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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Susan Laughlin (D)

16th District

Allegheny & Beaver Counties

1989-2004

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Simon J. Bronner, Ph.D.
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Transcript: Heather Deppen Hillard

Simon Bronner (SB): Good morning.

The Honorable Susan Bogosian Laughlin (SBL): Good morning, Simon.

SB: I'm with Representative Laughlin of the 16th District, and you have had many years of service here in the House and I would like to ask you about that. Where I'd like to begin is to ask you about what experiences in your childhood help explain who you are today?

SBL: Well, I guess I can start with my parents. My father came here with his twin brother from Armenia in 1913. They left Armenia because that's when the Turks were killing off the Armenians. In fact, his parents, his sister and her daughter were both killed. So, somehow he landed in Montana and then to North Dakota –he worked for the railroad. It was so cold there – he used to tell us that it was 30 degrees below zero there. So, he had a friend in Pennsylvania and they were writing to each other and he told them, “Why don't you come down to Pennsylvania and you can work in a mill. It's warm there and you don't have to work outside like you did at the railroad.” So, him and his brother did go to Pennsylvania, and in-between there – I don't know when it happened but – my father did serve some time in the Army; he was a cook there. And, I don't know how he got along there because, you know, he didn't speak much English. But, I guess, he eventually learned it and, in fact, he even learned to write – read and write – in English. And while he was there – he was 20 years old when he first came here [the United States] – while he was there [Army], about almost 15 years, his friend said that, you know, he's

got a nice lady over in Beirut. And he said, “Why don’t you send her your picture and I’ll tell her to send you her picture.” So, that’s what they did; they liked each other’s picture and he sent her money to come over here [United States]. And whenever she got here, he said, “You’re not the woman in this picture.” And she says, “Well, if you don’t want to marry me I’m going back.” And he said – well, his friend then said, “Well, no, if you don’t marry her, I’ll marry her.” But that didn’t happen; they both got married and raised four children. And to tell you the truth, I don’t know how we ever learned English because we only knew Armenian. That’s how they talked – that’s how they spoke to us in Armenian. But somehow, I guess playing with other kids, we learned until we went to school. But (*pause*), I know that I had a lot of good friends from the beginning.

Whenever I went to school – in fact, to this day, these friends are together. There were nine of us in the beginning; we all went to school together. About a few years after I was married we formed a card club and we started playing Pinochle for over 30 years. [We] went to dinner – we had dinner first; we’d cook dinner and then sit down and play cards. And, about, after 30 years we were sick and tired of playing Pinochle, so they decided we would play another game and that was Poker. So, to this day, we play Poker once a month. And I’ll tell you, this is like therapy for all of us. You know, we all get together, we talk, we laugh, [get] through tragedies, and any kind of events that go on. And it stays in that club; it doesn’t go out. That’s why, I guess, we’ve been together for so long. But anyway – growing up, my brother had a paper route and whenever he was, I think, 16 years old, he quit the paper route and he gave it to me and then I had the paper route until I was 16 and then my other sister had it. And, then when she decided to stop delivering papers, we had to give it up because my other sister did not want to do that. But anyway,

we were all pretty average students, except for my one sister who was always on the honor roll – we used to kid her about that all the time – but, she was very serious and she did very well in life, you know, she became a nurse. She married a dentist and she was his nurse. So, and my brother, then, went to the Navy and he was gone for four years; he was in Japan. And I was working in a shoe store and one day I was sitting, marking some boxes, and a box fell down. And low-and-behold it was Charlie Laughlin [State Representative, Beaver County, 1973-1988] that picked it up and said, “Not only am I good looking, but I’m also helpful.” So that was my first encounter with my future husband. And, before that, I was babysitting for a woman and she says, “I found a really nice man for you.” She used to shop at the A&P and that’s where he worked; he was a produce manager there. So, after the incident in the [shoe] store, he called me up the next day. He says, “Aren’t you Susie Bogosian?” I says, “Yes.” He says, “You know, I’ve been wanting to call you,” he says, “but there’s so many Bogosian’s in the book.” There was two. *(laughs)* So he says he didn’t know which number to call. But anyway, he calls me and we make a date – it was February 14th – and he brings me flowers and a box of candy. Well, I thought that was pretty nice. But he came up in a cab – you see, he never had a car until, you know, after we were married. In fact, my parents never had a car and we never owned a home; we always stayed in an apartment – so, when he came to pick me up on February 14th, my parents really didn’t – especially my mother – did not like him because he seemed like he was arrogant. And they didn’t like the fact that he always came to pick me up in a car – in a taxi. *(laughs)* And this was in 1951. And then we would always get a cab to come back to the house and beep the horn – my parents did not like that. *(laughs)* So, we went to – we had dinner and we went to a movie and I thought,

