, who's probably my best friend in Lancaster, was a lawyer; we shared offices, not practices. He was County Chairman during most of the [19]60s and a wonderful County Chairman and still a good friend. Several faculty at Franklin and Marshall College, notably Sidney Wise and Richard Schier and John Vanderzell all helped out; Sidney and Dick probably more than John. And there were just a bunch of people in the town that pitched in and it was a very amateurish sort of campaign. I think the first year we raised 2,000 dollars or something like that. Even the fifth time around I don't think we were raising any more than 20,000 dollars. So, when Mike Sturla [State Representative, Lancaster County, 1991-present] tells me it's costing him 100,000 dollars to defend that same seat, I say "Boy, something's out of whack."

HM: What was it like being a Democrat and in Lancaster County?

⁵ Five-term United States Senator from Arizona [1953-1965, 1969-1987]; Republican nominee for President, 1964.

JP: Well, the city was fine, of course in the county, I was widely reviled as a tool of the Philadelphia bosses, (*laugh*) which is really kind-of funny because I wasn't, but they said it and the *New Era* tried to make it stick. I remember one time being in the New Holland Fair parade in a convertible and the dog-gone thing boiled over and so we came to a screeching stop right in the middle of New Holland and all the Republicans lining the walks you know, "Get a horse! Get a horse!" (*laugh*) But, it toughened me up, you know, I have been sort of immune to criticism ever since; some people would say too immune, but anyway.

HM: What was the demographic makeup, the first time you ran for office?

JP: In the House? Oh, gosh that would have been [19]64 and of course, that was the Johnson landslide. I think we came in with something like a majority of 116 to 93 or something like that. And Herb Fineman [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1955-1977; Speaker 1969-1973, 1975-1977] once said to me, [after] I said, "Isn't it wonderful having this big majority?" "No," he said, "it's hell because you've got too many people to please." He would much rather have worked with a small margin where he could go to a guy and say, "If you don't vote for this bill, we're going to lose it." Well, when you got 116 to 93, it's kind of hard to make that argument. So, it was the last time we had that kind of margin in the House though.

HM: And you represented the city at the time correct?

JP: The city of Lancaster, yeah.

HM: So, what special challenges did that present?

JP: Well, you know, it's odd, I've served under both Mayor Monaghan, a Democrat, and Mayor Coe, a Republican and there wasn't a whole lot of difference. I mean, they made the kinds of requests that the Mayor of a small city would naturally make. And I thought the Democratic Party, and I still think, was more sympathetic to those pleas than the Republican Party was. But, Mr. Coe and I had a perfectly amicable relationship. I've always made it a point to stay on talking terms with my Republican opponents. I don't believe in diatribe in politics. And one of the reasons I'm kind of glad I'm not actively involved these days is that it seems to me the general tone of public discourse has deteriorated greatly over the last 25 or 30 years.

HM: What made your District unique compared to other Districts?

JP: Well, I don't know that it was unique. I mean, third-class cities like Lancaster and Reading and York all have similar kinds of problems. I think one thing that might be a little unique to Lancaster and kind of to its credit is its citizens did not put very many personal demands on me. A lot of legislators, particularly from the western part of the state, their constituents were always wanting them to help with a contract or fix a ticket or do something. And I didn't get those kinds of requests. I think by-and-large people in Lancaster, even in the city, were inclined to try and solve their own problems and didn't

come to me, except on special occasions. So, in many ways it was easier, I think, being a State Representative from Lancaster than it would have been from say Aliquippa or Duquesne.

HM: What aspects were unique in your first campaign? Can you talk about who you ran against?

JP: Well, four of my five races were against the same guy, Eugene Rutherford [State Representative, Lancaster County, 1961-1964, 1967-1968]. He had an electrical supply business down on Prince Street and we had a perfectly amicable relationship. He beat me in [19]62, I beat him out in [19]64, he beat me [19]66, I beat him in [19]68 and then I think finally the Republican Party decided he wasn't a safe enough investment so they got Harold Horn [State Representative, Lancaster County, 1971-1972], an insurance broker, to run and he won by 236 votes to my chagrin. And I remember meeting him once in the Capitol the next year because I had, in the meantime, become Governor [Milton] Shapp's [1971-1979] Legislative Secretary and he stopped me down in the basement of the Capitol he said, "Pitt, how do you stand it?" And I said, "What do you mean, how do you stand it?" He said, "Well, my God, we come into Session at 11:00 [AM] and the Chaplain prays and then we sit around there for 15 minutes. The Speaker refers a couple of bills to Committee. Then he announces a recess for lunch. Then we come back and there are a couple of bills reported out of Committee and we vote on a Resolution to commend Maisey Buckholder for her 37 years of devoted service in the Fleetwood Elementary School. Then we call Caucus for a half hour and come back and

vote on a couple of minor bills and go home.” He said, “I didn’t come up here to do that.” And sure enough, he very soon into the first term, he told the Republican Party, “I’m not running again.” And he didn’t. And in [19]72, I guess Terry Madonna⁶ was the Democratic candidate and he lost to Marv Miller Jr. [State Representative, Lancaster County, 1973-1990], but in a fairly close race. And then Marv was, because he was a moderate Republican in the city district, had a fairly easy time from then on and I would rate him very well amongst the State Representatives I’ve known.

HM: Could you talk about the campaigning? Did you like to campaign?

JP: I loved campaigning, at least when I was young; I don’t anymore. I didn’t have any money to speak of, so we mostly did door-to-door. And I recruited a lot of high school and college students and Saturday morning I’d say, “We’re going to meet at Maisey Corbin’s house at 9:30 and ring doorbells and hand something out.” So, 10 or 15 of us would get together if the weather was okay and do that. And we never had any television; we couldn’t afford that. I think the first time or two we did a little radio, but that didn’t seem to us to be cost effective. So, mostly it was press releases and my wife, who was not at that point my wife, had a coffee clutch for me; she was a Democratic committee-woman in the 3rd Precinct of the 5th Ward. And she was mortified because only one other person showed up and she really was distraught. And I said, “Look don’t worry. I’ll take these press releases down and the [*Lancaster Intelligencer*] *Intel* will print it verbatim and WGAL and WLAN will read them verbatim. And sure enough next

⁶ Dr. Terry Madonna-Director of the Center of Politics and Public Affairs at Franklin and Marshall College-Local Media political consultant

day on the front-page of the B Section: “John Pittenger speaking to a crowd of friends and relations at the home of Pauline Leet...” (*laugh*)

HM: You talked about running against Eugene Rutherford off and on, why was it such a swing district?

