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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable John P. Milliron (D)

79th District

Blair County

1975-1978

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Heidi Mays, House Archivist
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Transcribed by: Erin Miller

Heidi Mays (HM): Good morning. I'm here today with former Representative John Milliron, who served from 1975 to 1978, from the 79th Legislative District from Blair County. Thank you for being here with me today.

The Honorable John Milliron (JM): My pleasure.

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

JM: Well, I was the oldest of five kids. My dad was a city cop in Altoona. My mother was a registered nurse. I can never remember when we weren't always talking politics. My father ran for office – Altoona, even to this day, but back in the sixties and fifties was heavily, heavily Republican, and the Democrats had a hard time even getting candidates to file petitions. So, my father ran for city council, city treasurer, ran for mayor in 1955, school board, district magistrate. I mean, he was just one of the good ole boy Democrats that whenever they needed someone, and there were about ten of them that seemed to be the same names constantly, but anyhow, we just grew up always talking politics; myself, my dad, my other brothers and sisters. So, it was something that was much more of a family affair. My mother's family – her maiden name was O'Friel. Her father, my grandfather O'Friel, was very active in Democratic politics, also. There were two sides of town, not right side of the tracks, bad side of the tracks, but two sides of the city. The railroad literally split the city in half, and she was from what's known as the 5th Ward area, and we were from the other side, the even-numbered wards, the 6th Ward, and it was just something we always ended up enjoying, and I don't ever remember me not liking

politics and probably wanting to run for office. I never quite knew what, but when I was growing up, that's how it was.

HM: Was there ever a decision made between Democrats or Republican?

JM: In Altoona?

HM: In Altoona, or for you personally?

JM: Well, no, I mean, in Altoona, you know, I'm sure – oh, I don't even know how to say it. I'm sure at some point in time there were some deals between the Republicans throwing a bone every once in a while to some Democratic leaders, but it never happened when I was in office because when I won, Republicans basically just came after me from day one, with the exception of Sam Hayes [Samuel E. Hayes, Jr.; State Representative, Blair, Centre and Huntingdon Counties, 1971-1992; PA Secretary of Agriculture, 1997-2003] who was a Republican from my County, and Sam was a first-class guy. He and I go back a lot of years together.

HM: So, was it a family decision, you know, to become a Democrat?

JM: It was, but at the same time it also came about relatively quickly. The incumbent was a guy by the name of Denny Bixler [State Representative, Blair County, 1969-1974], and Denny had announced, not unexpectedly, but caught a lot of people off guard, that he

wasn't running for reelection. He actually ran for the State Senate against Bob Jubelirer¹ Jubelirer only beat him by, geez, something like thirty votes out of – I don't remember the number cast, but for a Senate, State Senate seat – but anyhow, when Denny announced he wasn't running, it was like January of [19]74, so there wasn't a lot of notice, and I was active with the Young Democrats, and a group of us were talking, and then I ended up talking to my father and turns out at that point the Democrats were almost conceding this seat, and they decided to – the Party, which again, is a very weak entity back home, because of the Republican domination – the Party decided to nominate a school board director, a guy by the name of Kimmel; I can't remember his first name. But, he'd been the only Democratic member for like 30 years. He was almost 70 and they said, "Okay, we'll endorse him to make him feel good." And I was like, "No, no way. I'm not going to concede the seat," so my dad and I talked it over, and that's how we decided to, to run.

HM: So tell me, was there an endorsement process?

JM: Actually, there was at that time, and again, the Blair County Democratic Party just was, you know, was a very – a lot of vacancies for committee people and all, because again, we were in the minority dramatically. They had never run the courthouse. There was a Democratic mayor back in the early [19]50s, and they would win an occasional seat maybe on council, but the bottom line is there was an endorsement process, but it didn't really mean much. So, they endorsed, again, this gentleman by the name of Kimmel, and then another young guy my age, by the name of Joe Moran decided to get

¹ Robert C. Jubelirer; State Senate, 30th District, 1975-2006; President Pro Tempore of the Senate, 1985-1992 and 1995-2006; Lieutenant Governor, 2001-2003.

into it, and it's always been my opinion that he was talked into it by the Party because they wanted to split up the, the younger vote and maybe give Kimmel a better chance to win the Primary. So, it was a three-way Primary race, but I was not endorsed. As a matter of fact, they wanted me out of the race. I worked for PennDOT at the time, and I got called to Harrisburg – the District Engineer called me in his office in Hollidaysburg and said the Secretary wants to see you and yeah, I was a 25 year old kid who had worked for PennDOT for less than a year, and meeting the Secretary wasn't exactly something I had expected and – you know, it's terrible, I can't remember his name. He was from Washington County: Jake Kassub. So, I came down and they made me wait for half an hour, so when I went in, he basically said that he had heard I was going to run for the Legislature and didn't really think that was a good idea and that he would prefer that I not run. I was very polite, I think, and said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary. Thank you, but I intend to," and he said, "Well, then, we're going to have to leave you go," and I said, "Well, you can do that, but I'm an officer in the Union, so I think you'll have your hands full," which surprised him, and we didn't reach a compromise. I agreed to take a leave of absence without pay, but they tried to – when I say they, Governor [Milton] Shapp [Governor of Pennsylvania, 1971-1979], the Democrats are in control in Harrisburg, but certainly not in Altoona or Blair County. So, there was an effort made to get me out of the race but not successful.

