

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Richard J. Cessar (R)

30th District

Allegheny County

1971-1994

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Simon Bronner, PhD
June 7, 2005

Transcribed by: Raymond Whittaker

Simon Bronner (SB): My name is Simon Bronner. I'm conducting an oral history with Rick Cessar, who was the Representative for Allegheny County in the 30th District from 1971-1994. Welcome to the project.

The Honorable Richard J. Cessar (RC): Glad to be here.

SB: The first question I'd like to ask you is about your early years and what prepared you for public life?

RC: Believe or not, when I was a young man I became a policeman at the age of 21. And I lived within the community for 17 years serving as a police officer and very active in the community. Fire department, church – I was the usher, took up the collection, you know, and my children were in the baseball league and they were active in the community. And then I became a member of the Elks Lodge, which was the biggest lodge in the whole state, 2600 members. [I was] very active in it and participated in all philanthropic endeavors of that organization and got to know a lot of people. I thought that I should be making a career change after 17 years and, fortunately for me, a gentleman by the name of Lee Donaldson [State Representative, Allegheny County 1955-1970] had just been elected as the Majority Floor Leader in the House of Representatives. And he said, "Would you like to come work for me?" Well, suffice to say in those years, the early [19]70's, public employees weren't paid too much. So, I had an opportunity to go with him and I had a substantial increase in my pay. So, I talked to my wife and with

five children, I thought, well, I got to make a decision. I made the decision and I went to work for him. And [it was] very enlightening.

SB: Wasn't he related to you?

RC: He was my wife's cousin. He was my wife's cousin. And I knew Lee for years. He was about three/four years older than me. But, I knew him for years, even before, you know, he got into politics.

SB: Did you come from a political family?

RC: No. No. As a matter of fact, I was a Ronald Reagan [U.S. President, 1981-1989] kind-of a guy. He had been a Democrat all of his life and my family was Democrat. And when I went to work for Lee Donaldson I became a Republican. And that was really the burst of my Republicanism. And I really never thought too much about politics to the extent that I wanted to participate. I voted all the time, but that was it.

SB: Well, what do you remember about your first campaign?

RC: Oh, that was a great campaign. It was a Primary campaign and I lived in the borough of Etna which had, like, 650 Republicans registered; you had Fox Chapel, you had 2,000. And the other areas, the other communities, in the Legislative District, there were many more Republicans in those Districts. And fortunately for me there were seven candidates.

And I went around and I, well, I worked for Lee Donaldson first of all, and I did something that nobody ever did, I think. I worked for him for four years and I served in his District office every day and we'd meet on Saturday's and we'd go over what I did. And I got to know the committee people; I got to know everybody, politically. And I think that was what really helped me. But in that light, the election was held and in the borough of Etna there was, like, 500 people [who] voted. I got 450 votes and the other six candidates got, like, 50; something like that. So, I won that Primary and then in the General Election, I ran against a Mayor of a Democratic community, Sharpsburg [Richard D. Panza]. And the District was predominantly Democratic and I had a landslide victory of 5,000 majority. So, it was really the beginning of it all.

SB: Were there many District offices at that time?

RC: No, no. I don't think there were any. There weren't any. I would come to Harrisburg with Lee Donaldson and I drove the car over. I worked in the office up here and I stayed at the Old Government Hotel down near the railroad station and it was, like, four dollars a night. And I stayed there, then we went back home and I worked in the District Office. But, what I did do then, I did get myself a license to sell real estate; in case something would happen, I had to go out a start over again. But, I never had to use it, fortunately.

SB: What were your impressions, then, when you became a Representative for the first time?

RC: Oh, I was pleased, I was happy. I was honored knowing full-well that there aren't too many people who have the opportunity to serve in this great state as a Representative. And I was very fortunate too, in the four years that I worked for Mr. Donaldson, Lee Donaldson, I got to know the Members that were there. They were older, and the Members at that particular time all came from different backgrounds; they were dentists, lawyers, and businessmen, people that owned different businesses, a lumber business. It was kind of a different mixture of people and they all imparted something that I kind-of sopped up and really helped me going forward to be able to perform as a State Legislator.

SB: Were there particular Legislators who acted as mentors for you and if so, what did they teach you or advise you?

RC: Well let me say, I had a plethora of advisors. (*laugh*) And one of my great advisors had been the State Senator who had been the Pro Tempe in the Senate, that's Robert D. Fleming [State Senator, 1951-1974; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1939-1950]. And I would see him all the time, as a matter of fact, I'd get invited over to his office every evening and that's where he would hold court. And all the Senators came in there and they imbibe and had some cheese and crackers and talked about what was going on during the day. And, you know, then the newspaper people came in. And they were there and that was a breed all to themselves. Duke Comensky, from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, was classified as one of the toughest newspaper men you have ever met. He came in there and he participated and it was on a level that was I would

say, respect between the newsmen and the Senators. So, yeah, he was one of my mentors, but I had a lot of other ones like Ken Lee [Kenneth B. Lee; State Representative, Sullivan, Susquehanna and Wyoming Counties, 1957-1974; Speaker, 1967-1968 and 1973-1974], Bob Butera [Robert J. Butera; State Representative, Montgomery County, 1963-1977], my Leaders that were there; all good men. Lee Donaldson, of course. But, there were always mentors there and you took the advice of them. Ray Wilt [Raymond E. Wilt; State Representative, Allegheny County 1951-1964], whose grandson now serves in the General Assembly¹, was one of my mentors. And he owned a trucking company, very successful. And I just really was very fortunate in my early career.

