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INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Robert C. Wise (D)

83rd District

Lycoming County

1965-1974

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Heidi Mays (HM): Okay. Good afternoon.

The Honorable Robert Wise (RW): Good afternoon.

HM: I'm here today with Robert Wise who served from 1965 through 1974 from the 83rd Legislative District from Lycoming County. I appreciate you taking the time to be here with me today.

RW: Looking forward to it.

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

RW: Okay. I kind-of come from a political background, as far as my family goes. How much time do we have? (*laugh*) My great-grandfather on my mother's side was a member of Select Council in Williamsport. He was a Member of the Legislature here, and he was a delegate to the Republican Convention that nominated Abraham Lincoln for President. My grandfather on my father's side was an ardent prohibitionist, and he ran for sheriff in Lycoming County. He was a police chief during the term of our only prohibitionist mayor who was an editor of a newspaper, and so forth. My dad was active in politics. He was Democratic Register Recorder and County Commissioner for four terms. So, that, together with the fact that I went to law school and was First Assistant DA [District Attorney], through my family and my public activities, the voters definitely knew who I was. They didn't like me, but they knew who I was.

HM: *(laugh)* Well, what influences do you think shaped you to become a Democrat?

RW: Well, I suppose the fact that my mother and dad were was maybe 90 percent of the reason I'm a Democrat, but the other 10 percent's important, too, because I'm a very solid Democrat. I admired FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt, United States President, 1933-1945]. He was my President when I was a kid growing up, and I admired JFK [John F. Kennedy, United States President, 1961-1963], and I've never been sorry that I – although my wife was a Republican when I married her. I took her to a dinner for Judge Williams who was running for Governor. It was on a statewide basis. Lincoln Club had a dinner. I took her to it. She assumed I was a Republican and was going to be a Republican, so it was quite a shock when she found out that wasn't the case. *(laugh)*

HM: So, did she change Parties, or is she still a Republican?

RW: I actually dragged her down to the courthouse, and I said, "Peggy." I said, "All these gals are working hard for me." I said, "You cannot remain a registered Republican." With bitter protest, she changed her registration and she's never let me forget it, believe me. *(laugh)* But she's still a Democrat, but I know how she votes. We're just – we cancel each other out. *(laugh)*

HM: *(laugh)* Well, what kind of Democrat would you say you were, or are?

RW: I'm basically a conservative Democrat.

HM: Okay.

RW: Yeah, I'm a fiscal conservative, but I believe in most of the social programs that the Party stands for.

HM: Could you just elaborate a little bit more about your education and your career before coming to the House?

RW: Okay. I joined the navy on graduation of high school, and I got in the Officers' Training Program, and they sent me to Notre Dame and then to Caltech [California Institute of Technology]. When I graduated in [19]46 –that was [19]43. When I graduated in [19]46, the War was over in Europe and practically over in the Pacific, so they said, "You can." – now, I studied meteorology, weather forecasting – so they said, "Look, you can either fly hurricanes in the Caribbean, or you can get out," and I decided in my senior year at Caltech that I wanted to go to law school, so I opted to get out, and then, I went to Dickinson Law School in [19]46-[19]48, graduated, and then became a lawyer in 1950. [I] was admitted to the bar in 1950.

HM: Okay, and then you became the Assistant District Attorney?

RW: Yeah. A friend of mine ran for DA in [19]55, and he was like the – he began [19]56. He appointed me and another lawyer First and Second Assistant DA's in Lycoming County.

HM: Great.

RW: That kept me busy for four years.

HM: *(laugh)* Well, how did you become interested in law?

RW: You know, it's hard to put a finger on that, although my parents saved, like, a graduation program from junior high school. That would be ninth grade, which listed all the kids and what they wanted to be, and after me was lawyer. And I did not remember that, and I really didn't decide until my roommate at Caltech and I both decided we wanted to study law, and he did, and I did.

HM: So, do you think your background in law helped you with your service in the House?

RW: There is no question about it, not that non-lawyers can't be terrific Legislators because many of them are, but the training we have in the law enables you to understand a bill, first of all. Legal issues, and you know in general what the law is and what you want to change, you don't want to change, so it's, it's a tremendous advantage, I think.

HM: Well, I want to get to your services; Legislative Service Director for the Legislative—

RW: Reference Bureau.

HM: Reference Bureau. Thank you. So, do you think you always had political aspirations? Or when do you think you first got that bug?

RW: I think that kind-of went along with – of course, my dad was active in politics, so as his son, I was interested, but the bug really bit me when JFK was elected President. There is just no question about that; 1960.

HM: Okay, so what happened?

RW: Well, I admired him so, and he really challenged the young people of this country to take an active part in politics, and I wanted to take him up on it. (*laugh*)

HM: Okay. So, how did you personally become involved in politics? You talked about your family's involvement, but you personally. How did you get involved?

