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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable L. Chris Ross (R)

158th District

Chester County

1997-2016

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Jennifer Ott (JO): Good Morning. I'm here with Representative Chris Ross, a Republican, who represents the 158th District in Chester County between the years of 1997 and 2016. Thank you very much for being with me today.

The Honorable L. Chris Ross (CR): Thank you for inviting me.

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

CR: Well, that was a long time ago, but anyway, I grew up in Haverford, Montgomery County, and basically I always remember even as a small child paying attention to elections and I have an early memory of, actually, my parents watching the 1956 Republican Convention, when I must have been about five at that point. And I also remember with a little tiny transistor radio listening to the election results and I think it must have been in 1964 because, maybe it was even earlier than that, but I remember listening to Hugh Scott, who was running against Genevieve Blatt I think at that point, and in the beginning of the election when the returns started coming in Genevieve Blatt was way ahead and Hugh Scott who was somebody that friends of my family knew personally, was behind, but he started catching up and he started catching up, but I wasn't supposed to have the radio on, so I had my covers over my head and I was turning the radio down low so that my parents didn't catch me, and I remember I fell asleep before Hugh Scott actually passed Genevieve Blatt sometime in the early morning, and woke up the next morning, at first, thinking he'd lost and then finding out he'd actually won.¹ So, you know, I sort of had an interest in politics and I went away to school in New Hampshire and was there 1968, which

¹ Hugh Scott defeated Genevieve Blatt in 1964 United States Senate Race.

was a pretty incredible year from a campaigning point of view, and because New Hampshire's such a small state you have an opportunity to actually see the candidates pretty well, and at different times Richard Nixon, George Romney – Mitt Romney's father – and Eugene McCarthy all came and spoke at the school, so I had a chance to really see them in person and listen to them and hear how they were presenting their campaigns which were all very different, but pretty interesting. So, that kind of got me engaged and interested in politics, and after I came back to Pennsylvania I got involved in first John Heinz's first campaign as a volunteer in Philadelphia, and then two years later to Dick Thornburg's first campaign and so that was kind of my early engagement. It was always something that was around the House. My brothers at different times volunteered for different campaigns. I had an older brother who went as a page to the 1964 convention out in San Francisco. So, it was always of interest and the [19]60s, in particular, when I was a kid growing up, pretty incredibly intense political periods of time when a lot of changes were happening. So, those are the things that probably got me engaged in it.

JO: Okay. Could you describe your educational background – you mentioned it a little – and your career before being in the House?

CR: Okay. Well, I initially went to Episcopal Academy, which was back then at City Line Avenue – it since has moved – and stayed there through the seventh grade. Then I went away to boarding school up in New Hampshire, as I'd indicated, at St. Paul's. I graduated from there [19]69, then went away to England for a year to Winchester College, which was a public school as they call it, which were more like our private schools, but a very challenging educational environment and a school that was founded back in the fourteenth century. So, really a kind of

an interesting experience and some of the teachers and some of the courses were really intense and I think that helped me a lot to get ready for college. And then I applied from there and got into Harvard, and went to Harvard for four years, graduated in 1974. So, majored in history, particularly medieval history, and enjoyed trying to understand why people at different times did what they did and what the forces were. And those kinds of things, I think, that kind of understanding of history, help you try and understand problems that you're facing in today's world too and gives you a little more context sometimes. We sometimes think these are the worst of all possible times, but it's somewhat reassuring to look back and see how bad things were at earlier periods as well, and that people figured out how to work their way through some of those difficult crises in the past.

JO: You mentioned you had worked on some of those campaigns, what shaped you to become a Republican?

CR: Well it was really pretty traditional in my family. I actually had a great-great-grandfather who was a Congressman from Massachusetts back in the 1860s. So, he was literally around in Massachusetts at the founding of the Party. And I think my family on both sides – I had on my mother's side, some of her father's ancestors were – there was also a Republican Congressman in the 1880s, I think, 1890s, from the Philadelphia area, and then he and his brothers were, at different times, Republican delegates to the National Convention in the late Nineteenth, early Twentieth Century. So, there's a lot of Republican background in my family. We came from the side of the Party that was very interested in being fiscally careful and trying to make sure that programs and government was efficient and delivered services well, also, more of a more

moderate part of the Party, back in the day, when people were a little more forgiving on some of the social issues. There's been a lot of changes in the Party since I first started following it. The moderate wing is much smaller now than it used to be and I've noted a huge change in the delegation of the 20 years since I've been here too. There was probably a good third of the delegation that I'd consider at least as moderate or more moderate than I am and that is nearly all gone; it's a much more hard edge conservative caucus today than it was when I first came in.

JO: What made you decide to run for the position you have now in the House?

CR: Well, after spending about 25 years in business managing a manufacturing company, I got involved in local politics because of some land use issues and concerns that we had in the township – London Grove Township – where I lived at the time in Chester County. And we were faced with very rapid growth and I felt that the local township government was not addressing it in an intelligent way and not being careful enough to try and preserve open space and manage the growth intelligently so that it didn't jam our roads and screw up the public services and so forth. They were a little bit passive and so I got involved with a couple other friends to run as a ticket to take over the township government and redo our zoning, redo our comprehensive plan, and try to intelligently review the many development plans that were in front of us, so that we didn't wind up getting sued and actually follow the law that was in place at the time, but also didn't roll over and give the developers unreasonable extra latitude. So, getting involved at the local level then made me think, "Well, I better get involved with the Party too, because I don't want the work that we're doing to just get lost after I leave." Getting involved with the Party meant looking at other local Party elected officials, and in particular felt

that I was coming from a different point of view than the sitting state representative, so I ran against him in 1994 in a primary and we came fairly close to beating him, within a couple of hundred votes, and two years later he determined that he wanted try another position and went onto Congress.² So, there was a vacancy, so I put my name forward again and that was kind of fun because after a slight contest for the Party endorsement, there was no opposition for me in the primary or the general, so [19]96 was a lot easier than [19]94.

JO: You sort of mentioned your first campaign wasn't much to campaign if there weren't any other opponents, but —

CR: That's my second campaign. And you learn more from the campaigns that you lose than the campaigns you win typically, and that's certainly true of a campaign where you have no opponent. There's very little to learn in that, other than that it's pleasant.