JP: Well, I think the demographics. It was a city that was changing. The minority population, both black and Hispanic was increasing. I think upper-middle class people were moving out of the city and it had reached a kind of an ethnic balance that made it a very swing district. And it still, although Mike [Sturla] has done a wonderful job and continues to, it’s still I think counted as one of the marginal districts in the State. And incidentally, there are not enough of them.

HM: Can you explain how you felt during your first Swearing-In Ceremony?

JP: During my first term? I felt like a new kid in kindergarten. I had enough sense to keep quiet for awhile, but that didn’t last very long. Fortunately, Herb Fineman and Leroy Irvis [K. Leroy; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1959-1988; Speaker 1977-1979, 1983-1988] had enough sense to see that I could make some contributions. For example, in [19]66 we were debating reapportionment because the Supreme Court had come down with its decision in Baker against Carr⁷. And I took a very lively part in a debate including the question of whether you could still constitutionally have multiple

⁷ 1962 landmark Supreme Court case that decided that reapportionment could be decided and intervened in by federal courts

member districts because at that time the Pennsylvania House had some single-member districts, like mine in the city, and some multiple member districts like the one in the county which was three seats. And I argued that constitutionally, we could not do that because it was a real danger that that would be used to dilute minority votes. And the Republican Leadership, in the end, saw the wisdom of that and abandoned any attempt to do that.

HM: So, how did reapportionment and – ?

JP: Reapportionment didn't affect me at all. The city of Lancaster continued to be about the right population. Mike [Sturla] has had to pick up one or two precincts from Lancaster Township, but it hasn't really changed the composition of the District. What reapportionment has mostly done is not shift power from Republicans to Democrats, but shift power from rural Republicans to suburban Republicans. And that from my political point of view has not been a good thing because suburban Republicans have generally been unsympathetic to the needs of the cities like Lancaster.

HM: Can you talk about your first impressions on the House itself?

JP: My first impression was chaos. (*laugh*) You know people reading papers and, you find after awhile that there's a method to that madness. And Harold Horn should not have been quite as disgusted as he was with the House. I think, incidentally, in some ways it's technically better run today than it was then. If for other reasons – which we

can talk about later – I don't think it works quite as well. But, that chaos is sort of on the surface. You know, you get 203 people from very different, I mean Pennsylvania is a state with enormous variety.

HM: Were there any Members that you would consider a mentor to you whenever you first came to Harrisburg?

JP: Any mentors that –

HM: Mentored you?

JP: Well, Leroy Irvis very definitely was my role model and then there were a couple of other people. Bob Wise [State Representative, Lycoming County, 1965-1971], who I guess had come in a year or two before I did from Williamsport, was also a lawyer, became a very dear friend of mine. And we kind of helped each other out. Those were a couple of people that were important in my life up there.

HM: Did you help any other new Members?

JP: Well, I would hope that I did, but I wasn't really there long enough to become very helpful to anybody. I think if I'd have stayed longer I might have been – I did help a couple of times later on with orientation of new Members. Jim Manderino [State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1967-1989; Speaker, 1989] asked me to come up

once from the Law School and do a thing in December before the new Session. So, I did some of that, but otherwise not anything formal.

HM: Well, you also worked for the House after your –

JP: Yes, when I was defeated in [19]66 I was unemployed for about three weeks and then Herb Fineman, who became Minority Leader, called me up and said, “Would I like to be the Director of Research for the House Democrats.” I might add that I directed nobody except myself. And I said, “Sure.” It was a job and a pay; not stupendous pay. So, I took that job. And one time, later in the Session, his staff was listening to him in the squawk-box in his office. He was attacking Governor [Raymond] Shaffer’s [1967-1971] budget and when he came up to his office he said, “Well, boys how did I do?” And the other guys one after another said, “Ah, you were terrific.” You know, “You knock them in the aisles.” He said, “Pitt what do you think?” I said, “C-, D +.” He said, “How come?” I said, “It was too long. There wasn’t any unifying theme that the press could get a hold of; too many facts and figures.” He said, “Come see me at nine o’clock tomorrow morning.” And I lay awake that night thinking I was going to be fired. When I came in the next morning he said, “What am I paying you?” And I said, “7,500 dollars.” He said, “I’m doubling your salary today. You’re the only person that tells me the truth.”

HM: Was he like that in general?

JP: He was like that. He was a wonderful guy to work for. And if you were asking me to work for somebody about whom I knew very little and I could ask one question about the person it would be: Do they tolerate criticism? Because I can't work for someone that I can't tell the truth to. And he was superb in that respect. And he took staff very seriously. I remember one day we were in Caucus, he let staff into Caucus which the Republicans never used to, but he always let me and a couple of others in. And one day he got a phone call he had to take and he said, "Pitt, just roll the calendar." So, I sat up there in the Majority Leader's chair and rolled the calendar for half an hour and nobody raised a peep. I don't think that could have ever happened in the Republican Caucus.

HM: Well, you spoke of Mr. Fineman and you also spoke of Mr. Irvis before; how did you get along with Leadership?

JP: Oh, I got along with them just fine. I think mostly because I was, though in a sense and we can talk more about this, an idealist by temperament. I also have an instinct that wants to live in the real world. And so I would raise occasional Cain, but I knew when to back off. We formed a little group called the Mushroom Club; a bunch of newcomers that would have been swept in in [19]64, about 10 or 12 of us. And we'd meet for lunch on Monday at the Governor's Hotel and go over the calendar and concert strategy. And the press called us the Mushroom Club because they said the Leadership "feeds them shit and hopes they'll grow. Keeps them in the dark, feeds them shit and hopes they'll grow." But, I knew when to back off. When I would push an issue and then Herb would say to

me, “Look, you’re getting awful close to the boundary on this.” And so, I would usually have enough sense to take half-a-loaf rather than to fail to get the whole loaf.

HM: Who else was a member of the Mushroom Club?

JP: Oh, Bob Wise and Bill Eckensberger [State Representative, Lehigh County, 1965-1976] from Lehigh County and Jane Alexander [State Representative, York County, 1965-1968] from York County, and Brady Hetrick [State Representative, Mifflin County, 1963-1971] from Mifflin County and Jim Ritter [State Representative, Lehigh County, 1965-1982] from Allentown, and oh, I can’t remember them all now; a wonderful bunch of people.

HM: You talked about idealistic goals; what were some of your goals?

