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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Babette Josephs (D)

1985-2012

182nd District

Philadelphia County

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Jesse Teitelbaum (JT): Good afternoon.

The Honorable Babette Josephs (BJ): Good afternoon.

JT: I am here with Babette Josephs, Democrat, who represented the 182nd District in Philadelphia from 1985 to 2012. Thank you very much for being with me today.

BJ: My pleasure.

JT: I'd like to ask you some questions about your time in the House, but before we get to that, will you tell me a little bit about your background: your family, your growing up, where you are from?

BJ: Well, I was born in the city of New York. I came to Philadelphia as a young bride. My husband, who is now deceased, was a graduate of law school. He was all set to practice law in Philadelphia. So, I came to Philadelphia. We settled in Center City because I told him I can't be car dependent; I cannot live in a place where I have to have a car. So, fortunately he listened to me and immediately we stopped looking all over the city and ended up downtown in Center City near 15th and Spruce. I haven't moved more than two or three blocks in the last 50 years. And I intend to stay in that neighborhood as long as I can. To me, it's the best neighborhood in the Universe.

JT: Good for you.

BJ: It's the middle of a big city, all kinds of amenities, but it's a neighborhood and I have friends across the block, around the corner, and I can walk to the theatre or a major museum. Don't have a car now, didn't have a car then, never planning to have a car. So, that's how I got to Philadelphia. I have two children, who were born in Philadelphia, and I have six grandchildren, but they are none of them in the city: I have some in the Pacific Northwest and some off in the New England area. So, four teenagers getting ready to go to college; two are in college, two are getting ready to.

JT: Wonderful. Good for you.

BJ: So, it's great.

JT: Tell me about your education.

BJ: I was educated mostly in the city of New York, but I went to law school at Camden, Rutgers at Camden. As I said, I had my children in Philadelphia, had my children then I realized that, like many women, that I really wasn't prepared for the kind of career I might like to have. So, I went to Rutgers Law School in Camden when my kids were six and eight, something like that. But we lived in Center City, and so my husband who worked in Center City was the childcare person. His office was right there and they could walk to his office if they had some problem, or he could run home if he had to. So, all of that worked out very well. I did not follow my friends,

many of whom took their kids who were school aged and moved out to the suburbs. My children were both raised in the city and they are both outstanding citizens and got great educations in Philadelphia public schools.

JT: Good. Now, did you practice law after you went to law school?

BJ: I practiced for about two years.

JT: Okay.

BJ: And then I got involved in, I guess, first the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) Pennsylvania Chapter. They changed their name, the Women's Political Caucus, jobs like that like, you know, on easy little issues like abortion rights. I've finally, I was very active in a whole bunch of other kinds of things as well as working on progressive Jewish issues. I was concerned about public education. I had, as always, you know, been keeping my eye out on public transit because I depend on it myself. And I was very, very active in the environmental movement and other parts of the women's rights movement. And I kept thinking to myself, I should really bring these people I'm working with together, I mean, there's so many folks I know now that I'm working with on these very worthwhile progressive forward looking issues, and if I could just get them all in one room there would be some kind of critical mass and some sort of explosion. And, around that time, the State Rep[resentative], who was a friend of mine and who I cooperated with, retired—Norman Berson [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1967-1982] – he retired. He is still alive; he's not still a ward leader but he retired – I decided the way

to bring all my friends together who were working on all these different issues was to run for office. That did bring them all together and gave me a great basis for going to people with my questions about almost anything –

JT: Sure

BJ: – that I cared about. I had very many friends, for instance, very knowledgeable of and active in the environmental movement. I had lots and lots of friends who were working on women's education and job training. You know, more friends who were working on peace in the Middle East. So, every single issue I had somebody I could talk to about what kind of policy is the best policy as we move forward. And, then they all brought their friends to my first and second run for the State House – because I ran in 1982 and did not win – It looked like I was running for Congress. There were huge numbers of people volunteering in my office because I had made all of these relationships and because all the people who are involved in grass-roots and even ward politics on all of this progressive kind of issues thought, "Oh, what a good idea. We will help her."

JT: Good.

BJ: And so I ran in [19]82; I came very close. In [19]84 I won and started to serve in [19]85.

JT: Okay. Now, do you come from a political family?

BJ: Only in that they vote. I wouldn't say so. I don't think anyone would say so. Nobody else in the family is an elected official or close to it. They are all sane. But, everybody follows and reads and helps and, I mean, we are not a family of slugs but mostly people are scientists. My son and daughter-in-law; my daughter-in-law is an astronomer, my son is a mathematician. Small business owners, lawyers; I'm a lawyer, my husband was a lawyer. I think a lot of the grandchildren are going to end up going into science or at least one or two of them.

JT: What would you say were some of your influences in shaping yourself to becoming a Democrat?

BJ: Oh, Richard Nixon.

JT: Really?

BJ: Yeah. You know, I'm old. I remember him only too well, and the sad part is he looks good next to Republicans we have now. I don't know. I just watched him. I could not vote in that election because I was only 20 in November.

JT: Okay.

BJ: But, I watched that election, and I watched him and I just never could be a Republican. I voted Republican, occasionally.

JT: Okay.

BJ: In city elections. Well, I voted Republican against Frank Rizzo [Mayor of Philadelphia, 1972-1979; Police Commissioner of Philadelphia City, 1967-1971], and I would continue to do that if I had to today, but fortunately I don't. And I voted Republican on some other levels, but I've never registered as a Republican and I've never really supported a Republican. Not in 30 years.

JT: Okay.

BJ: There used to be kind of Republicans on the city level, you could – they were reasonable. They weren't, you know, social crazy. They didn't whine all the time. People while all the time; it's amazing. But that seems, unfortunately, to have passed and we do not really have a two-party system right now; we have the Democrats and people who say no.

