

## **Jane Kenny Interview** (June 26, 2013)

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** I'm Marie DeNoia Aronsohn at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics. I'm here today with Jane Kenny who served as Chief of Policy and Planning and Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs in Christie Todd Whitman's administration. We're here to discuss the administration as part of an ongoing series of interviews for the Center on the American Governor. Jane, as you know, this is your second interview that we're conducting for the Center on the American Governor. The first time around you spoke of your time in the Kean administration. This time we'll be focusing on Christie Whitman's administration and those seven years but we'd like to begin with your beginning so your entrée into politics. You were studying for your Ph.D. here at Rutgers. Right?

**Jane Kenny:** Yes, I was, and I had all my coursework completed. At the time I had a child who I was told by her dentist was dentally mature and she was going to need braces. I never forgot the phrase. And so I decided to look outside, take a leave of absence, and just coincidentally, Chris Daggett who was then Chief of Staff for Tom Kean-- he was-- sorry-- Deputy Chief of Staff, called Rutgers Graduate School of English looking for a writer of all things. So the man that was the chief person for the English department at the time-- his name is Barry Qualls-- he's very involved in Rutgers now and he's one of my favorite people-- he came to me and said, "Why don't you go work for Tom Kean? You could go to Drumthwacket." And of course I had no idea what he was talking about but I did begin as a writer. Not even-- it was really a glorified answerer of letters in the governor's office in the Kean administration. It was on the third floor. It was called the mailroom-- I used to call it the sub sub subbasement because of my literary background and people that really had very inconsequential jobs worked in the sub sub subbasement. I began to answer letters that constituents wrote to Tom Kean. So the fact was that he had wanted every single person to get an answer to a letter-- that was one thing. And then another thing was there was a plan to automate the offices and I thought oh, good, I'll learn how to use a word processor and then I can write my dissertation on a word processor instead of a typewriter, which is what we were all using in the early '80s. So I went to work for Tom Kean and quickly got hooked.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** I assume you never went back to your dissertation.

**Jane Kenny:** I never did, no. I took a leave of absence and I never went back.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Politics was very compelling to you right away once you began to work--

**Jane Kenny:** Yeah-- certainly small 'p' politics and the fact that you were influencing people's lives every day with decisions that were made. I could see it firsthand because being in the governor's office, even though it was the mailroom, we just got asked all kinds of questions, issues of concern, people that would write letters and a lot of them were very compelling about some of the issues that they were facing in their towns or in their neighborhoods, whether it was environment or health or municipal issues. It quickly became obvious that decisions that were made in the state affected people's lives every day and I had been walking around blissfully unaware of that for my first couple of decades of life. The introduction was a very big eye-opener for me, and I think I was also really fortunate because I got to work for somebody like Tom Kean. Although I didn't work for him directly in those early years, I had to watch him carefully so I would know what his voice was and how he spoke and how he handled issues so I could write letters in his voice, and it was an incredible education and an incredible introduction to government.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** You were with the administration all eight years.

**Jane Kenny:** Well, actually seven because I came in-- I finished my last course in May and I remember I had the interview with Chris Daggett and he said, "When can you start?" and I said, "Well, I'm not finished teaching. I have to turn all my papers in and everything so I don't do that until May 18<sup>th</sup>" and he said, "Can you start May 19<sup>th</sup>?", which was a Thursday. So there was a desperation about getting some of this stuff done. He really saw that need and knew that Tom Kean wasn't going out into public a whole lot then. I don't know if you remember his first year, he had a bad back, he was in the hospital for a while, and it took a while to get the administration going because of the recount which took several weeks. I wasn't around for any of that so when I got there in May after a year and a few months into his administration he had been out. Whenever he had been out people would say, "I wrote you three times and you never answered my letters" and he was really getting frustrated about that. So I think Chris Daggett understood that this was a priority and they also made this other decision to automate state government because they knew that we weren't going to be able to handle those kinds of issues, tracking bills and getting back to people and doing mass mailings and all the kinds of stuff that we take for granted now, the way we can easily communicate with people, and then people weren't even really faxing. They were basically putting letters in an envelope with a stamp and putting it in a mailbox. If you wanted to communicate with someone, that's how you did it. So yeah, I stayed for seven years. When he got reelected as you remember by a sort of historic majority and gave us a lot of credit and our office that we then formed. About a year after I was there we changed the mailroom into the Office of Constituent Relations and made it much more professional. We hired a lot of young people right out of college-- really great writers. A lot of people that you would recognize if you heard their names

