

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable William Wachob (D)

75th District

Clearfield and Elk Counties

1979-1984

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Heidi Mays, House Archivist
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Jesse Teitelbaum (JT): Good morning.

The Honorable William Wachob (WW): Good morning.

JT: I am here with William Wachob who represented the 75th District covering Clearfield and Elk Counties between 1979 and 1984. Thank you for being with me today.

WW: Thank you for having me.

JT: I'd like to start out by asking you about your background. Tell me about where you grew up and then your education.

WW: Okay. I grew up in Elk County in a little town of Johnsonburg. It's a paper mill town. My entire family was from there, grandparents and parents. My parents were blue collar workers. My dad for a long time worked in the paper mill. My mother ran the food service department at the local high school. Some of my earliest political remembrances would be my mother driving voters to the polls. She was close friends with a Democratic committeewoman in the town we grew up in and I can remember she'd take Election Day off and they got paid. She would drive people into the polls and that's probably the only real recollection I have of politics in my early days. That's really where probably most of my values came from and spent all of my formative years in Johnsonburg.

JT: So, you would say that those would probably be some of your influences in shaping you to become a Democrat then?

WW: I think so, yeah. It wasn't, I never really thought about it. I think this was right, but I think back then you had to be 21 to vote but, you know, my parents were both Democrats and most of the town were Democrats and so it was just kind of assumed that you were a Democrat. I went off to college and worked for a Democratic candidate running for the state legislature at the time and I guess reinforced my Democratic roots and values. And then just, you know, was a Democrat forever.

JT: What led you then to, eventually, running for the House?

WW: Well, I went to Edinboro State University at the time. I majored in Political Science but I always thought my goal in life was to be a County Administrator or a City Manager and I did an intern, not an internship, but a paper, I think on the City Manager's office in Meadville when I was in school. I also had an interest in juvenile justice and criminology. Edinboro at the time didn't offer a major in Criminology but I took as many courses as I could and had a focus in Criminal Justice. It was during that time I did a couple of internships, one was with the Elk County Probation Department in the summer of, guess it would be [19]75; and then in the fall of [19]75 I got an internship here in Harrisburg. They had for all the state universities a state internship program and I applied to it and got the position. I was assigned to the Department of Welfare in the Office of Children and Youth and at the time it was under Governor Shapp [Milton J., Governor of Pennsylvania, 1971-1979] and Pennsylvania was going through under

federal law all of these efforts to get juvenile delinquents out of adult prisons. And I got very interested in that and met some guys there who were providers. They ended up starting some of the alternative programs once the kids came out they had to go somewhere. And after I graduated from Edinboro I went back and hooked up with a guy by the name of Tom Jeffers who was running one of the alternative programs and he hired me and I worked there for, I guess, a better part of two years but towards the end of that two years, we were lamenting about some of the legislation that was coming out of the General Assembly and the Senate at the time and, you know, we realized, or he realized more that I did at the time, that the place where policy really is made is where the budgets are decided. And so, it was really at that time, he actually started saying, "If you really wanted to impact the system, you know, you should run for the Legislature." You know, I knew who my Legislator was back in Elk County. He had been there for 24 years, actually. And there was some rumor that he was going to retire. So, I ended up going home and talking to my parents and said, "I'm kind of interested in running for the Legislature." And they just thought I was crazy. And I found out I came back, my job was here in Harrisburg. And I came back to Harrisburg and I ended up going and meeting with Representative Renwick [William F.; State Representative, Clearfield and Elk Counties, 1955-1978] and he said, you know, he was kind of coy, he said he wasn't sure that his time may have come, that he's gonna step aside. And he didn't discourage me but he didn't say, "That's definitely what I'm gonna do." So, I really just started organizing and my, I was lucky at the time, my boss, Tom Jeffers, gave me, we worked out an arrangement where I could work three days of the week and be home in Elk County campaigning the rest of the time. And we just really started with friends and family and reaching out trying to broaden our circle and just try to meet as many people. So, that's really where all that came from.

JT: Well, did you enjoy campaigning?

WW: You know, I think at the time I was too young to know any better. I enjoyed meeting new people, although, I have never been an overly outgoing person. I enjoyed kind of being around and hearing about people's problems. I think I always had an affinity for trying to resolve problems that people had and kind-of identified with some of the problems that people had. You know, I guess my earliest recollections are that I didn't dislike it. There were some people in my family who were much better at it than I was. My mother was great at campaigning. My father wasn't much interested in it. My two sisters that I have, they were both very active in the campaign but weren't real outgoing themselves. It was kind of a mixture but I, for the most part, enjoyed it. It's kind of a fascinating, especially at a young age, at any age really, but at a young age it really opened doors and witness experiences that few really have the opportunity to see. So in that respect it was probably a better education than I ever got in any of the schools that I went to.

