

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

**The Honorable Jeffrey H. Coleman (R)**

60<sup>th</sup> District

Armstrong & Indiana Counties

2001-2004

INTERVIEWED CONDUCTED BY: Simon J. Bronner, Ph.D.  
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Transcript: Heather Deppen Hillard

**Simon Bronner (SB):** Good morning Representative.

**The Honorable Jeffrey H. Coleman (JHC):** Good morning. Good to be with you.

**SB:** We're here to talk about your experiences in the House. You were elected in 2001, and a good way to start, I think, is to tell us what experiences in your childhood do you think prepared you for where you are today?

**JHC:** Well, I think a range of experiences prepared me for public service. At the time growing up as a young missionary's son – my Dad is a Pastor, my parents are Presbyterian missionaries – and traveling to places like Peru and Bolivia, Korea or Singapore on a summer and then for four years in the Philippines, really seemed like disjointed experiences. It didn't make a whole lot of sense at the time in terms of preparing me for a career in anything. I remember leaving the Philippines and coming back to the United States as a 12 year old and thinking, "How do all these things work, in terms of seeking a career?" But I found out that serving people in third-world countries or working in places like Apollo, Pennsylvania, they do fit because there's a human experience. There's need everywhere and by not growing up in a community from birth to the point of me running really helped me take, kind-of, a fresh look and approach at the problems that the places that I represented faced; unique ones.

**SB:** How about your education? How did you choose where you went and what you were going to study as preparation for your public service?

**JHC:** I probably chose my Alma Matter now, Liberty University, because of a recruitment video. George Bush, Sr. was the commencement speaker at Liberty University in the [19]90s and Liberty had always been, kind-of, a front-line school in terms of political activism for people of faith. It seemed like an exciting, dynamic place. A place that I could fine-tune and hone my skills, but a school that also gave me the freedom to do things like campaign and was close enough that I could drive back on the weekends and campaign in Pennsylvania for people that I believed in. From there, I was able to build, kind-of, a nucleus of the team that eventually helped me knock on doors – 10,000 of them – and put together the grassroots shoestring campaign that, eventually, became successful. So, school was, in many ways – I would never consider myself an academic and would never tell you that my favorite hours were those spent in the classroom. Most of them were the ones spent building relationships in the cafeteria and asking friends to come back with me to Pennsylvania on a weekend trip to campaign.

**SB:** How was it that you decided to run?

**JHC:** Well, I had always – really since leaving the Philippines, I left there with a sense that public service is “where it’s at.” That [politics] – the rough-and-tumble of it, the debate, the campaign, the thrill of it – that was probably the initial attraction. And, I also grew up in a family that had a very clear sense of direction on what was wrong with the country, what was wrong from a public policy standpoint; that as people of faith, as a Christian, I didn’t really have the luxury of being able to sit on the sidelines while other people made those decisions. I grew up, kind-of, at the end of the Women’s Rights

Movement and the time when Roe vs. Wade was becoming national policy and a majority of people had accepted that, living in an environment that was post the school prayer ban and really, changes culturally in America. That's really a time that I grew up, in the [19]80s, when people of faith were called to a new activism. The last time that Christians in large measure had become involved in the political discussion and had an impact was in the 1960s with the great Civil Rights Movement. This was, for me, kind-of, a new Civil Rights Movement, and I wanted something to be a part of. So politics, for me, was, kind-of, a natural. It was the only place where I saw that I could take ideas and make them happen, stop things from happening and make other things happen that were good for, I thought, for our communities.

**SB:** When you entered into your first campaign, was this a matter of intense debate, some of these issues that you mentioned?

**JHC:** Well, they weren't debatable from the standpoint that my constituents agreed, and in large measure, with all of the positions that I took. They were largely pro-life, they largely stood on the side of lower taxes, or when you asked them about limited government, "Should government be smaller or bigger?" Really, because of their experiences with the Legislature; because they knew about midnight pay increases; they knew about taxpayer-funded stadiums that they voted against and they didn't want to pay for [it]; they knew of the perks that come with this office, the free car leases, the abuse of the system that really drives cynicism up and voter participation down.

So, when I was talking about my core values, my beliefs, going door-to-door and sitting around a kitchen table or talking at the Township Barn, these ideas weren't foreign but this is probably the first time in that district that someone was willing to speak candidly about it and say, "As a Politician, I am the problem if I am not the solution, and if you give me the opportunity to serve, I'm going to do something about it, both in the way I personally conduct myself, the votes that I make." I took some hard pledges at the beginning so that I would be accountable to those voters. The one thing that I said over and over again in door-to-door visits was, "If I don't do the job I've committed to in the first two years, then send me home. I don't deserve to go back for another term."

**SB:** Did you have a special strategy of going door-to-door? Was this part of your campaign?

**JHC:** Absolutely. Technology now allows challenger candidates, really on a very limited budget, and ours was a limited budget. You know, a race in Pennsylvania for a challenger, if you don't have 150 or 250,000 dollars, you might as well stay at home. Well, I had none of those things. I didn't have name ID. I was zero in the polls, if there was a poll taken. I didn't grow up in that community, so people really didn't know. I didn't come from a prominent family, but technology allowed me to reach voters that voted. Technology now allows you to target on a street not only who's registered to vote, but what their voter profile and history was. So, you, kind-of, have a sense when you're walking up the stairs to that home, beginning before you knock, both if they are a Republican or Democrat, but if they are a die-hard and you're able to target your message

to your base and then talk about broader issues if you think it's someone that might need a little more convincing. Voters like to tell you what they stand for and, in my case, the wonderful thing was that on most times and in most visits, the voters agreed with me and I agreed with them.

**SB:** When you came to the House in Harrisburg, was there any thing that surprised you?

**JHC:** Well, I think every freshman Member – every first-term Member – is just taken back at the sheer grandeur of the building; it's the People's Palace. I came at a point and time in the House that it had just gone through this magnificent renovation. Things were sparkling; there was no tobacco stains on the walls and in the carpet. Everything was fresh and new. The 83 year-old mahogany desks on the floor were polished. It really is overwhelming, and I remember the first day that they sat our freshman class down in the chamber during orientation – introducing us to all the bells and whistles of the building and telling us where to get coffee – I looked up and saw my name on the board. That was a huge moment for me. You are overwhelmed; but I also think that can be a double edge because that overwhelming nature – that sense of the building – can also intimidate you from doing the right thing. My sense is that we're all equal – all of us – from the Speaker of the House on down. We represent the same salary, most of us. We represent the same number of people. We have the same responsibilities and duties. We have an equal vote. So, for me as a first term Member, to challenge the system, that was a surprise to some but it was something that I had determined early that I was going to do and not be intimidated or warned off by the process.

**SB:** As you were adjusting to the House, did you have some mentors that helped you?

**JHC:** I sure did and many of them in my freshman class. Primarily, because these were people that had a little more life experience on me. People like Dick Stevenson [Richard; State Representative, Butler and Mercer Counties, 2001-present] from Mercer County, down the hall, who represents Mercer and Butler County. People like Kelly Lewis [State Representative, Monroe and Pike Counties, 2001-2004] from the Pocono's, who was the only other member of the 2000 Class to have defeated an incumbent. People like Scott Hutchinson [State Representative, Butler and Venango Counties, 1993-present], who was here a few years before me. What a great, quiet leader. People like Paul Clymer [State Representative, Bucks County, 1981-present], who really I've accepted as a mentor from afar because he, kind-of, represents the ideal politician; someone who is not wedded to what leadership wants or what the interest group wants, but really what his core values and convictions are. So, I've had a lot of mentors, and the wonderful thing about the House, coming in as a 25 year-old, is there's a curiosity from the older members about how you got here and "what's your story." But then it gives me a time over the course of my four years here to ask them questions. People like John Barley [State Representative, Lancaster County, 1985-2002] and others that were willing to talk and share from experience. I've learned a lot. I've learned a tremendous amount from men and women who serve in the House.

