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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Todd A. Rock (R)

90th District

Franklin County

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Raymond Whittaker (RW): Good afternoon.

Todd Rock (TR): Good afternoon.

RW: We have the pleasure today of speaking with Representative Todd A. Rock, who has represented the 90th District, which includes portions of Franklin County from 2007 through 2014. Representative, thank you for sitting down and talking with us today.

TR: Thanks for having me today.

RW: I'd like you to start off and talk briefly about your early life growing up and some of the things you did, education-wise or job-wise, before you ran for the House of Representatives.

TR: Well, if I go back real early I could talk about politics in our family. That's one thing that started fifty years ago with my uncle and that's really about the time I was born, actually. That's all I really heard about when I was growing up was campaigns, campaigning issues. That's sort of how I – you know, I didn't know there was another side other than Republican, you know? So, I grew up with that. So, later I moved on and you know, graduated from Waynesboro High School. I went on from there to Hagerstown Community College then later went on and got a teaching certificate from Penn State University. Prior to coming here, I was a teacher for ten years and ten years before that I was a homebuilder. So, both of those professions served me well here in the House because we deal with so many education issues and certainly spending ten years in the classroom, that would certainly help being on the Education Committee; it was very

helpful. Then we're always tinkering with the construction code and trying to make changes there and, of course, being a builder for ten years, that was also helpful. So, it was an interesting early life and it played right into this position.

RW: Having that sort of distinctive family presence in state and local government, what types of things did you learn from them that you took with you into a role as [a] public servant?

TR: Well, you know they laid the blueprint for me and for many of us in the Rock family. I think there's been eight or nine of us now that have served in an elected position and I think the years have totaled up to nearly one-hundred years of service between all of us. But, you don't get reelected to all those times if you're not doing something right. You know, when you make promises you keep them; it's hard work, its dedication – all of those things. You listen to the people that have elected you and you understand the people that have elected you. And you do what's right every day. Someone said, "How do you know what right is?" Well, if you don't know that, then you better not get into politics because you just do the right thing every day. I haven't found the job to be that difficult because I made some promises, I've kept them, and things have worked out pretty well for me.

RW: What motivated you to run for the House in the time that you did?

TR: Well, you know I had the family history, first of all. Because of that, I served on the Waynesboro School Board for three years and was looking to possibly get into something, but I wasn't sure what. It didn't matter to me what the position was as long as I could make a

difference. I thought about the county level, different positions, but the pay raise came along and that sort of changed everything. Really, it's very difficult to get into a state-level position just to run against an incumbent and you have to have the issues on your side. Certainly, the pay raise did that. It wasn't an automatic in for any stretch of the imagination, but it certainly made it easier. Because of our history in the county, we have some good roots there in local politics and, you know, I got into it and it was a difficult campaign to say the least, but after all the campaigning – and I could go into how detailed that was –

RW: Because it was not just a primary campaign.

TR: That's right.

RW: You had to run against your opponent again in the General Election.

TR: Yes, it doesn't happen very often but I had to run against an incumbent twice. I think I went to ten thousand, seven hundred doors, my volunteers did about another four thousand doors for me, and after all that, I won by one-hundred and twenty-five votes. So, the power of incumbency, it's something very difficult to overcome but we did. You know, so that's how it all happened. It was very difficult, but I haven't had anybody run against me in the campaign –

RW: Hey, you must have done something right; you haven't had an opponent since. But, people say that when you're on a two year election cycle, you're continuously running for office. Have you found that to be the case?

TR: Not so much in my county because we – sixty-five percent Republican – and if you get into office and you do the right things, you can usually stay there if you want to. I just didn't stay any longer, because I have a term limit set and we can go into it later about why I'm leaving a couple of years earlier than I would really have needed to, but in this job it's, you make your promises, you keep your promises, and people are normally satisfied with that.

RW: What aspects of the campaigning process did you enjoy and then conversely, did you dislike?

TR: Well, you know, I enjoyed meeting the people. When I first started out, I certainly didn't enjoy going every Saturday nine to nine and every day after work; I didn't enjoy that. But, I did enjoy the people and I remember thinking, you know, walking up every sidewalk of ten thousand, seven hundred doors and "What's this person going to ask me about? Are they going to be upset about I'm running against an incumbent?" That can be very difficult and it can be very stressful, to say the least. And I don't know how, when I look back at that, I'm not really sure how I got through that because as you look out six months you say, "I've got to campaign every day. I got to campaign every Saturday. I can't take a day off." I'm not sure how I got through that, I guess just one day at a time and now its eight years behind me. It's hard to believe.

