

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Bob Bastian (R)

140th District

Bedford and Somerset Counties

1999-2008

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Transcribed by: Erin Miller

Heidi Mays (HM): Good morning.

The Honorable Bob Bastian (BB): Good morning.

HM: I'm here today with Representative Bob Bastian who served from 1999 to 2008. He represented the 69th Legislative District representing Somerset County. Thank you for being here with me today.

BB: And part of Bedford County now.

HM: Oh, I'm sorry.

BB: Yeah, that was in the redistricting. Yeah, six years ago.

HM: I'm sorry. I forgot Bedford County.

BB: It's okay.

HM: I'd like to begin by asking you about your childhood and your family life and how you feel that that, perhaps, prepared you for public service.

BB: Well, I was born and raised in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Born in 1938. I just turned 70 a couple weeks ago. Have an older brother, five years older, and had a younger sister who died

of cancer, ovarian cancer, back, actually, when I ran the first time, 1996. And my mom and dad; my dad was a school teacher for more than 40 years, my mom was a school teacher, but when married and had a family, stayed at home with the kids. My dad was very involved in public service all his life from being a school teacher, but he was involved in a lot of other activities. Mom was, also. Public service, I'm not sure that they had a whole lot of influence on me on public service, except to say that I was born in a home that was not rich, not poor, but in a home that was loving and had the Bible in its place and education as the center. Mom and Dad both being school teachers, they wanted to make sure their kids were educated, and so I had the love of family, and I've continue that in my own family since then.

HM: So, the Republican Party was a, a good fit for you?

BB: It was. My mom and dad were Republican. I'm not sure; probably I was Republican to start with, because of that, but I stayed Republican because I felt that that's what matched my feelings.

HM: Was your family political in any way?

BB: No, not at all. We talked politics at the table, not a lot, but they were not involved in the political activities at all, no.

HM: Well, could you describe your educational background and your career before –

BB: Sure.

HM: – coming to the House?

BB: Born and raised and graduated from Williamsport High School in 1956. Went on to Penn[sylvania] State University, Main Campus, for three years and then applied to vet school. Got accepted at [University of] Penn[Sylvania] and Cornell [University] after three years, and that was kind of the standard back then; you didn't have to have a B.S. to get into vet school. Went to Cornell. Cornell was much closer to Williamsport than Philadelphia was, and plus it was a rural atmosphere, which I appreciated. Graduated from Cornell Vet[erinary] School in 1963, and then from there went into practice on the Eastern Shore of Maryland [in] a little town called Centreville, Maryland, right off of Route 301, and then was taken into the United States Air Force. From there, I think it was in the late fall of 1965, I was sworn into the Air Force January 1, [19]66 and then got out January 1, [19]68, 1968, and then came back to Somerset County, Pennsylvania, where we have stayed since then.

HM: And what was your responsibilities with the Air Force?

BB: I was in the Veterinary Corps, and their responsibility was mainly food sanitation and public health, and they were the jobs. Basically, I was an inspector of facilities that serve food on the base, and plus, I inspected food coming onto the base and inspected food preparation facilities off base like dairy plants, bread plants, things like that, cheese plants.

HM: And where were you stationed?

BB: Missouri. Southwest Missouri, little town called Knob Noster, Missouri, Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, for two years.

HM: Okay, great. Well, how did you decide to become involved in politics coming back to Somerset County?

BB: That's, that's – I think probably I always had an interest in politics. When I was in practice, and I was mainly in dairy cattle practice, large animal practice, I would talk politics. When the elections came around, you'd talk about who was running, what the advantages were, what the pros and cons were. I was involved in Farm Bureau and was involved in their political process for a good many years. Had debates at Farm Bureau dinners, which I would organize and carry out, and I think for a long time Somerset County, which was a Republican county, was represented by a Democrat. Bill Lloyd [William; State Representative, Somerset County, 1981-1998] preceded me for 18 years. I think there were a number of people felt that Bill Lloyd should be replaced by a Republican, and so I was asked by several people to run in 1995 in the [19]96 election, and I finally agreed to do that and not just because I wanted the public office so much, although I did. I think it was because I was tired of working hard and long hours as a veterinarian, and I needed a change and needed a different challenge, and I sure got one, but I needed a challenge, and the political process offered that challenge, and I was glad to do it.

HM: Well, you said you ran in [19]95?

BB: [19]96. I was approached in [19]95, ran in [19]96, and Bill Lloyd beat me, but I held him to probably the closest election he had the whole time he was in office, and he was there nine terms. And Bill represented Somerset County well, but he was still a Democrat in a Republican county, and some people felt that shouldn't be, so I challenged him. I didn't beat him, but I scared him off. The next time he did not run, and I ran for an open seat.

HM: Okay, and what was that process like?

BB: It was a lot easier running in [19]98 than it was [19]96. I knew who my opponent was, and he had a reputation in Harrisburg as being a very astute individual. Harvard-taught, an attorney, and well-respected in Harrisburg, so I knew it was going to be tough. My wife and I thought we could do it. I don't think a whole lot of other people thought we would do it, but – and we didn't, but we kept him to, like, two or three percentage points, and then in [19]98 it was an open seat. He actually ran against Arlen Specter [US Senator, 1981-present] in 1998, and, of course, Arlen beat him, but he was ready for a change, too. I think he was tired of Harrisburg.

HM: So, did you enjoy campaigning?

BB: You know, to begin with, I enjoyed talking to people, but the way you win races is to knock on doors, and I found it difficult to get started doing that, but when I got into it, I enjoyed it, just talking one-on-one with people, and I did a lot of door knocking, particularly in [19]96. In [19]98 it was a different story because I had that experience. I had made a lot of contacts. I

spent probably more time in [19]98 talking to business people about what business people wanted and needed out of Harrisburg. And I won that race fairly easily in 1998.

HM: Well, you mentioned your wife thinking that you could win. Was she involved in your campaign?