JT: Alright.

BJ: The "no-publicans".

JT: There you go. Getting back to your introduction to the State House, your campaign; do you remember your first campaign? You were talking a little about how large it was and you felt like you were running for Congress. Can you compare that campaign to some of the ones that came

after it? Did they get even more involved, or would you say you got used to it and knew what you needed to do?

BJ: It depended. Nothing is very even. I had, of course, a very vigorous first campaign. It was more or less an open seat. It was after reapportionment, so the person I defeated had represented some of the district that we were contending for and the person who retired, Norman, represented a very big part. So, it took me a while to get known in the other part.

JT: Okay.

BJ: So, I think that's why I didn't win the first time. By the time the second time came around I made it my business to get known in all the other parts. Nowadays we have much, much closer races than we used to, but I used to think it was pretty close that I won by about 400 votes. Nowadays, we have people winning by two, five, and one. So, I guess it's not so dramatic. And then for a while – the first time out I had a stiff challenge. It doesn't matter who you are, where you are, generally speaking, the first time you are out people test you. But then it was very quiet. I mean, we are talking about all of the [19]80s, all of the [19]90s. I had some people who could raise some money, but it was very quiet and it didn't really start until the reapportionment of 2000 that I started to gather opponents who had a lot of money. And that was hard, that was hard. I think it's something all incumbents get faced with.

JT: Sure.

BJ: People get into, "Oh, she's a shoo-in! She's going to win; she's always won. She'll win again. Why should we do anything? Why should we worry?"

JT: Right.

BJ: And people who helped me, in 1982, my campaign managers, my financial, all these volunteers – except for the one manager in 1982 and 1984 – young people, enthusiastic, just starting out in their careers; they grew up, they got married. A lot of them. They got children. Some that did marry got children some that didn't marry got children. You know, they got real jobs and moved away.

JT: Sure.

BJ: So, in 2000 when I started to draw these more moneyed opponents, the folks who had been my stalwarts in the [19]80s, they weren't around anymore. As I said, they moved away, they got other jobs, they grew up.

JT: Sure.

BJ: They couldn't quit and work on the campaign. So, that was a difficult time, all through the 2000s. And I think every incumbent must really experience something like that in any office. I mean, once you've been there, and I don't know what the critical mass of years is, but some critical mass, people just say, "Oh, she's going to be there forever. Why should I do anything?"

JT: Right.

BJ: I think actually that was about half of what my problem was in losing in 2012. I would ask people to do simple things. I could see the writing on the wall. I knew what was going on. I would meet somebody in the square – one of the things that I love to do and to talk about doing is, I don't have a car. Most of the people in my district don't use a car, don't even have a car. For instance, this will shock everybody in the legislature; I do not do any PennDOT work. I do not do any PennDOT work. We all walk around Center City, Philadelphia. So in the spring before the primary I would meet people, I knew them, I've been serving them for 25-28 years, and I would say, "Oh I know you live in a high rise—here's some literature. Would you put it in the second class mailing room? Would you help me distribute it – campaign literature – in your lobby?" or whatever, and people would say to me, "Oh, you're a shoo-in. You're going to win." And they wouldn't take it.

JT: Oh.

BJ: That's a problem and that's what happened to me, really, and my campaign was not very good; I could not get out the message that I really did need help. But people were so used to having me around; they figured I would be there forever. This cannot be an individual problem. I think it's probably a pattern.

JT: True.

BJ: Anybody who's ever been in office for any length of time who might be watching this interview, is going to be saying, "Oh yeah, that happened to me." So, I don't know what to do about it.

JT: Yeah.

BJ: I do not know what you do about it.

JT: Don't take anything for granted?

BJ: To try and talk other people into not taking *you* for granted.

JT: Right.

BJ: Because candidates always say, "Help me. Help me. I need your help." And I really meant it but I wasn't able to convince anybody that I really meant it – or not enough people.

JT: Yeah.

BJ: I went through the paces and said, "Please help me. I need your help. Give out this literature. Give me a contribution. Come to a meeting. Set up a coffee party. Please help me. I need your help." "Oh you're a shoo-in." So, it's difficult. I mean, you want to be known as

someone in the neighborhood that is reliable, that's always going to be there in the area – the city – that people can go to but you don't want to go overboard with that too much or you don't get to come back.

JT: Do you think that is a national trend though, a lot of people taking for granted, "Oh, you're a shoo-in," and so, that's why a lot of incumbents basically lose elections?

BJ: Well, I think it's different on either side. I mean, I think that for instance, the Republican Party, people lose elections like Luger [Richard; United States Senator, Indiana, 1977-2012], because they look like reasonable human beings and the people who are running against them are maniacs. To put it mildly, they really are very, very paranoid and strange people. The Republican primary has gotten to the point where it produces people way to the right of regular voting Republicans. The people who come out are way to the right and the people who get elected are way to the right.

JT: Right.

BJ: I think the Democratic primary works in the opposite direction. People who come out are to the left of regular Democrats in many places where there's a Democratic primary, so they produce people who are too the left of most Democrats. I don't think we get the same caliber of person who is completely – I mean, I'm the person who emerged from a primary against the city committee, against the Party. I ran against the Party and the person I beat was supported by the Party, but I don't consider myself disassociated from the left wing of the Democratic Party; I'm

part of it. I'm not beyond it. I'm not so left-wing that I can't deal with anybody, that I insist on my positions. I voice my positions but I know that not everybody agrees with me. A lot of education has to go on and dialogue and persuasion and convincing people, "No, you have to put yourself over here and you'll see the logic of the argument that I'm trying to get here." I'm not big on forcing people to, you know, compelling them to do things. I think there's a different dynamic, as I was saying; I think in the Democratic Party we are producing people who are a little bit to the left of all Democrats but they are not isolationists. I think the Republicans are producing people who we can beat in a General election because they are so right-wing, and they come off as nasty, mean. Making distinctions between legitimate rape and what, you know? Taunting the whole campaign, taunting your opponent about her use of her ancestry or her nonuse; it's so unlikeable. Who wants to hear this stuff? Voters, I think, are talked down to all the time. Voters want to hear about policy. They want to hear about, "alright they got it."