**SB:** Can you reflect on what you learned from these members?

**JHC:** Well, in many ways they were so frank and candid about their mistakes in life and the mistakes that they've made as politicians – public figures. The one thing that I've learned over the course of four years is that you don't get a second chance to be a husband and you don't get a second chance to be a father. You don't get a second chance to do marriage right, and that if you are going to choose this job as the pre-eminent force in your life you're going to have a trade off. For many of the members of the House the sad undercurrent in the story is the disintegration of their own families. And here we are, Republicans and Democrats, talking about family values, and how to strengthen family, how to get more money in people's paychecks, how to make sure marriages stay together. But at the same time, the pressure of the chicken dinner circuit, and of performing in public as a Lawmaker, presenting the perfect image as a family unit, the perfect picture that you put on the direct-mail piece – that pressure often overwhelms people. I was so fortunate to have people that, kind-of, took me aside and said, "Look, what matters most in life?" I decided, kind-of, halfway into this process that it was my wife, my relationship with God [and] my family. Those are priorities now that I can go into, maybe, a future stop in public life and really say, "Look, I've got my priorities in check, and we can do this without burning the candle at both ends." Those are the kinds of lessons, I think, that were the most valuable to me.

**SB:** Was there also pressure of having a home district that was further from Harrisburg and the Capitol than some of the other Representatives?



**JHC:** Sure. I mean, if you represent Downtown Harrisburg and have the luxury of taking the cab in, or a 15 minute ride in the car, it's a lot different than a three and half hour trip or, for some colleagues, a five hour trip from Erie or Scranton or some other distant point to the Capitol. For me, spending half the time at home and half the time here wasn't natural. I've gotten married one year into my term of office. That's a decision that I think a lot of young people need to make early on is, "How are you going to manage your family life? Do you want to take that trip back-and-forth?" It is wearing. That's why I think it's so important to put a time limit – a term limit, to use the term of the day – on yourself so that you know what your limits are and your family knows what to expect. But, I also think that it's taught me, those distances, have given me a lot of time to think, to reflect, to pray, to converse with my constituents. The cell phone is wonderful. So those were working trips and working times back and forth. Solo trips aren't fun. I know today, my wife and I incorporate most of our travel together, which has made just a tremendous difference and it's much more enjoyable.

**SB:** When you talk about term limits as a personal reflection, now do you also advocate that as a matter of policy?

**JHC:** No, because I think the best term limit is the ballot box and I proved, and many of us who defeated incumbents, people that said, "This is our office, it belongs to us." The incumbent that I defeated was a good man; he served 11 and half years, but I thought was out of touch. So, I had to make the case on that shoestring budget that I was the better person; that I had a better vision, a contrast. But, it was a temporary trust that is

conferred. As long as we as Lawmakers don't ever think that this job belongs to us – or Politicians in general – then we do okay. It's when we begin to think, This is our system and we need to protect our club to make sure that people get re-elected at a 97 or 98 or 99 percent rate every year, that's when the system begins to break down because self-interest will eventually take over. So, I don't believe constitutionally it's a good policy to limit the voter's ability to extend a term of someone they think is valuable. Let them be the judge of whether or not it's time to go. But I also think as a candidate, for their own sake – for the sake of their careers and maintaining the skill set that they maybe had before they went into the House – say, “I'm going to do this for three or four terms. I'm going to give my best effort to the Commonwealth and then it's time to return the seat to the people, somebody else.”

**SB:** Reflecting on your service, what do you consider your major accomplishments?

**JHC:** Maybe one of the major accomplishments that I hope we've achieved, I think we've done it to some degree of success, is reconnecting people with the political process. When I mean people, I mean citizens of all ages – middle school, high school, college age, senior citizens – back into the process. This is a mystery; people have no idea what goes on in this building and frankly, they have busy lives. They are running stores. They're taking care of a sick relative. What they see is a snapshot, three or four times a year, of what happened in a midnight vote, what happened at four in the morning; something that they would never have voted for with their common sense; something they don't understand. So, they usually have looked at this process with disgust. I said

for my own District, which is what I was responsible for; we were going to try to do things differently. That meant an aggressive office schedule. We had real office hours – nine to five – just like working people. We didn't have curtains on our storefronts so people could see what we did in there. We had open offices, so that our staff wasn't behind a cubicle or wasn't hiding away from view. There wasn't smoke coming out of some back room in an empty office when constituents were to be served. We did something called "Eggs and Issues Breakfasts," Saturday mornings at the Township Barn or the Fire Hall. We would get 150 people on a Saturday morning. Why? Because they knew that if they came to this forum we weren't going to waste their time. I was going to give them an unvarnished view of the pressures I was experiencing, so they could support me, and the decisions I had to make, and why I made past decisions. They always didn't agree with the decisions that I made; in fact, on more controversial issues sometimes the majority of my district felt a different way. But I felt it was a responsibility of mine to put myself, kind-of, on the griddle. Let them ask the tough questions at a Breakfast and then say, "Be on your way, have a great weekend." So, it was those types of things, in addition to some other outreach programs, that I'm most proud of because people in my district, Armstrong and Indiana Counties, the 60<sup>th</sup> district, now have an accurate view of what it means to be a Legislator; what the person that follows me is going to expect, in terms of pressures, demands, outside influences. For people that pray for their lawmakers and that – President Bush talks about it all the time, the power of people praying for him in that office – how do you know what to pray for? Do you just say, "Bless the Legislator," or do you pray for safety, for protection, for family needs? Politicians are real people and this job can be awfully stressful. So, by letting people know where

you're at, it helps decrease that cynicism and then helps them access a system that had really, before, been bolted shut by people that just wanted to protect self-interest.

**SB:** You were quoted in regard to this issue, "What it means to be a Legislator," of saying that you thought in your time you had "raised the bar of public debate" and had also "raised the expectation of what it means to be a Member" of the House. Could you explain that?

**JHC:** Well, for me, "raising the bar" was simply changing the way that a politician – a public servant – communicated with the constituents. I didn't work from a handbook, and there are a lot of handbooks which include your talking points of the day, your message of the day, your sound bite of the day, what the Caucus wants to project – Republican or Democrat, we all do it – and it presents this, this, kind-of, monotone, dry, dull, drumming sensation out into the public. And people hear, "Oh, there's a politician, he's just talking again," and it goes on and on and on and on – on TV, on radio – and that's why they don't trust the politicians. What I said by, "raising the bar," was that I thought we could be honest. That you can trust the public to say, "You know what? I've been under enormous pressure to vote for this or for that and I am being beat up by my leadership. And that means that I may lose a staffer or that may mean that I may lose some benefit that I've been offered. Or you may not get money in the form of a grant for a local park, because I voted one way or the other." Now, if that money just didn't come to the district, they would think I was just sitting on my hands, not being an effective legislator. But if I told them the process, which is pretty tough sometimes to explain –

and it's a long, selling process – I think that kind of honesty and openness and transparency is “raising the bar.” And a lot of people are doing it. I'm not going to pretend that I'm the only one who is speaking candidly about the process; more and more are.

