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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Joseph Preston, Jr. (D)

24th District

Allegheny County

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Raymond J. Whittaker III (RW): Good Afternoon.

The Honorable Joseph Preston, Jr. (JP): It's always good to be here.

RW: I'm here with Representative Joseph Preston, Jr., Democrat from the 24th District, which encompasses Allegheny County, having served here in the House of Representatives from 1983 to the current, 2012. I would like to ask you to start off and talk a little bit about your childhood and growing up and how that may have played into your future as a public servant.

JP: The first seven years of my life, let's see, when I was born, my dad bought a house in Apollo, Pennsylvania, which is in Armstrong County, and two years later when my brother was born, we moved to Vandergrift. And I remember him being gone quite often – at the time, he was a Minor League baseball player –

RW: Oh, okay.

JP: – and he worked at Pittsburgh Plate Glass in Creighton, in Allegheny County. And I found out later the reason why he was gone, in a sense, was because Black players or African-American baseball players, weren't going to make it to the league then, because he played in Canada and he played baseball in Virginia at a AA team called the Virginia Squires. I did a little research on it. But, Vandergrift was a place where, on the street, I remember being in kindergarten and first grade that we had two hours for lunch.

RW: Oh; that's nice.

JP: And, you know, you went home, you changed clothes, and from there you went out and you played, got dirty, and whatever it is. We went out to the dump; we played baseball, football, or tag or something like that, we came back, changed clothes, and we went back to school. I will never forget that; and I don't think anybody does that at all anyplace in the United States.

RW: No.

JP: But I remember that. And it was, you know – my mother didn't work. I found out later the reason why she didn't work, she had a college degree, and there was no place for an African-American woman to work there. And I guess later on in life I found out why we never had – and when we went into a store, a retail store, my dad gave us a little accolade, because, you know, he was known as Smokey Joe Preston, and I still meet people who knew him – and there's another story I'll tell you later about that – but, when you go into the five-and-dime store or Kresge's or whatever, Grant store, clerks would always follow you, and they only followed the African-Americans when they went in, you know, and you couldn't sit at the lunch counter, but they'd follow you, and I learned that. And I think one of the first teachings that you learn about some different things was that I was about nine years old and we had moved to Pittsburgh, and I remember my mother was telling me about the time, I was five or six years old, and I remember all the parents taking their kids off of a bus. And I was the only Black person there on the bus; now I realize that. But, I found out the parents were taking their kids off the bus because the bus company was not going to let me go on the field trip because of the color of my skin. So, I've

always kind of respected that and learned that. And we almost went to Oakmont, Pennsylvania, instead of going through Pittsburgh when things went down and my dad got laid off and my mother had to go to work. So, the Vandergrift experience and the playgrounds and the kids, you know, on my street, everybody was either, all the kids were either two years older or two years younger, so I was really stuck in the middle and not really, you know, but I still have some of the same friends. So, Vandergrift, as I said, I'm just a kid off the Kiskiminetas River who grew up in a small country town, and people laugh at that, but it has taught me a lot. And I was fortunate enough, my father, his brother-in-law from his sister, my Uncle Art and my father all my life, they're the only two people I can ever say I've never, ever heard them complain; they took the hand they were dealt with and they adapted to it and made it work. They might not be happy, but they made it work, and I think that that has rubbed off on me in a lot of ways. I'm still impatient, but it has rubbed off. So, Vandergrift, Pennsylvania.

RW: Were your family or those around you participating in the political process at all? Did you get to observe any of that, being from this small town?

JP: No, never; never. It's very unusual, but I'll say it like this: When I moved back to Pennsylvania, I left high school, and I really never had any intentions of coming back to Pittsburgh because it was not a favorable place for a person of color, an African-American male especially, to try to do something with their life. I remember my mother wanted me to go to broadcasting school. I had wanted to go to Bradley University. I had to wait a year and eventually would up going to Wilberforce University in Ohio – an A.M.E. church, and I'm Baptist, which was interesting – and that came from another interesting scenario of dealing with

things. But, I'd like to think that the family issue was very important to me, because my dad had me understand what it was to be able to provide, but at the same time my mother had to go to work, and she had a college degree, and she wound up working for the State of Pennsylvania. And that's an interesting thing, because when I first ran, it was illegal, because of the Hatch Act, for her to even work on my campaign.

RW: Right. Right; sure.

JP: All she could do is say, "That's my son, Joe," but that was it.

RW: Yeah; right. How about your work experience then? After graduating – you finished your degree at the university.

JP: No; I finished late.

RW: You finished late.

JP: I finished late. I dropped out of school and had a previous marriage, worked in the steel mill. I've worked in three different steel mills in my life. In Jones and Laughlin, I worked as a laborer, but I also came back, when I was in school, and worked in Cleveland in personnel. And some of the – I did what they called something in the Pearson correlation, where you matched scores and came up with coefficient scores, and you matched the entry-level employees. All the employees now, back then, to get hired by the steel mill, you had to be a high school graduate.

RW: Right.

JP: They also made you take a personality test and an aptitude test – I think it was called the GZ, Guilford-Zimmerman – and sometimes an MMPI, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory examination – and you took an aptitude test. And I went through all of these different scores, and I came up with a score where it would help them determine, through certain correlative measures of success, of where to pick from the hourly to those people who are better to go on to foremen and those people who would go on to the trades. And I know 20 years ago they were still using it. That was one of the things. And also, it was very interesting, too, when management would come to you, and I'm a skinny kid, not wide like I am now, and sometimes they would ask, "Do you have any other friends in maybe other cities who are like you?" In other words, they were looking for Black people and they didn't know how to bring it, you know, bring it out. So, that has happened. So yeah, I've had an interesting work career. The job I wanted I never got because they said I was too young. I really think it was because of the color of my skin, but they said that. I would be supervising 18 people, and the youngest person was 12 years older than me, so I never got hired. It was for Morton Salt up in Cleveland. So, it's interesting. I've sold printing presses. I sold industrial and commercial lighting. I did street lighting, ball fields, restaurants, and things like that, and then I moved back to Pittsburgh at an age, and my mother said, "You know, if you would just go back and finish your college education, I could die then and not worry about you being able to take care of yourself." So, I went back to Pitt, and I did 52 credit hours in about 18 months.

RW: Wow.

JP: So, that's it, and that's how the political connection, because I was a salesman. The only thing I thought government was good for –

RW: Right.

JP: – at that time was a purchase order. Because, see, in sales, if you sell to the private sector, they may order something and then they may cancel. Government never cancels. They may change it, but they don't cancel. So, I got involved; I met a gentleman by the name of Bill Robinson [William Russell Robinson; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1989-2002], who at that time was running for council – I didn't even know it – but, a lady by the name of Doctor Helen Faison from my church told me go see this gentleman about being readmitted to going to Pitt and enrolling at Pitt. And when I met Bill Robinson, he told me what he was doing and would I be interested in participating, and I said fine. So, I was kind of like the person that would get there before him, so when he came I could tell him where the cameras were if they were there in the room, and you started learning that, because that's – you do that when you're setting up sales presentations and things like that, and that was kind of my first involvement in the political thing, because he did wind up winning for council. And I remember walking down the hallway in City Hall in Pittsburgh, and he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Well, I got a job. I'm working here in civil service." "Well, you should have came to me and, you know, asked me to help you." I said, "Well, I'll save that for another time." But, basically what I did then was I wrote examinations, did content validity, and tested people and did some

personnel systems, and I did it for Allegheny County and that's where I ran for office when I was working for Allegheny County as a personnel analyst.

RW: Well, then, what prompted you then to run for the House of Representatives in the early [19]80s then?

JP: One of my predecessors who I went to elementary school and high school is a still famous person. His name was Joe Rhodes [Joseph R. Rhodes, Jr.; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1973-1980]

RW: We did his interview; yeah.

JP: I ran – I was living in Cleveland when I met Joe, not met Joe, but ran into him at Kent State University, and that's when he was in the review for the Kent State Massacre.

RW: Right.

JP: And we were talking about what we were going to do, and he said he was just going to go back to Pittsburgh and possibly get involved with government, and I thought about it, and I wound up still going to Illinois. When I got back, I remember trying to reach different people, and I was getting ready to graduate and I wanted to do a reference and I couldn't reach certain people who are politicians for a reference, so I got involved with other people's campaigns again, all right?

RW: Right; sure.