JT: Right.

BJ: Maybe Elizabeth Warren [United States Senator, Massachusetts, 2013-present; special advisor, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, 2010-2011; chair, Congressional Oversight Panel, 2008-2010] did something she should or should not have done, who knows? "What's your policy? How are you going to vote on this? If I call up, do you have a mechanism you can help me?" That's what people want to know. I don't know. I don't think the Democrats are quite as nasty and we don't whine quite as much.

JT: Tell me about the 182nd district; the geography, the people.

BJ: Best district in the Universe.

JT: Is it?

BJ: Absolutely. I know everybody else here is jealous of me because they can't have the 182nd district. It's the center of Philadelphia. And as the center of Philadelphia, I consider it unusual if not unique; I can't be definitive, almost unique in that it has a huge thriving very close-knit active visible residential neighborhood in the middle of the commercial and industrial districts. I don't think there is another city in this country that's comparable. In New York people don't, I mean, it's not a middle class; people live downtown, they are very wealthy. There's no center in L.A., Chicago is empty at night, San Francisco, people aren't downtown but there are a lot of people living in that city. I think that Philadelphia is just extremely unusual and it's all in the 182nd district. So, we have people who walk to work. That's why they are in the 182nd district. Lawyers, doctors, architects, people who aren't professionals as well, of course. Students, all kinds of folks who are in the 182nd because they don't want to use their car much or they don't want to use it at all. They walk to work, they walk to the grocery store, they walk to the museum, to the theatre to the movies, to school, you know, whatever, or they take public transportation. That is very, very unique and it's very, very diverse. Everybody lives in downtown Philadelphia. I canvass a lot. A lot of little doors, one after another. Knock on the door; you do not know what kind of person is going to answer the door. Any race, any age, could be speaking any language or you can hear the English is accented from any language, old, young, people with little kids, there's straight, gay, as I said, every race, every religion, you do

not know who is going to answer the door in the 182nd district and it is really, really wonderful. That's where I raised my kids in the city. I thought, "How are you going to learn to get along with lots of different people?" Live in Center City, Philadelphia, that's how you get to learn to go along with and go to school with [lots of different people]. My children went to school in Center City, Philadelphia for the most part, and their friends were from town and they learned to walk around, and to be on their own. They learned to be autonomous when they were very young, which I think built their character. It's often said that some very large percentage of lesbians and gay men, transgendered and bi-sexual people live in the 182nd district; I don't believe it. I think in every district there is 10 percent of people who are of unconventional untraditional sexual orientation. I think people congregate in my district, that's a little bit different. And I think that because its expensive, relative to the rest of Philadelphia, it's a place where single men can live as a group as opposed to single women, lesbian women, women couples, cannot afford, because women's job are still lousy and women still have obligations that men don't have. How many lesbians have children? Many, many. How many gay men have children? Some, but they are not with them; they are with their mother, right? Men have better jobs. Men do better financially. Men can live in the city. Two men living together, even if one of them has child support obligations, a whole different situation than two women living together with child obligations. So, I think I have an overabundance of gay men as against lesbian women. Gay men are a little more visible when they are walking down the street, only because of us, because of society. If you see women hugging and kissing each other you don't think anything of it, right? You see men flags go up and that's what you see in center city. But, I don't believe that overall I have more than 10 percent of gay men and lesbian women because

that's what everybody has. Bur I do have people who aren't afraid to come out, which is nice. So, you know whose boyfriend is whose boyfriend. Nothing is hidden which is always better.

JT: Sure.

BJ: Much better, but not so much different than any place else and I really think that if you are in government or wherever you are a leader, if you are nonjudgmental, and I'm not, people will tell you what is bothering them and you'll find out about them. In Center City, Philadelphia, I don't think I have more gay people than anybody else.

JT: What were some issues that constituents brought to you? Do you think they were unique to your district or common throughout the state?

BJ: A lot is unique in this district because almost every organization, whether it be social change or professional group or trade association, has its state office in Philadelphia and downtown Philadelphia, so they are very often in my district. So, I get inquiries from the state office in charge of, I don't know, rallying – the Horticulture Society is inside my district. I get people asking about the flower show, about the horticulture people being in touch with me about agriculture policies in the state, which I don't think, for instance, any other state Rep[resentative] would get because the horticulture society is not in any bodies district. The person who runs that society probably doesn't live in my district, but does not think of her own state rep, she thinks, "Oh, who is downtown here? Oh, I know, its Babette." So, we get all kinds of requests from people who are experts from their fields and are just looking for information about what is going

on with their bill, with their policy, are they worried about some movement? Is there some regulations? So, we get all of those kinds of inquiries that I don't think very many other people get. Maybe Dan Frankel [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1999-present] who represents downtown Pittsburgh, gets some of these. But I think mostly it's in Philadelphia. Then I would say I have a constituency that is very interested, like everybody, of course, in quality of life issues, especially downtown because block by block by block you will find middle class, working class, decent people, folks with jobs, hard workers, and they are kind of reclaiming downtown Philadelphia. It's a movement that has been [going on for] more than 50 years. Because when I moved into town and told my husband's family, "Guess what? We are moving to the 1500th block of Spruce Street," they were horrified; nobody lived downtown. But, I made an incredible number of friends who lived downtown and whose parents thought they were crazy to have moved there, too, I'm sure, whose children were the same age as my children. That's how I met a whole group of women, and later on their husbands, who are now, basically, well, like myself, they are kind of in retirement age, but in-between they ran the city. I mean the people that I met in that area in that time of my life turned out to be the folks who were running all of public education, advocacy, the people who were the lawyers, folks who were working for health. I mean, they were all very active politically in consumer or progressive kinds of moves. All of these women that I met, basically sitting in the park, all of us with our children until they got old enough to send to school, then we could go back to work ourselves. Of course nowadays couples get daycare and both of them go back to work, but this was thought of as a little pause.