JP: Well, I start by thinking and I still think that politics can make the world a better place. And mostly for me that involves, on the one hand, preserving freedoms of various kinds, but on the other hand, trying a little bit to narrow the gap between rich and poor. And the Republican Party is fine on the freedoms part, but not so good on narrowing the difference between. In fact, I would say the [George W.] Bush [2001-2009] Administration has pursued all kinds of policies in the opposite direction. But, that’s the idealist part of me that wants to make a better world of it. But, I know how darn hard it is. And some people when they find out how intractable the world is become cynics and just say, “Well you know they’re all pursuing their own self-interests and I might as well

get mine.” And I never, fortunately, fell into that trap. And continued to fight for the things that I thought were important and you know settle for the half-a-loaf.

HM: As a Member, what legislation or issues did you feel were your most important?

JP: Well, I can mention three or four. One was scholarships. The Legislature, the term before I came, had passed under Governor [William] Scranton’s [1963-1967] leadership – he was a wonderful Governor – a bill setting up a student loan program and establishing the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency [PHEAA]. And when we got in the majority in [19]65, we decided to add a scholarship program to that. And we did and the Governor said, “As long you don’t cost me too much money, boys.” (*laugh*) And we worked out some compromises on that. The chief battle on that was philosophical. I guess I proved that I was an elitist because I wanted to focus large amounts of money on a relatively small number of students. I wanted to make it possible for very bright, very poor kids to go to college. And the Caucus was the other way. They wanted to make a lot of little scholarships available to a lot of people. And you know in a democratic society that’s an understandable instinct. I mean 1,000 people have more votes than 100 people. So, I lost some of those battles, but we got the program in and I think today, I don’t pay much attention to it, you know, closely but, I think it’s still one of the two or three best state student loan and scholarship programs in the country. In fact, Washington [D.C.] tried to hire Ken Reeher away from us when they were setting up their program in I think it was [19]72 and didn’t, thank God, succeed because they made a mess of it. It took them five or six years to get that thing running properly. That was

one issue. I was very involved in mental health and mental retardation questions. We went around holding hearings around the State at the state schools and hospitals and discovered what really terrible conditions existed in many of those places. And so we put through the bill that is now I think still called the Mental Health and Retardation Act of 1966. And with help from Leroy [Irvis] and others I got help to get that through. And one of my tasks that did not succeed, because I failed as often as I succeeded, was in chairing an ad hoc committee on real estate tax exemptions. One of the problems in a place like Lancaster is that the city serves the whole county: the courthouse serves the county, the churches serve the county, the opera house serves the county. Those things are all tax exempt, but the burden of paying those taxes in the city falls on the people who don't own tax exempt property, i.e. the average row-home owner. And we discovered in our surveys that the amount of tax exempt property in a municipality varied from 2 percent or 3 percent in a very rural township where maybe one church and a firehall were the only tax exempt properties to a place like Lancaster where between 20-30 percent of the real estate was tax exempt. So, we did a good study and wrote, I think, a good report and recommended that a certain amount of money, I've forgotten what it was now, be set aside and divvied up among those municipalities where the percentage of tax exempt property exceeded a certain level; I think we said 15 percent. Well, that didn't fly for a variety of reasons. And the fourth thing that you may want to talk about in more detail – it fascinates me, but I suspect it doesn't the average viewer – is that in [19]78 I was just coming back from Harvard from teaching up there for a couple of years, having been defeated in [19]66, and came back to find that Leroy had asked me to Chair a Commission on the Reform of the House. There had been some scandal; I can't

remember whether it was per diems or car rentals or what, but one of those comes up every few years. And he felt they needed to clean up the reputation of the House, so I was asked to Chair a seven-person committee to do that. And we produced a report and I think in many ways the present structure of the staff of the House follows very much the lines that we laid down in [19]78. It's hard to believe, but it lasted 26 years, 28 years, so it must have been done some good.

HM: Yeah. Can you tell me what specifically the goals were of the committee whenever you formed the committee?

JP: Well, our principle recommendation and it was followed, and followed pretty faithfully, was to separate--there are two kinds of staff in the House, they're what you might call the household staff. The people who deal with payrolls and see that the building gets cleaned and that the gorgeous Dome gets washed off at least once every 10 years and that the lights bulbs get replaced in the chandeliers in the House and Senate and all the other things that have to just make the House and Senate function. And then there are the political jobs where you ought to be responsible to a politician because he's going to have to answer for what you've done. Well, those were all mixed up and we decided to separate them out and put the non-political people under something called the, what's it called?

HM: The Bipartisan Management Committee.

JP: The Bipartisan Management Committee. And I guess the first Democrat, one person was the Republican and a Democrat, and I think Bob Hendershaw was the first Democrat, well he was a protégé of mine; he had worked with me in the Department of Education and we had known each other for a long time. And the first Republican was a guy from Philadelphia, a lawyer, a very able guy-I can't think of this name, do you remember that?

HM: Was it Austin Lee [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1957-1964]?

JP: Austin Lee, exactly. And we all got together very well. And that worked out well; some of the other parts of it have not worked as well. But, it's time probably for somebody else, not God-help me, to set up a committee and take another look at that and see what – because I'm sure there's ways in which the House can be improved.

HM: Was there anything that you can specifically think of right now?

JP: Well, I can think of some things that I don't think will do a lot of good. There's a lot of talk for example about cutting the size of the House. And I don't object to that, but I think, frankly to spend a lot of political energy doing that is probably a waste of time. And there are other things that I would like to do that are more technical, but in the long run, you know seeing to it that journals get published promptly so that – I don't know what the status is, it used to be if you were a member of the public and you called up and said, "I want to know how Tom Smith, my State Representative voted on House Bill 462." They wouldn't give you that and I thought that was an outrage. I thought Dick

Campbell and the Data Processing staff ought to make that available; he did too, but his bosses said no. Do you know what the status of that is now? Is that information readily available?

HM: I believe it is.

JP: Okay, then we made some progress in that field too.

HM: Did you think that the recommendations that you made were, did they go far enough at the time?

JP: Well, we deliberately didn't try to do anything seismic. For example, we didn't touch the question of pay. There was a separate commission that had been set up on compensation and we didn't want to touch that with a ten foot pole. And so, we left that strictly alone and that saved us some headaches. And I think we also had a rule of unanimity. I said, "This isn't going to be a partisan fight." I suppose the commission was four Democrats and three Republicans, but we certainly never voted that way. And if we found an issue that we couldn't get agreement on we'd just say let's just push that off to the future. The result is that there are some problems that we should have tackled, and we didn't. And what we did was submit – our time was running out; I think they've given us until November 30th to make a report, and I think we filed this preliminary report, so-called, on November 8th. And I'm very proud of the fact that they gave us an appropriation of 100,000 dollars in which we spent 7,000 dollars, which must constitute

some kind of a record. And we asked in our report if they wanted us to continue in office for another six months and wind up some of this stuff and the answer from the incoming administration was a polite “no thanks.” So, we faded off into oblivion.