JO: Did you enjoy campaigning throughout your career?

CR: Yeah, I mean, the part that I felt was useful, although it's very tiring and wearing, is physically going door-to-door and meeting voters. There's certain kind of mechanical aspects to campaigns that, particularly after you do them a number of times, wind up getting a little tiresome and it is a physical grind to go door-to-door. I think it's particularly hard if you're in office, because you're coming up here meeting all your obligations on the floor, and then feeling like your missing time when you should be going door-to-door in your own district. So, the first

² Representative Joseph R. Pitts defeated Chris Ross in the 1994 Republican primary 4,759 to 4,519. Pitts defeated Democrat challenger Libby Swingle in the 1994 General election 11,654 to 6,900.

few campaigns – the one that I lost and then some of the campaigns that I did in the early years – I did a lot more door-to-door. And I would go door-to-door sometimes not campaigning, just to go and find out what’s going on, and I think that is really important for everybody that runs, because you’ve got to have a little bit of a double check on yourself to see what the voters are actually saying. There’s so many people that want to interpret it for you, and tell you what the voters think; it’s true of lobbyists up here, but it’s also true of campaign consultants that you’ll have. And if you’re not really doing a little bit of a truth check on the thing and actually going back and talking to people and getting the sense not only of how they feel about things, but looking them in the eye, seeing how serious they are about certain things, getting a sense when you go through a neighborhood how one neighborhood would react and then moving into other parts of the district and getting a bit of a feel for that, that if you don’t do all that I think you really, you miss a good deal of what you’re supposed to be representing and doing it gives you a little more confidence when you come up here and speak on behalf of the people. So, that part’s good. The back-and-forth, the criticizing your opponent, the negative campaigning and the negative campaigning you receive, that gets tiring after a while. I mean, I did a calculation, I think I was on the ballot something like 26 times in the last 25 years, 26 years, or 27 years. I mean, between primaries and generals, and more than half the time I was opposed, so that gets old after a while.

JO: Could you describe your district: the people, their issues, and the political makeup?

CR: Well of course it’s changed three times, so the district that I originally was elected to extended west to West Grove and included Birmingham, Pennsbury, Kennett Township – none

of which is in my district anymore. I lost West Grove and Birmingham in the first redistricting after I'd been there for a while along with Pocopson, and then I lost Pennsbury, Kennett Square, and Kennett Township most recently and that really has kind of changed it. And it's a funny district, particularly now in its current configuration, because it stretches through five different school districts but it doesn't necessarily have the majority of any of them, and there are no significant towns or cities in the district that act as a focal point. I'm near Kennett Square, but it's not in my district anywhere, I surround West Chester, but that's not in my district. I go to the edge of Downingtown and quite close to Coatesville, but they're not in my district. So, Avondale, Unionville and Marshallton are kind of the towns in my district and they're pretty small. So, it's funny; it has mushroom growers in the south and it goes all the way down to people that really are connected to Newark, Delaware and the University of Delaware down at the state line, actually at the corner of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. And then I go up into, you know, West Bradford, beyond Marshallton, in the Downingtown School District and through horse country around Unionville, and then over into the area right around West Chester, including parts of the University that are outside the borough. So, it is kind of a diverse district. It's predominantly Republican, and predominantly white collar, suburban and those are probably the main features. You know, it had been more rural and more agricultural. I think the agricultural aspects of it have changed a good deal. The mushroom industry is still there, but the horse industry has changed a good deal. We used to, of course, have the King Ranch, which is gone, so there was a lot of cattle. Dairy farming has shrunk. Corn and other kinds of agricultural crops have gone down. And the horse industry is actually going through some changes right now too, so that's becoming slightly different flavor than it used to be as well, and perhaps

shrinking in certain ways as well. So, a fair amount of change, but still fundamentally, primarily a bedroom community.

JO: What makes the district unique?

CR: Well, I don't know that there's anything that makes it unique compared to some of the others. I mean, I suppose every district is unique at some level, because they are all – you know, 203 – they're all slightly different mixes of all of those elements. It's on the edge between what I'd call metropolitan Philadelphia and more Lancaster County, Central Pennsylvania. If you go to the next district over, even though it's still in Chester County – John Lawrence's [State Representative, Chester and Lancaster Counties, 2011-present] district – that feels an awful lot more like Lancaster County. I'm probably on the western edge of that, so it's kind of a transitional area. It's influenced by Wilmington. People do commute down to Wilmington for work and the areas around Wilmington, northern Delaware. Some people, of course, commute toward closer into Philadelphia, to the 202 corridor, and as I say, there's a part that kind of looks down to Newark, Delaware too. So, it's kind of around a lot of things but not necessarily a thing into itself. So, it does still have an underlie of Quaker influence from early settlement. That was really the settlement of Chester County. They were the Pennsylvania Quakers initially and you can still see a lot of Underground Railroad sites and still a surprising large number of Quaker meetings that are still in existence. Some that are still active and some you can still see the preserved buildings where they did have a regular meeting back in the early Eighteenth Century, basically, when the settlement occurs. So, you have layers of history and, of course, having

Longwood Gardens in the district is a significant factor as well as being near some of the other Brandywine Valley institutions. So, a certain amount of tourism is a factor there as well.

JO: I'm going to move to talk about some of the relationships in the House. What was your relationship with the media, and is it different in Harrisburg versus home in your district?

CR: I usually got along pretty well with the media. My wife actually had worked as a newspaper stringer for the early years in our marriage for a local newspaper that was a pretty good newspaper. So, I had a reasonably comfortable relationship with the media. I think you have to be sensible recognizing that they have their job to do and they're not always going to try and make you look as good as you would ideally like them to do. I used to tease them that I had a 50 percent rule that if at least 50 percent of the information was accurate in the news article I was okay with it, and I think people that get totally freaked out over one tiny detail that doesn't get expressed quite the way you want it to are being unrealistic and unreasonable. But, I do think that you have to be careful about what you say to the media and I think a lot of times the most important thing is to be very clear and to use short phrases that are easily quoted and easily written down. If you get rambling, then they may excerpt parts of your ramble. I'm thinking of a current presidential candidate who seems to have this problem, that, you know, if you're not disciplined, more bad things will happen. And certainly there are sometimes when the media, depending on the subject and who is interviewing you, have an agenda in mind and are trying to push you into saying certain things, you know, sort of the *60 Minutes* interview, and you just have to be disciplined in terms of how you respond to that. But, most of the time I think they've been pretty reasonable.

