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BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

**The Honorable H. Sheldon Parker (R)**

42<sup>nd</sup> District

Allegheny County

1967-1978

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**Heidi Mays (HM):** Good morning.

**The Honorable H. Sheldon Parker (SP):** Good morning.

**HM:** I'm here today with Sheldon Parker, who represented Allegheny County in the 42<sup>nd</sup> Legislative District from 1967-1978. Thank you for being here with us today.

**SP:** My pleasure. Thank you.

**HM:** Could you start off by telling me about your childhood and your early family life?

**SP:** I had a passion early on for politics and for government. I think I've been able to trace it back to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, an election for homeroom president. You know, don't ask me why, there's no family history, there's no involvement, but I guess I basically like people. I like the fact that being in a position of authority gave me an opportunity, you know, to make a difference and also the diversity of opportunities and responsibilities that come with it. So, I started out at that tender age and kind-of put together a junior Republican group and we got ourselves involved in the Taft/Eisenhower battle [1912 Election] back in the early [19]50s for the Republican nomination for President and kind-of went on from there. But, I think it's been rewarding and interesting.

**HM:** Could you tell me about your family life? Where did you grow up?

**SP:** [I] grew up in suburban Allegheny County. I grew up, basically, in the Legislative District where I came from. The Parkers and the Matthews, my grandfather and grandmother, came over in the 1800s from Germany and settled in the western Pennsylvania area. So, the roots were very deep in that part of the Pittsburgh area. The opportunity to go to a wonderful school in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, and then to go on to a top-notch liberal arts college up in Massachusetts and to do some graduate work at the University of Pittsburgh; you know, all of these resources were tremendously helpful in forming my later career pattern.

**HM:** So, how did you decide to become a Republican?

**SP:** Probably, because of family influence, even though there weren't any active politicians in the family, I think there were certainly leanings based on the economy. The area I came from and represented was a strong Republican area. I liked to think I was a kind-of middle of the road or a moderate Republican, but still basically shared the philosophical and other values of the Republican Party.

**HM:** Could you describe your career and your experience before coming to the House?

**SP:** Well, after a short time in the military and finishing a Master's Degree at a very strong political science program at the University of Pittsburgh, I continued to be involved at the grass roots level in the Republican Party. [I] was a committeeman in my District, went on to become the town Chairman of the Republican Party. I was elected to

the Republican State Committee, so I had a chance to come to Harrisburg. Went to Republican National Conventions, once even as an alternate delegate; much better seats at that particular convention. So, I kind-of thought I earned my spurs when an opportunity opened up to run for the House seat, thanks to a Supreme Court decision in 1966 that there would no longer be multi-member Districts. And the gentlemen who represented the District that I went on to serve was considerably overweight, was a bit past retirement age, and I had the advantage geographically in terms of where the Republican voters were. So, I thought this posed an opportunity that wasn't going to come around again. So, you know, thanks to a hard-working young Republican lady who went out and knocked on doors with me every night – two years later became my wife – and a lot of good friends and hard-working associates, we were successful in a six-person Republican Primary.

**HM:** Did you give up your career whenever you came to the House?

**SP:** I was in the investment business, fortunately, with a strong family backing in that business. [I] was licensed to sell stocks and bonds; did some public relations work with the firm. So, I didn't really give it up, but I went part-time. And as I served longer in Harrisburg, the time commitment became greater and that was, you know, one of the reasons why I had to stay with them; become more active or do something else. But, the Legislature, when I was first elected, was definitely, you know, part-time. I think the vast majority of the men and women serving certainly had other employment.

**HM:** Could you describe the nature of the House at that time? Did you come to Harrisburg several times a week or – ?

**SP:** Well, we had a lot of problems; this was Governor's [Raymond] Shafer's four years [Pennsylvania Governor, 1967-1971]. It was a very close margin; I think Republicans had two votes more than the Democrats in the House. We had some Members who weren't willing to vote for taxes and the State was not in very good financial shape. I think everybody realized at some point or another we were going to have to have a personal income tax. So, we were in Session a lot. Probably more than the salary justified and more than I think a lot of us were planning on. But, at that time, we were basically talking about two and three days a week. We didn't, unfortunately, because we could never pass a budget on time and, you know, some years, once we went 18 months, you know, without a budget just passing stopgaps, to get us through the immediate financial needs. So, it was not a very happy experience in terms of family life and how to start a relationship in Harrisburg and talk to an employer back in Pittsburgh.