JT: Did it get easier as you, from session to session, the campaigning?

WW: You know, in some respects the campaigning got harder. I was, and I think that's natural, I mean, on the personal level I was used to it so it was easier in that respect. I think when you're in office and want to do the job and you hear about this more now than you did back 30 years ago that there's a real conflict between spending the time on doing your job as opposed to spending your time out campaigning all the time. So, there's always that conflict that takes place

and I sensed it too, I mean, I pretty much worked seven days a week. The early part of my tenure in the Legislature I was not married so I had the time to travel around and pretty much work seven days a week. I'd be here for three days and I'd go home and I'd have dinners and meetings and constituent hours and everything else I had to do.

JT: And you had a lot of help with campaigning then?

WW: Yeah, we had a pretty good group of family and friends who were always willing to do stuff. It was pretty new to everybody who were involved, so in that respect something new was always kind-of more fun than later on in life when you've been doing it for 20 years and, "Do we have one more campaign left in us?" So, it was fun.

JT: Good. After you got elected, tell me about your first impressions coming to the House, your Swearing-In Ceremony, and what you felt when first coming into the Capitol building.

WW: I can remember being a little, not star-struck, but kind of in awe of coming down here and, again, I was by this time, I was 25. Mister Renwick, who preceded me, was very good about showing me the ropes, what he did and shortcuts to do this and that. And for the month of December, which was kind of an interim period, I hadn't really taken over yet because we hadn't been sworn in, but he was done. I used his staff, he was a committee chairman and he let me use his staff and they were very gracious about showing me the ropes. It was kind of a rude awakening in January when I got here and got Sworn-In and got sent up to the sixth floor to be in a big room with six other members and six other secretaries. And really, only just a part-time

secretary to do all the work that she was doing with three or four staff members. I remember Swearing-In day. There was a battle for the majority. It was, like, 102 to 101 or something and we went back-and-forth and we had planned a dinner; we were going out to celebrate and it ended up dragging on until I think seven, eight, nine o'clock at night and my family were planning on driving back to Elk County and as it turns out we never did go to dinner. We ended up going to a friend's house and just had some hors d'oeuvres and cocktails and stuff. So, that was my first experience. It was probably an experience to be repeated, however though, because we ended up spending hours on the House floor talking really about nothing. Ultimately, it got resolved and Jack Seltzer [H. Jack; State Representative, Lebanon County, 1957-1980; Speaker, 1979-1980] became the Speaker but it was only after – it started at noon or something – eight o'clock at night we had some kind of resolution.

JT: Do you remember who sat around you on the House floor?

WW: I do. I had Tom McCall [Thomas J.; State Representative, Carbon County, 1975-1981] who was a Member from Luzerne County – I think it was Luzerne County – he sat on my right. Now his son [Keith R. McCall; State Representative, Carbon County, 1982-2010, Speaker, 2009-2010] is going to be the new Speaker. And to my left was Dave Sweet [David; State Representative, Washington County, 1977-1988] and in front of me were the committee chairmen, Marty, Marty, I want to say Marty Murray, but that's not it. Jim Gallagher [James J.A.; State Representative, Bucks County, 1959-1986] was the chair of the Education Committee and Norm Berson [Norman S.; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1967-1982] was the Judiciary Committee chairman. And behind me was Lester Fryer [State Representative, Berks

County, 1963-1986] from Reading, Bud George [Camille; State Representative, Centre and Clearfield Counties, 1975-present], he and I shared Clearfield County, and Tom Fee [Thomas; State Representative, Lawrence County, 1969-1994] who was from out in, I want to say Meadville, Butler County area. And then a couple seats down was Joe Steighner [Joseph; State Representative, Butler County, 1979-1994], who got elected the same year I did and I think has been here until pretty recently.

JT: You mentioned that you had about six people in your office. How was that like?

