

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

**The Honorable Donald R. Walko, Jr. (D)**

20<sup>th</sup> District

Allegheny County

1995-2009

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December 16, 2009

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**Heidi Mays (HM):** Good afternoon. I'm here today with Representative Don Walko who served from 1995, and he's currently getting ready to leave us here in 2009. He served the 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative District from Allegheny County. Thank you for agreeing to be part of our Oral History interview today.

**Donald R. Walko, Jr. (DW):** It's really great to be here, Heidi. Thank you so much for your time.

**HM:** Thank you. I wanted to begin by asking you about your childhood and your family and how you feel that might have prepared you for political life?

**DW:** Well, I grew up in a working-class family. There were two of us – I was the younger of the two – my sister is three years older than me. When I went to first grade, my mother went to work in a factory, a box factory, did a lot of sewing work there, and some very difficult work as far as physical action. My father was a factory worker himself. He operated a big press in a big company in south Greensburg. He was active in the union, and he worked there for 38 years until the plant moved to South Carolina, and he retired, so I grew up in that environment of a union household. Both my parents were members of unions, and again, my dad was a local union officer, and an international delegate with the United Electrical Workers. So, I learned a lot about politics from being exposed to that.

**HM:** So, were they members of the Democratic Party?

**DW:** Oh, yes, very staunch Democrats. My mother passed on in 2004. My dad still is a very good, solid voter. Never misses a vote, cares about Democratic causes, you know, the health care issue. He's sort of fiscally conservative, but he's also socially progressive when it comes to workers' rights, really, civil rights. I remember as a child watching Martin Luther King – I don't know if it was the live version of the speech at the Lincoln Memorial or a rerun of it – and I remember him saying, "What a great man," you know, back then, growing up in an all-white community, you know, maybe he was a little different in that regard; was a little more progressive than sometimes people would prejudge him to be.

**HM:** Would you say your family laid the foundation for you to become a Democrat?

**DW:** I would think. I think just with those values, a working-class family, understanding the role of the unions in building a middle class, understanding having grown up talking to both grandmothers extensively and both grandfathers, especially my grandmother Walko, who really was listening to the radio all the time, watching every little thing that was happening in the news, sharing the stories about the Depression, sharing the stories about relief, and that did make a very big impression on me. My grandfather on the other side, the D'Amico – my mother, her maiden name was D'Amico – he was from Pescara, Italy, came to work in the coal mine, and again, he spoke more Italian than English, but I did talk with him a lot and spent a lot of time with him, and again, I learned about his perspectives and the opportunities in America, and it's those opportunities that I still believe that many of us, particularly in my Caucus, believe in: opportunity, a hand up, you know, that sort-of thing. It's interesting: my grandfather Walko, with whom I spent the first, maybe, five years of my life; our family lived in part of the house.

My mother, my mother, father, my sister, and I lived in almost like an apartment within my grandmother and grandfather Walko's house. He had a wooden leg; he lost his leg in a mining accident, probably in the early [19]20s, and he was unfortunate; there was no workers' comp[ensation]. He was crushed. His leg was crushed between two wooden carts. They had horses and wooden carts in the mine, and that leg was crushed, and I always heard the stories, "No workers' comp. All they gave him was barber school tuition," which must have been pretty small. Fortunately, it was the Roaring [19]20s, and he was able to do pretty well in the barber business and the like.

**HM:** What a great story.

**DW:** Yeah, it was interesting because I'll never forget – you're too young – but, Lawrence Welk – did you?

**HM:** I've heard of him, yeah.

**DW:** Yeah, you heard, but when I was a little boy and my mom and dad would go out on a date, I'd stay with my grandfather and grandmother, and I was allowed to watch Lawrence Welk<sup>1</sup> and then the beginning of *Gunsmoke*<sup>2</sup>. Now *Gunsmoke*, you know, they started off with a drawing or a shoot down or – I forget what it's called – they drew pistols, and right when that happened, then I had to go to bed; that was nine o'clock. But, I'd sit on his knee and he'd, every now and then, talk about the part of his leg that was wooden.

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<sup>1</sup> American musician, hosted *The Lawrence Welk Show* from 1955-1982.

**HM:** So, what made you decide to get involved in politics?

**DW:** Really, when I came out of law school and moved into a developing or revitalizing neighborhood of the city of Pittsburgh, the North Side, I got active in community affairs. Really, I didn't think about running for office. I did law work. I did a lot of volunteer work with the Perry Hill Top Citizens Council and other organizations that were active in the North Side of Pittsburgh in housing revitalization and community development, and I thought it was a natural progression to get some political clout behind that kind of involvement, and I tinkered with the idea of even running against then-popular Tom Murphy, [Thomas J. Murphy, Jr.; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1979-1994; Mayor of Pittsburgh, 1994-2006] who went on to become mayor. I decided not to run, and then when Mayor Murphy – when Tom became mayor in 1994, [19]95, early – I'm sorry; it was early [19]94 – I decided to run for his vacant seat. So, I'm sure there's somebody out there who's going to run for my vacant seat.

**HM:** Well, could you describe – you've touched a little bit upon your education and some of your previous experiences before coming to the House – could you expound upon that a little bit, like, where you went to school and your degrees?

**DW:** I went to Penn State University and graduated with a degree in accounting, and I really never understood where I was going in my career, and then I went to Dickinson Law School right after graduating from Penn State and graduated from there three years later, 1978. Came out of law school and went to a tax department of a major CPA [Certified Public Accounting]

firm. Didn't really like that that much. I didn't like the environment. I didn't like the – really, I didn't feel fulfilled. I went with a smaller CPA firm and did work with them plus legal work, and then, lo-and-behold, I went to an organization that was just formed, newly formed, that helped nonprofit groups throughout the city of Pittsburgh in organizing their boards and dealing with development issues, in dealing with foundations, and as an attorney, I was doing that sort-of work in addition to just helping them with their books or whatever, trying to keep them in line with the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] requirements. And then from there, I went to a small law firm, did a little stint with city controller Tom Flaherty [Pittsburgh City Controller, 1984-2006], just for two and-a-half years, went back to the law firm, and then ran for this position. I've been sort of in a different career mode. It's never been really clear.

**HM:** So, could you describe for me your first political campaign and could you possibly compare it – how did it compare to some of your other campaigns?

**DW:** Well, my first political campaign was ill-conceived. It was – when I was in law practice, I ran against a long-serving State Senator, Eugene Scanlon, [State Senator, Allegheny County, 1975-1994; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1969-1974] thinking that I would be more in touch with the community, I was more involved in neighborhood activities, and then, he proceeded to kill me [*laughs*] at the polls; a substantial victory for him. I did make good inroads, and I made a lot of friends from that State Senate campaign. I think that was 19 – Lord, I can't even remember what year it was – 1986, perhaps? And that was that campaign, and then I didn't run again until 1994 when I ran a very good campaign and had a lot of success.