SB: Well, in your second term, you served on the Appropriations Committee. Was that unusual?

RC: That was very unusual. Second-term Members never got to serve on that Committee. I think it really came about because the fact that I had been there for four years and I got to know all the Members. And you have to remember this too, in those years that I was there [19]67-70, Members really didn't have office accommodations. If you were a Chairman you had an office. But, they had seats on the Floor and they had a lock-box in the back and that was about it. So, again it wasn't until after that I got there and became a Member and Herb Fineman [State Representative, Philadelphia County 1955-1977; Speaker 1969-1972 and 1975-1977] who was the Speaker then, started to look and say, "We got to start doing something to make sure the Members are

¹ Rod W. Wilt, State Representative serving Crawford, Lawrence and Mercer Counties, 1997-2006.

accommodated.” Then we got some office space and then we had one secretary for five Members. So, that was really the beginning of it. And Herb Fineman was really the person that really pushed this forward.

SB: Well, there was a lot of talk about the Legislature being modernized during those years and you were a witness then. How did the change come about and what was key in that modernization?

RC: The key in that modernization was, as I said, Herb Fineman, who had been an active member of the National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL]. And there was a movement at that particular time that we have to modernize the General Assemblies and provide more services for the Members. And I think the thinking at that particular time was the complexity of government, especially with the Federal Government and all the mandates that they had and what they were doing in the field of social issues that we had to be better prepared to be able to handle those issues statewide. And he really pushed this and I truly believe he was really the big push in all these issues.

SB: You were also, early in your career, involved in the Policy Committee. Could you describe what that committee did and how that changed when you came onboard?

RC: I was elected to a Leadership position in my fourth term. And I was elected as Policy Chairman and in those days when you ran for an office, for Leadership, you had to campaign. You campaigned to win your seat, but if you wanted to be a Leader, you had

to campaign again. And I campaigned and won the seat. I had a couple pretty good opponents, but I won. But, anyhow, at that particular time with the Policy Committee, they would meet maybe once a year and go up to the Poconos and the Leadership would go up with the Members and then talk about what we were going to do the following year, that year. So, fortunately for me, during my interim from [19]70-76 before I was elected to Leadership, a good friend of mine by the name of Chuck Jones, who had been the Dean of the Political Science department at the University of Pittsburgh, called him one day and I said, “Chuck, I said, I got a problem. I’ve just been elected to become the Policy Chairman. What do I really do?” And, anyway, he said, “Let’s meet.” So we had lunch – I paid (*laugh*) – and we talked about this. And he said, “Why don’t you try to put something in effect like they have in Congress.” So, we talked about it and I said, “Alright, fine.” So, we laid everything out. So, at that particular time, Bob Butera, from Montgomery County – [who] was one of the great Leaders that I served under – I called him and talked to him and met with him and I said, “Bob, here is what I would like to do with the Policy Committee. I would like to get about 20-25 Members from our Caucus to serve on that Committee and we’d meet weekly, but before we initiate this, with your permission and expenditures from your account, we’ll fly Chuck Jones up to Harrisburg and have him meet with us.” Bob, said, “Fine.” So, Chuck Jones flew up and met with Bob Butera in his office with all the Chairmen of all the Committees, Standing Committees, and discussed this issue. Unanimously, everybody agreed [they] would do that. So, that was really the beginning of that policy movement that I helped initiate along with the support of Bob Butera.

SB: Well, when you said that one has to campaign for these positions, such as the Policy Committee, what does campaigning entail?

RC: Well, “I need your help; I want to become a Leader.” And you got to call on each Member. You got to send them a letter outlining your qualifications, what you can do, what you can’t do. And you got to convince them that you have the right stuff. As John Glenn said, “You’ve got to have the right stuff.” And we all campaigned that way. But, you put together coalitions too. And you picked off, like my delegation in Allegheny County – then, I think we had ten Members in the General Assembly – and then you picked off another group. And you put a coalition together, then you come up with a majority to win those seats.

SB: Well when you talk about the “right stuff” and you referred to Butera as a very good Leader, what are the qualities of Leadership that you admire, that you think are essential?

RC: Oh, I think integrity, absolutely, positively integrity. And I think you’ve got to be a good Leader; you’ve got to respect the views of other people. And I think those were two of the things you just have to have; integrity – I think that’s the key to it – honesty, integrity, veracity, you know. Those were the key in my view. And Bob Butera had those.

SB: You also referred to the atmosphere, particularly in the [19]70’s with Representatives living in town, dining out a lot. You see a lot of folks just on the street

who you're working with. Could you describe the social scene there or were there social groups and socialization that occurred?

RC: The hot spot when I first came up here in 1967 was Lombardo's Restaurant, over where the PHEAA [Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency] building is now and the strip mall there. And that was the place to go and everybody went there. And most of the Members lived either at the Harrisburg Hotel or the Penn Harris and then they built the Holiday Inn and everybody stayed in town. Of course, I couldn't afford what some of those other guys did. You know, I stayed at the Governor. But, that's where they stayed and everybody was here. Then you went down to Johnny Durban's at night, that was a local pub, and the Senate Bar, a lot of people went there after or before. But, it was really confined to people staying in town. That's pretty much what it was. And it was nice and we'd go down to the Forum. Jimmy, the Greek fellow, had the Forum Restaurant, and we'd go down there and you know you'd meet the newspaper people there. I'd meet them from the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, Ed Jensen, Pat Boyle, sit and have a beer with them; talk about things. Everything off the record. And those people, then really worked to get a story. And you know, they would want to meet with you and see you and they would just relish the fact that you trusted them and they trusted you.