**HM:** Could you describe your first experiences here at the House? What did you think of the Capitol Building and the Chamber whenever you first saw it?

**SP:** Oh, just awesome. We are so blessed here in Pennsylvania. And the Parkers for a lot of years have made a point of visiting other State Capitols and we probably had the opportunity to be in 25 or more and, you know, Pennsylvania's is really so special. To have those wonderful murals and all of that gold, I mean, it's just stupendous. And I'm

so pleased that it's been well taken care of and really looking forward to the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary [1906-2006] Celebration in October of this year.

**HM:** Could you describe the demographic makeup of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Legislative District while you served?

**SP:** It was about 12 miles out of downtown Pittsburgh, very much a suburban community for the city of Pittsburgh, with most traffic going into the city to work everyday. I think the school systems made it an exceptional District and the composition, at least when I first won, was very Republican. As I was winding down, it became a little bit closer in terms of registration and, you know, the margins on General Election Day weren't two and a half to one anymore. And that, again, was probably another reason why I pulled out.

**HM:** Okay. You said that the people were going into the city of Pittsburgh to work. Where were they working? In what types of jobs?

**SP:** I would suggest mainly white-collar type jobs. This was a pretty affluent area; most of the District was anyway. And they were going to many of those corporate headquarters in downtown Pittsburgh, which unfortunately, there aren't as many of anymore. But, it was interesting and I think if I were there today I'd find more of those people going out further and not just into the city of Pittsburgh, but to outlying suburban areas.

**HM:** You talked about Mt. Lebanon being one of the cities, or I guess towns?

**SP:** Townships.

**HM:** Okay, townships that you represented. What were some of the others?

**SP:** Dormont, which was a little less white-collar, maybe. Castle Shannon, which was a little bit more blue-collar and Baldwin Township which was, you know, kind-of in between. But, the reality was the vast number of the voters and certainly on the Republican side came from Mt. Lebanon.

**HM:** Could you describe your relationship with yourself and your constituents?

**SP:** I think it was a close relationship and having come up through the ranks, so to speak, I think made it a lot easier. And I had an opportunity to work with, even without the Harrisburg experience, school board Members, local councilmen, and township commissioners. And it was, I think, a very close relationship. We periodically got together and exchanged points of view; we'd have breakfast together. And it was a manageable sized district with good, hard-working reasonable decision-makers.

**HM:** Okay. Some of the tools that, you know, legislators that they have today, you didn't always have at your disposal. So, how did you reach your constituents?

**SP:** Well, we did use the U.S. Mail a lot. We sent out, you know, questionnaires. We sent out newsletters. We had a friendly, weekly newspaper that treated us much better than the downtown press and with plenty of pictures. We did some telephone polling, but you know, you're absolutely right; it was very, very different than it is now. I mean, I'm just kind of blown away by all of the resources that there are available here.

**HM:** Could I ask you who was doing the work? Was it you, personally?

**SP:** Well, a lot of it. At that point in time, the early years in Harrisburg, we actually worked through a secretarial pool. And we had to wait in line to use the telephone booth to call outside of Harrisburg. Our desk was actually up on the Floor of the House. We had a locker to keep our coats and other possessions. I mean it was really rudimentary. And so, the legislative office was really at home in our apartment and I often said it would have been nice to be able to put my wife on the payroll because she fielded a lot of telephone calls and a lot of inquiries while I was gone; very nicely and in a very workman like fashion.

**HM:** When did you first get your, I guess, your first office?

**SP:** I think we're talking about 1974. There was a move on the part of – and I think we need to give Speaker Herb Fineman [Herbert; State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1955-1977; Speaker 1969-1972, 1975-1976] a lot of the credit and other legislative

leaders, that we really needed to be focused more and, in terms of our employment, give service in Harrisburg a top priority. So, there were then offices for those of us with some seniority; at that point, I was working my way up and had a little bit of clout. And at that point, I only shared a secretary with only two or three other Members. So, there was progress. And gradually we moved toward having a shared secretary back home. Three of us would catch Eleanor Kerr for a few hours when we were back home and then she'd do the work and we'd come back and sign the letters. But, again, nothing like a home office or anything like that.