HM: Well, that's a great story. So, you won the Primary, and then what kind of competition did you have?

JM: Well, everybody, everybody you're going to interview is going to tell you what a tough race they had and what a great campaign they ran, and I hear that from every new Member that comes in, so I don't want to sound like them, but the guy that I ran against was a man by the name of Ted Johnson who was the TV Anchorman on our local Channel 10 TV station. My name recognition, I thought, was good because of my father being so active in the Party and being a city policeman and everybody knew him, but it paled in comparison to the guy who was on TV for 15 years on the evening news, and, you know, little folksy Channel 10 in Altoona – no cable back then. I mean, so that was about the only station you got in your area. So, I think that was one of the reasons why the Democrats weren't putting up a big fight. They didn't think they could beat Ted Johnson, but we did a lot of work, and Ted was an older gentleman. Ted was, I'm guessing, mid-50s, which now, of course, isn't old at all, but I was in my mid-20s, so it was a very much of a young versus old race, but at the same time, right during that period – and I don't want anybody to ever think I'm minimizing it and again telling everybody what a great race I ran – right in the middle of it, Watergate broke, and Republicans just weren't going to win, and that's one of the reasons Bob Jubelirer had such a great difficulty. As a matter of fact, he was the only Republican Member of the Class of [19]74 in the Senate. No other new Republicans had won that year in the Senate. The House went from, I believe, 92 Democrats in the minority in [19]73-[19]74, and my class had 47 new Democrats, and I think there were 108 or 109 of us in the class. So, I mean, we were considered – 04 [1974] and 06 [1976] were very much the Watergate babies; repercussions against the Republicans. It was hard. So, that was a major help for me, and it was also one of the problems, I meant, over the next four years – I was only in two terms – the Republicans gradually went back their old voting patterns, and in 1978 it was

just a massacre. We went from 118 to 93, the Democrats did, and I don't remember all the numbers, but there were about 15 Democrats defeated in a Primary in safe Democratic seats that people were upset with, and then another 25 of us, 30 of us lost in November. So, it was a big, big Republican year in [19]78. That's the year Dick Thornburgh won, brought in a big Republican majority in the House. So, anyhow, I ran against a guy by the name of Ted Johnson. [He was] well known, but Watergate broke, and it was a major factor in helping me win.

HM: So, your subsequent campaigns, you said, they were probably very hard fought?

JM: Yeah, I don't remember the exact numbers. I won my first race by 100, I think the second race by 400, and lost the third race by 200. So, we never had easy runs, never easy.

HM: Do you recall how much a campaign costs to run in Altoona?

JM: Yeah, spent a little over 3,000 dollars in my first race. I think it was 31 hundred, and that was – I didn't think – we had set a goal of 2,000 and the House Democratic Campaign Committee, which at that time was basically one or two of the Leaders – Herb Fineman [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1955-1977; Speaker, 1969-1972 and 1975-1977] was the Democratic Leader – they helped out. I think they gave me 500 or 750 bucks, which I hadn't counted on, but I mean, that was huge money, but it's small, small bucks compared to today.

HM: Yeah. I wanted to talk a little bit about your education and career prior to coming to the House. What can you tell me about it?

JM: Well, I wasn't a very good student. I was a good student in high school. I went to Bishop Guilfoyle High School. Went to Duquesne University in Pittsburgh and left there after five years and did not graduate. Wasted an awful lot of my father's money, and again, he was a city cop. He didn't have a lot. I wasn't a very good student. But, I loved politics and I had quit for a term in [19]68 to work on Bobby Kennedy's campaign, and I'd quit another term for some other political thing. It was not an excuse, but I just – I wasn't a very good student, not because of ability, sorry to say, but I just didn't really put a lot of time in it like I should have. So, in [19]72 I left Pittsburgh, where Duquesne's located, and came back home to Altoona, and again, because Governor Shapp was Governor, Democratic Governor, my dad was able to get me a job at PennDOT. It was literally a clerk's job, but I didn't know what else I was going to do. I only had three years of college, and it was sort of, I don't know; figure out what I'll do. I subsequently went back to school and then went to law school, but in 1974 when I ran, I did not have a college degree.

HM: So, how did you feel whenever you were first elected and during your first Swearing-In?

JM: It's, you know, it's a feeling, and I don't think it changes with age, but I was twenty-five, twenty-six, and I've talked to Members who were first elected in their forties, fifties, sixties, and it's that same feeling. I mean, it's an overwhelming feeling.

First of all, it was exciting that night, and there was, you know, the next couple days you're running on adrenaline. Not the second time at all, but I meant the very first time just thinking, Boy, that many people supported you, or that many people worked for you. So, I mean, the only way to describe it is literally just a major, major adrenaline rush where I don't think I slept for two days and giving interviews and making calls and calling old friends from school and telling them. But when I came down here, first day I had ever stepped foot in the Capitol was in December after the election – the Swearing-In was in January - got a little mini tour. We really didn't have orientation then like they do now, but came down, found out where my office would be, and, I think, took some pictures for the Pennsylvania Manual or something, but when I was Sworn-In, you literally look around to the Chamber. It's just so gorgeous, and you're overwhelmed by it – and you've probably heard this, since you're interviewing all these Members; you've probably heard this story many times – but the story is that when the first day you're here on your Swearing-In, you look around and say, "Oh, my God, how did I get here?" And six months later, and you've met everybody else, you say, "How the hell did they get here?" So, you know, the novelty wears off relatively quickly. You got to get right down to work, but it's an overwhelming thing. Wonderful feeling.

