

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Roy W. Wilt (R)

8th District

Mercer County

1969-1981

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Heidi Mays, House Archivist
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Transcribed by: Raymond Whittaker

Heidi Mays (HM): Hi, good afternoon.

The Honorable Roy Wilt (RW): Hi, Heidi.

HM: Hi. I'm here with Roy W. Wilt, who served the 8th District for Mercer County and he was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1968. Happy to have you here.

RW: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

HM: You are a member of a long line of Wilts that have served in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, and I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about growing up in a family with a lot of political experience?

RW: It was interesting to say the least, because that was just one of the things that was going on at the time. We also had several family-owned businesses, so whenever the dad was away in Harrisburg for three or four days there was still plenty to keep us busy. We primarily were in a trucking business and lots of relatives worked for us; my brother, I think, the three sisters' husbands, so it was a family unit kind of thing. We transported produce to chain stores. So, we had plenty to do when he was away and never really got too bored. And as far as the politics side of it, certainly we were involved. I remember being in the back of little trailers, behind pickup trucks, being drug through northern Allegheny County – that's when you were allowed to use PA systems to campaign – and my brother would drive the pickup since he was older than I was, and I'd get stuck in the

trailer in the back bouncing around bumpy roads trying to convince people why they ought to vote for the Republican ticket. I remember that very vividly. It was kind-of an exciting time.

HM: Do you remember how your father [Raymond Wilt; State Representative, Allegheny County 1951-1970] got into politics?

RW: He was always in politics. He served for a long time as a constable. Later on, he was elected Justice of the Peace before District Justices. And then when he had that office, he got elected to the Legislature. So, he was in politics before I was born I guess, really. But, I used to go with him to pick up people that he had warrants for and take them to the workhouse and stuff from the time. I was as high as this table, I guess. So, we were always people interactive. That's just how the family was and everybody was involved.

HM: So, you've always had political aspirations?

RW: No, heavens no. That just happened out of a set of circumstances that were totally unrelated. In fact, he served a suburban district in Allegheny County, outside of Pittsburgh, and it used to amaze me how they [the Legislators from the area] would read the Sunday *Pittsburgh Press* and then decide how they were going to vote when they got down here Monday. The paper had that kind of influence on them. And I never liked that approach and it never appealed to me. And because there was so much media, as

now, the media centers, the people are more reactionary and more sensitive to what the media is saying and doing. And so, there was that aspect, and I always thought that was kind of bogus. It's what you have to do to survive, but it wasn't something I would choose to do on my own and never did.

HM: You and your father both served at the same time in 1968.

RW: We did, by happenstance. He was still here as a Member and I moved to Greenville, which is 80 miles north of Pittsburgh, and was working as the Dean of Students at my alma mater, Thiel College, in Greenville. And in the meantime, I had gone to summer school at Michigan State and got a Master's [Degree] in personnel and higher education. And so, I was very active with the school community and the young people there. And just some things were going sour. I hadn't endeared myself to the Administration and the (House) seat was open and I thought, "What the heck?" So, I ran in the Primary that year; I was defeated, but nonetheless, I ran. And then, the next year my County Chairman asked me to run for County Commissioner and I found out that there was something wrong; whenever I had filed, in about within the week, a Deputy Chairman of the Party also filed and there was only one seat open. There's something very wrong with this arena. And I was being used for fodder and so, that was a short-lived campaign. I quit campaigning way before the election came. But, then the subsequent year, the person whom I had run against – I don't like to use those words "ran against", I never really ran against anybody; I just ran for the job, but that's semantics – the next year, that the individual, who also worked as a corporate person, was given an

ultimatum either to resign from his corporate job or not run for the Legislature and he chose not to run because of the benefits he had built up with the company. So, the seat was then vacant again and the County Chairman, after I had paid my dues as it were, gave me the word that the seat would be vacant again and I ran that time and won.

HM: Did you like campaigning?

RW: No. No, I didn't like campaigning at all; I didn't then, don't now. But you know, it's what you do. It goes with the territory. It forces you to be an unreal person. I mean, the person you would choose to be. I'm not a backslapper kind of dude, you know, that strangers are strangers and when I get to know them, we're most likely friendly, but there's that alleyway there that is difficult for me to cross until I really know somebody. But, I wear well over time. That's the good news. But so, the basic elements of campaigning, of being outgoing and vivacious with cold contacts, was something I really came across with difficulty. But, after awhile you learn to do things and then you hope you have enough time to let people really know who you are as opposed to what you're first impression was. So, as I said, it's the price you pay for the job you want to do and over the long haul it was served me well.

HM: Can you comment on how campaigning has changed over time?