RW: Well, I told you of my interest in Kennedy, and so I first decided to run in 1962. That was really the toughest campaign I ever had because, as you know, the county is strong, strongly Republican county. And the worst part of that campaign was I decided to run, and I made the conservation cleanup Susquehanna River my prime issue, as far as the campaign was going. I actually was able to get Dr. Goddard, the Secretary of Environmental Resources – it was probably called something different then – to come up and basically endorse me based on the campaign I'd been running, which didn't make his

Republican friends very happy in Lycoming County. (*laugh*) But, at any rate, I lost that election in 1962 by about 1,000 votes. Now, the county – the problem then, however, wasn't so much the registration; the problem was that Bill Scranton [William Warren Scranton, Governor of Pennsylvania, 1963-1967] was the head of the Republican ticket, very popular. Dick Dilworth [Richardson Dilworth, Mayor of Philadelphia, 1956-1962], the mayor of Philadelphia, was the head of the Democratic ticket, and do you remember the Keystone Shortway¹ was a big issue in those days? Senator Confair [Zehnder H. Confair; State Senator, 1959-1972] from – well, you'd be too young to remember that – Senator Confair from Lycoming County was the principle sponsor and energy behind that Keystone Shortway, which came within 15 miles of Williamsport, and Dick Dilworth said – because he represented Philadelphia, and he was concerned about the business that the Shortway across the northern part of Pennsylvania would take away from the turnpike across the southern part – so he said, “Nobody but the bears and the crows will use the Keystone Shortway.” So, during that election, they said, “You know what Dick Dilworth said about the Lycoming County voters? Nobody but the bears,” about the Keystone Shortway, “Nobody but the bears and the crows will use it.” That went over like a ton of bricks, as you can imagine, and, of course, the other Republican strategy was to depict anybody not from Philadelphia as a puppet of the Philadelphia political machine, so they run ads that Bob Wise is a puppet at the end of a string, and Dick Dilworth would be working the string, and, “You know what Philadelphia has in mind for us bears and crows.” It really was an interesting campaign. I only lost it by 1,000 votes while Scranton was carrying the coal county by 15,000 votes, but that was my toughest election and my first election.

¹ The longest east-west Interstate in Pennsylvania, connecting New Jersey and Ohio. Constructed from 1959-1970. Today, known as Interstate Route 80, or I-80; also called the “Z. H. Confair Memorial Highway.”

HM: So you entered it back into the race two years later?

RW: Well, that's, that's a different story.

HM: Okay.

RW: I had no intention of running again after that. At least, at that time I didn't, but the Republicans nominated Barry Goldwater as their Presidential candidate, and the local Democrats sensed that this is a great opportunity because I had run so well two years before. So, they talked the fellow who had been nominated as our Democratic candidate into resigning, and I said that I would then – the Democratic committee then named me as a replacement candidate, and, of course, in that election, that was as big a Democratic sweep as it had been a Republican sweep two years before. So, I won over 25 hundred votes in my District in [19]64. That was my first term.

HM: So, timing was everything?

RW: Timing is everything. Believe me. *(laugh)*

HM: *(laugh)* And it matters who's heading up these other tickets.

RW: That makes a difference. It does make a difference.

HM: Did you experience that at all again?

RW: No, no. Every election after that for me was relatively easy. Some were big margins. I mean, 4,000 was my biggest margin, and some were smaller, but that was my only tough campaign.

HM: I'm thinking with today's standards, you know, every election you had competition, though.

RW: Every election I had competition. No, this was a Republican seat. I mean, the Congressman turned his staff loose to work for my opponent. They really, really went after me, but I had a lot of public support, and that helped.

HM: Well, that's good. Did you like to campaign? Was that something you enjoyed?

RW: I liked to campaign. I'll have to admit that after three or four campaigns it began to drag on me, but I primarily went door-to-door in the Republican districts because I knew I had to get those votes if I had a chance to get elected. So, I went door-to-door in the Republican districts, and my opponent for two campaigns, Jamie Humes, he would go door-to-door in the Democratic districts, and we would pass each other like two ships in the night. It really was funny. But, I loved campaigning and coffee klatches, and I did all my own advertising, and that was fun to do. All we had was newspaper and radio and brochures to hand out. We didn't have any television advertising at that time, so the expense was totally different. I never spent more than, or even close to, 5,000 dollars in any of my election campaigns. And in a recent campaign when our present

Representative was elected, Representative Cappelli [Steven W.; State Representative, Lycoming County, 2001-2008], on the Democrat, it was an open seat because the previous candidate had – Assemblyman - had retired. The Democrats, Federal, State, and local, spent close to 400,000 – and so did the Republicans – close to 400,000 [dollars] on that campaign. Can you see the difference? A lot of that was TV advertising. A lot of it was mailing of brochures and personal letters and that sort of thing, but that's all expensive, so that –

HM: Wow.

RW: – that's a different animal nowadays than it was when I ran.

HM: Well, who helped you with your campaigns? Did you have a staff of volunteers?