JP: And then I started getting these calls, "Well, what are you doing?" "Well, I couldn't reach you there." So, I've always tried to treat people like I would like to be treated, and that's the process. And I was involved; it was contentious with some of the local ward politics. And there's one gentleman who has since passed on; he was a ward leader back in Pittsburgh. His name's Sam Tiglio. He said, you know, no other politician has had to go through what you do, because I had three of the strongest ward bosses in Philadelphia as ward leaders that existed in the ward political spectrum back at that time. There was a guy named Jimmy DiVea, Bubby Harriston, and Dock Fielder, and they were ward chair people and they were kind of the bosses. And we had been on opposite sides. One day they were supporting a candidate that I had supported in the past and they said, "Do you want me to help you?" And I remember him always telling me, you're always bringing another candidate; don't ever come unless you come yourself, and that's what happened. And here it was, I was fortunate enough to beat an incumbent, and it's a lot longer, I originally thought that 10 years would be good; I never thought I would ever be here this long. When I got Sworn-In, my daughter was three weeks old, Diana, and I had her in one hand, and I remember I held up the Swearing-In of the Speaker until they found a seat for my wife at the time, because it was so crowded.

RW: Yeah.

JP: And I don't know if you would call it a rabble-rouser or anything like that, but, you know, we started off like that. And some people say sometimes I do raise just a little bit of hell, but not much.

RW: Well, let's go back to that first campaign, running, you were in, I think, a three-way primary in that first in [19]82.

JP: I was running against an incumbent.

RW: Right.

JP: I was going to be outspent three to one. I had my job intimidating. I was working for the county, and I know at that time a gentleman by the name of Tom Foerster [Thomas J. Foerster; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1958-1968] was the Commissioner, the Chairman of the Commission, and I was on a track that he wanted me to come and work on his personal staff eventually and then go and become an assistant director or director in the county. This issue came up, and at one time Cyril Wecht was the Chairman of the Democratic Party, and it's a normal process that Jim Manderino had called and said, "Why is this guy who's working for the county government going to run against the current incumbent?" So, we had this meeting with Dock Fielder and myself, Commissioner Foerster and Cyril Wecht, and talked about me not running and pulling out. And Dock Fielder was shaking his head, and Dock had one eye so, you know, he was just looking, you know, looking at the guy. And we were all friends in a sense, but at the same time Foerster said, "Well, do you think you can win?" Dock said "Yeah." And

Foerster said, “Well, if he wins, Joe has a job. If he doesn’t win, he doesn’t have a job.” And he looked at Cyril and he said, “Is there anything else?” and that’s where we all started. And it was a very competitive campaign. The gentleman who did win I have the ultimate respect, because we’re from the same area; he was originally from Ford City, our families knew each other. I remember I had one minister even try to challenge and intimidate my local minister just as well. And it got kind of contentious where everybody was saying that, you know, this is a fight against the middle class, whether it’s the lower class. And the district has changed, but at that time the district, I think I had about the third largest Italian population and the second largest Jewish – I had five synagogues still open in that area, and I had the mixture of African-Americans, which was evolving and changing and moving out to the area of East Liberty and Homewood and it included part of Penn Hills. So, it was an interesting campaign, and I can’t remember the number that I won by, but it wasn’t that much.

RW: About 500 votes.

JP: Okay; 500 votes it was.

RW: Maybe a little less; yeah.

JP: And I was running against an incumbent who, like I said, was outspending me three to one. So, it was a tough, emotional thing for myself and my family.

RW: That was going to be my next question: Did your family get involved in any way in your campaign?

JP: No. My wife did, and this was before, you know, my daughter was born.

RW: Right.

JP: And I remember being at a fundraiser when my campaign manager came and said, "When's the baby due?" and I said, "Alma, what baby are you talking about?" "Well, your wife is pregnant." "No, she's not." She says, "Look, I'm a grandmother. I know your wife is pregnant." "No." I walk over to my wife and I said, "Are you expecting?" She said, "Yes." I said, "You could at least tell me; don't have someone else tell me," and she said, "Well, I haven't told anybody yet," and that's how I found out, because she was so engrossed. And my wife has always had her own career just as well, because when I first moved back to Pittsburgh and was working for the city, she worked on the corporate side and she traveled over, and I wasn't home now, in a sense. Here I was, going, you know, after we won the race. But it was a very interesting time and a very tough campaign because the incumbent ran again the second time, and that was tough because –

RW: That was a four-way primary in [19]84.

JP: Well, what was really tough – yeah. Another gentleman was – Jesse Jackson was running for President. He was president – one of the people that was running – he was president of the

Rainbow Coalition for the whole State of Pennsylvania when it was new and was hot, so he's campaigning with his picture with Reverend Jackson campaigning. The current incumbent was running just as well. And with the split, as I told you about the diversity of the district, there was an Italian gentleman who was also running, and that was very competitive. And the person I will never, ever forget who was my treasurer was Tommy Martinelli, who stuck by my side and took me into places. And I remember there was a guy named Joe Rocco who was a Democratic Committeeman, and I remember calling him on the phone about coming over and talking to him, and he said, "Wait a minute." I could hear him cover the phone, and he talks to his wife. He says, "Honey, do you mind if this Colored fellow comes over?" you know, and from that day he was one of my strongest supporters, you know, until he passed on. I saw his son every once in a while, and I think about a lot of the – I used to have to sit down in a place called Benetello's every once in a while and the old-timers would get together with their homemade wines, and I would have to sit sometimes for an hour or two and we would just – I wouldn't understand the language, but we would taste wine and bread for two or three hours and just, you know, drink. But it was interesting, and a lot of people, I think about Tony Stagno and a lot of people who were very precious to me who have since passed on, but we took care of a lot of people. I remember a bank manager says, "I don't believe what you do." I said, "What do you mean?" "Well, you know I have a lot of the Italian people come in and they have their interest book, and they don't want to get it in the mail, they want it put in the book. And they will look at it and if they disagree with it, they don't talk to me," – he's the manager talking – " 'We go see Preston. He come back. He fix.' " So, you go through those types of things. So, it's a world that has really enlightened me, and I'll have memories that most people will never be able to share.

RW: Well, what did you learn then from those first two campaigns that sort of helped you later on?

JP: Respect people and have them respect you to a point you only have to tolerate so much disrespect. And when people say, "Well, why are you talking to me?" I say, "Because that's the way you're talking to me. I try to talk to people like I like to be talked to," and that's the way I would refer to it. "But if you're going to talk to me like this – " and some people will say it's arrogance, but no, it's a level that this issue is not Joe Preston, it's the respect of the office just as well, because there was somebody here before me, as Joe was and Bill Pendleton [William W. Pendleton, Sr.; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1981-1982], and there will be somebody here after me.

RW: What techniques did you find that helped you either within getting your message out to people within the district or just getting to know people in your district each and every day?

JP: First, you're talking to probably the only person in the Legislature who's never had a formal press conference. I've had people have press conferences about me, but I've never had a press conference, because that means I would have, you know, my staff, and when I first started off in my legislative office – I never will forget that – I got one staff person for a salary of seven thousand dollars and no benefits. People don't understand that. And up here in Harrisburg, you have one person. We didn't even have one person; we shared a person.

RW: Right; sure.

JP: It was a half; Dave Mayernik [David J. Mayernik; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1983-2002] and myself. So, what you have to do is, the first thing I did was try to visit every not-for-profit in my area to get an understanding and learn what they are. And that comes from a sales background. I would go into a city and I would go in at night, and I would go out to the left and then out to the right, to the north and to the east at night and come back, and I would go out and intentionally get lost. And I like to try to tell, when I would talk to younger Members, I said you have to treat your district and try to pretend that you're blind. Imagine that you're blind, and even if you can't, maybe you can't really hear, but you want to learn about it, and you have to treat it that way. And sometimes people will say, "Well, you're not really listening." No; you have to really get in and feel what people are talking about, because I had a mixture of a district that goes from wealthy to an awful lot of low-income people and a wide mix. You know, it was really, really very interesting. You know, you go to some people and say, "This is Representative Preston," or "This is Joe," "This is my man," "This is Joseph." So, you had a wide mix of people.

RW: About your district, how has it changed over the last thirty years?