RW: You brought up the topic of people; talk a little bit about your district, the 90th District, and sort of the demographics, the geography, the industry that's involved in your district.

TR: You know, a very conservative area, Franklin County, a lot of agriculture there. I grew up in that district, so I know the people; that's the main thing. I've grown up there, I've lived in that district all my life; my family's lived there for forever, so we know the people well. Blue collar working families, so I understand them [and] they understood me and it was a very good working relationship.

RW: What types of issues did they often bring to your attention, whether in the district office or here in Harrisburg?

TR: You may not believe this, but the number one issue I think I've heard over the eight years is Game Commission Deer Management – you wouldn't believe it. We have a lot of hunters down there and they're not happy with the current Game Commission Deer Management plan. I would say it's number one and really close to that, I would think, would be property tax reform. I would certainly think, maybe I heard about that even more now since I've been in for eight years, but deer management, property tax reform. It's amazing what you hear about. But then you hear about a lot of other issues, don't get me wrong, but they were two that I would say were right up there in the top.

RW: How do you balance the work you have to do here in Harrisburg versus the work that you have to do every day in the district or for the district?

TR: Well, I tell people I really have two separate jobs. One, when I'm in the district, that's completely different. People are walking in the door, I'm meeting them there, taking care of issues like speeding in front of their house and I have water ponding in my yard, and I have all these kind of issues that I have to deal with. When I come to Harrisburg, it's a whole different set of rules, you know, it's a different job, actually. We're going into Session, I'm going to committee meetings, I'm meeting with lobbyists, and I'm meeting with people in my office down here. It's two separate jobs and you have to get that in your mind to figure that out, you know. When I first came here, I didn't realize it was going to be like that. I didn't realize that my district offices would be so busy. I didn't realize that, you know, twenty people a day would stop in just because they have an issue then I have fifty emails a day and I get twenty phone calls a day and we all have to figure out those issues. I've never, in eight years, have told anybody, "Sorry can't help you". We figured out something; we may not have got the answer for them but we gave them some resources to move in that direction. So, the district is completely different than Harrisburg. I even feel different on those days. When I'm in the district, I feel one way; when I come down here, I'm more anxious. You just don't know what's going to happen. When we come down here, you don't know if you're going to get out of here at six in the evening or if you're going to get out of here eleven o'clock at night. So, totally different job, parts of the job.

RW: Talk about that first time coming to Harrisburg; your first Swearing-In day after being elected as a new member. What do you remember about that day?

TR: You know, that was – I don't know – it was scary, I think. A little overwhelming to realize you're going to be here with 203 Members, 50 in the Senate, and making that all work, I don't

know anyone – well, I know Rob Kauffman [State Representative; Cumberland and Franklin Counties, 2005-present] from my district and Mark Keller [State Representative; Cumberland, Franklin and Perry Counties, 2005-present] but other than that, I really didn't know anyone. And, from previously watching on TV and come down and watching Session, it seemed so confusing. It's like, "How am I going to get my arms around all of the different issues?" But, as time goes on, you know, that comes to and you figure it out but on that first day, that first week, that first month, I couldn't even find my way around the Capitol. I still have trouble with that. So, that was a little intimidating but, after time it gets better as we go.

RW: You mentioned some of the other members that were close to you. Did you have a certain mentor or someone that either your district ties with or someone that was mentor to you when first started?

TR: I don't think I had one person in particular. Certainly, I leaned on Rob Kauffman being my, you know he's in Franklin County, we basically split Franklin County, so, I've certainly asked him a lot of questions and he was very helpful. But, I think I didn't have one mentor; I think just a combination of different people. And, I got to be friends with different guys from areas in the state I just didn't think I'd have anything in common with, but I do. So, I think together with the combination of six, eight, ten different people, they were my mentors and that's how I sort of learned what to do here.

RW: A part of the process that people don't generally think about when you see it from afar is the committee process. And, you were assigned a number of committees when you start out here. Talk about the role of the committee process and also your role within the committees.

TR: Well, I served on Judiciary, Game and Fish, and Education, and Children and Youth. All those committees are very active. I talked about education earlier; there's always issues there and they're difficult issues. You have the Teachers Union to deal with, you have parents; they're very difficult issues to deal with there. And then on Judiciary, we did a lot after the Sandusky situation at Penn State, we did a lot of child protection bills – I had one of my own – and all that came through Judiciary, so they're very active committees. That's how we really, you find out when you get here, that's where the work is really done. Five thousand bills are introduced in a two-year Session and we do a lot of that work to whittle that down in committee, because we certainly couldn't bring all those to the Floor and ever get that all done. So, we whittle that down in committee, so that's where the real work is done here, I believe.