today-- a terrific group of young people who were passionate and committed to government-- committed to doing the right thing and getting the word out. We went to town meetings and would answer questions of constituents. We did all that community outreach and stakeholder outreach. We didn't know what it was called but we were doing all the kinds of things that I spent a lot of time in later years of my public life doing. But that was really the beginning of it and it was such an eye-opener. When he got reelected he gave a lot of credit to our office and the outreach that we had done and the relations that we had formed with communities and nonprofits. So he promoted me at that point and brought me downstairs to the good real estate as I always like to say and I became a senior aide first to the Chief of Staff but then he asked me to be Cabinet Secretary. So I started working on issues as a senior aide for the governor. I stayed for seven years, turned the lights out at the end of the administration.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** After you turned the lights out what did you do next?

**Jane Kenny:** Well, I was really fortunate because towards the end of his tenure I was offered a job. Tom Kean believed that you had to form partnerships with the business community, and a lot of the issues I was working on, specifically the arts, I got to know different members of the business community and tried to help them help the state. We had the policy and they could help us implement it. So one of the CEOs offered me a job as vice president for corporate and community affairs so I was lucky I had a job. I stayed with Tom Kean until the end and did the transition for him because I wasn't out looking. The CEO allowed me to do that so I stayed there for four years. I didn't know it was only going to be four years. I didn't know that Christie Whitman would be elected governor and that there was no way that I was not going to want to be part of that.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** When did you first hear that name, Christie Todd Whitman?

**Jane Kenny:** Well, she worked in the last year of the administration. I do remember really clearly though I was in the governor's office of course working for Tom Kean. If you know the way the governor's office works now, he used the very small office, as you face the place where they give the press conferences. He was all the way over on the right in the corner, a tiny, little office, and he stood up most of the time when he worked 'cause of his back and he would always be standing when you walked in to give him a briefing or give him information. And I remember I was in there for some reason and he said to me that he was going to appoint Christie Whitman to be President of the Board of Public Utilities and he had

wonderful things to say about her and it made me very curious to meet her. I knew she had come from a family of public service and didn't really know much about her other than that. Her mother used to write to Tom Kean. She was on the Board of Higher Education and she obviously had been very involved with the Republican Party. So I knew the name because I read the letters and she was a beautiful writer so I noticed that, but hearing about Christie-- that was the first time I had heard her name when she came to the BPU.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** And the first time you met her?

**Jane Kenny:** Probably with the first cabinet meeting. I don't remember the first moment I met her but I remember that we did have a cabinet retreat up at Waterloo Village. And she was there and that was when I talked to her more informally for the first time. But the BPU at the time was in Newark and so I didn't see her as often as I saw the other cabinet members. It was the last year of the administration so things were really dying down. But when I went to the private sector I ran into her a lot because I had been in this national organization called Women Executives in State Government and we supported it in my private sector work and because I reported to a CEO I could still be in it. So they would often invite prominent women or women of interest to come and speak and I'd be somewhere else in the country and she'd be there and we used to talk I just remember always thinking how well she handled herself and how well she was received wherever she spoke. People really enjoyed her and her story. One day I ran into her somewhere and she told me she was going to run against Bill Bradley—

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** For the U.S. Senate.

**Jane Kenny:** --for the U.S. Senate and I was like oh, why are you doing that? I just couldn't—

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** What were you thinking?

**Jane Kenny:** Well, because Bill Bradley was such a popular senator and everybody knew him, play sports in this country and you're a star and he was a good basketball player, and I just thought that it was almost a setup for her. I frankly I just didn't understand it but I had to admire her. It wasn't as if I thought oh, wow, fools rush in-- it wasn't like that at all. I felt she has a purpose here and she knows what she's doing; she's made this decision and this is something that she'll make work for her.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Did she express that to you or you could tell?