JP: I don't have one synagogue left. I still have a very minute now Jewish population. Most of the middle-class Italians have moved. I still have some of the older Italians. I was with a guy named Romeo Geonte, who is blind now, just the other day. There's a higher percentage of African-Americans that have come there. The voting population, unfortunately, is still, even though it's a majority, the voting population still winds up being a high propensity of

nonminorities just as well. The district has continued to evolve historically at one time because of the areas, representing the area called Homewood, East Liberty, Highland Park. And I guess people think about East Liberty because it was commercial at the time. Highland Park is where the zoo is and, of course, some of the parks. And then I had the borough of Wilkinsburg and another small borough of Aspinwall, you know, as you leave now. So, it was a great dichotomy and a great mixture of three different school districts just as well. For an urban district, it was very diversified.

RW: Well, one thing we didn't touch on was, at what point did you decide to become a Democrat? Was it because that was the area, a high propensity of Democratic constituency there?

JP: Well, when I lived in Chicago, the last area when I lived in a small suburb of Chicago, they had five parties. There was five parties and things like that, and when I moved back to Pittsburgh was when I got very active. I remember, I forget if it was Schreiber when he ran one time. Before that, I was working for Addressograph Multigraph, a printing company, and I was down there running a printing press for one of the campaigns, and that was interesting, in another town. But I never really got involved in that, and when I came back to Pittsburgh I registered as a Democrat. But the involvement from a political standpoint, I was always traveling and I was selling, working 14 to 18, 20 hours a day some days, and six or seven days a week. That's what I was doing until I came back in the city and got back involved with personnel.

RW: When you first registered as a Democrat to being 30 years later; how have you seen the Democratic Party change and what has it meant to be a Democrat? Has that changed?

JP: It has changed because the system manipulates itself, Democrat and Republican. I think one of the local newscasters and a friend, Chris Moore, always says, "Not a dime bit of difference," okay? When you look at it and when you take, you know, take everything off. When I first moved back I remember I won a hundred dollar bet. I said, you know, this Party is going to wind up having two Republican Senators and a Republican Governor. "No way." I said, "I'll tell you why: You got fat. You got lazy," and look what happened, you know, with all due respect. And even today now, we've gotten so used to having Governor Rendell [Edward G.; Governor of Pennsylvania, 2003-2011] here in the Party that we have fallen behind with things, and we think by just throwing money – it's not about that. I think Jesse Jackson was the perfect example when he ran for President. How did he win Iowa? People believed that he was going to address their issues and needs, and if that's the case, people don't care what Party you're from, they're going to vote for that candidate. Now that we've let the TVs, the mechanics, the mailing, mail machines, people don't go door-to-door that much anymore except for the candidates, and even in this about mail and TV and radio, the media, we don't really even really get a chance to touch people.

RW: Right.

JP: And, you know, in the old days people liked to say, you know, an old lady would say, "I just want to look you in the eye and determine if I'm going to vote for you and get a feel of you," and

that's a little bit different. We don't have that now. You know, the makeup is on; the lights are on; everybody is rehearsed, you know, and primed. So, that's probably the greatest loss of where we say, and I always think about that because I became friends with Dick Caliguiri for the Mayor, and he was a person, one time he said, "Never get too big for yourself." And I will never forget that: Don't get too big to do the little person's job or too little to do the big person's job, and that's part of the philosophy that I follow every day of my life.

RW: Well, let's talk a little bit more about your district then, since you mentioned a lot of the areas in your district – East Liberty, et cetera. What are some of the projects or things that you're most proud of bringing back to the district?

JP: Well, let's reverse it. Let's talk about some of the things that disappointed me the most. I think the last four years there were two things that I wanted to see happen more than anything else: I wanted to see people made uncomfortable because of construction in two areas, in Larimer and in Homewood. And I remember coming back to people, the Rendell people that called me and said, "Well, what is it you want?" and I said, "I need housing." Just basically in a sense not name your price, but it was there to do. And I wanted to take out about six or seven blocks, and then people starting arguing over – I'll never forget, I came back; I was hosting this forum that was already on and I was late getting there, and somebody asked me from the Governor's Office, "What do you want?" and I told him. And they got to arguing over different houses in each block that were better, and I wanted to take it all out, because if you leave three or four, then two years later you got to do that, then you got – and it didn't happen. And then over in Larimer you had different community groups not liking someone because of the personality or

why I wasn't invited here and that. I wanted to take out the whole section. And we went through a baseball stadium for Clemente, which Major League Baseball was going to participate in. Then we had a church that was talking about 200 homes, then developing a community center and a lot of those different things. That was probably one of my personally greatest disappointments. The other thing I think, though, that things will change, you know, when you have hubs. East Liberty is a key. You have Downtown Pittsburgh, you have Oakland and East Liberty, and East Liberty at one time was a center where you didn't have to go downtown unless you wanted to. You could buy a wedding ring, you could buy your furniture, go to the doctor, dentist, lawyer, get married there, anything that you wanted, and that died. There were three gentlemen who were very important to me in the life that we started talking about. It was Ed Lesoon, who's a local businessman; Chuck Starterman, who owned a plumbing company and who was buying real estate; and I forget, Lars – Lars, redoing the Chamber of Commerce – and they were all local business people. And Ed Lesoon and I used to talk about having hotels in these certain areas, and it was a key, because Pittsburgh was a steel town. Remember, they had problems even getting a convention center because they didn't have enough hotel rooms.

RW: Right; yeah.

JP: And people were staying in West Virginia, all the way out in Monroeville. If you had the Open, the Golf Open there, they're staying 50 miles apart. And all I'm thinking about, if we got hotels in East Liberty, that means people from out of town are going to come there with disposable income, and that makes a difference on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday on retail stores. And people laughed at us, and then we started working with them. But these guys spent

their own money getting property and helping things. And it's finally kicking loose. We put 10 thousand dollars of State money into the project and helped fund the East Liberty Development Corporation, starting off with a staff of about two or three, and now I think they have about 15 people who work for them. We have probably had 90, 100 million dollars' worth of construction going on. Maybe people in East Liberty don't realize that what they're seeing now is only half of – you can't stop what's happening now, because now you have private people going in there now that we have the Bakery Square going and things like that. So, it wasn't about politics. Politics closes the door. There are a couple of buildings we spent there with the Motor Square Garden. With the State, we put up 1.3 million dollars, and then we had another building where the State Welfare building is. We put four banks together with over about a million dollars of money. But we've redone the streets, timed the lights now. They have a Target in the area. You have a Home Depot. People laughed at that and didn't think it was happening. Now the housing is coming. And who would ever think in East Liberty you're seeing houses and condominiums or townhouses sell for three, four, five hundred thousand dollars, but at the same time providing for those people and giving those people who are part of a workforce development area of being able to get affordable housing just as well. So, that's part of the thing. What you try to do is set the tone. What you don't want is a politician to set the tone for you. Our job is to be able to back you up and try to bring people together at the table. They don't have to like me, but I want people to sit at the table and respect each other, and that's all you have to do.

RW: Well, then talk about Pittsburgh's importance in the State.

JP: Pittsburgh's importance within the State, for the region is concerned is because of the difference in the counties. You have a metropolitan statistical area that is very rich, and I don't think they really realize that. I know I go down to the Mon Valley, and sometimes those old-timers are still thinking the steel mills are going to come back. I know that, but it's not going to happen. But now you have the Marcellus Shale probably for the next 10 to 15 years. The issue the steel industry is going to come back, and not in a large way but in probably a substantial way, because now we're talking about, with people like building bridges, now we're looking at pipelines –

RW: Right.

JP: – that aren't even there. The design is not even there and the need there. There's transportation; the trains and the trucks are going to grow. The river traffic, I think, is picking up. I had the pleasure of serving on the Port Commission of Pittsburgh and watching that grow. So, you set the tone when you say Pittsburgh. That includes parts of West Virginia, Ohio, you know, going over into Steubenville and Weirton, still in Ohio, and Wheeling, West Virginia, and going all the way up through almost to Route 80 where you have New Castle.

RW: Right.

JP: That area with the university settings that you have with the University of Pitt, Carnegie Mellon, Point Park, the community college system that's growing out in Westmoreland County – those community colleges have really set a tone – those are some of the things, I think, that the

State, and, you know, if it wasn't for a former Speaker, African-American, the first African-American, K. Leroy Irvis [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1958-1988; Speaker of the House, 1977-1978, 1983-1988], we wouldn't have a community college system.

RW: Right.