RW: Oh, the money situation has just gotten horrendous and the demands. I served a District that was unique. I was blessed in that my whole District was in Mercer County;

but I didn't have all of the District, I only had the rural area. And there was an urban area and an industrial area in the Chenango Valley. I didn't have that, thank goodness. So, I had the rural areas, townships and boroughs. The good news was that the Pittsburgh papers just came up to the county line. They usually stopped at Lawrence and Butler County, which is our southern boundary lines, and the Erie paper usually stopped around Crawford County and not into Mercer. So, there was very little coverage from any of the media that was outside the District. And so, I didn't have the pressure of having people calling me on Sunday or Monday and telling me what the editorial said from either of the papers or whatever. I just didn't have to contend with that. And then, to my west was Ohio. So, there wasn't any particular media over there that had a lot of interest in covering me. And so, what the media knew is basically what I shared with them. And so, you know, it's an enviable position for any politician to be in, to have that kind of basic blackout from major media and maybe that's how I survived, as I look back in retrospect. But, I didn't really have to be anything that I wasn't in order to look like I was something I wasn't. Did I answer your question?

HM: Yes. Can you tell me how you decided to become a Republican?

RW: Oh, yeah, by inheritance. (*laugh*)

HM: I was wondering if there was some family influence.

RW: It's like if you would ask me how I became a Lutheran.

HM: It's always been, huh?

RW: It was the lineage that I inherited with my birth.

HM: Has your family always been Republican then?

RW: Certainly, on my father's side. I would be reluctant to guess on my mother's side. I didn't know those folks as well. And I don't really think they were politically sensitive anyway, so I doubt if they voted most of the time, actually. They lived in the city; they lived pretty close to the heart of the city. Whereas, my dad's people were out from where we lived and so there was more identity there across the board. But, yeah that's just pure and simply how it came about. Of course, over the years I became indoctrinated and I guess became as hardcore as any or most are these days. And my son, even more than I, which is interesting. So, yeah, that's how it is. Somewhat of a moderate, I guess, if you got the yardstick out and were measuring that way. Yeah, I'm very people oriented. Fiscally, I was very conservative. I guess when it came to social issues, I was more moderate than the conservatives would be today, I guess. I don't think that I understand about that.

HM: Okay. Can you describe the makeup of the 8th Legislative district and how did you fit with them?

RW: Sure. You know, it was a very comfortable fit because they were all townships and boroughs and, usually, whenever you get into legislation that effects local government, its cities and first class townships and whatever versus boroughs and townships. And so, I didn't have to have divided loyalties. I mean, I could be wholeheartedly supportive of the interest of townships and boroughs as opposed to worrying about cities and whatever size they were. And so, that was another blessing I had so far as the structure of the district. I didn't have to straddle the fence on those issues and they got pretty hot because, you know, an awful lot has to do with gas tax reimbursements and all that kind-of stuff. You know, the way governments operate, and so that wasn't a challenge.

HM: Okay.

RW: So, I was blessed there as well by that very homogeneous grouping.

HM: Okay. So, it didn't really change through the years either, then?

RW: No. When they redistricted they got to where they played with those games the district did change ultimately, but I don't think it ever did while I served it. I was, again, very lucky.

HM: What kind of constituent are you now?

RW: I'm an aware constituent. I have my opinions, but I have been really cautious not to second guess the people that I elect or vote for to be here. That and leaving from office, I think that your successors get a little bit nervous about how you're going to behave in relationship to them, whether you're going to second guess them, et cetera. You know, when I was here, I served as diligently and as rigorously as I could. And when I left, I did it with the same excitement and figured that the people that have it now deserve – they have the latitude to do the job now as they see it. So, I've never been critical, you know, of who served from the time I left until now. I'm not that way on other issues; certainly, there's no reason to be like that in politics.

HM: Prior to coming to the House you had some military experience and you also had career “real-world” experience and you also had your degrees. So, how did that influence any of your decision making in preparation for your career in public service?

RW: Well, it gave me some credentials to give me credibility to a constituent that really didn't know me. I was raised in Pittsburgh and lived there through to and including my college years, even though I spent four years where I am now. And the military, I still was basically a resident of the North Hills of Pittsburgh. So, you needed something to validate the fact that you could make a contribution and, you know, didn't come without any kind of abilities to contribute to the people's needs. And it's a pretty wide spectrum if you take business and education and the military – other than some specific professional credentialing – it, you know, that covers a pretty broad front for someone that's going to represent people who live in rural areas who lead pretty simple lives, who

carry a lunch bucket. You know, they're things that people can identify with. So, yeah, it served me in good stead actually and I used it. I hadn't just come out of academia as an egghead and never worked for a living besides that. And that was a big ad.