**HM:** So, you learned from your first...?

**DW:** I learned a lot from that first – I learned how to count votes, how to really read people, and then, how to evaluate an elected official’s performance. As I was going through that campaign, frankly, I gained a lot of respect for Senator Scanlon. The more I got to know him – and he is deceased at this – but, the more I got to know him, the more I respected him and started to understand when you’re a State Senator and you’re dealing with a district of 250 thousand people, it’s going to be a lot more difficult to be hands-on with community groups and the like. And I didn’t also understand the big picture of many of the other issues that we deal with up here, so I learned from that. I learned also to make friends and to build along a foundation, and that foundation that I built back in 1986, even though they might not have been backing me at the time, I kept in contact. I used many of those contacts in my efforts to become a judge.

**HM:** Very good.

**DW:** And I succeeded at that, so.

**HM:** Yeah. Well, I was hoping you could tell me a little bit about the 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative District, about the people and their issues?

**DW:** It’s a wonderful district. I always loved serving that district. It’s a diverse district, the demographics are divergent. You have very poor areas. You have racially mixed areas, and you have two precincts out of the 60 that are above average income. Pretty much plain; 95 percent

Caucasian, so down to the inner city precincts that I have are very diverse and have many blight challenges. But it's always been fun, and I like every little nook and cranny of that district, from places like the Strip District in Pittsburgh; Bloomfield, I have a little piece of that; Stanton Heights; I have all of Lawrenceville, which is a tremendous, powerful neighborhood in the city of Pittsburgh, which there's a huge influx of artistic people and young professionals mixed in with the long-time residents who also have their class; and then the North Side. How could I forget that wonderful community where I live?

**HM:** Did reapportionment affect your district at all?

**DW:** Yes, it did. The one thing – because I had inner city precincts – we lost population. My district had to be moved further into the North Hills. That's when I picked up the above average income precincts. I picked up the borough of West View, but the hardest thing about it was, for example, perhaps 19 precincts had been in the district of Representative Mayernik [David J. Mayernik; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1983-2002] who really delivered for his district as far as grants for Little League fields and that sort of thing. He was written out. They reapportioned him out. I had nothing to do with it, but many of the residents there thought that I did, you know, or they blamed me, and it's funny, though, because David himself and his mother, may she rest in peace, Ludmilla Mayernik, backed me for election in 2002, and that was after the reapportionment. Since then, I have great relationships with the people of Ross Township and West View, and I also have a little township called Reserve, so that was the reapportionment impact for me. I don't know what's going to happen to the district the next

reapportionment, because I think it's continued to lose population, particularly the North Side, and some of the Lawrenceville precincts lost population.

**HM:** What do you think the most effective way that you were able to talk to your constituents has been for you?

**DW:** I'd say, you know what? Frankly, door-to-door, and what we did right after I became a Representative – I don't golf that much. I golf in a blue moon. On a Friday afternoon, for example, at two o'clock I'd say, "Okay, I'm just going out into the district," and I'd pick a neighborhood and go door-to-door talking to people, and they're like, "What are you doing here?" "I'm not running. I'm just here to say hello [and to] see if you have any concerns." If they weren't home, I'd leave a little constituent service brochure. After that out, maybe two and a half to three hours of going door-to-door, I'd stop at the local neighborhood tavern, whether it's Nied's Hotel in Lawrenceville, the Beer House in Deutschtown, the Teutonian Manticore, and various other places, and just say hello to people, just stop in, maybe have one refreshment, and then go home, or head to wherever I have to head, and that, I found, to be the most effective. Not campaigning, but just saying hello to people, and then, of course, the congregate events throughout the years, whether they're nights at the races or various events like that, charitable and otherwise. That's the best way to communicate, and naturally, we also had newsletters, and for a target list I had a legislative update on a regular basis to talk about some of the more boring things [*laugh*] no, some of the more complicated things that I'd spend maybe spend two pages describing.

**HM:** Do you have a web site?

**DW:** I do now. Back then, I didn't even know what the web was when I first started, and I don't believe we had computers, but not the internet; not email. I can't remember when that came on.

**HM:** Okay.

**DW:** And it sort of revolutionized the way we communicate and the way constituents communicate with us. For example, I used to, maybe every week, I'd dictate on a tape 50 letters or sometimes 60, and now it's like it's almost none. We respond to feedbacks through the internet. We don't respond by internet. I try to avoid that, but when somebody sends me a feedback, I respond to those in writing.

**HM:** Well, since you touched upon it, what other changes have you seen since you started?

**DW:** Well, back in the old time, when I first started (it's not that old days), I think the equipment's become much more sophisticated. The computer system's much more sophisticated. The phone systems, all of that sort-of thing, the photocopier, more sophisticated. I think we had a FAX the first few years I was in office, but it wasn't provided, it wasn't standard. Now, we have very fancy equipment that's provided by the Caucuses. I think that's probably the biggest change.

**HM:** Have you always had a district office?

**DW:** Yes. We made that a priority. I remember when I won the Democratic nomination I had no Republican opponent into the fall, and we started looking for a space right at that point, and then, I got a little place down in Brighton Heights, which was accessible by roadway – well, all the parts of the district were accessible from that district office. I had a handicap ramp built, cement, right up into the office, and we were right next door to a beauty salon, and those people were really great. We became good friends. We'd always go to their parties, whether it's a birthday party or New Year's Eve, and right down the street from a really nice little market where I'd get my coffee and maybe corn to take home. We had a little storefront there; it was nice.

**HM:** And you've maintained the same?

**DW:** Well, no, we had to move because that was razed for an Eckerd Drug.

**HM:** Oh.

**DW:** Eckerd bought – which was a good move, because the little store was eventually going to go out of business. The beauty salon's still in business. They moved down the street one block, but we had to move. We moved up to Perrysville Avenue to a really nice office. The location isn't, isn't as nice as the one we had before. I miss having that beauty salon next door. In fact, on really hot Friday afternoons once in a while if I was in the office until five, I'd knock on the

wall, and they'd send over a beer. We'd always wait until five, but she'd come over with a little paper bag. "Here, Don." Linda, Linda Smith.

**HM:** Very nice. Well, I'd like to ask you about your first Swearing-In Ceremony and what you remember from that?

**DW:** Tumultuous. That was when Stish, Representative Stish [Thomas B. Stish; State Representative, Luzerne County, 1991-1996], switched to Republican. Oh, I can't recall if it was in December, early December or mid-November, he announced that he was switching to Republican. That changed the balance of power, and there was a fight over the certification of his election results, and it went on for about four hours. So, I had a busload of people here, and they were just hanging around waiting for that to happen. I did letters to every one of them. I think it might have been 45 people, explaining that what was at stake, why there was such a brouhaha about the seating of Representative Stish, and unfortunately, that's what I remember most about that, other than just the grandeur of it. I remember being so impressed by all the flowers on the House Floor and the Chamber of the House. I remember being impressed with the people who were there, how much respect they paid to the institution.