**Jane Kenny:** I just could tell. She said to me she was doing it and I looked at her. I remember I didn't know her well enough to say, "What?" <laughs> I just kind of listened and she just said it in a way that was calm and confident and it seemed to me that she knew what she was doing, and so of course I watched her. I didn't work on the campaign. I wasn't involved in any way during that time, but I did see her speak and I did watch her and she would come out to these different things that I was at and speak and really my admiration for her continued to grow. I thought she just did a beautiful job, the way she ran that campaign and it also showed some of the foibles of a person that wouldn't take on some of these issues. Although property taxes really had nothing to do with Bill Bradley, he just refused to talk to her in an equal, almost respectful way. It sort of changed my opinion of him a little bit 'cause I had always thought so well of him. I thought well, why won't he just answer the question. We don't have that many statewide elected officials and we're a small state. But anyway, as you know, she lost but she did very well on the campaign.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Were you surprised? Do you remember that evening when the results were coming through or perhaps you saw it the next day--

**Jane Kenny:** Yeah. She came really close and it was sort of like yeah, good for you, but then I kind of lost track of her a little bit and then I heard she was running for governor. I had worked with Cary Edwards in the Kean years and really had a tremendous amount of respect for Cary and tremendous fondness for him as well but I thought it would be just really cool for Christie Whitman to have a chance at this.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Because of her?

**Jane Kenny:** Because of her and the work she had done. Obviously, I would be lying to you if I didn't say the fact that she was an intelligent, compassionate woman-- that gender really had something to do with it but just the whole package. It wasn't just a gut reaction; it was just the whole package of what I had seen over the past few years and although I didn't work specifically in the campaign, I think her brother one time called me and asked me to write something on the arts and I did that. But one thing we did do, right before the election, we invited her to come to speak to the employees. I was working at Beneficial, which is now Pfizer, and it was in that beautiful campus in Peapack, Gladstone, and it was a beautiful day and we had all the employees outside in the grounds. A lot of people were very

interested to hear her of course and we just invited everyone. And the next day there was a front-page story in the New York Times; she's addressing a group of businesspeople. It was one of those things that you felt wow, this is really her message, let's get businesses back to the state. We should be business friendly and here is this person and this is what she's going to do; these are the promises she's making. I'm not saying it turned anyone but it was a very positive moment for her and I just felt wow, this might happen. I didn't really know but for the first time I started thinking maybe she would win.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Was that when you first started thinking maybe I want to be part of this--

**Jane Kenny:** No. I just didn't know that well enough. I was just so excited and I didn't think of myself and it was more this would be great, and I remember talking to people, especially the people that worked in the company where I worked and they just kept saying, "She doesn't have a chance" and I said, "She does." I used to argue with them and say, "She does have a chance. She's a very solid candidate and she does have a chance" and it was kind of interesting that people really dismissed her outright when she was running, people that I knew.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** What do you think that was about?

**Jane Kenny:** Well, Christie Whitman wasn't an insider in any way, shape or form and we'd never had a woman governor. I do think gender always plays a role. I don't like to overemphasize it but I think that it's uncomfortable for people to not have the people that have been in charge, not to have the familiarity and to know the people that they're talking about, and then the backing of the party. I mean she didn't even really have much support from her party. I think there was a lot of comfort even in Trenton with the Republicans-- the senate and the different members of the legislature who felt that they understood Jim Florio, they could work out things with him, they all knew how to talk to one another, and here was this person that they really weren't sure how they would deal with. This is kind of where I think things were at the time, but as you know she did win and I kept working. I had kept my head down and I kept-- I had my corner office and stock options and I just kept my head down. I had two small kids at the time and a very young 12-year-old so I-- it was three kids and I had someone living with us at home taking care of the kids but I was always home early and my chairman started early in the day so I was in real early. But I'd be home at five o'clock and so life was very set for me. And after a couple weeks I said, "Oh," <laughs> so then I thought well-- I helped Tom Kean close up the governor's office and no one in the transition



office had ever been in the governor's office before so I thought okay, well, maybe I can help as a loaned executive, help Governor Whitman transition. And so the CEO said, "Of course" and so I would drive from Peapack down to Trenton three days a week and start working, and Judy Shaw-- chief-- became the first woman Chief of Staff and Peter Verniero had just been named. But none of the cabinet had been selected. I believe not long after I went down Debbie Poritz who became the first female Attorney General but really it was just Peter and Judy and a lot of people from the campaign that were helping with the transition. It was-- and Christie Whitman wanted to do listening sessions so we would just bring people in and do these roundtables on health or energy or pollution or finances and create separate task forces.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** You were on a volunteer--

**Jane Kenny:** Totally volunteer. I was just going down there. I showed up in the mornings, I did whatever anybody wanted me to do and started getting to know Christie Whitman again as governor-- as governor-elect and it was really just really fun. I realized that oh, <laughs> I just really liked this.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Had you missed it?