**HM:** What other changes did you see while you were, you know, from the modernization aspect? Did you see changes in research?

**SP:** We saw, yes, certainly quality staff and I think one of the things I'm proudest of, when I had an opportunity to Chair a Select Committee and do some hiring, I actually hired, I think, the first PhD who was ever on the staff of the House; who went on to be a key person in the [Governor Richard] Thornburgh Administration [1979-1987]. And I raised the bar a bit in terms of the men and women who were on staff. But, you're right; I think we did see the professionalization. We saw some job descriptions written. We saw management; committees created with some standards that new employees had to meet. We saw some additional staff hired to be shared with committees. And I think the professionalization of the staff moved in a major way during the 12 years that I was there.

**HM:** Would you say anybody mentored you whenever you first started?

**SP:** I was lucky that the Majority Leader of the House, Lee Donaldson [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1955-1970], was also from the Pittsburgh area and he was a bit of a friend before we both came to Harrisburg together. And I would consider, you know, Lee my mentor. But, before Lee, I was very close to our Congressman in Washington and served a couple of years as an intern in D.C. I was one of his legislators, while he represented a much larger geographical area in Washington. So, I would certainly consider him a political mentor, as well. But, it was really Lee, I think, as much as anybody who really facilitated my progress in Harrisburg.

**HM:** After serving for several years, do you feel like you helped anybody get started?

**SP:** Well, I'm kind of proud, having been an intern myself, that I did have a number of interns working for me back mainly in the District, but often they would come to Harrisburg and spend some time. A number of these men and women have been successful. I can't tell you any of them have turned into full-time elected officials or politicians, but I know that a number of them have been quite successful in other areas of endeavor.

**HM:** Can you explain the role of camaraderie through intra-caucus, inter-caucus, and individual relationships?

**SP:** Yeah, tremendously important. And when I first came we were all kind of forced together; there weren't very many places to eat, there weren't very many places to stay. And in the bars and restaurants, you know, we would get together across Party lines. And I think that type of coming together is really something that's missed today. I mean, you know better than I, there are just so many places to go and so many lawmakers now own their own homes and moved into rooming houses, so they're not in hotels and motels the way we used to be. But, certainly some of us had very good friends and valued associates across Party lines. And the Party identification, although important, it didn't seem to be quite as crucial as it is today.

**HM:** Were you a member of the Allegheny County Delegation?

**SP:** Yeah, we had a pretty good sized delegation; both on the Republican and the Democrat side. And I had the opportunity to Chair that Delegation, by virtue of seniority probably as much as anything else. And it was kind of interesting and it tied into my Committee work. We really didn't think that we were doing as well when it came to State resources, grants and aid and those kinds of programs, as our friends in Philadelphia were doing. So, we got together and did some studies and you know made some arguments; mobilized our County Commissioners and our Mayors and all the rest. And I think by the time it was all over, we're gaining a fairer share of what Harrisburg had to offer. The old problem, though, you know Pittsburgh is 200 miles away. There were mountains, bad roads during the cold weather months and so many of our Philadelphia

friends were just able to hop on the train, weren't they, and didn't have the same logistical challenges. So, their visibility in the halls of Harrisburg was much higher.

**HM:** Who else was a member of the committee whenever you were here?

**SP:** Of?

**HM:** The Allegheny County Delegation.

**SP:** Well, we were very lucky to have you know, Lee Donaldson. And of course, K. Leroy Irvis [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1959-1988; Speaker of the House, 1977-1978, 1983-1988] was working his way up in the Democrat Leadership. We had Rick Cessar [Richard J.; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1971-1994] who was elected later, who became a Committee Chairman and was tremendously valuable. Jim Knepper [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1971-1980] from nearby Carnegie, a good personal friend of mine and sometimes roommate, was very active and effective and also a small town newspaper publisher. So, he brought another dimension to what was going on. So, we really had a, I think, a quality class group of men and women who were working together as much as possible.