**HM:** Do you remember who you sat beside?

**DW:** Fred Trello [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1975-2002]. Fred Trello was to my left. My little boy had chicken pox, so he couldn't even come to the Floor. Nicholas, we brought him to the Floor maybe three months later. Greg Fajt [State Representative, Allegheny

County, 1991-1996] to my right, and I loved sitting by Fred Trello and Greg Fajt. What a story in contrast. I mean, Fred, the old time politician; Greg, the mover and the shaker, the guy who beat a Republican, or chased him out of the race, frankly. McVerry [Terence F. McVerry; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1979-1990] was his name, I believe, and a very modern kind-of guy. You know, using the internet or whatever, but he and I had a blast that first year, and then Joe Preston [Joseph; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1983-present] sat to his right. And Greg and I, I'll never forget all the debates we had because that's when Ridge [Thomas J. Ridge, Governor of Pennsylvania, 1995-2001] came in. He wanted to reform welfare, reform health care delivery, change workers' comp[ensation] laws, and there were some really intense debates, and Greg and I would be sitting there, and we always had a lot of work, letters to sign, everything. We were, like, constantly working on the House Floor, just watching everything that's going on, except when we participated in the debate, of course, but I looked over to Greg and said, "You know what? I don't think we could buy a ticket to this kind of a show," and he laughed, but that's the way that year went on that way, and then Greg ran for State Senate two years later, and, well, I certainly missed him when he left the House, but he, of course, is doing very well in his career.

**HM:** Well, as you were getting started, did you have any mentors that helped you along?

**DW:** Well, you know, Greg did a lot that first couple of years, and then, Fred Trello, he didn't – he wasn't in general a mentor, but on every amendment that I had a question on, I'd ask Fred. He was very explicit. I mean, he could really describe what was going on. He watched every single thing that was happening on that Floor, and he was a wealth of information. Frank

Dermody [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1991-present] was a very good teacher of mine. Representative Veon [Michael; State Representative, Beaver County, 1985-2006], who, at the time was Policy Chair, he was a great teacher when it came to focusing on issues. He advised me to focus on an issue and become the expert, become the go-to guy, so I studied the prison situation out in Western Pennsylvania, my penitentiary in my district. So, later on, I studied the prescription drug issue. I became the go-to person with questions about pharmaceuticals, the pharmaceutical industry, so I thought that was very good advice, and I'll have to think back, but on different issues, there were many different kinds of mentors, whether it was – like, lately, Joe Markosek [Joseph; State Representative, Westmoreland and Allegheny Counties, 1983-present] on transportation issues, and by the way, in my fifteenth year, I still consider myself learning. Representative DeLuca [Anthony; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1983-present] has become the guy, the go-to person on insurance issues. So, all of them have different styles, but all of them have different things they can teach you. So, there's a lot of mentors out there if you're willing to accept their advice and learn from them, and I'm sure more are going to occur to me as we go on.

**HM:** Oh, please feel free to, you know, add as you need.

**DW:** And I'd like to also add about – catty-corner from me was Dick Olsz [Richard; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1981-1998]. To the left of me was Fred Trello, and I don't know if you know, we changed the rules a few years ago where we can't be in Session past 11 [pm]. Well, back in the day we'd be in there until one, two, three, midnight, and Fred Trello and Dick Olsz were excellent singers, and they'd start singing a nice, quiet Frank Sinatra song, and

that was a joy to listen to them. Yeah, as the debate drones on, or the House is at ease, I mean, they weren't doing it when somebody was right at the mic[rophone] talking about an issue. They weren't interrupting with a song, but it was so fun listening to them and so entertaining to be around them, and again, that's part of what Greg and I were talking about, buying tickets to something.

**HM:** Well, what role do you think camaraderie has in the House, because you're talking about wonderful personalities...

**DW:** Right.

**HM:** And I think....

**DW:** I think it has a major role. I don't care what kind of business you are, whether you're in a law business on a major complex case, whether you're in municipal government, whether you're struggling to do your billing in a small law firm; you need to have camaraderie with the people you work with, and I think that's vital. I think Paul Costa's [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1999-present] a really good example. He encourages people to get together once in a while for karaoke, and I wouldn't make light of it because often what Paul does is bring people with divergent positions on issues, pro-life, pro-choice, pro-gun, pro-gun control, bring them all together in an environment where they can talk, and they can talk about the issues, but generally speaking, they just talk to each other, so that when you are debating, when you are fighting it out on a tough issue, you realize that that's part of democracy, and you're just a player in democracy.

You're not mad at that person for disagreeing with you. If you are, then you should quit, so. And the other thing is camaraderie helps you step aside from questioning motives. So, I believe in somewhat expansion of gambling in Pennsylvania. That's my voting record. Paul Clymer [State Representative, Bucks County, 1981-present] doesn't believe in it at all. He'll fight it tooth and nail. Now, do I question his motives? No. He's pure. He believes what he's talking about, and I think that's what we all have to do, and I think camaraderie helps you in that endeavor.

**HM:** Do you think anything surprised you when you came to Harrisburg?

**DW:** Oh, yeah, I'm glad you asked that, because the thought did cross my mind, and I was going to include it in my going away speech, but I didn't want to make it too long. When we started discussing workers' comp issues, school voucher issues, even gay marriage, or all these different issues that we've discussed in the 15 years I've been here, but starting from day one, the first debates, I was very impressed with the level of intelligence, knowledge, skill of the people who were participating in those debates, whether it was Kathy Manderino [State Representative, Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties, 1993-2010], whether it's now, like, John Pallone [State Representative, Westmoreland and Armstrong Counties, 2001-2010], or even the sometimes long-winded John Maher [State Representative, Allegheny and Washington Counties, 1997-present], who I consider to be my friend and who is a friend. The level of discourse is so high I think people should be proud. Now, that doesn't always come across in some of our debates, because sometimes if you're taking a position against a piece of legislation, one of the logical things for you to do is delay it, and delaying things really gets boring. You

know, this motion, that motion, this parliamentary thing, that one, but all in all, the level of debate has been really amazing to me. Who or whatever side of the issue the people were on.

**HM:** I wanted to ask you about your relationships with Leadership, and did you always get along with Leadership?

**DW:** I didn't always vote the way they wanted, but generally speaking, I'd get along with them. I understand the big picture; that a united Caucus can accomplish certain things or stop certain things from happening, and so generally speaking, I've gotten along with Leadership pretty well. I did vote against their interest in a few issues. I had to vote my conscience. One that comes to mind is the school voucher issue. While I do support public schools and I have voted to increase taxes to increase public school programming, early childhood initiatives, preschool programs, all day kindergarten, being from a district with roughly 10 parochial elementary schools with people wanting to make that choice, I supported school choice. Now, that vote never counted because they struck it from the board after we were all voting because they didn't get the votes that they needed. There were a lot of powerful people against that, and that was one example of me taking a position that was diametrically opposed to the Leadership at the time.

**HM:** I should also make a note that the Leadership has changed.

**DW:** Oh, that's in a state of flux even as we – even yesterday, the majority whip, Representative DeWeese [H. William; State Representative, Fayette, Greene and Washington Counties, 1979-present; Speaker, 1993-1994], resigned. Oh, he didn't have to – he was automatically taken out

of that position. We have a Speaker, the majority Leader, the majority Whip, and various other offices, and it's fair to say that there's a lot of turmoil regarding that. Nonetheless, the Governor and most of our – we still try to accomplish things as we move forward. It's been the worst budget – I call this budget year of 2009 twisted, tangled, and tortured. I was even on the phone with one of my colleagues back in Allegheny County, Alex Bicket [partner in the law firm of Zimmer Kunz, Pittsburgh] who ran for judge who lost, but, you know, he and I had become friends, and he wondered – “Well, aren't you going to be there at this lunch tomorrow?” I said, “No, we're still in Session. We're still working on the final part of the budget,” and there's all kinds of reasons. I don't want to talk about it from the point of view of placing blame anywhere, but if I had to, I could. Lack of compromise, lack of willingness to compromise and negotiate on the part of certain people. Frankly, in my opinion, the Senate Republicans were the worst.