HM: Do you remember who you sat next to on the Floor?

JM: Yes, a guy by the name of Ted Berlin [Theodore; State Representative, Bucks County, 1975-1978]. I had an aisle seat, in those days because the majority was so large, we had the normal Democratic side and about three seats in the entire way back on the Republican center aisle, and I was right up front. I have no idea why. I don't know if

Herb Fineman didn't trust me, wanted to keep me within eyesight, or what, but Ted Berlin was from Bucks County, and Ted served two terms same as I did. He lost in [19]78 also, but he sat next to me in the first term, and the second term was Mike Cassidy [Michael E.; State Representative, Blair County, 1977-1978] who was elected from Blair County, and so Mike and I – first time ever Blair County had two Democrats, so that was the second term.

HM: Can you tell me about your first office in Harrisburg?

JM: Yeah, it was just such a luxurious room. It was about 20 by 20, and there were four of us, and two secretaries were there. At the beginning – I'm sorry. There was one secretary, and then later in the Session, we actually got a second secretary. We thought that was just so wonderful to have half a secretary – but, there were four of us. It was room 602, which never to this day was explained to me why the fifth floor has six hundred numbers and E floor has five hundred numbers. I mean, it's almost a symbol or symblematic of the Legislature. I said, "Why is that?" And everybody said, "Well, it's always been like that. Why the hell you care?" You know, so you just get used to being on the fifth floor with a six hundred number, but what happened was, you know, constituents would come down and call me later and say, "We couldn't find you. We couldn't find the sixth floor," but anyhow – and there were four of us in there. Steve Reed [Stephen R; State Representative, Dauphin County, 1975-1980], current mayor of Harrisburg, Ralph Pratt [State Representative, Beaver, Lawrence and Mercer Counties, 1975-1986] who is now retired, but he went on to be a judge and the President Judge of Lawrence County, and Billy McLane [William J.; State Representative, Lackawanna

County, 1975-1978] from Scranton. Sort of lost track of Bill, but the four of us were in the corners, and then, eventually, two secretaries in the middle, and didn't get a lot of support staff then, but it was the beginning of the Legislature becoming full-time. By the time I left and into the next year, in [19]79, it was basically one person, one secretary. They still had larger offices sometimes with two or three Members in it, but the support staff started to grow, and the committees stopped being political as far as big turnover. They'd have people on a committee where you would learn it, and then no matter who the chairman was, the permanent staff would stay, and it was one of the big efforts of Herb Fineman. He had, had determined to upgrade the legislative staff because we were always in the dark when it came, basically, on budget time, because the Governor had all the staff people – and this wasn't a Democratic or Republican thing – but, the Governor's Office had all the staff and all the research and all the ability, and we'd sort of have to just take their word for whatever they'd say, and Herb basically made a decision that he was going to have the Legislative Branch as informed as the Executive Branch, and as much as he was a real leader on it, Bobby Butera [Robert J.; State Representative, Montgomery County, 1963-1978] played a role, and then after Herb left and Matt Ryan [Matthew J.; State Representative, Delaware County, 1965-2003; Speaker, 1981-1982 and 1995-2003] became Leader and then Speaker, Matt continued the process where by the mid-Eighties we were pretty much of an equal footing with the Executive as far as staff, research, and ability.

HM: Would you say that was one of the major changes that you experienced?

JM: Oh, sure. Yeah, and it was brought about for lots of reasons when Herb wanted it. Very few people there – it was still the days when the Speaker said he wanted something, very few people opposed him, although there was a Speakers fight that year that would put the one this year between Denny O’Brien [Dennis M.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1977-1980, 1983-present; Speaker, 2007-2008] and John Perzel [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1979-present; Speaker, 2003-2006] and Bill DeWeese [H. William; State Representative, Fayette, Greene and Washington Counties, 1979-present; Speaker, 1993-1994], it almost pales, because there was two Democrats; there was Herb and Marty Mullen [Martin P.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1955-1982], two Democrats from Philly, and it was over the abortion issue and Herb’s style. Herb was very forceful. I don’t remember the exact numbers, but about seven Republicans voted for him and about five Democrats voted for Marty Mullen along with the Republicans, but Herb won. Not real close, but it was the first real Speakers fight, but that was between the Caucus. That wasn’t between a D and R, and an R where the minority party was trying to be in control of the Chamber. But anyhow, Herb – I lost my train of thought – you’ll find that all through this. As I start to tell stories, I’ll forget what the original question was – but, Herb really got that started with the staff, and that was the beginning of, of how it started.

HM: Would you say you had any mentors whenever you first began your career?