**SB:** Do you feel that you had conflict with your leadership and your Party?

**JHC:** Well, conflict in the sense that I hope we have always had, I believe, from the Speaker on down, a very polite – cordial friendship – relationship. Matt Ryan [Matthew J.; State Representative, Delaware County, 1963-2003; Speaker, 1981-1982 and 1995-2003] the Speaker who preceded the current Speaker, John Perzel [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1978-present; Speaker, 2003-2006], was very kind to me. [He] understood that when I made a decision it was out of a belief system, so he really didn't try to muscle me in one way or the other. John Perzel, I think, knows where I'm coming from as well. I think it's important to be very honest and open with your leadership. Let them know what you will and won't do. Let them know that in a host of other things – if the leadership plans on cutting taxes, on reducing the size of government, on protecting traditional marriage, on strengthening families by family affirming policies of reforming education – there are plenty of areas where I want to be an innovator and a helping hand. So, there are plenty of ways to work together. It's tough though, sometimes, to work together, when a deal has been cut in a close-door; in a setting that rank-and-file Members aren't particularly welcome, or participating in that negotiation process. It's a reality of the system; but the only way that system changes is by rank-and-file Members

saying, “We can count, too.” We know that if 30 or 40 or 50 votes walk off the proverbial Reservation – and don’t give them the votes for a tax increase – you can’t buy enough votes on the other side of the aisle to pass that bad piece of legislation.

**SB:** Wondering if I could ask you to speak a little more directly to this tax increase, because that did get some publicity and you were quoted as saying that there were “retributions for bucking the leadership,” and [you] also said this was “a difficult time for you.” Could you describe that?

**JHC:** Well, the retributions in Harrisburg have changed a great deal over the past 20 years, prior to my coming to Harrisburg. There used to be a day when if you voted against your leadership your desk was in the hallway, the doors were changed, the locks were changed, your secretary was looking for another job. That does not happen as often, although there is a member of the House who doesn’t have a staff because she voted the wrong way according to the view of her leadership. But, what I was talking about, really, is that the incentive structure changes. If you are viewed as being principled or independent or doing what your constituents, in essence, want you to do; that means that you could have a reduction in staff – and that was made clear to me that I had been given a number of staffers early on to help transition, to set up offices – that some of those could be losing their jobs. So, then it doesn’t become about the tax increase, it becomes about the people that you care about, that are depending on you to support their families, their livelihood, to pay off school loans, to take care of putting food on their tables. So, that’s when it becomes almost a gray area. But then you have to go back and say, “If I

begin to not do the right thing and change my principals to accommodate on this vote, there will be another vote to come.” That first vote that you make – and for me it was the tax increase vote – the first major test of what you campaigned on, is the most difficult. And once you have made that decision, I think its smooth sailing from then on because they know there is no longer a pressure point that works with you. [There is] no longer a threat that if leadership offers you two million dollars for a bridge project in your district or 100,000 dollars to put up a new park for some kids, that isn’t a price high enough to raise taxes on those same families that’ll be paying the price and the consequences for your bad decision and your bad action.

**SB:** How about legislation that you sponsored? Are there examples that you are particularly proud of, or had a particular experience in getting through?

**JHC:** I sponsored some bills, usually I, kind-of, viewed myself as a team player when it came to legislation. Most recently, the Commonwealth Caucus Plan, a group of pro-growth conservatives – Republicans and Democrats – that are looking for a solution to the school property tax issues. [I’m] very proud of a plan which, essentially, would eliminate school property taxes and shift it to a consumption based system. I think it is much easier as a rank and file Member to sign on to pieces of legislation that are moving, or to work with others to find out, “Who is the best ball carrier on this issue? Who has the credibility?” I tried to stay in areas where I thought I could be helpful and I was, more often than not, an advocate on someone else’s bill, or someone that was asked to

speaking out against legislation that I thought would be contrary to the best interests of my constituents.

**SB:** Was there legislation or issues that were particularly frustrating for you that were not successful?

**JHC:** The most frustrating days in the House are the days that you walk off the Floor – and it could be three in the morning, four or five in the morning – and you have to hop in your car and go three and half hours back to your district. I remember Thanksgiving Day a couple of years ago and the debate had rolled on at a controversial issue – gambling – into the middle of the night. It passed the House and all of us on the opposing side of the gambling issue really thought, “Hey, we made the arguments. We won the day on debate.” But, we knew that deals had been made behind closed doors and that votes were traded and bought; and that the dynamic had shifted from one that we were winning on the merits, to one where we could no longer argue on the merits. So, you leave the chamber thinking, “This system doesn’t work. This is absolutely a broken system.” You walk by the room – the anteroom – full of lobbyists, and they’re gleaming and they’re lighting up cigars. The champagne corks are popping in the Governor’s office because they have won another debate over ordinary, common sense people that don’t have the ability to write a 100,000 dollar check to access the system. So, those are the days that are most frustrating; whether it’s a tax increase or a massive expansion of organized gambling; whether it is a limit on personal freedom for a Pennsylvania citizen or sneaking a fee-increase and calling it a revenue enhancer; those are the things that make



you really cynical. And the hardest thing about it is that because the newspapers often carry a wire story – the Associated Press version – and don't really focus on how you opposed one initiative over the other. You are painted and tainted with the same poison that, really, is not deserving. You are viewed as someone who is supporting a system that didn't speak up for the people that needed to be represented.

**SB:** Maybe this is an opportunity to talk a little more then about the role of lobbyists and influence. How did you deal with them and were there some other issues which this became particularly intense?

**JHC:** The lobbyists, I think, play a very important role in terms of educating members. They are the experts for their Industry, so I don't say that an entire Industry of people should be branded in a negative way. Most lobbyists are professional; they are courteous. But also, the same thing with your relationship as a Member with House Leadership, your relationship with lobbyists has to be clearly defined. You cannot put up a sign on your door that essentially says, "For 10,000 dollars I will vote yes or no. For 5,000 dollars I'll do this." There is a sense in the House that you come here with a price tag; that there's a certain amount as a threshold where your convictions, kind-of, turn to butter and your spine turns to dust and you become something other than the hard-charging liberal or conservative or moderate that you ran on. And, I think that is a problem. It's not the fault of the lobbyist; it's essentially the fault of a system. There's no quick answer on how you change the system, other than the fact that the public needs to be aware of – and needs to pay close attention to – who's giving money, what the positions were that

changed because of the influence of money, full disclosure, instant disclosure [and] the Internet. I hope all those things will help change the role of lobbyists in Pennsylvania.

**SB:** How about the media's role in the process?

**JHC:** I've had a very good relationship with, not only the Harrisburg press core, but [also] the press core in Southwestern Pennsylvania, where I'm from. I've always found that if you return a phone call to a reporter within his deadline requirements that he's not only going to be fair to you, but he'll also tend to let you know what the aim – the goal, the focus – of the story is. I'm helping the reporter do his or her job in giving a sound bite that reflects one view that they are trying to have represented in the story. But it also builds a trust relationship and a certain credibility that says, "We're going to give Jeff Coleman – or any other Lawmaker – a fair shake." I've found the press to be very fair, most of the time, if not all the time, getting the story right. If I did not communicate effectively in a phone interview, I talked too long, if I didn't have my points pre-ready – and I made sure, usually that before I called a reporter back I knew the gist of the story, I could do a little research and have some time to reflect on what I wanted to say, and kind-of speak in measured balanced tones – if I didn't do that, it's really my fault and usually not the reporters. These guys are professionals and usually are not out to get you.

**SB:** Well, this is a point, speaking of media, where I'd like to show you some photos from your service and ask you for the stories behind these images that are occurring. The

first one shows a Swearing-In Ceremony. Could you reflect on your experiences there, and whom you are with?