JP: So, I think that's happening. I think that we have to wake up and get our airport together, but we're too busy sometimes playing what I say partisan politics, and we don't need to do that. It used to be that no matter who the Governor was one way or another, and when we were developing the airport I was there at the groundbreaking, we all stood together. You couldn't tell the difference between a Democrat and a Republican. Now, depending on who's in charge, that's who gets invited with us. Democrat or whether it's Republican, you know, gets divided; this caucus against that, the House against the Senate. It has become divisive up here in Harrisburg, even from a socialization standpoint. We used to talk, you know, we would argue, and I would talk to somebody across the floor, the good gentleman here, his intentions are sincere, but let me point out just a couple of things of why I can't be for that, and people would see us going at it and then at seven o'clock in the evening they would see us sitting down there having a sandwich or a hotdog or a beer or something like that and we're talking about our kids.

RW: Right.

JP: But we don't do that now. There are certain places you go, you can almost see where the Republicans are, you can tell where the Democrats are, and that's part of the thing that has changed and created a great divide.

RW: Well, let's go back then to your first term, coming here to Harrisburg for the first time. What were your impressions of the building, the process?

JP: I remember it very sincere, because I remember I drove my car over and we met – Tony DeLuca [Anthony M. DeLuca; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1983-present] and myself, Joe Markosek [Joseph F. Markosek; State Representative, 1983-present] and Dave Mayernik. Dave Mayernik has since retired. But the four of us got in the car and we drove up here together to be freshmen-elect, because you don't become elected until after you win the November election. And I remember coming across the bridge, and all of a sudden we just looked and we said – now, Harrisburg's a small town.

RW: Right.

JP: But at night it's pretty. It's not like Pittsburgh, but it's pretty – and we said, "Wow." I mean, we all just said it at the same time without even thinking. And it has been very interesting. I have an awful lot of fond memories about that first term, because I remember somebody said, "Well, what are you going to do?" and I remember simply saying, "I'm going to find out first where all the bathrooms are." They said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm just going to take my time and learn things, because I don't want to make mistakes." I got a phone call from a

gentleman by the name of Charlie Caputo. He used to be here; he was a staff person, but they said that he could write, he could talk and write all in the same language where the Reference Bureau didn't need to make changes. And he says, "You don't know me, but my name is Charlie Caputo. I've got orders to take care of you. I need you to come over here right now." – I kind of understood some of what he says, and I'll get to that in a minute – So, I go over and I sit down there and he goes over for an hour or so a list of things for me not to be seen at and not to associate with and certain people. And he said, "Now, I'll go over this with you again," and I left. And I remember calling Tommy Martinelli, my treasurer back in Pittsburgh, "Thank you," because I understood what he meant, and I think that being up here has been a way that has helped save me. And then Dave Sweet [David Sweet; State Representative, Washington County, 1977-1988] gave me some special advice, too, that's the first term. He said, "Your first term, you go to everything, every event, and then after that you go to things that directly affect your district or have an interest to you that you can maybe take back in Pennsylvania or your district. Get off and go to a movie or go bowling or something like that." Just try to live and have some semblance of a life, you know? That's kind of the advice that he had, and that's kind of what happened.

RW: That was going to be my next question: Who did you see as a mentor to you early on?

JP: I have a lot in life. Like I said, you heard me talk about my dad and my Uncle Art. Jay Williams was my minister, and my first two terms I remember coming back on Wednesday, and sometimes, about once or twice a month, we would just sit on the steps or I would sit in the office and we would talk about the area. He was a minister and wound up being at one church

for 50 years, and I grew up at the church since I was nine and we would talk about things. And to show you what he was like, at one time in Pittsburgh there were two Black Baptist associations. He was president of the one, and he said, "If we merge, I'll resign as president and let the other person as president." That's the type of person he was. But he gave me opinions of things, and he always had me learn about, it's not about just opinions; you have to find things that are comfortable for you and don't just take something because somebody said they did it this way. Ask them, did they try it any other way sometime, and talk to people. And I know sometimes my wife and I, one of the few dichotomies we may have from competitive conversations, you might want to say, is that my ideas are not my ideas, they're from someone else, and if they were my ideas, that means I'm not spending the time listening to someone else. And I try to tell people, when I talk to freshmen I said and I tell my constituents, if a politician says this is their idea, run from them, because they're lying. Either that or they haven't listened to a word that you said, because how can they be thinking and telling you this is their idea, because it just means they're not listening to you. Ideas come from other people, and you take them in combination and you adjust them. The other was Dock Fielder. I loved the man. We had great falling outs, but I still loved the man. And I always knew, every form of political advice he ever gave me, I knew it was going to be right. It doesn't mean I did it that way, but it was always going to be right, and I knew it. And sometimes I'm going on and I say, "Why am I doing this; I know he's going to be right." Now, other things away from politics, that's a different story. But Dock Fielder was probably politically, he, Dick Caliguiri, Tom Foerster, and Bubby Harriston I think were important factors in my life, along with my mother and my wife. It kept me balanced, because it gets very emotional. I remember when we lost a welfare vote up here one time. It struck me, it bothered me for about five to eight days. I just kept on thinking

about the people who weren't going to get the services that were necessary. And there are other different things that happened, and all of us have these different stories of people that you've helped, and there are some stories I couldn't even tell you that I helped, and I had to stop people from, you know, Tony Stagno called one guy one time because he had his girlfriend stand behind him in a place, and his wife had come to me and I couldn't understand what she was saying – I'm not going to say the word that she was talking about – I called Tony Stagno, after I called Martinelli; he didn't understand the dialect in Italian she was talking. Tony Stagno came down, and we called the priest down the block and he didn't understand, and finally he was telling us the word that she was using for his girlfriend. And we called the guy down and we told him, we said, "Look, you're going to have to do something about this, and if anything happens to your wife...." And a couple of weeks after that, some guy says, "I don't believe what I saw." I said, "What do you mean?" "You're standing on Penn Avenue and some old White lady with a scarf around her head is on her knees just kissing your hand." It was this guy's wife, you know? And every Christmas she would bring a pie for a couple of years and all that stuff, but it was just the fact that you handle those personal situations and deal with the mixture. And then – I'll give you the one story, I think, that tells you about being an elected official away from legislation: I had a lady come to me one time, and her son was an adult who was totally dysfunctional somewhat and she was going to have to take care of him for the rest of his life, but he was in his 30s, and she had a bad hip and a bad leg, and I remember, I said, "Well, what is it that you want me to do about your son?" She said, "All I want to do is for him to be able to sit at our dining room table and eat." I said, "Well, what do you mean?" "Well, we can't eat at the table." I said, "Why?" She said, "Because the rats come on the table." I said, "What?" She said, "I can't stop the rats." Now, he was going to a school, and I found out that he had an income on SSI [Supplemental

Security Income] about eight, nine hundred dollars a month and she had income. I called the city's rodent control, a person that I had worked with when I worked at the city, and she called me back about four hours later and she said their staff went into the yard in the back and the grass started moving so much, they wouldn't go in there. To cut the story short, I found her an apartment – it was upstairs – that she could live in, and about two years later I get the letter from somebody, either in Maryland or New Jersey – I wish I had saved it – but it said, "You don't know me, but I want you to know that my mother has died and you helped her and her son when she moved up the steps. But she has died now, but I want you to know you taught me something. I will always take care of my brother, and God bless you and thank you." You can't do that; see, those are some of the small things, and if I hadn't found that person – but I'll never forget that; all she wanted to do was be able to have her son and her sit at that table and eat in peace.

RW: Wow; that's an incredible story. What were then some of the harder issues that you've, whether here in Harrisburg or back in the district, that either were successful or were not successful?

JP: Well, I received a lot of different forms of intimidation from different people, but the object is to stand up and fight for people. And I remember when a church wanted to be built and the Black contractors were upset that they didn't think they were getting a fair share, and I remember talking to the guy and I said, "Can you give me one or two days? At least break the lines." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because the supplies have to come in. They've paid for them. Then you do what you need to do." But then I arranged a meeting and things worked out a little bit later.