JO: How about your relationship with lobbyists?

CR: Again, good lobbyists and bad lobbyists. The good ones I'm happy to work. I think that you can get a fair amount of information out of them; they know their clients, and if they're good at it, they can express their client's concerns legitimate or otherwise, and you can press them, question them, challenge them and try and understand what the problem is. One of the things I like to do with a lobbyist after they've expressed their client's point of view, particularly if it is the first time I've confronted the issue, is to ask them, "Well, what do the other guys say?" You know, "Who's against this? Who's against your position, first of all? Tell me, who's going to oppose you?" and they usually are a little uncomfortable answering that question, but ultimately they usually do with the good ones. And then I'll ask them. "What the other guys are gonna tell me?" You know, "What's the other point of view?" because that will help make me formulate some questions for them and get me thinking a little bit. I'm very uncomfortable if there's an issue where I only see one side of it. That means to me that I'm missing something. So, I'm very interested in finding out what the opposition point of view is and making sure that gets fairly expressed so I can make an intelligent decision. But, most lobbyists are good and they're different types of lobbyists. We have the highly technical, issue oriented lobbyists who are really in the detail of it. I like working with those guys better. There are some guys that rely on personal relationships taking people out to dinner, slapping them on the back, and often are a little sloppy on the technical aspects and I tend to downplay my connections and relationships with them and recognize that I'm not gonna have that much of a useful relationship. And there have been some lobbyists who've flat out lied to me or tried to deceive me and the place up here

you have some much information flying around, you have to trust people, and you have to have a trusting relationship and I basically have taken the attitude that if somebody lies to me once, I'm not gonna really rely on them thereafter, and there have been even occasions where somebody has done stuff that I felt it was appropriate to ban them from my office. I haven't done that very much, but there have been a couple of people who've been in that category, who've gone beyond the pale to the point where I don't want to have business with them anymore. But, the vast majority of them have been pretty reasonable, and some of them have been really outstandingly helpful. And depending on what you're trying to do with a bill, if a lobbyist and his organization like what you're doing with a bill they can be very helpful in helping you with other members, and also building up other support, because just cause you have a good idea up here doesn't mean you're gonna get a bill passed. You need a tremendous amount of cooperation and energy behind it to overcome the natural inertia that makes it very difficult for a bill to get passed or move through the process and so, lobbyists who are working with you because you agree with them, they agree with you, can be very helpful.

JO: When you began your career here in the House did you have any mentors?

CR: I basically listened to pretty much anybody that I could who I thought had any good sense. You know, certainly, Matt Ryan [Matthew J.; State Representative, Chester and Delaware Counties, 1963-2003; Speaker, 1981-1982, 1995-2003] was the Speaker and he understood this place very, very well. I learned a lot from John Perzel [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1974-2010; Speaker, 2003-2006], who was out majority leader, then Speaker. John Barley [State Representative, Lancaster County, 1985-2002], was the Appropriations Chair.

These were all guys that had worked the system and understood it pretty well. We weren't always on the same page with issues and I saw certain things that I liked and certain things that I didn't like as much. Don Snyder [Donald; State Representative, Lehigh County, 1981-2000] was the Whip when I first came in, was another good one. And then the people who sat around me, Sandy Major [Sandra; State Representative, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Wayne and Wyoming Counties, 1995-2016], Pat Vance [Patricia; State Representative, Cumberland County, 1991-2004; State Senator, 2005-2016], Larry Sather [State Representative, Blair, Huntingdon and Mifflin Counties, 1993-2006], these were all people that I learned a lot from just, you know, asking them questions and getting them to explain what was going on on the floor. Seeing different committee chairmen and how they managed a committee meeting was helpful as well. The other group that I was involved with, and very fortunate to be involved with from the very beginning, was the Local Government Commission. The original executive director, Virgil Puskarich, who served in that capacity for many years until he actually died; and then Mike Asbury and Phil Klotz now more recently, and it's a really good bipartisan, bicameral, technically correct organization. There are a lot of good models to follow that I learned from Virgil and others and he, in turn, got me involved in the Council of State Governments, which was a national organization of legislators, executive branch, judiciary from across the country and actually the Canadian provinces and Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, and I learned a lot from my colleges in other states as a result of that, which was really due to Virgil's encouraging me to get involved with them as well. And basically, it's just watching what works and what doesn't and seeing what I want to imitate and what, you know, either I don't like or I think is very unsuccessful. The one good thing about the seniority system and the fact that we don't have term limits here is it does take you a while to get to be a chairman, and it does take you a while

to really be in a position where you're being asked to run bills. And it was very frustrating, because I came in in my mid-forties, I already had decent career behind me, and I wanted to get at it, and I think most people that come in here have that attitude, but it's not bad to be kept on the bench a little bit for a while and watch other people do it, because then when you do get your chance, you're probably going to be a little more effective and a little more intelligent about it. You'll still make mistakes, but you might not make quite so many mistakes.

JO: Have you become a mentor to anyone?