HM: Well, being an employee of the House and I know some of the changes that are often talked about are the Chief Clerk’s staff is now a permanent staff. They don’t switch between the Parties.

JP: Yeah. The business of switching every two years was just a terrible nuisance particularly in the [19]60s and 70s when there was a lot of switching; the last decade has been mostly Republican. But, it’s just nonsense to say that somebody who’s been the Head of Disbursements or something has to step down and become the Assistant Head because the other Party won the fall election; that’s not what that’s all about. So, we made some progress in that respect.

HM: And you talked about staffing and the professionalization, I think that all kind-of goes hand-and-hand.

JP: Well, it’s a lot better. It used to be that, gosh, most of the standing committees other than appropriations had virtually no staff at all. And they now got some subject matter expertise. I think in this respect the Republicans have done, frankly, a better job than the Democrats because I think they have, my understanding is, that they have centralized hiring, even of the political types. The Democrats have given, I think, too much authority

to the Chairman of the Committees as a result of which, their staff vary in quality; some of the good Chairman have very good staff and some of the weaker ones have not so good staff. So, I'd like to see that tightened up a little bit.

HM: So, you think that we're about ready for another – ?

JP: I think they're ready for another jolt of reform. The problem is to know what to do. There's an enormous agenda, you know: abolish the Senate, abolish the House, cut the size of the House. I do want them to get rid of that unaccountable expense account which is an outrage; it was an outrage then and it's an outrage now. And if they haven't figured that out, they're even dumber than I think they are. But, there are some other things. I've talked to Members about, for example, lessening the duration of Committee Chairs. Some of the people in the House want to limit a Committee Chairman to two or three terms. I'm not sure that's a good idea. One of the things that bothers me is the fact that legislative appropriations carry over. Now, most of state government, they lapse as you know that's a technical word, but I know when I was Secretary of Education, on June 30, I used to have a great stack of yellow sheets; I'd have to sign every one of them. You know, if there was 17 cents left in an account I had to sign a piece of paper that said that [this can lapse back into the State Treasury] Legislature, cleverly, has exempted themselves mostly from that requirement. So, their appropriations carry over from one year to the next. Now, the reason they do that is to make themselves independent of the Governor. So, if they are in a budget impasse with him, they can continue to run their end of the government without any interference for maybe six months, anyway. I don't

think that's good practice. I think they ought to be under the same duress that the Governor is, but I'm not sure we're going to be able to change that.

HM: Well, you talked about this Commission. Can you talk about the Committees that you served in while you were in the House?

JP: Well, in my first term, I was on the Finance or Revenue or whatever they called it and it was not a very, oddly enough, a very important committee unless you wanted a major tax change which at that point, we didn't. And the Chairman was Tommy Frascella [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1955-1966], an irascible guy from Philadelphia. He stopped me in the hall one day and he says, "Hey Pittenger, I got a bill I want you to take care of." It turned out to be the bill that some state college students were agitating to exempt textbooks from the sales tax. Well, this seemed kind of small bore to me so I said, "Yeah, I'd Chair the hearing." And we got a bunch of kids in from Millersville and Indiana and Kutztown and the young man who was chairing the delegation I said, "Tell me, what do textbooks cost you in a semester?" And he said, "80 dollars," – remember this was 25 years ago – I said, "80 dollars at six percent, let's see that four dollars and 80 cents. So, that'll buy a couple of beers right? And the same thing in the spring?" "Yeah, same thing in the spring." I said, "Well, wouldn't we be better off not doing this." I said, "By the way, how much will this cost the State Treasury?" And I've forgotten what figure he gave me, let's say five million. I said, "Wouldn't we be better off putting that five million into a scholarship program that help people who really need help rather than giving four dollars and 80 cents to every beer-

guzzling student in the state? Well, he didn't care for my description of that, but my colleagues on the Committee agreed with that and we buried the bill with no recriminations. My other Committee was Third Class Cities and as I look back on it now I didn't do a very good job. I didn't, on that committee, I didn't sort of seize the day as they say and promote an agenda which would have been [more helpful to the city]. I was just so new to all that. The second time around I think I was a little more useful particularly with this ad hoc committee. And I was on the Education Committee, by that time, and was able to influence PHEAA policy and that sort of thing. So, that was a little more challenging agenda. And Jim Gallagher [State Representative, Bucks County, 1959-1986] the Chairman of that Committee, who was a Democrat from Bucks County, was a very, very nice guy and a very able guy. He was only a high school graduate, I think; ran a bus company down in Bucks County, but, a staunch friend of public education and an easy guy to get along with.

HM: Well, how did you get involved in education issues because that's certainly – ?

JP: Well, my family just, I mean they can't help it. My father was one of 11 children and I think the feeling amongst the 11 of them they have something like 240 years of public school teaching. And then he (father) became a college administrator for 25 years. And my mother was a college graduate and a member of the school board, you know, actively interested in educational issues of all kinds. So, the talk around our dining table was always about education. So, even though I've – when I was nominated by Governor Shapp in [19]72, there were a lot of raised eyebrows in the education community and

they said, “What’s this lawyer know about education?” Well, I hope the answer is: more than they thought, but somebody else could make that judgment. (*laugh*)

HM: Well, one of the other things that you were involved in was bringing interns in.

JP: Yeah.

HM: And why did you feel that that was important?

JP: Well, I thought the internship program was important for a couple of reasons. It gives students the chance to see the real world and the real world isn’t exactly the one that gets talked about in their political science classes. I say that carefully because there’s a lot of very good faculty, but there’s a lot of nonsense being propagated out there and this is a chance for them to get acquainted with the real world. Secondly, it’s a chance for some legislators to see what good people there are coming out of the colleges and universities and to realize that they have something to offer in the way of policy analysis and all that. And third, I just like young people, like having them around. And we used to have a seminar at my apartment. My first two years as Secretary of Education I had an apartment overlooking the Susquehanna River; a lovely place, French windows you know, high ceilings and I was fond of throwing parties. And the interns would get invited to those things, you know, and they’d meet the Lieutenant Governor and the Secretary of Banking and the reporter for the Harrisburg Patriot and the lobbyist for Gulf Oil and you know this was an important way of mixing things up. And I regret that, I

think partisanship has made it more difficult to do that kind of thing today than it was 35 years ago.