RW: Outside of that, you also have to participate within your own caucus. I think you've been in the majority most of the time that you're here, if not all of it.

TR: Not the first two years.

RW: First two years. So, how has that played being in the minority and the majority and how you perceive getting success?

TR: Well, you know, when I came here in the minority, that was different. You just couldn't really move things forward; you just had to sort of be the opposition at that point. I tried to work with the other side, certainly, when you can, but many times I was opposed to what the other side was trying to do because I came here as a conservative, I made that well-known when I came here, I represent that type of a district, so I wasn't going to change when I got here. Some guys and ladies fall into that; they get here and they feel like they have to please leadership or they have to do things for a certain reason, and I made it very clear from the very beginning that I represent Franklin County and I'm going to represent them the best that I can. So, that's what I did here.

RW: Now, being the case where it's Republican majority across the board – you have the Senate, the Governor's Office – how have you been able to work with the other chambers and the other Agencies with the Governor's Office to get things accomplished?

TR: Oh, that's been an easier process. We, as a caucus, have gone in a more conservative direction, I think, in the last four years under the leadership of Mike Turzai [State Representative; Allegheny County, 2001-present; Majority Leader, 2011-2014, Speaker, 2015-present], so that was good for me. And we've got the budget under control, we got the spending under control, no new taxes – certainly, I haven't voted for any new taxes – and we've only raised just a few taxes along the way, so I think we've gone in the right direction. And, for me, certainly it's been a lot easier being in the majority than it is in the minority.

RW: Talk about some of the bills that you've enacted and that you've authored, sponsored on your own.

TR: Well, the one that I always get a laugh from is the very first one that I did. The pizza business owners came to me and said, "You know, we're the only state, I think, in the country that doesn't allow a lighted sign on the delivery vehicle." I said, "Well, I think I can maybe get that done." So, we wrote the bill and we got that passed, you know? That was a really big deal for them. But, that was just one. I had one, another child protection bill that came out of the Sandusky mess at Penn State. That one provides further protections for kids under the age of twelve and increases the penalties even more for kids under the age of four, I believe. I also did a bill that allows school districts to pay their police officers with tax-payer dollars. Before, they could not do that, unless they were an employee of the school district. That was one that you won't find that bill number – I think we got that in through the fiscal code during budget time or something like that. They were the three bills. Of course, I had the three bills passed for the fallen soldiers in my district; that was Sergeant Shaffer, Sergeant Tieman, and Master Sergeant Bitner. They all passed away either in Iraq or Afghanistan. So, we renamed three state roads after them in my district. So, that was probably the highlight, the most honoring thing that I was able to do since I've been here. Most memorable, certainly.

RW: How about some of the things that you sponsored that haven't passed. Has there any that [you want to] highlight that you think, "I wish in the time here, we really would have got that done"?

TR: Well, the teacher strike bill, I think, would probably be the number one issue. I think it's sort of, the economy sort of resolved that for us because things are so tight now at the school districts that I think teachers think "We can't go on strike because there's just no money." But, certainly that was the first bill – the first big bill – that I sponsored. Many thought, you know, coming in here as a freshman, "You sure you want to do that?"

RW: Right.

TR: And it was difficult at times, but I think it was a right thing to do. I think the kids have the right to an uninterrupted education and certainly if, in other industry, if you want to go on strike, that's certainly up to you, but when it comes to children, I didn't think that teachers had the right to strike. Me being a former teacher, I just didn't think it was the right thing to do. We weren't able to move that forward but I did sponsor that for, I think, three sessions.

RW: Yep.

TR: So, that was the number one issue that was the biggest issue, I think, that I sponsored.

RW: How has technology, or social media, altered positively or negatively the way you've done your job?

TR: You know, that's one thing that I have not gotten; I have a Facebook page and all that, but I'm 51 years old, so I was sort of, raised without that. You know what I'm saying? I didn't even

have a computer in high school, you know? So, I haven't gotten into the Facebook part of it and Tweeting like a lot of Members have, but I know that is a very effective tool to get the word out, to get out what you're doing. But I haven't used that a whole lot. I do have a Facebook page, but someone else sort of takes care of that for me and I have input as to what goes on there but it certainly has made a big difference in a lot of campaigns.