**HM:** Shifting gears a little bit, what legislation or issues do you feel were your most important?

**SP:** Well, I guess one of my real frustrations in serving, and maybe one of the reasons I after 12 years – although I think, frankly, 12 years is a pretty good length of time and if I were promoting term limits, which I’m not, I think I would chose 12 years – I was in the minority eight of those 12 years with a Governor of the other Party. When I was in the majority, they were the early years when I had no seniority at all. So, anyway I don’t think I was really able to, you know, put my name on any legislation, as such or to get as involved as maybe I should have been. I guess I had a regret, too, that I really never specialized and I think that is a lesson to be learned for lawmakers. If you can really get your arms around something and stay with it for a period of years, you probably do have an opportunity to make a difference. But, my liberal arts background and lively curiosity, I’m afraid got in the way of this need to specialize. But, anyway, Federal-State Relations, I think was kind-of where I was coming from and was set in that direction. And we ended up with a lot of research. We ended up, I think, making the case that Pennsylvania wasn’t receiving its fair share of Federal monies. We made some other recommendations to tie Harrisburg and Washington more closely together. And we led to the creation of a new House Committee to work on these issues – the Federal-State Relations Committee – which, I guess, is now the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee. So, anyway, that was all interesting and important, but you know, not something that you know is going to get you a place on Mount Rushmore. *(laugh)*

**HM:** I’m going to just ask you if you can recall some of these issues; during the [19]71-72 Session, you amended the First Class Township Code to extend the probationary period for members of the police force and firemen [Act 72-1971]. Do you remember

what impact this legislation had on these groups and was that something that was essential to your District or to Pennsylvania in general?

**SP:** I think I did that at the request of some police back home, but in terms of the overall impact, I have to plead lack of long-term memory.

**HM:** Some other things that also became law in [19]72; you sponsored a piece of legislation that allowed interpreters to be used for the deaf and hearing impaired during criminal proceedings [Act 362-1972]. Do you recall how you became aware of that situation because it certainly seems very necessary?

**SP:** Yeah, that really was and that was also, I think, that was at the request of a school that was working in this area back in the Pittsburgh area. And actually, one of my joys was to work with the hearing and deaf community and also to go to their banquets and have my remarks sign languaged. And it really was rewarding and I think this is an example of how lawmakers can make a difference if they listen to their constituents.

**HM:** During the [19]75-76 Session, you co-sponsored a resolution that established the Benjamin Franklin Symposium Committee [HR 250]. What was this committee designed to do and how was this symposium designed to aid legislators?

**SP:** This was an effort to focus the legislative branch on something a little longer term. To come together with a group of experts over a three-day period and to look at the

demographics of the State, to bring in workforce experts, to bring in people in higher and basic education and look, not just toward the next Session, but toward the next 20 or 30 years in Pennsylvania. We did this on two occasions. We opened the Session with these 3-day meetings of experts. We went out [and] we were able to raise money in the private sectors from various foundations in Pennsylvania; they also thought it was a good idea. But, to be candid with you, it was one of my disappointments that it didn't stay. Unfortunately, the attendance was not the greatest and I'm afraid that I concluded that Harrisburg tends to deal with the here and now; it tends to be more reactive than proactive and it's very difficult to convince busy men and women, you know, to sit still and look and plan ahead. And I don't know what we can do about that, but you know I haven't quit. And had an opportunity in my next career to further that a little bit, but again, I'm not holding out too much hope based on some first-hand experience.

**HM:** The next issue: on a multitude of occasions, you attempted to get a bill passed that would create a committee for Pennsylvania's future [HB 1613-1976]. Do you know what would have been the basis for this committee and what would its work entail?

**SP:** Well, other States, again, have also had these type commissions or these type efforts you know to plan and look ahead. And this was another attempt, you know, to try to put things in the context of a couple of decades hence so we could be a little bit more intelligent in our planning; so, this and some efforts to introduce legislation on productivity. I think again, I like to think that maybe I was a little bit out there in front

and I just wasn't able, for one reason or another, to be persuasive enough to get those 26 Senators and 102 lawmakers and the Leadership as interested as I was.

**HM:** Another topic that's being ripped from the headlines right now, you had sponsored legislation that would have decreased the size of the Legislature [HB 13-1971].