JM: Yeah, several of them. One was Herb Fineman. Really taught me an awful lot in a very forceful way. For whatever reason, we hit it off. Again, it was not a father/son thing, but Herb took me under his wing, again, because of my age, you know, very

impressionable age, and Herb was great. Sam Hayes, a Republican from Blair County, Sam was an absolute great resource. Sam could be as partisan as there was on the Floor, but when I would talk to Sam about how things were going or how this would be or how should I vote or just ask advice, Sam would always just give me very straight advice, not saying you should desert the Party or not vote with the Democrats. I mean, he was a good, good resource, and I'd follow his opinion a good bit, but Herb and to a little bit lesser extent Jimmy Manderino [James J.; State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1967-1989; Speaker, 1989]. Jimmy was the Majority Whip, but Herb really ran the show. Leroy Irvis [K. Leroy; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1959-1988; Speaker, 1977-1978 and 1983-1988] was the Majority Leader, but Herb was, Herb took a liking to me and taught me an awful lot.

HM: What role do you think camaraderie plays in the House of Representatives?

JM: I don't know if it plays as much now, but it was a tremendous influence back in the Seventies. It wasn't partisanship; it was camaraderie. We'd have great partisan debates on the Floor. I like to think they were a little bit higher level than we see today, but some great, great orators. Leroy Irvis was. Matt Ryan was. Jimmy Manderino was, but anyhow, we'd have some good partisan Floor debate, and when it was done, we'd go out and have a beer, meaning D's and R's. It was more of a generational thing. Marv Miller [Marvin E. Miller, Jr.; State Representative, Lancaster County, 1973-1990] from Lancaster, Nicky Moehlmann [Nicholas B.; State Representative, Berks, Lancaster and Lebanon Counties, 1975-1990] from Lebanon were both Republicans. Oh, boy, there were a number of others. Ollie Wagner [George O.; State Representative, Montour and

Northumberland Counties, 1973-1980], another Republican from up in Northumberland County, along with the Democrats that came in with me. I'm saying, I would think most of us were in our mid, late twenties into our early, mid thirties, and you commiserated with each other. You talked about problems, or how do you handle this or what do you do back home when you have this, but again, it was a very strong influence on me, but it was not dominated by a Caucus feeling. It seemed to start in the mid to late eighties where the two Caucuses just didn't associate with each other. In those days, the Committee Chairmen were the only ones that lobbyists would take out to dinner. So, your Committee Chair would call you up and say, you know, not, "Do you want to go to dinner?", "We're having dinner next Tuesday," so you basically went along. First of all, you're happy to get a free meal, but you also did it because that's what your Chairman wanted, and there would always be five, six Democrats, five, six Republicans. I mean, it was not a partisan thing. Very seldom anymore as a lobbyist and very few lobbyists in this town go and invite D's and R's to get together for dinner. You either invite D's tonight and R's tomorrow or House, Senate, whatever, but the partisanship is extreme now where the camaraderie, for your word, was prevalent then.

HM: Do you still maintain any of your relationships with your former Rep[resentative]s?

JM: Yes, not as many as I'd like to, but I still keep in touch with a number of them. Ralph Pratt from my office. Ralph retired this year from the bench in Lawrence County, Newcastle area. He's in Florida. Steve Reed, as much as Steve and I would always go at it when we were Members, but we kept in contact, and yes, some of my, I consider still,

some of my very close friends. Sam Hayes, one of my, as I'd said earlier, one of my Republican mentors. Sam and I still keep in touch. So, some very good friends that I made in those days.

HM: Oh good. You mentioned the Committee Chairmen and their role in this process. You served on several committees while you were here. Did you have a favorite?

JM: Transportation. I think a lot of towns complain they have the worst roads in the state, and Altoona was no different, Blair County. So, it was always a big priority campaign-wise to say you would try to do something to improve the roads or get new construction because of business and industry, so the Transportation Committee was very important to me. My first Chairman was Joe Bonetto [Joseph F.; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1965-1976]. Joe was out of Washington County, I believe, Washington or Westmoreland, and, again, very fair guy. I enjoy him. And then second time was Bobby Bellomini [Robert E.; State Representative, Erie County, 1965-1978] out of Erie. Bells Bellomini, and again, both took care of me very well. Rudy Dinnini [Rudolph; State Representative, Dauphin County, 1967-1990] was the Republican Chair, Minority Chair, and became the Majority Chair for many, many, many years, and again, Rudy was a very classy guy, and there'd be a lot of votes in that committee where the D's and R's would work together to see how they could help each other out on a project, so it wasn't partisan. There was partisanship on the Floor, but that particular committee was very bipartisan, and it's maintained that a good bit over the years, but that was my favorite committee as far as a structure. As I'd said earlier, this was the Watergate time, so my, I guess, biggest pride, or the thing that I enjoyed the most was we had pretty much