**HM:** Well, I also wanted to make a comment, too, that you were in the minority for a good part of your legislative career, and now you're in the majority; has that been a dramatic shift for you?

**DW:** It has. In fact, I've only had one prime sponsored bill become law, other than miscellaneous resolutions. I've had a role in a number of different initiatives, either on the Judiciary Committee or before that on the prescription drug realm, but once we took the majority after 12 years – I served for 12 years in the minority – it was then I could move a major piece of legislation through the Urban Affairs Committee and have it signed into law, and so it's made a huge difference, particularly, I'd say, on urban issues. For example, one of the big challenges in many of the precincts, many of the neighborhoods in my district, is the challenge of blight, and that's a challenge not just in urban centers but in rural communities. And my bill empowered the

court to appoint someone called a conservator to take control of a property, even if it's privately owned, take control of a nuisance property and bring it back into useful existence and gain a first lien position on the money invested. You give the owner, the real owner, a chance to get it back, but if they fail, you can sell it, and the proceeds, if there are any net proceeds, usually there wouldn't be, would go to that owner, if they can find that person, or go to the Commonwealth, so that was really a revolutionary kind of move, and I had thought it existed in some other states, but I think there's only one other state that has it, and that's Ohio.

**HM:** So, who did you work closely with to get that passed?

**DW:** Representative Petrone [Thomas; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1981-2008], who was the chairman of the House Urban Affairs Committee. Jon Castelli, who was their Executive Director of that committee, and Cindy Daley, who is the Housing Alliance Executive Director, and she was very much involved.

**HM:** Were there opposing issues?

**DW:** The banking industry was really against it, because anything to jeopardize their first lien position they were wary of. They were wary of the precedent that the act set, you know, really, what you're doing is taking private property without a condemnation. You're taking it into what's known – well, technically, it's a receivership. We changed the name to conservatorship, because that sounds more positive. So, there was a lot of resistance from those individuals who know it's personal property, it's private property, and just don't want to put any negative on it.

However, this is blighted. The requirements for the conservatorship to take place are very stringent, so it has to meet a number of different things from being a blighting influence, being a public nuisance, being in violation of safety codes, et cetera.

**HM:** Has it been a successful program?

**DW:** Well, there are a number of – it just started in a year ago, and the courts had to set up what are known as protocols, so they could handle it in the court room, and with all the forms and whatever, procedures, and I understand that it's working in Allentown area, Philadelphia, and I'd have to check. I haven't checked lately, but as of about one week ago there was movement on the act.

**HM:** Okay.

**DW:** And, in fact, the Housing Alliance hired somebody to implement it, and this is a thing of beauty. This is a person with whom I met in 1994 when I was the Democratic nominee, pretty much the winner, presumptive winner, I spent time with City Magistrate, Housing Court Magistrate Irene McLaughlin [Judge, Pittsburgh Housing Court, 1993-2003], and since then, the Housing Court was eliminated in the city of Pittsburgh, but she went into private consulting. She was hired by Housing Alliance to implement the bill that she gave me the idea for in 1994. So, I should have called it the McLaughlin Act, but I don't know, we'll see. I do give her credit all the time for the idea. So, it took me from, I introduced it every Session from 1995, became law in

2008. But it was worthwhile, and I think it's a meaningful surgical tool to use in urban and rural revitalization.

**HM:** Well, you talked a little bit about your work with prescription drugs. Can you tell me who you worked with and what all the issues, or maybe some of the issues, the highlights? Because there were a lot...

**DW:** Well, I'm really glad you brought that up, because it really opened my eyes to a lot of issues. One, the whole thing came about because of the prescription drug prices escalating. My constituents, many constituents bringing up their problems in buying their drugs, their prescription drugs, and they might have been a little over the PACE [Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly] and the PACEnet limits. Those are our prescription drug programs for older Pennsylvanians, but, but they would be over that limit and then lose all kind of money because they could not afford their prescription medications, and I found it ironic that, you know, the Veterans' Administration buys them at this price, Medicare buys them at this price, and then consumers in America buy it at this price. And I know they keep contending, "Well, it's research and development," but a lot of that gap is made up of advertisement, which is not legal in Canada and Europe, and also the executive bonuses and executive compensation packages, so I felt it was something worth pursuing, and I studied various things, the Canadian model, I came across the model in Maine, and what they did was basically get Maine to be the prescription benefit manager for every citizen of Maine. I guess they call them "Mainers?" I don't know what they call them, so when reading about it, I came across the name Chellie Pingree [Maine Senate, Knox County, 1993-2000; U.S. Representative, 2009-present]. Chellie Pingree, at the

time, was the Majority Leader of the Maine Senate. Now, they were term limited, which was really a shame, because she served her eight years and then had to leave the Maine Senate, but she was a really bright, progressive person who came and appeared, sat right where you're sitting. We did a show on the issue, and she was so impressive to me that I continued to keep in touch with her, and I took a group of Representatives: Kathy Manderino, Paul Costa, Jimmy Wansacz [James; State Representative, Lackawanna County, 2001-2010], and some staff members. I think that the four of us went up on a mission to Maine. We met with the Attorney General [Andrew Ketterer, Attorney General of Maine, 1995-2000; State Representative, 1990-1994], the Speaker of the House [Dan A. Gwadosky, Fairfield County, State Representative, 1988-1996, Speaker, 1994-1996; Maine Secretary of the State, 1997-2005], Chellie Pingree, who was on her way out or was already gone as Majority Leader of the Senate, and a number of other people about how they approached it, how they dealt with the pharmaceutical industry. It could be done more easily in Maine than in Pennsylvania, as far as getting the, the Commonwealth to negotiate on behalf of our 12.5 million citizens. Maine did it with 1.3 million citizens, but they're close to Canada, so their citizens were just going crazy. You know, they'd say, "Well, we'll go drive to Canada and get our drugs." So, what I did to emphasize this point and this problem was work with the – oh, by the way, Chellie Pingree went on to become Executive Director nationally of Common Cause, and now she's a member of Congress from Maine, so it was wonderful meeting her, an accomplished business person who went into politics and government, but anyway – so, with the Citizens for Consumer Justice were following what I was doing, and they loved it because what I was doing is pointing out the need for people to get prescription medications, pointing out the inequities of what we're charging, what they're paying versus what those other organizations are paying, like the Veterans' Administration, and so we

got a busload of people and took them up to Niagara Falls and then Hamilton, Canada, to fulfill their 90 days for prescription medications. I guess that's all you're allowed to bring back across the border. We went up there and met with Canadian doctors. They had to all get their re-prescribed medicine; they all had to visit with the doctor, so there was a progressive group of doctors in Hamilton, Canada, who we set up interviews or meetings or reviews, and they had to re-prescribe the drugs, and then, we all went over to a big pharmacy, got the prescription medications. That group of 55, or, I'm sorry, 33 consumers saved roughly 55 thousand dollars, on the medications they bought on that visit. And, we had a wonderful time talking, and I interviewed with the doctors up there about the Canadian health system. Now, that's a big thing to chew off there. I mean, you can't really – and the pharmaceutical industry always painted us going to that model for prescription drugs, as we were going to the Canadian model for the whole health care system, but that was never the intent, nor was it possible, really, at that time. Hillary Clinton [First Lady of the United States, 1993-2001; U.S. Senator, New York, 2001-2009; U.S. Secretary of State, 2009-present] had tried it a few years earlier, and it just couldn't work. But anyway, it was fun, and we learned a lot, and then as a result of that, we kept moving with Tom Sneddon [Director of Pennsylvania's PACE Program], Todd Eachus [State Representative, Luzerne County, 1997-2010], who I consider to be the quarterback on the Legislative Initiative, the Governor's people in doing a major expansion of the PACE and PACEnet programs – major expansion of the people who were eligible – and even at the press conference where it was announced, the Governor gave me credit for being one of the main architects of the initiative, so I was very proud.