CR: You know, the freshman in the last few term that come in that are on my committees, people that I sit near, you know, I'm happy to offer advice to the newbies in Chester County and you know, people that are in the delegation that have come in. You don't want to be excessive in that regard because they want to find their own way, but if I see something that I can point out as a suggestion and, you know, sometimes they're trying to push a bill and there are some things that I think they're doing that might make it less successful for them that I might point out. And, obviously, over the years I've gotten more comfortable standing up in caucus, and again raising issues that I think we ought to be thinking about. It's challenging for me because I am by-and-large more moderate than most of the members in the caucus, so I have to bear that in mind when I'm talking to them. But, one of the things they did when I was first came in, and I don't think we do it as much as we should today, is that the more senior members said, "First of all, pay attention to what sells in your district and what makes sense for your district, and it's different than my district, so therefore how I vote isn't going to be how you should vote." And so the first question is, "Is this going to be popular in your district? Is this going to be accepted in your

district? Because we want you to come back, you know, we want you to be successful.” And it’s terribly tempting if you want to get a bill through, to lure people in even though it’s bad for them. And actually, there were one or two bills that I had that were controversial and people co-sponsored them, I think partly because they liked me and they thought it was a nice thing to do, and before I put the bill in with a couple of them, I went to them and said, “Look, I want you to understand, *this* is what this bill is about, and I’m a little worried, because I think your district is not gonna like that,” and they hadn’t really paid that much attention, and they were actually quite grateful that I didn’t leave them hanging out there being a co-sponsor of a bill that was going to be quite unpopular in their home district. So, I think that kind of relationship building is important around here and I think we need to do more of it to take care of each other.

JO: Beginning to talk about your House service, do you remember your first Swearing-In or any memorable Swearing-In’s?

CR: Oh yeah, sure, sure, I remember most of them to some degree or another; they do blend together after a certain point. My second one I had my service dog that we were training with me and we and we have a nice picture of him. He got a little scared during the run up to the actual Swearing-In, so he climbed up onto the seat next to me and he was sitting there and, you know, I didn’t have the heart to kick him back down under the desk and I suddenly saw Matt Ryan look around and look at me and see the dog and I thought, “Oh boy, I’m in big trouble right now.” He didn’t say anything and then afterwards I talked to him and he said, “Oh, look if I’d commented and given you a hard time about that my wife,” who was swearing him in, Pat Jenkins, “she would have kicked me out of the house.” They had black labs. This was a

chocolate lab, so he was a big fan of them. But that was kind of a cute moment. And I remember the first Swearing-In, I had a whole bus load of people, as you often do for your first Swearing-In, and I didn't know where I was going and I actually was trying to get from the House floor back into what is now Irvis Office Building, and I walked them on the second floor and we walked ourselves into a dead end, and I had to turn the whole bus troop around and work them back out again. So, yeah I remember the early days and not knowing where I was going and being slightly on edge and a little anxious about everything, hoping I wasn't going to mess up too badly. So, it's changed a lot over the years.

JO: You've been on numerous committees throughout your time in the House. Which have been most memorable for you or do you feel you did some exceptional work in?

CR: Well, you know the various different committees that I've chaired have been interesting. I spent a good deal of time on the House Environmental Resources [and] Energy Committee and probably some of the more significant bills that I had, came through that, both in term of what is known as the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards Act [ACT 213 of 2004], which is our renewable portfolio to encourage more wind, solar, renewable energies and earlier I'd worked with Art Hershey on the creation of the Keystone Growing Greener, Keystone grant programs to save open space, put money behind that. And then later on, both through the Council of State Governments and then here on the floor, working on the Electronic Waste Recycling Act, which has kind of gotten screwed up, and I was trying to fix this term and unfortunately was not able to. But then also, the Energy Conservation ACT 129 [2008], which was not my bill, but I wound up being engaged in. Pension issues, carried Governor Corbett's pension reform bill and tried to get

that incorporated in. We're still struggling with that. New people have picked up the banner on that, Mike Tobash [Michael; State Representative, Berks, Dauphin and Schuylkill Counties, 2011-present] and Warren Kampf [State Representative, Chester and Montgomery Counties, 2011-present], and we're still struggling to try and get our pension costs under control. And then the last one being chairman of the Liquor Committee, this last term, working on attempts to privatize liquor, getting that through the House a couple of times, unfortunately not getting what I consider a good solution on that through at the end, being a little disappointed in that untimely. But also, working on a variety of other issues and, of course, the work that I did through the Local Government Commission. So, it's been a varied career, lots of different things, some of them successes, some of them disappointments.

JO: So, what has been the hardest issue you encountered as a Representative? You mentioned a few that you struggled with.

CR: Yeah, I mean there hard in different ways. A lot of times it's difficult to bridge the gap from different points of view. Some of them that have been frustrating, I mean, trying to put a good regulatory environment on short term lending, so called payday loans, was a very frustrating piece of legislation, and in order to really get a solution a lot of times you need all parties to be willing to actually settle, and so sometimes it's a matter of catching that moment. I mean, I think we missed a moment on liquor, for example. There was a chance there, I guess back in the spring of 2016, this year, to where I think we'd sort of beaten everybody into a point where they were ready to go for a deal and then there was a little flinching at the last minute from my side of the negotiating, I think. On the payday lending it was difficult because the

consumer groups and the people that were representing the consumers, I should say, and some of the legal defense funds in Philadelphia and so forth, really didn't want to compromise; they just wanted to say no. And we actually got a fair amount of negotiating success with the industry. Some of the industry kind-of fell off the wagon and I had some personal problems with them because they were attempting to use, you know, what I would consider disreputable dirty tricks tactics, but on the other side, there was no real consideration for actually trying to find a reasonable framework for short term lending. Every time we got some concessions off of the industry, the goal posts were moved a little further by the other groups and if it was just that simple, it would be fine, but there are people that are short of cash and need some form of credit and may not be in a position to be able to use collateral that they have to justify a loan, and they have nothing to fall back on. And so, the idea from my point of view was to provide a fair, safe alternative that didn't trap them in a cycle debt, and to try and work technically on that, but there was never a serious conversation about that, it was always just, "No, no, no." And whenever we got a little better version, then they found a new reason to say, "No." And it's sort of interesting because one of the things that's difficult to deal with with special interest groups is sometimes they don't want to settle, because if they settle, then there would be no reason for them. So, creating a bogeyman man, and then beating up on it and demonizing it can help with their funding base; it encourages people to give to that particular organization. It's good for them, it's bad for public policy, and I think the public gets caught in the middle in this sort of thing. If it's an issue where the public understands it well enough or enough people are engaged in it, you can sometimes go over the special interest group's head to the public at large, but the number of people that were engaged in short-term borrowing is relatively small, and they are sort of the lower class, working poor, you know, of that demographic, that are so busy that they're not that

politically active; they're just worrying about getting food on the table and figuring out how to get their kid to the doctor and they don't have time to organize politically, and so, that wasn't a very powerful group particularly in the Republican Caucus. So, I was never able to get critical mass on that, and that's too bad. I mean, I think that they've, you know, they tried to drive the industry out, they drove it underground for a while, they're still trying to drive it out, but they haven't put anything else on the table. And so, I guess people go to loan sharks or, I don't know, run up a debt and ruin their credit by not paying their regular bills or do something along those lines, which I think is a worse option than a carefully constructed short-term lending product that isn't excessively expensive. But, that was a frustrating – it was an interesting problem from a political science point of view, as to how you would solve that. I did get bills out of the House a couple of times, but then they failed over in the Senate. And so, you know, it's again, you sometimes can figure out how to do the math internally, but you've also got to worry about the governor and the senate. That one was one that just didn't make it over the finish line either.