WW: It was pretty interesting, you know, you get elected and you think that you got this big job and everything and at the time we thought we, for me I thought I was making more money than there ever was, and I think we were paid 18,720 dollars the first year I got elected. I remember I was all the way in the back corner so I actually had a little bit nicer than most. But there were no partitions and there was just, I was there and I think Frank Zitterman [State Representative, Lackawanna, 1977-1980] was in the middle and I can't remember who else was there but I remember Bill DeWeese [H. William; State Representative, Fayette, Greene and Washington Counties, 1976-present, Speaker 1993-1994] was over, there was one large rooms and then there were two side rooms off of it and in the one side room was Bill DeWeese and Joe Zeller [Joseph; State Representative, Lehigh County, 1971-1980] from Allentown and I think on the other side was Joe Hoeffel [Joseph; State Representative, Montgomery County, 1977-1984; U.S. Representative, 1999-2004] and I can't remember who else was over there. There were no windows or anything. You had, when you walk around this place now and see all the office space and things, it's pretty amazing.

JT: Very neat. You mentioned that Mister Renwick had helped you get a little settled when you first came in, but once you got in and session began, was there anyone in particular that you saw as a mentor?

WW: Well, I did pay attention to, even though we disagreed on especially social kind of issues, I did pay attention to what Bud George was doing. He shared Clearfield County, so he had a similar district as I did. And so we would talk about different pieces of legislation. I think he always wanted us to have a caucus and throw our two votes, one way or the other, but two votes doesn't make all that much difference here most of the time. And I think I ended up becoming very close with Bob O'Donnell [Robert; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1974-1994, Speaker, 1991-1992]. He and I in fact, for most of the time I was here shared an apartment together. Joe Hoeffel was a good friend and Dave Sweet. I had shared office space over time, for a big part of the time I was here, with Allen Kukovich [State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1977-1996; State Senator, 1997-2004] and so he was of the same age, all of them, we were all kind of the same age. I was a little bit younger than most of them, but we all kind of got along together, ate dinner, you know, had dinner together and you know, to this day, have stayed friends.

JT: Good. Getting back to your district, can you tell me a little bit about the 75th District? The geography and, specifically, the constituents?

WW: Yeah, it is a, it was a heavy manufacturing county, especially Elk County was big manufacturing. St. Mary's was the carbon capital of the world. They made all kinds of parts for radios and television sets and little transistors that are no longer in use for those types of electronic equipment. Johnsonburg was a paper factory, or a paper mill town. There was a lot of timber in the area. The northern part of my district, kind of north of Johnsonburg in northern Elk County was also an oil and gas area. Some of the early oil wells were drilled. You get down to Dubois and they had a lot of fair amount of manufacturing but you also had, with Interstate 80 going through, that provided a lot of recreational-type activities. There was a place called Treasure Lake which was kind-of a high-end development where people lived. It was a place where people could come, because of [Interstate] 80 coming through, you know, that they wanted to come there and spend the weekend or vacation. And then, you know, obviously a lot of schools and hospitals and things that employed a lot of people. But at the time it was really a fairly heavy manufacturing area. It's kind of sad now to go back home and see, the paper mill is still doing well but I think at the time I was there they probably employed 750 people, now employ around 300 and they produce 15 times as much paper. They are good paying jobs for those that have them but there are not nearly as many of them. And then you have the manufacturing business over in St. Mary's really has pretty much gone by the wayside. There are still some small manufacturing plants that do a variety of things but nowhere near, I mean, I worked for a company in the summers going to college at Stackpole Carbon and this was a plant that employed 1,000 to 1,500 people. They had a cafeteria there and everything for the workers. And that place, it's empty. There's nobody there anymore. It's actually an incubator for some small businesses.

JT: Wow. What were some of the issues that were important to the constituents?

WW: Well, I always describe Elk County now when I talk to people, they say, “Well, what’s Elk County like?” and I say, “Well, Elk County is, the most popular color is fluorescent orange.” So, that tells you a little about the interest of people, I mean, it’s a very outdoors – it’s right on the edge of the Allegheny National Forest. People do enjoy the outdoors, hunting, fishing and, you know, hiking and all that that kind-of an area offers you. And those issues are so important. I was very involved in legislation to deal, to some extent, to some of the employers there, the oil drillers, much to their chagrin. I was involved in legislation that tried to protect our water supplies because they were going back in and trying to recapture as much oil and natural gas as they could and in some of the processes that they used, would always have, could damage some of the water systems. So, that was an issue. I remember unemployment compensation, worker’s compensation were issues back in those times. This again was the early [19]80s and a lot of those people that I talked about who worked in the factories and had good paying jobs were being laid off. We were going through a recession. I ended up getting very involved in the welfare legislation. Governor Thornburgh [Richard; Governor of Pennsylvania, 1979-1987] at the time proposed a work fair program that, as Democrats, we tried to modify over time and I think we were somewhat successful in doing that. So it also, like Pennsylvania, was an aging population, so there were, to this day, when I go back home and see my father who is 82, he’s taking medication that he may not be able to take had it not been for us establishing the PACE program. So, that was something that I worked on. Also we have, you know, it’s a rural area and so transportation is a problem and it’s certainly not as cost-effective as it is in the city but we do have a regional bus system that I was active on trying to get funding for rural regional

transportation to help people get from town to town, to doctor's appointments or to hospital visits and what have you.