JT: Sure.

BJ: My kids are about 50 now so, 45, 47 years ago. So, I still know those folks, a lot of those folks. Congestion is a problem because we are all squashed together. Congestion and noise, that's more of a quality of life. Almost every single bar or tavern we have is law abiding and wonderful in the neighborhood. But all you need is one. And we got one. We got one here and we got one there. That's a real problem, when we have a nuisance bar or nuisance alcohol server. A lot of problems on and off sporadically in some places and something that I'm very aware of and try and make sure that the bad bar owners are not spoiling it for the ones who are good. Noise; there has been some contention about noise around Rittenhouse Square late at night, things like that. I think that mostly my constituents are interested in policy. I'm getting emails from my constituents right now on the Terrence Williams execution. They're against capital punishment; they're against the finality of this execution when there are some problems.

JT: Sure.

BJ: I get emails about fracking, about all the time because I have so many environmentalists in the district and so many people who understand that if we ruin our farm lands we are in trouble. We like to eat. I know the district is very much interested in fresh crops, fresh food, healthy food, local food. I've helped start farmers markets and community farming. All kinds of farm to city. I work with two or three organizations that do that as their primary. And anytime they want some kind of help we have a farmers market on Rittenhouse square. We have a farmers market in Fitler Square; we have them all over town. They are very popular and I want to send a signal to the agriculture community, most of whom are Republicans here, "Come on, we are buying your food. Help us, you know? Help us, please." So, I would say almost every issue.

My district is very upset over this voter identification. Not that they are not very middle class—most people have identification; if they don't have a driver's license they do have a passport. They just don't think it is fair; they don't think it is right. They don't believe in voter suppression. And I've done workshops and I've explained over and over again, this is entirely Republican. People understand that. They are annoyed. They are very seriously annoyed that they have to drag up some passport. Here are these stories about old ladies who can't get their birth certificate or young men who used to be women or women who have a new name because of marriage or divorce and they are infuriated by that. I have more letters – I can't tell you. I have all kinds of environmental kinds of things; all kinds of criminal justice. People very interested in quality public education. They would not have been angry at me if I had proposed twice to restore – and I have – all the cuts in public education, which I did. All of those issues people are very, very interested in and pushing for the progressive ends of all them, and still have the quality of life problems that anybody has in this society that are compounded by living in the city where it is congested and noisy.

JT: Right. Would you say that most of the issues, then, that you bring to Harrisburg are constituent based or do you bring a lot of personal feelings into that?

BJ: Both. Both. I think that I match my constituents pretty well. You know, I have the same feeling that they have about voter ID. I've been very upset about it. I think it's, as they do, that it is nothing but raw naked suppression of the vote. As I said, I sent my children to public school. I am a product of public school; my late husband is a product of a public school. An overwhelming number of people in Center City, Philadelphia are against school choice. They

are against the charters being gobbled up by these private charter running business people. They want to see public education. I don't know. I think I probably people disagree with me slightly on privatizing the liquor stores, but once I explain to people, "Look, we have this nuisance bar, now do you want a nuisance liquor store?" They go, "Oh no, of course not. You are right." So, some of these things I'm slightly out of phase, but I've always found that if I explain to people, even if they didn't agree with me, and I have a number of folks who will never agree with me on keeping the state store system the way it is, but they think, "We'll vote for her anyway. We agree with her on everything else." I don't think it is a make it or break it issue. I've been pro-choice for abortion rights long before I was ever elected. Now, I have found out as I was running the first couple of times that everybody is pro-choice. Everybody is still pro-choice. Never felt as if I was sticking my neck out, at all, ever. On that issue though, it's a hard issue to make work. I never felt that people disagreed with me, not very many of them or in any fundamental way. Folks that are tolerant if they are not part of the LGBT community, they don't care. Let people get married. Why should they be discriminated against at work? That's horrible.

JT: Getting back to 1985, when you won your first election and started to serve, what were your first impressions of the House, specifically the capitol building? Was it overwhelming? What were your first impressions?

BJ: Well, I came in 1985 having been very familiar with the legislature, because I had set up the Pennsylvania chapter of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), which now has some other name – Pro-Choice America, I think they call it – but, I lobbied, I came on that bill, I

talked to people about abortion issues, legislators, aides, I brought organized rallies that brought people here and truly it was that exercise, it was listening to people give me reasons why they couldn't be pro-choice, which were always, as I remember anyhow, political reasons. "Oh they'll defeat me!" [That] kind of stuff. "Oh, I got six churches in my district." Oh, my priest..." You know? Every once in a while you'd get someone who said, "I really believe this," which is something you have to respect. But, I got so cynical listening to some of the answers of these men and a few women – there were fewer women then than there are now, piss-poor right now anyway – I thought at some point, you know, I wouldn't behave this way if I were in this position. If I were in this position I could really move us forward here. My state Rep[resentative] retired. He was pro-choice. He was helpful, Norman Berson. I would have never run against him. He was a very good state Rep[resentative] in my opinion. And we got into the district of this person who represented east of Broad Street and while he voted right, well, he voted pro-choice more or less, he complained about it all the time. He didn't want to vote this way. I don't know; his religious objections. It was only that he was forced to make this vote and so on and so forth. So, I got here understanding how difficult it is to move a difficult issue, and how recalcitrant folks are. And how really petty and small minded – not everybody who I talk to – but so many state Rep[resesntative]s on both sides of the aisle, are small minded petty, considering their own election; that was it. Their own level of comfort; not the policy. So, I saw all that before I got here, so I was one of the few people who came here as an elected official with a fair amount of sophistication about what this place was like. And it wasn't really as bad as it is now. We had gridlock here. Ever since I've been here we have had some species of gridlock. We've had mostly, from my perspective, mostly the Republican are just digging in their heels. But I've seen, we have our own species of blue dogs and I've seen it happen on our