HM: Do you remember your first Swearing-In Ceremony?

RW: I do vaguely. It was significantly different being here as a Member as opposed to being a tourist and an agitator, you know, a brat kid of someone who was a Member here. Yeah, the whole family was here. It was a big event. You know, I reflected a great deal that day on the day my dad was Sworn-In. When he was Sworn-In, my niece now, who's maybe 50 years old – wow – we were in the balcony and the place was packed, as it always is on Swearing-In days, and my dad was standing down on the Floor of the House and we're up in the steep steps. And they had warmed her bottle before they left the hotel room to the point where it was almost scalding, I guess, in anticipation of her wanting it later on. Well, when we got up there she got into a snit and so they couldn't give her the bottle or it would scald her. So, they were trying to do everything they could to settle her down and not draw attention to herself and then, in one of her outbursts with my dad standing down in the well of the Floor and somebody talking to him, you heard this child scream out, "I want my pappy." (*laugh*) And everyone goes, "Ugh." But, that was one of the things that I remember vividly, and we still joke about to this day, because it was just little Jean who has always had kind-of an attitude through her life and it was a foretell of what she was to become, I guess, or the personality that she became. She's been a very successful woman. I don't mean to say that. Yeah, but my own, my boys

were pretty young. And of course, my dad was being Sworn-In that day. In fact, he was the ranking Member, Republican Member, of that Session and so he called the Session to order. And that was pretty cool. Other than that, I don't remember much about it. It was just the normal fanfare. You know, herding a family around in the anxiety and wanting to know where your office is and who's going to be your secretary. You know, how far down in the bowels of the building were you going to be placed and that kind-of stuff. All of which were the absolute worst, but that's all history too. I certainly didn't get any leg up over anybody else in the class because my dad was here before. I ended up in the basement, which was later condemned as a fire trap. I shared a secretary with my dad, no less, and two other Members. So, needless to say I didn't get much work done. I was at the bottom of the pecking order and I knew better than to try to nose my way in. So, for the first year, two years, I had to find my own way around about how to accommodate my constituent's needs as well as my own. Because again, he was urban/suburban Pittsburgh and I'm up in the country with a total rural population. Constituent needs were significantly different. So, that lent itself to some interesting kinds of things.

HM: Well, you were certainly no stranger to the Capitol then when you started?

RW: Right, right. Or to the Leadership or to the, you know, a lot of the Members generally. So, yeah, in that respect. But, I was very cautious not to use that or you know, to play that as it were. That just doesn't fit with my personality to do that kind of thing. I mean, I was who I was and I didn't know who anybody else was. I mean, my dad that was his thing, but – In fact, we voted for the first Shapp [Milton; Pennsylvania Governor,

1971-1979] income tax. We had been operating on stop-gaps almost the whole year [and] well into the next fiscal year. And the Democrats had voted for a Budget, but then couldn't get the votes to pay for it. And every time I went home, what little the people knew about it down here was, you know, "I sent you down there to get the job done. The place isn't operating. People aren't getting paid. You're operating on stop-gaps." So, you know, I heard that for as long as I needed to and so, we finally got the vote for the first income tax on the board and it was up there – that was before they had rules about how long the board could be open. I mean, they could leave it open for days it seemed – so, they messed around, messed around and I said, "that's enough of this stuff," and I voted for it. Well, ironically, at that time my dad knew he wasn't going to run again, so he voted for it. So, it was 102/103, lock the board. And with that, he was down front, of course, being the number one ranked Member, and I was in about the third row from the back, and he came up the aisle – and he was a man of about my height, but about another third as big – screaming, "What did you do?" And I said, "Gee, I don't know. I think I did the same thing you did." (*laugh*) We both were tired of the things hanging out there. He figured he didn't have anything to lose since he wasn't going to run again anyway. And I figured I had nothing to lose because my people were getting disgusted with the system not working. And that's what they sent me down here to do. They said make it work. So, that was my first opportunity at making it work when other people who created the situation weren't willing to accept the responsibility for it. I said, you know, "I didn't come down here to run for the next election. I came down here to get whatever I did this Session; done." So, that was my rationale and that was what happened.

HM: Would you consider anyone to be a mentor to you whenever you first started?