SB: Would business be conducted at these?

RC: No, I think everyone wanted to get a story for their newspaper. You know, the bylines and – they just wanted to get a story.

SB: How about among the Legislators?

RC: In what regard?

SB: In talking about legislation.

RC: Oh, sure, sure. Sometimes they would. Yeah, they'd talk about legislation, absolutely. You know, "What are you doing on – ?," especially, if it was an issue that had some relevance to what was happening in Allegheny County. Whether it be the city of Pittsburgh or the County, you know. Or what you were doing for the County. On health issues and social issues, are you bringing money back to the county? What about roads, potholes? Those are the kinds of things they'd like to write about.

SB: Well, let's talk about issues that you were involved in as a former police officer. You did introduce and were involved in pieces of legislation about crime and police welfare. Can you describe your involvement and what was important to you about it?

RC: Oh, I think then, you have to remember this, the police departments in this country – in this state – weren't all that well compensated at one particular time. And there were issues related to crime and punishment and those are the issues we addressed. And you know, proliferation of drugs and guns really came into play. And we're always looking at some way to mitigate the consequences of that by incarcerating people who were doing

those things. You know, and being a volunteer fireman for a lot of years, I taught fire fighting, you know, I had some great mentors there when I was a young cop and being on the fire department also. But, we found that we had to do something for the volunteer fire departments. And I was in the middle of writing the legislation, which created the Loan Fund for the volunteer fire departments. And that has been one of the hallmarks, one of the centerpieces for local fire departments. You know, fish fries they had to have, and they had to go out and raise money on their own. Councilmen and Commissioners in local communities were really not willing to supply the money for equipment and for training. And this really helped the fire departments. And they've just really increased the benefits for being able to purchase equipment under that program we started there.

SB: How did you get involved in Transportation?

RC: Oh, after my career as being a Leader, I didn't run for Leadership and I became the Chairman for the Transportation Committee. I had my choice. I was the ranking Member in the General Assembly at that particular time after Matt Ryan.

SB: Well, that raises your role in Leadership and after you were Policy Chairman you became Caucus Secretary in 1983. Can you describe this shift and who suggested it and why?

RC: Yeah, I was elected to that. That was a Leadership position. And I have to laugh – the present Majority Leader, now, Sam Smith [State Representative, Jefferson County

1987-present] – whenever you were running for one of the positions, somebody got up on the floor in your Caucus and nominated you. And I asked Sam Smith to nominate me and somebody has to second; we always did that. You always got someone from the part of the state you were from. I'll never forget, Sam Smith got up, "You know I got to talk about Rick Cessar; great guy," going on and on about me and then he says, "What the hell does a Caucus Secretary do?" (*laugh*) So, anyway it ended up that was a big laugh that we had, but Frank Salvatore [State Representative, Philadelphia County 1973-1984], who had been in Leadership with me, made a suggestion. He said, "You know, we're getting into the age of computers. Why don't we talk to Matt Ryan [Matthew J. Ryan; State Representative, Delaware County 1963-2003; Speaker 1981-1983, 1997-2003] and do something in that regard and put it under the Caucus Secretaries domain." So, we did that. And we put ourselves into what they have today. We started the whole process. And I had John Perzel [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1979-present; Speaker 2003-2006] on my committee, Tom Gannon [State Representative, Delaware County, 1979-2006], and a number of other people; and Karl Boyes [State Representative, Erie County, 1981-2003]. And Gannon, Tom Gannon was just an outstanding computer whiz. And we did it and we built a computer center. We put in instructors, we had all of the secretaries come down and learn how to run the computers. And you know it was one of the great things we did. And now you have computers. We said someday we will have computers on the Floor. They do have them now. So, we did that and it was a lot of fun, it was interesting and we had a lot of good staff people. I'll tell you one thing too, and I got to say this; in my career we had help from staff people, all of them just great, really just great.

SB: Well, what was critical about the staff role that you relied upon?

RC: Well, they really had to understand Transportation issues, when I was on Transportation. And then the staff people I had, of course, when I was the Whip, I had to keep abreast of what was going on so I had a couple of people to analyze bills for me and do all those things. But Sam Hayes [Samuel E. Hayes, Jr.; State Representative, Blair, Centre and Huntingdon Counties, 1971-1992; State Secretary of Agriculture, 1997-2003] pretty well ran everything, you know, being the Floor Leader. Sam was a workaholic; good Floor Leader. Seven o'clock in the morning he'd be there; he worked all day and worked late at night. Members would come in to see him. I would chat with him in the mornings. But Sam was a good Leader and Sam depended on his staff, but Sam depended on Sam to a great extent too. But my role is, you know, we had some issues I would try to make sure we had a good number who was going to be where if an important vote came up.

SB: As Whip or as Secretary?

RC: As a Whip. As a Whip. As a Whip.

SB: And tell us about how you became Whip or why you shifted from Secretary to the Whip?

RC: Well, no I was the –

SB: Oh, 1981.