“Hey, this is pretty nice.” *(laughs)* And, that was going on for a few months and my mother said, “You know, you’re seeing too much of him.” She says, “You better stop.” So, I didn’t know what the heck to do then. You know, I really wasn’t in love with him then, but I liked him; he was different from all the other guys I dated. So, he calls me up and he says, “Well, what time do you want me to pick you up?” And I said, “You know what, I can’t go out with you tonight.” He says, “Why?” I says, “Well, I have to wash my hair.” He says, “I’m coming up at 7 o’clock and you better be ready.” *(laughs)* So, then I started inviting him over to dinner on Sundays. He did not like the food; it was Armenian food. You know, he asked me what my nationality was and I says, “Armenian,” and he says, “What’s that?” And whenever I told him, he had never heard of an Armenian. But anyway, another few months passed and we were walking on the street – crossing the street on 11th Street and Ambridge – and he says, “Let’s get married.” I says, “Okay.” *(laughs)* So, the following week we went to Pittsburgh [and] we picked out a ring for him and a ring for me – a wedding ring for me. So, we come home and showed my parents and my mother says, “That’s not an engagement ring.” And I said, “Well, you know, that will come later.” So, we did get married. A day – right before we went to the Church, he calls me up and he says, “We have all these flowers here. What are we going to do with them? We delivered all the ones that were supposed to get the flowers. We have about five left. What should we do with them?” He was angry with me on the day that we were getting married. So, I’m walking down the aisle and – he’s the kind of guy that has to tell you off and then he forgets that he did that and he thinks that, you know, we should forget too, and everything’s okay after that; but he’s got to get it off of his chest. So, we walk down the aisle and everything’s fine,

you know, like nothing happened and then we have the reception and we go on our honeymoon to Washington D.C. – on a bus. *(laughs)* And, we had a great time there. But, we had to get married on a Monday because his boss at the A&P said, “You know, you can’t get married on a Saturday; you have to work.” *(laughs)* So, we got married on a Monday. But then, you know, the kids started coming and he said, “You know, we have to get out of this three-room apartment.” First, we were in two-rooms when we got married and then the lady passed away across the hall in three-rooms, so we just carried our stuff over across the hall and moved into three-rooms. And, whenever my daughter was born, he said, you know, we have to get out of here. So, he found a house in Conway and we moved to Conway. And, life was very good; we had to buy a car then—that was the first time we bought a car in 1959 – when we bought the house. In fact, when he went to buy the car, he went to the dealership and he said, “I have \$5,000. That’s all I can pay for a car.” So we got a brand new car for \$5000. But...

SB: Did you know that he had political ambitions at that time?

SBL: No. No we did not. In fact, his brother, Larry, was very much involved in politics. He was a Union Steward at the A.M. Byers Company¹ and he negotiated contracts with, not only with the Union, but even with the Police in the Ambridge area. And, in fact, Larry also became the Worker’s Comp[ensation] man. He didn’t have the education, and yet, there was something about him. And even, you know, the rest of the family – they were all very smart. When Charlie came to the House, people asked him if he was an attorney. That’s how smart he was, you know. Just “street smarts.” But all he

¹ Located in Ambridge, Pa.: America's largest producer of wrought iron products from 1930 and until 1969.

did, you know, was 12 years in school. But, when we were 21 years old, Larry came to us and said, "You have to register." So, we got registered and we started voting. I don't think we missed any voting days. And then, about 1965 – I have a son also; he's the firstborn. And Sallie was born on December 23rd of 1957 and in 1960, 1950 – when was it – 1965 she had gotten some pains in her stomach and she was home from school for about a week and the pains were still there, so I took her to the doctor and he couldn't find anything wrong with her. So, they took her to the hospital and still couldn't find anything wrong with her, [so] they took out her appendix and she was still sick. So, then the doctor said, "You know, we better take her to Children's Hospital." And, Children's Hospital did a biopsy under her arm and they said she has Burkitts African Lymphosarcoma. And I said, "Well, what's that?" and he says, "That's the kind of cancer she's got." So, you know, we were devastated. We didn't know what was going to happen next. So, she was going through chemo[therapy] and radiation, and it was only six months since she started getting the pains that she passed away. And Charlie could not deal with that; he could not. Right after we buried her he wanted to leave. He says, "I want to get as far away as possible from here." I says, "You know, no matter where you go she's going to be with you." So, he thought about it [and] he says, "Okay." So then he started getting involved in politics at that time, just to keep his mind off of her. I had to take down all her pictures; he couldn't even go into her room. And whenever he heard anyone's name was Sallie, you know, that would hit him again. But, getting involved in politics, I guess, was the best thing that happened to him. He started with the Mayor in Conway who was trying to defeat an incumbent. And he walked the whole . In fact, he had holes in his shoes from all the walking he did. And his candidate did not