**JHC:** Swearing-In Day, 2001, for me was an exciting day on a number of fronts. First, when you walk into the hall it's a different chamber than you would normally walk into, either as a visitor or as a legislator, in every day legislative session or work. It's filled with flowers that either smells like a wedding or a funeral, depending on what angle you're coming from. But, it's a beautiful chamber on Swearing-In Day. It is the only time when family members fill the area behind the brass rail and you're given a certain number of tickets, which allow people that are close to you to share in that moment. Now, if you happen to come in on a Special Election, then you can have the whole balcony to yourself and the floor. But in this case, everyone is Sworn-In at the same time by the Speaker of the House. We are each given a choice of a Bible and most members, if not all members, choose a Bible with which they take their oath on. John Pippy [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1997-2003; State Senator, 2003-present], who is in that picture and sitting to my right, was a wonderful early mentor for me because he came in in his twenties, and [he's] sitting there with his daughter. He's now graduated onto the State Senate and has made a distinguished career in the Military. And the person to my left is now a Judge; Judge Wogan [Christopher R.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1981-2002] in Philadelphia. So, I was pretty honored to be in that little group, second row from the back, seated with mostly people from Allegheny County and a few from Philadelphia. Directly behind that brass rail [is] my then-girlfriend and the woman who is now my wife, Rebecca. That was the day that I proposed to her. I had the Chief

Page [deliver] a written proposal that morning. It, kind-of, got me out of having to go down on one knee; something that I probably dreaded. But, a written proposal and a ring delivered right after I took the oath. So, I kind-of took two oaths on the same day and both really made for a very memorable Swearing-In Day.

**SB:** We're going to look at another picture from your re-election. It was also the Swearing-In [Ceremony]. Now you're an experienced legislator and I wonder if you can speak about the feelings then?

**JHC:** Well, the great feeling about the seat that I had, as I moved from the second to the last row to the second row from the front, was that you can see and hear the debate better – I'm just a few feet from the Democratic leader's podium and a few more feet from the Republican leaders podium, so you make eye contact – you really get a sense, a very different sense, at the front than you do from the back. Both are great perspectives, but when Republicans took more seats, they needed volunteers to sit on the Democratic side, so the colleague who is being Sworn-In next to me, Tom Creighton [Thomas; State Representative, Lancaster County, 2001-present] from Lancaster, he and I both volunteered for service to sit on the Democratic side. We got an aisle phone [and] close seating, so having a seat at the end is pretty coveted in the House. So that day was, perhaps, a little bit different in the sense that I knew what to expect and I had a track record then with my constituents and my thoughts probably are shifting more towards, "How many more terms?" "How much longer?" "Do I need to do this?" "Do I want to do this?" And, "What else to I have to contribute to the causes I believe in?"

**SB:** You've been quoted as saying that you're proud of your Filipino identity and this next photograph shows you receiving an award. I wonder if you could speak about that and the meaning of that identity to you?

**JHC:** One of the great privileges I had over the course of four years in office is being, kind-of, an Ambassador for Filipino-Americans across the United States. It's a fast growing immigrant population; over two, almost three million estimated Filipino-Americans living within the borders of the United States. Filipinos enjoy a special relationship with the U.S., not only because the Philippines is a territory, but there has always been a fraternal, and in some ways paternal, relationship between [the Philippines] and the United States, always looking out for the strategic outpost in Asia. Having the privilege of having a mother from the Philippines, and then going back for four years as a missionary, and then traveling back at the invitation of the Philippine President, that's a relationship that I really didn't expect to develop over the course of the four years in the way that it did. And, once the community found out that they had a Filipino-American elected to a State Legislature, and that he was a Republican and they knew that the President was a Republican, Rebecca and I spent a lot of weekends traveling to New York and LA, cities [like] Chicago – [all] around the country – speaking to Filipino-American groups. My message wasn't really any different. It was that Filipino-Americans as stewards, as new American citizens, stewards of the legacy that they've sworn an oath to, should bring, not abandon, but bring the value system that is intrinsic almost to their heritage; their faith [and] their commitment to their family.

Divorce rates are almost non-existent [as] there's no legal divorce in the Philippines.

You have stronger families [and] respect for your elders. Those are things, the message I always took, that Filipino-Americans – beyond just being prominent, successful doctors or lawyers or engineers, which many of them are – can be great Dads, great Moms, great role models [and] mentors for an American family that in so many ways is crumbling and falling apart.

**SB:** You were also invited to the White House, and we have a photograph of that, for a State Dinner. Could you tell us the story here and what that experience entailed?

**JHC:** Well, it was a wonderful experience. Rebecca and I were so surprised and honored to get the invitation. We still don't know how we made the list. When we arrived at the White House, after going through all the security checks and the bomb-sniffing dogs, you're one of 130 people that are invited to a State Dinner. President [George W.] Bush, at that point, had only hosted three. The President isn't a formal man [and he] doesn't like to put the tux on, but he did because the Philippines enjoy this special relationship. So, we walked into the East Room of the White House, before going in for that picture, and then going into the State Dining Room and we were shoulder to shoulder with Supreme Court Justices and the Vice President [Dick Cheney] and most of the members of the President's Cabinet and authors. It was just a fascinating evening and we really felt so privileged and overjoyed to be in the same room and the same company as all these distinguished Americans. The White House really is the finest in every sense and when we roll out the red carpet for a Head of State, it is the best of our music, of our

culture, of our sensibilities. They split you up – that was probably the surprise of the evening – Rebecca sat at the Vice President’s table. They had great conversation and she sat next to Sandra Day O’Conner’s husband [John O’Connor]. And my table, right behind her, was with Chief of Staff, Andy Card, and some Philippine Dignitaries and Janet Ashcroft. On to my left was Janet Ashcroft and on to my right was Meredith Brokaw; two people from very different backgrounds – one from the Upper East-Side, one from Missouri – and really representative of the cultural divide in, many ways, in America. So, it was a fascinating evening and one that we will always cherish and remember.

**SB:** The next shot shows you at the Pennsylvania Farm Show. I was curious if you would explain what your role is there?

**JHC:** I really wasn’t aware of the magnitude – the scope of the Farm Show – [and] how many of my constituents participated and were blue ribbon winners at many of those contests. But here, I’m interviewing some folks about Agriculture Policy and we did a legislative show on a monthly called the, “Jeff Coleman Action Report” on a monthly basis, where we went out and tried to highlight and profile some of the good things that are happening in Pennsylvania. It’s easy to be critical of Government and government policies because there [are] so many obvious flaws. But there are also so many good things, and agriculture in my district – Armstrong and Indiana Counties – and across Pennsylvania, really, is the crown jewel and shining achievement of a generation past

that's being maintained today and it's exciting to be able to highlight farms and what people do on those farms.

**SB:** You also served on the Agriculture Committee. Was there special work there that you were proud of?

**JHC:** Well, the Ag[riculture] Committee was a great learning experience for me. My father's side of the family has an agricultural history, but it was something I didn't know a whole lot about. So, I enjoyed spending an afternoon on a dairy farm and learning about the Twenty First Century technology that is brought to bear on that industry and learning about the new ways that farmers are producing hay for ethanol. It was really just a fascinating time. No real specific area of expertise that I brought, but [what] I took away was some wonderful memories and experiences from Pennsylvania Agriculture.

**SB:** There's also a shot of you singing.

**JHC:** *(laugh)*

**SB:** I hope that can describe the event as well as your skill.

**JHC:** Well, I, occasionally, have enjoyed the opportunity of singing before an audience. I have led church worship in music at my father's church growing up. That shot actually came from the Pennsylvania Prayer Breakfast and the Chairman that year, Representative



Tom Creighton, asked me to close with “God Bless America,” and with the help of all in the audience, we pulled it off and hit the notes. But, it’s not anything that I think will be a (*laugh*), career shift or change. But, it’s fun to sing and those trips back-and-forth to Armstrong County; anybody who was passing me on the Turnpike saw the singing Jeff Coleman if he wasn’t on the phone.