side as well. Not as much. In the last 10, 12, 15, years it has become completely impossible to function really at all. I guess the last time the door was shoved open against that kind of resistance, I guess was at Rendell's [Edward G. Rendell, Governor of Pennsylvania, 2003-2011] last year, where the Democratic caucus or the end of the eight year term, the Democratic caucus basically we stayed in all summer – every summer almost – to get the kind of education funding that the governor asked us to stick up for and which I was only too happy to stand up for, because we had such a splendid record in the state of kids improving, and this is not the cheating scandals this is outside of that; kids scores being improved when we put money into early childhood education, basically. Everything else was gridlock, though. The interesting thing is that this didn't start to happen in Congress until really the last four years, I suppose, with President Obama [Barack; President of the United States, 2009-present]. But, after it started to happen in Congress, the national papers started to write about the gridlock and what was going on and how you couldn't get anything done at all and reporting on Republican Senators who said, "He is going to be a one term President. He's not going to get anything passed," I had a much easier time with my constituents when that stuff started to show up in the national papers because I would say, "See? See? That's us, but worse and longer. Now do you know when I come to talk to you about how frustrating it is to be in Harrisburg and how I can't get anything done? Look what they are doing to Obama. They've been doing the same thing here for much longer. Much, much longer." And people go, "Oh, I got it now." That was a help, you know. Every cloud has a silver lining, I guess. So, it's pretty discouraging to be up here and I think, I feel kind of a little bad for the people who are going to come here and first of all didn't have the experience lobbying on a really difficult issue the way I did, so they don't have any background. And I don't know, they somehow think they can make a difference. Well, it's an Institutional

change that is needed and one person or two people or even a whole class of incoming freshmen do not an Institution change. It's a shame, but that's the case. So, I can tell you, I was very much brought down from a condition of elation. I knew I would be working 24/7, and I wasn't wrong; I was working 24/7. I didn't realize I would lose a seven or eight years of summer vacation running one after another, but I did and I'm happy that the result was that eight years of kids got really well educated, which we will see as the scores start to drop when we start seeing kids who were in school during these, the Corbett [Tom; Governor of Pennsylvania, 2011-present] years, because their scores are going to go hit the bottom. That's sad. It's infuriating. It's absolutely infuriating, because we know what to do because Rendell showed us what to do and Corbett just lies about it and the Republicans just lie about it. I didn't have that experience of coming up here and being – I hit the ground running.

JT: Right. Was there anyone in the House that took you under their wing, say a mentor or one of the small caucuses or anything like that?

BJ: Well, I always a big admirer of Allen Kukovich [State Senator, 1997-2004; State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1977-1996], who went to the Senate eventually. I haven't seen him in a while but I still love Allen, and he did mentor to a certain extent. I was always close with Dwight Evans [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1981-present], who was a very good guide to what was going on in the city. Actually, before either one of us were in office, I was friendly in the neighborhood with Allyson Schwartz [United States Congress, 2005-present; State Senate, Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties, 1991-2005].

JT: Okay.

BJ: When she was in the Senate we would see some of each other, and I think we were elected at around the same time, in the same year. So, there were people here, David Richardson [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1973-1995]; the great Dave Richardson was in the House. Alphonso Deal [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1981-1987]. We had very outstanding people, but the great freeze and gridlock was starting to size up even then 28 years ago. It was extraordinarily difficult. I used to go to the National Conference of State Legislatures. NCSL has every year some sort of conference and I used to just be astounded to listen to other state officials, state elected people from all over the country, Democrats and Republicans talk about how, "Oh, I got this bill passed and I got Republicans to support me because I made "X" argument or I had "Y" relationship," and I would just sit there shaking my head, "You could not do that in Pennsylvania." And people all over the country would look to Pennsylvania delegation and say things like, "Oh yeah, we always heard you are really part of some legislature." And I think we were then, maybe not anymore, because things have gotten stuck everyplace it seems like, but we were nothing to be proud of. The Pennsylvania Legislature seems to be, in many ways, the forerunners of the National gridlock, the freeze, the fact that you can't get anything done in government through Congress. We seem to have perfected that long before Congress even thought about it.

JT: Did that make session days frustrating then, especially on the floor?

BJ: Yes. Oh, it's all frustrating. It's frustrating all the time. I think all of us, particularly now, we are in such a deep minority; I just do a lot of press releases. I do a lot of writing. I do a lot of speaking. Part of the problem that I have with my Republican counterpart this term, in the committee, is that I carry that desire into the committee. I cannot marshal enough votes; I'm in the minority, that's the definition, to defeat anything that Mr. Metcalfe [Daryl; State Representative, Butler County, 1999-present], my Republican counterpart wants to put forward. But, he also wants me not to say why I'm opposed; he wants me not to ask questions of witnesses. He wants me not to make statements when he makes an opening statement at a hearing, but I'm not supposed to. He makes a closing statement, but I'm not supposed to. We got kind of famous for fireworks because his way of approaching me is intimidation and bullying and I don't respond to bullying. So, my committee meetings are, they are not frustrating in that I can't win any votes; I know I can't win any votes. As I said, when you are in the minority that's what it means. But, it's galling; it's infuriating beyond frustrating not to be allowed to say why you are voting no or why you think something. It's a Democratic caucus's view, basically, is not a good idea. I was threatened. I mean, people come to my hearings, my meetings, just for entertainments sake. At one point, some bill, I raised my hand and started to complain about why I thought it was poor public policy and chairman Metcalfe said, "That's enough. She talked enough. Security Guard, take her out of here." So, the poor House security man comes to the back where we are all sitting and he doesn't know what to do; he's not going to lay hands on me. I don't move. I don't get up. I belong in that room. I'm a Member. I have a right to voice the opposition point of view. Why should I pay attention to all this stuff that is going around me? And he is yelling, Metcalfe is yelling, "Take her out of here. Take her out of here," and the other Members were all trying to get him to calm down. I'm just sitting there. So, when you can't