win. So then – that was in the Primary – then in the General, he walked the District again to get a write-in vote for his candidate, and his candidate won. So, that’s what started it all. And then he joined the Young Democrats and then whenever [an] open seat came – Bob Hamilton [State Representative, Beaver County 1941-1946; 1949-1972] was the Member and he was in for, I think, 32 or 34 years and he was retiring so – he says he would like to run for that seat. I said, “Okay.” There were four other candidates and, of course, he came out on top; he won that election. And then in the General, the Senator – who was Jim Ross [State Senator, 1973-1990] who was running for the first time in as Senate; he was the County Commissioner. They were on the outs; Charlie and Jim Ross were on the outs. So, the Senator did not support Charlie and he only won by 69 votes. And after the – what do you call it, he had a, (*laughs*) I can’t think of the word – but anyway...

SB: Runoff, you mean?

SBL: Yes. Then he only won by 21 votes. So, that’s when I got involved, when he got Sworn-In, I thought, “You know, he’s got to run in two years and if he loses he’s going to have to look for another job.” Although, he said, “You know, if I have to dig ditches, I’ll do that.” He was a hard worker. But that’s whenever I started taking phone calls at home and answering the door at home; it was *constant*. And, I wrote everything down for him; I gave him the telephone numbers and then he would come home and he would call them back and answer their questions. And after a few months I thought, “You know, I could do this. You know, why should I just write it down and give it to him?” So, I started

taking care of it myself. We had a Watts line at home; I called the Departments myself and I got the answers and got back to the constituents and told them that, “Representative Charlie Laughlin told me to tell you that he took care of your problem.” So, that’s how it went from 1973 until 1983. They had no District office until, I think, [19]77 or [19]78, and I was begging him to open up an office because nothing was getting done at home and I just needed a break. I wasn’t getting paid to do this, so please, open up an office. So, it took him almost five years before he did that. And, I knew –

SB: What was his resistance?

SBL: He said I’m the only one he can trust. So, finally he got two people to replace me. But, he would get on the radio every month to answer questions, and at the end he would always say, “If you need anything, call my wife, Susan,” after he opened up the office. And he would give the *home number*! And he’d come home and I’d say, you know, “Why don’t you give your office number?” So, I think after that he did start giving his office number. But I said, “How do you know all [the answers to] these questions people ask you?” And you know what he said to me? “I just make it up as I go along.” (*laughs*) But anyway, he was good. He was very good at taking care of the constituents. He says, “Only give me the problems you can’t handle.” So, that’s what we did. If I couldn’t take care of a constituent, he would do it.

SB: Would you talk about politics at home?

SBL: Well, mostly, you know, nothing about legislation; just the politics. And he was the kind of guy – if a politician wasn't supporting me – he'd go after them in their Election. So, he built up a strong relationship with the Elected Officials that way. I guess it paid off because the following two years – for the Second Election – the guy that ran against him as a Republican, switched to Democrat. So, after that Election – after the Second Election – Charlie won by 5,000 votes and I don't think he had any real opposition until 1982, ten years later, when an Attorney ran against him, and Charlie beat him pretty bad too. So, after that, you know, he really didn't have any kind of opposition.

SB: Were you involved in the campaigns?

SBL: Yes. After he got into Office I was involved. In fact, I was his Treasurer. You know, I wrote all the expenses. In fact, I even did his House expenses beside his campaign expenses. And, it was a lot of work for me and I still do it. I still do my own campaign and my own expenses there and my own House expenses; I do all of that because I'm used to doing it.

SB: Did you ask him for a salary?

SBL: You know what he said to me? I says, "I'm not getting paid to do this," and he says, "You're getting a check." I says, "I would get that anyway." (*laughs*) He always had an answer. And, you know, sometimes we'd get in fights. Not often – we didn't

fight that often – but sometimes I'd get angry with him and we'd fight and he would always win. But you know what? I always got my way – I still got my way. (*laughs*)

SB: Would you tell him then, when you would disagree with a decision he made?

SBL: Yeah, I did. And every once in a while he'd say, "Yeah, you're right." But not very often. (*laughs*)

SB: Tell us then, about the circumstances leading to your running for Election.