BB: Oh, yeah, very much so. In fact, the whole family was. We have five children, and I'd say most of the older ones, all the older ones – the younger one probably didn't 'because she was still in grade school or high school, I guess, at the time, early high school. Actually in, probably in junior high at the time, so the four older ones did. They knocked on doors. They worked at the polls for me. Several of them lived out of state, but they would come home and, and work some.

HM: Well, we like to ask about this question for a historical perspective. Do you recall how much you had to raise for your first race, as far as money goes?

BB: I would guess we raised easily 150, 200,000 dollars. Now, we got some money out of House Republican Campaign Committee, too, but we had several five hundred dollar a plate fundraisers, and we got the business community very much involved to try to get a Republican in Harrisburg that would vote business principles rather than a Democrat that probably voted, and he had to vote too often with Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. So, they wanted a change, and I was the guy they asked to do it. We raised a good bit of money that first time. Second time was a different story because we felt that the hard work had been done the first time.

HM: So it tapered off?

BB: It tapered off.

HM: Okay. Since you were so heavily involved in the community, did you feel that that was a good fit for you, and did people recognize you?

BB: Oh, I knew the rural community. I didn't know the town community as well. I knew the agriculture areas. I had spent a lot of time on most every farm in Somerset County, and when I ran the first time, it was just in Somerset County. It wasn't in Bedford County because that happened four years later. But, I spent a lot of time in people's farms, and most of those farms wives were involved, the families were involved, so I go to know a lot of people that way, especially through the Farm Bureau Organization, and I think I was well-known in that community. And that's when, in [19]96 when I ran, that's where my strength was, obviously, not in the boroughs of Somerset and Berlin and Meyersdale, but in the townships, and I knew the townships, and they knew me, and I think I was credible in my practice as a veterinarian. I think they knew I was honest, and I think they knew I was hard working, and so that was a real advantage, yeah.

HM: Well, we've already started talking about your district, which is generally my next question. You said it's a Republican district, and you represented both rural and townships.

BB: Well, small boroughs.

HM: Is there anything else you could tell me about your district?

BB: We actually have probably more industry in the Somerset and Bedford Counties right now than a lot of people realize. We have, probably, six or seven different steel fabrication areas. At one time, we had two companies building fire trucks. Now just one now, but we had – and more industry than you’d think in Somerset County. Coleman Company, which was there for a long time, and that’s been bought and sold a couple times, but they offered a lot of jobs. But still, basically, it’s an agriculture county.

HM: Well, would you say that there’s anything that makes your district unique?

BB: I would say Somerset County probably has a kind-of people that make it unique. Very hard working, very honest, very sincere, the kind of people that we enjoy being around. I think they’re a very unique people. Hardworking, don’t ask for the world in wages, are happy to live in a rural area where they can hunt and fish and enjoy the outdoors. We have a very great county, even though I don’t know if you realize this, but the Chamber now has a name called America’s County, and it’s across the country, America’s County, partly because of Flight 93¹,

¹ United Airlines Flight 93 was hijacked on September 11, 2001, en route to San Francisco, CA from Newark, NJ. The plane crashed near Shanksville, PA, after passengers overtook the plane upon discovering that the hijacker’s directive was to attack Washington, DC. All 44 onboard were killed, including the 40 passengers and crew.

partly because of Quecreek², but it's just a great county, and they have coined that name and registered that name as America's County, and I think it is America's County.

HM: Well, I want to touch upon the two events that you just talked about. Your district was thrust, literally, into the national spotlight with those two events. What was that experience like for you as a Representative?

BB: Well, one was, you know, a total recovery. The other was a total rescue, and they're opposite that way, but when I was in my office in Somerset when that first plane hit the tower, and the girls in the office saw a flash come on the internet, and they then followed it the rest of the day, and they told me about it right away at 9 o'clock in the morning, and I, you know, was it an accident? Was there more of them? Well, when the second one hit, you knew that there was something serious going on, and, of course, then, the third one. When the fourth one hit, and we knew it was in Somerset County, I immediately called the hospital (I'm on the board there), and asked what I could do. Well, by that time they knew there were no survivors. I called emergency control in the courthouse, and they knew there was – you know, I wasn't a firefighter, or if I wasn't an EMT [emergency medical technician], or anything like that, there was no need for me to be there, so I didn't go there, but I made sure they didn't need help. I didn't get out to the site, actually, till about the third day, I think when – I'm not sure Lieutenant Governor Schweiker [Mark; Lieutenant Governor, 1995-2001; Governor of Pennsylvania, 2001-2003] or Governor Tom Ridge [Governor, 1995-2001; US Representative, 1983-1995] came, but, you know, when a Congressman or a Senator or a Cabinet person or the Governor comes to town,

² Quecreek Mine disaster occurred on July 23, 2002 and lasted five days. Nine miners were trapped 240 feet underground and rescue efforts from local fire companies to Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection collaborated on the Dormel farm to successfully rescue all nine miners.

they like to let the local Representative or Senator know they can be escorted by them if we're available, so when they came to town to visit the site, I was with them, and then Tom Ridge came that Friday night for the memorial service, which was just, you know, it happened on a Monday. Friday night was just four days later, but he gave a very inspiring speech. We had a tremendous turnout at the courthouse. So, I got on the site several times later that week, but again, you know, I stayed in the background. I couldn't help, but I did, you know, try to console and so forth, and lots of time – and of course, President Bush's [George W.;, President of the US, 2001-2009] wife [Laura Welch Bush] came and then Vice President Cheney's [Richard B.; Vice President of the US, 2001-2009] wife [Lynne Ann Vincent Cheney] came for two different memorial services, and I was involved in both of them, not as a participant, just there to help console and talk to the people, and that's what I did. But many, many times since then I've been at the site. I don't know how many, but many, many times. Motorcycle groups coming in, bus groups coming in; they want somebody to speak about the situation. There is a Flight 93 Chapel about three miles away from the facility that was put together by a local retired priest, and I've spoken there many times on Memorial Days, on Fourth of Julys, on anniversaries of 9/11, just to groups about the experience and about the situation. I mean, it was a tragic situation, but, you know, it's really the beginning of another war is what it amounts to. I give President Bush high grades for fighting terrorism, and I – you know, he's had a lots of problems in the last four years, but I gave him high grades on what he did to fight the war on terrorism, and I hope it continues. It has to continue.