even say your piece that is infuriating. And when you are dealing with somebody like Daryl Metcalfe – truthfully, I get to the point where I want to push his button, I do. It gets so obvious after a while; it's so easy that I try not to do it at every meeting. It seems like discrimination against the mentally stupid. I just don't do it. Actually, one of the last meetings we had, I had no objection to the bill and I said, "Mr. Chairman we have no object to this bill." He said, "Well, call the roll." I said, "I think it's unanimous." He said, "Any no votes?" No, no votes. People in the audience are very disappointed. You know? I told everybody I'm reasonable; I'm a very reasonable woman. You know, so they all laughed. But it's true, I am. It's just that if it is terrible public policy I want to be able to say why. That's what you call a democracy. This man has violated rules. It's very disturbing actually. It's funny on some level but you ask yourself, how did Kaddafi, for instance – he started out being a popular hero, right? – How did he get to be a dictator? Did he start off by just violating little rules in a committee? Nobody objected? So then he violated bigger rules? More committees? The legislature? I mean, that's how these things happen I think. I am very disturbed this session the number of times the rules have been violated, on the floor a number of times. It's like the U.S. Senate, who, what? Invoked the filibuster 80 times, more than ever the whole history of the filibuster? I think the Republicans have called the question on the floor in this session – where they are in charge – more times than the question has been called on the floor in the last 30 years cumulatively. And the committee is the same: we had on two, maybe three, occasions the question was called in committee. The majority chairman just got tired of listening to us. So, somebody called the question and he encouraged it. That's not what you are supposed to do in committees; committees are supposed to discuss. That's what a committee does. You are supposed to do all the work on the committees, so then when you get to the floor everybody is satisfied and the detailed work

doesn't have to be done by 203 people, it's done by more like 20. But, his idea of committee, Mr. Metcalfe, I guess is to push through anything he likes while the rest of us just sit there and worship him. Not going to happen.

JT: Some would say that that's just the prerogative of the majority.

BJ: Not to break the rules. Prerogative of the majority is to fill the agenda, set the topic for hearings, have more witnesses, have more votes on the committee, but it's not to break the rules. It's not to have committee meetings without the proper notice. It's not to decide that – we had the situation once somebody said here I have an amendment A-whatever the number was, and the chairman says, "anybody second it? Alright nobody seconded it. Next." "Wait, wait we second it!" "Too late. Next amendment." That's not the prerogative of the majority. And, as a matter of fact, at a hearing, I forget which one it was, he made an opening statement and he did not allow me to make an opening statement and three members got up and made angry comments about that, and they were not all democrats. And they left the room. One after another, they got up and said, "This is disgraceful. This is disrespectful. Not only of the chairwoman, but of the rules. We are not sitting here and taking this. Your behavior is dishonorable." And one after another they left. As I said, not all Democrats.

JT: Sure.

BJ: So, we've not only got to the point where we have gridlock, we have professional bullies. It's pathetic.

JT: Now, this, of course, was the State Government committee that you are talking about.

BJ: Yes.

JT: Over the span of your service you served in several other committees, Health and Welfare, Insurance, Professional Licensure—

BJ: Judiciary, I've been on Judiciary.

JT: Sure. Appropriations. Did you have a favorite over the years? Did you think that one committee got a lot more done than others?

BJ: I liked State Government, myself. When I was the chair we did an awful lot of good stuff. We stopped the constitutional amendment to have marriages between a man and a woman and I don't think that is coming back after New York. I worked very hard on opening voter accessibility. I was looking into universal mail-in ballots, which they have in New Jersey and Washington State and Oregon. I even brought the Secretary of State who's elected in Oregon. He came to Harrisburg and talked about how it works in Oregon and why it could work in Pennsylvania. I've been trying to raise penalties against certain dirty tricks around Election Day and some of the stuff that, for instance, is going on in Florida now, where all that voter fraud is going on through, what's the name of it – the strategic alliance, something – the group that the Republicans hired in 10 different counties. Now there is fraudulent registration forms and

information that they're registering Democrats and not submitting them, which is illegal, serious, illegal. Having all this stuff go on, I don't know, I lost my train, but – depressing.

JT: Sure.

BJ: Very depressing.

JT: Sure.

BJ: When people are acting that way. And when we had a few little mistakes made here, by a group called ACORN, oh boy, what a fuss they made. Nothing like what's happening in Florida with the breadth – and those people were in Pennsylvania, they just didn't hire them from Pennsylvania this time, because we're not a ballot battleground state anymore. So, I don't know, you started me off, and I got lost somewhere.

JT: No, that's good. That's good. I was asking you about the committees that you had served on.

BJ: Committees, committees. So, State Government. I like State Government. I mean, I think we did, in the four years that I was the chairman, I think we moved things forward. And we certainly stopped the constitutional amendment on marriage. I don't know. I thought all the committee work was interesting. It gets you an opportunity to see the details, and if the

Committee Chair does it right, then you can tweak things so that actually what you're trying to do can really work for people.

JT: So, would you say that it was easier, in some aspects, especially for getting some legislation through, to be in the Majority?