**Jane Kenny:** I don't know. I don't miss it. I don't so much miss things. There was a double excitement because here was this woman; she's very different from anyone I had ever worked for; she's not that much older than I am. I mean it was almost like generationally we were similar. She had a great sense of humor. We laughed a lot. Even though things were crazy and there was a lot of crazy stuff going on, I liked her approach. I liked the way she thought about issues. She was serious but didn't take herself seriously. So the next thing I knew I had been offered some cabinet positions and I just remember going home over Thanksgiving and we were at my parents' house, my sisters and brother and my husband and my mother and father, whoever; there was the generational thing. Everybody was there and I told them that I had been offered this job to go back into government to be in Christie Whitman's cabinet. And I remember my father saying, "Why would you give up what you have?" and "Financially you're going to be so much better off if you stay where you are" and my sisters and brother said, "Oh, that sounds like a lot of fun and that'd be great" and I was struggling with it and my husband said to me one night, "You're not struggling about whether to stay in the private sector or go to-- You're struggling about which position you should take in government" and I realized he was right and I just really wanted to do it. And I was worried because I had these little kids and I had this wonderful woman who lived with us, she actually

stayed with us for seven years, but I remember saying this to Christie Whitman when we talked about it and she said, "Well, I'm just going to kick you out at the end of the day. There's no reason why you have to stay late. You do your job, you go home, you be with your family. Family's really important. I'll kick you out if I see you're still here." So she understood my concerns.

I wanted to be Chief of Policy and Planning. It was one of the offers and that was the one I took because I thought working next to her in the governor's office is what I thought would be the best thing and what I wanted to do. I talked to some people who had done both. Chris Daggett had been in the governor's office and then he went to DEP as commissioner in the Kean years and Mike Cole had been in the AG's office as you know, I mean he had been Chief Counsel for Tom Kean in the second term and then he went over to the AG's office and was AG. And they all told me, "You're so much better off in a department. Don't go in the governor's office. It's crazy there. You can do so much. You can really change policy outside the governor's office. You can implement policy" but I didn't listen. I really wanted to work with her directly. That was my main reason for wanting to be back in the governor's office so I could work with her every day. I knew the difference between being a cabinet member from serving for Tom Kean and being in the governor's office. I knew what the difference was and I wanted to be working on policy for her 'cause I agreed with her approach and I thought this probably will not be that hard since I really feel very comfortable with her-- how she talks about issues.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Was it the right decision?

**Jane Kenny:** Yes, it was the right decision. Yes, overall it was the right decision. When you say "right" there's so many—

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Gradients of "right."

**Jane Kenny:** I did miss kindergarten and second grade and that hurt. I would go home at night and I'd think okay, so I was with her for 45 minutes today I mean as an awake child. <laughs> That was hard. When people ask me to come and speak about balancing everything and doing it all and having a career and children I always say, "It's a myth-- it's a total myth." I mean obviously I had a family and had a career but not at the same time. You really need a lot of help to do that. But the work was exhilarating, very, very tough. So many things were going on. She just wanted to get everything done the first year and had made a lot of promises which were very important to her.



**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** What were some of those policies that you worked on that first year?

**Jane Kenny:** So many things. Some of the things that I don't think people even remember. She did this whole juvenile justice reform. We were very, very involved with that. She had done some work with a national group understanding prisons and the kids that were being treated were all over the place. There was no uniform way to treat young offenders so that was an enormous work and I had a very good policy adviser in my shop, Bruce Stout, who really understood the national implications and understood the issues and he was invaluable. We worked on environmental issues right away. We already realized that New Jersey had so much contaminated land, underused. The only people that were using it were people that were criminals. There wasn't any benefit to a town or municipality from this land. Christie Whitman signed the first Brownfields Act, which meant you could clean up this land and put it back into productive use. Health issues, the arts-- as it turned out, when I got to Christie Whitman's office some of the issues I had worked on for Tom Kean were still in the same folder or file.