HM: Well, what was the community's response?

BB: Community's response was great. We opened up our homes and our lives to people coming in from around the world, and particularly the families of those 40 people, and still do. Shanksville is a great community, and they literally opened up their lives to and kept people in their house and provided – I know that when the State Police surrounded that place for a while, and there was always coffee and cookies and doughnuts for – I mean, these guys were in the woods. I'll never forget, one State Policeman from Pittsburgh who was assigned there. He was in the middle of the woods around the perimeter of Flight 93 protecting it because it was a crime scene, and in the middle of the night he had a bear come up to him. Now, this is a guy born and raised in Pittsburgh scared to death of a bear, and the State Police in charge of the situation was our local commander, and he said, "He really was scared to death." He says, "the next morning he had a brown spot. I'm not sure if it came from inside or outside, but he was scared." Well, the guy had a pistol on his belt. If he got that scared, he should have shot the bugger, but, you know, the bear was more scared of the man than the man was of the bear, But, there's incidents like that of humor, but still it was a sad, sad situation, no doubt about it, and there's lots of little skirmishes going on about the property. Today it's not settled. We have a number of people – one of our county commissioners is one of the fifteen board members. Our county's DA [district attorney] is one of the 15 board members, so I keep inside of that circle knowing what's going on, but I've met what I could as a person and as my office to do what we could for Flight 93.

HM: Well, on, you know, moving into a more positive note –

BB: Okay, right.

HM: – let's talk about Quecreek, and as you said, that was a recovery.

BB: No, that was a rescue.

HM: That was the rescue. I'm sorry.

BB: That was the rescue, yeah. That's right. Totally opposite.

HM: Yes.

BB: First of all, I knew well the coal company involved because I've been involved legislatively with them ever since the start. I knew the farm where it happened because they were former clients of mine, a dairy farm, so I knew them well, and I knew the fire company that responded because I was in the process then of getting them a sizeable grant to rebuild the fire company, which was in drastic need of some help. They had basically, an old schoolhouse converted into a fire company that was really outdated. But that fire company building was where the families all stayed during those three and a half days. So, I knew the whole situation. I stayed in the background the whole time. I was not a well driller. I was not an EMT. I was not a fire company guy, and I sat on the back overlooking that hole a lot of the times, was at the press conferences, but stayed totally in the back. In fact, I was criticized in the paper the next week because I was not involved. But they didn't know my involvement; they just never saw me there, and it was not my job, but I was there, again, consoling. I knew two of the people of the nine at that time. I know them all now, but two of the nine I had some direct contact with

beforehand. One was a client, had raised cattle. He still raises cattle, but, and I knew him well, and I knew one of the other guys. He was the son-in-law of a good client, and so there was a personal attachment there, too. Our family donated some money to feed the people. Again, the fire company women did a fantastic job feeding the rescue workers and feeding all the families, of course, tremendous help from the community again. But I was there when they started pouring them out one by one at 10 or 11 o'clock at night, also. But, that was a great experience. Those guys have gone through an awful lot to be thrust from an ordinary coal miner to in front of the world answering questions into a microphone that, you know, they had no experience doing, but they handled themselves well. I don't know if you read the book they wrote, but it's the kind of language that they experienced down in the hole, and they lived through hell, but they are doing well. I think some still have a little psychological problem with it, but I think for the most part they recovered and are back working. Two of them that I know of are still working for the same coal company, three of them; one underground and two on top. But one guy, I think the top guy in the crew is back underground doing well.

HM: That's amazing.

BB: It is amazing, yeah, it is amazing. And what's interesting, one of the guys that was down there worked 250 feet below the surface of the ground. Now he's working 250 feet above on a windmill farm outside his home in Meyersdale, so he went from the bottom to the top. I thought that was interesting.

HM: Yeah.

BB: But that was a nice experience, and again, we'll still go back this, give speeches at the anniversary. Bill Arnold³ and his family have set up a foundation, and I know them well, and I've spoken at every one of the anniversaries. We've had a lot of people up there as tourists. When you come to Somerset County some time, let me know. We'll take you around to both sites, and maybe you been there. I don't know.

HM: I've been to one, yeah.

BB: Okay, so.

HM: And, and like you said, they are putting memorials in each.

BB: Both sites.

HM: In both sites, yeah. Well, I wanted to now move to your relationships and how you felt during your first Swearing-In Ceremony. What was that like for you?

BB: I thought I expected more from a Swearing-In Ceremony than about thirty seconds, to be honest with you, but as soon as we got done, we went right into a huge debate on rules, and I had family here and wanted to spend some time with them, but they wanted me on the Floor, and,

³ Bill and Lori Arnold and their family live on a working organic dairy farm where the rescue shaft was drilled to free the miners. Bill Arnold is also President of the Quecreek Mine Rescue Foundation.

you know, I've heard about people pushing your button all the time. I wanted to push my own button, you know, right from the start. So, hey, it wasn't any big deal, you know, I – it was, it was an experience getting to know a lot of new people. Didn't know many people, hardly anybody in Harrisburg, really. But, that was not overly impressive to me. I think just the aura of getting to know the Governor. Of course, I'd met him a couple times during the campaign, but it was a nice experience, but I wasn't overly impressed by, you know – I mean, I was sixty years old, you know? I wasn't a rookie at anything. I think I've lived a good bit of life and had some wisdom, and I don't get impressed by people unless over time they're genuine. You find out who's genuine down here and who isn't. Doesn't take long.

HM: Well, I wanted to ask you: do you recall your first office in the Capitol Building?

BB: Still have it today.

HM: Okay.

BB: I never moved. I'm clear up on the top of the fourth floor. I'm about as physically far away from the House Floor as anybody, and I've never moved. I have a small office. Never needed any more. Stayed in the same place.

HM: Was that by design to be the furthestest away?