BJ: Oh yeah. It's easier in terms of, if you have a vision. If you don't have a vision, go back to Bush [George W. Bush, President of the United States, 2001-2009], huh? Then it's really difficult, because then you don't know what to do from day to day. And putting together coalitions to move things forward is very hard. I think very often of small children and castles made of blocks or something like that. How long does it take to build something for a child? How long does it take for another kid to walk by and knock it down? When you're knocking things down, it's easy. It's easy for Republicans to knock things down, as we see on the national, because they're not responsible for anything. Now you watch them in the state field trying to make policy, trying to put something together; they're not so good at it. And I would say, of all the things they promise people, they've done none of them this term. They haven't made us a school choice state, thank goodness. They haven't gotten rid of the prevailing wage. They haven't broken the public service unions. They haven't privatized the state stores. They haven't ended unemployment compensation as we know it. They haven't done any of the things they said they were going to do. Not so easy, is it, boys? Is it? And they control the whole ball of wax. What they managed to do is get through voter suppression. So, in the words of their leader, Romney [Mitt Romney; Republican United States Presidential Candidate, 2012] wins. Done.

JT: Yeah. Over the years, there's been a number of the issues that you brought to the floor, a lot of them dealing with civil liberties, basic rights; were there some specific issues that you continued to bring, just because they weren't going the way that you wanted them to go?

BJ: Oh, all of them.

JT: I know you mentioned some earlier when you were talking about the district.

BJ: Yes. Yes, I would say right now there are two groups that it's still, in this state, in this country, that it's still okay to make fun of in certain rooms, in certain atmospheres, and it shouldn't be. And to scorn and discriminate against, and that's members of the LGBT community; it still seems to be okay to make homophobic jokes, I don't know why, in certain places. And immigrants, whether they're here legitimately – I never can figure out what, immigrants with papers and without papers, I mean, we all have ancestors who came here. How many of them have papers? My family didn't have any papers, they just came here – so, I think that immigrants, whether they're here legitimately, whatever that means, or not, it's okay to discriminate against them, in many circles. And I keep on trying to make points about, you're not allowed to do that, sorry, any more. Too bad. Tough. Tough. You don't like the fact that this country is being run by a black man and by a woman and a black man? The world being run by a woman and a black man? Tough. Get used to it. You know? It's time.

JT: Yeah.

BJ: It's time. It's time we got over all this garbage and started treating everybody fairly.

JT: Right. Now, obviously, you have had some contention with some of the Members across the aisle. What about the camaraderie? Out of the House floor, out of committee, over the last 15 years, 20 years, that you've been in office, did you get along with some Members across the aisle, out of the office?

BJ: Oh, I get along with them. I mean, I see them, I smile. I'm not a drinker, I'm not a bar-hanger-outer. I've tried, over the years, to make friends on the other side, particularly with women. Some of the other women are more successful than I am. I just look at how they vote. And it gets hard, it's hard to smile. I do, of course. But there's two women on my committee, two Republican women, they see how he tries to bully me. I don't think they say anything to him in private. They sure don't say anything in public. As a matter of fact, they don't say anything at all. I wouldn't recognize their voices if they – I'd have to turn around to see which one was which. I don't see it possible to socialize for more than a couple minutes with any Republicans. I just feel too annoyed with them. Democrats, well, I hang out with a lot of Democrats, particularly the Philadelphia people. They are very nice, very attuned to everything.

JT: Sure. And you're also a member of some of the informal caucuses?

BJ: Yes.

JT: I'm sure that's a nice way to meet with people outside of the House floor.

BJ: Well, I try to make some bridges. I'm a member of the Agriculture Caucus, because I have been on the Agriculture Committee, which is another one I really like being on. I like to eat, I think is what it is. And I belong to, also, a Republican-dominated caucus, the Hunger Caucus, both being part of my interest in food, but I can't say I'm a social friend of any Republican in State Government.

JT: Do you see yourself as a mentor to any of the younger members?

BJ: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. The younger Philadelphians, particularly, and a lot of women. Oh, absolutely. My custom was in November, in the spring and in November, was to call people, if they were for sure coming, welcome them into the House and telling them, I'm sending you my card or here's my email, and let me know if I can help you. And I've done that. But to the Democrats, and I made friends, or if I've heard of somebody who's coming from a particular situation, or has a particular interest, I might try to talk them into being on my committee. "Hi, this is Babette, I'm on the State Government Committee. Want to be on State Government?" I try and sell my committee to freshmen.

JT: Sure.

BJ: Sometimes.

JT: Good.

BJ: Yeah, I just think some of the other women get along better with the Republican women. But I don't know what to say to them. I really do not know what to say to them. They don't seem to have interests that are, I don't know, nice, even. Forget about womanly.

JT: Right.

BJ: Feminists, forget. Equalitarian, no, never. Nice, polite, respectful – nothing. So, I say hello. Every once in a while, I see them in Center City, Philadelphia, though. I see my Republican colleagues, men and women, walking around in Philadelphia enjoying themselves, after they have voted against us, every day, day after day after day, and it makes me mad. I want to say to them, how dare you come in this district? And enjoy the atmosphere here. All you can do is vote against this city. So I do, I see everybody in Center City eventually. Hey, what are you doing here? Oh, well, we brought the family to the museum. Yeah, it would've closed if your vote had counted! So glad you're visiting your child at the University here or in College. Lucky it's still open; no thanks to you. I don't say those things, of course.

JT: Sure. Sure. How was your relationship with the media over the years? And did it change since the early days?