demanded, and, you know, I tried to describe this; you don't demand much of Herb Fineman. I mean, you're intimidated by him, but the freshmen wanted to change the rules of how the Caucus was run. Didn't have a lot of luck the first year or so, but as the first term wrapped up, Herb had appointed a committee, four or five of us freshmen, three or four of the old-timers. Bill Rieger [William W.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1967-2006] was one, Harry Englehart [State Representative, Cambria and Somerset Counties, 1965-1978] was one, and he appointed me Chairman of it to rewrite the rules, and Herb basically didn't think they would pass within the Caucus, so he sort of left us play, and I think he put Harry Englehart and Bill Rieger on it just to keep an eye on us, and I'm sure they also gave him regular reports, but we came back with, in those days, they were really revolutionary proposals to change. The Democrats did not elect the Appropriations Chairman. That was appointed by the Speaker, and there's not a more powerful committee. Not then, not today, than Appropriations. So, when it was an appointment, it really consolidated the power of the Speaker, and so anyhow, one of the proposals was to have the Appropriations elected by the Caucus instead of appointed, making it a Leadership position but elected, and that passed. We were very surprised. The second part of it was we used to have stand-up vote; no secret ballot. So, when you – for Caucus elections – when the Speaker asked you for a commitment or the Majority Leader, there wasn't any saying, "Yeah, don't worry" and then voting for the other guy or whatever. You had to really know how to count noses because it was stand-up. So, one of the other things was for a secret ballot, which again, was revolutionary in those days. We were rather disappointed the first election in the fall of [19]76; after the elections, you have Leadership elections in November before the next Session begins for your Leadership, and we were really thrilled. We were going to have our first secret ballot

ever, but Bill Rieger from Philly made every – he was Chairman of the Philly delegation – every Member from Philly had to show him the vote before they put it in the ballot box, so it wasn't too secret, at least from Philly, and some of the Leaders at that time – Herb was still there – recommended to you it would very good idea for you to show them your secret ballot, but that was the only time. After that, it's basically secret, and the Members now have to guess who lied to them.

HM: Well, those are some major changes that I'm sure they're feeling, you know, the effects today still.

JM: When we tell people about it, I mean, it's just hard to imagine not having secret ballot or not being able to elect Appropriations, but things change.

HM: Yeah, yeah. What were the major pieces of legislation in which you were involved in?

JM: Again, my biggest pride was the internal Caucus roles that I was Chairman of the Committee. As a first, second term in those days, you didn't have a lot of input in legislation. Very, very seldom did a freshman ever get a bill passed. If you were in the minority, you didn't get it passed at all. I was able to get two things passed when I was a Member, one the first term, one the second term, and again, not dramatic things, but one was a change to the historical tax code, which helped out a little building called the Mishler Theatre in Altoona, and it was my first bill. So, I was very proud of that, even though it didn't impact anybody except us in Altoona, but the second session I was on the

Urban Affairs Committee and was Chairman of the Subcommittee on Third Class Cities, and we had a significant change to the pension law for third class cities. All the pension funds were running huge deficits. I think a lot of them still are, but there were some structural changes made, and the state helped reimburse. We mandated that you had to buy back military time, had to buy back local time, but yet we never reimbursed a municipality, so there was some things changing then. So, it wasn't dramatic, but it was something I was proud of because I helped the city of Altoona, which was my District.

HM: How much work would you say goes on in Caucus behind the closed doors as opposed to —?

JM: Again, I don't know what it's like today because you're not there. I mean, you only can repeat secondhand. Caucuses then were very, very well attended. It was just insisted on by the Leaders, and that's where you found out what the votes were going to be, and if you had questions, that's where you asked. Not that there wasn't some good Floor debate where questions were asked, but we didn't have that staff yet that I told you about. You know, first term I shared a secretary. Nobody back home, no research, so if you really wanted to know anything, you needed to be at the Caucus to learn. So, a lot of major decisions were made there. Not so much party line vote. I think it's always been overly overplayed by the media that Caucus decides how you vote. Major policy issues, that's true, but most of the votes were not all D's or all R's or Caucus positions, but you went to Caucus to learn what was going on, because it was the only source of information. Nowadays, because everybody has their own research staff and has access from the internet and whatever to more information, the Caucus has lost some of its importance,

although that's a shame also because you should – it's supposed to also be there to help move the process along on the Floor, and when everybody's asking routine questions that could have been answered in Caucus, you slow the process down, which causes frustration, which causes the anger, which causes the shouting matches. But, the Caucuses played a major role then, but it was more informational.

HM: Being elected as a younger Member and having this interest in reform-type issues, what are your thoughts on today's reform measures that the House is trying to take?

JM: Most of them are good. I think the institution always needs a good shake up every twenty, twenty-five years, maybe more often than that because you become complacent, and it's the old thing you can't see the forest for the trees. You do something for so many years you don't question it. It's just the way it's done, so you need to have new eyes or fresh eyes and consider changes. A number of the things I felt were a little bit off the wall – for instance, I think one of the proposals was that every Member's guaranteed one bill a year gets voted on. Well, there's a committee process, and that committee needs to be utilized and hearings and debate, and just because someone may have an outrageous concept that they want to put everybody else on the spot, I don't think is appropriate. But a lot of the changes as far as how the voting's occurred, giving everybody twenty-four hours, giving people – taking some of the power away from the Rules Committee, where it really got a little bit – not just with Johnny Perzel, but even before that with the Democratic Leaders – it was getting very, very concentrated. So, the power needs to be dispersed and it's good that every once in a while there's some hell raised by newer

Members, not necessarily younger, but by newer Members who feel left out, and that should never be the case.

HM: What aspect of your job as a Pennsylvania House Member did you enjoy the most?