Liberty State Park-- I don't know if you remember but that was a very controversial issue in the Kean years. In the Florio years I think they were still trying to get a golf course right on the park land. We did make the decision that there wouldn't be a golf course right in the park land and that was an enormous decision; that was an enormous issue.

The Performing Arts Center-- I think Judy Shaw likes to say when that decision was finally made that the state would go ahead and finish this project, which I had actually worked on for Tom Kean, there were four women in the room who made this decision. I know she was really proud of that. That went ahead but this was all right away.

Of course, though I didn't work directly on it, the tax cut. That was coming from the Treasurer and I think he probably worked with the Chief Counsel. At the time she decided she would like to do it earlier than had first been proposed. I remember the Senate President was very surprised when she announced that at her first State of the State. Something that took a lot of time that I wish we had postponed, but all for a good cause I guess, was the second part of the autonomy bill that Tom Kean had passed in the '80s for higher education and we felt that they shouldn't be regulated, that there should be more autonomy, and that was if you remember very controversial. I worked very closely on that issue.

There were a lot of things going on right away and Christie Whitman really wanted to hit the ground running and she did. Her first year, she did the tax cut. We were really trying to get businesses back to New Jersey. A lot of them had left. We felt that they either didn't understand what the laws were or they thought they were too onerous or taxes were too high. There was this whole feeling of we are open for business and getting business to come back and constantly showing those numbers and that data. I was very involved with the economic master plan. I was very involved with trying to see if privatization would work in any shape or form. This was all in the first year. I left the policy office in May of the following year and my staff put together a list of all the things that Christie Whitman had accomplished with us as her policy advisers and it was this long list of issues. One of my main areas of focus were the urban areas in the state. The governor had asked me to put together what she came to call an urban coordinating council. We felt that people were working in the cities, given state aid or state subsidies or grants, that the Department of Health didn't know what the Department of Environmental Protection was doing and the Department of Labor was off on a different corner. Everybody was trying to help and a lot of money was coming from the state but it was not always clear or coherent. She really wanted the departments to work together on a plan that had been developed by the community with the mayor. We basically said, "If you give us a plan that has the church groups' or the nonprofits' and the mayor's support we will get this group of people" and EDA would be at the table and Labor and Health and DEP and we'd all be there and we'd say, "How do we support what you want to do?" And I mean the results are still out to this day. I will see some of the mayors are still there too, and I will see mayors and they'll say how much they miss that work that we had all done together.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Briefly, a couple of the results that are still out there.

**Jane Kenny:** I think you were there when we did Long Branch.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** I was.

**Jane Kenny:** Yes. So we thought that if we had some state aid as well as grants there was so much potential there. Here's this ocean. <laughs> It was so derelict. There was a lot of disagreement about what should happen there and so it had been at a standstill for so long. We came out and because the State was there and we tried to do a coordinated plan with the City and the nonprofits. We got a developer. We actually brought a developer into a conference that had done Faneuil Hall and some of the work in Baltimore. Her name is Jane Thompson. We put her in a hotel. The only thing that was there was the Hilton. We gave her a beachfront

room and the pier was still standing, half demolished, and there was just nothing around and she just saw it. She got it. And they helped us, they worked with us to put together a plan for Long Branch. Pier Village was one of the first things where people started thinking how do you get some sort of a critical mass of not just departments but we also forced moderate- and low-income housing so that was part of the developer's agreement. It wasn't just okay, everything's going to be market rate. We were mindful of the fact that all kinds of people needed to live here. It had to be a vibrant community. We didn't want to drive people out that had been there for years but give them the opportunity to maybe come back and live there again so that was part of the agreement. I think that coordinated approach attracted, as well as the state subsidy and grants and the fact that Long Branch. At that point they understood-- the town and the community understood that they needed to speak with one voice if they wanted to have all these good things happen. And so that was the beginning and it's great to go there now and see this thriving community that had been pretty derelict before that.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** I remember thinking "if only." What was it like working on all of this so quickly that first year with the legislature? How did the legislature feel about all this if you recall?