JO: In 2013, you became one of only three Republican Members to join the LGBT Equality Caucus and you've partnered to sponsor legislation that would add sexual orientation and gender identity to nondiscrimination laws. Did you deal with any opposition from your Caucus because of your involvement, and has it been frustrating that these efforts have not got passed in the House?

CR: Well, first of all, I think that as I indicated, you know the Caucus has changed dramatically, but I've been there for a long time, you know, I've been very clear on my support for women's health issues. I am a pro-choice Republican. There aren't very many of them around. And I

don't think anybody has any questions about where I am on any issues. One thing I learned fairly early on, was that if you are – particularly on tough issues like these – if you are ambiguous, you are gonna get hit by both sides. And also when people would ask me how I vote on an issue, I pretty early on would say, “Okay, I’ve thought about it. I’m gonna be here.” Now, some Members say, “Well, I don’t know. I don’t know,” and, you know, “Give me something. Talk to me” whatever, and those people get jammed up because, they’re seen as swing votes. I’m not seen too much as a swing vote. On a lot of issues, once I’ve thought it through and they hear me say yes or no, then they leave me alone. I don’t think there was a lot of doubt among the Caucus members and I think they probably figured that I probably wasn’t likely to be susceptible to pressure. So, I certainly got plenty of emails and mail internally within my district, and I’ve had conversations with individual constituents who didn’t agree with me. I dealt with that as best I could. But, I think history is on the side of those that are supporting LGBT rights; it certainly has been moving in that direction. And one of the things that I’m most encouraged by is that if you look demographically, those that are 35 and under are wondering why we’re even talking about this; it’s just something that’s very accepted to them. People my age and older come from a time where people were in the closet, where people didn’t talk about these things, where it was something shameful, and so some folks are having trouble getting over that. But, the good news from the body politic is that we’re dying off. So, the trend of history is going in the right direction on that one.

JO: During your time in the House you consistently advocated for alternative energy development. How did this issue become a focal point for you and how did you address it through legislation?

CR: Well, I think I'd always been interested in it from an environmental point of view, and also I think that, for me, it makes sense that, particularly, solar and wind which is produced here is, first of all, easier on the environment. By and large there are issues that you have to deal with, particularly on wind sometimes, but generally that they're renewable, they're easier on the environment because we're not burning fossil fuel, and so, they were things that I was curious about and interested in and I'd been very active with Council of State Government on the Energy and Environmental Committees both at the national and at the regional level and chaired both those committees, so I had heard a lot information about what other states were doing in this regard. We're a little difficult state compared to New England states, because the only game in town for them is renewable; they don't drill for gas or oil and they don't have coal, so, they are going to be importing all of those energy sources and they'd like to be energy independent internally within their state, so it's a lot easier sell for them to talk renewables. In our case, it's perceived as putting people out of work in parts of Pennsylvania when you walk away from coal or don't rely heavily on oil or gas for your energy supply, so it's a much trickier balance and we actually had the alternative energy portfolio standards instead of the renewable portfolio standards because we included waste coal. Which, by the way, caused us to lose the support of the Sierra Club and some of the, what I will call, more extreme members of the environmental movement, because they didn't want to see any burning of any fossil fuels at all. Waste coal is a little tricky because, although they put very clean scrubbers on so there's minimal pollution, there is some air quality impact, but more importantly, there's a huge improvement in the water quality, because what you're doing is addressing the issue of acid mine drainage and neutralizing a lot of the sources of that acid. So there was a real plus, net plus from my point of view, by

having waste coal operating under the electric portfolio standards. So, these things just made sense to me, and it was kind of fun when we actually did the standards, and then I also worked on trying to improve the energy efficiency standards. About that time, I was building a new house for myself, my wife and family, and so we tried to throw in as many of the different elements to see how they really operated and see what worked and what didn't and how our policies were working on the ground, because again, sometimes in Harrisburg it looks good, but when you actually try and do it down at the grass roots level it doesn't work. And so, we put solar panels up and we did geothermal and, you know, worked on super insulation, passive solar, air circulation within the house to minimize the need for air-conditioning, a whole variety of different elements, native species in the landscapes so that we'd reduce the amount of watering we had to do, and just everything that we could think of to try and make the house as energy efficient and intelligent as possibly could. So, that was a good experience as well, but I think we continue to need to do more in this area and, you know, at the end of the day global warming is still controversial in Pennsylvania, although not in many other parts of the world, and we're still fighting that battle a little bit but I think everybody can agree that conservation and reduction of energy costs is a good thing and so there are some opportunities to deal with it, and we all recognize that there is more flooding now and there's more severe storms, so again, another thing that I think we can probably get some consensus on is addressing some of the issues of rising sea level, increased storm severity and hardening our infrastructure so that when a hurricane Sandy or Katrina comes along, that we are able to bounce back and have less damage done. And so, those are adaptation to climate change perhaps rather than getting too optimistic about reversing it right now might be a more realistic approach.

JO: What motivated you to reexamine and update ACT 47 of 1987's Pennsylvania's Financially Distressed Municipalities Act and what was the outcome of your involvement?