You do things. Another quick story: I remember we helped fund, the State helped fund, we matched up the church named Bethesda Presbyterian in Homewood with Chatham College and some graduate students, and we had an adult, a Black male adult reading program, and think about this: How do you put a functioning illiterate individual and four months later see him with another school, Beginning with Books Program that we were helping fund just as well, and you're in the library and you're watching the man that, four months ago, he was functionally illiterate and now he's standing in front of 12 kids, two of which are his kids, at the library and he's reading them a story. How do you place a dollar on that? You know, those are some of the things. But people are always going to talk about infrastructure and streets, but I think the big thing is, I've made over 30 thousand votes, and people can complain one way or another, you know, and you hear people sometimes talk about the pay raise or whatever. I'm an executive, you know, and we have a budget of, you know, 30 billion, 40 billion dollars, depending on one way or another, and I make decisions, and you make decisions, as any elected officials do, and the best thing you do is pray that it comes out right and not hurt someone. And I make those decisions and go to sleep every night with the same thought: I'm not sorry about it; you have to be able to make decisions, because if you don't, you know, and no one does, where would we as a society be? So, you try to relate to that and you try to relate to a lot of different people. And I get out, and I've had my life threatened. I remember my daughter came back from one time and told me there was a gang at school that, you know, they planned on killing me. We were involved with a Federal investigation where nobody else was willing to deal with it and dealt with an awful lot of government, and 52 kids went to jail. I testified at two of the trials against eight people at the Federal level under the RICO [Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations] Act. Before that, I dealt with the heroin dealers from the Italian guys and I

remember them; we were meeting with some of the government officials at the police, State and Federal levels and local, and I remember at eight o'clock in the morning they rolled up with me and the other person I was talking to and they said, "Oh, so you want to tell everybody who we are." You know, I've been through that just as well. And I get frustrated with people who are always willing to ask me to do something but aren't willing to do it themselves. So, I've stayed humble. In my district office, for an example, I'm the janitor. I clean the bathrooms. I sanitize the bathrooms. I mop the floor. Sometimes it may not be the best what everybody else does, but as long as it's on your desk, I don't touch it. Anything else is free to go. And that's part of staying balanced. You don't get carried away with these four walls. As a freshman, I was offered an office in the Capitol, and I turned it down. Manderino said, "Why?" I said, because, you know, I don't want to get that carried away with it, and secondly, I don't want people just to stop by because I'm easy to reach. So, my office is almost as far away as you can get it, so if you come in there, you really come in to see the Representative from the 24th District.

RW: Well, you've had 13 bills signed into law. I don't know if you've even kept track. You have 13 bills.

JP: No. I think there are other things that are more important. I think the one that I always think about is the one where we started the State program for school dropouts, you know?

RW: Yeah; that's in there.

JP: That was probably the first one that really meant a lot to me. I think people don't believe it, but a quick story is, Pittsburgh has district elections now because of Joe Preston.

RW: Yep.

JP: And people don't believe me when I tell them the story that we had to have the State Police, I will never forget, drove out to Holy Cross – is that where Governor Casey went to school at? It was a basketball game, that he had to sign this bill before 12 o'clock so that we could have the time schedule so they could have district elections.

RW: Okay.

JP: And people don't believe it when I tell them, that they always think it was more activist, but that's what happened, where they could actually put it in the ballot. But I think there are other Members' amendments, but I think probably legislatively in the last four to six years, some bills, even though I wasn't, I started to talk off, but when we dealt with some of the infrastructure, what we called the CSIC [collection system improvement charge] and DSIC [distribution system improvement charge] plans, and it was passed with – it was prime-sponsored when we were in the majority, seconded in the minority now, but this will set a tone in Pennsylvania in the next five to eight years that no one can stop for creating jobs and infrastructure development between the water, the sewer lines and the gas lines, of bringing things up to date and giving the utility companies, but working with the unions and working with the Public Utility Commission, to effectively give Pennsylvania the right to be able to have what I call an adequate infrastructure

plan if they're willing to be able to spend the dollars to do it. But before, the laws wouldn't give them the permission to really do it. And being Chairman of Consumer Affairs, I've had a chance to be able to experience and do some of those things that I think, like historic, nobody will ever think of me about it, but the industry knows where the idea started, from being at a restaurant in Coopers, talking to Frank Gates, and raising the issue that we were going to spend that. And we spent six to eight years, three different Chairmen – Bob Flick [Robert J. Flick; State Representative, Chester and Delaware Counties, 1983-2006] , a Republican, when he was in the minority, I became the majority Chairman, and working with Bob Godshall [Robert W. Godshall; State Representative, Montgomery County, 1983-present].

RW: Some other topics that you've done legislation on – minority and women-owned businesses.

JP: Yes.

RW: The trial board bill, police trial board bill.

JP: Oh.

RW: I know there was some stirring about that. Could you talk a little bit about that?

JP: The police trial board bill, and in the City of Pittsburgh right now, they have a civilian review board. It never would have happened if we wouldn't have had a police trial board, and

that was the great Mayor Sophie Masloff. And it started off with the way the police were reviewed, and at that time everybody but the Chief and the four Deputy Chiefs were all in the union. So, that means whether you're a Captain or a Lieutenant – they eliminated the Captain now and they call him, when they appoint them, a Commander, which was a maneuver to take it away from the union job – that means you're disciplining one of your own members of the union.

RW: Right.

JP: And they had this ball or whatever where they put these balls in and you pulled them out to pick who, and it had to be other police officers, to determine if they were guilty or not. Only two members had the guts to even sign on the bill from my area, and I remember I went through an awful lot of intimidation about it. My wife said she got stopped by – she didn't know why she was getting stopped by the police, but she had this car with these HR plates on and she was getting stopped by the police all the time.

RW: An easy target; yeah.

JP: But, it was something that the people needed, and I stood the course. Tom Murphy [Thomas J. Murphy; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1979-1994] and Bill Robinson stood the course with me. And I was just looking at the picture when we signed the bill, at that time with Governor Casey and some of the community groups when we signed it. But it was a very tumultuous type situation, because you had the unions basically disciplining their other

members. And since then, I think the process has evolved and now has worked out well, but it never would have happened, and I don't take credit for it; we're just a vehicle. Again, the idea came from Sophie Masloff, and she stuck with it.

RW: Is there anything that you're leaving on the legislative table that you'd like to see passed in the future?

JP: Oh, there's a lot. You already heard me talk about some of them. That was Larimer and Homewood and even along with the development –

RW: Sure.

JP: – and doing those things. I think that we have to really address the issue of recidivism. Recidivism and the prison system, you know, people say we ought to change the name instead of the "Department of Corrections." Well, you know, there are two things that we have a responsibility for: raising individuals and giving people in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania a right to be able to pursue a life, and if someone makes a mistake and we have a system that's supposed to correct it, and this is rough statistics, 60 percent of the people in the corrections system could be rehabilitated. In other words, that means they don't have to, you know, where they say "Don't go past 'Go;' go directly to jail again," that doesn't happen. Another 20 to 25 percent, it's like doing a road: If you spend more money – okay? – It lasts a long time, and they may or may not come back. And then you have another 15 to 25 percent, lock them up and throw away the key. So, I'm looking at 75 to 85 percent of saying that instead of spending 34

thousand dollars a year for each prisoner we have in, think about if I can tell you that two out of three wouldn't come back if we would do our job and then why would we be spending 400 million dollars on a prison system? Dwight Evans [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1981-present] said it, and again, like you already heard me, it's not Joe Preston's idea; it's a combination of both. You have to work at the front end. And then the other issue is our educational system, and it's not about the pro-choice and, you know, issues of dealing with the school choice things so much as it's more or less just the dichotomy. It's not just about the unions. I'm watching people in Pittsburgh; they're fighting more about preserving Schenley High School than the quality of education. You can't do it. And my question is that I say, if I gave this school district 100 percent of its budget now, what difference would I see in the product? I had confidence 25 years ago; I have lost a lot of that confidence. Sometimes you reach a bullet where you have to make some tough decisions to be able to make and go alternative ways, and I think that that's probably where the State is going to wind up going. Those are some of my biggest things, because if you don't have an education, the basic understanding, when I'm talking to young people and I say, look, how many gallons is it going to take to do that wall, what's that got to do with it? I said, if you ever want to go into business and you want to stop being a painter, and if it only takes 30 gallons to do that wall but you wind up going out 50, how are you going to make any money? So, if you don't understand the basic math as far as coverage – how many ladders do you really need? How many cloths do you really need? How many brushes do you really need? Do you need one, two, four, five people? Unless you have that understanding, what's the point? Basic math makes a big difference. So, those are some of the things that you have to do. And then the other thing is effectively communicating to each other. Well, I could walk up and say, I understand, if I got the other

brother, you know what I'm talking about? You know, we got to be this and we can do this and we'll do a little business, or do I say, "If we're going to be able to do some business, let's sit down and talk about how we're going to effectively do it." Now, which way do you think someone wants to hear? And that's part of what we have to do with the educational process, and we're not doing it. We're failing at it. I had one school system, I don't even go and visit anymore. The superintendent is a friend of mine, but at the same time, he's not doing the job. I'll bite a bullet. I'm my own worst critic just as well. My staff will tell you, when I finish something, I ask, "Well, what did I do wrong?" first. Give me the bad stuff first; I don't need to be pumped up, and that's part of the responsibility of elected officials. You've heard a little bit about the pluses and minuses, some of the things I'd like to be able to see, but the education and the issue of recidivism is really ridiculous. Nobody meets a person in this State right now when they get out of prison. They know they have to go see a probation officer, but that's it, and chances are they probably created an infraction in their neighborhood with their neighbor, and what do they have to do? They have to give an address, and usually they've got a bigger relative to let me in, and maybe it's somebody next door or the corner grocery store or something like that. We as a society must do better, and we're really failing at it right now.