**SB:** You mentioned your concern for faith in public life, and we do have a picture of a campaign that you led called, “A Friend For Life.” I wonder if you could describe that and the background and the reception for it?

**JHC:** I think one of the things that is so disappointing about the role that faith and people of faith play in public life, is so often the discourses hardened to one position or the other and there’s no middle ground our dialogue and nobody is really seeking to change hearts and minds. We often, as conservatives, simply state fact, and say, “This is what we believe to be the fact, both from the standpoint of logic, from our faith, from our convictions, from history, from past precedent and we want the rest of America to accept that position.” I don’t think you can do that. I think there’d have to be some commonalities, some sensibilities that people on the left and the right and of all stripes politically should be able to come and accept. The “Friend For Life” was an effort to channel money – to channel funding – from a license plate, to crisis pregnancy centers in Pennsylvania. I think everyone can agree that the abortion rate in Pennsylvania has historically been too high. There needs to be, what the President calls, “a new culture of life,” where all life – from the folks in the nursing home to the unborn, and now we have

got the sonogram technology with 3-D images of the baby inside the womb – should be respected and welcomed and protected into life. But, we can't continue to rehash the old debates in the same way. So, the effort from the license plate – which did get passed by the House and, I believe, stalled in the Senate – was to provide a new stream of revenue on a voluntary basis, based on the old Pennsylvania slogan from the [Richard] Thornburgh [Pennsylvania Governor, 1979-1986] Administration, "You've Got A Friend In Pennsylvania," to say, "Look, we're a friend for life. We support and affirm life," and a portion of every license plate sale would go to prevent, and actually to affirm and welcome more children into Pennsylvania into loving homes.

**SB:** Another campaign that you had was with the name, "Tax Me More."

**JHC:** Right.

**SB:** I wonder if you could explain that, and we have a photograph of you speaking on that campaign.

**JHC:** Well, I think that political debate often gets a little dry and, as I mentioned earlier, it's tough to get a message out in an age of slogans and bumper stickers and I thought, "How do we get people to not simply accept the premise that there will be a tax increase?" It's inevitable; the skids are greased, the deal's been cut, there's nothing that we can do about it. That's typically the response of the public when it comes to a tax increase. What I was trying to do with the "Tax Me More" campaign, is essentially say

to Pennsylvanian's, "Well, let's create, if the Governor would agree, a voluntary fund, by which you could send in a dollar or two dollars or 1,000 dollars in a voluntary tax contribution if the legislature makes the case that this is an important enough program, you should see money flowing into that revenue screen." The bottom line is – what I was trying to illustrate there, hopefully to some degree of success – is that the public was not ready for another tax increase. That when they're working from January 1<sup>st</sup> to June 1<sup>st</sup>, simply to pay for the cost of State, Federal and Local government, there is a problem, and it is not on the part of being under-taxed. It is on the part of legislators, both in Harrisburg and Washington, making spending decisions that we cannot pay for.

**SB:** Speaking of spending decisions, you are shown in one provocative shot with a dollar bill on the podium –

**JHC:** (*laugh*) Right.

**SB:** – of the floor. Can you explain what this gesture was about?

**JHC:** Well, that day interestingly enough, we were going into another series of conversations, debates – pretty raucous ones – on the issue of gambling. And outside of the Pennsylvania House, the lobbyists, paid lobbyists, for the gambling Industry were handing out dollar bills and saying, "We're losing all this money to other states and people are going across the borders." I took one of the dollar bills and brought it back onto the floor and said, "I'd encourage anyone to take that dollar bill and invest it into the

local Rescue Mission, which would essentially be dealing with the increased effects of addiction, bankruptcy [and] crime.” All statistically proven empirical data that would say that if you were to expand to the degree that they wanted to – organized gambling in Pennsylvania – you would have consequences. Every Legislative decision has consequences, good or bad. Let’s not pretend gambling doesn’t have them. And this dollar bill would go to better use at the Rescue Mission that would be, essentially, cleaning up the mess that we create by legalizing 67,000 slot machines in Pennsylvania.

**SB:** An historic event during your term was the tragedy on September 11<sup>th</sup> [2001]. Can you describe where you were and what your role was during that time?

**JHC:** It was a surreal day and everyone in the House remembers where they were. I was at a Committee Hearing in the Philadelphia area on school property taxes. It was a surreal event because we were getting these little slips of paper, kind-of updates by the minute, on what was happening. And it really, based on what those slips of paper were saying, felt like an invasion. It felt like America was being invaded. Finally, at some point in the Committee Hearing, I remember the Chairman gaveling us out saying, “We’ve been attacked and we’re going to suspend the balance of the Committee Hearing.” But, it was a devastating day. Because I was traveling alone and was not with my family, it felt even more distant because I was in Philadelphia and the people that I loved and cared about were half a State away.

**SB:** You're also shown speaking at a Ronald Reagan Memorial Service. I wonder if you can describe whether he was a model and how you came to speak at that event?

**JHC:** President Reagan is someone that is an ideological hero for some. For me and for many others, we believe in what Ronald Reagan stood for. But it was really the way in which he stood for things he believed in, with great grace, with dignity [and] with compassion. I think the test of a political leader is not really what he says or does publicly, but how he comports himself privately. How does he treat his wife? How does he treat staff? How does he interact with people that he randomly encounters in a bathroom or in a grocery store or on the street? Those are all the tests of character for any leader at Town Council or the Presidency. Ronald Reagan, to me, embodied so much of what is good and right about politics. There are people in the House that, I think, have those same kinds of attributes and characteristics that are humble and carry their power lightly, that look people in the eyes and don't glaze over the cleaning lady that's polishing your desk in the morning or emptying the trash, that just don't avoid eye contact with messengers in the hallway or people that run the cameras. Those are all important attributes and I was so pleased to be a part of the Reagan Tribute because at the highest levels of achievement, he was probably the best example, to me, of the way that you could do leadership; with humility, with great grace and dignity.

**SB:** That's at the National level. Are there heroes on the State level that you would make?

**JHC:** I'm going to speak in my closing remarks – my parting remarks – about one individual and I really selectively decided that, because I have so many good friends on both sides of the aisle, that a list of naming would inevitably leave an important person out that has done something kind or contributed to me in some way. But a person that I've watched from afar, and a person who is a leader in the House that has comported himself in a way with the kind of style that's almost like [Frank] Capra's, "Mr. Smith," the Jimmy Stewart character in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*: eager, honest, soft-spoken, stands when you speak to him, never allows any interruptions, doesn't gossip, backbite, [or] participate in the good-old-boy club, Paul Clymer. Paul is someone that has brought all of his energy into so many debates, most recently on the issue of gambling. But [he] does it in a way that he can walk off the field, so to speak, leave the Floor of the House without feeling any hatred or animosity towards the other side. If I can be in any way, in my political life, demonstrate half of the character that he has demonstrated to me and many other members, I'll be a successful public servant.

**SB:** Speaking of energy, you, yourself, was voted the "Hardest Working Member of the House" and a poll also called you its "Most Ambitious." How would you vote for yourself?