RC: Right, I had been the Policy Chairman for four years and in that role also I had been the Campaign Chairman for the Republican Caucus. And in 1977-78 cycle I was the Campaign Chairman, and I put together the campaign for our Caucus. And it was a long story, but I worked at it. And anyhow, it ended up that we had 85 Republican House Members and the Democrats had 118 Members. And we put together a campaign and we really worked hard at it; found candidates all over the state. And Election Day, election night, I got a call from Jack Seltzer [H. Jack Seltzer; State Representative, Lebanon County, 1957-1980; Speaker, 1979-1980]. “We are the Majority. We got 103 votes.” And Dick Thornburgh won and then when the Caucus reorganized, Matt Ryan moved up to Speaker, Sam Hayes moved up to Floor Leader and I moved up to Whip. So, that was the third-ranking Leadership position.

SB: Did you enjoy the role of Whip?

RC: Oh, sure I had a lot of fun with it. A lot of fun with it. You know, you got to play with numbers whenever tough votes were coming up, especially if you had to raise taxes. So, you know, then you really had to try to get a count for the Floor Leader. The Floor Leader would depend on you to do that. But, we all worked at it.

SB: And one of the statements that you made when you accepted the role of Whip was to say to Jim Manderino [James J. Manderino; State Representative, Westmoreland County, 1967-1989; Speaker, 1989] that you could “beat him.” (*laugh*) What was your relationship with him?

RC: Well, he was a Whip then too. We had a lot of fun. We had a lot of fun. Jim Manderino and I ended up being super great friends. As a matter of fact, at his Memorial Service, as a Republican, I gave the eulogy for him. We had gone to different meetings together in different parts of the country. And we were in Taiwan together, Matt Ryan, he and I, and a couple of other Leaders. We roomed together. We roomed together. I admired Jim. I thought he was just one of the brightest guys ever; he was a bright man.

SB: Well, something else that that raises is the relationship between the Parties. Since, we often think of them as adversarial, how did you work with the other Party?

RC: Well, I had a good relationship, a real good relationship. I was always of the opinion you know, that “you catch more flies with honey, than you do with vinegar.” And most of the Members accepted the fact that you extended the branch. And most of the Members, we would go out at night. We might have a debate on the Floor, an issue would be contentious, we would go out at night, and we would be together, have a beer, talk about it and we really didn’t get mad at each other. You know, you might scream on the Floor, but you never really got mad at each other. You know, we became pretty good friends and a lot of the Members understood that.

SB: Were there particular issues that were hotly contested in your memory?

RC: Taxes, all the time taxes. Pay-raises all the time. You know, those were issues that really people shied away from. Nobody wanted to vote for taxes. Nobody wanted to vote for pay-raises. Nobody wanted to vote for changes in pension benefits. You know, those were things. And then you got different fights from different groups of people. There were people there that really thought that one part of society wasn't being provided for enough on different social issues. That became contentious. There were times that year that different groups came to Harrisburg, whether it be teachers, firemen, policemen looking for their benefit. And of course, some were for them, some were against them. And those were contentious times.

SB: Well, as a Leader how did you convince Members that it was in their best interest to vote for taxes or for pay raises?

RC: Well, you know when you lead, you got to lead and if you're there you got to make sure that you lead in the right direction. You got to make sure that they understand the real consequences if you don't do an action. As opposed if you do an action. And there were Members that just really shied away from that. That kind of became difficult. And sometimes you had to go across the aisle. There was one instance, whenever there was a tax vote and Republicans – that was in 1968, I was on staff and [19]69, I guess – [19]68, and we need one vote. We had 103 [Republican] Members. We could get 101 votes for

a tax, but we couldn't get the other two. And that went on and on and on. And, anyway, it ended up that one of the Democrats voted, one of the Democratic Members, got the 102. And the same thing happened whenever Jim Manderino was Floor Leader. They went on for months. The budget should have been done the end of June; it wasn't until late August that we passed the budget. And I think that's what really helped do in the Democratic Party to make sure that people were upset because we were going on a budget that had been placed the year before; stopgap budget. So, anyhow, why that got a lot of people upset. And I think that's what really helped us to take the majority as part of it.

SB: In your role as Caucus Secretary, were you also involved in grooming candidates and mentoring new Legislators coming in?

RC: Oh, you know, I wasn't on the Campaign Committee per say. Whenever I was there, it really fell into a position of the Policy Chairman doing x, y, z. The Policy Chairman meeting every week with the Members discussing the issues that would be presented or issues of concern to the General Assembly or to the Republicans. But, then the Chairman of the Policy Committee, the one that followed me, was given the responsibility of being the Chairman of the Campaign Committee. And that's how we did that. So, the Policy Chairman had two roles: conduct the meeting of the Policy Committee and also to organize the Campaign Committees.

SB: Were you also involved in reapportionment as part of the Leadership?

RC: No, the reapportionment to some degree, but we had a Reapportionment Committee and we had a Chairman of the Committee and we had staffs that worked on reapportionment. But, you made your views known to the Reapportionment Committee as what you thought you would like to have. With a decline of population in urban areas and the growth in the suburban areas, this necessitated a shift. As I recall, I was first elected in 1971, I think we had 25 legislators from Allegheny County. And as the population decreased in Allegheny County and moved into the suburbs from Butler County and moved to the East and York County picked up some seats and Chester County and Bucks County, the population grew there. That meant that we would lose seats in Western Pennsylvania and they would pick up seats in the eastern part of the state and the northern part of the state. So, that was an impact on us locally in the Allegheny County. But, then what happened was the Members from the city of Pittsburgh wanted to intrude into the suburbs. And to that extent that's where we got involved. We tried to stop that intrusion. And we tried to say, "Well you lost the population in the city of Pittsburgh, ought not to be a Legislator from the suburbs ought to suffer because you lost the city of Pittsburgh." But, it seemed like we always compromised. And in the compromising we would say, "Ok, we'll allow x, y, z Member to move into some of the suburban communities," especially if they were Democrat. *(laugh)*

SB: Well, besides population change, your District must have changed in 25 years. How did you respond to that?