JT: Did you have a district office?

WW: My district office, for probably my first two years, was in the corner of my bedroom at my parents' house. That was our allotment. And we had a watchline, I don't even know if they have watchlines anymore, but we had a watchline in my bedroom that I could call anywhere for nothing. And, you know, the only way I dealt with that was to get around and do office hours at community buildings and borough council buildings and things like that on a regular basis then I think it was second term when I got elected they put some money in for district offices and I opened up a store-front office down in Johnsonburg and had a couple of part-time people that worked there different hours of the day.

JT: Very good. Once you got into the House and started working on the House floor, what were some of the pieces of legislation that you were involved with, either as a sponsor or just interested in helping support?

WW: You know, I think one of the first debates that I can remember, and I wasn't so much involved in it, but was active on it to some extent, was No-Fault Divorce legislation and it was probably, at least that I can remember back now, was one of the first pieces of legislation where there really, wasn't necessarily a partisan issue as it was kind of a religious issue and should we liberalize the divorce laws. That was one, but as I had mentioned before, I got very involved in a

whole range of, providing services out of lottery funds for senior citizens. One was the transportation and then the prescription drug assistance. I also got very involved in the, what we called, Oil Divorcement, which would have prohibited integrated oil companies from owning everything from the oil and drilling all the way to the gas pump. At the time, a couple of independent oil, or independent gas station owners in my area called me and said, "Can you come down here and just, we want to show you what's happening, not just tell you what's happening." So, I went down and I knew the guy most of my life and he ran the local gas station, full service, you know, you pull up and you didn't have to get out and pump your own gas. And there was a Quick Fill, or I don't know what the brand was across the street and this was, again, when gasoline was in shorter supply and we were doing an odd/even rationing system. He said, "Now the truck's gonna be coming through in like ten minutes. He's gonna go right by my shop and he's gonna go down the street and fill up the Quick Fill station because that Quick Fill station was part of the chain the oil companies had." He was an independent; they called him an independent service station dealer. And he said, "Eventually we'll get some gas, but the other guy is over there pumping away and our tanks are bare." So, I got involved in trying to come up with a legislative remedy for that. And you know, as, after being here a little while I got involved also in just the environmental protections for oil and gas drilling in my area. And then I think probably the bulk of what I spent a lot of time on here for the better part of three or four years was trying to modify the Governor's work fair proposal. That's probably the one issue I that was more closely identified with here. And I think a lot of people thought that was a city issue, that was an issue for somebody else to fight but the truth of the matter was that a lot of the people I represented who were just honest, hard-working, blue-collar workers, they were the ones that were being affected by the recession and they were the ones being thrown out of work

and after they ran out of their unemployment compensation, really had no income and so it really, I think at that time, changed the welfare debate, and what we tried to change the debate from, you know, the woman with a bunch of kids in an inner city who's standing in line buying her cigarettes and steaks, when the worker is coming through and buying hamburger and just trying to make do with what he has. Those were all the preconceptions that people had about the typical welfare recipient that we tried to dispel.

JT: Good. You were also involved with several committees while you were in the House: Games and Fisheries, Mines and Energy Management. Did you have a favorite one?

WW: I was on Mines and Energy and again, worked on some legislation on that with the oil and gas drilling. Game and Fisheries wasn't particularly active the time I was there. My predecessor had chaired the committee so he was very involved. You know, even though I represented that area and I represented an area where people were interested in that issue, there just wasn't as much, you know, we were, I think at the time we were involved in debates about doe licenses and who should be able to get licenses and should we not have a doe season this year and what have you. But most of what I remember about being on that committee anyway was the sportsmen in my area would always call me for the stocking list so that they could follow the truck and get a bunch of trout. And then I chaired the Subcommittee on Welfare of the Health and Welfare Committee and probably spent most of the time that I was here dealing with that. Also, I think from the beginning I was on the Judiciary Committee and that had been an interest of mine, especially the juvenile justice area from the work that I did prior to the Legislature so I spent a fair amount of time on that.