RW: What are some of the legislative roadblocks then that are preventing these ideas from coming to fruition?

JP: Partisanship. Right now, as compared to when I first came in, the biggest difference in the House of Representatives that I'm in, in the last 10 years, there are people, the day they get

elected, I can already tell they're running for something else. I've watched people run and run over to the Senate, and the day they get in the Senate, they're running for something else. So what do I mean to them? I'm just a vehicle for them to try to get from point A to point B instead of us trying to solve situations. And it's like filling a tooth; you want your tooth to be filled good enough where it doesn't bother you for quite a long time, right? And that's what government should be about, so that we can fix things and go on to something else. And all we're doing now is laying what we call tar and chip on the road the last three to four years as compared to fixing the road where we don't have to worry about it for 10 to 15 years. That's my greatest problem. Most of the time I went through in this place, there are issues that I really won't go into that involve legislation and also sometimes as far as race is concerned, but also I remember in two and a half years, I watched 12 active Members die, and that was a tremendous thing, and I said I don't want to see that happen with me. So, it's a great camaraderie. I've had a chance for the last six years of working with the Chairman, even though he's been in the majority, he's treated me with respect. And I remember him telling me, he says, he thought we were going to stay in the majority, and I remember he came to me and he says, "You know, Joe, if we ever get in the majority, nobody has ever treated me any better than you," because I just treat someone like I like to be treated, with respect, and that's all we need to do. But you can see it on the floor; you can watch. I've sat on the floor and I said, now watch, you're going to see his hands go this way. Three seconds later, the hands go this way. Now watch, he's going to do this, "And you...," and sure enough, five seconds he says, "And you...." And you can tell them; they've sat down there and they've rehearsed their motions to the tee. I don't like being used.

RW: Well, you came in, and more recently now there has been a move to reform with a lot of the new Members coming in. What have you seen from the things that have been reformed, whether it's the House rules or the way business is done, and do you foresee that continuing?

JP: Some of it's good. Some of it has put us all back there. I remember I watched a lot of the new Members saying, man, if we could be here another two hours or three hours, we could get this over with. But no, they had to stop that.

RW: Right.

JP: Okay? I had somebody, you know, get angry at me about, you know, here it is they're bringing in food for you. I said I'd rather take two hours out and go out and pay for my own dinner than for me to have to sit there and eat while I'm still there at eight, nine, ten, eleven o'clock at night. So they've raised issues. A lot of them have been valid and some of the other ones weren't. When we talk about being open and concise, all we have to do is really be honest about everything. Everything has to be in writing anyway. And a lot of the people who were talking about things, it's for their own political careers; they're already running for something else. Now, the other thing is, you hear people complain, like now they're complaining about the per diems and things. There are some guys that spend five hours driving here, to get here from Erie, whether it's snow or not, and most of the people complaining are within 50 to 100 miles. They're the ones raising the issues that don't have that problem. The other thing is, most of us who come from, my trip is 200 miles and the other one is 300, most of the other ones here also, and really, they need to change the rules, those people complaining, ask them if they have

another source of income or not. We can't do that. Some of them are running their farms; they've got a business. Some of them are doing real estate; attorneys. We don't do that out in western Pennsylvania. We are what we call full time, and the ones who are complaining and using it already have other sources of income. So, you know, that's just one of those things that you look at, and I think that we just need to be fair and honest with each other and respect each other. They don't want to go to anybody else's territory but they want other Members to come and see what's going on in their district. And I think the society and the public out there needs to understand that you need to go and see what it's like in other parts of the State, and I've been in almost every county maybe but three or four. I've dealt with when the Royers were having teenage pregnancy problems, and I remember, Dave Richardson [David P. Richardson, Jr.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1973-1995] told me, he said, "Shut up, Joe." I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "They got the problem." I said, "But, Dave, we've been raising this issue for years." "Don't worry about it. It's going to get handled now. Somebody else got the problem," and that's what has happened.

RW: Yeah.

JP: So, that's where we are.

RW: Talk a little bit about working with the other levels of government. You talked about people going into the Senate and to other areas of government. How do you work with the Senate and the agencies, the Governor's Office, to get bills and legislation that you want done accomplished?

JP: I've been fortunate enough to be a Chairman, so I have support staff, and part of the function of my support staff is to work with those Members that don't have those areas about being able to deal with administrative offices. So in other words, I have a chance to offer research staff to Members who want to deal with things for the Administration, so we'll help them get a little bit more even, because the Administration always has, you know, you're never going to compete with them because they have the staff, they have the research capabilities, so we deal with that. And I think almost every Governor that I've been through – and I've been through about six Governors with Thornburgh, Casey, Ridge, Schweiker, and Rendell and now Corbett – all of them, you know, they have staffs that take a year, a year and a half to really tune up, and half of that then, like we're seeing right now, you're seeing some staff leave. A lot of them don't realize how much work is involved, you know? And so I've never really had big complaints. I've disagreed with some of the processes and the issues of certain levels of access, but most people find out about with me that I'm not going to waste their time. I'm going to get in and let's sit down. I'll ask, can we have an eleven-minute appointment, you know? I'm serious, all right?

RW: Yeah.

JP: Come eight minutes, I'm ready to go.

RW: Well, talk then a little bit about, you've been in both the majority and the minority. Talk about the differences and the advantages or disadvantages of being in one or the other.

JP: Jim Roebuck [James R. Roebuck, Jr.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1985-present] said it all really great. He says, "When you're in the majority, you vote; when you're in the minority, you have to talk," because, well, it doesn't mean that much. I'm a person in the minority. I'm Black. I'm an African-American. I understand more than anything from the experiences that I've had, and what it always means to me being a minority is, when someone needs you, they need you; they pat you on the back, they shake your hand, and they'll thank you, all right? And when it's over, fine. When they need you, again, whatever you did in the past doesn't mean a thing; you start all over again. Either that or they forget your name. So, that's part of the issue, I think, about being in the minority. And a lot of people here, we had eight years of one Governor, and they were so used to it, that kind of neutralized it. That's not the case anymore.

RW: Right.

JP: So, now you got a lot of people who are crying who are going to say it's unfair. Well, majority rules. The object is to try to find some common ground where you can agree on, and what you can agree on, make that happen, and what you can't agree on, sometimes you just have to lump it. You can raise it, but don't be childish or immature about it, and sometimes we do that, too, because we say, "Oh, we showed them, didn't we?" "We told them." What did it accomplish? It's like the football player who, you know, acts like he has been there before in the end zone, the dance, or the guy that makes the tough tackle and he gets up and he burns all that

energy, you know, "ah ah ah," instead of using it to get to the next step. That's all what life is about; treating people with respect and working together.

RW: You mentioned a lot about your committee work.

JP: Yes.

RW: You're a recent Chairman. You were Subcommittee Chairman in the past. Talk a little bit about some of your highlights that you've had in your committee work.