RW: You came in on a wave of reform. A lot of other members came in in that same session. The House has made some reforms during that time. What do you think about the reforms that were made and do you think there's still room for additional reforms than you think you made?

TR: Well, there's certainly room for more reforms, no doubt about that. But, I think the most important thing we've done here, and it doesn't make the front page of the paper, but we've changed the culture. We've changed the way we do things here. We've changed the way we do business. The tax-payer, the people of Pennsylvania come first now. I think most of the things we do are in the open; you can go on the internet and find out what we're doing, how I vote, my expenses – you can find all of that stuff out about me that you couldn't before. We changed a lot of House rules. I think one of the ones that you don't think a whole lot of is that we can't be here past eleven o'clock – I think that's a big change. Prior, the leadership could keep you here as long as they wanted til they got out of you what they wanted, you know. If you were a 'no' vote and they wanted a 'yes', if they keep you here long enough, they're going to get enough guys to switch over. That's one thing we changed that I think has really made a difference. But, generally, we've changed the culture; some people that were here that weren't looking out for the best interest of Pennsylvania have moved on, we forced that in some situations, and I think we

have people here now that are committed to doing the right thing, I think we're on the right track but certainly there's more reforms to come.

RW: One of the, I guess, reforms you self-imposed, which was a term limit.

TR: Yeah.

RW: Is that, I guess, is what played into your decision to leave the House now? Could you talk a little bit more about that and how that was a personal decision of yours?

TR: Yeah, originally it was I said that I would say ten to twelve years, but somehow that evolved into ten years, which was fine with me, but actually I'm leaving after eight years. I had an opportunity in the business community to go back and work in the business community at a local business deal, George and Sons; I had that job available to me. That was the reason that I left a couple years early, but I just thought it was the right thing to do. I don't have all the answers, I don't have all the best ideas so, if I'm here for thirty years, I'm the only person that gets to put my views forward. In that same amount of time, if three different reps represent my district, [it's] hard to tell what might come of that. So, I never thought that I was the smartest guy out there, that I deserved to stay here for a certain amount of time; I just thought ten years was enough time to get my feet wet, to figure this whole place out, and get involved, make a difference, and then move on, and that's what I chose to do. People really respect that, when you actually make a promise and you keep it; that's big and many, many people have told me and thanked me personally for keeping my promise.

RW: With so many big issues left on the table, we haven't done anything about liquor privatization or pensions or school property taxes, there's still issues with Marcellus Shale; do you regret any of that decision, with so many big things left unresolved?

TR: Yeah, certainly. You know, the pension reform, I was a teacher, I was in that retirement system and this retirement system; it's obvious that something needs to be done, you know? It's a shame that we can't get to first base on that. Liquor privatization, I voted for that. Some of the other big issues, I'm on board with. It's just, in our caucus we just have about fifteen or twenty members that have a difficult time with the issues that you talked about and to get to one-hundred and two votes, that's difficult. For me, it's easy. The district I represent, they certainly want those changes, but we just can't make it happen under the current set-up we have; we just can't make it happen and that's disappointing.

RW: Typically, Members around the eight year, ten year, twelve year mark start seeing committee chairmanships and running for leadership; was that ever an aim for you to get into a position like that or just –

TR: No interest there. No interest at all. You know, I know that plays well back in the district that, you know, I'm a chairman or I'm in leadership, but what can I really change for my district? I mean, it's good for me, but I don't know how it's that much better for the district. I certainly wouldn't want to go into leadership. The time commitment it takes, the time away from home – you basically give up your life, depending on the leadership position, you give up your life at

home. I have a one year-old grandson at this point; I'm more interested in seeing what he does than I am spending nights at fundraisers and wherever around the state. A chairman, that would be okay, I mean, I have no problem with that, but really, I think to be a chairman now, it's about fourteen years, I think? So, I'd have a ways to go for that anyway. So, I wouldn't say that's something I didn't find interesting, but certainly leadership is not something I'd want to do.

RW: Do you ever see yourself running for another elected office in the future?

TR: You know, that's why when you said earlier, or I talked to you earlier, about I have a job available to me at this company, they've offered me a really nice job at a great company to work for, but in that sense I made that decision, I had so many people ask me to run for a different position and I certainly have made this decision: not to run against someone else. I did that once, that was very difficult and I don't look forward to that. But, if there's an open position, say at the county level like I talked about earlier, and they need someone that's used to dealing with the public and can fill that spot, that's something I'd consider, something I'd consider. So, going forward, I'm not exactly sure what the future holds, you know, a lot of times when you make plans, I think God looks at that and just laughs and says, "Yeah, he thinks that's the way it's going to work out." I just sort of let things play out and we'll see what happens.