**JHC:** Well, I think, you know, different snapshots in my four years, and even leading up to running for office, ambition and work were the hallmarks of who I was. I've over-worked and I under-relaxed and I didn't really have, what I would say would be, a balanced approach to the job. After four years, though, I can report that I do. I don't take

calls, for example, of a political nature after six o'clock. Weekends and Sundays are for my family. I've set up the new boundaries in my life that weren't there at the beginning and I think that's so important. But ambition, I think, in healthy doses is so important because there has to be something you're striving for. Otherwise, you become lethargic and complacent. A frustration of the House is sitting in between votes for three or four hours and, literally, nobody on the floor of the House knowing what the bill is that's coming over from the Senate. We ask each other a lot, "What are we doing here? When are we leaving? How long are we going to be here?" The week in which we are talking now, [November 17, 2004] is one of those weeks. We don't know why (*laugh*) we're extending into Thursday and Friday, perhaps, in a legislative debate. But all of those things have made for a wonderful and great learning experience in so many ways.

**SB:** Do you have regrets about your service?

**JHC:** I don't have regrets because I don't second-guess decisions that I've made based on the best available information, in terms of a vote. I can look back and say, "I could have voted differently" or, "I should have supported someone", say, for leadership, strategically, in hindsight. You can make decisions that way. But, I view all of the mistakes that I've made, and there are many and many are obvious, as building blocks – as things that have tempered me [and] have changed me. I'm in an ongoing learning process in evaluating how I can do things better, but I could not be who I am today without the four years of experiences. I wouldn't have made the tough choices and decisions that I've made if I wasn't really forced by the virtue of the decisions that we

make in this job to make hard choices and decisions. So, I leave with no regrets and no disappointments, no things that I think, “Well, if I didn’t do it, they’ll never get done.” I have a great deal of faith in good people that have been elected that if there is anything undone it will get continued in the next term in, probably, a better way.

**SB:** What are your fondest memories of serving in the House?

**JHC:** My favorite and fondest memories are conversations with members of the House. I just have an extraordinary inventory of stories from people that are so diverse from my own background. People like Louise Bishop [Louise Williams Bishop; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1989-present], in Philadelphia. She has a radio show at six in the morning and then drives into the House to vote at 11 o’clock. [She] does it everyday, has done it for a couple of decades now, [a] Gospel music show. People from, really, all different walks of life that have full lives and full experiences. I talked to a member the other day who has been here almost as long as anyone, Bill Rieger [William W.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1967-2006], and he’s taken a lot of hits publicly because he stayed in the House so long and I asked him why did. And he said he was offered a Congressional seat – a chance to graduate to Washington – [and] he turned it down because he wanted to be home every night with his wife. And I look at Bill Rieger at his achievements and accomplishments and decisions much differently than I do. I’ve developed a great friendship with Bill DeWeese, [H. William; State Representative, Fayette, Green and Washington Counties, 1976-present; Speaker, 1993-1994] someone that is radically different from me politically, but someone who toasted at



my wedding, and who I have enormous respect for because when he gives his word he keeps it and he's a professional, in that sense, and lives by a certain code. Decisions, we can disagree with and policies, absolutely, and I've debated him on the floor. But, its people like that, that the stories and late night sessions that I will always remember. I'm spending a lot of time now just mentally making sure I don't forget them and I get every picture that I want. My home office will feature a lot of those wonderful moments and memories.

**SB:** How do you want your tenure as State Representative to be remembered, or what do you want your legacy to be?

**JHC:** I want to be remembered as a good steward. Someone who did not abuse the public trust, who was clear and concise about what he said he was going to do, and that did not violate that temporal, conditional trust that is conferred by the voters – and it's easy to do. There are so many things that can wreck a record and so many things that can cause people to have a very different view of you when you leave office. But I think, by and large, when you ask constituents, "Did Jeff Coleman do what he said he was going to do? Did he conduct himself in a way that you thought was fair, decent, honest?" They'll say "yes," and that is the greatest accomplishment I can hope to take away from here.

**SB:** Well, you mentioned earlier that you espoused faith in public service. Did you feel that others felt that same way? Did you feel as a minority member because of that?

**JHC:** I think that everyone comes to the House with a set of ideals. I don't think too many people come here simply because there's a good benefits package or pension plan. Cynically, you can look back at people's records and say, "Well, that's what kept them here," and I believe that. I believe that, for many people, this is a good deal and there's no reason to leave. I think we have to think about the incentive structure; should we be incentivising life-long careers in the legislature, or should there be a system that rewards limiting Chairman's terms, or making sure there's fresh blood always in the system? Turnover is a good thing. Change is good in the Legislative body. But, I don't think I was in the minority. I just think that we need external forces that offer encouragement. When people do things right, we need to applaud; we need to give them rewards. Editorial review boards need to celebrate Members that do the right thing. Community groups, citizen groups instead of launching petition drives to oust a Member or to campaign against him when he's done something wrong, should be in constant communication and contact saying, "Hey, we know what you ran on. Here's just a little friendly reminder." Encouragement can go a long way to helping people that have core convictions, do the right thing. When rubber meets the road, when it's really time to stand up for what you believe.

**SB:** How did your faith enter into decisions you made, or outlooks that you held?

**JHC:** Well, my faith is important because it sets my priorities. First, it tells me that I'm not the most important thing – person – in the universe, that I'm accountable to someone, [and] that I have a purpose and meaning in life that goes well beyond whether or not I

win or lose the next election. If someone comes here without a deep abiding personal faith in God and a system that grows out of that, you have to find meaning in things or in the accumulation of power or some other means. You've got to find it somewhere. I leave here, really not with any regrets over not having done things, because I trust that ultimately, the things that I did contributed to God's plan and purpose for my life and hopefully in the life of the State.

**SB:** Well, in November of 2003, you announced that you were going to run for a third term and then in January 2004, you announced that you weren't. What happened in that time?

**JHC:** Important decisions happened in that time. I had always been on a fast track, politically. I didn't make a formal announcement that I was seeking a third term, but I was on track and planning to do it. But, my wife and I spent a great month away from the hustle and bustle of the decision making – the first time we were really out of the grind – and we spent some wonderful days in the clear air of the Northwest in Washington State, on a little harbor. It was the first time that we had time to think, to pray, to crack a book open, to really reflect on our goals; and we evaluated. I said, look, if I want to have an authentic marriage – meaning not one of these deals that you have a wife behind you as a trophy to smile and wave and nod at a speech – if we wanted to raise kids and start a family, another campaign at this time in our lives was not going to help us meet those goals. So, we made an announcement, without consulting our leaders in Harrisburg [and] without consulting our families. We let them know what the decision was right before

we did it and made a public announcement and weeks of speculation and what I was going to do and where I was going and all that ensued, but I really wasn't responsible for that. I was only responsible to do what I thought was right for us at the time. It's a wonderful decision and, kind-of, a liberating decision because once you've set a deadline, there really are no other tugging forces that can keep you from your goals.

**SB:** Well, what was said to you by fellow Party members or leadership after the announcement you gave?

**JHC:** Well, I mean, I think there was a disappointment that I didn't consult and I didn't ask, essentially, permission to leave. This is a system that relies on predictability, to some degree, [the] ability to plan for your successor, ability to budget for campaign funds. I assured them that I would be an active campaigner, that I would ask an appropriate successor to run [and] I did. [I] campaigned hard for him and he was successful in the fall with over 60 percent of the vote. Higher margins than I'd gotten in my first race, so I was pleased about that. But, I think that politics is a system that expects a certain amount of exchange of gossip and information. One thing I have learned is that there are certain decisions that are best made with your family and close advisors and friends. Certain decisions are not political in nature, and if it was a decision to run again for public office, that would be a political decision. That would be a decision when you call on people and say, "How much money do we have in the bank? What do our poll numbers say? What are our strengths? What are detractors saying? Who's the field of opponents? What's our strategy for victory? What are the next goals?"