RW: Yeah, he was here, but we deliberately – well, we ate dinner and stuff together occasionally, but I got myself in with some of the like kinds of Representatives from like kinds of Districts, which had been the northern tier. And as I remember in retrospect, they were all about twice my age. I don't know how I fell in with those people, those guys, but they were great people. They had a lifetimes experience and we would sit back there and tell stories and keep things livened up. And, yeah I learned a great deal from those folks about – not so much about legislation; they didn't care that much about that – but, about life they knew a great deal. They had both been County Commissioners and things like that. And one owned a car business during the War years and he used to tell us stories about how they had cars hidden whenever they were rationed or you couldn't get them, but you know, for some reason they were able to have access to them. They had them hid around in barns and stuff like that. Just very, you know, they were just phenomenal people and I related to them quite well. And we had a lot of fun together. Yeah, I guess I remember, one day I was running at the mouth about something we were voting on and it was Alvin Kahle [State Representative, Venango County 1965-1973], Alvin was from over in Emlenton, which is Clarion County. Anyway, he had glasses like mine, but he had half-glasses and they rode down on his nose. And so, anyway, the vote came and I voted a certain way and when everything quieted down he finally looked at me with those glasses down on the end of his nose and said, "I just realized something about you." I said, "What's that Alvin?" He said, "Your mouth don't work like your vote does." (*laugh*) You know, that's why I hung out with those guys. They had a sense

of humor and they knew what life was about, and it wasn't a criticism it was just, you know, how we dealt with each other and the issues. And it was a good time. You know, we had a lot of fun.

HM: Did you mentor anyone?

RW: That's hard to know. Not very many. There were always guys around who thought they needed to do that. That they somehow had more wisdom than most of us and kind-of pushed their way into where they convinced people about how significant they were to the system. And I mean, that was their stick and that's how they saw the situation. So, they usually were the big brothers, as it were, to the younger Members. If I was, it was by happenstance; it wasn't by any design. There were some in my own class that I didn't get close to them, per say, because some of them were just real screwballs and remained that way through their tenure. But, you know, I used to be pretty forthright with them about how I thought they were out of touch with the world and reality. So, that kind-of stuff, but we weren't mentors. We just got to know each other to a point where we could say almost anything to each other. And it was a wholesome thing. I mean, it wasn't as demeaning as it might sound by my telling, but – and we all had Districts that were close together, so we had a lot of activities together with interest groups. But, there were some unique people in that crowd and getting to know them – and there were people out there like that; who came from the same kinds of Districts, but I saw myself being totally different from them.

HM: Has your son [Rod Wilt; State Representative, Mercer County, 1997-2004] ever come to you for advice now that he's a Member, or do you let him find his own way?

RW: Oh, absolutely. No, I mean, the advice thing, he's more apt to ask me directions somewhere than he is to ask me about you know, how to vote. The issues are all different. I mean, stuff's been amended now that it's nothing I'd even recognize as being what the law of the land is. So, I don't really have a reference point there. And the only thing I ever told him was, when he came here, I said, "Just remember one basic rule: that you're dealing with stagnant numbers and the name of the game is to add to and not to subtract from. And if you use that as your measuring stick as you go through the system, you're going to do alright." You know, you got to get 102. You don't get that many, you know, there's no game. And I think he's used that more often than he's admitted, but I think that's the basic fundamental. So many people never understand even after they've been here a long time and left. You know, they think they can go around writing people off and being rude and ignorant just because yesterday you didn't agree with them. I think it's a real death trap for a lot of people to come down here and they never learn that. I don't want to be phony, but I think they have to learn not to personalize so much of this stuff and you don't have the option of writing people off. You have to deal with them how they are and where you are. And we all know that, that people you might not agree with, somebody today, but you're going to need them desperately tomorrow. There's no sense in alienating and cutting people off. It just is not a way to be successful around here. That's the only advice I ever gave him.

HM: Okay; your most important piece of legislation?

RW: Oh, I think, I've heard that question asked a lot and I just don't – what was important then isn't important now. I mean, it's lost. You know, it's just part of some bigger quilt or patchwork. Now, initially I thought what I had done was just absolutely incredible. When I was Chairman of Labor and Industry, which is a committee that I had no identity with at all, but the Speaker – that was my first committee assignment – and we had a piece of legislation that said we had to comply with the Federal mandate for whatever it had to do with, or else it would cost us money. You know, it was one of those you do it or else we'll take your money away. Well, I had fought all year, well we introduced the legislation, and we sat around all year and I kept telling the Democrats, "Hey look, we got to pass this. It's not going to hurt my people, I don't care if you do or not, but you know you got to pass it for your own people." Well, they were going to get the Federal legislation changed and they were going to get this. I said, "Well, go ahead and do it. Let me know when you get it done. You know, I'll be around." So, it came pretty close to the end of the Session and it still wasn't done and the Leadership's saying, "Hey, Pennsylvania is going to lose all this Federal money if we don't implement their required provisions." And so anyway, we had a meeting and they asked me to recess it because they still had one other piece of information they had to find. Really, they had to call Washington [D.C.] to see from the Congressional Delegation whether anything had changed there and it really hadn't. But, anyway, I had gone somewhere and gotten lost and so they finally got the word that you better pass it or else you're going to lose these monies. And I came back to the committee room and I've made the motion, or somebody