RW: The way I tried to work it was I tried to have someone who would be a friend or an energetic Democrat, active in every voting precinct in the 83rd Legislative District. Now, some of those folks were dedicated Democratic committee people. I didn't have to worry about them covering the wards for me, and where it was weak, or there wasn't any, I would try to get volunteers to help me, or I'd work that ward or precinct myself.

HM: Was your fam – I'm sorry – was your family ever involved? I have to know about your wife. (*laugh*)

RW: My wife's parents were, my wife's parents were (*inaudible*) Republicans, and her mother went door-to-door for me in the ward we lived in with a Barry Goldwater button on one side and my button on the other side, (*laugh*) so they did help me, and my wife under protest also helped me.

HM: (*laugh*) That's a great story. Well, could you describe your District, as you recall?

RW: Yeah. My District was when I first ran was made up of the city of Williamsport and the Township of Loyalsock.

HM: Okay.

RW: It had about – the voter registration on the Republican side was about 13 [thousand], 5 [hundred], and on the Democratic side was about 9,000, so there's about 45 hundred voter difference in registration. While I was in Harrisburg, the borough of South Williamsport and Duboistown, the borough of Duboistown, was added, and the townships of Armstrong and Susquehanna were added. After I left the Legislature, three more strong Republican precincts were added: Hepburn Township, Old Lycoming Township, and Lycoming Township, so now, the District is about 17 [thousand], 5 [hundred] Republican and about 13 [thousand], 5 [hundred] Democratic; about 4,000 different. So that, registration-wise, it really hasn't changed a whole lot as far as the Republican edge. It's really real close to the same.

HM: Well, what were the people's issues? Did they have anything that they really wanted to see accomplished?

RW: As I think back, I can't think of any. I mean, local folks in rural Pennsylvania are very much against taxes. I mean, they, they want to hold the line on taxes. You can assume that going in, and I tried to do that, although I did vote for taxes when we had to do it, but that's the one thing. The issues that were important to those folks were pretty much, I think, driven by Federal and State issues more than local issues. I can't recall any compelling issues at the local level except, as I said, in my first campaign I made clean streams at the centerpiece of my campaign. Our river was badly polluted with mine acid drainage and municipal sewage, and it's a gorgeous river, flows right by Harrisburg here, and lots been done to clean it up since then.

HM: Well, we talked about your first election and you being elected to the House. What was it like coming to Harrisburg? What was the political scene like here?

RW: It was, I have to say, it was a thrill for me. The first day that we met in the Majority Caucus Room, which was Democrat in [19]65, all the new Members were there. I think there were only the newly elected Members. I don't think the returning legislators were there on the Democratic side. But I remember that Josh Eilberg [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1955-1966], our Democratic Leader, said, "There's someone I want you to meet," and he brings in the Philadelphia Democratic Chairman Frank Smith, who gave us a pep talk, the gist of which was to vote with our Leadership. That would keep us out of trouble and would make a strong Party. I felt very

uncomfortable at that notion. I turned around, behind me was a tall, lanky guy who looked about as unhappy as I was, who later turned out to be Kent Shelhamer [State Representative, Columbia County, 1965-1976], and Kent and I eventually became roommates, and we roomed together almost the 10 years that we both served in the State Legislature. That's how that got started, but I was thrilled by coming to Harrisburg.

HM: So, during your first Swearing-In Ceremony, do you recall how you felt during that?

RW: Yeah, I was, I was absolutely thrilled to death. It's so beautiful. Everybody, you know, gets a Bible, everybody gets flowers on their desk, and it really was, it really was exciting, and Peggy and my three children were there. It was an exciting time.

HM: Do you recall who you sat beside on the House Floor?

RW: No, I cannot remember who that was.

HM: Okay. Was there anything that you felt surprised you whenever you first came to Harrisburg?

RW: Well, I had no idea what I was getting into, so just about everything surprised me, but one of the things that surprised me and kind of shocked me was the lack of facilities we had at that time. I mean, I had a desk on the Floor of the House. There was a phone

bank in the rear of the House. I had a locker, small locker, behind the House to hang my coat and hat in, and we had access to a secretarial pool, but that was it.

HM: So, no office?

RW: No office; absolutely not.

HM: Did you have an office after?

RW: Oh, yeah, that's Herb Fineman [Herbert; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1955-1977; Speaker, 1969-1972 and 1975-1977] was a big, big factor, I think, in improving the facilities of all the Legislators, and by the time I served my fifth and last term, I had my own office; I had my own staff; I had my own secretary. And they were beautiful offices, and that was true whether we were in the majority or minority, and it went back-and-forth in the five terms I was down here, but both sides had, had excellent facilities. Big difference.

HM: Well, do you think the lack of facilities whenever you first started impacted your performance at all?

RW: I think it did. I think it made it much more difficult to be effective, no question about it.

HM: Well, what were your thoughts as you sat there as an elected official and you started watching the process? Because, different people have made comments about how chaotic it sometimes looks from an outsider's viewpoint.

RW: *(laugh)* It often does look chaotic from a visitor's point of view.

HM: Yeah.