BB: Oh, not necessarily. You know, I was a rookie. There was only four freshmen Representatives, Republican Representatives that year so, you know, I didn't have much choice, but I didn't have any problem with that.

HM: Okay. Whenever you started, did you have any mentors that assisted you and – ?

BB: Well, you know, John Pippy [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1997-2002; State Senator, 2003-present] and Sam Rohrer [State Representative, Berks County, 1993-present] were in the complex with me. And John Pippy, you know, he went over to the Senate now, but he's a great guy. We talked a lot. Sam Rohrer and I – probably if there was a mentor, Sam Rohrer might have been the one. He was right behind me in the same complex of offices, and I've gotten to know Sam well over the years. Sam was, and is, a great guy. I would guess that probably I got to know Art Hershey [State Representative, Chester and Lancaster Counties, 1983-2008], who, you know, that black and white dairy cow we had in common right from the get go, and Paul Semmel [State Representative, Berks and Lehigh Counties, 1983-2006] was another guy that was a farmer, and Jess Stairs [State Representative, Fayette and Westmoreland Counties, 1977-2008], you know. Actually, Jess Stairs was a client of mine in the [19]70s. Jess Stairs milked cows in Westmoreland County before he came to the House, and he was a client of our groups, and I spent some time on Jess's farm treating his cattle before he came down here. Now then he sold his cows, of course, when he got into office, but he still has beef cattle, still raises some sheep. So, I knew Jess. I had met Paul Semmel before through his wife. My wife and his wife are on the Dairy Princess Committee through Farm Bureau. So, there was a couple relationships there, but Art Hershey became a friend over the years through, through his

background in farming and my background in farming. But I'd say Sam Rohrer might have been the mentor of anybody. Eileen Melvin, who became the State Republican Chairwoman, is the one who got me involved in this, and I talk to her often. Another guy that I have a huge amount of respect for is Brad Cover. At that time [he] was a County Commissioner. Got to know him before that, but he talked me through a lot of the issues that I needed to be aware of. You know, I have a pretty narrow view of life. I stood behind a dairy cow for thirty-five years. *(laugh)* That's a pretty narrow view in somebody's barn, so there was a lot of issues I wasn't really familiar with that much, but I became familiar. I mean, this is an issues place. This is what we do for a living; to know issues, understand issues, vote for or against issues. You have to be aware of them. So, lots of people, but I'd say Brad Cover was actually one, and probably Eileen Melvin, and I know Sam Rohrer was a good mentor to me. I spent a lot of time with Sam.

HM: Do you feel that you've had the opportunity to be a mentor to anyone else?

BB: Oh, yeah. I think some of these younger guys coming in have looked to me because of my experience in agriculture, number one. Number two, I think with Carl Metzgar [State Representative, Somerset County, 2009-present], who won the Primary in Somerset, I spent a lot of time with Carl making sure he won the seat. I wanted to make sure it stayed a Republican. I wanted to make sure it stayed as a conservative-thinking Republican, and he is, and I spent a lot of time with Carl over the last, well, since the Primary, six or seven months, and so I'm happy to replace myself with one that I think will vote much like I did. And I'm not going to tell him anything now. I mean, I got him where he is – helped to get him where he is, but, you know, I was given some great advice when I was in a campaign school the first time I ran, and they said,

“When you win an election, look in the mirror, and you’ll see why you did. But if you lose an election, look in the mirror and see why you lost,” and that’s a very true statement. Now, I helped Carl win, but Carl won because of who Carl is and from now on I’m not going to give him any advice at all unless he asks for it. Then I’ll help him, but I’m not going to give him anything. I mean, he’s a big boy, and just like anybody else coming in they’re going to get their bumps and bruises, but they’ve got to make their decision. If he wants help, he knows where to ask for it, you know, but he’ll find other people down here, like-thinking people, that he’ll get to know pretty well, too. Yeah.

HM: Do you believe that there’s camaraderie in the House?

BB: Oh, no doubt about it, yeah. I’ve made some friends here, guys like Sam and Art Hershey, some staff people, particularly in the Ag[riculture] Republican Committee. Kerry Golden, Jay Howes that I’ll stay friends with forever. We’ll communicate back-and-forth, and, and we will do that probably forever, because they are good people and they’re agriculture people, and that’s been my background, so, yeah, we’ll spend time, talk.

HM: I also noticed that you were the Co-Chairman of the House that the House Built.

BB: Oh, yeah. That was interesting. I didn’t put that down here, as a matter of fact. The Habitat for Humanity. That was a great project. My wife and I both spent time out there. There was actually three houses. They were all being built at the same time. We had one under the House the House Built, but sometimes you’d go and you’d work on one of the other houses

'cause that's the project they were doing that day, so we did a lot of work there. The first four years down here we had an apartment, so my wife spent more time down here then. After that, it just got too expensive, and we had some grandkids that we needed to spend more time with, so she didn't come down much for the last six years. But the first four years, and that happened during that period of time; every Wednesday when we'd go home, we'd go out and spend three, four hours before we left for home, both of us working. That was a good project.

HM: And it looked like it was a bipartisan effort as well.

BB: Oh, no doubt about it, yeah, definitely.

HM: I'd like to ask you about your relationships with your Leadership; do you feel that you got along well with them?

BB: Did I have a what?

HM: A, a good relationship with your – .

BB: Oh, yeah, definitely. You have to build relationships on your side as well as the other side, and I think I did that. John Perzel [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1979-present; Speaker, 2003-2006] and John Barley [State Representative, Lancaster County, 1985-2002] helped Bob Bastian get a lot of funding for things that I could have never done by myself. Of course, then later, Sam Smith [State Representative, Armstrong, Indiana and Jefferson Counties,

1987-present], and I gave them credit on the Floor yesterday for that, particularly John Perzel. I have two big projects that I got funded, and John Perzel promised a large amount of money for a water pipeline project at home, and anything John ever promised me, he got me. And then in the end, we got a large amount of money for a road project, 219 – for the continuation of funding 219 – and this was a bipartisan thing with John Wozniak [State Representative, Cambria County, 1981-1996; State Senator, 1997-present] and Rich Kasunic [State Representative, Fayette and Westmoreland Counties, 1983-1994; State Senator, 1995-present], the two State Senators at that part of the county. Tommy Yewcic [Thomas; State Representative, Cambria and Somerset Counties, 1993-2008], you know the other Rep[resentative] for the northern part of the county, he's a Democrat. That was a very much of a bipartisan thing, but again, Sam Smith and John Perzel were behind making the sure the Governor knew. But then I got to give the Governor a lot of credit for that funding also. It never happened without him.