**HM:** And how would you rate it today?

**DW:** How would I rate...?

**HM:** The program.

**DW:** I think it's a very good program. I don't get a lot of the complaints I used to. We included a lot more people. I don't know if it's up to 250 thousand older Pennsylvanians in those prescription drug programs, and it just seems to have lost its steam, because we're taking care of so many people, and the pharmaceutical industry, to their credit, has tried to do the same. They've tried to include more programs. I can't recall right offhand. They have a good program where they all cooperate and try to provide medications to certain people who are above our PACE and PACEnet requirements but still have a need. And what I consider, Todd Eachus and I used to talk about it; I came up the left flank, and he went straight up the middle, and by me being on the left flank – or is that the right flank? Whatever – I helped put the pressure on the issue.

**HM:** Well, very good. I have a note here that you worked closely with the Homeless Children's Education Fund.

**DW:** Oh, yeah, we've been heavily involved. That's a family thing. My wife pushed the kids to get involved in something at Christmastime, but we really do it all year, and I think as we speak they're doing shoeboxes – or no, no they did it last week. Forgive me. I can't – where they filled shoeboxes with, depending on the age, they had this really, it's almost like a factory

up at our kids' school; they get the whole school involved, and my wife is the driving force behind it – our family is – and the shoeboxes are given to homeless children. If you're a homeless child who's 12 or 13, a girl, they might have some kind of makeup kind of things. You know, they have it all inventoried, and we get it all donated, and that's an annual thing, and then we participate in the fundraising efforts in general. We work closely with Joe Lagana, the Executive Director. I've been able to get grants for the initiative and also push more awareness here at the Commonwealth level, and I know Dr. Lagana, who founded it, really doesn't need any pushing; he's very strategic-minded himself, and he's very well-connected. But, he devotes a lot of energy and we love working with him.

**HM:** And there's certainly a need. I have a note also that there are approximately three thousand homeless children in Allegheny County per year.

**DW:** Yes. I think perhaps a better way of looking at it might be that every given day there are six hundred, and what those are often are abused children, often are children of – the mother might be abused; they're in a shelter. And that gap is where the educational needs need to be met. And it's funny, because one of the roles I'll have in court in Allegheny County will be dealing with dependent children, and I'm really thrilled to be doing that, and it ties in with what we've been doing with the Homeless Children's Education Fund over the years, and I really hadn't thought about talking about it, but it does warm your heart, and I love it when my wife does the thing, they had the big shoebox thing. I couldn't make it. It was like being in a factory watching them go through the assembly line, and all the little kids from kindergarten to eighth grade were working and then my wife was mad at me because I couldn't be there because she

always gets choked up because it is moving, but those kids – and I’ve been to the shelters, and it, it touches your heart because, maybe, a five year old child or a 10 year old child [is] between places, and there’s nothing more unsettling than that, I think.

**HM:** Well, what a wonderful program.

**DW:** It is. It’s great. That’s one I wish I could get more grants for them.

**HM:** Okay, being from Allegheny County and Pittsburgh in particular, I have to ask you about building new football stadiums and...?

**DW:** Oh, that whole battle. Well, I still contend that the NFL [National Football League] should put more toward their stadiums. I don’t know how you can justify multi-million dollar salaries going to a, you know, subsidized industry. Now, looking at baseball, they should get their act together, and that’s one of the things I was trying to do is pressure baseball to do the model of the NFL. Now, when we were doing that, I didn’t realize that – I mean, it’s true that these NFL affiliate members they’re all going for other people’s money, too, and I just think it doesn’t say the right things. I mean, here we are, we have 19 libraries in Allegheny County, I think – or something; there’s a lot of them in the city of Pittsburgh that are going to be closed down for lack of funding – and I just find that ironic that our priorities are askew, and I love the Rooney<sup>3</sup> family. They do wonderful stuff, things in Allegheny County and all over Western Pennsylvania, but I just don’t think its right, and I didn’t think it was right then. I can see the State participating, and I think my advocacy efforts helped in forcing them to put more public

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<sup>3</sup> Owners of the Pittsburgh Steelers football team.

money – I mean private money. They weren't even going to put basically anything in at first, and then they started up, and then there was the seat licenses, and the Pirates put the naming right money into the stadium, and again, I think PNC Park is an absolutely beautiful place. I love going there, and I have bought small season ticket packages. They call them a 10 pack, and for 10 different games. So, it's not that I don't like them and not that I don't think they're valuable for the city of Pittsburgh. I just think there should be more private investment, and I won to some extent and lost to some extent. In fact, I had a lot of fun on that issue, too, just thinking back; I went up to Minneapolis, and Senator John Marty [Minnesota State Senator, 1986-present] and I had a press conference asking Bud Selig [Commissioner of Major League Baseball, 1992-present] to quit holding cities hostage, to instill revenue-sharing for Major League Baseball. And we also, at the same time, urged Congress to re-evaluate the anti-trust exemption that we give to major sports like the NFL and Major League Baseball. They're a business that can tell who can come into the business, and that's like, it's an anti-trust exemption, but in exchange for that, I think they should be more willing to put more of their money into it. But forgive me; I'm just this little old guy, and I mean, I know these guys are millionaires, and we love them. Ben Roethlisberger<sup>4</sup>, Hines Ward<sup>5</sup>, and I love watching those guys, but I just think that little homeless kid needs the resource as much as the NFL owner, and there are limited resources. It's not unending. That's been a while since that whole issue, but again, that was a fun issue. I had a lot of – I thought we pointed out some good issues.

**HM:** Well, I wanted to ask you; are there any other pieces of legislation that you would like to talk about?

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Todd Roethlisberger is a quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers, 2004-present.

<sup>5</sup> Hines E. Ward, Jr. is a wide receiver for the Pittsburgh Steelers, 1998-present.