**SP:** Yes.

**HM:** Why do you believe a smaller Legislature would be beneficial and has your opinion changed?

**SP:** No, I still think that, particularly with all the tools and the communication and all the resources that the House and Senators have, I think they could well represent more people than they currently are representing. I think also that there are, you know, millions and millions of dollars that probably don't have to be spent and I think that this would be one way, kind-of, to turn the image and the suspicion on the part of a lot of Pennsylvania voters right now, that the General Assembly is somewhat dysfunctional. I think that the attempt to cut the size of the House and Senate, again, was a little bit ahead of its time, but, as we both know, its been resurrected big time. Now I'm talking about – I think maybe 10 fewer Senators and maybe a 150 House Members. I mean, I'm not looking for some draconian cut because I do think that representation and being accessible to a lawmaker is important on the part of the constituent. But, I do think that it

would send a very, very strong signal and would do a lot to regain the trust of the Pennsylvania citizenry.

**HM:** You also had many opinions and statements made in connection with the tax debates going on in the House at the time including personal income and corporate net income taxes. Can you describe to us the circumstances surrounding this situation in the House and your beliefs on it?

**SP:** Well, we really needed an income tax in Pennsylvania. And there were, of course, a number of people who weren't very enthusiastic about it; became a very, very partisan issue. And I think one of the most difficult times we had were in the early [19]70s, when we had a six month budget; Governor [Milton] Shapp [1971-1979] took over [and] he needed an 18-month budget. And the income tax was passed within 30 days of his taking over, but it was declared unconstitutional; the court decided the uniformity clause was violated. So, we had to go back to the drawing board and pass an income tax, you know, a second time. In the meantime, I think our business friends were being really roasted and were forced to ante up more and that was not good for Pennsylvania's competitive position. And I think, clearly, we needed a balance between business and personal taxes. And I think the threat was, without a personal income tax, that we would not have any business in Pennsylvania; it would all go to other states that had a more appropriate mix of taxes.

**HM:** What do you think the hardest issue was before the Legislature during your tenure?

**SP:** I think probably the budget and finance issues were. In that same time period, in addition to two income taxes – and this was actually put together on more of a bi-partisan basis – a new tax on insurance premiums at the level of six percent. And unfortunately, though, when all the lawmakers, including myself, went home, we found how very unpopular this so-called “panacea” was. And it was not too many days after its passage that it was rescinded. So, again, this was just one more example of the difficulty that Pennsylvania faced as it tried to put its tax and fiscal issues in order. And then it was more usual than not that we would be well into the next fiscal year with our budget passing and that creates all kinds of difficulties.

**HM:** Was anyone able to straighten it out because it seems like it had kept happening every year?

**SP:** Well, you’re right. I think it’s all a matter of timing, but as you know, for a variety of good reasons, it went very smoothly at least, you know just a couple hours past a deadline this year. But, it does, you’re right, track the circumstances of the moment; you know how many votes there are and who the Governor is and all those tough issues.

**HM:** What would you say is key, in your mind, to getting legislation passed?

**SP:** Well, certainly, I found that it’s much easier in Pennsylvania to stop legislation from being passed than it is to pass legislation. I think, you know, you need a majority,

obviously, of the House and Senate. You need the Governor's willingness to go along. You need strong support at the grass roots level; that includes media. I think you need your, you know, your Lobbyists working full-time on behalf of a cause. You know, it's a very complicated and difficult thing unless it's something that fits into the category of apple pie and motherhood, because somebody's ox is going to be gored. And the Pennsylvania General Assembly has never been known for acting rapidly on anything and the more something drags on, the greater awareness sometimes leads to serious impediments to passage of a good idea.

**HM:** Is that something that's learned or is that something that, you know – I'm just thinking new Members; whenever they come in and they have ideals. At what time do you learn that?

**SP:** Well, I think it's more complicated than political science 101 or the textbooks tell you. I think you almost have to go through it. And also you're bound to be disappointed at some point, but you kind-of have to pick yourself up and hang in there and maybe do better the next time.

**HM:** You served on numerous committees as well. Did you have a personal favorite?

**SP:** I think I enjoyed the Education Committee as much as anything. And I think also the Appropriations Committee was fun only insofar as you did have a chance to, you know, fund and support good, worthwhile causes. And I found in my

community/volunteer life now that, you know, raising money isn't always fun and the legislative branch, you kind-of felt as though you were supporting good causes. I don't mean to say giving it away, but, you know, making it available for those worthwhile endeavors.