SBL: Well, about – when he [Charlie] was in the hospital, we were talking to him and I left for some reason, and he said to my son, Tom, he said, "You know, if I don't make it," he says, "tell your mom to run for my seat." And my son, Tom, told me that and I said, you know, "I can't do this." And I told that to Charlie, I says, "I can't do this." He says, "Yes you can." He had more confidence in me than I did. So, you know, we went through the funeral – like, you know, it was sixteen days before the Election [and] we couldn't get his name off of the ballot; it was too late. So, the only thing that I could do was run on a write-in. So, I put a letter together – it was only about a handful of people who came to my house – I put a letter together and in with that letter was a sample ballot and the letter told you exactly where to place the stickers that I had in the envelope. And so, that's what we did; we sent them to the whole District. And I even was working the polls and we had people at the polls with stickers, just in case. But [it was] unbelievable; people had stickers in their pockets. They couldn't wait to vote for me. And, I guess,

that's how I got over 9,000 write-in votes and the Election Bureau told me that – and then Charlie got 1,100 votes. And there were two other candidates that, you know – 250 for one and 50 for the other. So, that was a big thing to go through. But, the Election Bureau told me there was about 2,500 other ballots that they could not count because they placed the sticker in the wrong place. Sometimes they placed them over his name, and you couldn't do that. You had to place it underneath his name, and it didn't count when you did that. So, yeah, I was very happy with that. In fact, when he used to be on the radio, he once said, "My wife is probably the only one that can beat me on the ballot." And that's exactly what I did.

SB: What are your memories of your first Swearing-In Ceremony?

SBL: It was awesome. I was able to bring my mother with me, and I just couldn't believe it. It was unbelievable. I remember the first time Charlie was Sworn-In. He couldn't be Sworn-In on the first Tuesday in November [January, 1973], because we were still going through the process of the recount. So, finally, about the middle of January we both went to Harrisburg with my son and we walked all the way down to the front, in front of the Speaker [Kenneth B. Lee; State Representative, Sullivan, Susquehanna and Wyoming Counties, 1957-1974; Speaker 1967-1968, 1973-1974] and he was Sworn-In then and we just walked up the aisle and he took his seat. But whenever I came in, I sat next to a fellow that sat next to Charlie on the House Floor, which was *very* nice for me. We had a lot to say, you know, mostly about my husband – Keith McCall [State Representative, Carbon County, 1982-2010; Speaker 2009-2010], a great

friend. And, of course, Tony Melio [Anthony; State Representative, Bucks County, 1987-2010] sat next to me, and that was one of the best things that could have happened to me because, you know – my husband – nine months later I'm on the House Floor and this fellow that kisses everybody and hugs everybody – he was kissing me I don't know how many times a day. He would hold my hand while we were sitting on the House Floor. He was so concerned about me and, you know, that made it so much easier for me and I really appreciate, you know, that he was that way with me. But that's all it was, you know, and his wife knew, you know, that he kisses everybody. He'd come in here and he'd kiss you. *(laughs)*

SB: Did you have other mentors when you were in the House?

SBL: You know, it was mostly the people that knew my husband – the Members – because they would all come up to me and talk about him [and tell me] what a great job he did with the Consumer [Affairs] Committee. And, they still talk to me about him. They think of different things that he did and said, and they think that he was the greatest.

SB: And then, in your service, you also were on the Consumer –

SBL: Yes.

SB: – Committee.

SBL: Yes. I guess they figured since he was the Chairman, they'd put me there too.

SB: What do you consider your accomplishments, then, in the House?

SBL: Well, as far as legislation goes, I looked to see, you know, some of the things that he had been working on. And the first thing that I thought of was, when the people were coming to the office after I had got in Office, about losing their homes because they can't pay the property taxes. And I said, "Well, you know, you can make payments." But, you know, at the time, he was gone and that bill only went from year to year. You had to keep introducing that same bill that would give you the option of making payments on your property taxes in order to save your home. So, that was the first bill that I passed [Act 63-1989], where it would just be an ongoing thing; we would never have to introduce this again. And I just think that that was a great thing to do for the constituents back home. But, one other thing that I did was from the Aliquippa School District, they wanted that two-tiered taxing because all the mills were closing down – and not only closing down, but they were actually removed – and so they lost that revenue there. So then, in order to get more money from the property, they said, "Why don't you have the two-tiered taxing," where they would still have to pay a higher percentage of taxes on that property and then lower the residents – residential. So, it seemed to have worked because they were able to get more revenue from that [Act 16-1993]. And another thing that I have done that I am quite proud of is, I had sponsored a Resolution to form a Site Committee to look for a site in Southwestern PA for a National Veterans Cemetery [HR 550-1998]. So, it was myself, my Senator, Gerald LaValle [State Senator, 1990-2008],