**DW:** Well, I've been active in the Judiciary Committee, and over the last couple of Sessions, we've tried to backtrack on what we – we had a Special Session on Crime back in 1995, and I think that it succeeded in part, but it also failed in part because we ended up putting more people in our jails without really solving the crime problem. We weren't practical enough on crime. We were just tough, and you got to be practical. So, I think over the last few years, last few Sessions, we've made major inroads toward evaluating, are our mandatory minimum sentences effective? Or are they just keeping people in jail longer? Are our treatment programs sufficient when you have 90 percent of your people in our prisons with some kind of addiction problem? If you're not treating it and they get out, are they going to go back and do the same kind of crime and then come back in again? And that's why I favored – my subcommittee moved the legislation regarding studying the mandatory minimum sentencing and how effective they are. I think next Session you're going to see – or next year – you might see legislation addressing some of the points that were raised in the study. We also have been pushing problem-solving courts. Trying to put legislative will, or political will, behind understanding if the court system simply is a tribunal where guilt and innocence is determined, where liability or non-liability is determined, where custody or non-custody is determined, where parental rights are determined. If it's just that, it's not going to work, ultimately. You have to collaborate. You have to have multi-disciplined approach, so when an addict comes into the criminal justice system, you have to endeavor to have the underlying causes of criminal behavior addressed. And it sounds maybe soft to some people, but it's practical, and I saw it work in 1996, and then I saw it work in 2007, 2008, the initiatives of the drug treatment courts in saving people's lives, lowering the rate of repeat offenses – recidivism – lowering that rate, making communities safer all at the same time,

and those are things that I've been pushing for, well, really, since 1996, when I first really became interested in them. And again, it's one of those things I don't know exactly why I became interested. I just happened to be studying the issue, learning about it somewhere and saying, "You know, that is a good idea." So, I went to the first graduation in 2007 at the Philadelphia Drug Treatment Court. I was with other members of the Judiciary Committee, and we were all very moved listening to the people who had successfully completed the program. They're usually offenders, low-level or property offenses, not rape, not aggravated assault, but the other kind of offenses, like low-level. They complete the program, which involves intense treatment, other kinds of reparations to their community, they graduate, and less than maybe 25 percent of those people after graduation commit a crime again. So, that's pretty doggone good, versus having your recidivism rate of 70 percent, you know, the exact opposite. And then I went, it's funny, because we went in 2007, 10 years later, to see that graduating class, and I said, "Wow, I wonder if they have an alumni association." By gosh, they did. In fact, the whole ceremony was kicked off by the president of the Alumni Association, who was a gospel singer, and that was pretty heartwarming. I'd recommend anyone study the Drug Treatment Court to see – again, it's like the Homeless Children's Education Fund, addressing a need that is not really easy to address, although in the case of a child you can be very sympathetic and, you know, very caring about them more easily than you can some criminal who's drug-addicted, but it's just as important because you're saving lives. You're helping people move down the right course, and that also goes for something called Mental Health Court. Those are people with mental illness that are in the system, and so that's part of what motivated me to run for judge too.

**HM:** Well, I –

**DW:** So I talked – pretty long answer.

**HM:** No – but you're currently working on establishing Veterans' Courts, too. Is that correct?

**DW:** Yes. I worked with Michael McCarthy [Judge, Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, 2007- present]. My main involvement was getting a grant of 25 thousand dollars to help them with paying for part of the case managers. But, we studied the issue – again, Michael McCarthy – Judge McCarthy, Allegheny Court of Common Pleas, one of my new compadres starting January 4<sup>th</sup> – he had the idea from the court up in Buffalo, and also, there's one in San Diego, but he went up to Buffalo. He and I talked about it when the idea first came up. I took the Subcommittee on Courts to meet with him, and the Subcommittee on Courts also had a public hearing on the issue. The reason I was doing it was to try to get as many State resources lined up as possible to make sure the State Agencies that are applicable are aware and will cooperate, and then again, the grant that I got – and they got the check the other day, so – oh, and the whole reason for it; you might say, "Well, why a Veterans Court?" Well, the crime rate is higher among combat veterans, and it's due in part to their post-traumatic stress disorder as result of being in combat. I can't even imagine being in combat. I can't even imagine myself – I've been fortunate – but, bullets flying, friends being shot down, legs being blown off, on and on and on as you can imagine the horror, and they get a higher percentage of post-traumatic stress disorder, of course, and those have a higher crime rate. The State involvement can be to make sure that any State agencies that are relevant to helping veterans who have a problem in the criminal justice system; making sure that the county officials like Mike Murphy, who is in the

Veterans Affairs organization in Allegheny County, making sure they're involved. And again, the whole goal is to make communities safer, help that person regain a useful life, and move on. It's more about justice than it is about simply locking them up and throwing away the key or ignoring the fact that they have this issue.

**HM:** Well, you had talked about your role in the Judiciary Committee and, specifically, been the Chair on Courts. Did I understand you correctly that that is what led you to want to become a judge?

**DW:** Yes. As I said, part of it was being on the Judiciary Committee and then when I realized that the courts are evolving to meet the changing society. Again, they're not simply tribunals in a vacuum. The Family Division in Allegheny County, for example, call themselves the original problem-solving court. The court that looks at the underlying, root causes of the disruptions in family life. Where over in the Criminal Division, the courts that look at the underlying causes of criminal behavior, instead of just dealing with the cases in a vacuum – and once I saw that Justice Baer [Max Baer; Judge, Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, 1989-1993; Administrative Judge, Family Division, Allegheny County Court, 1993-2003; Judge, PA Supreme Court, 2003-present], Justice McCaffery [Seamus P. McCaffery; Judge, Philadelphia Municipal Court, 1993-2001; Administrative Judge, Philadelphia Municipal Court, 2001-2004; Justice, PA Superior Court, 2004-2008; Justice, PA Supreme Court, 2008-present], Justice Castille [Ronald D. Castille; Philadelphia District Attorney, 1986-1991; Justice, PA Supreme Court, 1994-2008; Chief Justice, PA Supreme Court, 2008-present], were interested in these kinds of initiatives, I said, well, you know, there might be a role for me at the bench in

Allegheny County in working with them and addressing moving forward on these kinds of initiatives.

**HM:** Well, as you plan to leave the Legislature, are there any laws or pieces of legislation that you would like to see continue or be passed?

**DW:** I certainly think that the Judiciary Committee should continue to review mandatory minimum sentences and revisit how our crime and corrections system, how we're treating handling corrections, and again, I want to come back to one of the initiatives I was involved in was a program called Recidivism Risk Reduction Incentive, and that's a law relating to if somebody's convicted of a crime, you're sentenced. You're given an opportunity; if you meet your treatment needs, if you're a model prisoner, if you do the other things required of you at the correctional institution, you can knock some off your sentence, and what it's all designed to do is reduce recidivism, and it gives an incentive to the inmate to comply with all of the requirements, and instead of them doing the whole sentence there, it's cut back up to one quarter, up to 25 percent, and people want to say, "Well, you're putting them out on the streets early." Well, they're getting out on the streets with a far more, more likelihood that they will not recidivate; will not commit another crime. So, it's all designed to reduce repeat offenses, make communities safer, and help the individual rebuild their lives. And they're strenuous programs. They're not walks in the park or cake walks; they're real programs that have substance. That was one thing I hope we continue to monitor and see how they're doing.

**HM:** Do you think your issues have changed over time?

**DW:** They do evolve. I mean, in response to the things that are happening in my communities you can't help but evolve. You can't help but react to – you don't do it every day, like something new comes up today and then tomorrow and then the next day, but over the long haul, you are evolving to meet changing needs, and sometimes you address them and move on to another challenge, or sometimes you lose and move onto another challenge. So, it's all part of the process, and sometimes being a legislator might mean fighting against some initiative you don't like, and that's, again, your role here. Your role in the General Assembly could be that of a trustee, could be that of a delegate, or it could be a combination. If you're a delegate, you know, you're doing what your constituents want. They delegate it to you. If you're a trustee, they are placing in you trust, and you sometimes have to do things that you don't believe, maybe, they want. You know, it's a hybrid. Maybe they don't want a gas tax increase, but we need the bridges and roads repaired, so it's that sort-of thing.