**HM:** Could you describe some of the important issues that were brought before these Committees? And do you feel like you had an active role in it? You said about the Appropriations Committee.

**SP:** Yeah, I think we, you know, we were dealing with, certainly, financial issues in both higher and basic education. And also school formula issues and trying to equalize a little bit between the suburban and the urban areas. I recall those as being key. The University of Pittsburgh, having gone on the state-related list, was a constant challenge and the equilibrium between the state-owned colleges and universities [and] the state-related, the community colleges, were coming into their own. I think all of those issues, you know, were important. In addition, to an attempt to rewrite the School Code and then we had some hearings that seemed to go on interminably on that particular issue, Heidi.

**HM:** You also remarked earlier about the Federal-State Affairs Select Committee [HR 46-1973]. Could you just recall what specific issues that you felt it needed to be addressing?

**SP:** Well, during that period, the [Richard] Nixon [US President, 1969-1974] White House was looking at a new federalism and, you know, decentralizing our funding and giving States more of an opportunity to participate in some of the Federal tax revenues. So, those were I think important days, in terms of how Pennsylvania was going to act during that opportunity. So, the legislative branch, I think, was beginning to feel its frustration increasingly as Governor Shapp got himself into trouble and became interested in becoming President. So, I think there was a resurgence of legislative strength and involvement. We also were able to make sure that the General Assembly also approved Federal monies that were coming into Pennsylvania and this was a step forward. So, I think all of these kinds of things, but it was basically the opportunities that were coming from Washington that we felt we needed to be able to take advantage of in the General Assembly and to move expeditiously, if that's possible at all.

**HM:** So, during this time that you served, do you recall any way that the House was able to deal with major events? There were certainly events going on in the national scene. Do you think that you were able to have any kind of role in how your constituents were being affected by these types of things: like the civil unrest and – ?

**SP:** Probably not too much on that score, but I do remember the terrible flooding that took place in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton/Harrisburg area that became both a State and Federal responsibility. As you recall, the Governor was forced out of his home and had to relocate for nine or ten months. And I do think that, and it wasn't just the areas I mentioned, I think the whole state was –

**HM:** Johnstown.

**SP:** Johnstown [1977]. I think the whole state was impacted. And I do think the General Assembly did rise to the occasion and cooperated and worked with some of our financial and our emergency response resources.

**HM:** So, they were able to respond to natural disasters more effectively.

**SP:** And I think we learned an awful lot from that hurricane in terms of bolstering our Pennsylvania emergency management capability.

**HM:** How would you compare the technology in the House today to that whenever you served?

**SP:** Oh, goodness. Occasionally, a Leader would have a phone up on the Floor of the House. I understand everybody has a phone, everybody has a computer, everybody has a chance to be on Pennsylvania Cable Network [PCN] with gavel-to-gavel coverage of what's going on in the House. I think all of this is good and I really welcome the diversity of media outlets that are available today. Unfortunately, when I was there, we had one big city newspaper that was spending a lot of time selling advertising and subscriptions because of what was going on in Harrisburg. So, it was very negative in terms of coverage. The radio and TV representation was not what we wanted it to be

either, so there really was not much way to tell your side of the story or to get the whole story out. And I'm glad to know that that's very different today.

**HM:** Well how is your relationship with the media or was it, whenever you say the major newspaper was covering Harrisburg negatively, were they blanket[ing] the whole Legislature?

**SP:** Well, I know particularly on the pay-raise issue, because I really think that our 12,000 dollar salary, when we were supposed to be focusing on this particular job, you know, was not adequate. So, I had a dust-up with a reporter and you know, took a couple of hits in the newspaper back home that found their way to my re-election campaign in the reprint that was circulated widely. Fortunately, it didn't have that much impact, but it was, I think, it was my closest race, however. So, yeah, I think probably some of us maybe didn't react maybe the way we should. I think we, you know, were frustrated and were looking for a little bit of something positive, because we realized that our newsletters weren't going to go out that frequently. We weren't going to have, obviously, a chance to be in contact with our constituents nearly as often as these daily's.

**HM:** What was your relationship like with lobbyists?

**SP:** I grew to like and respect, you know, almost every lobbyist, but I am happy that the staff is professional now and more adequate, in terms of staffing committees. But, I always found that lobbyists were going to be effective; always truthful. And we really,

back when I was in the House, needed them to a greater degree because, again, we didn't have the amount of research and the amount of information available to us as is currently the case. But, I do think they perform a valuable function.