Paul Semmel [State Representative, Berks and Lehigh Counties, 1983-2006], who was the Chairman of the Veterans [Affairs and Emergency Preparedness] Committee, and John Pippy [State Senator, 2003-present; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1997-2003], [who] at that time was a Representative – before he became a Senator. So, we toured, I think, seven or eight different sites in Southwestern PA. It had to be no more than 75 miles away from Pittsburgh. So, we did find a site that we all agreed on and right now it's – you know, the funding is there [and] it's being built. It's not complete yet, but I understand that, you know, that a certain section of it is able to be used. But I think some of the greatest things that I have done I'm very proud of; whenever, I think it was just a couple years when I was in Office, I was able to get \$850,000 for a brand new road in Baden – between Baden and Harmony Township. And, after that in 1992 – whenever – with redistricting, I acquired Leetsdale; now I acquired Allegheny County. I didn't have all of Beaver County now, because of, you know, the mills closing down [and] the people moving out. I had to pick up 7,000 population because, you know, you need 60,000 for each Representative – 60,000 population. So, whenever I acquired Leetsdale, the Elected Officials came over to me with open arms and they said that, you know, “We need an overhead bridge, just like you have in Ambridge.” ...[Charlie]...was the one that worked on that bridge; [he] worked to get that funding for that overpass. And that's when I got into Office and Mike Veon [State Representative, Beaver County, 1985-2006] sponsored legislation to name that bridge after him. And it's there. You know, they did name it after him, although there was a little problem there; whenever the bill came to the Floor, there was another Member's name on there and one of the other Members did not want anything named after him, so that bill went down. And then Mike Veon, again,

sponsored a bill – a stand-alone bill [HB 749, Act 20: 1991-92] – which has Charlie’s name on it and it passed handily – unanimously, I should say. So, the people in Leetsdale came to me and said, “We want an overpass too, in Leetsdale,” because you had to cross over a railroad crossing to get to the Industrial Park in Leetsdale. So, I looked into it and PUC [Public Utility Commission] is the one that decided – and PennDot [Pennsylvania Department of Transportation]– that they were only going to put a stacking-lane in; but you *still* had to go across the Railroad Crossing. So, then I worked on PennDot [and] PUC, and I wrote letters, and I went to the Transportation Commission meeting and requested money for that overpass and just like that, “Okay, we’ll give you seven million dollars.” But, that was in [19]92 and that still isn’t built, but they’ve gone through all the phases and they’re working on the right-of-ways right now, and they say that they’ll probably break ground in 2005. So, I think that’s a great accomplishment. Also – I don’t know what it is with PennDot. I get along great with them. Henry Nutbrown would come down once a year – of course, I’d talk to him many times on the phone, and saw him at many meetings – but, once a year we would get in a car together and we would go through the District, and I’d say, “Henry, we need *this* resurfaced. We need another resurfacing somewhere else.” So – and he always came through for me. And then, we worked on – I don’t know if, you’re probably not familiar with Aliquippa, they have what they call, Constitution Boulevard, which is a road that was the worst in the whole three County area. And Henry Nutbrown then retired, so Ray Hack took his seat and me and Ray did the same thing. I says, “Ray, we’ve got to have money for this road.” I says, “Even the Governor Ridge [Thomas; Pennsylvania Governor, 1995-2001], who was coming to Aliquippa, he says, ‘This is the worst road I’ve ever been on.’” And I told him

[Ray Hack] that and he says, “Okay, we’ll get some money from Aliquippa because Aliquippa got \$25 million for a brand new Ambridge-Aliquippa bridge and there was money from there that, you know, they could use. And so, they used some of that money plus what PennDot had and it was just – I think three years ago they said, “Okay, we have all the money in place, we’re going to start.” So last year they started with [Route] 51 in Aliquippa, so it should be completed some time next year [2005]. But, the hillside was so bad that, you know, they would have to close that road, many, many times because of the slides. So now, you know, we have that in place. [*Editor’s note:* As per the request of Ms. Laughlin (July, 2009), the accomplishments that she had worked on as a Member of the House have been completed: the National Veterans Cemetery, Leetsdale Overpass, Hillside on Constitution Boulevard, and resurfacing of Constitution Boulevard.]

SB: What are your frustrations, reflecting back on your service?

SBL: Well, I think the frustrations are whenever you go after something and nothing happens. Then you keep going after it, and writing letters, and talking to different organizations [and] different people until finally, I think, they get tired of hearing from me and they say, “Go ahead and give it to her.” (*laughs*)

SB: Reflecting back, what do you think is a key to success in getting legislation through?

SBL: Well, to tell you the truth, you have to talk to the Members. With this two-tiered taxing, Matt Ryan [Matthew J.; State Representative, Delaware County, 1965-2003;

Speaker of the House, 1981-82 & 1995-2003] was a Leader at the time, and he said he did not like that bill. So, when it was up on the Floor, I went over to Matt and I says, “Matt, please don’t get up and say anything about this bill,” and he didn’t. *(laughs)* So, we were able to get it passed.