HM: And which Governor was that?

BB: Governor Rendell [Edward G., Governor, 2003-present].

HM: Okay.

BB: Oh, yeah.

HM: Well, that's my next question. What were your relationships like with the Governors?

BB: Well, I didn't vote for him, and I think he knew that. (*laugh*) I voted for the other guy both times, but when he wins, he's my Governor. It's just like right now. When Obama [Barack H., President of the US, 2009-present] won, he's my President as of January whenever, and I respect that. I respect the office. Governor Rendell's been in the county a number of times, and he is a very sharp individual. He came for our Bicentennial of our courthouse, and the man spoke up there for fifteen minutes, never had a note about the history of Somerset County. That's a very intelligent, sharp individual. I was impressed by that. When we presented him the pipeline project, for which I got a lot of state money, he was there, and without him, and Jack Murtha [State Representative, Cambria County, 1969-1974; US Representative, 1975-2010] and Bill Schuster [US Representative, 2001-present] and a lot of other people. Those things don't happen unless you get together. So, I give the Governor credit for that, and of course funding for 219. That was a 35 million dollar project. That's a lot of money and would have not happened without Governor Rendell, and I thanked him for that. Yeah.

HM: Well, I'd like to ask you about your committee involvement now, specifically what committees were you involved in, and did you enjoy your roles in those committees?

BB: Ag[riculture] Committee was my main committee, and I ended up as the Vice-Chair the last time. Ray Bunt [State Representative, Montgomery County, 1983-2006] was the Chairman most of the time, but then Art Hershey has been the last couple Sessions. I never missed an Ag[riculture] Committee and enjoyed the relationship with the other people, Dem[ocrat]s and R[epublican]'s, and I enjoyed that committee. Education also was a great committee. I was there four out of the five Sessions. Jess Stairs was always the Chairman on the Republican side.

Education's key to anything that anybody does is you have to have education, and I learned a lot there. Another committee I enjoyed very much was Labor, although I, you know, there was good and bad labor unions, but still, you know, you have to understand labor to understand a lot of things, and I enjoyed that committee. I learned a lot. I enjoyed that committee. The other one was Veteran Affairs and Emergency Preparedness, and because I'm a veteran, so I fit right in there. I enjoyed all my committees, yeah. Early on, I was on Children and Youth for a term. My wife and I were involved in foster care for a number of kids and ended up adopting a child, and I asked for that committee. I got it. I found out pretty quick that changing those adoption laws are going to be almost impossible. There's so much clash on trying to get anything done there, and I asked not to be off the committee, but I asked for another committee and got off that and got on Education. But, I've enjoyed my committees. They were a great learning experience. You know, there's, what? Five thousand bills or so introduced every Session, and it comes down to five hundred you were to talk about and about fifty you pass. I mean, it's 10 percent each time. But, to understand that legislation, you have to sit through these committee hearings and committee discussions to really understand them, and those four committees I didn't miss committee meetings. I tried to be at them all. And, it's a great experience. It's a great way to run the ship, as far as I'm concerned.

HM: Well, is there any one particular piece of legislation that came through your committee that you were either surprised by or felt very strongly about?

BB: I'll talk about two things in the Ag[riculture] Committee that – and I know it surprises some people; being a veterinarian, they'd think that I would think animals have all these rights to

everything. Animals don't have the rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness like you and I have. That's guaranteed in our Constitution. They do have the right to humane treatment, and I agree with that, but two bills – one was a horse bill, one was the dog bill. The horse bill was back in about my first or second term, the dog bill was just this last term. And, then the horse bill when it was introduced by Jim Lynch [James; State Representative, Forest, McKean and Warren Counties, 1993-2004] from up in the northern part of the state, was very much animal rightist, and I totally disagreed with he did. The vet school was on my side. That bill should never have passed, and I worked hard to be sure that we got changes, and we got enough changes in that bill so in the end I could vote for it, and I did. But it wasn't without getting down and dirty to be sure that we weren't going to have an animal rights horse bill, and in the end Jim Lynch agreed to it, that we should make those changes, and we did, and it was a good fight. And a lot of procedural stuff goes on in those things, try to get it out of one committee and into another and all those things, so it was a good education for me on procedural matters but also just on getting a bill right, which we did in the end. The dog bill was a little different because it was tremendously animal rightist, a huge bill that the Administration tried to get through as regulations and didn't succeed, so they tried to put it in a statute, and again, we got a lot of changes. We didn't get enough. In the end I couldn't vote for it, but we did get a lot of changes, which I think a lot of people appreciated. So, they were two good experiences, you know? One I totally went on, the other one I partially went on, but I got a better bill than what they started with. The Governor and the Administration really wanted that dog bill. I worry about more animal rights things coming down the pike in the future, not that animals shouldn't be taken care of 'cause they need to be, and I spent my lifetime doing that, but I don't think a pig has the right to live if you want ham, or bacon, or pork chops. You have to kill him to get the bacon, ham,

pork chops, so I don't think he has the right to live. I think he has the right to be treated humanely, but, you know, people disagree on those things, and I stuck up for what I thought was right, and some people agreed and some people didn't. But there was a lot of pressure to get that dog bill, and they got not what they wanted, but we didn't get what we wanted, it was in the middle somewhere, but at least they got it passed.

HM: Well, I'd like to talk about your legislation that you've sponsored, and what was your role in that? I noticed that during this past Session you had sponsored House Bill 483, which would establish the Mine Families First Program.