**HM:** I heard that you did a few Sunday night radio shows on WTAE and could you talk a little bit about those?

**SP:** *(laugh)* I had a good friend and constituent who had an opportunity to kind-of program some downtime on Channel 4 – or sometimes it was TV, but most of the time it was radio –and it was the Jerry and Shel Show. Gerry Kaufman [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1967-1972] was a good friend of mine; just a wonderful person and so smart from the Squirrel Hill area of Pittsburgh. And so, we would go at it for an hour on Sunday night. And once in a while, somebody would be out in their car and have their radio on and we'd actually hear that we were listened to by somebody. But, I think back in those days even, more people were glued to their TV sets or doing other things on Sunday nights. However, once in a while, if it was a hot issue, we ended up on TV on the 11 o'clock news because of our proximity; the radio and TV stations were in the same building.

**HM:** What aspect of your job as a Representative did you like the most?

**SP:** I think wrestling with the issues was, I think, certainly gratifying. The diversity, the ability to, you know, have something to say even though it wasn't always said by me.

And I think close behind that would be the constituent service. I think there were a number of occasions where you felt as though you had facilitated the person getting to a right person or dealing with a particularly tough issue. So, I think, all of those types of opportunities, you know, I cherished; the case work. And certainly during the early years, I had a chance to be much more personally, you know, involved because there just wasn't anybody else to pick up that phone or to try to convince that bureaucrat to really give this person a complete hearing when he wanted to have his son considered for a mental hospital, for example.

**HM:** What aspect did you like the least?

**SP:** I grew not to really appreciate the campaigning very much. It was great for my weight. It was great for a chance to catch up with people and to hear from them. But, I'm afraid that, in many ways and in many situations, kind-of got to be nasty and, you know, the negative flier that would go in the mailbox and being on the defense and you had the record [and] your opponent didn't. So, I think I grew weary of that and the fact that the District was growing a little bit more even in its Party affiliation, [that] was another reason why I thought it might be time to do something else.

**HM:** When you think back, do you have a fondest memory in serving?

**SP:** Well, I think one of my fondest memories, maybe because it was so different, was that the Legislature celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence

by going to Independence Square in Philadelphia [1976]. And we actually, you know, had our Session there and the President of France came [Valery Giscard d'Estaing 1974-1981]. And largely because of the Federal-State Relations involvement, I was able to be on the program, and that was really exciting and very different. And I understand, I guess about that same time, the U.S. Congress also in conjunction with the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Declaration also came to Philadelphia. But, anyway, I think it was really special too to be reminded that Pennsylvania was really a century ahead of the Federal Congress going back to 1681 when, you know, William Penn received his land from the King [Charles II]. And the Pennsylvania Legislature was more of an English Council with a Speaker – and Benjamin Franklin being a Pennsylvania Speaker [1764] before he went on the national stage – and all of those things, just brought back a whole bunch of memories and a lot of history really came alive for me.

**HM:** Do you have any amusing stories you can share?

**SP:** Oh, probably not. I served with a lot of characters and, as you know, we didn't have some great days, always. We had fights when somebody had too much to drink late at night when we were trying to wear lawmakers down to vote for unpopular issues. So, you know, a lot of those things, but I'd be hard pressed to single out a particular favorite, Heidi.

**HM:** Okay. What would you say was your greatest accomplishment in serving?

**SP:** Oh, that's a good question. I think I'd be hard pressed to single out any one thing. I think we talked a little bit about, you know, the committee and trying to bring Harrisburg and Washington together and professionalizing, you know, the staff. I just think I kind-of, you know, did my best and, you know, try hard and didn't maybe have as many opportunities as I probably could have made for myself. But, again, I blame it on, you know, not being at the right place at the right time. Whereas, you know, I was exactly at the right place at the right time when I had an opportunity to run and win for the House. So, I'm a true believer that, you know, sometimes it's better to be lucky than to be good.  
*(laugh)*

**HM:** Would you say you had any regrets?

**SP:** Well, certainly the inability to convince my colleagues to be a little more futuristic and to be a little bit inclined to look and plan ahead. I think that would be my regret in terms of what I worked on and didn't see happen. But, I'm not sure I see it happening today, so maybe it's just one of those ideas or things that you hope for but it's completely unrealistic that anything is ever going to transpire along that particular approach of long-range visioning, planning, whatever.