SB: Why do you think he did that for you?

SBL: I think he had an affection for my husband. He came down to his funeral and he gave a fantastic speech and he called him a Statesman. And, I think there was a good friendship there, and I felt the same about him too. In fact, all the times that I had opposition in the General [Election], my opponents really never had a lot of money from the Republicans and I went up to Matt one day and I says, “You know, Matt,” I says, “I want to thank you,” and he says, “Why?” And I says, “Because you never put any money into my opponents Campaign.” He said to me, “Republicans don’t believe in wasting money.” *(laughs)*

SB: How about the Democratic Leadership? How would you categorize your relationship?

SBL: There was a good friend of ours – my husband got him his first job when he got out of college [and] helped him become the Comptroller of the County, and he was designated to take over when Charlie retired. So, after that first Campaign, getting ready for the second one, he came to me – no, this was the third one, this was the third one,

because the second one was the fellow that worked for my husband for five years ran against me – Sam Kovolenko– and, he ran this last time, but on Election Day, he shot himself. And, I don't know if you read that in the paper. But, him and I became friends after that. In fact, his mom asked me if I would write a Letter of Recommendation for him, because he couldn't find a job; and I did. And, you know, we were friendly again. We were still friendly during the time that he ran against me – But, this third time that I ran, in 1992, my friend who's the Comptroller said, "Let's have lunch." I said, "Okay." So, we sat down and he says, "You know, you said you were only going to run one time." And I says, "Well, I changed my mind." (*laughs*) So, he decided to run against me in 1992, and I beat him two to one. But that was – you know, we had the same political friends. They had to make a decision on who they were going to support. And, you know, they supported me and I was very grateful for that. But after that, you know he – Rick Towcimak is his name – we became friends again. It wasn't a really nasty campaign, you know, but he did sue me because I said something that I thought was true about the Comptroller's job. And, he sued me so I had to send a letter out to all the constituents saying, you know, that this was a mistake, (*laughs*) and it cost me about 10,000 dollars. But anyway, you know, we got through it and we're still friends to this day. And I thought possibly he would run this time, but he didn't. You know, he's got a little boy now and he says he wants to stay home with his family.

SB: Did you enjoy campaigning?

SBL: No. I do not like to campaign. I've never knocked on a door. My husband did all of that for me, so I didn't have to. And everyone knew me, you know, in Beaver County. It was a four to one Democrat district; it's now two to one. So, I just couldn't do it. You know, I stayed in the office and I worked. People would come to me [and] I would take care of their problem. So, that was the campaigning I did. Of course, I didn't campaign in the office. But, I just felt that I didn't need to do this.

SB: What do you think is responsible for the change in the Party affiliation that you mentioned?

SBL: Well, I think it had to do with the redistricting. I know that with this last redistricting that I ran two years ago, I did not win any Allegheny County area – I didn't lose bad, but, you know, I still didn't win, but like I said, I didn't do anything; I sent out one newsletter saying who I was – but, I did very well in Beaver County and I think that, and I know that the guy who's replacing me, Sean Ramaley [State Representative, Allegheny and Beaver County, 2005-2008], did well in Beaver County and he even won in Allegheny County. But he worked, and that's what you need to do.

SB: Was it a challenge during that period - both your husband and your service - having the District be Industrialized [and] lose jobs? How did you try and respond?

SBL: Well, you know, I'll give you one instance, that happened maybe three or four years ago. All the different parts of the mills were shut down, except one, and I think

there were only 400-and-some employees there. And, the owner of that mill called me and asked me if I could get a million dollars for that mill to continue rather than shut down. So, I worked on that. Governor Ridge was there at that time. And I sent letters. I called his Action Team – his Response Team – many times to get that million dollars in order to keep that mill open. Well, they finally came back and said they could only give me \$350,000, not a million dollars. And I was really disappointed in that because I know, if Governor Rendell [Edward G., Pennsylvania Governor, 2003-2011] would have been the Governor, he would have gladly given us a million dollars to save all those jobs. And I think it's the difference between, you know, who's in the Majority. You have to deal with that, and I know that Governor Ridge, you know, saw my record of voting and probably thought, "Well, she never votes for me anyway, so we're not going to give her this." That's my opinion. So, that's what you have to deal with whenever, you know, you're in the Minority.

SB: In your district too, you have a high percentage of Senior Citizens.

SBL: Yes I do. *(laughs)*

SB: How did you respond to them?