did, they seconded and three seconds it passed and it was out of Committee, gone. And people come up to me afterwards said, “Where did you go? Who did you talk to? What swayed them?” I just kind of fluffed it off; well I hadn’t done anything really. They thought I was out making some kind-of deals or calling somebody on the phone or resolving some difference. I just walked away from it. I figured, you know, give them enough rope in time they – so, I never did ‘fess up the fact that I really hadn’t done anything with anybody; that it was just, we came to the reality I told them they would in the summer, and this was getting to the end of the Session, those kinds of things happen, you know? Significant, it was then, because it meant big bucks, but over time you know, it was just something else that needed done. I always thought when I came here that I was really a mechanic just to keep the system working. I didn’t come here to reinvent the wheel; only to keep the one that was here working. And that was within that philosophy. Otherwise, when I left here I was Chairman of Agriculture and the only lasting symbol I have that I know is the slow-moving vehicle emblem that’s on the back of farm wagons and Amish buggies [Act 77-1971]. That was mine. I don’t know, some stuff like that. But, did I change the course of destiny? No.

HM: During your Farewell Address, you recollected on some natural disasters such as Hurricane Agnes [1972] and its aftermath and the Johnstown Flood [1977]. How did the Legislature work together to provide relief at that time?

RW: It had more to do with the overriding factor, because when those things happen the stuff that we fight about day to day disappears. There’s an appreciation for the fact that

partisan politics is out the window and its people that count. When people are in need and they need it now and the next level of government beyond local government needs to do something about that. And that's what the teaching point was there; that if we could diminish and keep to some kind of reasonable level of partisanship of most of what we did and do, If we would look at it from the people's standpoint, the people's needs standpoint, we could get an awful lot of stuff done faster and not have to be here as long as we're here and had been there or they need to be here now, if I can be critical. If somewhere along the line, there could be a chip programmed into people that turned that little light on in their head that said, "Hey, it's time now." I mean, there's no disaster, but there are needs and let's deal with those. That's what it taught me and it has certainly, with what's happened in the south and in Florida and, you know, across the board, the same kind-of thing. I never felt more helpless than when my area was hit with a tornado. What do you do? You look at it and gasp and you see the people in need and people's lives are gone. You know, don't even know where the people are, they've been sucked away and thrown on a hillside somewhere. After you live through one of those situations, it gives you a different perspective on what it means to serve. I guess that's what I was referring to.

HM: Do you think the same reaction was there with Three Mile Island [March 28, 1979]?

RW: Oh, absolutely. I was here all through that. That happened, basically, over a weekend and my office was on the second floor, at that point, where the Governor's

Conference Room was; which was the command center. So, every morning I got on the elevator, I never knew who it was, you know, what national personality I was going to see. So, I saw an awful lot of them that were prominent in their day and my day. And I don't know how it was that I was here that week, but then I was back here early that next week and we weren't in Session, but the first time I really came to grips with the fact that something potentially dangerous could have happened, was when I went downtown to eat and there weren't any waitresses in any of the restaurants, because they had all left town. Then it finally dawned on me, there's something wrong here, you know? When people leave their homes something's wrong. Yeah, that too.

HM: Especially, because you could have been in the other part of the State.

RW: Yeah, right. I didn't need to be here. But, by chance, I was. I'm not sure what it was anymore. But, that was, you know, an eye opener if there ever was one. And I thought up till then that it was just a media event. But, after that I realized how it affected the people in the area. And it was easy to get around because there were a lot of people over the weekend that decided to be somewhere else and certainly, traffic was diminished significantly. And as the time went on, you know, it became clearer, but that was how I came to the stark reality that people in the area were nervous because they weren't here to work, they weren't at their jobs. I said, "Whoa, this is bad."

HM: Moving onto some of the technology and traditions of the House; could you comment on the changes of the House structure, especially the introduction of offices, the changes to the addition of staff and the professionalization of the Legislature?

