

Interviewer: David C. Cummings

Interviewee: State Representative Michael K. Hanna (76th District)

Interview Setting: Interview conducted at the Main Capitol Building in the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee office under Representative Michael Hanna.

Interview Date: October 23rd, 2008 at 2:30 PM
(*Start of Interview*)

Segment 1 (0:00 – 8:37)

Cummings: As a young boy growing up, what were some of the things that played a factor in your decision of what you wanted to do in your future career?

Representative Hanna: “Well I grew up in a large family and I guess early on I just kind of saw myself as part of that family and never really thought about where I was going. It would have to be my schooling and ultimately college that shaped my final decisions on what I was going to do.”

Cummings: When you were attending the now closed Lock Haven High School, do you think there was a particular event that made you want to become a Representative?

Representative Hanna: “Probably the only thing in high school that would of directed me in this direction is by the time [I] got to my junior year and senior year, we were in the late 60’s-early 70’s, and there was a lot of unrest and I got actively involved in some student issues and ended up on a student panel that had been formed to try and resolve some of those issues. So I guess to the extent, I mean I wasn’t a formal member of any student government organization in high school, but to the extent that that panel got involved in some governance issues that was probably my first real introduction to legislating if you will, and of course we had a supreme and ultimate commander in the principle who could veto anything that we suggested so it was the art of compromise in trying to find things that he would accept as a way of resolving the issues that were presented to us.”

Cummings: Do you miss some of the rivalry between the old Bald Eagle Nittany High School and Lock Haven High School?

Representative Hanna: “Yeah to some extent, I think consolidation was a good thing, we did it at a price obviously. I mean we lost that local rivalry, that high interest, I mean those, those nights the *[laughs]* community was electrified as you know. So we lose that, but I think the advantages of cost, administration, and probably most important, just the breath of classes and curriculum expansion that a larger school can provide, educational opportunities that it can provide, preparation that it can do, was an important compromise, they were good goals to reach even though we did lose some of the community aspects of having two neighboring rivalry schools.”

Cummings: What are some other factors in your life that may have steered you to running for a political office?

Representative Hanna: “Well after high school I went to Penn State [University] for a brief period of time and of course while I was there, being a big university, I was a freshman and I wasn’t really involved in any governance issues at all, not even in East Halls where I lived. I left Penn State in [19]72 and didn’t

come to Lock Haven University until [19]74, I think. I was at Lock Haven from [19]74 to [19]77, and while I was there, I was a Political Science Major, and got much more involved in Political Science classes, Philosophy classes, and Sociology classes and really enjoyed-That's when I was at Penn State I was an engineering major, and I think I really found in Lock Haven that I could-that I had much more interest in the people side of things, opposed to the engineering side of things. So, by the time I was a senior I was actively involved in student government. [I] got to serve a term as a student government president and found out that I really enjoyed it. Like any job it carries its frustrations along with its satisfactions, but I found that I really did overall enjoy that."

Cummings: I first moved to Lock Haven between 1991 and 1992 which would have been the year you were first elected, could you tell me about your first campaign running for State Representative?

Representative Hanna: "The first campaign-of course from the time I left LHU I had three years in Law School there, served in student government there as well, both in student government itself and also in the law review, I was an elected officer on the law review as well so I had elected positions almost all the way through school. But, then from the time I left law school until I ran for office in 1990, I didn't hold an elected office at all, I spent all my time practicing law and of course raising a family and the practice of law did carry some municipal components of it. I did get involved it representing townships, water authorities, sewer authorities, that sort of thing, but I didn't hold any elected office. So when I decided to run for office, it was a big step and fortunately for me the district covers two counties and the county chairmen of both counties had worked with the incumbent democrat representative, trying to effectuate a transition [since the incumbent] knew he was going to step down, his health was bad, and he ultimately died in office, but Russ knew he was going to step down so the chairmen knew he was going to step down, so they had tried to work towards an effective transition. The republicans were sure they were going to win the seat [*light chuckles*], so the democrats were doing everything they could to try and make sure that didn't happen. The way they saw that working out was that they needed to come together on a consensus candidate in the primary, so that we could save money, not divide the party, and move forward to a general election with our resources intact to win the election. That's exactly what we did, so it was a good strategy, I owe a lot to the two county committees, they really were responsible for helping me pull that strategy together so it did work."