**Jane Kenny:** I think they were really cooperative. When you think about what we got done it wasn't as if we were handed it on a silver platter-- you had to go through the process, but we got stuff done. We got legislation passed. We got the tax cut. We were able to make those differences. I think Chuck Haytaian was very cooperative, very helpful to us. We always tried to bring them in. Process is really important in Trenton as you know. Some of us really had to learn about that because nobody had done this before. I think that the hardest part really was the fact that Christie Whitman was a total outsider. You could say it's 'cause she's a woman or whatever but the fact of the matter is when one of the legislators or two of the legislators would walk in the door they would walk in there'd be the Chief of Staff, female, me, Chief of Policy, female, sometimes the AG, female, the Governor, female, and this was really a different atmosphere. And I had been in that room with Tom Kean and often had the only woman in the room, so it was very different.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** In your recollection, were some of the legislators better at working with you and with the administration than others?

**Jane Kenny:** It's always the case. There's always the case and it was true in the Kean years too so I can't make too much of that. But he had more of a camaraderie 'cause he had been in the legislature and he had paid those dues and I think the

legislature always respects people that have been there. I think that there were a few women in the administration who had been legislators and they had good relationships with some of them. I knew a lot of the legislators. They were still there from the time I had worked for Tom Kean. One of my cousins was in the legislature at the time. He was in the Democratic Party, Bernie Kenny, so I felt that I could go and talk to people. In fact higher ed, which was so controversial, and if you remember we had terrible articles that came out every single day in the state's largest newspaper written as news articles which were really opinion pieces. They compared what we were doing to the takeover of Bosnia and it was really amazing, but if you remember except for Gordon McGinnis, one person, the Democrat, the legislature supported us or it didn't say anything. And I had talked to every one of them before we announced this and it made a tremendous difference so we had a lot of flack and a lot of things thrown our way but it wasn't from the legislature. That would have been the end of it, that would have been a loss for her, and it wasn't so--

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** What was the administration's role on federal issues?

**Jane Kenny:** Very active. Unfortunately-- just at that time when Christie Whitman was elected governor, the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress came in and it was headed by Newt Gingrich and the Contract with America. A lot of people were new in Congress and the issues they were looking at would really have adversely affected New Jersey had they been successful because they were looking at some of the environmental laws like the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Medicare, Medicaid. They wanted to surgically open up a lot of these laws without giving comfort that something better would take its place for the states. And so as Chief of Policy I was in charge of the Washington office and federal issues and I would go to Washington with her. At the first National Governors Association a lot of these issues were discussed. She would meet with the moderate Senate members, especially Bob Dole and Olympia Snowe, which really gave me a tremendous respect for Bob Dole. He was so loved in the Senate by Democrats and Republicans. It might have been maybe my last witness of the way that you can really work together and the sort of civility that's so important to have. I think sadly, sadly we have lost it. But she was really active. Another big issue that we were working on in the governor's office and writing papers very quickly to show the data of how this would adversely affect our state. And I remember being in this little meeting room-- very small meeting room with her with Dole and Snowe and some others basically getting someone to fax me some information about New Jersey. One of my policy advisers had written up this stuff. He was brilliant on Medicaid. And I don't know if you remember Brian Baxter but he sent this and I literally handed it over, and the next thing I knew it was being held by all the people and discussed as a way to negotiate a change or a settlement with the Congress. I remember telling Brian that Bob Dole talked about

his numbers and held this piece of paper. So we were in the middle of it. We had meetings with Leon Panetta in the Clinton years and Janet Reno would be at the meetings. But after that first year or towards the end of that first year, Christie did become very known nationally because she did the tax cut and she got to do the response to President Clinton's State of the Union address and it really was rapid and she was very popular. I think after the first few months she had the highest popularity rating that had ever been recorded for a governor in that time, so that made things very busy and there was just a lot going on.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Exciting--

**Jane Kenny:** It was exciting, yeah. It was-- the adrenaline was definitely—

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** There was even discussion later of her as a vice presidential—