RC: I made them all Republicans.

SB: Well, how did you do that?

RC: Well, I think the voting trends were there because of the like of what you did. And Democrats crossed the line to vote for me all the time. And I think there was a feeling that they were getting serviced well and they were comfortable with me and had a comfort level. And I believe that carried through into my predecessor.

SB: Well, how did you characterize the difference between Republicans and Democrats in those days in Pennsylvania?

RC: Oh, in my legislative District, one thing you have to remember is that sometimes that people get elected they have a view of people being one way or the other hardheaded. I would say in my time I might have had real “die in the wood” Democrats. Die in the wood Democrats that wouldn’t vote for a Republican if their life depended on it. You know, 30 or 40 that I knew that really were outspoken. The same way with Republicans, you know. I was always concerned when somebody would say to me, “I never voted for a damn Democrat in my life.” And the guy would say to me, “I never voted for a damn Republican in my life.” You know, that troubled me because that said to me that that individual really is not in tune to what is happening in the real world. You can’t be all Democrats and all Republicans. There’s got to be an opportunity for people

to express themselves. And I think today people, and then too, they looked at you as what you stood for. If you had the moral fiber and the integrity, they supported you.

SB: Has the Party system changed a great deal since you began running?

RC: Oh yeah. When I first ran you had a Party structure that was in place, Democrats and Republicans. Today in very few communities do they have a two-Party system, you know. Where I live presently, I don't think there is a Democrat that serves on the Town Council, School Board. In the community I lived one other time there's not a Republican, they have no Republican Party. So, you know, there's a lack of competition. If a community is a Democratic community today, it stays Democrat. If it's Republican, it stays Republican. That's just the way it is. But, the people, that's what the nice part about what I'm saying to you is, the nice part about it is that if a community is strongly Democratic or strongly Republican, if there is a good candidate running people are smart enough to say I'm going to vote for the good candidate. Whether it be a Democrat or Republican in that community.

SB: What caused the change?

RC: I think that people begin to realize that not everybody is right all the time. And they look at what you can do and they look at the economy. They look at what you provide, they look at how their children are progressing, they look at their jobs. You know, those

are issues that reflect on the way people think, in my view, on how their going to vote. Except, I said those hardheads on either side.

SB: Well, since we're talking about change. What were the biggest changes in the Legislature in your 25 years of service?

RC: The operation of it? Oh, I think Members having offices. I think that was important, to do their work. And right now, of course, we've become a full-time Legislature. Some people say today we ought not to do that. We ought to revert back to what we were before. I'm not quite sure of that. I think that the complexity of the issues today are such that Members have to be apprised of what's going on in the Federal Government because of the programs they put in place that really dovetail on what we do here. If we don't comply with what they want, then they shut off money that we should get coming to us. I think that has been something that I have looked at. On the operation of the General Assembly, one of the great things we did, and Jack Seltzer did this, is that we turn around and said that we would put in a Bi-Partisan Management Committee. Prior to that, the Party controlled the General Assembly, if you were the majority Party; Democrat or Republican. You then had an opportunity to fire everybody who worked in CORE. Fire them all. And you elected a Chief Clerk [and] Assistant Chief Clerk of that Party. And every time the politics changed there was that change in place. So, Jack Seltzer came up with an idea, he said, "Look we'll get rid of that." And that's whenever he crafted – we all worked on it in Leadership – crafted, and put that in place to go for the

Bi-Partisan Management Committee. And the Chief Clerk is elected by the five leaders of the Caucus and they just really have done a good job.

SB: Earlier you said too the makeup has changed from older individuals, people who were veterans and also you mentioned a lot of them came not out of law professions, but from industry. What difference does that make and how has that changed?

RC: Well, I think, and I've always said this – I could be wrong, but it's my view – my personal view is when I first came to the General Assembly and we had Leaders and Members of the General Assembly, many of them served in World War II. We had fighter pilots, paratroopers, sloggers, you know in the infantry and navy. And I think they developed a certain thing about life that really held them in stead. And a lot of them became self-made. They went on and got an education and they knew how difficult it was. And I think they brought a mentality there that's a, you know, "we got to do what we have to do, but we have to do it in the right way." And, "we can't look at this saying that this is our livelihood, this is a part-time job," essentially. And they worked at it that way. Today it's changed and I said, you know, it's changed for the better in my view. Contrary to what I said before about what they presented, but it was a different era. Everything changes and a lot of the Members today I see have a lot of integrity and really want to do a good job. They're bright guys. They're a lot brighter than we were. You know, these young people are really bright. But, I think the life experience that they don't have leaves a little bit of a void that I think they should have.

SB: Does it change their approach to the legislative process?

RC: Oh, I think you got to look at it and say, yeah I think so. I think life experiences are very important, very important. I mean when you make decisions on social issues, on issues of concern to people of means and people who don't have means; older citizens, young people for education. You've got to be able to put that in perspective to make sure you fully comprehend there's not just you in your life, but other people who are there who might need more help than you need or want to give; compassion.