JM: Oh, my, feeling a part of something that was making change that you could actually see results. I mean, not immediate, you know. If you voted for a highway bill, you didn't see the highway being built and paved and whatever, the next day, but seeing things like changes in the education code and having a sense of actually accomplishing things. I think that's part of the frustration now and with a lot of the proposed rule changes and as everybody's calling them, "the reformers." They don't feel like they're part of the process and, you know, no matter if it was an education bill which would have been, you know, massive and very technical or health care bills, you know, you talked about them, and you just really felt that you were part of something that was going to have an impact on everybody's lives, and it, you know, a little bit of idealism at that point. Nothing wrong with that, but you know, I felt part of something much bigger than myself, and that was – it was an overwhelming feeling, but it was also a very nice one.

HM: Well, what did you not like about being a House Member?

JM: Probably the criticism back home. You always want to think you have thick skin. You go back to meetings, and you try to explain why you voted this way, and most times, you know, people would say, "Yeah, I understand," but they always expected a little bit more than what you were able to do, and it was frustrating. Again, I was only in for four

years. I mean, it was fantastic. I wouldn't trade that four years for anything, but I didn't have a twenty-year career. But it was frustrating to go to a group where they just questioned why you voted for something, and then when you'd give them the reasons, it would – I mean, there was partisanship; I tried to minimize it before, but there was still partisanship. The Republicans would be taking shots at me back home, the Republican Mayor and the Republican County Chair and things like that, and, you know, it's always been the Democrats support Philly and nobody else, and that's not true, but, you know, I'd be voting for some Philadelphia projects and get criticized big time back home, and, you know, you try to explain to them that we're getting some significant things back here in Altoona, and those thirty-five votes from Philly – there were a lot more than there are now because of reapportionment – but, you know, those thirty-five votes from Philadelphia are always there helping me out, and that's important for you. Well, then you'd be labeled, "Ah, yeah, you just traded off. You just sold out." I mean, at times – nobody in politics, I don't care what you are, no matter what you say, you don't like criticism, but it's part of it, and you need to expect it, but it doesn't mean you always like it.

HM: What was your relationship like with the media?

JM: It was good because back home was this small town. As a matter of fact, you know, the people from Philly and Pittsburgh talk about House Members. They've never been on TV. Nobody knows who they are. In Altoona one little TV station, two or three radio stations, one local newspaper. The TV station would be at my office at least every Friday when I'd be home. Sometimes call me, sometimes more often in the summer, but

I thought I had a very good repertoire. I never really felt I was unjustly beat up on by the media. Didn't have a real problem.

HM: Oh, good. When you think back on your experiences, do you have a favorite story that you'd like to share with people?

JM: Oh my. I got a number of them. My first, okay, my very first bill was something that helped the railroaders, because Altoona being such a railroad town. In retrospect, it wasn't a very good bill, but anyhow, it would have helped me out politically back home, and Herb Fineman, the UTU, the United Transportation Union, wanted it, and they were very good to me, and they're good people. But, anyhow, they went to Herb Fineman. Herb said yes, and he came to me and said, "Here's the bill. You put your name on it, and we'll give you all the credit," and whatever. So, I get into Floor debate. Get it out of Transportation Committee, and it goes on Floor debate, and, again, it got ripped apart. There was a gentleman from York County, nice man; John Hope Anderson [State Representative, York County, 1961-1982], a Republican, just ripped it apart. Faith Whittlesey [State Representative, Delaware County, 1973-1976], who was a Republican from Delaware County, later Ambassador of Switzerland under President [Ronald] Reagan [40th President of the United States, 1981-1989] ripped it apart, and a number of my Democratic friends sort of deserted ship on me and whatever. So, anyhow, I was giving this impassioned plea and trying to be logical and the vote was something like 120 to, whatever, 80. I mean, I lost it. I wasn't even close, and I was angry and disappointed. So, I stood up on the Floor and I remember saying something to the effect of, "Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to address my comments to the Republican side of the aisle. They

may have Faith and Hope, but they don't have any damned charity anywhere," and I've had more people remind me about that. As a matter of fact, John Hope Anderson about ten years ago, there was a little get together, and John Hope asked me if I remembered swearing at him on the Floor of the House, so yeah. Kenny Brandt [Kenneth E.; State Representative, Lancaster County, 1973-1990], I think Kenny did an [Oral History] interview earlier. Kenny's favorite story, which I've adopted and told many times, was, and it's sort of a take off on what I'd said before, about you look around and see the beautiful Chamber and say, "What am I doing there?" But it was late at night; three o'clock in the morning, four o'clock, and there's this massive debate going on, just on and on and on, and someone leaned over to Kenny and said, "Could you imagine these were the winners?" So, you know, but there were many other good stories. Some bad ones, but many other – I don't want to – I could spend all day here telling you old stories, but it was one of the things that built on the question you had earlier about the camaraderie. There were many, many good times together, and it helped solidify credibility, so when you had an issue, and you'd go to someone, and you'd work with them, or you socialized with them, and they knew you, and they felt comfortable with you, and it really was an intrinsic part of the process.

HM: Do you have a fondest memory?