HM: Could you comment on the changes in the House structure while you were a Member?

JP: Well, the changes I mostly want to emphasize are the change in what I described as sort of the civility. We very seldom spoke ill of each other on the Floor and I remember once when I did and I got reprimanded for it by Lee Donaldson [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1955-1970], the Republican Leader of the House. And I said, “You know, you’re right Lee. I was out of bounds.” But, otherwise we got along fine. I particularly had a good relationship with Marv Miller, Sr.; [State Representative, Lancaster County, 1967-1976] the father of the guy who succeeded me in the House in representing the city. His father was in that three-member district outside the city; and a newspaper man, been with the *New Era* for years, and he was a good guy. And I remember once being at a Democratic City Committee Meeting and some ignorant committee man [got up and said], “I want to ask Rep. Pittenger why he was seen walking down Third Street arm-in-arm Tuesday afternoon with Marvin Miller, Sr.?” And I said, “Well, you saw me walking down arm-in-arm because we had things to talk about.” I said, “We’re in opposite Parties but we have a lot of common agendas. We both represent parts of Lancaster County and we just think its good politics to find out what the other guys are up to.” And I still think that. But, I sense from talking to Mike Sturla and others that there’s less camaraderie across the aisle today than there was, and that’s

not just Harrisburg, that's Washington [D.C.] and the United Nations and every place else. It's not a pleasant world.

HM: Could you comment on the seniority system in the House?

JP: On the?

HM: Seniority?

JP: Seniority. I think seniority is inevitable in some form or another. And it's a lot better just to accept it as a fact and work within what are the limitations. I mean if a guy gets to be real senior and he's not too bright, you put him in charge of the Fisheries Committee. I don't want to suggest that fisherman are dumb because they're not, but what the Committee on Fisheries does isn't as important as what the Education Committee does, frankly. So, you can have a weak Chair there, but you can't have a weak Chair in Education. So, you can make the seniority system work. It's a little harder, but I don't get too excited about that.

HM: Did you notice any changes in the House Rules while you were there?

JP: Well, you know, I haven't been up there [Harrisburg] to see it in operation for years, so it would be really inappropriate for me to try to comment on that.

HM: Could you explain your relationship with the Media?

JP: I've always had a very good relationship with the Media, I think, mostly because I tell them the truth. And I remember one episode, which I've written about in the book, where a young reporter from a mid-state daily, which will remain unnamed, came to interview me when I was Secretary of Education. And I saw five minutes into the interview that it wasn't going to work because he just didn't have the background to be asking sensible questions. [So I said, "Look pal, let me] make you a deal. You let me ask myself the questions, you write down my answers and I guarantee you'll have a decent, at least, an accurate story." So, we did it that way and he took off and a couple weeks later I had an ecstatic phone call. They not only printed his interview verbatim, but they'd given him a raise. I said, "You owe me a dinner." He said, "Yes, I do!"
(laugh)

HM: Could you comment on your relationship with lobbyists because I think you've had that – ?

JP: Well, I had a good – the only time I remember being irritated by a lobbyist was somebody in the liquor business who came and poked his finger in my necktie and demanded that I vote for some bill and I said, "Get your paw off my necktie." But, for the most part, for example, the education people I was on better terms with PSEA [Pennsylvania State Education Association] than I was with the School Board Association because one tended to be Democratic and one tended to be Republican, but I

got along with them alright and they are the source of an enormous amount of information. For example, if somebody proposed a change in the school subsidy formula you could find out from PSEA how that was going to affect your District in about 12 hours; it would take the Department of Education 12 weeks to come up with the same information. So, you had to be on good terms with those guys if you're going to stay on top of the game.

HM: Well, talking about the Department of Education, could you discuss your career after leaving the House?

JP: Well, I, of course, was defeated in [19]70 for the third and final time and was on tenterhooks for two or three weeks, and then Governor-elect Shapp called up and said, "Pitt can you come down and have breakfast with me on Sunday morning?" And I said, "Sure." So, I got my intern to drive me down and the intern entertained Muriel Shapp or vice versa while Milt and I went out to the neighborhood delicatessen. And of course, he was mobbed because he'd been the first Jewish Governor in the history of the State. And he finally, after fending off all the well-wishers, got around to saying, "Would I like to be his Legislative Secretary?" And I said, "I would on two conditions: the one was he had to understand that I supported [Robert P.] Bob Casey [Governor 1987-1995] in the Primary that year." And he laughed and said, "Well, we all make mistakes." And he was a very forgiving guy, too forgiving, in some ways. And I said, "The other one is I really would like to be Secretary of Education someday and I want your promise that if I perform well in this legislative thing, you will consider me, not that you will appoint me,

but you will consider me for that job.” And I apparently performed alright and, of course, helped him get the income tax through; that was my big legislative achievement. Some people would say that’s not a great achievement, but I, on the contrary, think that helping put the finances of the State on even keel was a major undertaking and I’m very proud of that.

HM: Can you describe your duties as Secretary of Education?

JP: Well, it’s an exciting, but a terribly demanding job because in this state, unlike many others, the Secretary of Education is responsible for public education-kindergarten through PhD. So, I had not only the 504 school districts to worry about, but the 14 state colleges and the four state-related universities and a whole bunch of other institutions like the School of the Deaf and the Scotland School and so on. And I had a staff of 1,100 and a budget of, I guess if you counted all the subsidies, probably three billion then, maybe 10 billion now. And part of the problem was that mostly they were civil service and that was both good and bad. It kept the worse forms of politics out, but it made it very difficult to hire really first-rate people. Women and minorities were greatly under-represented in the staff. It tended to be worn-out school superintendents who were looking for a place to pad their pensions, you know, before they retired and that’s not a recipe for vigorous leadership. But, in trying to get some untraditional people into slots, we encountered some opposition from the Civil Service Commission. I must say Dave Hornbeck, my Deputy, was marvelously effective in getting them to waive some of their sillier rules. So, we were successful, I think, on a lot of fronts on that score.

HM: Did you surround yourself with good people? You mentioned to me –

JP: I am very proud of the people we brought into the Department, yeah. I'm still in touch with a lot of them and I think, on the whole, they were a very effective crowd.

HM: Can you tell us about Project 81 and the State College System Act?

JP: What was Project 81?

HM: What was Project 81?