SB: One of the statements too, that you made earlier was about the Leadership and the role of the Chairman comes up. How has that changed in the legislative process?

RC: [Are] you talking about the Policy Chairman or Chair ?

SB: Chairpersons of committees.

RC: Oh, okay. I was on that committee, Committee on Committees. Is that what you were referring to?

SB: Well, I guess I'm talking about the process and the importance of legislation being passed through committees. What is the role of the Chair of the Committees and how has that changed in the time that you served?

RC: That's something that really has changed and really all for the better. When I was first elected and I served under a Democrat who was Chairman of the State Government Committee from Philadelphia. And Sam Hayes and I were two of the guys on that committee. The gentlemen from Philadelphia – I won't mention his name, I know it; great guy – and anyway, he called a committee meeting. We'd go to his office. Well, Sam and I would be there and other people wouldn't come. "Well, I want to get this little bill out of Committee here. Doesn't do much, gives Philadelphia a million dollars for a little project they got down there." So, the bill came out of committee. And the Chairman at that particular time, anything he wanted that was it. It came out. Then the news media wasn't allowed in. They would be standing outside the hall waiting with, "What went on in there, what went on in there?," looking for you to tell them what went on in there. And of course we said, "We defer to the Chairman," and we'd leave. But, then the change came about and the committee's meetings were open and that was important. And then the Media was allowed in to do the reporting. But, yeah, prior to that the Chairman just ruled.

SB: At one point in your career you were actually running for two public offices at one time. Could you describe what prompted you to do that and what occurred?

RC: One time I had an idea that I should come back to Allegheny County and try to save Allegheny County. *(laugh)* I ran for County Commissioner [1991] and for my House seat. And anyway, I lost in the Primary by about 80 votes. I think that's the best thing that ever happened to me, because Allegheny County was on the verge of going broke

and having all kind of financial problems. But, I ran both times. It was a good exercise. I never realized how big Allegheny County was. I went into parts of Allegheny County where I thought there were Indians hiding in the woods (*laugh*). But, it was interesting. It was a good experience, good experience.

SB: Do you think Representatives today can have two offices?

RC: No, no I mean not today. At one time some people served here and also maybe the Mayor of a community or a councilman or commissioner of a community, but not today, not today.

SB: What advice would you give to new Members coming in today?

RC: Boy, they might not like this, but I think pick an issue or an area that you think you want to excel in and you work it, looking at that issue and trying to learn all you can about that issue. And what you're hopes are for what you hope to achieve and I think there is enough older Members around that would give good council. Some Members may not want to think that they need any council. They already know what they should be doing. I never subscribed to that. They maybe right, but my view is that I think they should just look and say, "I need some help, what do you suggest I do and what is the best way for me to precede."

SB: What is the issue that you wanted to excel in?

RC: Oh, you know, in those years I really looked at issues that affected local communities; where I came from. I looked at the issue of policemen. I look at the issue of firemen because that's where I really knew what was going on. I looked at some of the issues, social issues, because when I was involved with the Elks we were very prone to do a lot of things for different issues that were relating to providing health care. So, those were the issues that I really looked at, you know. And like I said before, volunteer firemen, the Loan Fund, that was extremely important and that really has been one of the things I thought that was really great. Talked about vehicular homicide too, you know, that was an issue that I felt strongly about and that was part of the policing and the law, you know, that we hoped to help correct some things.

SB: What was the most difficult issue that you had to convince others to go along with you?

RC: Welfare reform was always tough. You know, you always had people coming to Harrisburg in those days that really were not satisfied with what benefits were being provided. And you had to make sure that you could balance what you thought was the right thing to do on those issues. One issue comes to mind in my early career – Marty Mullen [Martin P. Mullen; State Representative, Philadelphia County 1955-1982] from Philadelphia, he had been the Majority Appropriations Chairman, and we were debating a welfare bill on the Floor. And it so happened that Philadelphia wanted, welfare people wanted, five million dollars additional money; that was it. And Marty Mullen, being the

Chairman of the Appropriations Committee on the Democratic side, got up on the Floor and denounced the appropriation as being excessive and saying we're not going to do it at this particular time, vote against it. And of course, my phone rang off the hook people denouncing me for that vote. But, those kinds of issues permeate the General Assembly at different times. Social issues are difficult to deal with. And you know, you want to have compassion, (*inaudible*) whenever somebody's there that is the Chairman of the Committee and says you ought not to do that, you don't do it.

SB: At one point, you were actually in the hospital during your service and word was you continued your relationship with the restaurants in town. Could you describe that?

RC: (*laugh*) Yeah, 1990, I guess it was, or [19]92, I had a hip replacement. And I had it done over at Hershey Medical Center. And the food I ate, I just couldn't taste anything. So, anyway, I made a couple of calls to my staff people and they called over to a couple of restaurants here, Catalano's being one and the Maverick being the other. And they brought me in food, so, yeah.

SB: Were they common places then to also have your business lunches and to do a lot of the operations?

RC: Absolutely, absolutely. Good restaurants, great restaurants.

SB: Well, looking back on your career, what do you consider your greatest accomplishments?

RC: I look back and I really believe that I ended my career on a note of being fair and honest, having integrity and trying to do what was right. And not really trying to destroy anybody or any issue. And I felt that I carried out my part of my bargain with myself and my self-esteem and what I believed is the right thing to do.