JM: My first time. Very first day; first Swearing-In. I remember having flowers there, and I didn't know you sent flowers. My family had found out from somebody else and had flowers sent and looking around and being extremely proud for my father. It was a story, and I think I told you – my father had run for mayor, city council, city treasurer

about six, seven times and never won, and the first time I ran I was working a heavy Republican precinct, and as people came up, and I'd say, "Hi, I'm John Milliron. I'm running for the State House. I really appreciate your vote," you know, just going along okay, and then I – not great but going along okay, but I was feeling good about it, and this little old man came up and was on a cane, and put my hand out, same thing, "Hi, I'm John Milliron. I'm running for the State House, and I'd appreciate your help." Now, my father was John. We had different middle initials, so I wasn't Jr., but he looked me right in the eye and said, "Are you related to that other John Milliron?" And I said, "Yes, I am, sir. That's my father," and I'm thinking, "That's really great," and I don't know who all will ever be watching this. I hate to use the profanity, but it doesn't have an effect if I don't tell it. He looked me in the eye and said, "I been voting against that son of a bitch for thirty years, and it looks like you guys are going to outlive me," and he just walked into the poll. I just stood there in total shock. I must have missed twenty more voters. I didn't know what to say, and I doubt if he voted for me. He was very sincere. He'd been voting against my dad and all, but winning that time was a great feeling, but that day of being Sworn-In was a combination of personal feelings but also feeling very proud for my father and my mom and my family and friends and people worked hard, so there were other nice moments in getting some things done, but that, that one I'll always remember.

HM: Well, I'd like to touch on your career after leaving the House. Can you expand on that?

JM: Oh, okay. I lost [19]78. I didn't expect to lose. I mean, things were tough. Budget in [19]77 went through. We didn't pass the budget till the end of August, first week in

September, and that really wasn't it because we spent all the non-preferreds and didn't pass them until December with another tax increase. Anyhow, it was a tough time, and a lot of us lost, but I probably had the feelings that a lot of Members who lost did, and that is that it wasn't my fault. It was everybody else's fault. All those idiots in Altoona who never stuck with me and who deserted me and all of these things which weren't true, but I, you know, I had just turned thirty, and I felt my whole life was over, and I was crushed. I think that's a problem with coming down so young and then losing. So, I really didn't do much of anything. I was back home in Altoona for four, five, six months. Mike O'Pake [Michael A.; State Representative, Berks County, 1969-1972; State Senator, 1973-present] then called me, and the Legislature had just passed, and there was a Constitutional amendment to have an elected Attorney General. Called me up and asked me if I would be willing to work on his campaign for Attorney General. So, I moved to Harrisburg and got an apartment down here with a couple other guys from the Legislature and was active in – actually, over a period of six or seven months, I ended up becoming his Campaign Manager. We lost to Leroy Zimmerman², but during that time made a lot of contacts, and afterwards, I got a call from a guy by the name of Jim Roddey, who is a well-known Republican from Allegheny County, but at that point, he owned Pittsburgh Outdoor Advertising. He called and asked me if I could help him out, the billboard industry, with a problem, and I said, "As a lobbyist or what?" And he said, "Yeah," so I started doing work. So, Lamar – not Lamar; at that time was the Outdoor Advertising Association – was my first client, and I started doing that. I was single. I was starving, but I was okay. Didn't have to worry about much else, other than having beer and food

² Leroy Zimmerman was Pennsylvania's first elected Attorney General, serving from 1981 to 1988.

money. So, I started doing some lobbying work, and that's what I've been basically doing for the last 26 years.

HM: So, it started off very small and now you own your own company?

JM: Oh, very small. First four or five years it was tough. There were a lot of months, you know, end of the month came, paid the rent, and only had ten bucks left, but it's grown nicely. We're not the biggest firm in town, but we have a nice sized firm. There's four of us, four lobbyists and two support staff, and we still represent the outdoor advertising industry. That's why I said Lamar, because they dominate the market now, but it's something I've enjoyed, but I've really – once I turned 25 and was elected to the House, I've never worked anywhere else except basically the Capitol, either as a Member or as a lobbyist.

HM: So, while you were a Representative, how did you feel about lobbyists?

JM: I didn't have any problems with them because we didn't have a lot of contact. There was a lot of Party structure. First of all, there were very few lobbyists. I don't think there were more than five firms in the whole town. George Wolfe had a firm. Ralph Tigue had a firm. Boy, there was a guy by the name of Metzger, but there, there were very few, and it's because there weren't a lot of – not that there weren't issues, but they were more of the corporate lobbyist, you know, utilities and that type. But anyhow, the lobbyists basically dealt with the Leadership, whether it was Minority or Majority, D or R, and to a lesser extent the Committee Chairmen, but they, they didn't deal with rank-