RW: What are some of the fonder memories you're going to leave behind for being a House Member?

TR: I think the changes we've been able to make, coming in here in 2007, so many people said, "You're going to go there and just become part of the system, you can't make a difference," well, we did; we made a big difference. Like I said earlier, we changed the culture here; we changed the way of thinking. But actually, I'm going to miss the friends I've made here. You know, so many times you think you're going to be able to stay in touch and it really doesn't happen and I made some really good friends, worked around some of the smartest people I've ever been around. I know we take some criticism here for different reasons, I can tell you the people that I got to know are generally good people and they want to do the right thing and I'm really going to miss those relationships.

RW: We touched on it a little bit earlier, but any big disappointments or regrets? Whether legislatively or how the process works?

TR: You know, just I think some, I guess, with the way the process works. You know, there's so many different people that have to be pleased to get one piece of legislation passed. Take the pension reform. You know, we had, like I said, we had three different state unions we have to deal with. There's so many things that have to take place for something to take place that's better for the people of Pennsylvania, certainly, but there's all these influences that come into play to make something happen. That can be frustrating at times. It's like it's so obvious, let's just get it done. But, until we satisfy everyone, we can't make it happen. That can be very frustrating and disappointing. But, I think we could have gone further in – we talked about reforms and things we've done – I think when we had that opportunity in [20]06 and [20]07 and even up til now, I think we could have gone further with those, but I have to be happy with what

we've done, because so many thought we couldn't do anything. But, there's always more to do and I wouldn't say I'm really disappointed with those kind of things, it's just that, you know, I wish we could have done some more.

RW: That leads into my next question; what are some of the things that you'll take with you from your experience here, either from the people that you've worked with or just the politics of the place? Something that you've learned that you'll use again.

TR: Well, it's a new perspective, certainly. I didn't understand the way our state government worked; I thought I did. But, when I came here, I figured it out, you know? And, so many things, the decisions that are made here how they affect our everyday life. I certainly went through my civics classes and I understood the process, but you're actually here and you get to see the inside, it's amazing how different that is and how the process works. So, I'll remember that always and I'm grateful for that experience.

RW: What advice would you have, or encouragement would you give, to young people looking to get into state government or a public office?

TR: Well, I mentioned that earlier. I think you can't be looking for a job; you have to really want to do this, because it is something that's, at least for me – and that's another reason I've done the term limits – you do the job full-speed and if you do it full-speed, I don't think you can do this for twenty years or more, you know, you really can't. I looked at it as a sprint, not a marathon, and you get the things done, but that takes its toll. Your weekends are gone, your

evenings are gone; it's very difficult. But, I would tell a young person, or someone that's just getting into this is, you're going to make those promises and you better be prepared to keep those promises. Don't make them if you're not going to keep them. Work hard for the people, know your district, and you have to keep that in mind when you come down here, because there's going to be so many forces saying "Ah, you're going to stay elected, don't worry about it; you're in, you don't have to worry about it," but I never looked at it that way and I never stayed in Harrisburg either. I never spent one night in Harrisburg. You think about that one time, you have all these people living down here, basically, and once you're out of session, you can do whatever you want, you know? So, I thought it's best to just get out of here and go back to my district, because if you spend too much time here, you sort of forget where you came from. So, I think you need to keep all of those things in mind when you're going to run for office, because it's not just all getting your name on the front page of the paper and getting your picture in the paper, it's much more than that.

RW: That kind of ties in to what my last question is; how would you like your tenure as a State Representative to be remembered?

TR: Just very simply, you know, a guy who said he was going to do certain things, he went to Harrisburg and did them, and he got out. It was that simple. You know, I said that I was not going to take the perks of the job and I didn't; I never had a state car, I never took a per diem, I took very, very limited mileage. For the first six and a half years I took absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing. And, you know, I kept my term limit promise. So, I think it's as simple as that. He made a lot of promises, he said he was going to change Harrisburg, I was part of that, I

certainly didn't do it on my own, and I think I made a positive influence on Harrisburg, and I think the people really appreciate that.

RW: Well, we really appreciate you taking the time to talk about your career and your accomplishments here as part of this project and we certainly wish you luck in your next chapter.

TR: Thank you very much.