Cummings: Representatives have to face reelection every two years, is there a part of that that makes you nervous every campaign or is it just something you have become accustomed to doing?

Representative Hanna: "There is an anxiety level that comes with every election. This is my tenth one and I've only had one that was uncontested, so there is an anxiety level that comes with every one, there is I guess a level of getting use to it and accepting it and there are I guess different points in a legislative career as well. Early on-my first couple of races-I was an underdog, it was like if I win great, if I don't it's not a big deal, but then once you get elected that hole perception changes. You want to retain your position; you want your record to be strong enough that you can win. So there is certainly a high anxiety in the first couple challenges to prove that you are worthy of the job, but then as it goes on, I've at least felt that I have been able to transition from looking at each race as a test of me, to more of a benchmark in where I think the district needs to go. I think the good thing now is when I look at these

things; I try to look at what the objectives have been while I've been in office, whether we come close to them, and what remains to be done. As long as there is something that remains to be done then that's what I would like to try and run on, of course there is always work to be done. I guess what I'm saying is towards the last couple of elections the anxiety level hasn't been as strong, it's more of a-I guess you get to an acceptance level of this is just part of the job."

Segment 2 (0:00 – 10:33)

Cummings: What do you enjoy about serving as the Chairman of Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee, as well as serving on both the Education Committee and the Game and Fisheries Committee?

Representative Hanna: "The interesting thing for me they are such a good fit for the district. I mean there is certainly a whole group of folks who think that if you're not on the Appropriations Committee that you haven't made it as a legislator. Appropriations is certainly a powerful committee and one that's worth being on, but for the 76th district, being a rural area and agricultural area, an area deeply interested in hunting and fishing and an area who's economy is at least partially dependent upon higher education. The committees I have are a perfect fit. They really fit well with the district [and] I get to actively participate in the development of policies that most interest the people in the district. Those three committees fit my area very well and I think that's probably the most important consideration when you're looking at committee selections, not so much the interest of the legislator, but the interest of the district, and how you can best serve those. I mean, I was asked early on-did I want to be on the Judiciary Committee because of my law degree, and my answer was no [laughs]. I mean, as you know, we have a very small bar association. We only have two judges in Clinton County, and only I think four or five in Centre County, so it's a small-the judiciary just-I mean it's obviously an important part of local government, county government there, but it's not something I needed to serve on. My district is far more interested in the issues that affect hunting and fishing, agriculture, and education."

Cummings: Could you explain a typical day in one of your district offices?

Representative Hanna: "The one thing in the office that I can tell you is, the best thing for me to do is to stay out of the way [laughs] our district offices have really developed specialization in constituent services that are tailored to specific needs of our people and they are things like PennDot work, birth certificates, just a whole host of things that are largely [and] extremely important to our constituents but are pretty proforma once you understand the different forms that are involved and you understand what each person needs. It's not something that I need to do and as I say the staff is specialized in it; I mean I can point to [if] someone asks me a driver license question that's very complicated or complex, I could spend an hour and a half trying to figure out the answer or I can turn to Gail, or Janaan, or Tammy and they can tell me what the answer is. Those things I just leave to the staff to do and they do them very well. My day ends up focusing on the things that they identify as things that they cannot handle, and they tend to be things like bigger permit issues, a water quality permit [that]one of the local water authorities is trying to work their ways through, or a water authority trying to find the necessary funding to help carry out an improvement project; something like that. So those types of constituent things I

find myself much more actively involved in and that's what, when were not down here [in Harrisburg] doing actual legislation, I'll find myself doing those types of things back home. Yesterday's was in Snow Shoe-was a host of issues, but primarily it was a constituent that was facing difficulties with Centre Crest Nursing Home in care of a loved one. It's not really a state issue, it's not a legislative issue but it's a constituent problem that I'll work with her to try and address with the county commissioners in Centre County. And then I had some other issues come in that were PennDot related in Snow Shoe, but not proforma license things or registration issues that the staff wouldn't take care of, but more interested in summer jobs and winter operator jobs, and those types of things. So I find myself getting involved in those things when I'm back in the district."