**Jane Kenny:** Yes.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** --potential--

**Jane Kenny:** Yes.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** What was that like?

**Jane Kenny:** It fit in with all the national attention she was receiving. It was one more piece of that with people coming in to interview her for national newspapers, magazines, writing books about her. It was a lot of flutter but at the same time she was very seriously governing and there were a lot of things going on. The Edison pipeline explosion was a major tragedy and we quickly worked on legislation to improve pipeline safety. I don't know if you remember a real tragedy when Megan's Law was passed. The people who lost their daughter to a predator in the neighborhood, Christie had a very, very personal connection with that family and the mother of Megan that became Megan's Law. She is an amazing woman, the way she was able to gather her strength to get this law passed, and Christie Whitman was just totally involved with that. Very much leading those charges. So even though there was all this flurry of activity and speculation, she was governor and that was what she was doing.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Did you feel that you faced different expectations because of the governor's gender and because you are a woman?

**Jane Kenny:** Well, I had never really had other peers or a female in charge of any place I ever worked, so for me that part was just fun. I mean I just really enjoyed that person that I was working for who was a woman and there were like perspectives that we shared. It was much more comfortable understanding how I could help her best, but at the same time it was really important to have all the voices at the table to get the better product. So mine was one voice. I was really thinking of myself as a person that had been in the business world and a person that had been in the governor's office and I felt that's where I could give her good advice and help. I also felt, having been a mother my whole adult life, I had that perspective, which I think was something we shared. I liked not being the only woman in the room. I liked it that we had a voice and that we certainly had the opportunity to appoint more women to boards and commissions, which we did. I definitely felt the difference; it wasn't a small thing.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Between the two administrations?

**Jane Kenny:** Yes, in that way or in any other experience I had ever had in my professional life. Before I was of an age before the whole blow-up between Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill where people became aware that you should be careful what you say in the workplace, sexism abounded. It was very easy for people to say things when as a woman you'd walk in the room. People would comment. There was always something to be said. So I liked the fact that that wasn't happening anymore. It was a relief. But I also felt when I was in the private sector a lot of my male colleagues told me they trusted me but they never really wanted to be in a closed-door meeting with me again 'cause they had their future to think about. That just floored me like somehow I might try to get money out of the company by accusing them of something. So I thought, "Boy, if I wanted to be a whistleblower there are so many times that any of us could have done that" but you sort of continue to work on your work. But it was a relief not to have to put up with a lot of what's supposed to be funny-- it's not always funny. A lot of the younger women really had a hard time. I was happy that it made a difference to be in that atmosphere and to be in an atmosphere that was very respectful of where people came from and where their thoughts were.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Overall, what do you think were Governor Whitman's greatest strengths?



**Jane Kenny:** She has an amazing inner strength. She really doesn't get rattled. Crazy situations just make her stronger. She's very clear about how she feels about things. She's always willing to listen and she's able to make a judgment, make a decision. She makes a decision based on the input that she gets from as diverse a number of people as possible. She really loves hearing people. You'd be in the room and there'd be somebody that-- I might bring in one of the younger people on my staff or somebody that had worked in the legislature for a while and might have something to say. She'd always kind of perk up, here's another point of view; she really liked that. So I think that she was able to listen to a lot of different sometimes conflicting information but still make a decision based on her own moral compass. She has a very strong moral compass, very compassionate. I love the fact that she always took her work seriously but not herself. That was really something I believed. I used to tell my staff this is how we are going to be but I saw it in action with her. So she has a lot of strengths. I think that she was clearly a very good governor and she got a lot done. She really cared about the people she was working for and with, had a lot of respect for all kinds of people.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** What do you think were some of her greatest accomplishments?