and-file, so they didn't fund your campaigns like they do now. They didn't really come to fundraisers because you didn't have fundraisers in Harrisburg, and occasionally, you know, we'd go to dinner, and – I got to get off the point for just one second here on the story. I told you lobbyists we didn't have much contact with them, and they only took out the Chairmen. For whatever reason, Lombardo's was the only place in town, one of the only places in town everybody went, and there were about eight of us first, second termers. Must have been second term. And I don't remember how it happened, but anyhow, we all ended up together at Lombardo's, and we thought a lobbyist or someone was going to meet us, and they didn't, so we ended up running this huge tab, and we didn't make a lot of money then, and we didn't know what to do, and Max Pievsky [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1967-1990] was the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee from Philadelphia, and we knew Max had an account there, so I was like, "Oh, God, let's sign Max's name, and then we'll reimburse him, okay?" Yeah, so everybody said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." So, the waitress comes with the bill, and she knows who Max Pievsky is, but so I signed "Max Pievsky," and I left a very generous tip, so she didn't question it. Well, a week or two go by, and I was saying to the guys, "You got to go and tell Max we signed his name." "No, no." Well, you know, we put it off. Max never said anything. We thought, "Well, that was okay." Well, then we got a little bit greedy, and we all agreed we'd go out again and sign Max's name. We did that three or four times. Dave Sweet [David; State Representative, Washington County, 1977-1990] was there, Bob O'Donnell [Robert W.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1973-1994; Speaker, 1991-1992], the younger guys, Bill McLane. So anyhow, we keep going to Lombardo's signing his name. We're in Caucus this one day, and the end of Caucus, and we're ready to leave, the whole Caucus, and the freshmen – a lot of us sat

together, and right as we're ready to leave, Herb Fineman hits the gavel and said, "No, this Caucus isn't over, and Max Pievsky has something to say." So, Max gets up and says, "Somebody in this Caucus is running around signing my name to dinner tabs," and then he turned and looked right at us and said, "and I know it's one of you guys." So, we all started laughing, and you know, so he said, "I want each of you to sign my name," so he gives, like, eight of us a piece of paper, and we're thinking, Max, for God's sake, how dumb are you? We're not going to sign the name the way whoever signed it – the way we normally did sign it. I'm the one that had been signing, so I go with my left hand, sign Max Pievsky, so he goes to Ralph Pratt and says, "No, it's not you," and Dave Sweet, "No, it's not you." Gets to me and says, "Milliron, you're the one," and everybody in the Caucus was laughing. I said, "Max, who squealed on me. Who squealed on me?" He said, "Nobody. If you're going to sign my name in this town, spell it right."

HM: *(laugh)*

JM: I had been spelling Pievsky P-E-I instead of P-I-E-V-S-K-Y, so I got caught, and that was the last we signed Max's name for dinner anywhere.

HM: *(laugh)* Oh, that's great.

JM: Anyhow, since lobbyists did not take us to dinner, we didn't have a lot of contact with them.

HM: Well, I guess one of my last questions would be do you have any advice for new Members that would be starting? *(laugh)*

JM: Yeah, lots of advice. One, don't be so doggone bitter and partisan. I'm a Democrat. Always have been, always will be. [I] vote mostly Democratic, but the Democrats in the Legislature aren't the only guys that have good – men or women – that have good ideas. And the partisanship has gotten so – partisanship is fine, but it's become bitter, it's become personal. And when that happens, you don't use the talents of the other Caucus, whether it's their transportation ideas or education or economic development, and as a result, you know, the Caucus in control is the only one that really provides a lot of the ideas. So, my first thing would be socialize with them. The only way you'll get to know people is by going out – you don't have to drink, like Paul Clymer [State Representative, Bucks County, 1981-present]; nice man. Paul's never had a drink in his life, but go out. I don't care if you have coffee or dinner or a beer, but get to know them a little bit better. You can be partisan on the Floor, but leave it at the door when you leave. One of Jimmy Manderino – God rest him, probably the most brilliant Leader I had ever worked with, ever knew – but Jimmy's, one of his best friends was Matt Ryan, and to listen to them on the Floor, I mean, you would never think they'd even talk, let alone be such great friends. But, my advice would be to absolutely tone down the partisanship and try to socialize more because you'll be pleasantly surprised at how much you can learn from the other Party. Not because of the Party, but because of just individuals with great ideas, and if that would happen, I think there'd be a lot more productivity and a lot less rancor. You wouldn't even need as many – a lot of the rules changes came about because of the partisanship, you know, because the only way they

could get so the Leaders could get some things done were by keeping everybody else in the dark and because of the partisanship. So, I think that would solve an awful lot of – I got lots of other advice for them, but that's the only one I'd be willing to give right now.

HM: Okay. How would you like your tenure as State Representative to be remembered?

JM: As making a difference internally, making the House Democratic Caucus an open, free-wheeling exchange of ideas. It sometimes has become unwieldy, but before that it was, again, I told you Jimmy Manderino was a great friend, and Herb Fineman was my mentor, but they ran that place with an iron fist, and I was elected, you know, to do my job and not just to follow those two guys. So, after those reforms, which are taken for granted today, I think it really makes the process, within our Caucus anyhow, much better.

HM: Well, thank you very much.

JM: Thank you. My pleasure.

HM: This was a wonderful interview.

JM: Thank you. I enjoyed it. That, that was fun. Thank you. See, Kenny Brandt and I when we get together with some of the other guys, the stories, and it is nice if you could – through this Oral History, I mean, just being able to just, you know, compile them because everybody had something that happened to them, and I wish I would have

written down some of the stories guys told me twenty-five years ago because they get lost, and it's part of, it's part of what happens here.

HM: Yeah, yeah.

JM: But thank you. I appreciate it.

HM: Well, it's always, always fun to hear the stories.