RW: But, I loved it because the Floor debate was often serious, and many times it was very humorous. These men and women, most of them had great senses of humor. I remember one time, a couple of the fellows from Pennsylvania Dutch areas like Lancaster and Lehigh County or Berks County, would get up and they'd debate using the Pennsylvania Dutch lingo. And there really were a lot of fun at times, although we were trying to do serious business, and then some guy *(laugh)* introduced a bill to name, I don't know if it was a greyhound or what it was, the Pennsylvania State Dog, and, of course, they never should have reported that out of committee, but it got on the Floor of the House, and all the guys started to bark. "Arf, arf, arf," and the place just, of course, became chaotic; everybody laughed. And there were a lot of humorous times, and we had a lot of – I was not one of them, unfortunately – but we had a lot of fellows with great senses of humor and interesting stories to tell, and we always enjoyed those. They would tell a story that would be apropos to the bill or issue we were talking about, and it really made it good.

HM: Is there any one person that you think was better than another?

RW: Well, I don't know what you mean by "better," but on the, on the Democratic side, of course, Herb Fineman, Leroy Irvis [K. Leroy; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1959-1988; Speaker, 1977-1978 and 1983-1988] were the, I think, the two most effective legislators, Leaders at least, and Marty Mullen [Martin P.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1955-1982], who was the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee for years and a very good friend of mine, was also very effective. He was carrying the fight for the Catholic Church. I mean, he was an unabashed, unashamed Catholic, and he was fighting abortion or anything that smelled of abortion, and he led the fight for aid to Catholic schools and private schools, and he was a very effective Legislator. On the Republican side, Bob Butera [Robert J.; State Representative, Montgomery County, 1963-1978]; on the Republican side, Kenny Lee [Kenneth B.; State Representative, Sullivan, Susquehanna and Wyoming Counties, 1957-1974; Speaker, 1967-1968 and 1973-1974], obviously, the Speaker. I think one of the things that surprised me the most was how much talent there was on the Floor of the House, really. And it's even better today. I was watching the debate, partly because I was coming down here. It got me thinking about these things, and I was interested in what would happen with the budget, and so I watched the debate the last few days, and I was impressed how good these guys are and women are. I mean, they are excellent. They have the facts, they can deliver the arguments, and they're very persuasive, very sincere, and I was very impressed. I think if the folks of Pennsylvania give Congress and probably the Legislature low grades, but if they would watch something like that, I think they would come away impressed.

HM: Well, that's –

RW: I was when I served here.

HM: Good. Do you think you had any mentors whenever you first came?

RW: The closest thing that I had to a mentor was Dean Fisher. Governor [David] Lawrence [Pennsylvania Governor, 1959-1963] had appointed him as a member of the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board, and Dean, Dean had come to me – he was one of the people that came to me and suggested I run, and that would have been in [19]62, and when I was finally elected in [19]64, he interceded, I think, with Herb Fineman for me, because I got a plum assignment on the State Government Committee, which a freshman Legislator normally would not get. And I got Game and Fisheries, which was a great assignment for somebody from Lycoming County. So, to that extent, you might call Dean a mentor.

HM: One of the questions we ask is about camaraderie, and you talked about sharing a room with Kent Shelhamer.

RW: Right, right.

HM: What, what kind of other activities other than rooming with a person would produce, maybe, camaraderie or those things?

RW: Well, let me put it this way; shortly after we got here, we had a group of 10 or 12 so-called rural Legislators – now, I come from Williamsport. That’s not rural, but Lycoming County’s rural – from central Pennsylvania that would get together about an hour before the Democratic Caucus, and we would have our own Caucus, go over the calendar, discuss the issues we had a problem with, and, I think, as a result of that – we did this every Monday an hour before the Democratic Caucus – I think that we were better prepared to deal with the issues on the Floor, and we’ve thought about how we’re going to vote on those issues. I think we had to be better prepared than a lot of the folks were who maybe took their lead from just from the Leadership. So, that that was important. After the Session on a Monday or Tuesday night, three or four of us or five of us would have dinner together. I mean, we lived too far away to go home, so we had to go out and eat, and we’d talk about what happened, what we were going to do the next day, and that was relaxing and we got to be real good friends as a result of that social time together.

HM: Well, the first group you talked about, was that the Mushroom Club?

RW: Right. *(laugh)* I think one of the reporters named it that, but that was our handle.

HM: Yes, I think Mr. Shelhamer referred to that, and Mr. Pittenger [John C.; State Representative, Lancaster County, 1965-1966 and 1969-1970] referred to that, so that must be the group that you’re talking about. *(laugh)*

RW: *(laugh)* That’s the group I’m talking about.

HM: So, it prepared you and did you guys unite behind issues that were common to your areas then?

RW: To the extent that they were right for our area we did, because as a voting block, we could be much more effective. But, there were many times we did not vote together. I think it irritated the Leadership at times, but it did give us a little bit more wallop in voting on the Floor of the House.

HM: Well, you talked about being away from home. Did that present some problems for you?