JP: Well, we had a special – I came in as the Chairman of State Government right after the chad fiasco in Florida. And we had a Special Committee, and I think from that, the voting processes – because we had the same process here in Pennsylvania – and that changed. The voting machines came and everything else. I think that we as a State where we kind of failed at is, we let the counties slightly off the hook because counties are given the right for taxes and they're supposed to, their primary function, is to do elections, okay? And we give them the right to collect taxes. And, you know, we kind of bail them out on a lot of that, but it was a big expenditure. Going into Consumer Affairs, I had one gentleman, he was standing outside my office and he was telling this other guy, Sam that I knew, and this guy worked for, well, he worked for Verizon, and he was telling him, he says, "You know something? Here in Allegheny County, FiOS went in to the Black areas first. Do you know why? Because of Joe Preston. He insisted on...," you know, because we're sitting in a meeting and this executive VP [Vice President] is saying there's this Black politician that we got to – and it happened because everybody thought that it was

going to go every place else first, and it was just a logical situation that I just thought, if you're there, why not ask for equal representation. Do something here first. If you're going to put it in, do it here first. Don't just go because you think everybody else – and the wealthy areas, everybody in my area always says "What happens in Squirrel Hill...." Well, this time it happened in Pittsburgh. Those are some of the things, you know, from a legislative standpoint, and I've done other things away from that. But, you know, the Consumer Affairs, the telephone, the cable competition, was a bill –

RW: Right

JP: – that we passed. And now you have cable companies actually competing against each other, and you're going to start seeing it more so even with the phone systems, it's going to be even more competitive. I already mentioned earlier about dealing with the CSIC [collection system improvement charge] and DSIC [distribution system improvement charge] bill with the combined and dealing with infrastructure and development, and to sit down and have the Chamber, labor, health agencies, educational processes, and consumer groups, and I like to think an ideal bill is a bill where everybody doesn't agree on everything but they agree on 95 percent of it and they're fighting over – so what; let's do this. And that's part of what we had to do.

RW: You mentioned about telecommunications being a big issue. Now you're more connected than ever, probably. You showed me your Blackberry, you have a computer, you have e-mail.

JP: I'm getting rid of that Blackberry.

RW: Yeah. You have social network sites.

JP: Yes.

RW: How has that changed, technology, over your 30 years that you've been here?

JP: When I first came here, they had typewriters and mag cards. That was it. Most people listening to this, if anybody listens to it, they're not going to realize what a mag card was. And I was used to stenography, because I was used to dictation, and I never heard of speed writing. And when we had those large, heavy computers and Word and Word Perfect and you had everybody competing with each other and Microsoft, and you go through the adjustment. Now, technology has changed; it has gotten more expensive in some ways. I remember I bought eight, nine, ten thousand dollars for the equipment because we didn't have that process. People don't realize those offices are not State offices; they're our offices. The technology is totally different. It speeds things up. You know, it used to be you sent somebody a letter, and you'd either call them and let them know the letter is coming, you know, and then you expect a response back. Now you call them up, "I sent you an e-mail 20 minutes ago. I haven't heard from you yet. What's the problem?"

RW: Right.

JP: So, decisionmaking processes here and in the House are a lot faster, and therefore, you don't have a chance to really digest and look at all the things that are possibly right or wrong.

RW: Do you see that only helping or hindering?

JP: It's a little of both.

RW: It's a little of both.

JP: It forces you sometimes to make decisions when you haven't knocked out all of the "if, if, therefores" and all the other alternatives, because you have to, you know, you get pressed into doing things. And I'd like to think that's what a bill is about; that's what a law is about. It's never a new idea; all you're doing is augmenting, changing, or adding a variance to something that somebody else already thought of. And you have to look, every five to ten years, you have to look almost at everything, because everything changes, and that's the way it is. The glasses you have now are not the same type of glasses they had 30 years ago.

RW: That's right.

JP: That's part of the things you have to realize. I try to do that with community groups from my area. If they're still doing exactly the same thing that they were doing five years ago, that means to me they haven't evolved. I'd like to think Joe Preston is not the same person, you know, that he was when he came in here 30 years ago. Yeah, I'm a little heavier, I don't have

the same hair and it's a different color, but I've evolved and I've stayed in tune to that. I still read the newspaper. I still believe the newspaper and that and I'm not walking down the street – I tell people, "Why don't you put that thing down and give yourself a break? You're going to get hit by a car." I almost hit somebody walking across the street listening to those things. And I'm still wondering why everybody is walking down the street talking on the phone at nine o'clock at night. They can't be making money. It has got nothing to do with the job. It's not about the babysitter. It's not the mother or the wife or the girlfriend calling, "Oh, how are you doing?" "What are you doing?" "What's going on?" "Where are you at?" "Why are you there?" I don't understand that; I don't understand that. And I'm not a person who really talks on the phone long. After a minute, if we're on the phone after a minute, I'm trying to figure out, why am I still talking?

RW: You mentioned you still read the newspaper.

JP: Yes.

RW: What role does the media have in politics and what was your relationship with them?

JP: I read four or five or six different newspapers every single day. It helps me – and not all from Pennsylvania – it helps me understand some of the things that other people are doing, and also it's like reading – you have three pieces of paper right in front of you, and if you imagine if you have the Quran here, the revised version of the Bible over here, and the Holy Scripture of the Catholic church over here, and you turn to Genesis, the first chapter, sixth verse, and if you read

them, they don't sound exactly the same, but it's the same subject, it's the same verse, but it doesn't sound the same, and that's part of the reasons why I think that you go to other people's districts, that you talk to other people, and that you don't want everything the same. If that's the case, we'd eat the same thing every single day. Nobody does that. That's why you have four or five different brands of hamburger or chicken places. Everybody doesn't go to the same place every day, but it's an interesting dichotomy to be able to look at.

RW: You're a part of the Pennsylvania Black Caucus.

JP: Yes.

RW: The Pittsburgh-Allegheny Delegation.

JP: Yep.

RW: How do groups or organizations like that fit into the legislative structure?

JP: When I came here, there were only two delegations: Allegheny County and Philadelphia County. There was no such thing as a Southwest Caucus, Northeast Caucus. And we dealt with issues that affected all of us. In some ways, maybe my idea might be third, but eventually it might wind up being first, but I supported the other people. And we developed then as a region where we created that, and now we have regional, the Southwest Caucus. But like this morning, we met on some issues this morning, the Southwest and Allegheny County Caucus. They had a

display of a presentation. It was a very big difference. The other thing is, and again, for some reason, when I came here everybody thought that because we're Black or the Black Caucus, the only people we're ever going to hire was Black, you know? And I remember the staff came to me one time on the floor, because I made a statement and I was addressing the issues, giving an example of what upset me, and I said, now, I can look over on the Republican side and I can look at the support staff there and say, "They must be racist, because there's not an African-American or anybody of color over there," even though Harrisburg is over 60 percent Hispanic and African-American and even though Dauphin County has an awful lot of people, and they've even elected people of color to elective office, but I wouldn't say that. I remember saying it almost like that, but I can't believe that's the case. I have to believe that all classes are sincere. But then I look on the Democratic side and I see people of color, and most of the people who are Democrats aren't from this area. So, you sit down and you wonder, why? I've had the first, as a Chairman, the first Executive Director I had was a Caucasian and the next one was an African-American and the next one, the one I currently have now, is Caucasian, but the reason why they were chosen is because they were the best that was available. But all too often I have a problem of dealing with those things every day, and it's something that I see here. The issue of women: "Well, have your gal call my gal." My Director, you know, we always joke, we're at a restaurant, and if there are six or seven people there and there's only one woman, they're never going to give her the tab, okay? – Even though she's the boss. And that's part of the issue that I see here, and an awful lot of the women elected officials don't get the same level of respect. The Black Caucus issues, we've dealt with some things, whether it was dealing with some of the issues with Penn State and some level of intimidation, and some of the other Hispanic problems that have happened in this State, and dealing with some of the things, FBI [Federal Bureau of

Investigation], and pushing issues that affect multicultural districts and try to raise the issue of diversity a lot more, because that's the way you stimulate the economy appropriately where dollars circulate within a community. The only reason why you have poor areas is because that means dollars are not circulating door to door, and that means because they don't have enough money to be able to deal with it. And, you know, I'm watching people spend millions of dollars on campaigns that get elected for a 50 or 100 thousand dollar job. That is also some things that has also amazed me. So, you know, there are a lot of things that concern me, and I think people really need to understand. I'm a fan of what they call the Federalist 10 Papers, Madisonian thought and theory, and basically, to tell the truth, if government would tell you everything, you'd be nervous, because there are things – everybody knows there is nuclear waste that goes through from time to time, but if we told you when and how, you'd be upset: "Well, why are you doing that?" But somewhere along the line if we told you everything, you'd throw us out, but at the same time, if we don't tell you, you get upset. Now, which one do you want? And somewhere along the line, government and the populace have to reach that little common ground where, trust me. I'm going to get ripped off in life because I trust everybody until they prove otherwise. When you prove otherwise, I literally almost forget your name in three months. I will never, ever forget it one way or another and I never try to get even. Somewhere along the line, something always works out right, and that's what we do in this business. Unfortunately, we try to get too even.