JT: Did you enjoy committee work?

WW: I think once, I think it was in my second term, I got to be a subcommittee chair and then in my third term we were in the majority so we could do more and that was more fun. The standard committee work, just going and voting and if you're not carrying a piece of legislation or whatever, it's not, not that there's anything wrong with it, but it wasn't terribly exciting.

JT: What about being on the House floor? Some members say that it was intimidating to even to go up to do any of the debate. Did you find it comfortable or was it intimidating to get your point across?

WW: It was pretty intimidating and, again, I was fairly young so it was pretty intimidating probably all the way through. I got more comfortable with it but it was still, I know, probably later in my three of the three terms that I was here the welfare debate kind of came up later in that and I can remember being the prime sponsor of that legislation that I had to spend a fair amount of time on the floor speaking and for me it was intimidating pretty much all the way through. You know, you do have, there are two hundred and some members, it's a fairly grand place physically with all its history and everything and you had some extremely talented debaters who were there at the time and so it was a bit intimidating.

JT: You mentioned that it was a bit easier to get some of your legislation or even some of your committee work through once you in the majority. What obstacles did you come across, whether you're in the majority or even not, when trying to get some of your legislation passed?

WW: Well, I think, you know, and this was probably by design, but the legislative process is, I think, not really set up to change very much and that's probably a good thing. You can't just ram something through, even when we were in the minority, we could bottle things up for a while and create problems and that's probably, in retrospect, even though at the time we wanted to do things, in retrospect, that's probably a good thing, probably the way the founders wanted the process to work. So, you know, some of it just had to do with partisanship. If my name was on it as a D[emocrat] and it was a good idea, you know the Republicans would find somebody in their caucus to introduce the same legislation and theirs would be considered and mine wouldn't. On one level, it really didn't make any difference to me as long as we address the problem. And I think that probably, by-and-large, that's the way it is for most of the members here. If they have an issue that they need to get resolved legislatively and they're not carrying the bill, as long as it gets addressed and impacts the lives of people throughout the state, then that's a good thing.

JT: Was there a good feeling then when your legislation finally was passed and it became an act?

WW: Yeah, it was, you know, to go to the bill signing, especially if we co-sponsored a lot of bills, and so if a bill got passed into law, typically everybody who was a co-sponsor would be invited to the bill signing. But, you know yourself whether or not you really had anything to do

with getting that passed. Even if it was a piece of legislation that I wasn't the primary sponsor but had spent a lot of time working on, it was always gratifying because it's a long process. We only dealt with one part of it, then it obviously had to go over to the Senate and you had to deal with it over there and ultimately the Governor would have to decide whether or not they were gonna sign it into law. So, it was a very gratifying when all of that got taken.

JT: Being from a relatively rural district, did you ever feel that your district was neglected or put aside in favor of some of the more urban areas?

WW: Absolutely. It was, you know, it's just a fact of life. I go back to my comments earlier about Bud George and I wanted to have a caucus of two. That would have probably helped but I found, I mean it was a disadvantage but I always found if you were willing to, you know, just keep after it and be aggressive and keep pounding away at the door that eventually you could get what you needed. And that is probably truer working with the departments and getting resources from them to address problems, I mean, there was obviously the legislative end of our job on the House floor and in committees, but then there was the whole working with state agencies and really the departments and things that had the financial resources to impact the problem. They didn't always need to be impacted through legislation so that really just took more persistence in not always just having a staff person call up and say, "Can we get this or that?" Sometimes I would just walk over to the office and go in and have the meeting. And I just found that you could make change and you could do things and be a productive member here even if you didn't have an Allegheny County caucus behind you or Philadelphia County and you're just willing to be persistent and keep at it.

JT: During the three sessions that you were at the House, was there one issue or one piece of legislation that was probably much more important than any others? Was there an issue that was touched by a lot of the members during the time you were in the House?

WW: Well, I think not to belabor the point, but probably the welfare legislation. At the time it was the only time I think that I was ever mentioned in Newsweek, because of the timing of the issue and the fact that the Governor at this time, Thornburgh, was trying to change the system and I think that while his changes went too far, I think we were able to modify those and that, for me, was the one issue that I was most connected to and I think it had a lot to do with members, impacted really all members because, again, if it were the mid [19]90s or whatever when everybody has a job and unemployment's before four percent, it wouldn't have been a big deal but it was in the mid, early [19]80s and people were out of work and so members were feeling the heat, not just from people, the typical or traditional person on welfare but from people who they knew, needed the assistance and weren't lazy and wanted to work and take care of their family.