**HM:** What do you think the hardest issue you encountered as a legislator was?

**DW:** Well, I guess it's never easy to raise taxes, I think. Or when they were reforming workers' comp, I fought against a lot of the reforms, the so-called reforms, and I think by doing that, we eased some of the changes as far as their impact on injured workers. Those were hard issues. Raising cigarette taxes; that's hard. You know, to some extent I agree with smokers who – well, I don't; I wish they would quit, but anyway – I agree with them that we are focusing on one kind of product a lot, so it's hard. It's hard to respond to the smoker who raises that point. One thing that – and, well, there might be other issues that are not occurring to me at this particular

moment, but – in general, one of the hardest things for me to deal with is the fact we had a budget that was 101 days late, and then, a little piece of it's still not done as we're taping, that it will be done, I hope, by the day after this taping. But, how do you go into a grocery store and somebody comes up to and yells at you and say, "Why can't you guys get a budget done?" What am I going to say? "Oh, the Senate Republicans are blah, blah, blah." People don't want to hear that, and I don't blame them. To me it's, like, the hardest thing is to disagree with them, so what I usually do is say, "You're correct," and then they think I'm really an idiot, you know, for just admitting that they're right and not being able to do anything about it. And, whether issues like the size of the legislature: should it be bigger? Should it be smaller? The last reform in the size that was done was when it was doubled in size. Or, should we just eliminate the Senate? Why do we have a Senate? Or should we [*laugh*]? So, those kind-of issues are always tough, I think.

**HM:** Well, you may have already answered this, but what do you think the hardest issue is before the legislature right now?

**DW:** Well, I think the gaming issue because the day before this taping it only passed by one or two votes in the House, so obviously, it's a really tough issue to move forward on. To some extent, I agree gambling is wrong, you know, and it does, in effect, operate as a tax on the poor. On the other hand, every state around us has it, and many other states do it, and the reality is we have no other revenue sources. We're sort of locked in. It's very difficult to raise a personal income tax. We don't want to raise property tax. We don't have the ability to raise property taxes, the local municipalities and school boards do. But, gambling's a tough issue, the expansion of gambling. I'll have to think of some other ones right off – I can't right off hand.

**HM:** Well, what do you think – what aspect of your job did you enjoy the most?

**DW:** I enjoy the level of discussion of issues and the ability to explore issues, whether it was the prescription drug issues, whether it's how our courts are operating. I love that. I love working with my colleagues on the Judiciary Committee on analyzing the Crimes Code or looking at sentencing procedures and attending Commission on Sentencing meetings and visiting court rooms and watching how they operate, whether it's Community Court, whether it's Drug Treatment Court, Mental Health Court, Veterans Court, whether viewing reentry programs in Philadelphia or Pittsburgh. That's another thing that I'm looking forward to is working with them, working with schools that handle delinquent children. That's the most fun, and meeting interesting people, Chellie Pingree, Rod Blagojevich's [Governor of Illinois, 2003-2009] people, who were very creative on prescription drug issues. I never met Blagojevich, the former Governor of Illinois, but I did meet some of his people, and they were top notch, the ones that dealt with the health care system, so I thoroughly enjoyed that aspect of this position. Meeting Presidents, I met President Bush [George W. Bush, President of the United States, 2001-2009], Hillary Clinton. I haven't met Obama [Barack H. Obama, President of the United States, 2009-present], and maybe I won't have a chance now if I'm moving to the courts, but I must say that President Obama is extremely interested in promoting Drug Treatment Courts and extremely interested in pushing our problem-solving courts as a way to really help reduce crime and make communities safer, and he did that as a Senator in Illinois. He was very supportive of that, and as President, I know he is. It doesn't make headlines, but it's something he's very interested in, and I hope to be involved with that as time goes on.

**HM:** Well, what aspect did you not enjoy?

**DW:** Well, I did miss a lot of family things, and it wasn't just when I was here in Harrisburg. It was when I was home, because the expectations of your Representatives are very high as far as being at things. "Oh, we missed you at the Crime Watch. Where were you?" Well, you know, I'd just gotten home, so there's an expectation that you have to be out in the community a lot at events, charitable functions. Those are fun, too, but then again, if it's Sunday afternoon and you're with the family in the back yard, you might not want to leave. So, that was one hard aspect, and also being up here when there were certain family events, or – and then the whole political accountability, you know. The House has a two year term, which probably should be changed to four, but I don't know whether that's going to be possible or not; If we have a Constitutional Convention maybe it would be. But, there's a constant accountability to the public, and that's what we call reelection. Some people criticize us for always having to run for reelection, but when you're doing that, you're accounting, and that person who's maybe criticizing you for having to run can make a decision on whether to rehire you, so. That's tough, though. It's tough to be in that constant – I don't know how you would describe it, you know – fight for your job.

**HM:** What would you say your fondest memory is of serving in the House?

**DW:** I think when that prescription drug bill was signed into law that I was part of and standing right beside the Governor. I think that was really fun, and I think most fondly of that. I think

some of the things we've done, raising awareness for members of the Judiciary Committee of the problem-solving courts. I found that to be extremely fun. Working on neighborhood revitalization, particularly once the Rendell administration came in in Pittsburgh, the Strip District. In fact the Governor gave – we had the Governor in a meeting, and I don't know if you're familiar with the Strip District, but there's a terminal building, a market building, and I got the Governor to give 150 thousand for a study on how to put a market in there, make it a multiple kind-of, you know, farmer's market, crafts and all that, and they are moving forward with that as we speak, but that was back in 2003 when we did the studies, and I find that to be very stimulating. Also, the environmental initiatives, money that we were able to steer toward through DCNR, Department of Conservation of Natural Resources, or the Growing Greener money toward riverbank solidification or river walls to solidify our river trails for walking, so I had a part of that. Been part of the Woods Run Fishing Contest, which is run by a group of people dealing with Brightwood Civic Group; it's a citizens' council on the North Side, where every year now we have roughly two hundred kids participating in the fishing contest on the Ohio River in the shadow of Western Penitentiary. So, what you have there are about three hundred and 50 people, maybe two hundred contestants, and their mothers, fathers, uncles, grandpaps, friends, down there on the riverbank for about three and a half hours to four hours. We get people with food, and what I love about it – we got DEP [Department of Environmental Protection] involved; we have the Fish and Game Commission – and I love it because here's a river that was so polluted 50 years ago that you were told not to go near it, and now you have grandfathers telling those stories to the grandkids who are fishing, and I just think it's heartwarming. It's good for the environment. It teaches people to respect the environment, and it's a wonderful family outing once a year now on the North Side of Pittsburgh. Mayor Luke

Ravenstahl [Mayor of Pittsburgh, 2006-present] and I are the cosponsors, and he's a joy to be around, as well, the mayor of Pittsburgh, and I've worked closely with him. And that's another joy that you work with multiple governmental officials on different levels, whether it's Congressman Doyle [Michael F.; U.S. Representative, 1994-present] or Mayor Luke Ravenstahl, Governor Rendell.