RW: Talk about some of your relationships with, you talked about Governors that you've served under. How about some of the Speakers of the House who you've worked with? There were a number of them over the last 30 years.

JP: You know, it's always interesting how there's always an alpha and an omega, and I think about the first three to me was, K. Leroy Irvis was the epitome of which we'll call a statesman, a superb statesman. Jim Manderino [James J. Manderino; State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1967-1989; Speaker of the House, 1989] was the great politician, the powerbroker. He didn't have to bang his fists; if he raised it up high enough, you didn't want him to bang it down. Matthew Ryan [Matthew J. Ryan; State Representative, Delaware County, 1963-2003; Speaker of the House, 1981-1982, 1995-2003] was a powerbroker who dealt with, I think, a great love of intellect and strength. I think about Keith McCall [State Representative; Carbon, Luzerne and Monroe Counties, 1983-2010; Speaker of the House, 2009-2010], who came at a very difficult time, who has done very well. And I think about Sam Smith [Samuel H. Smith; State Representative, 1987-present; Speaker of the House, 2011-present], and I've watched him come in and was here when his dad was here. So, you've watched them. And I'm not going to deal with the issue with DeWeese [H. William DeWeese; State Representative, Fayette, Green and Washington Counties, 1976-2012; Speaker of the House, 1993-1994] and Perzel [John Michael Perzel; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1979-2010; Speaker of the House, 2003-2006], because as a Speaker, it was in the dichotomy where the lines were becoming wider between us and them at that time and it became like north and south, east and west, hot and cold issues. It became very apprehensive, because that's when television came in.

RW: Right.

JP: When I first came here on the floor of the House, there was no TV and there were only four or five microphones and four speakers on the wall. Now you've got stereo, cameras all over the place, one way or another. You can't pick your nose or anything without being seen. You have to be careful about everything. You know, is that good? Yeah, in a way, but now you got people who are speaking not to us, they're speaking to the people. And yeah, that sounds good, but the thing is, they're standing and reading their speeches. Unless I've had to deal with numbers where I had to be quantitatively accurate on things, I've never read a speech on the floor of the House, because I felt that people should hear the words from me, because I represent the people of the 24th District and it's coming from my heart. And instead now, most people, when you're reading a speech, those aren't those people's words; somebody else wrote it for them. Come on; I don't like to be talked to like that, and for some reason, society is letting us get away with it. I'll shut up at that, but it's the truth. I don't know if hardly anybody up there is writing their own words, maybe except for Jesse White [State Representative, Allegheny, Beaver and Washington Counties, 2007-present], and that's about it. It's really getting that bad.

RW: How about in terms of national politics, or even international? You mentioned it before off camera. How much do you follow that?

JP: National – from five-thirty to six-thirty in the morning, the first thing I do is watch what's happening in the financial world and the international, because history is always cyclical, going around the world, and you watch things. And I remember 10 years ago telling people, we can look at the Middle East and everything else, but North Korea, because, see, the Chinese believe in what they call nuclear proliferation. In other words, if there is something, a nuclear thing,

they have the population that their race is going to survive. The North Koreans, they don't believe in that, but they believe that they're fearless about things and that basically most of the other people are kind of wimpish about things, and they can intimidate you. I don't think that we realize what it costs us when we're letting our companies go over there but the dollar isn't coming back except in the hands of rich people. I get people complaining about the decisions we make and the salary or my per diem, and I'm listening to the other guy getting a 10 million dollar bonus and he's taking the jobs, you know, to Korea or to Indonesia or to India, and here I am, fighting about that. And K. Leroy Irvis once said something that always sticks in my mind. He said, you know, part of the problem is those of us who become professionals, when we get the two-car garage and the swimming pool above the ground and the three- or four-bedroom home, they think that we're equivalent to the three-bedroom home, the pool in the ground, and somebody opens the door for you and it's not the owner of the house that opens the door to let you in to take you into the library. It's a different process, and we get carried away with it, and it's unfortunate.

RW: What are some of the things that you enjoyed most as your time as a Representative?

JP: The camaraderie and going home.

RW: And then conversely, the least?

JP: People using the system, using the system for their own personal or political future. Very few people have ever used this process for personal gain. It's always, I mean, think about it:

Why is somebody spending 10 million dollars to run for a 100,000 dollar job? It's about the level of respect, the prestige. I mean, there are three sets of power. I mean, you can be wealthy, you can be famous, or you can be political. It's about power.

RW: What do you think is the greatest problem facing State politics now?

JP: We're not sincere. We're carrying out somebody else's ideas and policies from influential groups, and because of that, we're pushing ideas that are really not our own. A perfect example is the Voter ID issue, and we haven't had voter fraud here in Pennsylvania. A bill is about, if there's a problem, a bill is supposed to fix it, but when you don't have a problem, why are you spending millions and millions of dollars on something and there's not a problem? Part of our function is to fix something – remember I said about the tooth earlier? – So that we don't have to come back and do it again. What we have to do maybe in five or ten years, as society changes, as we have computers, is make adaptations.

RW: Any regrets?

JP: No, I don't have any regrets. I made some tough decisions. Maybe we could have done them a different way, but at that particular time, that seemed the right thing to do. I've always been open and honest about it. I've always told people, if you want to talk to me about it, like I said, I try to treat people like I like to be treated. If you want to talk to me, let's take a walk.

RW: What would you say to someone who wants to enter into politics? What would your advice be to them?

JP: The first thing is, if that's what you really want to do, but you'd probably make more money by not being involved in politics. That's the first thing, you know? The other thing I think is, I tell people, I say, I look at a politician to see what he was before. How a person is before they get elected is the way they will be when they get elected, and if you've seen some people doing things that don't affect their job, they get no personal real gain for it but they're out there doing it, that's the way they will be when they get elected, and I think that's a very good variant that I look at. Whether you're running for judge, whether you're running for borough council, whether you're running for President of the United States, what did you do that didn't get you any form of money, it wasn't your responsibility for your job, or you didn't have to do it at all, but you did it anyway, and that's the way a person will be when they get elected.

RW: Well, do you think, now that you're leaving the House, do you think you'll stay active in politics going forward?

JP: Don't know. I don't know. I'm looking at the options. I always think that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear, and we'll see what goes in for, you know, for the next day. I always say, you know, you never knows what comes tomorrow. You're just hoping if you open up the door, there's nothing there to stop you from leaving; if there's something out the door, then stay at home for a while. I'm going to spend this first 60 days of really being at home. I never really had a chance to spend the time I always wanted with my daughter; she's 30 now.

And if anything, the family has really been the greatest sacrifice I've ever made, because there were times I really think that I was so concerned about other people, I knew that everybody was okay here, that I was more concerned about over here because everything was being handled, and it's something I want to be able to do and make up.

RW: Do you ever foresee running for another office?

JP: Not that I know of.

RW: No?

JP: I used to think about it. At one time I thought about it; I was ready, years ago, to run for Auditor General. I had looked briefly at the City of Pittsburgh, but I said, you know, it's different. I like to be able to manage things, and I'd like to think that most of the people say I have some of the best staff, because I challenge them. I trust them; I trust them. I don't ask them what they're doing. We have tasks. If they have a question, we sit down and discuss it if we disagree with things. And the first thing, when I interviewed most of them, I have a habit of saying, you don't ever make a mistake in this job, I do, and if I say I want it this way and if you disagree and we talk about it and I still want it that way, do it that way. And if you go out there and do it someplace else and you screw it up and you come back, you still haven't made a mistake. And people, they're not going to complain to you, but then you and I will handle it. And all my staff knows the minute someone swears at you, they say, "Whoa, wait a minute. Let me get the boss." They don't have to listen to it; I will, you know, depending on what – and

because of that, I have a habit of, I'm a good administrator. I'm effectively handling things, and I like to handle tasks. I love the issue of the challenge of every day. I get up between, like I said, between five and six-thirty and seven o'clock every day, seven days a week. Every day has been the same here, so I'm looking forward to it.

RW: And lastly, how would you like your tenure as a State Representative to be remembered?

JP: Good question; you almost got me stumped there. That here was a person, he came, he respected the people of the 24th District, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania can be proud to be able to say that Joe Preston was a Legislator and represented them very well and very honestly and I'm glad that he was there.

RW: Well, good. I think that's as good a point as any to stop our interview. I appreciate you coming in and talking to us, and I wish you the best of luck.

JP: As they say, adieu, arrivederci, au revoir, sayayung, goodbye.

RW: Thank you.