What do we do next?” There’s another, kind-of, undercurrent and that is, “I’m always looking for a challenge. I’m always looking for something that challenges me personally.” There is a routine that develops in the House. You get comfortable, no matter what. No matter how good, how energetic [and] enthusiastic you are. And I never wanted to be a routine guy that began to think of this as my livelihood. Twenty years and a gold watch at the factory is a mentality. It’s not what I think of when I think of public service.

**SB:** When you describe the system and the process, you said that it was somewhat “mysterious to the public.” How would you categorize or characterize that process?

**JHC:** When the average income in Pennsylvania is a little over, say, 35,000 dollars – median income in Pennsylvania – and Legislators are making 67,000 [dollars] and asking for a pay raise that could bump us up into the 100,000 dollar range, or pretty near that. [That’s] on top of an automatic cost of living adjustment, on top of a car lease [if] some members choose, on top of full benefits packages that they give you medical benefits for life – nursing home care if you get sick. The public looks back at that and says, “State Representative, we understand that it’s a job that requires some travel. We understand that it requires you to make decisions on votes, but we also recognize that most people that come here have other sources of income, livelihood, other professions [and] jobs.” This was created as a part-time Legislature, not a full-time, all year round structure behemoth, which it really has become. So, when I say people don’t understand the system, they really are befuddled. They just don’t get it. Ordinary average people don’t

understand. Now, I don't want to feed cynicism by being a permanent critic. I don't believe you can simply be critical of the system and say, "Well, that too bad. The system is broken; it's flawed," and then walk off the field. So, I've spent another part of my time helping to elect people that I believe in and I was successful in helping a number of people reach their goal of being a Member of the Legislature. So, I'm hoping that by little changes here and there, from the East to the West and the North and the South in Pennsylvania as new people, fresh blood, decide to enter the process – respectfully, diligently, studying the issues, being savvy and articulate defenders of their positions – that the system can change. But until then, people are going to continue to rate State Legislators, as a whole, down with the shyster car dealers that they've come to loathe, and that just not good for public service. This year, in my district, about 75 percent of the people turned out to vote. On an average year, that figure could be anywhere from 27 to 30 percent, and that's with voting for local candidates. There's something wrong with the system that doesn't encourage people to trust and have faith in the people they've sent to represent them.

**SB:** Let me ask you about your District. Has it changed in the time that you've served them?

**JHC:** You know, it's changed and sadly, it has changed, I think, in many ways for the worse. And it's really not because of local policies or local leaders because you have people that are elected and serve in Town Councils and County Commissioners slots and Township Supervisor posts, and in the State Legislature. The number of people that

represent my area are good, decent people. The problem is, I think, State policies that have made Pennsylvania, essentially, off-limits for people that want to create jobs here. I often say that there's a "Welcome to Pennsylvania" sign, then at the bottom it says, "Closed for Business." I think it's because of bad tax policies [and] regulatory policies. Things like the medical malpractice crisis that make local hospitals, essentially, consider [offering] a second sub-level of care, or a good quality, high level of care. A tax climate that, essentially, says, "If you want to do business in Pennsylvania, you're going to need a state loan or a grant to get by." We lost another Company, a furniture manufacturer this last week. The solution that we offered in Pennsylvania was a big government grant program from the Economic Development Fund. Instead of changing the climate that says, "Please stay in Pennsylvania... We welcome you... you're entrepreneurs... we want your creativity here," we've put it all off limits. We've said, "Canoe and kayak our streams. Visit our quaint shops on Main Street. Drive up and down Route 15, Route 30 [with the] beautiful scenic drives in the fall. But if you want to live here, you're not going to be able to afford the property taxes. If you're going to open a business here, you're not going to be able to do business, because of regulatory and legal climate." So, why stay in Pennsylvania? That has hurt areas like mine that had Industries – coal, steel, specialty manufacturing, tool and die – that now need to transition into the Twenty First Century economy. But, there simply is not the infrastructure to support [anything] new. We've got beautiful rivers and lakes and scenery, but we don't have a climate that says to a company in Sweden, or a company in Canada, or a company in Luxemburg, to come to Kittanning or Apollo or Leechburg or Ford City. There's not too much reason, unless

you put them in a Keystone Opportunity Zone, which is one little plot of land that is a good climate. The rest of the place doesn't do so well.

**SB:** What are the obstacles to change in the Legislature, in your opinion?

**JHC:** The obstacles to change, really, come down to a basic ingredient. And that is, there has to be the ability to change and hold Members accountable. People that are making bad decisions and bad choices, I find, are often the most charming, the most sincere, the most loving people you'll ever want to meet. But they're also the same ones that are voting for a tax increase, voting for pay increase, voting to expand gambling and change Pennsylvania for the worse. So, you have to say, "Personal feelings aside, how do we elect people to public office that will do a job that will do it right, that will step down when their ambitions or personal goals get in the way of making a good decision?" To do that, requires some external political pressure. It requires people willing to write checks, run for office, challenge the system, like I did; challenge the establishment.

**SB:** What are your plans now?

**JHC:** Well, I've got a few things that are on the burner and I'm doing some job interviews. My wife and I are going to be living now permanently in Hershey, Pennsylvania. I don't know what the political future holds. I'd love to run for office again and when the time is right, I plan to do that. But the time and the circumstances have to be something that it absolutely is a good fit, and I don't imagine that there will



ever be an easy political race in the future, so I don't anticipate a smooth ride or getting picked or tapped to do something like that. In the meantime, though, I plan on spending a lot of time helping people that I believe in get elected. I was one voice of 203 [Members]. And now, my voice has a little bit of an echo with some new members and I'd love to see that echo build into a chorus of good people who are committed to principals, and really believe in the ideals of public service.

**SB:** What would be your advice be to new Representatives being sworn in soon?

**JHC:** To know what you believe in, first, before you come here. To, kind-of, on a three by five card, take a little inventory of the things that you made commitments to and promises to, things you won't do. Because it's this little three by five card mentally or literally, that is going to keep you anchored and centered when that tap on the shoulder comes and says, "We want to talk to you in the back room and we want to make you an offer that you can't refuse." And, it's at that moment, when the winds are blowing pretty tough, that you need to reach back into the core reasons why you ran in the first place. So, that's the biggest piece of advice. And then secondly, is to put on the other side of the three by five card, the people that matter most to you, because it's people that usually come before politics, that knew you before the title, before the license plate that says you're a Member of the House of Representatives, before the trappings of the office, [who] knew you as a real person and care about you deeply. It's those people that you're going to need to pick up the phone after one of those tough votes and talk to, to be

consoled or encouraged. You never want to lose those friends or never lose sight of the people that matter most.

**SB:** Will you describe your enthusiasm for entering into public service? Do you feel there's that enthusiasm among young people today, and if not, how do you fuel that?

**JHC:** There's plenty of enthusiasm. I think a lot of it's misplaced. There are plenty of people from all political persuasions that are stirring the pot. [They are] getting young people excited about public service and why you should register to vote. The problem is the same problem, though, that older people experience about public service. Among young people – 18 to 24 year olds, and maybe a few ages above and beyond that framework – it's the same problem with young people as it is with older people; they are also cynical about politicians. They also can hear in their ear when a person is doing political speak to them. They can tell if someone is skirting a question, just as easy as a trained reporter for the *New York Times*. They can spot a fake – a fraud – relationship when they see a politician and his wife, or vice versa. They can spot someone who is a fake, who is imitating real life. They can see the strain and the stress. They want people to believe in. They want people in public life who are not just going to ask for their vote and to register, but someone who will listen, who will dialogue, who will challenge their assumptions about politics. And if their assumptions are challenged – young people that are in politics – and men and women are found to be the real deal, flaws, warts and all, I think you'll see a whole lot more of young people step forward and say, "That's something I'd be interested in doing. That's a career worth pursuing. That's something

that's noble and good." The other thing, though, that young people have to know that are pursuing a career in public services is, there's a lot of sacrifice. There are a lot of decisions that you have to make early on in life that have enormous impact on your ability to get elected and the lifestyle that you will accept when you get here. And pressures and temptations aren't unique to any age group and I think it's important for young people to be grounded.