SB: What went into your decision not to run again in [19]94?

RC: Coming down the Turnpike, I was 66 years old, it's snowing and I'm stuck on the Turnpike and, "oh my God," I said, "I'm crazy. I got to get out of here." So, I came home to my wife and I talked to her in December-something or January. I said, "Look this is it, no more. I don't want to be a statistic on the Turnpike." So, I didn't run anymore. That was it. I was 66 years old. It was time for me to go. I think really (**END OF SIDE 1**) you have to know when it's time to go. And I knew it was time for me to go after 28 years. I knew then.

SB: Were there difficulties or obstacles because you were traveling further to Harrisburg than other Legislators?

RC: Oh, it wasn't a pleasant drive. You know, when I first started we were all poor as church mice, as Legislators. I used to drive from my home up to Butler County, now I

lived in Etna and that was probably about 25 miles up to Butler County. And there was a gentleman up there that had a farm, Francis Kennedy [H. Francis Kennedy; State Representative, Beaver and Butler Counties, 1963-1974], and he had been a member of the General Assembly. So, he and I and another gentleman by the name of Don Fox [Donald W. Fox; State Representative, Lawrence and Mercer Counties, 1957-1974], from over in the [*inaudible*] Valley, the next county over, and Budd Dwyer [R. Budd Dwyer; State Representative, Crawford County, 1965-1970; State Senator, 1971-1982; State Treasurer, 1981-1987] – the former Auditor General – we would meet at Francis Kennedy’s farmhouse. Of course, Budd Dwyer had to have his breakfast and Mrs. Kennedy would make him bacon and eggs and toast. And then we’d all get in one car and drive to Harrisburg. And we did that because, you know, it was economical. And then with the advent of getting money to be able to lease cars, why that kind of changed. But, we did that for a couple of years, you know. And that was difficult too, if you had a meeting and somebody had to get back and you know scheduling was a little bit difficult, but that is what we did.

SB: Were you one to use cell phones or other communication in the car on the way over?

RC: Cell phones weren’t there. Not then. Nah, they didn’t have cell phones, then.

SB: That wasn’t there yet.

RC: No, they weren’t there yet.

SB: And what do you consider your major disappointments?

RC: Disappointments. You know, objectively you always want to do more. And I think some of the Governors disappointed me to some extent and some the way they conducted themselves. I won't name them and won't get into that, but I think some of the things that were done by them I didn't care for. You know, Governors do have a lot of power and can do a lot of things. But, all in all I think I looked at it and my wife always says this, "You know, your cup is always half full, mine is half empty." And I kid her about that. And I think I went through that being half full rather than half empty and looking at life that way you can accept defeats. You can do it graciously and you can accept things and try to make them right whenever you have an opportunity. And I did on different occasions.

SB: What did you enjoy most about being a Legislator?

RC: You know, I never really had an ego, never really had an ego. I enjoyed the people. I enjoyed the opportunity to serve. I enjoyed the opportunity to be able to say that here is an accomplishment that really will be helping society move forward. I was born during the Depression. I was born in 1928, and I knew what life was going forward and that always helped me in stead. And that goes back to what I said before, life experiences are something that places a value on you and your thought processes.

SB: What did you like least about being a Legislator?

RC: Oh, you know I'll tell you going to all those banquets and all those dinners. I ate more chicken than enough. You know, sometimes you had you know, two events to go to in an evening. You know, you go here go there and you know – I'm talking about back in your District. Saturday nights my wife said, "Well, what are we doing?" [I said] "Well, we have to go to this firehouse, they're having a dinner." "Again!" "Yep." "Like chicken?" "Yep." So, you know that was it, you were doing that. But, I enjoyed the people and you got there you had a good time. But, you know, we'd like to do something on a weekend other than that.

SB: Is it hard to have a personal life while being a Legislator?

RC: If you're in a District that's very active with a lot of fire departments a lot of different groups, you know, the farmers and all that, it becomes more difficult. You got to be out there. You know, I had to be out there because I came from a Democratic District. If Rick Cessar didn't show up, "Huh, he's getting too high-headed for us here." And some of my Democratic friends never went. But, you know they still voted for him. With you, they looked at you.

SB: How did campaigning change over the years?

RC: A lot different. You know, today I think my first race cost me a grand total of \$15,000 maybe less. Today, you know, I spend a half a million or a million dollars for a seat. And they depend on the Media, depend on fliers, you know. Then when I first campaigned, I had poll watchers working all the polls. I had everybody who knew everybody calling everybody, you know. Some of that really exists today, but not like it did then. And of course, some of the unions, the PSEA [Pennsylvania State Education Association] and you know, those people participated and they helped depending on your view on their particular issue.

SB: Are there ways in which you would like to see the Legislator's roles change as a result of more experience?

RC: Well, I think that's for them to decide. I have some opinions, but I just don't think I ought to. I think, on the whole, some of them work hard. And you know, there are different views on different aspects of government that some people feel strongly about. And I've said this talking to different Legislators, I think that one of the things today, if I was there today, my concern would be centered around school taxes. You know, the Governor's Act 72 [lower property/school taxes because of gambling revenues], accepting it. But, I think that to me in a state like Pennsylvania where you have an awful lot of senior citizens, school taxes are really difficult. And I think there has to be a real, strong hard look at that issue. And I'm sure they are looking at it. There are different groups coming up with different ideas.