RW: Well now, let me tell you, first of all, so you have some benchmark to reflect on my comments. I think one of the biggest mistakes that was made while I was here was that we became a full-time Legislature. You can take this job and make it totally consuming or else you can make it manageable in the time you have. And if you really just want to be a Legislator and meet needs/service needs and deal with legislation and as the pay structure improved – I voted for every pay raise when I was here and Leadership didn't even ask me; they just counted me, because I said if I'm going to do it and you know it's right and it's okay for me to make it whatever is some comparable wage to what's going on on the outside, and I would go before my electorate and tell them that, which I did. I still never had an opponent. It's when you go around and hide and you can't justify it. But, now that the job pays the kind of money, well I think that's what caused it first of all, now they can justify it saying, "Oh, how much they are consumed by the job and therefore they need commensurate pay." Well, it's a philosophy and if it works for you, fine. I never got that far in thinking that was really a necessity. When I look at some of the larger states that still have part-time Legislatures, they get it done somehow. And certainly you have to trust the Administration more. You're not around here to keep an eye on them, but there are other ways to do it. I just don't know why. I've never been an advocate of reducing the size of the Legislature, because I've always thought that the people in a rural area were going to lose because the migration of the

representation was going to go to the media centers. I told you about my county, I'm sure that someone out in the hinterlands of my county will not stand a chance when the media is in the urban area. And it's just real tough to compete with that. So, that's reason why I never really favored it. And, I thought it was healthy, you know, it was a diversity that the smaller group will bring. But, I don't know that the bigger group needs to be here as much as it is here and I don't begrudge them whatever they make if they are going to be here and do the job. They should be making a decent pay. But, they ought to be totally responsible as well. You know, maybe not have outside occupations. But, that's, you know, we can discuss that and that's been argued back-and-forth since there was a Legislature, I suspect. Anyway, that's where I was on the issue.

HM: When you first started, you said you shared an office with your father and two other Members.

RW: All of which had lots of seniority.

HM: All of them. So, when did they start getting their own offices?

RW: Oh, it was a progressive thing. I don't know if in my second term if I had one. No, certainly not. I think my next move was up on the second floor and we had taken an office that the Governor was in, or some part of his staff was in there, and we made it into House offices. And even then, there were two of us in there. So, there had to be three, maybe four terms before there were offices –

HM: Okay.

RW: – for the rank-and-file. Maybe the Chairman's had them. Well, not necessarily, there were a lot of Chairmen on the first floor or the basement of the Capitol Building. So, it was a while.

HM: Were you sharing a secretary at that time?

RW: Oh, yeah. Sure, and that was always a struggle. You know, it just depends on who you were with and how well –you're dream was to get an office and the secretary with someone who was pretty inactive or else had a secretary back home that they gave everything to if they were attorneys or whatever, so that you could have somebody down here. But, for those us that didn't have support staff at home of any kind, it was a tough row. And, I mean, you just did what you could do and what you couldn't just didn't get done. But, life went on. The legislature and the government didn't stop, which reinforces my point, I guess.

HM: Were you writing your own letters at that time, then? Or did you continue to?

RW: Yeah, pretty much. What became the ploy was depending on the areas of interest, if there was some auxiliary committee that you were on that dealt with them, you would get the staff in those committees to write them, really. And I remember once having someone from the Game Commission write a letter from me to a constituent who was

complaining about the overabundance of geese and how they were messing up his yard, et cetera. I remember getting a letter back and that taught me to read what other people write. He took off and was chastising my constituent for complaining because he was sure that he was a game violator during hunting season when he went out and shot the geese in his yard. I said, “No, this isn’t how you treat a constituent. I don’t know who it is at the Game Commission you represent, but you don’t represent my folks.” So, you had to be a little careful, because they didn’t have a sense of the districts, I guess. Yeah, that’s what you did. Maybe get somebody from the Departments. You would ask a lobbyist to give me some ideas on how I can approach this. Basically, they’d write the letter and you’d take it and get it transposed on your letterhead. You did what you needed to do to get by, that kind-of thing.

HM: Did you have a district office at that time?

RW: No, I never did have a district office in the House. My office phone was in my house. I had a coda phone recorder for anybody that wanted to call that was separate from the phone. It was just an add-on. No, there were no [district] offices in the House.

HM: Things have changed, huh?

RW: Certainly have. Certainly have. And it makes life easier and that’s okay. I mean, certainly the constituents are getting better service.

HM: The technology has certainly changed as well.

RW: Right, you know, with all the computerization. That's good stuff. I'm not knocking that at all. To keep up with the times, that's imperative to do. And you can just respond so much quicker and not write about something after its history, which is what we did an awful lot of. We just held stuff until it was over and, you know, write and tell them what happened, rather than run the risk of telling them something they didn't want to hear anyway, that would alienate them. Yeah, it's a much better, much more streamlined system now.

HM: What was your relationship with lobbyists?