RW: Well, I think, for me and everybody, especially if you had kids, because my wife reminds me every day, and then our kids grew up without a father. It wasn't that bad, but I was away half of each week when the Legislature was in Session, and she had to carry the whole ball, so that, that's a factor.

HM: You talked a little bit about the committees that you were assigned to. Did you have a favorite committee?

RW: I suppose I did, and that would be the Education Committee. On my second term, Herb appointed me to the Education Committee, and I became the Chairman of the Higher Education Subcommittee, dealing with the colleges, community colleges, state-related colleges, and private colleges that we did support, and there were a few like that.

And that, I worked hard at that assignment for the last four terms that I was down here, and that was my, definitely was my favorite assignment, no question about it.

HM: Did any particular legislation that was of interest to you come through the committee?

RW: Oh, yes, yeah, lots. The bills that I can think of would be the bill to unify and strengthen our state colleges – they were colleges then, not universities, except for maybe, maybe Indiana [University of Pennsylvania] – the so-called State College Bill to give them – before that, these schools had their own local boards of trustees, oftentimes recommended for appointment by the local county chairmen, and so they were somewhat political, and their finances were really controlled in Harrisburg, and we wanted to give these institutions the chance to grow. There had been a master plan of Pennsylvania developed, I think, even before I got here, and that master plan had recommended that we get these state universities autonomy and independence, so that they could grow as you would want a state institution to grow. They had been state normal and state teachers' colleges, but they were all branching out, and that's what we wanted. But at any rate, that bill had been held up in the Senate by Preston Davis [State Senator, 1963-1972] who was a Senator from just below me in Northumberland County. He was very much opposed to that concept, and we would pass the bill in the House, and he would hold it up and get it defeated in the Senate, wouldn't even get out in the Floor of the Senate. Finally, in 1967, I was the Floor Leader on that bill. We got it passed, and we got it through the Senate, so that was, in my mind, a major accomplishment. We also – and this was also part of this master plan for education – we also wanted to strengthen the

State Board of Education, and so that, that was my next assignment. And we got that bill passed, I think, in the [19]69-[19]70 Session, and the State Board of Education, which you're probably familiar with, coordinates the growth of the state universities, state colleges at that point, all the community colleges, I think they were even put with the state related colleges, and vocational schools. That was very important. We wanted the State Board to have more autonomy, and we were successful in that, and I was the Floor Manager in the House on both of those important bills, and maybe as a result of that, I got appointed to the – in those days, I don't think this is true anymore, it might be; In those days the House and Senate had representation on the PHEAA Board, Pennsylvania Higher [Education] Assistance Agency Board, so I was appointed to represent the Democratic House – and I don't know, [19]71 maybe – and then later, I was appointed as the Democratic House Representative on the State Board of Education, not as a Member, but as a delegate, as a listener, somebody with input, and then eventually, when my term was up in [19]74, I got appointed by Governor [Milton] Shapp [Pennsylvania Governor, 1971-1979] to the State Board of Education in [19]75, and a couple years later I got appointed Chairman of the Council of Higher Education. So, that was a very, very satisfactory bit of service. I won't tell you why I'm no longer a member of that unless you want to know.

HM: Of course I –

RW: Would you like to know?

HM: Of course I want to know.

RW: Well, in my fifth year, I think it was Governor [Richard] Thornburgh [Pennsylvania Governor, 1979-1987] had been elected Governor, and appointed a gentleman the Secretary of Education. I'm trying to remember where he was from. I can't remember accurately even his name, but he let it be known that up to that point the State Board had been totally nonpartisan; half Republican appointments, half Democratic appointments. He let it be known that henceforth, as terms expired, only Republicans were going to be elected, nominated, or appointed to the State Board of Education. I thought that was horrible. When my good friend from Millersville, who was really the hardest working member of the Council of Higher Education on our State Board that there was at that time, when his term came up, he was not reappointed. And I was so frustrated with that I sent the Governor my resignation. I said, "This is crazy. I don't want to serve in an organization that's going to be that political," and I don't know what the composition of the State Board is now. I'm sure it's fine and that's been corrected, but that terminated my service after five years on the State Board of Education.

HM: I had no idea. Well, I appreciate you talking about your experience with the, you know, field of education. I wanted to talk a little bit more about something you mentioned, the Clean Streams Acts?

RW: Right, right.

HM: Would you mind talking a little bit about the issues?

RW: Right, well, we had a Clean Streams Act of sorts in Pennsylvania. In 1965 there were important amendments to that, which I supported. I think John Laudadio [State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1963-1978] was the chief sponsor behind that, but I think I was a cosponsor of that, and, and we all worked hard to get that done. And the purpose of that was to prohibit the drainage of mine acid into our streams and rivers, and that was a big step forward. Of course, it takes a lot of work to dry up and neutralize that mine acid drainage, but that's being done across the state of Pennsylvania, and it's been effective. Babs Creek, north of where I live, ran orange from mine acid drainage. Not a fish or any aquatic life lived in it. You go by Babs Creek today, beautiful stream, full of trout. What a difference and it's not polluting the Susquehanna River anymore. That was the Clean Streams work. If you were going to name one bill, aside from those educational bills that I felt was the most important contribution I made, it would be the Susquehanna River Basin Compact.