Cummings: When you retire as Representative of the 76th district, what are some things you hoped to have accomplished that you have not been able to do yet?

Representative Hanna: "The biggest thing that I've always said from the start was one of the things that used to depress me the most-I grew up at a time when Piper [Aircraft Corporation] was in its heyday. When I was in high school we used to have a traffic cop down at the far end of town at the corner of race and main street because there was just so much traffic from the schools letting out at the same time that Piper let out that they actually literally had to have a traffic cop down there to direct traffic, it was below the last light in town. Well then we moved into an era where Piper was just slowly winding down operations and we had the loss of Piper, and of course the loss of International paper and Woolrich is scaling back. I just grew up in a time where my first tentative working years in Lock Haven were a time when one of the most common things that you heard people say is [that] we come from a depressed area. That was depressing to me! So I always said that when I ran for this job that I thought the most important contribution I could make was to try and provide economic opportunity and when I came down here [to Harrisburg], the first thing I was told by other legislators, other leaders down here, was everybody has their niche, you can be the legislator that helps firefighters, you can be the legislator that's standing up for the Fraternal Order Police, you can be the basic education guy, you can be-they all had their niche. I said, well I want to be the economic development guy, and they said oh no, nobody can do that, you'd fail at that, *[light laugh]* you cannot-nobody can actually provide economic development in our job; I just-It was very unsettling to me, and I just-it was very unsettling to me because I thought, well what's the most important thing we could do and it always came back to economic development. So I've kind of prided myself on the thought that I thought my job was to identify, not just prospective employers, but also employers who were in the area that could grow and one of the things that I saw right away was the strength of our universities, the strength of higher education, and the need to facilitate their growth, so that they could continue to be a economic driver in Central Pennsylvania. That's why I've tried to be a good friend to LHU and a good friend to Penn State, and that's worked to a considerable extent, I believe. Lock Haven [University] turns out to be one of the fastest growing institutions in the state system; that's a good thing."

"Then I looked at just the business sector and realized that manufacturing is really the only strong economic driver, and I just decided that I was going to do everything I could to try and recruit manufacturing jobs to the district. Even at a time when everybody told me manufacturing jobs were leaving to go overseas, not just leaving Clinton County, not just leaving Pennsylvania, but leaving the

U.S., but we've been able to do that, we've been able to recruit and expand First Quality tremendously, we've worked with like Renovo Rail, which again is heavy manufacturing, Cleveland Brothers, again heavy manufacturing, but it just—they were the type of jobs that if you worked hard and given the companies tools that they needed to succeed in our area, they would come there and expand there, and develop there. Those were the—that was the important contribution I could make. I've always tried to measure my success by looking at whether or not we've provided economic opportunity. Today, I still hear people say that we're a depressed area, but there's far fewer saying that today than when I first ran eighteen years ago and that's, I think, the way I measure whether I'm getting some things done or not."

Cummings: I have been here six weeks and "Dog Law" seems to be one of the greatest achievements of your Committee, what do you think has been your greatest in your career?

Representative Hanna: "In the legislative arena there would be one set of achievements. In my job as a legislator I would fall back on the economic development issues. I mean the biggest single success that I've had, has been my partnership with First Quality and their growth over the last nineteen years from just a couple of—not even a hundred employees to 1,200, 1,400, 1,500 employees in the district, so that's my single biggest achievement, is my partnership with First Quality and the expansion of their operations in the district. Legislatively, puppy-mills ranked-Dog Law ranks right up there amongst some of the best that we've done. The other things largely end up rolled into budgets because that's the most important piece of legislation that we do every single year. If we don't do the budget right, it doesn't matter *[light laugh]* what else we do. So I'm pretty proud at some of the budgets we did. I really liked the budgets where we've done big things for education. The years where we expanded pre-K, early childhood education, where we provided money to shrink class sizes, where we provided money to do technology; those things I think are huge achievements rolled into budgets which I certainly don't get all the credit for, but I'm very proud that legislatively I participated in shaping that budget by saying that they were priorities—top priorities for my area to see in legislation. Those types of things I think are probably the biggest legislative accomplishments that I can claim; budgets that do right by education, do right by economic development, and as I say I'm going to always to be proud of the work that we did on the Dog Law, largely because most people said that we couldn't get it done and we did."