RW: Oh, good. Good. I never had trouble with lobbyists. I just treated them like I did everyone else, forthrightly. And, yes was yes, and no was no, and you wouldn't quibble. I mean, and they knew tomorrow I could be their biggest fan, but today the answer is no. And that was all. It wasn't hard. I didn't rely on them. I didn't ask them for anything that was inordinate so, I mean, I didn't build up a bank of IOU's with anybody. I didn't particularly dine with anybody, you know, in particular, if anybody. So, it was I appreciated lobbyists. I totally appreciated them because I respected the information they gave me. And if they gave me bad information once, there wasn't two times. And I think that was pretty well understood and a good lobbyist didn't need that told to them. They know that.

HM: You've been very active since leaving the House. You had a nice term in the Senate.

RW: Yes I did. I had a good term in the Senate.

HM: Yeah, from 1981 to 1990. And would you like to talk a little bit about your Senate career?

RW: Oh, sure. The Senate career was all together different day. Over here, you're competing with 102 people and not very many offices – when I say offices, I'm talking about physical offices, I'm talking about position offices. It wasn't very long, well, I went over there as a Chairman of a committee; they created Game and Fish for me over there, as an election tool. So, I ran the Special Election and I was the deciding vote, the majority vote, over there. And that's when Budd Dwyer [R. Budd; State Senator, 1971-1981] left the Senate and was elected Treasurer. And then I ran the Special Election. I think it was the first election that broke certain spending guidelines. I don't know, remember, what it is anymore. Maybe a million dollars, 100,000, something; I don't know. I didn't worry about it then, I could care less about it now. But, we had set the new benchmark on spending in campaigns, certainly because I represented the balance of power. You know, I was a Chairman when I went there and shortly thereafter, I was elected to Leadership or appointed to Leadership. I think, first was Policy and then I was Secretary who takes care of all the appointments. So, my stay in the Senate was a very rewarding one to be sure, and had much more recognition for whatever talent I had to

lend to the office than it ever was here. And, yeah, it's good to be able to sit at the table where the decisions are made. And that's what people don't understand generally about the importance of that. But, it was just an all together different arena. I mean, I loved my time in the House and certainly excellent experience and good relationships, but as far as my feeling of appreciation for the time and energy I put into it, certainly that was far more recognized in the Senate that it was here.

HM: Currently, you're the Chairman of the Harness Racing Commission.

RW: I am. I've been there, I guess, we just figured out for about nine years. When I first retired I was, I guess, Bobby Jubelirer [Robert; State Senator, 1975-2006; Pennsylvania Lt. Governor, 2001-2003] appointed me to one of his positions over at the Ethics Commission. And I served over there for a time, I don't remember how the years were divided up, but I guess it was about six years. And then I resigned from there and was appointed Chairman of the Harness Racing Commission by Governor Ridge [Thomas; Pennsylvania Governor, 1995-2001] and have been there ever since.

HM: And what is the Harness Racing Commission up to these days?

RW: Oh, well, this morning was a rather active morning. There's just one more license to issue for the State, which is presumed that once you issue the license those people will as well get a gaming license. So, we had a difficult decision to decide who would get the last license and we kind-of messed people up, because we decided – there were two

applicants – and we decided that neither one would get it; that there were better fish out there in the pond if we just invite them in to apply. And that's what we chose to do, which kind-of shook a lot of people up, because they were sure that we would pick one or the other. We really thought that the benchmark of what we wanted to achieve was higher than what we had to pick from. So, we said no, we're not going to compromise what it is we wanted to have happen with this so far as our contribution to it. So, we decided not to give it to anybody. It was tough, and you're talking to the winner, millions of dollars, you know, heaven knows how much, but it was significant and there was an awful lot of hush over the room. But, I think we did the right thing.

HM: So, you're still directing the decisions in Pennsylvania?

RW: Well, in our little corner of the world. You know, we're not going to change the course of destiny, but those things which we touch we want them to be okay. You just want them to be something long-lived and respectable and let people know that the system can work for good even though there are those few times that it doesn't. Yeah, that's about it.

HM: Are you still active in politics?

RW: Not in any kind of a named position. I think I still represent some kind of a front to a lot of people, even though it's been 16 years now that I'm out. There is still a lot of positive feedback that I get from folks on the street. I don't know, formally am I

involved? No. I served on a bank board. I served on a nursing home board, a large nursing home, full-continuing nursing care. We just built a new 25 million dollar complex. I served on an insurance company board in Exton. Plus, the Harness Racing thing. And I got a 100 acre farm that I farm at home. So, I don't usually have the need to be looking for something else to do.

HM: Okay. And you were just recently honored by the McKeever Environmental Learning Center.