BB: That was a piece of legislation trying to put into statute what Governor Schweiker basically did on the ground that week in Somerset County, and it was something that nobody was going to be against. That was a good piece of legislation and, you know, we got it through.

HM: It became Act 57 of 2007.

BB: Yeah, right, right.

HM: Yeah. Is there any other pieces of legislation that you'd like to discuss that you were involved in?

BB: Two other ones that I'll mention. One was the Assumption of Risk Bill, and we tried to get it through as a stand-alone bill, it ended up being an amendment on another bill (*cough*) that I

never even got any credit for, which is fine. But the assumption of risk, if you get on a ski slope skiing, and you run into a tree and hurt yourself or kill yourself, you can't sue that ski slope, because you assume the risk of doing something stupid. That's the Assumption of Risk Law, and it exists for skiers, but it doesn't exist for ATV's or off road bikes or snowmobiles. So, when we passed the law to require all ATV's to be licensed and to have insurance, guys were saying, "Well, let's put this money in a separate fund that comes from those registration fees, and we'll give grants to people who have ATV parks," which now exist, but they needed protection from the assumption of risk that if a guy does something on an ATV, you can't sue the owner. He has to assume the risk of doing something stupid. And so, we got that through, and that was a tough thing to get past the trial attorneys, because they didn't want that, you know? Just limits where they can have lawsuits. So, that was a thing I worked on for a year, year and a half. I had some pretty good meetings with the Administration and the trial attorneys, and they're a tough bunch, but they finally agreed. They knew they had to do that, and that was something I worked on hard. The other thing that never got off the ground, but it will next time, I think, is the Bible literacy. Bible literacy is a law that exists in four states today where you teach the Bible as a nondenominational, nondevotional course. It's an elective for 11th or 12th graders. It will be a "may" bill, rather than a "shall" bill. In other words, a school district may teach Bible literacy. They don't have to, but at least they have permission from the State Department of Education to do so. It's being taught today in some schools across the state of Pennsylvania, because that school board allowed it to happen. There are courses out there that you can get teachers' guides, a book that's fairly thick, but it teaches a lot of things about the Bible that if a kid never goes to Sunday school and church doesn't understand. A lot of things are engrained in our society. You know, if a kid doesn't know anything about the Ten Commandments, he's neglect. He should

know about the Ten Commandments from the historical perspective or from the literary perspective or from the geographical perspective. The Bible – you don't get anything historical about geography in the Bible. It exists. I mean, when they mention about the Red Sea or about all these geographical places, they exist. They're real. The Bible's real. Kids need to know a little more about the Bible if they have religion in their background or not. So, we got the bill written, we got the bill introduced. I've talked to Dr. Zahorchak [Gerald L.; PA Secretary of Education, 2006-present] at the highest level. I've talked to the Senate Leadership, talked to the House Leadership; It will happen next time, hopefully. But I got a lot of background work done. Didn't get time to get it cleared through the process.

HM: So, who do you think is going to introduce it next?

BB: Sam Rohrer or one of those individuals of that same Christian background.

HM: Okay.

BB: Yeah.

HM: I guess I wanted to ask you, how do you feel about moving from the majority to the minority? How hard is it?

BB: It was tough. It was tough, but we got what we had coming, you know. We made some bad mistakes and paid the price. The whole agenda's different. You don't have the power to

control the daily program up there. You don't have the committee chairs, you don't have the numbers on the committee chairs to get legislation through or stop legislation. I would guarantee you that that dog bill would have never come out of committee if the Republicans had been in power. We would have gotten something out of committee, but not as strict as what that was. So, when you're in power, there's a lot of changes, or when you're out of power, there's a lot of changes, and it was much different. I was glad I was in the majority for four years – and I didn't leave the House because we were not in the majority the last two years; that wasn't my reason. I just was old enough that I wanted my weekends back and my nights back, and so it was time to do that, but that wasn't the reason we didn't win the majority. You know what they said, "You got to get it back the first time." Well, the Obama wave really hurt the Republicans this time. Next time, I would guess that probably we'll have a good chance, but I don't know. People spoke, so, you know? Republicans did a lot in the [19]90's and the early 2000's of this decade, but, you know, the Democrats have it right now, so the House will still go on.

HM: Did you ever become frustrated?

BB: Oh, yeah, frustrated lots of times. I have a favorite saying that Harrisburg looks best in the rearview mirror too many times, and yeah, I got frustrated. I got frustrated by not getting enough done. Some days were very discouraged. When they have a golf tournament on a Tuesday and we're done at noon, that's wrong. That needs to be reformed. Why don't they have their golf tournament on Friday? Well, the guys aren't here, so they don't do it, but I can't come in Monday afternoon at one to get out at four, and they come in Tuesday morning at ten and get out at twelve because of a golf tournament, and then nothing happens on Wednesday, either. That

shouldn't happen. People have to know about those things, so yeah, I got frustrated. The pace – I was interested – I mean, when I was in practice, I was go, go, go. I got a lot of things done every day. I started early, I work late, but – and I started early and work late here, but it was because I was taking care of district business, not because enough was not happening here. I got frustrated. Sure I got frustrated. If anybody has any energy at all, you get frustrated with Harrisburg.

HM: Well, you talked about wanting to get your nights and your weekends back. Would you say that being a Legislator is a 24-hour a day, seven day a week job?

BB: Oh yeah. Yeah. I mean, there's things –

HM: If you do it right.

BB: – If you do it right, there's things to go to almost every night, almost every weekend. I mean, this last weekend I was busy Sunday afternoon, and I love to do Eagle⁴ ceremonies, but a lot of them are Sunday afternoon. On the last two Sundays, I did two the Sunday before, I did one this past Sunday, and I love to do those things, since I was born and raised in the Scouting program, but you do a lot of Sunday stuff and a lot of Saturday stuff, and particularly if you're in a campaign; you've got to be everywhere, you know? The one-on-one contact is definitely how you win voters, you know? So, newspaper ads or TV ads, you can do all you want to, but you still got to talk to somebody across the table one-on-one.