JP: Was that that civic education thing? I have only the vaguest recollection of that. It was something; I've always been interested in the question of how you get young people to understand something about government and politics. And we got some money from one of the foundations to fund some trial programs in various schools. And it was one of those things that worked fine as long as the money lasted and when the money dried up the program dried up. I can't say we did any great good. In fact I would have to say in all candor that the state of civic education in our high schools is worse today than it was 35 years ago. And I may not be all together to blame, but I certainly didn't do much to counter act it.

HM: What would you say your greatest successes were as Secretary?

JP: As Secretary? Well, one of the top ones had to do with retarded and handicapped children. Governor Shapp felt very strongly about that and he had no sooner come into office in [19]71 than the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children filed suit against the State, claiming that handicapped children were handicapped not only by their physical and mental condition, but by the lack of attention paid to them by the State. And they were absolutely right. And it didn't take us very long to see that we had no moral, legal, or political grounds on which to continue to defend the system. So, we entered into a consent decree which made a lot of the school people angry; they thought I should I have fought this thing all the way to the State Supreme Court, but I wasn't going to waste State money doing that. And so we entered into a consent decree and Pennsylvania was, and I think still is, looked to as a pioneer in the education of the handicapped.

HM: What about your failures as Secretary?

JP: What about my – ?

HM: – failures as Secretary?

JP: Oh my failures. I didn't do much with the colleges and universities. They are a law unto themselves and tend to resent interference by anybody in Harrisburg: Secretaries of Education, Legislatures, Governors as illegitimate. And we had some minor triumphs, but I would have to say that on the whole, I left the system largely unchanged.

HM: In your book, [Politics Ain't Beanbag] I recall you had a section, I think you were at Penn State, and you're walking through the campus and you saw yourself hanging in a tree?

JP: Oh yes. I was sort of the gadfly on the Penn State Board of Trustees. I was one of four or five Democrats out of I guess 35 trustees. And that occasioned a little anguish, but the time you're talking about, I used to try and play squash when I was up there and I was walking over towards the gym from the place where we were meeting and I saw these three bodies swaying in the wind. And it was me and [John] Jack Oswald, the President of Penn State, and the Dean of Liberal Arts; I've forgotten his name now, Stanley Paulson, I think. And what happened, it turned out, was that they had denied tenure to a fellow in the sociology department--Wells Keddle-- and he surfaced again in my life when he turned up at Rutgers, 20 years later when I was there. But, the students thought he was a terrific teacher and should have been given tenure. So, my State driver drove me into the Nittany Lion Inn and I hear this mob of students shouting, "We want Pittenger!" And I said to my driver, "Aha, at last I am appreciated." He said, "Mr. Secretary I don't think that's a friendly crowd." So, he drove me around to the back door and I snuck in and I sent a message out by him I said, "Look, I'll meet for breakfast with 10 of you tomorrow morning -- you're paying, I'm not -- and I'll hear your grievances. And they said, "We think this professor ought to have been given tenure." I said, "Well, I won't comment on the merits because I don't know the merits." And I said, "I'll tell you this, if you have your way, and decisions of this kind that have come up through the

ranks and been carefully considered at various levels get overturned, you're going to be the losers in the end." I said, "Suppose the Governor of Pennsylvania was not Milton Shapp, whom they by and large liked, but was Ronald Reagan?⁸ And suppose the Secretary of Education was not John Pittenger, whom they didn't particularly like or dislike, but was Max – and here I'm drawing a blank again – Max Rafferty, who was the Secretary of Education in California? I said, "Would you like to see Reagan and Rafferty overturn decisions that have been made by the faculty and deans of Penn State?" Well, students are so damn short-sighted that that didn't sway them at all, which is what got me hung in effigy the next day. I must, having been a victim of it, I must say it doesn't hurt at all.

HM: Okay (*laugh*) My next question was, how do you handle criticisms of your policies?

JP: You just smile and grit your teeth and you know publicly you say, "Thank you very much for your advice" and privately you say, "You sonofabitch, wait till I get even with you." But, you know you don't. There's no point in getting upset by it. It's going to happen one way or another and if you handle it gracefully, you get good points for it, I think, and to blow up is just crazy.

HM: In [19]72 –

JP: Like, I remember once being interviewed by a young woman *{Unintelligable}*
There's too much of that kind of thing.

⁸ 40th President of the United States [1981-1989]; 33rd Governor of California 1967-1975.

HM: Okay. In a 1972 report, you offered six goals for the Department of Education to abide by including flexibility, improvement of quality teaching participation, administrative improvement, access to equal opportunity, and imagination in productive spending. Do you think these goals were attained then?

JP: Not wholly, they never are. They're things you aim at and the question is not whether you get 100 percent because you never do, but what's the difference between hitting 50 percent and hitting 75 percent. And I think, you know, on most of those, we made reasonably good progress.

HM: From [19]91 to [19]96 you served on the State Board of Education and were the Chairman of its Council on Higher Education. What was that experience like?

JP: Well, that was interesting coming at it from a very different point of view. I had been out of the state and out of Pennsylvania politics for, gosh, almost 15 years and Governor Casey very kindly put me on the State Board and then a vacancy fell on the Chairmanship of the Higher Education Council. I had about the same amount of luck trying to move the colleges and universities in that position as I did as Secretary. They didn't want to be moved. *(laugh)* And I was particularly concerned that there was duplication. I know Graham Spanier, the new President of Penn State, had announced some plans to expand some of the branch campuses. Well, I had been against the branch campuses from the beginning, thinking that they impinged on territory that was better met

by the community college system. And it's the fact of those branch campuses that's prevented us, I think, from developing a really first-rate system of community colleges; although we have some very good ones. And I tried to do something about that as Chairman of the Council and by and large, failed. The State Board of Education doesn't have very much power; they're appointed by the Governor. They're largely invisible to the public. The Legislature could probably abolish them tomorrow morning and nobody would notice the difference. So, you have to do what you're going to do in fairly quiet and what I call "interstitial" ways; that is ways that don't rock the boat too strenuously. There were some good people on the Board, but I would say collectively we didn't amount to a whole lot.

HM: What would you say the state of Pennsylvania politics is today?

JP: Oh, I can't answer a question like that, Heidi. I mean it kind of depends where you are in the State and where you are politically. I am disturbed by a tendency, and I think it's greater on the Republican side, but it's affected both parties, the tendency to pursue ideologies; to pursue frameworks that purport to give you the answer to everything. And I don't think a lot of things have answers or not very good answers. And I'd like to be more flexible, some people would say opportunistic; I don't think so, but it is up to them to judge. I don't like this notion that, you know, God or somebody else is handing down all the solutions and all we have to do is find out what he wants and do it. That strikes me as a pretty simple-minded approach to public policy.