SBL: Well, Senior Citizens love me. *(laughs)* And they were all worried because they had been coming to my office all of these years and they didn't know what they were going to do if that closed down; and, they loved the staff. So, you know, Sean had

assured them, you know, that they were going to stay there. And, anything having to deal with Senior Citizens, like the PACE [Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly], you know, I worked hard to make sure that, you know, we did get through with that program and then increasing the income for PACE. And it even helps some of the people with the Adult Basic that we have now. If you lost your job and you just needed a few more years to get on Social Security, then you could go to the Adult Basic, as long as your income was a certain amount. So, I'm proud of some of those accomplishments.

SB: You were also a Representative during 9/11 [September 11, 2001]?

SBL: Yes.

SB: Could you describe your memories of that and how that has changed "The Hill?"

SBL: Well, I was getting ready to – I had the TV on at home, and I was getting ready to come down to the office and I was ready to shut off the TV when I saw this plane crash into the Twin Towers in New York [City]. And I heard them saying that this was happening right now, and I just could not believe what I just saw. So, I ran down to the office and I said, "Have you heard what's going on?" We had the radio on and we were all in shock. So, I said, you know, "We have to close this office," I says, "I have to go home and watch it on TV [and] see what's going on." And that's what we did. And, then things started happening here in Harrisburg, you know, with Security – immediately they started happening. That's when we started getting our passes to come in and out.

The security at the airport [was] unbelievable. But, I guess you have to have this today with what's going on. We were planning on going overseas for a vacation and we canceled that. In fact, when I got on the plane that week, there was no one else on the plane. Even coming back it took a couple months before people started flying again. But, that was devastating.

SB: Since you had experience with your husband as a male Member of the Assembly, and then your own experience, how would you compare the experience of being a woman in the House?

SBL: Well, you know, whenever I come into the House, the women did try to get together and have their own Caucus, but for some reason, it never happened. I mean, unless they were doing it without me. But, I was fortunate because I knew these Members and they took me in. And, you know, I could say anything to them and they could do the same with me. You know, it seems like because of Charlie Laughlin they just felt that I was their friend. And, I was very comfortable with that.

SB: I noticed too, that annually you put in a Resolution for the Armenian genocide.

SBL: Yes I did.

SB: I wonder if you could speak to why that's important to you?

SBL: Well, as I said in the beginning, when my father came over here and then they learned that, you know, that his family was killed, the Armenian Assembly sent me a letter asking me if I would sponsor a Resolution because they had been trying to get Congress to sponsor this Resolution – they did, but it never passed. I think they are still trying to do that. So, they are getting the States to do it and that’s why they came to me. And I said, “Sure, I’ll be happy to do it.” I did have a little problem with the first time – and I don’t understand why – they said, you know, they said, “Okay, we’ll put it on the Calendar,” but it never reached the Calendar. So finally, after pressuring, they decided, “Okay, we’ll let it go on the Floor for a vote.” So, I think I must have sponsored at least three or four. And then whenever Daylin Leach [State Representative, Montgomery County, 2003-2008; State Senator, 2009-present] was elected about, I guess, four years ago, he called me up – I was in the office [and] he called me up – and he says, “Hey, you sponsored this Armenian Resolution?” He said, “Are you going to do it again?” I says – he told me his wife is Armenian – I says, “Look, *you* do it.” So, he’s been doing it for the last two years. (*laughs*) I did get someone from Philadelphia to come in and talk to me because she had heard what I had done and she says, “Well, you know this didn’t happen.” I says, “I don’t know about that,” I says, “I know what happened to my father’s family,” I says, “so, I believe him.” She says, “You know, we ought to get together, the Armenians and the Turks.” I have nothing against the Turks. It’s only through, you know, my father, you know, if he saw someone on the TV that was a Turk, he’d turn off the TV, that’s how strong he felt. So, I said, you know, “I know it happened,” and she tried to talk me into getting together with the Turkish people, and I says, “No, I’m not going to do that.” So, I haven’t seen her in five years.

SB: What do you think have been the major changes in the House in your term?

SBL: Well, the major changes are, you know, who's in power. There's, I guess, there's more women than ever before, I think someone said that there was only 112 women in all the years that this Legislature has been in, whereas there's thousands of males. But, like I said, you know, I'm comfortable – I'm always surrounded by men, which I don't mind at all, (*laughs*) and they've always been very good to me.

SB: How about technology since you've been involved with the House? Has that changed the way that the Representative works?

SBL: Oh yes, definitely. In fact, sometimes I think, you know, with our laptops on everyone's desk – sometimes you don't know what's going on on the House Floor; you're going through your laptop, your going through the e-mails and many times I just ask Keith [McCall], "Keith, what are we voting on?" (*laughs*) I hate to say it, but it's true. And then there's other bills that I'm very much interested in and I just listen very carefully.