CR: Well, it wasn't working very well was the main reason and that was something that came through the Local Government Commission, in my experience there. Probably the most immediate kick off was the crisis that we had here in the city of Harrisburg, and I was chairing the Urban Affairs Committee at that point. We actually had a bill come over from the Senate which I thought was, as far as I could tell, pretty much unconstitutional. In its early draft – and I think it was rushed a little bit from the Senate side – they had a nonelected person actually running the city of Harrisburg and the constitution clearly states, Pennsylvania's Constitution, clearly states you can't do that. So, we spent some time sort of slowing down on the House side and thinking carefully about how to do it under the aegis of the courts and to limit and focus the kinds of decisions that the receiver, coordinator, whatever we're gonna call him, ultimately wound up doing in Harrisburg, so that we we're doing it very closely with the court's support and that there were chances for the people in the city and the elected officials to have an opportunity to comment, or even execute if possible. If they failed, then we could use the court and what they call a Mandamus Action, where they kind of demand that you do stuff. It was a tricky, tricky issue, because if you don't have any cooperation from the elected officials, you get into some pretty murky territory, in terms of trying to be able to actually get people to execute. So, we narrowed that down and in going through this whole process – and Harrisburg, by the way, they hated it when we first put this on them, but fairly shortly, particularly with General [William B.] Lynch, who wound up being the receiver, whatever we're calling him, I forget; we had a funny name for him that wasn't either receiver or coordinator, but anyways, he was the guy

that was handling it and working with everybody. By the time it was done, it was a relatively short period of time, and the city counselors, some of whom were complaining the worst, had actually said, “You know, that turned out okay. We actually got some of the problems squared away.” But it opened up the question of Scranton, and a series of other cities that had been in Act 47, or Distressed Municipalities Program, and they hadn’t gone in and gotten straightened out like Harrisburg and come back out healthy; they had gone in and just languished there, and they were continuing to not be able to meet their obligations to their citizens, they were continuing to have lousy credit, which was costing them money, they were continuing to be very frustrated with the system. And we looked hard at it and did an Act 47 task force, through the Local Government Commission, and what we came up with was the sense that elected officials typically, when they look at crisis like that, there’s usually a recommendation list that’s 15 items or something like that, and out of those 15 items there’s probably a third of them that are not too painful or that might be reasonably politically popular and people will go for those, but then they’ll leave the unpleasant things off the list, because they don’t want to be the dirty guy who raises taxes or they don’t want to be the dirty guy who sells off an element that everybody’s proud of like a parking garage or something and then they lose patronage jobs and, you know, there’s all sorts of things that go into political decisions in the short run. And so, two things that happened that we put in: one was a time frame. So, you can’t just stay in this program for 25 years and go on forever; you’ve got to look at the options that you are confronted with and take some and take a plan. If you don’t like the coordinators plan, because we give them a coordinator’s plan through hired professionals that come in and look at their situation, if you don’t like their plan, give us another plan that will work. It’s got to be a plan that will really work, that will get you out, that’s credible, and if you don’t then we had a series of other steps

where we could ramp it up and get into a situation like Harrisburg where we brought someone in who was the dirty guy from out of town who did the horrible things and everybody knew we needed to do, but were afraid to. And then we also had – there are a very few number of municipalities that have shrunk in population, a lot of the businesses have moved out, nearly all the businesses moved out, and unlike other states we don't have a system of unincorporated areas; every single square inch of Pennsylvania is in a municipality, and if you get a municipal government that made sense in 1890 because there was a booming steel mill in town that since left, and you've got nothing but 150 elderly people left in the town, and the roads are buckling and nobody knows what to do with police and fire services and people are living in a very desperate situation, we need to have some mechanism to deal with that. We have the opportunity to merge or combine municipalities, but in a lot of cases the other municipality doesn't want to have anything to do with you, because you're a mess and we're gonna need to spend a lot of money and you don't have very many resources there and you can't tax the people beyond a certain point. So, you have a very difficult situation. So, we had a dissolution of municipal government option where they became a ward of the state and the state wound up putting in services that were necessary for the people that lived in that area, because nobody else wanted them. The counties didn't want to take them, neighboring municipalities didn't want to take them, and so this would be the final option. It hasn't been used, I'm not sure it will be used; most of the debate and discussion centered on this section. The Local Government [Commission] staff did an excellent job figuring it all out in terms of how would you go in, what would they do, how would it be fair to the people that live there, what means of revenue would you use, how could you get back out if you wanted to come back out, either to merge or reestablish your government because maybe some businesses and people moved in, and worked

the whole thing out. It took a fair amount of legislative language to put that into effect.

Everybody focused on it, it may never be used, but it's nice to know that it's there in case it someday does need to be used.

JO: Another topic that frequently appeared in your legislation was the problem of distracted drivers. What inspired you to tackle that issue and are you satisfied with the results?

CR: Well, I think people focus primarily on cell phone use, and there were some very specific issues where, you know, there were horrible accidents where somebody was distracted with a cell phone, and then shortly thereafter we got into texting. My thinking about this was, first of all, it was very difficult to catch somebody as just doing that. I mean, sometimes you can see a hand up to the ear, but a lot of times if somebody's going by fairly quickly and they may have their cell phone down here, and they are looking at it, and glancing at it, you don't know what he's looking at or she's looking at down at her lap. Secondly, I started thinking about it and I said to myself, well, eating in a car or doing your makeup or reading a newspaper, you know, you're commuting to work and you're in a traffic jam and you're reading the newspaper; I mean people do these things and all of them are distracting, and the problem isn't so much, are you using a cell phone? The problem is, are you paying attention to the road? So, I took the position that we ought to be looking at all distractions and that it ought to be an enhanced penalty just so that we can say it's illegal and then it really isn't good to try and spend your whole time penalizing things that are dangerous; you actually need to change people's behavior and, typically, we're not comfortable putting a heavy enough penalty to scare people off, so what I felt that the correct thing was to do what we did with seatbelts. I mean, the actual penalty for not

having your seatbelt on isn't all that great, but what we did do is we tied it into an educational campaign where kids were telling their parents to put their seatbelts on because they'd seen the ads and they were changed by them. And I think we needed to do the same thing with distracted driving; a serious educational campaign tied in with a penalty of some sort to show we are serious and that it was really a problem made the most sense to me. We've got some penalties now for texting and for, you know, for cell phone uses, been back and forth, but, I think we need to invest in the educational campaign. It's happening sort of ad hoc slowly and, because other states are doing it more aggressively in some cases than we are, we're probably getting some positive benefit just from being in the neighborhood so to speak. I think that was a more sensible way to go at the legislation. Certain Members wanted to have their particular version they had a crisis in their district, you know, a horrible accident that everybody was very upset about, so we kind of got side tracked with the emotional aspect of it instead of thinking rationally about the public policy technique that would be most effective.