**HM:** Are you still active in politics?

**SP:** Not active in politics except as a member of the governing board of our Condominium Association. And, boy, is that grass roots and that's a job that nobody else

wants. *(laugh)* But, no I'm still a news junkie. I can't live without a public affairs program and love it and respect it. But, I guess I'm tired and maybe a little bit disappointed with, you know, what's happening in government, at all levels. So, it's just as well that my cynicism doesn't, you know, add to that of so many others out there. But, you know, given an opportunity at the right place and right time; I'm not going to say never to elected office, but you know a chance to – So, I'm really more involved in the not-for-profit sector; art museums, human service organizations. A really exciting youth and government program of the YMCA, you know, one weekend a year, comes in and they become the Governor and Speaker and take over the State Capitol. I have the privilege of being the Vice-Chairman of that Board. And lot of it's fund-raising, but the volunteer role is interesting and some of the same skills and some of the same challenges that go with elective office; it's not completely removed from what I used to do.

**HM:** Thanks for letting me know what you're doing right now. After you left the House you had a very long career with the Pennsylvania Public Television Network. Can you tell me how you made the transition from the legislative branch to the television network?

**SP:** Well, it was interesting, you know, at the age of 40, I guess I felt burned out and so I didn't have too much more to contribute. So, I kind-of, you know, read What Color's your Parachute<sup>1</sup> and took a long, hard look at what was out there. And the trips to Harrisburg, particularly during the bad weather, were tiring; three wonderful boys were getting older, my wife continued her good work, but she deserved a little more support. So, anyway, I literally stumbled into this General Manager/CEO opportunity with our

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<sup>1</sup> Best selling job hunting book written by Richard Nelson Bolles first published in 1970 and 1972

Pennsylvania Television Network. But, I had been somewhat involved, because during my 12 years, the Network was founded and I had a chance to, you know, vote on the actual legislation in [19]68 and make it a reality and was friendly with our Public Television people, particularly in the Pittsburgh area. So, they told me they wanted to raise visibility and they told me that I would have the opportunity to try to convince lawmakers to vote even more money for Public Television. So, there were some natural fits. So, the difficult part was re-locating; the network's located in Hershey and I knew I couldn't commute for a five-day a week job, so we came over. We thought we'd give it at least three years and here we are, 27 years later, still in Hershey and I stayed with the network because it was challenging, interesting, and thought we were doing a lot of good for some 24 years.

**HM:** Well what special issues did running a, you know, the TV network present?

**SP:** Well, in many ways it's kind of like a small trade association. The network serves the people of Pennsylvania through eight public stations; you know, located in the predictable locations. So, you kind of have to try to work on relationships and making sure everybody's on the same page. And also keep convincing them of their responsibility, you know, to serve Pennsylvania. And we, you know, had some difficult times. We had a public affairs program, the "People's Business", for many years when I was in the House. It was the only public affairs program. And then we had it for awhile when I took the CEO's position, but eventually more media outlets came on stream and the cable industry put together a wonderful cable channel. And so, all of a sudden,

Pennsylvania Public Television wasn't as important, but we did a lot of programs on a lot of important issues, on a lot of areas which are important to tourism in the Commonwealth, history and whatever. So, I'm proud that we were able to increase, during my stewardship, our coverage and involvement in Pennsylvania. But, clearly, there's still so much that needs to be done.

**HM:** Could you tell me do you have any advice for new Members that will be just starting?

**SP:** Well, I remind myself that I have two ears and one mouth and that I really ought to hear twice as much as I speak. So, I would encourage those new Members to listen to the people who sent them to Harrisburg; that they should be aware of the important constituent/legislator role that they have. And I'd also encourage them to stay humble because there are, obviously, frequently a lot of people patting office holders on the back and telling them how great they are because they want something. So, I think that keeping prospective would also be a word of advice, Heidi.

**HM:** Thank you very much. This concludes our interview.

**SP:** Thank you so much. It was wonderful being with you.

**HM:** Thank you.