HM: In your farewell address, you spoke of Federalism possibly dying in this country and the fact that maybe State Legislatures could not govern most effectively the people that they are supposed to represent. Do you still believe that today?

JP: You know, the oddest thing is having, Heidi, in the 30-some years since I wrote that Federalism is dying at the hands of a Republican President and I never thought I would live to see that. For example, the No Child Left Behind⁹ legislation, which is one of the most fraudulent bills ever passed by the Congress of the United States, has taken an enormous amount of authority away from the states and given it to the Congress and the Feds. Whether for good or ill, I mean I think for ill as you obviously can tell. And in many environmental areas, time and time again, the Bush administration has overridden attempts by the States, for example California intends to impose stiffer rules on air pollution and water pollution than the Congress is willing to do. So, Congress and the White House tried to cancel the effect of those state initiatives. Sometimes I don't know why anybody would want to be in the State Legislature these days. I think one of the reasons they're pursuing these ideological agendas is because the old agenda: education, environmental concerns, labor concerns has been usurped by Congress.

HM: What aspect of your job as a Pennsylvania Legislator did you enjoy the most?

JP: Oh, I enjoyed the whole darn thing. I think it had its tedious moments. There comes a time when you've rung 5,000 doorbells when the 5,001st doesn't yield any particular

⁹ Public Law 107-110 [2001]-federal government programs that aim to improve the performances of US primary and secondary schools and increase the standards of accountability for states and school districts

insights, but I enjoyed the people I worked with. You know, people tell me how terrible the Legislature is and I say, “Well, what would you do to make it better?” And then you get these recipes that sometimes cancel each other out. I mean there is no consensus. There’s a lot of talk in Harrisburg these days about reform. But, I don’t see any consensus around any particular set of reforms where there’s any agreement that they would do much good.

HM: What aspect of being a Member did you like the least?

JP: That I liked the least: raising money. I didn’t have to raise very much, but I’m better at raising money for other people than I am for myself. I don’t know whether it’s my Quaker modesty or what it is. But, I just hate like calling people up and say, “Hey, you gave me 100 bucks last year, how about making it 200 this year?” It has to be done.

HM: Yeah. I don’t think we’ve touched on your career as an educator yet. You had your public service and then you went on to become an educator with some schools.

JP: Well, I’ve taught and I’ve been a Dean. The teaching I enjoyed. The deaning, frankly, the less said about it the better. That was not a great deal of fun and I don’t think I was a very good Dean. But, I think I was a good teacher at Harvard School of Education and a fairly good law school teacher and I think in my various guest appearances at F & M [Franklin and Marshall] and Millersville and sundry other places, I have done respectably. But, you call me an educator: that wouldn’t be the word. I don’t

like that word because “teacher” is a much better important word for me than “educator.” I mean teacher tells you what somebody is doing. You say somebody’s an educator, I have no idea what that person is actually doing. Now, I’d rather talk about teaching and learning.

HM: Some of the other things that I have on my sheet; you were a Chairman of the Joint Legislative Data Processing Committee.

JP: Yes.

HM: I’m fascinated by that.

JP: Well, I was fascinated by it too. When the Committee list came out I went in to see Herb Fineman I said, “Herb, what in the name of God are you doing putting me not only on the Data Processing - ?” I said, “I don’t understand a computer and I don’t propose to.” He says, “I’m putting you there because you’re the only goddamn college professor on our side of the aisle.” It was me and Sieber Pancoast [State Representative, Montgomery County, 1965-1978] on the Republican side. *(laugh)* And I think mostly because I knew I didn’t know anything and in Dick Campbell, we had a very active and energetic and thoughtful guy. And I gave him a good deal of rope and we made some real progress. We had a lot of things yet to do when I stepped down, but that turned out to be a more enjoyable assignment than I thought it would be.

HM: Well what were the technologies of the time? What was going on?

JP: Well, technology enables you to make faster decisions; it doesn't enable you to make wiser decisions. I remember one of our less luminous State Senators, a Democrat I regret to say, came up to me one time and said, "Pitt, ask the computer what to put in the budget?" And I said, "Senator, it doesn't work that way. You have to feed information into the computer that's structured in such a way that it yields the information you want." Well, he never did; fortunately, he didn't play a very active role in the Committee.

HM: Well, how do you think technology is impacting Legislators now and do you think it's for the better?

JP: Oh, I couldn't begin to answer that. I mean, I don't study; I don't lie awake at nights reading the journal.

HM: Well, I think one of the things you talked about was the journal becoming available online.

JP: Yeah, becoming available.

HM: That was a goal, I think?

JP: That's a step in the right direction, yeah. I don't use a computer, so I don't know; my wife's got one. She looks up the things that are essential to know, but there's a great mistake in thinking that the volume of information available is somehow going to increase the wisdom of the decisions. And the decisions are only as wise as the premises that you bring to them and if you bring a dumb set of premises, you're going to get dumb results, no matter how much data you've got. Computers are useful in a very limited sort of way.

HM: You've written at least two books that I know of, I think. You've been published several times. The Pursuit of Justice was published in 1969.

JP: That's a little primer for high school students on the Supreme Court and its role in American civilization. I wrote it with a prep-school history teacher of mine and I don't think it has sold more than a 1,000 copies and has been out of print for 30 years.

HM: Did you use a typewriter and not a computer? Okay. Then of your new books, Politics Ain't Beanbag, what do you want to say about that?

JP: Well, I decided when I retired that it was time to sit down and try to write all this up and see what it amounted to. Curiously enough, I didn't start out with any particular thesis. When I wrote the thing and started to look back on it I said, "Well, what have I learned?" So, I said to myself, "What did I start out thinking?" I started out thinking that everybody wants to achieve the best and that policies can be rationally arrived at and that

a whole bunch of premises that I now think are faulty premises. And so, I've revised a bunch of my premises and to a more, I wouldn't say a more pessimistic or cynical, but a more realistic view. I don't get excited when people follow their own self interest; that seems to me a fairly natural thing to do. And the trick in politics is to try to get A and B to see that they each have interests that the other one can meet without sacrificing the public interests; sometimes you can do it, sometimes you can't. But, I've become, I think – Jack Kennedy¹⁰ used the phrase to describe himself; called himself an “idealist without illusions. I suspect Arthur Schlesinger¹¹ coined the phrase, but I like it and that's what I call myself.

HM: Are you still active in politics?