JO: Let's move on to some of your memories from your time in the House: what aspect of this job did you enjoy the most and then maybe the least?

CR: Well, I think it's very difficult to pass legislation and I certainly love working on technical aspects of legislation, particularly hard bills that had a lot of technical aspects of them. I like going for them because I knew nobody else was really going to handle them, and, often it was crafting the bill correctly; getting the language clear and understandable and working through the whole bill so that the entire thing worked and made sense. That was certainly a lot of fun for me. And I had many good people that helped or advised or gave me good ideas or were critical in

helping get bills through. So, that whole process is fun to me. And certainly, in the House itself, the comradery, just chatting with the people that sit near you, teasing them looking at making jokes and so forth, there is a sense of shared service and also go through an experience together that you'd get being in a club, being in an athletic team, taking a road trip together with people, that sort of feeling of helping each other out and also going sometimes through an unpleasant experience that you both have shared. So those things were fun and I will remember a number of my colleagues who were really pretty nice guys. The one thing about this job is it tends to attract extroverts and people that like being around other people, so a lot of them are good story tellers and a lot of them are fun to be around. So those are the positive things up here. Down in the district, the main thing that was most gratifying was somebody who would come into the office and have a problem and you or the staff were able to actually help them, and actually maybe in some cases, solve a very serious problem. I didn't realize the amount of social work that you do in this job. People come to you with all sort of problems. Some of them really aren't particularly state related, but, they're going through a crisis and they don't know where else to turn. A lot of times there's very little you can do for some of the folks, but if it is a state-related matter and if there's some way where you can rattle somebody's cage up in Harrisburg, and they do tend to return our phone calls more the average citizen's sadly, but sometimes you can get people to pay attention and give people a straight forward answer, at least. You know, I would always tell people I can't necessarily make them do something, if they're being stupid and you really are in the right I will try and rattle them up a little bit and get them to think clearly about the issues so that they are sensible, but there are times when quite frankly people come in and either what they're asking for is impossible, illegal, or wrong, or they're in the wrong. Sometimes they're going to be dissatisfied, but at the very least, I can get them an answer and

give them, you know, a conclusion to the problem, anyway. And that often is helpful. And there are times when something is wrong and needs to be fixed and you can help fix it, and that's fun. And again, in the district, meeting a lot of the kids who are always a lot of fun and just talking to people and getting to know more people has been great, and again, meeting legislators and people from other states. One of the fun things about this also is by being a State Representative experts in all sorts of fields are eager to come and talk to you and educate you. So, somebody described the job as being paid to go to college and it's sort of like that; that in a lot of cases you can get the top people in a field, you know, brilliant lawyers or top scientists, or people that are incredibly gifted in whatever particular field you need advice from, and they are eager to give you advice because they want to change policy too and they see you as a conduit for getting their point of view across, so it's not that hard to get amazing information from very interesting people.

JO: Do you have a fondest memory of being here?

CR: I think the fondest memory I had in my district was – I didn't do it; it was one of my staff – a woman had actually been on heart medication and she was in the PACE Program, our prescription drug program, and she had failed to send back a form to get renewed for PACE, so when she went to the pharmacy for her heart medication, the pharmacist said, "I'm sorry, you have to pay full price for this expensive medicine." So, she went back and she started slowing down the dosage and spreading them out, and then started cutting pills in half and fortunately one of her neighbors came over and saw her cutting the pills in half and said, "What are you doing?" And she said, "Well I don't qualify for PACE anymore." And she said, "Well, you

have no money, you can't not possibly not qualify." And so, the neighbor brought her down to the office. The staff called, checked over her information and literally immediately got her back onto PACE so she was able to run down to the pharmacy and get back on her heart meds. And I tell this story because I had really nothing to do with it other than the fact that I fortunately hired some good people. But, you know, that is potentially saving that person's life and it wasn't a hard thing for my staff to do. Fortunately, they jumped on it and were aggressive about it, but that's a good story and a good tale. You know, I remember up here the moments when where back in the day when we used to work to two or three in the morning, being around with people and often I would drive home shortly before the end of the budget crisis or the end of the December or November period of time where all the bills are getting smushed together and things falling off the side of the table and people are screaming at each other and tensions high, and I would drive home and think, "This has really turned out badly, and I am so bummed about everything and I can't believe that all my colleagues did such a bad job and the leaders didn't bring us all together and" whatever. And then I'd get to a real bottom and I'd drive back the next day and somehow everything had broken and we got something that wasn't perfect, but it wasn't too bad; it was a lot better than I thought we were gonna get and we actually got a resolution. And those are kind of good memories, you know, late nights and almost being in a complete abyss. We actually went into the abyss, back in 2015, but fortunately, we came back out of it again in 2016 and I think everybody learned something from that, I hope. It's going to be interesting to see in the future whether or not people value the importance of getting a broad based solution for the public at large, or whether they continue to stick with their narrow section of the population and try and drive that particular agenda at the expense of everybody else. That's a change that I've noticed that I think is a little bit disheartening; the majority of the