JT: You had given some of your personal papers to the House Archives, and after researching some of them, one of the more interesting components was your "Harrisburg Report," which was a collection of notes and memories even, almost in a diary fashion, of what you found on a daily basis during the session time you were there. Why did you keep those?

WW: Well, it was something that my predecessor did, Bill Renwick did. He always had all four or five major newspapers in the area, or in the district, all gave space for Representative Renwick's Harrisburg Report. And I just kept it up and some of them are more personal, you know. I would be remiss without complimenting Bob Rebarchak who actually penned a lot of those Reports, especially the ones that had to do with just things that were going on in the House that didn't pertain to me so much, were just informational. He worked in the Democratic, I don't believe he's still around, I don't think he's working here anymore, he may have passed. He wrote a lot of those for Mister Renwick and wrote a good many of them for me and actually when I was going through my papers was kind of surprised that I kept all of those and they were all together. I never, that was probably something that my secretary, Noveen Sanherd, did and, you know, we'd get it done on Wednesday or Thursday and I think it typically ran in the local papers on the weekend.

JT: It's a great part of your collection. It's really interesting.

WW: Yeah, they're pretty neat and it kind of does give you a synopsis of what was taking place at that particular time. And some of it had to do with committee work and some of it had to do with something I may have been working on and some of it were just informational about what was going on on the floor and what bills were coming up so it is, for at least for those six years, was pretty interesting.

JT: Absolutely. At the time then, did you have a good relationship with the media while you were in office, specifically your local media?

WW: My local media wasn't particularly aggressive, you know, it was, they didn't have a bureau here or anything like that. Dubois was the biggest paper in the district. The Bradford Era, which was a fairly good sized paper for Elk County but was really in Bradford, it wasn't in my district. They covered some of the stuff but they, I've noticed now because I still get my local town paper, the Johnsonburg Press, they cover Dan Surra [State Representative, Clearfield and Elk Counties, 1991-2008] much more than they ever covered me. And I think the Press, the Johnsonburg Press, prints one of Dan's columns that he runs every week and so it wasn't a very proactive press. If I sent them a news release or I sent them the "Harrisburg Report," by-and-large they would print it, but I remember sitting down with a couple of the editors and they would say, you know, "We're not your P-R operation," even though I tried purposely not to make them very partisan and make them informational and I think they, you know, to some extent, they did get them out but they weren't – I had good relations with them. But even if I had bad relations with most of the people there, it wouldn't have made much difference because they weren't that kind of a press.

JT: Since you've left office, there's been several modern technological advancements on the floor of the House, specifically laptops on all of the desks, and the continual video stream of the session days; PCN [Pennsylvania Cable Network] is another one. Do you have an opinion on these advancements and if they're good or if there is something that should be left off?

WW: Well, I think even back when I was here there was always a lot of distraction on the House floor. You know there were people walking around and talking and cornering guys, you

know, so that you could talk about something else that had nothing to do with the debate that was going on, so I can't imagine that at least on the floor that that's a good thing, that all of that information is there. You know, I remember sitting there many a nights and thinking absolutely no one is paying attention to what is going on, so I think that the more access you have for diversion on the floor is probably not a good thing. I think overall all of that stuff, you know, certainly helps legislators keep informed and in touch. It's probably a benefit to the membership.

JT: Why did you finally leave the House after three sessions?

WW: I decided that I wanted to run for Congress and ran for Congress, started putting together a campaign in [19]83 and then ran for Congress in [19]84 against an incumbent member of Congress, Bill Clinger [William; U.S. Representative, 1979-1997], from Warren, Pennsylvania. And just really decided that I never really, and you know, I was fairly cavalier probably at the time, I figured the worst that could happen is I would lose and I would go on and do something else. And I really wanted to, I never really had it as a goal that I was gonna be here forever, and so I thought that at the time some of the legislation I was interested in, especially, you know, economic development stuff, job creation and things. At the time, we were also involved in nuclear arms proliferation and the nuclear freeze was a big issue that I cared about. The whole conflict between Nicaragua and foreign policy – that, I didn't obviously have anything to do with, but that I cared about. The foreign policy as it pertained, under the Reagan years, of involvement in Nicaragua and El Salvador, were issues that I was interested in and that the place

really to deal with that was in Congress. I thought the timing was right, that I could take a shot and have a legitimate chance of winning.