SB: What were you thinking of in preparing your Farewell Address to the House after so many years of being involved?

SBL: *(laughs)* Well, I didn't know how I wanted to do this. And, I even said to my son, you know, "What are we going to do here? I got to make a speech. What should I talk about?" And, first I asked Keith [McCall]. I asked, "Keith, what kind of a speech should I make?" He says, "Make it personal." So, I told my son that's what we should do and we should also make it kind-of humorous too. And, I guess it worked out well, because so many people are saying they really enjoyed it. And, in fact, one woman sent me an e-mail – that has been working here for 33 years – she said, "This is the best speech I ever heard." And they have been calling to get that first part that I read, about old people having fortunes, you know, with the silver in their hair and gold in their teeth and I have five companions: Will Power, when I get up in the morning, Arthur Itis, and there's three others, I just can't remember them right now.

SB: What do you want your legacy to be?

SBL: I think, whenever people think of me, I want them to say that, you know, she always returned her phone calls; she took care of us, and even if she couldn't take care of us, she would call us and tell us that, you know, I can't do this for you. I'm sorry, but maybe some other time." You know, sometimes people would come in and say, you know, "I've lost my license and I need to get my license back." I says, "Well, I'll check the Department of Transportation" and, they got a couple of DUI's [I'd say,] "I can't help you if you have any DUI's," I says, "You know, you'll have to go through the system." But, there was one very humorous story of an elderly gentleman that came to the office and said, "You know, I need some help. I have a problem." He says, "I was praying to

Charlie for a week.” I says, “Who?” He says, “Charlie, your husband. Did you forget about him?” I says, “Oh, Okay.” So, he told me what his problem was and I says, “Look, Bill. I’m going to see if I can help you out here.” I says, “I’ll call you in a day or two and tell you one way or the other.” I called him up a couple days later and I says, “Guess what Bill? Charlie answered your prayers.” *(laughs)* And then there’s – I have a file on an inmate [who is] constantly writing me letters. And they’re nice letters – they’re long letters – but they’re nice letters. He’s always asking for the Pennsylvania Manuals. So, I’ll send him a Pennsylvania Manual and he tells other inmates and then they call me; they want a Pennsylvania Manual. And then he’ll call me for other pamphlets and we’ll send them to him. And he’s always, “God Bless”-ing me, you know, “You’re in my prayers,” and, “I’m sorry you’re retiring, but thank God we had you for all these years.” And, I don’t know what he did. I don’t know how long he’s going to be incarcerated, but I’m saving that file. *(laughs)*

SB: If you had advice for new Representatives that are Sworn-In what would it be?

SBL: I think the best thing is to make sure that you take care of your constituents. I mean, people would come my office without appointments. You don’t need to have an appointment to come and see me, and that’s what you should do. I think you should try to get along with the Republicans. And, I know that I have made a lot of friends with the Republicans; they like me and I like them. And I think you can talk to them. Whenever you need some legislation passed, explain it to them and make them see why this is so important. And, you know, I think you’re going to be successful if you just do that. And

try to do what is best for your constituents. And I think that, you know, if you keep doing that you're going to be re-elected over and over again.

SB: What does the future hold for you?

SBL: Well, you know, in the last 16 years since I've been in office, I've been all over the world. My son and I, and his wife and my grandson take off four times a year; Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving, and then we take an extended vacation for the summer. And I think that, you know, I tell my son every time we go on these vacations, "You know what, we're spending your inheritance." But he says, "That's okay, we're all having fun." (*laughs*) So, I'm looking forward to doing some more travel. I'm glad I did it over the years, because I'm starting to slow down now and I feel it. I'm 72 [and] I started to feel it when I was 70. And, I don't know how much more traveling I can do, but I've got to take care of my house first because it's a mess. (*laughs*)

SB: Was it hard deciding not to run again?

SBL: No. No, it wasn't. I mean, that travel back and forth just really got to me. I've been flying for quite a few years. The last time I drove was coming back from Matt Ryan's funeral [April 3, 2003]. It was at night, there was about 10, 18-wheelers in front of me, I don't know how many were behind me. And it was dark and I couldn't take it any more; they were going 70, 75 miles an hour [and] I passed them all going 80 miles per hour and I thought, "I'm never going to do this again." And I haven't.

SB: Was it difficult then, or a disadvantage, having your District far away from Harrisburg?

SBL: Well, I was hoping that they were going to move the capital to Pittsburgh, but that's never going to happen. (*laughs*) It is difficult being so far away. Not as difficult as it is for anyone from Erie, though. You know, that's a five and half-hour drive. For me, it's a four-hour drive.

SB: Well, I want to thank you very much for sharing your memories and your experiences with us.

SBL: Well, thank you. I was happy to do this.