⁴ An Eagle is the second highest rank that a Boy Scout can achieve after meeting all requirements and advancing through the ranks and eventually leading a project which serves the community.

HM: Well, what do you think was the most rewarding aspect of your job?

BB: Oh, my. Probably helping people in the district was the most rewarding thing. A lot of people have issues with a state agency that they can't get done by themselves, and they feel powerless when they call Harrisburg on a 717 number, and they really don't get the help they want or what they need or what they should have, so they come to me. Now, I don't have one of those great big sticks that I can get everything done, but I do have the power to have Harrisburg listen and lots of times we had meetings in our office or down here, but more than likely in Somerset, with DEP [Department of Environmental Protection], with PennDOT [Pennsylvania Department of Transportation], with Children and Youth, MHMR [Mental Health and Mental Retardation] issues that people from town – so, Harrisburg would come out. We'd sit down, and we'd talk about these things. I couldn't solve it, but the agency in Harrisburg could, and again, they saw people across the table, not over the telephone. They saw that some of these problems were real. Some of these problems were severe, particularly Children and Youth problems, but I had great response from agencies. They tried, and a lot of people really do care, but again, if they can see somebody eyeball to eyeball, it's a lot bit of different than just trying to put them off over the telephone. It's easy to hang up on somebody, but when you're across the table and see the real tears or the real anxiety of people's problems, things get done, and I facilitated hundreds and hundreds of those things, and I think that's where I found my most satisfaction. And getting grants for fire companies, getting grants for Little League teams, getting grants for libraries. That was, that was satisfying, yeah.

HM: What did you like the least?

BB: Like the least? Oh, probably the partisanship; too much partisanship. I used an example yesterday in my final comments that when that board lights up, one side's all red, one side's all green. You know doggone well that whoever voted no on that bill the whole side – whatever side it was – voted no, they didn't all think that way or the opposite on the other side. They were intimidated by Leadership, by Administration, by, "Well, we got you this time." That shouldn't exist, you know? I mean, there's liberal Republicans, and there's conservative Democrats. You can't call all Republicans conservative and all Democrats liberal. It just doesn't work that way. We have some great people. Tommy Yewcic was one guy on the Democratic side. Good guy. Tom Tangretti [Thomas; State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1991-2008], Tom Caltagirone [Thomas; State Representative, Berks County, 1977-present]. I worked for those guys on a lot of issues, but the partisanship was very disgusting lots of times.

HM: Do you feel that your issues have changed through the years? Or do you feel that you've pretty much stayed the same person issue-wise?

BB: I think that's maybe what I'm proudest of, is the fact they didn't change me. People said I would change, and I don't think I have. Man's number one problem is still is, what do I eat? Agriculture still is the primary issue in my opinion. We're still an agriculture state. I hope it stays that way. A man's number one problem is, what do I eat? And I was proud to be part of agriculture community for thirty-five years, and I was happy with what I got accomplished down here in Harrisburg through the House Ag[riculture] Committee, yeah.

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

BB: The hardest issue. Some of the budgetary issues, you know, the budget's probably the biggest vote we make every year. And the budgetary issues, the amount of spending that goes on, there's too much waste, too much waste of tax dollars. And, you know, my great-aunt was one that taught me a little ditty I'll never forget, and it was, "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without," and that comes back from the 1800's or the early 1900's, and if you didn't live back in the [19]20s, [19]30s, and [19]40s, you don't understand that. But, that's a great ditty, and I think my wife and I and our family, and our kids, and our grandkids, I think, all them live that way. We go through hard times. My wife will make it good through hard times because we know how to raise a garden, how to save, how to conserve. So that's probably it, I would guess.

HM: What do you think the hardest issue is before the Legislature right now?

BB: Oh, it's going to be the budget.

HM: The budget still.

BB: The hole, the hole. I don't know how big that hole is. It's a half a billion [dollars] and climbing, and, you know, nobody wants to raise taxes. They've got to learn how to economize. There's waste; there's too much waste. There's probably too many people at work. I don't

know. I mean, I think there's probably too many people working in Harrisburg. They could cut back.

HM: Well, what do you think your fondest memory was of serving in the Pennsylvania House?

BB: Oh, my fondest memory. Probably just getting thanks from people for getting help. The personal touch that you give to people. And what's interesting is, some of those things, people that I helped, I didn't even have anything to do with it. I had staff people that were great at helping people. You'd give some of those gals – all my gals in Somerset, an issue with a person, and they, lots of times I didn't even get involved. I mean, they would dig it out. They would find an answer for a widow, or for a kid that was maybe not getting the kind of money he should, or scholarship that was given because of financial need, or I mean, just – I think that's the fondest memory; just helping individuals one person at a time, solving a problem that maybe somebody else couldn't solve. And you talk about solving problems; how many people have I had come to me that had DUI's [Driving Under the Influence] and wanted help, and I said, "There's the door. I'm not going to help you at all. You got a DUI for a reason. Suffer the consequences and learn from it," but man, they would come in. I had guys that come in and couldn't get their license till 2018. That's ten years from now. There's a reason for that. Suffer.

HM: Well, who were some of the people that you worked with in with your staff?

BB: Well, the gals in there right now is Deb Hiddi and Mary Knepper and Marsha Atkinson. They're the three gals. There's three other gals that I have a lot of – Helen Lucas was there.

Actually, Helen Lucas was an aide for Bill Lloyd, who I replaced. You know, in [19]98 when he ran against Specter and got beat, I won his seat, I went down to see him the next day, and he asked me, “Helen Lucas has worked for me for nine years and nine months. She needs three years – or three months to get her tenure. Would you hire her for three months?” I said, “Well, sure. That’s the right thing to do.” My Republicans down there weren’t crazy about that, but they allowed that to happen. Within a month, I said, “Helen, the job is yours if you want it,” and she was with me for a long time, and Helen was a good gal. Lee Snyder worked for me a couple different times and went onto a better job, and that is the same thing. She worked for a while, went on to a better job. Gigi Baker down here in Harrisburg. She’s been with me all ten years. She was very good with people coming down for, you know, a meeting or for just a tour, you know. She was good, too. So, I had good people.