JP: Oh, in a sort of a senior citizen [way]. The *New Era Reporter*, *Sunday Reporter* kept calling me the “Eminence Gris” of the Democratic Party. I thought it was a description of Cardinal Richelieu and his role in the administration of Louis XIV, but I find consulting my history books that no, it's about a priest named Father Joseph, who is in fact a Capuchin Monk, and who was an advisor not to Louis XIV, but Louis XIII¹². But, I'm still the “Eminence Gris,” I guess, in her view and it sort of involves being available by telephone to consult with the County Chairman and try to recruit people. For example, this morning I read a very good letter in the *Intel*, the guy who lived in Landisville, so I found where he lived and found out he was a registered Democrat and called up the

¹⁰ 1917-1963-35th President of the US-assassinated in Dallas in November of 1963-Instrumental in the Bay of Pigs invasion, Cuban Missile Crisis, Vietnam War, American Civil Rights Movement, Space Race

¹¹ 1917-present-American historian and social critic-served as Special Assistant to Pres. John Kennedy

¹² King of France 1610-1643

District Leader and said, “Get a hold of this guy. We can put him to use.” So, I do that kind of thing, but it’s nothing earth shaking.

HM: Would you mind talking about your run for the U.S. Senate?

JP: Oh, that’s one of the dumber things I did. I decided in 1980 that, who was it? [Richard] Schweiker [United States Representative, 1961-1968; United States Senator, 1969-1980] was vacating, I guess, the Senate seat and that I was the right guy to fill it. And the premises were all wrong and the campaign was not very effective. And I pulled out at the last minute before you withdraw from the Primary, so I never knew how I would have done. I think probably if I’d have stayed in, I would have gotten between two percent to three percent of the vote. So, it wasn’t worthwhile bankrupting myself.

HM: Did you ever want to hold another seat, another elected office?

JP: No, I never ran for elected office again.

HM: After that one.

JP: No. That was my kiss of death.

HM: Something else we found in our research: you performed as the Director of Research for the Minority Caucus. Could you talk about your role?

JP: Well, I mentioned, when you brought that up earlier, that Herb had offered me that job in December of [19]66 and for most of those next two years I was directing nobody but myself. But, it was a fun job. It involved some speech writing, some research, some advice to legislators and candidates, and a lot of interaction with our Congressional Delegation. One of the things that struck me: both Governor Shapp and Herb Fineman and Leroy Irvis were very open about giving me carte blanche to get in touch with Congress. Now, I remember being shocked by getting a phone call one time from a Republican Secretary of Education who said, “Pitt, I want to talk to you off the record.” He said, “Were you allowed to call Congressmen?” I said, “Was I allowed to call Congressmen? Of course I was allowed to call Congressmen.” Well he said, “We’ve got an edict from Governor [Richard] Thornburgh [1979-1987] that no member of the cabinet is to get in touch with anybody in Congress without the permission of the front office.” I said, “I would have resigned. I’m not going to operate under those kinds of constraints.” So, you know, I had a lot of freedom in that respect. Now, what did I get started on here, I’ve gotten off track.

HM: Director of Research.

JP: Oh. So, as Director of Research I was the liaison with the Congressional Delegation which was fun because I knew something about the issues down there. And nowadays, I think that’s the job that Jen Brubaker essentially has, isn’t it? And she’s got 16 or 17 people under her and quite an operation. Some of the Members of our Caucus never sought my services at all. Others like Frank Kury [State Representative, Northumberland

County 1967-1971; State Senator, 1972-1984] sought them all the time. And I remember, I tell this in the book, that Frank came to me one day with some outrageous request and I said, "Frank, goddamnit, this is the fifth time you've been in here this week. You've already booked me for two weeks of time." I said, "You're one Member of the 90 Member Caucus. You get, you know, your fair share of my time; it's 40 minutes and get out." So, he went to see Fineman and Herb called me and said, "Pitt, what are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm just seeing all together too much of Frank Kury." He said, "He's a good man; you do what you can to help him." And I did and we've stayed good friends, but it was an interesting assignment. I don't know that I would want to spend a lifetime in that kind of capacity, but for two years, it was fine.

HM: What would you say your fondest memory of your public service would be?

JP: Oh, I can't answer that kind of question. I mean there are a lot of memories that are very warm to me and particularly, relationships with people like Fineman and Irvis and Governor Shapp who was a wonderful guy to work for. And his usual answer when you took a tough problem was: "Just go do the right thing."

HM: Did you like working as a legislator better than being in the executive office?

JP: Well, I think the executive cabinet was in one way more fun because I had a little more control over the agenda, although less than people think. But, they were both interesting and I've done almost everything in politics except be a judge and I've never

had any interest in being a judge at all. But, those jobs, I was a better Secretary of Education because I'd been in the Legislature. And I was a better legislator, well I can't say because it came first, but I would have been a better legislator had I had the experience that I had in running a department. I mean they feed into each other. (*cough*) Excuse me. I'm pretty close to running out of steam so you better –

HM: I've read your book and there are a lot of really amusing stories in there. Are there any that you'd like to share today?

JP: Yeah. Well, the ones that I could share I've put in the book and I think I better had put them on TV. But, there were a lot of experiences that were very heartwarming and instructive at the same time. And I can't think of any one that particularly pops to my mind. I have to say again that Governor Shapp was a wonderful person to work for; deeply compassionate man, but as a businessman who made several million dollars in the cable TV business, he was pretty hardheaded about a lot of things, also. And it was that combination of compassion and hardheadedness that I think made him a very effective Governor.

HM: What do you believe was your greatest accomplishment?

JP: I think probably Chairing that Commission on the Reform of the House; in the long run will turn out to have had more impact on Pennsylvania government/politics than anything I did as a legislator or as Secretary of Education. I can't say that the educational

system is radically better or worse for my having been in charge for four years, no five years. But, the work of that Commission has had, I think, a lasting impact on the House.

HM: Lastly, what would you give as advice for new Members that would be starting in the House today?

JP: Be realistic and idealistic at the same time. I mean have a set of goals, but understand that getting there isn't going to be easy. There are a lot of detours and you got to keep your sense of humor. And the last thing I'd say, you haven't asked me about this, but much of my life has been spent mentoring young people and I'm still doing that even though I think the present political climate is not a fun one to be in. But, I spend a lot of my time saying to college and high school students, "Jump in. The water's cold, but once you get over the shock, you know you'll survive and you have something to contribute. And it doesn't make any difference whether you're running for, you know, Auditor in East Cocalico Township, or the Legislature, or Governor, you can make some contribution according to your talents and go to it." So, that would be my advice.

HM: Thank you very much.

JP: Thank you.