SB: Well, what did you do after you stepped away from the House?

RC: Oh, I was on a Bank Board [People's Savings and Loan Association 1987-1992] and I retired and they made me the Chairman of a Board of a bank, about a \$300 million dollar bank [Laurel Savings Bank 1998-present]. [I'm] Chairman of the Board of MAGLEV [1995-present], trying to build a high-speed train from Pittsburgh to the airport; been to Washington [D.C.] on a numerous occasions on that. Doing a little of lobbying, trying to get funds for it. You know, doing those things. Some grandchildren and taking my wife on vacations here and there, you know. I guess I just think I just can't sit still and not do anything. And that's how I feel about life. I want to keep myself mentally invigorated and physically mobile.

SB: Are you still politically involved?

RC: Oh, to a degree. You know, I support candidates, but I'm not in the forefront. No.

SB: And what does the future hold for Rick Cessar?

RC: Oh, gee I'll tell you slow up a little bit and smell the roses a little bit more I guess and listen to what my wife wants more. She likes the sea, she likes the ocean, she likes to read books, you know, go on trips like that.

SB: Do you still stay in touch with fellow legislators or staff that you knew while you were here?

RC: I come up and I see a lot of the people here. Fortunately, for me, my good friends – some of them died I shared with – but two of them in particular; Terry McVerry’s [Terence McVerry; State Representative, Allegheny County 1979-1990] now on the Federal bench; Mike Fisher’s [D. Michael Fisher; State Senator, 1981-1996; State Representative, Allegheny County 1975-1980] on the Federal bench, Third Circuit; they’re very good friends. As a matter of fact, we’re going to be having lunch in the next couple of weeks. Prior to their deaths, George Pott [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1977-1986] and Elaine Farmer [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1987-1996]. Jim Byrd, myself and Terry McVerry every year we had lunch or dinner at Christmas time and got together and it was a tradition. Unfortunately, Lane passed away and George passed away and I think they passed away within six or eight months of each other. And that kind of put a damper on our camaraderie in that respect.

SB: At your Farewell Address you gave special mention to Ivan Itkin [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1973-1998] and Matthew Ryan. Could you describe some of the reasons for that and are there others now that upon reflection that were very important in those years?

RC: Oh sure. I mean that was the moment of the day. I like Ivan. Ivan was a Democrat and he was an honorable man, really an honorable man. And always fair. Anytime I

wanted to get anything done, I got a bill I had anything, I saw Ivan, “Don’t worry about it we’ll move it, do it for you.” Matt Ryan was Matt Ryan. Matt Ryan became almost an icon in the General Assembly. And it was unfortunate he passed away during his tenure as the Speaker. But, those were two great friends, great friends.

SB: Your Farewell Address was fairly short. Are there others that you can think of?

RC: Yeah, you know, the day was wearing on. Everybody took, you know, and I didn’t say too, too much. But, I had made my friendships over the years with people. And you know, I stop and I look back on Lee Donaldson, Ken Lee, Joe Hepford [H. Joseph Hepford; State Representative, Dauphin County 1963-1976], Al Bush [Alvin C. Bush; State Representative, Lycoming County, 1961-1970 and 1984-1994], Warren Spencer [State Representative, Potter and Tioga Counties, 1963-1984], Leroy Irvis [K. Leroy Irvis; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1959-1988; Speaker, 1977-1978 and 1983-1988] , you know, they were all good friends. Jim Manderino, Max Pievsky [State Representative, Philadelphia County 1967-1990], and of course some of the new Members here too today that are in Leadership. But, to me it was just a great opportunity to be able to be there at this particular time. Craig Truax, who worked on my staff when I was the Whip and also the Caucus Secretary – had been the Secretary of State under the Administration of Ray Shafer [Governor 1967-1971] – one of the keenest political minds I have ever met. And of course, he and I would talk about politics and the history of politics in Pennsylvania. And I just wish that I would have, what you’re doing now, recorded his comments to me about all the nuisances that occurred with Ray Shafer and

Bill Scranton [Governor 1963-1967] and Dave Lawrence [Governor 1959-1963]. You know, and that's why I want to do this. You know, I think its history that's gone and never be captured, never be captured. And they had so much to offer. You know, so much to offer.

SB: Well, are there younger Members that you mentored and feel that you had a role in guiding?

RC: Well, you know, whenever you're there you talk to Members and you know, there's an independence in some Members. They'll listen to you and I mentored an awful lot of them in how to play golf. *(laugh)* And we kid about that to this day. But, I think they would ask your advice and if they served on your Committee they came to you and you know, there are still Members I see, "Rick, I can remember when you told me not to do this, I did this," you know, one of those things. But, per se for me, I tried to do that with people from the county. I'd get them and say, "Ok, here we are we're going to make sure you are on this committee, that committee and this is what I want you to do in this one and what I want you to do – " But, for me to infringe on the other Leaders from the other counties, I wouldn't do that.

SB: Well, before you were talking about your role in history. How do want to be remembered?

RC: How do I want to be remembered? Rick Cessar: good guy, honest, fair. Just really respected other people as he wanted to be respected. I think that's pretty much it with me.

SB: Well, I want to thank you for participating in this project and I wish you well.

RC: Thank you very much and I appreciate the opportunity to do this with you. You've been a great moderator and I'm sure that you'll get a lot of the other Members to do this and I think it's a great project.

SB: Thank you.

RC: You're welcome.