BJ: Well, I don't think anybody noticed me for about 24 years, and the last three or four years, I've been more noticed, which is the difference. When I got to be the committee chair, and then when we had these little contentions, Mr. Metcalfe and I, the media took some notice. But in

Philadelphia, the Legislature doesn't get much traction. And if you're not the chair of the delegation, or – I guess, if you're not the chair of the delegation, basically, because people go to Dwight, now they go to Cherelle [Parker; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 2005-present], for the reaction of the Philadelphia part of the Legislature. So, in Philadelphia, the Legislature does not play at all. The *Inquirer* is not particularly interested. The *Daily News* isn't set up. The other papers are more neighborhood-oriented, they don't have somebody here. Philadelphia's really, the *Inquirer* is really a very poor paper. And particularly poor on reporting what's going on in Harrisburg. People have no idea. So, one of the things I really always like doing and continue like doing, is press releases, my newsletter, op eds, because I have to make my own news. We don't get media attention, really, at all.

JT: Do you have a district office?

BJ: I have a district office. And mostly it's everything but PennDOT work. Trying to find people jobs, trying to find them a place to live. Right now, doing tremendous amount of work trying to help people get food stamps. I think that crisis is kind of over. Although a lot of people are hungrier than they were before. Very proud. Good for Governor Corbett, another strike for fairness; more hungry people. And I think what we're doing, basically, now, is making sure folks have the right ID.

JT: Sure.

BJ: Doing all kinds of workshops and outreach and encouraging people to call in to check to make sure they're registered, whether they've actually filled it out or they haven't heard, are they really registered? Where do they vote? Let's check the day, yes these are the hours, and do you have an unexpired whatever around. Or certificate, you know, unexpired PennDOT driver's license or passport or something like that.

JT: You've expressed some frustration with the legislative process over the years. Do you have a favorite aspect of what it is to be a State Representative?

BJ: It's all so much fun. I can't decide. I don't know. I don't know, really. I think probably feeling as if I've accomplished something. And the bill I like the best, and we need to do it again, and I was very pleased when we raised the minimum wage. And we were in the minority, Democrats were in the minority, when we did that. Ed [Rendell] signed it, but we were in the minority in the Legislature, both houses, and we still passed, raised the minimum wage. And we need to do it again, and when it went through its final stage, when Rendell signed it, I felt like I had done something.

JT: One of your proudest moments?

BJ: Yeah. I've done something that really helped people.

JT: Yeah. Good.

BJ: It helps so many people. And mostly, actually, women wage earners, principally, because there is more than half of the minimum wage earners are women. And women who make minimum wage also typically have much more responsibility than the men. Children and old people. It was such a help. We just need to do it again. We needed to do it long before we did it and we need to do it again.

JT: Do you plan on staying active in politics after you leave the House?

BJ: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Certainly, I want to make contributions. And sometimes, I think, over the last couple of months, there's such gridlock in Harrisburg. Maybe I can be more effective not in Harrisburg. And I'm thinking of some grassroots work. Some of the issues I've mentioned – immigration; I really would like to see a hard-hitting, broad-based coalition of folks who are ready to respond immediately when there is this anti-immigration discrimination going on. All kinds of women's issues. I don't think I want to get back into reproductive rights; it's really a shark tank. But certainly, anything that has to do with women, women's well-being. And I've done it all from job training and education to abortion rights to nursing babies to sex discrimination on the job, on and on. I'd like to work on food issues. I think it's really interesting that we can't get together. I think there's a way to get the farmers together with the city. I mentioned in the beginning of this that Philadelphia and the urban areas are the best customers for the agriculture interests. Agriculture interests typically represented by Republicans, urban areas typically represented by Democrats; we're not going to make it work economically if we don't work together. People in the cities, more and more, want to eat local food. We want to eat the crops. We want farm fresh crops and produce and livestock in our city

grocery stores and on our street corners. How can we make it easier for farmers? How can the farmers help us be in the position so that we can buy their food? Buy their expensive food; buy lots of their expensive food, so that all of us can succeed economically? I think that's a fascinating set of issues to explore. How can we go beyond Pennsylvania Preferred and really encourage people in the cities and markets to patronize our local farms?

JT: Right.

BJ: How can we explain to our local farmers, for instance, that transit, if they would support transit in the cities, they'd have something very foreign to rural folks and farmers and folks who try and stay away. Well, why should they be interested in transit? Well, isn't there a problem with urban sprawl eating up farmland? Wouldn't that problem be alleviated if we had universal, good, clean, cheap, affordable, safe public transit in all cities? Wouldn't the farmers be advantaged if they were on the side of public transit to try and contain cities in the areas where they should be contained? Isn't that something we could all work on together? I started that in office, and maybe it's something I can continue.

JT: Yeah.

BJ: And I remember when I first came here, or when I first was lobbying here, which was more than 28 years ago, it was more like 30, 32; you had the same setup with coal. The rest of the state produced the coal that was burnt in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and the other urban areas. But they understood better then, the Republicans, I guess, the symbiotic relationship. And so far at

keeping the cities in some shape where people could buy the coal, it was done. And now we have to remember that agriculture is a very important – billions and billions of dollars, thousands, hundreds of thousands of lives in this state tied up in agriculture. And we cannot grow our food in the city. And here's something we could go hand in hand and be an economic success in this state.

JT: Right. Yeah.

BJ: If we stopped looking at leaders who want to only divide and conquer.

JT: Nice.

BJ: So that was a great note. Let's end it.

JT: Yes. One final question, though; how would you like your tenure to be remembered?

BJ: Oh, somebody who this was part of her life, for being active in the community. First, she did it as a private citizen, then she did it as elected, then she did it as a private citizen again. You know, her issues are the ones we care about. And we'll do what we can to lead and follow.

JT: Nice. Well, thank you so much.

BJ: Thank you.

JT: Representative Josephs from Philadelphia, thank you again for participating in our oral history project.

BJ: Well, we'll look at this and we'll see.

JT: Absolutely.

BJ: Thank you for asking all of those provocative questions. And I did talk.

JT: You're welcome. And, yes, thank you again.