**SB:** Besides your own legacy, how do you see this period – the last four years – of the history of the House?

**JHC:** Well, the House is changing and it's changing in rapid increments. A number of things are happening. First, technology has dramatically changed the way that legislators are able to communicate with their constituents. The fact that we have a laptop on the floor of the House and we have a PCN [Pennsylvania Cable Network] camera on a fixed mount that is constantly trained to find the speaker at the microphone, meaning every deliberation, every discussion, everything that is in the public domain is now accessed by millions of Pennsylvanians, who then in their pajamas, can hop out of bed when they are angry about something I said and send me an E-mail and say, "You are out of line. You are way off the mark," or "That's not what we sent you to Harrisburg to do." That is a change in the system. Now, it is power and access, but the public hasn't yet really discovered [it]. I get some E-mail during a debate [from] people that are watching PCN, but people haven't really figured out, "Hey, my E-mail really does make a difference." If I get ten E-mail's in my E-mail Box before I'm ready to vote on something, that's going

to influence the way that I make a decision. The public has yet to realize what technology is allowing them to do. It's an open chamber, as it's always been, but technology now is not just giving you 50 seats in the balcony, it is giving you 12 and a half million seats across the State, where people of all ages, persuasions, religions, political views, walks of life, can now participate in the process. That's one aspect of it. The other thing that is changing is that campaigns and targeting has become much more specific and precise. Incumbency protection is keeping that recidivism rate, if that's the term, at a nice 1 percent. So, essentially, you're having people return at almost a guaranteed re-election rate. And I think that is a problem, because when taxpayers, for example, are funding public service announcements that are, essentially, being used as pre-campaign commercials for an incumbent that is not performing well in the polls, well that incumbent hasn't done their job or they haven't established themselves in traditional means. Should we be using three million dollars of taxpayer money to pay for them? The product is wonderful, but it's not the product and it's not the candidate's fault, or the office holder's fault. It's a system that is simply spending a lot of taxpayer money to keep us in office. And that has really changed over the last four years.

**SB:** Are you optimistic about the future?

**JHC:** I'm very optimistic. I'm optimistic for one really good reason; because I think that Pennsylvanians have been blessed with enormous common sense, and the people that send us here are becoming wiser to how this system works. I think we've pushed our luck in the Legislature over the last decade or so, with pay increases and tax increases.

There is a point where the public, I think, universally is going to say, “We’ve just had enough. We like you personally, but you voted wrong, it’s time to replace you and send you off to some other venture where you can’t do the damage to our checkbook; to our bottom-line; to our bank account.” But I am so optimistic because of the number of people that are saying, “Hey, I’m interested in running.” There were weeks here where I would get a couple of calls – two, three, four calls – from young people, 22, 23 years-old saying, “Hey, how did you do it? I want to get involved in the system,” or, “I want to run for political office.” Some people say, “Well, that’s scary. We don’t want all these new people in the political process that are too unpredictable.” But once they get here, they treat this office – this building – with respect. They’re not going to destroy the china and destroy the carpets. They’re going to take care of this building. It’s a public treasure and the institution is strong enough to withstand a major turnover, a change [or] a shift in power in order for the public to be, again, represented.

**SB:** You described yourself as a conservative. Would you call the House a conservative body?

**JHC:** Well, you have to look at the results and there are definitely more Republicans and Republicans control the process. The majority of people that run for political office and run for the Legislature would label themselves “conservatives.” Really, only a handful of people from Southeastern Pennsylvania would classify themselves in the other camp [as] moderate or liberal and progressive in their policies. The challenge we have is that because we have this abundance of Republican members – we have so many Republican

members – [and we] really have control over all of the reigns of power. There's nothing to keep us accountable any longer to do the right thing. So, we have moved progressively quickly away from strong, solid conservative principals of thrift, respecting the values of traditional family. We have gone in a very different direction. Traditionally, conservatives were, really, on the side of the small business owner, of the working family, really, on the side of things that most Pennsylvanians can agree with. The result, though, over the last few years has been very different. I think people are beginning to sense that you just can't say, "I'm a conservative and I'm standing up for all these things," and expect that they're going to do that when they get elected into public office.

**SB:** What are the results that you're referring to?

**JHC:** Well, the result is that even under Republican leadership, we've had the largest increase in State spending over the past decade. We've had the largest expansion of public education spending without the expected results. That would mean an increase in test scores. For example, Pennsylvania is in the top five in spending on public education, but we're in the bottom five in evaluators and performance on the test scores; SAT's and other benchmarks that we can tell whether students are learning or not. I'm not saying it's the fault of teachers. I'm not saying it's the fault of the people in the classroom. We know that that spending never makes it to the classroom. The spending is all on new infrastructure, on new buildings, on "Taj Mahal" blueprints for a school. It doesn't seem to make it to the classroom and that's desperately where we need to look at, for example,

one aspect, education reform. But there are so many issues that the public is, again, seeing a disconnect between what we say and what we do.

**SB:** Well, behind the issues, what would you consider your funniest or most embarrassing moment in your service?

**JHC:** Boy, it would be tough – there are a lot of them – and I think my colleagues would better answer those embarrassing moments. But, you know, there's a lot of humor on the floor of the House. There's a lot of barrel laughs and a lot of little moments. I remember this last gambling debate when we all discovered the volume button on our laptops and we all found a Web site – we just were connected to the full Web; we [previously] had Internet access for our E-mail [only] – but, it was probably seven in the morning, and we all discovered a country music channel on the Web and all over the House you began to hear these old strings of old country music. And someone found a big band channel, all through the House. You know, there are little moments like that, funny speeches. Unfortunately, because of cameras, people are a little less likely to make a crack up that they don't want their opponent to use in a political campaign. But, on a late night, you get the best of the funnies, either coming from the Speaker's rostrum – the Speaker is quick witted, he's a wonderful entertainer – and the retorts from the Democratic leader, from his podium are equally good. So, I've had a wonderful seat, a front row seat, to what has many times been a comedy, and I've really enjoyed it. I really have.

**SB:** What's the story you're going to tell about your four years in the House to your grandchildren?

**JHC:** Well, I'll say, first of all, it was one of the highlights and the honors of a lifetime. I don't know what comes after my 29<sup>th</sup> year of life, or what the rest of my story will hold. But this will be either the starting point or the highlight of a life and it's been wonderful in so many ways. All of what you expect people to learn in a Graduate Degree Program. All of what you expect people to learn, maybe, in 20 years of life. It's been, in some ways, a microwave oven, in terms of the character development and personal development and political development that I've had. I'll tell them it's tested everything that I've believed and it's tested everything I've valued most. And in the end, every thing that I came here with is intact and stronger, but hopefully much wiser and, maybe, a little more restrained and a little more careful to speak out. Through all of it, [I'm] much less judgmental, personally, of the motives and intentions of the people who serve here.

**SB:** On that note, I want to thank you for sharing this time with us, and your historical experience.

**JHC:** It's been my pleasure. Thank you.