JT: I like to ask each of the members that I talk to if they have any particular story that they'd like to share with me, something funny that maybe has happened on the House floor or something associated with that; a memorable story, whether it be happy or sad. Something that a lot of people wouldn't necessarily know that happened.

WW: My sense is, and I have not spent any kind of time here since I left, but my sense is that there was a lot more, while there was still partisanship, there was a lot more camaraderie back then. Some of my fondest times really were in after hours when we were all here Monday and Tuesday, especially most of the members would head out on Wednesday. But back then we had a fairly active sports caucus and we would play softball in the summer, spring and summer. We even played football, touch football that got fairly aggressive against the Senate staffers one year. It was myself and Kukovich and Hoeffel and Dave Sweet and Bob O'Donnell. I had been a quarterback in high school and in college and so I was the quarterback but Bob O'Donnell called all the plays and would map out all these elaborate plays. And we would play basketball, and other guys, Gregg Cunningham [State Representative, Centre County, 1978-1982], who was a member from State College and a Republican, he played and Joe Gladeck [Joseph M., Jr.; State Representative, Montgomery County, 1979-2000] and I think Joe Lashinger [Joseph A.; Montgomery County, 1978-1990] played. So, it was at least an opportunity that we all got together and played basketball in the winter time at a local gym here and typically we'd go out and have a couple beers and something to eat. There was a group of us that kind-of shied away

from the typical lobbyist dinner and cocktail party. My rule after about six months was unless somebody calls me from my district and they're going to be at the event, I'm not going. I was much more interested in going out and spending time with other members in an informal setting than going and shaking more hands. So, that was a positive experience that I had here. A funny experience that I actually reminisced with Bill DeWeese yesterday was around this time when I first got elected, my predecessor was right behind a marble staircase on the first floor of the Capitol and he had this big old desk. It wasn't this typical box desk, but had the big desk with big wings over it; it was huge. And he had a nice glass credenza and big plush chairs and we were here, I was here one night and Bill DeWeese and Doc Falhaber, who was his staff person at the time, they were here and we were talking and I think we were in my predecessor's office and this was in December, because I was the member then but hadn't been Sworn-In and DeWeese said, "Well, you know, if you want that desk, you're not going to get it unless it gets up to the sixth floor." And so, between the three of us, and it wasn't easy to do, we got it in the freight elevator and took the credenza, the chairs and the big winged desk up to the sixth floor and got it into my space and then took the other stuff down. I remember being down there the following week, I think this might have been on a Friday, the following Monday when Miriam came in, who was his long-time secretary, and she said, "Where'd that desk go?" And I just kind of smiled and she kind of looked at me and smiled and didn't say anything. I mentioned it to DeWeese yesterday and he started laughing and he said, "I can remember how hard it was to get it up there," because I don't even know what's up there anymore, if it's been gutted or whatever, but it was one of those kind of funny experiences.

JT: I was gonna say, I wonder where that desk is now.

WW: Yeah, that's a good question, they're all numbered and stuff so it could be, well, I actually took it over to the, then maybe into my second term or the end of my first term; we were the first people, members to move over to the South Office Building. I don't know what agencies were here and they cleared them out and we needed more space so, we were on the first floor. It went over there. Where it went after me, I have no idea. Funny story.

JT: That's great. Thank you. Yeah, I'll say. Tell me about what you've been doing since you've left office.

WW: Well, I ran for Congress in [19]84. I came close and decided to run again in [19]86. I didn't get as close. In the interim there for two years, as a government affairs person with the local paper mill in my home town and then after being unsuccessful in [19]86, I went to [Washington] DC and worked for Senator Tom Harkin [U.S. Senator, 1985-present] from Iowa and ran his political action committee, called Independent Action. Around that time, my wife and I had gotten married and we decided to move to California. She had lived in California before we got married and wanted to move back there. So, we moved to San Diego and I was kind of, I guess at 32 or 33, was kind of starting over and I was good friends with a couple guys from Philadelphia who were in the political consulting business and at the time that was a fairly new business, new industry. And they had done my campaigns when I ran for Congress. And we decided to open a California office and try to get more west coast business. And that started in [19]89, so I've been doing that ever since. We do, kind of, develop the strategy and the communications plan and then produce the television and radio commercials for candidates. We

do, I personally don't do it, but my one partner has done all of Ed Rendell's [Edward; Governor of Pennsylvania, 2003-2011] campaigns, and Mayor Nutter [Michael; Mayor of Philadelphia, 2007-present] in Philadelphia. I work on Bill Richardson, the Governor of New Mexico [2002-present] and the U.S. Senator from New Mexico, Jeff Bingaman [1982-present] and have helped to get over ten members of Congress elected from Texas, Washington state, California, Utah, and spend most of my time working on campaigns out there.