**HM:** Whenever you think back on your experiences, do you have a favorite story that you'd like to share?

**DW:** I don't know.

**HM:** Or a funny story about anybody? Any of your experiences? Through the Oral History Program, there have been a lot of interesting stories that have been shared, so I don't want to put you on the spot, but if you have one that you like to tell over and over again.

**DW:** I often bring up the Greg Fajt, the story about us watching, and we can't buy tickets to a show like this because it was an extremely tense night. We were during a budget battle, and there were health care cuts involved. There were people who were on health care who were no longer going to get that health care, because we were taking off the Medicaid program. They were mostly low-income workers, people who had a job, but we were taking away their health benefits, but that was the issue discussion. The intense – we were going to late night, and Greg and I were watching different Members fighting, arguing. Over here there was somebody almost coming to fisticuffs. Behind us somebody screaming vulgarities – because the issue was so

intense, and that's when Greg and I just looked at each other and said, "Man, what a show," and I don't know how funny that is, but that's something I always think it comes to my mind frequently. Right offhand, I can't think of anything. I wish I would have thought a little about that before.

**HM:** Going forward, do you have any advice for new Members that will be starting?

**DW:** I do. I think focus on an issue. Become the go-to person on an issue. I don't care what it is, whether it's urban blight issues, whether it's health care issues, educational issues, criminal Crimes Code issues. Learn an issue that suddenly you will become the go-to person, and I think that's really valuable advice. Never question anyone's motives, especially on the House Floor, but anywhere. If you have a divergent view from me, if you think murder is good, then I can't question your motive, even though I would wonder about that. Maybe that's a bad example. *[laugh]* Whatever the issue is, don't question somebody's motive. Just take it for what they're saying, and you can ask, "Well, why are you doing that?" or whatever, or "Why is that your position?" And I always say, too, no matter how intense the debate, the debate on the House Floor or in the committees, outside, just, it's over. You're both Members of the House. You're both representatives of people. You have a duty to be dignified and treat each other with respect, and every one of the people in the House, everybody gets there a different way. Some had an easy run. Some had a hard run. Some spent a lot of money. Some didn't have to spend any money, but they're all there. They're all people who put themselves out before the public. Like this, "Here, shoot me," or not – I shouldn't use that, either, but, "Here, throw an egg at me."

You're putting yourself out in the public realm on issues, and you have to respect that in all of your colleagues. I think those are key points that I've always tried to live by, anyway.

**HM:** Very good. Well, I'd like to ask you what are your future plans?

**DW:** Well, starting January 4<sup>th</sup>, I'm going to be a judge on the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County. I'm going to be assigned to the Family Division, as most new judges are. In fact, all the new ones are; all four of us. Another one who was elected with us had already been sitting in the Criminal Division. In Family Division I intend to work closely with Kim Clark [Administrative Judge, Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, 1999-present], as I might have mentioned, and Kathryn Hens-Greco [Judge, Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, 2006-present], who are very well-respected Family Division judges, and I intend to work closely with our administrative judge, David Wecht [Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, 2003-present], and the initiatives he's trying to push. I've already met with him extensively about them, and I intend to work with Justice Baer and the whole Children's Roundtable Initiative [Roundtables for Children Initiative] that he started and just a couple of weeks ago had their first annual meeting in Pittsburgh, and I attended all but one hour of the 18 hours of Session, and that one hour I had to go to new judge orientation, so I went down the street and found out where my courtroom was going to be. But anyway, I intend to work closely with the justice on a couple of initiatives; permanency for children, families for children is really how they describe it, the Child Roundtable logo is a little house and it says "Families for Children," and what that's about is when you have dependent children, those who are neglected or abused, you endeavor to get them a permanent place, a permanent family. It was so moving when I was at that roundtable, and I

was sitting with Kathryn Hens-Greco, the judge, and a staffer, but I was sitting there, and we were listening to this one child who, well, he was 23 or so, but he had been a foster child all his life, and he said he didn't remember looking forward to one holiday, never. He said, "I just never knew if I'd even have a chance to enjoy that holiday because I was moved around so much," and then there was another girl. She had graduated from the University of Pittsburgh. She landed in a great position right at the end of her high school career with a great foster family that helped her through college that remained her family and remains her family to this day, which this day is only a couple years after college, but she talked in terms of dreading the holidays, and always wondering will she have somewhere to be on Christmas? And so when she grew up like that, thanks goodness she can talk about it, but it makes the goal of the judges sitting at this conference, and they were from all over the Commonwealth, is to try to address that with permanency, and it sounds a lot easier than it is, but that whole system, when you're a Family Court judge in a dependency issue, you're dealing with a private attorney for maybe a parent. You're dealing with the guardian ad litem appointed to represent the child. You're dealing with the county youth organization, CYF [Department of Human Services Office of Children, Youth, and Families]. You might be dealing with another attorney, it might be the public defenders' office, or it might be the district attorney; it depends. And so, what you're doing is dealing with these multiple forces all for that child, and the goal is to understand what the needs of that child are, so I'm looking forward to that challenge. That would be roughly 20 percent of my work will be on that kind of issue, and the rest will be domestic relations involving all the equitable distribution, child custody, support, so it's going to be a challenge. And it's no wonder that new judges go into Family Division because after five years some judges sort-of burn out from the, the tension of it and move to Criminal Division or Civil Division. But I'm

looking forward to it, and I told Justice Baer on two occasions, and I spent a lot of time at that roundtable with Max Baer, and I ran into him up here at the Capitol, and we talked for a while, but I'd like to facilitate in any way I can a relationship between the court – and I've also discussed this with the President Judge Donna Joan McDaniel [Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, 1986-present; former Administrative Judge, Criminal Division; President Judge, 2008-present] and Administrative Judge David Wecht – to facilitate regular meetings with the Judiciary Committee members and the court, so that there's a real understanding of the needs as we move forward, so that court isn't stagnant and those law aren't stagnant. And it even came up the other day with Jesse, Representative Jesse White [State Representative, Allegheny, Beaver, and Washington Counties, 2007-present]. [He] does family law work, and he's talking about some modifications in protection from abuse, and I guess I'd be doing some of that, too, the orders of court protection from abuse, and he has some suggestions, and I said, "I would love to set up a meeting with you." Working with the Bar Association, the bench, the judges, and the legislators on the Judiciary Committee, and there are some wonderful ones, like Kathy Manderino, Jesse White, Chelsa Wagner [State Representative, Allegheny County, 2007-present]; people who are thinking people who understand that as society evolves, you should have your criminal justice and, generally, your justice system evolve. So, I'm looking forward to it, and it's as much policy as anything I've done up here. Granted, each case is decided on the merits, the facts, the merits, and the law. However, the whole system moving forward, it's a matter of policy how it goes, so I'm looking forward to it.

**HM:** Well, I wish you well.

**DW:** Thank you.

**HM:** In your new, new career.

**DW:** And I'll think of some – I'm sure there are a lot more funny things that I can't think of right now. It's been a lot of fun.

**HM:** Well, I appreciate you taking the time for this interview, and we wish you well.

**DW:** Thank you.

**HM:** Thank you.