HM: Whenever you think back, is there one story or multiple stories that you’ll be telling people about your time in Harrisburg? Or maybe your time in the district, because those were –

BB: I’ll clean this up a little bit, but – and this is a true story. Matt Ryan [Matthew J.; State Representative, Delaware County, 1965-2003; Speaker, 1981-1982 and 1995-2003] who I really thought was a good guy. I’d love to see what Harrisburg would look like today if Matt Ryan had lived. I think it’d be different, to be honest with you. But, Matt Ryan took the four freshmen out that went in in [19]98, or actually got sworn in in [19]99. About six months later, he took us out to dinner, the four of us, and that was Ron Miller [State Representative, York County, 1999-present] and Daryl Metcalfe [State Representative, Butler County, 1999-present], myself, and the

gal that left a couple terms ago. She was only here for three terms⁵. Anyway, he said, “Bastian, what do you think of Harrisburg after you been here for six months?” And, I will clean it up, but I said, “You know, I had my hand up a cow’s rear end for 35 years, and it hasn’t changed. Now, the point is that there’s too much baloney goes on or too much b.s. goes on here in Harrisburg,” and he laughed, and he said, “You’re right. Just never say it behind a microphone.” Well, here I am saying it behind the microphone. *(laugh)* But, there’s too much, too slow, and I guess government’s good maybe because it works slow because you’ll maybe do it right, but lots of times it works slow, still wouldn’t do it right, you know. That pension grab, that pay raise grab, they were pitiful. That’s just guys lining their pockets, you know? And it’s stuff that – Leadership don’t want me to say that, but that’s just true. That ruined this place. The pink pig should have been down here, you know? But a lot of guys suffered, and some guys didn’t suffer because of it, but that’s a good story, a true story. I don’t know. I just, I liked the fact that I could help people, help a lot of people.

HM: Well, let me just ask you: what changes, if you could make changes, what would they be?

BB: I think we need to come on the Floor and not do 30 resolutions. If you’re going to do 30 resolutions, read them off, have one vote instead of 30 votes. That was just time-consuming. I think there’s no need to start 11 o’clock and go till 2:30 and not give you a lunch break. If you’re going to do that, then give a lunch break for a half hour. Let guys get something to eat, because guys are walking in and out all the time. The ghost voting thing, although we changed the rule on that, that still happens all the time. There are too many guys that are on their way home or home at four o’clock in the afternoon. We never get done till seven [o’clock], but they

⁵ Mary Ann Dailey, State Representative, Montgomery County, 1999-2004.

never miss a vote. That has to change. There's no reason for that, and I'm probably guilty of it occasionally, but for the most part, I was there for the big votes, you know? I mean, you got to go to the bathroom, maybe you got to go to the office, or maybe you got a group of constituents you want to meet, but, you know, take a leave for like you're supposed to. Ghost voting's still a problem, but I think, keep things organized, keep them moving. Don't go to Caucus because you're not sure what you're going to do next. Somebody in Leadership has to say the night before, or a week before, "This is what we're going to do between Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, and we're going to get you out in decent time. We're not going to waste your time while you're here." The other thing I think has to change is the order in the House; too many people talking, laughing, carrying on conversations. They just aren't paying attention, but I think because of things go so slowly they just get tired of it. We don't need to recognize anybody and everybody. I think, you know, you have 20 minutes of opening and cut it off there and get your business done. We don't need to have guys staying; if you're here Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, you're staying Thursday and Friday. Get your business done and get home. I don't think there's one person in Harrisburg ever voted for me. They all voted for me back in the district, and that's where you need to spend your time. That's where I spend my time. When Wednesday came and the day was done, I was home. I didn't stick around Thursday and Friday, although sometimes you had to for committee, but they can get those committee meetings done. I'd start them early in the morning. I wouldn't have my first committee meeting at 9:30; I'd have it at eight o'clock. Get up and get breakfast by seven and get going. I wouldn't start at 9:30 in the morning. And then you have three committee meetings out of your four committees at one time. That's wrong. There has to be a lot more efficiency of time spent in Harrisburg, yeah.

HM: Well, how would you like your tenure as Representative to be remembered?

BB: As an honest, hardworking, caring individual. I think that's what I would say.

HM: What are your future plans?

BB: Hey, we have a farm, and we have 16 grandchildren, and we're going to spend some more time on the farm. We still raise some cattle. I enjoy forestry work. We have some demonstration projects on the farm. My wife's mother still lives, 96 years old, so she has a big family, we'll spend more time with the family.

HM: I think you've already given me some great advice for new Members, but that's my, one of my last questions. Do you have any additional advice that you'd like to share?

BB: Well, my advice to Carl Metzgar was keep your eyes open, your ears open, your mouth shut for about three months. Don't make amendments. Don't promise anything. Just learn what's going on. Get to know your people on your side. Go across the aisle, meet some people. Make some friends on both sides. Get active in your committees. But just don't say a whole lot for a while until you know what's the right thing to say. You can get your mouth in trouble pretty quick down here. And sometimes people remember that stuff for a long time.

HM: Well, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about your career today, and I always like to let the Representatives have the last word, so.

BB: *(laugh)* The last word.

HM: So, if there's anything additional you'd like to share.

BB: Hey, I'm a better person for serving. I'm a better person for serving in the Legislature. It's hard to believe that ten years is up already. I mean, it went fairly quickly. It really did. I don't think I changed much in Harrisburg. I think I stayed who I was, but I think my district is better because of some of the money and some of the things we brought back there and some of the problems we solved. Carl is going to take the same staff and the same office here in Harrisburg and back home, and I think that's a credit to him. Those gals know how to do things, and he'll give them a good, clean start, and give him a quick start. Carl's a quick study. He's a sharp guy. He'll do well, and I wish him well. I hope he doesn't get frustrated real quick, but give it a chance, yeah.

HM: Well, thank you very much.

BB: Sure, thank you, yeah. Good interview. Appreciate it.