Segment 3 (0:00 – 5:44)

Cummings: What part of the legislative process do you find to be the most frustrating at times?

Representative Hanna: "The committee of 203 *[laughs]*. There's no doubt that anybody that's worked on any committee, knows that as the committee size increases, the harder it is to get consensus, the harder it is to get things done and our legislative committees are twenty-five, twenty-six members generally at each meeting that's even difficult to develop consensus on. Dog Law it took a better part of eighteen months, hours and hours of hearings, and hours and hours of debate to reach consensus, just at the committee level, and then we finally brought it to the House Floor. There it becomes even more difficult, when you try and get a majority of 203 it's just so very very hard to get consensus. So the biggest frustration would have to be the sheer size of the legislature and I'm not sure that I know the

answer to that. I mean it sounds like the easy answer is to shrink the legislature. I recognize that it may help me in the difficult job of getting consensus, but I also recognize that's a great price tag to our constituents because right now if you shrunk the size of the legislature, the constituent service shrinks with it. So the services that people need back in the district shrink with the size of the legislature. It's not an easy answer but it certainly is the biggest frustration for me."

Cummings: As one of your constituents, I have heard other constituents say that you are a member that cares for them and that you represent them effectively. Could you explain how that makes you feel and how it plays into you being effective at your job?

Representative Hanna: "You know there's-and I'm sure you've studied this, there is representative democracy and true democracy and ours is a representative democracy. So that is my job is to make sure that I represent the people who elected me, and that's not a situation where I take a poll and the majority wins and I got to go and do exactly what the majority wants, but it is important for me to reflect the overriding values of the people that I represent down here, and I do try very hard to do that. I mean there are times when I find that I may be a little different on some issues, but at the same time I think that I have to weigh those issues in a way, to be sure that if I'm not going to reflect the district it has to be on a really solid principle. It can't be something that's just my whim and that I'd have to disagree with the majority of my constituents on. So we really have to not just serve our constituents, we have to serve our conscience as well and most of the time I find that I can reconcile the two without any difficulty, but I do try very hard to make sure when I'm looking at the issues, that I'm not just looking at it from my perspective but the perspective of the people that I represent."

Cummings: There is a lot demanded by constituents from their legislators at times which can have a serious impact on a legislator's personal time and activities. What are some hobbies and interests that you find enjoyable when you do have the free personal time that colleagues or constituents may not know about you?

Representative Hanna: "Well my biggest interest outside of the office kind of center around my kids. When I was first married-my wife and I enjoyed playing golf a lot, but as our kids started to grow up and they found their interests more in sports and hunting and fishing, things of that nature, my interest shifted with theirs and I don't golf at all anymore [*light laugh*] as a result of that. Outside of the office, if it's something that my kids like to do, something my family likes to do, then I like to do it. Right now that seems to largely center around those types of activities. I get less of the sports now that one is out of college and one is in college, so I don't get quite as much of the sporting activities as we did when they were playing basketball, and soccer, and everything else, but they're still both interested in fishing in particular and a little bit of hunting so I still do a lot of those activities and I suppose as I get a little older and they get a little older, maybe those priorities will shift again. Right now I find the most pleasure in doing things that my sons like to do."

Cummings: Well I thank you for your time and appreciate this great opportunity to interview you, and I am glad you shared your thoughts with me.

Representative Hanna: “Well I appreciate the opportunity to sit down with you and I’ve enjoyed working with you I wish we had a little more time together but as you know the way the office operates and the fact that I end up actually working out of 1-2-3 different offices that it often times is kind of tough to have as much contact as we’d like.”

(End of Interview)