RW: Yeah, that's been awhile ago, actually. Yeah, they named the auditorium for me and that was because, back when it was in its infancy, and when simultaneously we went to the State University system and it was kind of a satellite of Clarion University/College, and it would be footballed around there, and it was one of the budget times when the new Secretary of the Higher Education system took place, and I told the Governor's people, I said – from the few deals I made, I was successful – you know, “I need this resolved. This place is too important to the area and for what it does, not to have some certainty of funding.” So, as it turned out, the Governor's person called the President of the University system in the middle of the night and said, “Hey, you're keeping the budget from being resolved. I need an answer.” And it had to do with the funding of McKeever. And I had only heard that story well after it happened from whom, then was the President of the University system, about how he had been called in the middle of the night and given the ultimatum to give him an answer. So, anyway, and that was the fall out from it,

even though I been involved with it from the time they turned the dirt. And it's just a really good place with a lot of good stuff happening.

HM: Do you have any one fond memory of the House?

RW: Oh, they were all fond. I don't have any – you know, certainly being here with my father can be written off as being unique, and the friendships I've made here, they got stronger after I have left, I thought, with a lot of them. And to be part of this Institution is something you have to be in awe of. It's a pretty special thing. I mean, and that's the area which you have to keep as special, not being the end of all, just that. I was pleased when I came. I was pleased when I left, because I was thought, you know, I was fulfilled. I hope I had done some things that were worthwhile. But, it wasn't who I was. I mean, who I am is who I am and what I did is what I did. And I really ached for people who lose their own personhood by given the fact of what it is they do. It's very dangerous I think. It's a very dangerous place to put yourself. And I ache for my friends who I see doing that. You know, like they have to win the next election, or they have to whatever the Leadership thing, or the Chairmanship thing, whatever. Or that they forget about what they're here for and only worry about the next election. I think that's dangerous too. That's really dangerous. I know that people, I think, who are more inclined to stumble through the system and end up with, you know, giving the system a bad name as well as themselves. Yeah, I guess that kind of thing is what I left here with.

HM: Did you have any personal regrets or disappointments?

RW: Oh, the disappointments fade. So, do the regrets I guess. Yeah, I don't know regrets? No. I was, you know, for whatever ones I had, I think I was always able to have some avenue to compensate. And while I sat here and languished in the House, as I did, so far as moving up anywhere – not that I ever had any great ambitions to do it anyway – but, I was also Chairman of PHEAA's [Pennsylvania Higher Education Association Agency] Executive Committee for 10 years, so virtually ran the show from the Board's standpoint over there. And we broke all kind of records with the bond issues that we had released. I chaired the committee that built the new PHEAA building. I've never been in it. I've never been invited back, but we did everything that was necessary to get it in place. The land acquisition, closing streets, and before that, I'd seen every piece of available property in the Harrisburg area as we went through that process. That was a real fine experience over there, because it was a myriad of things to do. We had the largest computer in the state and one night we had this emergency meeting and decided to sell the computer that was over there. And of course, you always question, you always get suspicious when people tell you, you got to do it now, kind-of thing, like buying a used car. But, as it turned out, it was good we did because there was a new generation of computers the next day and we made a million dollars more than we would have if we would have waited till morning. So, I remember those kinds of things as being pretty exciting, where right judgments were made and worked faster than government normally does. But, I had a good tenure over there as well. And I was really active in a lot of the auxiliary environmental things: sewer, water and air, was one of the original members there. And some other things like that, that used keep my interest up, and that was a good

thing. And you got a lot of satisfaction out of it. The original Clean Air and Water Bills [I] was very much apart of all those. So, it's those things that I remember and not specifically one act as opposed to the other. Green and Clean, I was involved with that from way back when. So, there's all those kinds of things which were really, I see, as foundation stones for all the stuff that's happened subsequently. [I] enhanced some people's sensitivity to some of those things that don't have before.

HM: Well, the Wilts have served for six decades in the House. Is that correct?

RW: Something like that.

HM: Yeah. What do you think your legacy is?

RW: Heavens, I don't know. I never – what he did, he did well and honorably, I guess, would be the best I could hope for.

HM: Okay. How would you like to be remembered? Is that pretty much – ?

RW: Sure. Sure. I mean, that's the best you could ask.

HM: Great. Well, thank you, Mr. Wilt. That concludes our interview today. I hope it wasn't too painful?

RW: No, this is fun. It's been a long time since I've done one of these, so it was lots of fun. I'm glad you finally caught up with me and were persistent enough to make me come.

HM: Thank you.

RW: I started to feel a little guilty, but today seemed to be – after the decision I had to make this morning, this seemed like it would have been a good way to conclude the day, you know? (*laugh*) Regardless of what kind of reaction I got from the first decision. So, you know, I appreciate it.

HM: Thank you.

RW: You bet. Thank all of you.