JT: So, more or less, you still stay involved in politics then?

WW: Yeah, at a different level, and it's behind the scenes and we, I don't have to worry about constituents and being around shaking hands and it's, it's been a way to be involved and to try to get good people elected and just still stay involved in something that I really like.

JT: Do you follow Pennsylvania politics at all?

WW: Not all that much. My family still lives in Elk County, so over the years I've followed that. My sister actually worked for Jim Distler [James T.; State Representative, Clearfield and Elk Counties, 1985-1990], who took my place; he was a Republican member for six years. She worked in his district office and I've known, I actually grew up, not in the same town, but I grew in the same time or the same age as Dan Surra and we knew each other in high school. We played football against each other and a lot of my friends are guys that he went to school with so I've kept in touch with, with what he's been up to. And then the Governor's stuff; I've followed

all of the recent publicity on the bonuses and all that's been going on. So, I keep in touch as much as I can but not on a regular basis.

JT: Looking back at your time in the House, what would you say, what aspect would you say was your most favorite, aspect of the job?

WW: I think really sitting down with somebody who was having some kind of a problem, it could be plugged up ditch that PENNDOT wasn't cleaning out or, but it was a problem that they really had and that they needed to have resolved and they didn't have the ability themselves to be able, or the bureaucracy wouldn't move to take care of it. Or it could be going to senior centers and realizing that one of the problems they had were that they needed help with prescription drugs and we had a program, we had a revenue stream that could take care of that and to work on those no matter the ditch to the person who's experiencing the flooding in their basement is no less important than the person who can't buy prescription drugs. And to see that through the process, some of it taking longer than others but all of it, both of them tremendously rewarding for the people involved and I think that was the best part of the job for me. Also, I think that just being kind of at the center, it's similar in Washington but you're really at the center of the storm in Washington, you know, even here, you know things that are happening that other people don't know. You know things are happening before they know. And to just be kind of at the center of the universe per se in terms of your state and what's taking place and what have you, it's fun to be able to be in that position. I think in the history of our state, when you look at the number of people that have lived here, there haven't been all that many who have served in the Legislature

so for me to having had the opportunity to do that at a pretty young age was a real honor and something that I'll always remember.

JT: How do you think your tenure has been remembered? Or how would you liked to?

WW: I'm not sure they would have remembered it. Although in talking with Dan Surra yesterday, he always points out that he'll invariably run into somebody who will tell him, "Well Bill Wachob could get that done." So, I think that I was honest with people and I worked hard and I was willing to kind-of go against the tide. And if you do those things I think the rest takes care of itself. So I would hope that. I still run into people when I go back home to visit my family that remember and people that I've helped so, you know, I think I'm balanced. The time that I was here people would think it was a good time.

JT: One final question for you: what advice would you give to someone who's interested in not only becoming a force in politics, but specifically running for the House of Pennsylvania?

WW: I think that, you know, I think a lot of people get involved, not necessarily for the wrong reasons but it's more out of a partisan interest. You know, they're a real Democrat or they're a real Republican and it's more a political consideration that they're gonna run for the House and at the time I didn't really have a philosophy. I grew up in a blue-collar, working class family. I was raised Catholic, lived in a small town, and I was a Democrat because my parents were Democrats and what have you, but I got involved because I wanted to try to help people and I would hope that there are a lot of opportunities to help people here. You can be on the staff here

and do a lot. It's a little less so probably now because there are so many staff people, but back when I was here the staff people, for like, Jim Manderino [James; State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1967-1989, Speaker, 1989] and Leroy Irvis [K. Leroy; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1959-1988, Speaker, 1977-1978, 1983-1988], I mean, they had a huge amount of power. So, it doesn't always have to be an elected office that you can have an impact. But, I think it's a great experience. It's part of our system that's been around for over a couple hundred years and if you get the opportunity and you're interested in that, people should take the opportunity and do it. It's a very worthwhile endeavor.

JT: Well, William Wachob, I'd like to thank you very much for participating in our Oral History Program.

WW: Thanks, Jesse; it was good to be here.

JT: Thank you for sharing your stories with us and good luck with everything.

WW: Thanks.