HM: I was just going to ask you about that.

RW: That's something I really believed in, and that was a compact between New York state, Pennsylvania and Maryland. Susquehanna River Basin goes through all three states, primarily Pennsylvania, dumps into the Chesapeake Bay, which is so important, and New York and Maryland had passed it, and the bill got introduced into the Senate, and Dick Confair from Lycoming County, Senator Confair, was the man back there for that, and he got it through the Senate handily. Came over to the House, that was [19]67 – I'm not sure – [19]68, it came over to the House, Orville Snare [State Representative, Huntingdon County, 1957-1970] was Republican Chairman of the – probably was

Conservation and Clean Streams Committee, whatever it was, I can't remember; he reported it out. The GOP² Leadership was not in favor of this, for what reasons I don't know, but I know that the Farm Bureau was very much against it. Originally, the Grange was against it. They came around later and supported it enthusiastically. Second Class Townships were against it. A lot of people were against this because they felt that it was taking sovereignty away from Pennsylvania and sharing it with neighboring states and so forth, and so when that came out of Orville Snare's committee, Kenny Lee, the Speaker, recommitted that to the Appropriations Committee where I think he hoped to bury it. Al Bush [Alvin C.; State Representative, Lycoming County, 1961-1970 and 1983-1994], also from Lycoming County, was the Vice Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, so Al would be there to look after it. He was a very effective Legislator and part of the Republican Leadership, too. At any rate, hearings were held all through Susquehanna Basin, which is the central part of Pennsylvania, and a lot of enthusiasm, I think, for this bill was developed, and Herb Fineman asked me to be the Floor Leader on this bill in the House. And so, I appeared before the Appropriations Committee to lobby to get the bill out. There was not one vote for that bill in the Appropriations Committee. I mean, it was solid against this bill; that's how much work we had to do. As I said, popular support for this concept was building, and there had been other Compacts like this involving the Delaware River, and they were successful, and Pennsylvania sportsmen were all for this. They said part of the farm community was not, but some of the local governments weren't, but the Republican – as popular support for this bill, Republican strategy was, "Let's gut the bill," and they did that by reporting the bill out onto the House Floor with amendments that would make it impossible for the other states to go along, and maybe

² Grand Old Party, another name for the Republican Party.

even the Federal Government because they had to approve it too. Their amendments really gave Pennsylvania the veto power over this – anything that the Commission, Susquehanna Basin Commission, would decide to do. This would be totally unacceptable to the other states and probably the Feds, so that the fight, then, was to reverse those amendments that the GOP Leadership had put on in the Appropriations Committee, and so we worked at that, we fought hard, and we won that battle; we got those amendments stripped out and got the bill reverted to its former form, like in June of [19]68. And then, the big battle on the bill came up and finally came up in July 1968, and by that time, I think there was enough popular support for this bill that even my opponent Al Bush voted for the bill. It was like one 150 to 50, something like that. The bill passed by a lopsided margin, and that was really a thrill because that's something that's really going to help our part of the state, Susquehanna River Basin, you know, for years and years to come; and the Chesapeake Bay. As we pollute the bay, all that is lost.

HM: So, is it still in effect?

RW: Oh, yes. That's always going to be in effect. *(laugh)*

HM: Great. Okay. Well, Pennsylvania thanks you, then, for that hard work.

RW: Well, it was a lot more than me, but I had the privilege of being the guy on it, so I enjoyed that.

HM: Well, since you brought up the process of amendments, how do you feel about that? You know, the ability to either amend it, and – ?

RW: Oh, you got to have that. If the bill isn't right, you have to amend it and make it right, or if you want to kill a bill, you can try to amend it to death. I mean, there's pluses and minuses, but you have to have that ability.

HM: Okay.

RW: Almost every bill is amended in one way or another before it's finally goes to the Governor.

HM: Well, whenever you first started in Harrisburg, did you have a lot of issues that you felt wholeheartedly about, and do you think your issues changed by being here in Harrisburg?

RW: Oh, yeah. When I came down here, my principle issue was this clean stream concept; Clean up the Susquehanna River because that flowed right by Williamsport, and reforms to government, state government. That was a big thing in those days. It still is.

HM: I was going to say, "How ironic."

RW: But, I wanted to see some things passed like the Open Meeting Laws, ethics legislation. I worked hard on that, and I got – Herb appointed me Chairman of the first

Ethics Committee in the commission of the House of Representatives, so I was pleased about that. So, it did change because I got into education, and that was my prime responsibility for the rest of my time in the House after my second term.

HM: Well, I'd like to go back, I guess, for a second and talk about the reforms and, well, how do you feel about the reforms that are going on today?