majority ruling even though the majority of the majority doesn't happen to be a majority of the House or the Senate as a whole. And I think at the end of the day that the public wants us to make government work, not to just scream and yell about a particular partisan point of view. I'm going to talk about this in my final speech a little bit, but I think that we've got to get back to taking a step back and looking at problems a little bit more technically, initially, and a little more neutrally, and start relaxing a little bit about trying to make the other guy look bad and actually finding the technical aspects that we can all agree on that are gonna move the ball forward in a significant way. You know, this game of wanting to get 50 percent plus one and pass a bill that way is not very smart because it's a very unstable way to run government. All you need is another election or somebody changing their mind and suddenly what was the stated government policy becomes repealed and nobody can rely on something that they don't feel is gonna stay around for, you know, five, or 10, or 15 years. And businessmen won't make investments, it'll hurt our economy, and it ultimately makes people have less respect for government, and so we've got to pull back from that 'I want to beat you' mentality into 'what can we make work here,' and that's a different way of looking at government. One thing I'm going to say is, basically, we are spending too much time doing politics and not enough time doing government. Politics, it's a zero sum game; every vote you get is the other guys vote that he didn't get, and if he's doing well and looking good, that's a problem for you, you've got to start making them look bad. So, government is the reverse; it's trying to find those areas where you've got some consensus and you've got some agreement and putting aside the parts that you disagree on, you know, maybe we'll settle them later in a different way. But what is the consensus piece in the middle here that we can work on that's actually going to make a broadly accepted law that everybody can rely on? It used to be that we would – when I came in, we'd have an election,

everybody'd go, "Whew, we're over that." And then the first year, the odd year of the term, everybody would be, you know, working in their committees in a fairly bipartisan way on technical stuff and they would spend a lot of time passing bills or moving bills along, and then you'd get into the even numbered year and people had started getting their petitions signed and they were starting to get into the political mode and everything slowed down and we got less done. So we worked hard in the odd years, so that we knew that we weren't going to get as much done in the even years. And then you had that sine die period right after the election when we could get back to being bipartisan again and start thinking about stuff that we could actually get done and you weren't feeling too much like you were helping your opponent by getting a bill done. In the last few sessions we've started having political conversations and retreats about how to put the other guys in a bad way within a month of the election. So, the odd numbered years we're already trying to tee each other up to hurt the other guy so that when you get to the election next time 'round, they'll be weak and you'll be strong and you'll be able to get more seats. And political consultants are part of that, persistent fundraising feeds into it, but also there's a mentality that we've lapsed into where the caucuses are separating and the parties are becoming more fragmented internally, and all of that is hurting us in terms of being able to get good government, laws passed, and intelligent policies done. And the public doesn't like it. You know, we wonder why we've got low approval ratings, well that's why.

JO: How do you want your tenure as a State Representative to be remembered?

CR: Well, it will be remembered however it is. I have no special allusions about the fact that we go and people shortly will forget we were here, I think. But, I tried to the best of my ability to be

straightforward, honest with people. I tried to produce good legislation. I tried, to the best of my ability, to get people to think a little bit about issues sometimes, maybe bring up points that folks were not paying attention to, and I tried to treat people decently up here, whether they were staff or rank-and-file members or the leaders. And, you know, I think that if we model that kind of behavior, the public likes it better, it makes work up here better, we get better results, and so those are the things I shot for, and I've enjoyed it, but I'm ready to move on.

JO: And what would your advice be for a new member coming in?

CR: Well, I think just that, what I just said. I mean, I think watch a little bit first. Some members walk in here and think that they immediately are ready to rearrange everything and I think it's important to understand why it got like this and it didn't get like this just purely randomly. A lot of other people have thought about the same ideas before and have settled on this set of techniques. Now, that doesn't mean things shouldn't change because there are times when those techniques become outmoded and they don't fit the circumstances of the world today and certainly technological changes and some other things like that have gone along. But some of the reform ideas need to be thought about carefully for unintended consequences; a lot of our reforms have actually made things worse. We were just talking about how slow it is to try and actually get a consensus document moved forward. And people that are out to derail that have more tools to use now than they used to. Of course we want everybody heard and we want to make sure we're not going too fast, but if you make it much more difficult to actually run a bill and get it through the system, that means we get less production done, and so good ideas fall off the table too. Transparency is good, but people need to have a safe space to talk openly about off

the wall ideas that just cross their mind. If they are so scared that whatever they're saying is gonna be used against them in a campaign, they're not going to say very much. They're not going to offer an olive branch to the other side; they're not going to say, "Well, you know there's a part of your point of view there that I like, if you can give me some of what I need over here." You're scared to even start that conversation. We had an interesting discussion about pensions, about, I guess a year, year and a half ago, and there were Democrat and Republican leaders in the room and I was there, and there's such a disparity. The Democrats are "No," on all the pension issues, and they were saying, "We need to pay for these pensions. We need to pay for these pensions." I said, "Well, one think you guys would like I think would be a dedicated funding source that we set aside that was gonna pay down this unfunded liability of the pensions." And quite frankly, a lot of Republicans liked this idea too. So, they might go for a tax increase that was dedicated for that purpose. That'd be good for you and your constituency. We need a little less of the risk being carried by the tax payer on future pensions. So for new hires, asking them to share the risk a little bit by having a least part of a 401K defined contribution plan and then some secure benefit that's in a defined benefit, but not all of it in the defined benefit, because that's all the risk on the tax payer and none on the employee, if there is a shared risk on that, we do it carefully, and we thoughtfully talk to you about what you're worried about and, you know, to pinch points for you. Those two things together are a compromise solution that meets some Democratic needs and meets some Republican needs and this is how we used to actually make big compromise deals. But nobody would be willing to say something nice about the other guy's plans or that, you know, all the other Republicans beside me in the room didn't want to say anything nice about the give to the Democrats. The Democrats didn't want to say anything nice about the give to the Republicans. So there we were. I mean, it's still probably the middle way,

but you know if you are too worried that giving the other guy a win that will be used in the next election, then it becomes very difficult to even begin to discuss the other guy's ask. And you know, there's still deals that are made, there's still compromises. I mean, we've got these last few budgets through through compromises. But, it's an art that isn't being used as much as it used to be.

JO: Alright, well, that was my last question.

CR: Okay.

JO: But I will let you have the final word if there is anything else.

CR: I don't have anything more to say. I mean, I've said it all basically. It's been a good 20 years and I've enjoyed much of it and a whole lot of the people here and I will miss them, but I'm looking forward to having a little more spare time and more time with the grandchildren on the west coast and pursuing other interests that have been difficult to do with the time constraints of the job.

JO: Alright, thank you very much for your time today.

CR: Thank you for having me.