RW: I'm all for it. I mean, absolutely. Open meetings are essential. Disclosure of interest legislation that we pass is essential. You can always make that better. We took the first steps along that line at least, and that, that sort of thing gives John Q. Public confidence that the backroom deals are going to be kept to a minimum, if you'll forgive the expression. Openness is so important, and I think – I've been impressed with this current Legislature. I just think they're doing a heck of a job. I was so thrilled with the appointment of Denny O'Brien [Dennis M.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1977-1980, 1983-present; Speaker, 2007-2008] because watching that guy work as Speaker in the House is really impressive. He's really doing the job, and he's obviously nonpartisan. He treats everybody the same, and everybody has their say no matter how long they go, and he's very effective.

HM: Well, what do you think the hardest issue you ever had to face as a legislator was?

RW: Well, I don't know. That's hard to say. We had a lot of them, but tax votes are always difficult. Nobody wants to vote for higher taxes. People on fixed income are always stuck with that kind of situation, and so nobody wants to vote for higher taxes.

Obviously, it costs money to run the state, so at times you have to do it. Governor Shapp had the idea of first a flat-rate income tax. That was finally passed. I think that was declared unconstitutional. It came back to the Legislature, and we finally passed a bill that was legal. I don't think I voted for that. I don't think I did, but I have visions of him calling me into his office and him and the Budget Secretary talking to me. It's a terrible thing to say, but he's gone now; what he could do for Williamsport if I'd vote for it.

(laugh) But I did not vote for it. But, tax votes are tough, and one of the tax votes that I did feel good about – Kent Shelhamer may have talked to you about it when you talked to him – in 1972, Governor Shapp had presented a budget with about an eight and half percent increase in it, I think, and Kent, my roommate, Kent Shelhamer, was the leader of the idea that, “that is too much of an increase. We've got to cut that budget,” and he was successful in doing that. We cut that budget to something like four and half percent, which had the effect of saving around 150 plus million dollars, and the Republicans voted solid with us, and 10 or 12 Democrats were willing to put their neck on the line and did the same thing, and we accomplished that cut, and then which, you know, Hurricane Agnes came along, and every penny was used up for flood relief. But in a way, that was good because we didn't have to borrow money to do the flood relief because we had that in the kitty.

HM: Well, you mentioned the budget. Well, how do you feel about the budget process?

RW: It's tough. I never got to a summer vacation with my family on time in all the time I was here. It finally got to the point – we used to go take the kids down to Cape May in New Jersey. It finally got to the time that the only time I would schedule a vacation

would be the week of Labor Day, the end of August, because I knew if I scheduled in July or early August, I wasn't going to be there, and it was typical in those days of going through into July and August and just – things haven't changed, have they? *(laugh)*

HM: Well, we're trying, I think. I wanted to ask you: what do you think the major changes were in the Legislature during your terms here?

RW: You mean facility wise?

HM: It could be whatever you think. The facilities, the building?

RW: Well, we talked about, mainly due to Herb's initiative, I think, how the great facility – better facilities were developed for all the Legislators. And not only great facilities and offices and staff if you needed them, but even the car allowance; I mean, I had to run down here from Williamsport at least once a week, sometimes two or three times a week, and that car allowance really, really helped. When I came down here, I think the salary was 6,000 dollars with a 3,000 dollar expense account. When I left, it was 15 [thousand], 6 [hundred]. Now, that's not a fortune by today's standards, but it was a good increase, and, of course, we know the salaries today are much more than that and they should be. These guys work hard.

HM: Now, you were a part-time Legislature.

RW: I was a part-time Legislator. I worked here Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, except for budget time when we were down the whole week. I would generally get back by Wednesday night. I'd be in my law office Thursday, Friday, and Saturday morning, and Monday morning. I wouldn't leave till noon. *(laugh)*

HM: *(laugh)* So you had two jobs, basically.

RW: I had two jobs, right.

HM: And no time for anything else.

RW: Right, right, right. Pretty much.

HM: Yeah, that would be tough, and you talked about the Ethics Committee being created, so that would be another major –

RW: That was something that I felt real good about. That was needed, and I felt great about that. That was, as I remember, equal number of Republicans and Democrats on the House Ethics Committee. It was strictly nonpartisan.

HM: Whenever you look back and you think about your experiences here in the House, do you have a favorite story that you'd like to share? This is the hardest question, I think, for people.

RW: I wish I could share some of the really funny stories that happened, but some of them I can't share, and some of them I can't remember anymore (*laugh*), but I can tell you there were some many, many humorous, humorous times. But I thought about that before I came down, and I couldn't come up with anything. I should have called some of my friends, but I didn't.

HM: So, the humor probably broke up some of the, the seriousness.

RW: It really did. The humor broke up some of the tension, some of the antagonism that developed on the Floor. An important part of it.

HM: Do you think the House was very partisan at the time you served?

RW: Yes, very, very partisan. There's no question about that. I like to think it's less partisan today. I think people on both sides are making an effort to make it less partisan today, because that's the way you get things done; you cooperate, both sides cooperate.

HM: Well, how would you like your service as a Representative to be remembered? I know.

RW: I doubt if they will be, so I don't know. I have no idea how to answer that question.

HM: Whenever you left the House, you became the Director of the Legislative Reference Bureau.

RW: Right. I did, I did.

HM: Can you tell me how that came into being?

RW: *(laugh)* Yes, I can.

HM: Okay.

RW: The Republicans were in control of the Legislature at that time, and Al Bush, who was my political opponent but still my good friend, came to me, and he said, “Look,” he said, “We would like to have you Director of the Legislative Reference Bureau if you would take the position, because we want to make sure that whatever we do up there, whatever our guys, or our women, are going to do up there, doesn’t get leaked back to the Democratic Leadership.” That had happened in the past, and so I thought – I had no intention of staying in Harrisburg, but I thought about it; number one, the challenge of it; number two, if I may say so, the salary, which was almost twice as much as I made as a Legislator, which would effect that positively on my pension when I would eventually get it. So, I decided to do that, but, of course, I had to dig up some support on – I had all the Republican support I wanted, but I had to dig up some support on the Democratic side, which wasn’t too easy because Herb Fineman had his own guy that he wanted to name, and I got 10 to 12 Democrats to vote for me, you know, so I got named.

HM: Well, isn't that – ?

RW: The Senate was not a problem, but the House was a little bit of a problem.

HM: Well, isn't that interesting? Now, so Mr. Fineman had already identified who he wanted?

RW: Oh, yeah. (*laugh*)

HM: And, and he was causing problems, huh?

RW: Well, he, he didn't want me. (*laugh*)

HM: Very interesting.

RW: We had always worked – I always liked Herb. Tremendous individual, effective Legislator, but I had given Herb problems, and he had his own guy that he wanted in there.

HM: Okay, well, very interesting, then. Can you talk a little bit about the responsibilities that goes into the position of Director?

RW: Yeah. The, the Director has a fine staff of drafting attorneys, research attorneys. A Senator or Representative has an idea for a bill, and they'll come up to our office up there, and will meet with one of the lawyers, and will spin his idea, and then that lawyer will – he may have the bill, which he drafted, or he got from another state, or he may have an idea, and whatever it is, he'll sit down with one of the attorneys up there, and they'll draft the legislation that's needed, and then, that Member will introduce it later on. We, also, as Director, had to render legal opinions to the House or the Senate, and thirdly, we had to draft resolutions; somebody's birthday, somebody's wedding anniversary, some important event in somebody's life back in their Representative or Senator's community. Congratulatory resolutions were an important part of the job, too, which we did all that there. So, that was pretty much five days a week. I mean, I was down here more when I was Director than when I was in the Legislature, for two years.

HM: Is the Code and Bulletin printed there as well?

RW: Yes, yes.

HM: Is that – that would be something – ?.

RW: Yep, yep.

HM: Okay, well, can you talk a little bit about what you've been up to since you left that position?

RW: Since I went back to Williamsport?

HM: Yes.

RW: Well, I went back to full-time law practice.

HM: Okay.

RW: And I engaged in full-time law practice. I was active in things in my community, of course, but I went back to full-time law practice until just last year, and I retired, closed my office and retired in the end of May of 2006, and so now I'm a gentleman of leisure.

HM: Very nice. *(laugh)*

RW: I've got time to tune in PCN [Pennsylvania Cable Network] and listen to the House and Senate if I want to.

HM: Well, very good.

RW: My wife says to me – I watched it a lot the last week – Peggy said to me, “You know, you ought to run for the Legislature. You're so interested in what's going on down there.” Little did she know I couldn't get 100 votes if I would run today. *(laugh)*

HM: Well, my last question for you would be; what would your advice be for new Members as they begin their careers?

RW: Well, far be it for me to give anybody any advice along those lines. I think we've got a really talented bunch of people up there in the Senate and House, but be your own man or woman. Represent your constituents as best you can back home because they're the ones that elect you. They're the ones that sent you down here. Voting the way somebody tells you to vote is not good, it's not helpful. And I think there was a lot of that going on when I first came down here in the Legislature. I think I've been so impressed – as I said, the last week or so I've been listening to this debate – I've been so impressed by the Legislators from Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. When I was here, that was not happening. That was absolutely not happening. They were told how to vote, and they voted that way, especially in Philadelphia. But that – I really – I hear those guys get up to the microphone, they have the facts, they know what they want to say, and they say it beautifully. And they may be, you know, they may be with the Governor, they may be against the Governor, and that's really a healthy situation; be your own man. You can't be too far out of step, (*laugh*) or, of course, you'll cut your throat. You understand what I mean? Because you have to go, if it's your Administration, you have to go the Administration if you need help on road projects or what have you, which I had to do, and I don't recall a time when the fact that I kicked over the traces was really held against me. But, if you get too far out of line, they're not going to help you at all, so there's got to be a happy medium there.

HM: Well, thank you very much for sharing that little bit of advice. They'll appreciate that.

RW: It's been my pleasure.

HM: And I appreciate you taking the time to come down and be here with me for this interview. It was great. Thank you.

RW: Thank you.