**Jane Kenny:** Well, I'm prejudiced but I really believe the work that we did in the cities was an accomplishment. But it was so balanced by that whole idea of let's preserve land, a million acres, and the fact that we live in this densely populated state. How can we make sure that businesses like to be here and that people can thrive and that people can prosper. We can be healthy and we have places to recreate and that we preserve something that once you lose it you lose it forever. So that balance between working on contaminated brownfields and building up Long Branch and the city of Elizabeth and the work we did in New Brunswick and Perth Amboy and Asbury Park. Some of the stuff that we were doing there was also aided by the fact that we were trying to take the pressure off our green space and preserve that land. And some of the things that went into that were not just the Brownfields Act, which was the first in the country, but transit villages where you start to encourage people to live near where the public transportation is. What are we hearing now? There are more and more people who would prefer to be walking/urban. You'd like to be able as you age, or younger people, to be near mass transportation so you don't always have to be stuck in a car going somewhere and that was new. When we did housing-- when I got to be Commissioner of Community Affairs we did a lot of affordable housing. But I always believed that you have to do market rate and affordable-- you do moderate, you do market rate because you don't want to have a segregated economy. You need market-rate people to go out and occupy the shops and the restaurants but people need a place to live in the state, and when you talk about affordable housing if you just think

about it-- close your eyes for a minute and think you want your children to be able to live in your state. It's not for some other people. It's for our people, all of us; people in the state that might not be able to afford housing. You don't want them to have to leave here. So a lot of these issues were very passionate for her as well and I was passionate about it so I think that those two things together. There were a lot of other reforms that took place. I know the tax cut really spurred businesses to come here and made people feel better about living in this state. Some of the financial issues I think were misunderstood at the time, maybe not explained as well as they could have been, hard to understand but the financial community believed in it and the rating—

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Are you talking about--

**Jane Kenny:** --The Pension Bond Act and the rating agencies did too. We always had a superior rating. That is something that should have been looked at every year but she left not long after that so I think that was too bad that she left before she was finished being governor.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Because you feel--

**Jane Kenny:** Because I think she probably would have taken another look that next year. She was a very fiscally responsible person and believed that was part of her tenet, was part of her-- who she was, so if that seemed to start to be drifting another way or-- she would have gotten advice from the financial community again and-- as she did the first time and probably would have adjusted that.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** What would you say were her weaknesses?

**Jane Kenny:** Well, that I think only because that was never understood.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** That policy.

**Jane Kenny:** Yeah, because people didn't understand it and we knew people weren't understanding it. It never got explained well but she believed in it because the financial community embraced it. The rating agencies said this was the right thing. It enabled her to do some things for people in the state that we wouldn't have been able to do. It made sense to people that understood how finances work, but it didn't make sense to the Senate. The senator that was in charge of the

budget committee was from her own party. People say things that are catchy and that's what gets picked up. Then years later when it was clearly not working and a lot of problems in the state resulted from that. But that should have been looked at again. Governors that came after her should have adjusted some of those numbers. So I think that hurt her in a very unfortunate way.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Her legacy.

**Jane Kenny:** Yeah, because I think she left the state and there was really no one to defend her legacy. We were all really busy because do you remember right after she left the state, not long after that, 9/11 occurred and she was at EPA when that happened and it was just so devastating for this country. And the last thing she was doing when she was in the middle of making sure that the regulatory agency was working, was to defend herself. She was in Washington, D.C., and very, very involved in other issues, so a lot of that criticism stuck. That was too bad but she was a strong, strong governor and got a lot of things done. I wish she had been around for 9/11 because I think she would have been a tremendous leader for the state when we really needed leadership.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** How would you compare her to the other governors you worked with? There was Tom Kean but also--

**Jane Kenny:** I worked for a year for Don DiFrancesco. I knew her better in the end; I understood her better. I mean Tom Kean was my mentor, teacher, god. He was kind of way up there. I learned so much from him, watching him, listening to him, and I always was a student. I was always learning the whole time I was there. I was a young person and he was the master so I always felt like I grew up in the State House. But with Christie Whitman I really felt we talked to each other as colleagues and peers. She was governor. I had the ultimate amount of respect for that office and for her as a person but I just felt I could be useful to her because I understood more what she needed. I also came with more experience in my backpack, <laughs> your pack you carry around. I had spent some time in the private sector. I understood more what the financial community was looking for and needed and what government could do and shouldn't do to help, but how you can really form those kinds of alliances. And I had a good rapport with a lot of the people in the legislature and I grew up in Jersey City so I was very comfortable working in urban areas and understood the vibrancy that could be in an urban area. I really believed in that. So I think it was a difference for me and I think that in terms of governing and in terms of their issues they weren't very dissimilar. We're odd in this state and we still are a little bit because most of the Republicans in this

state are much more moderate than the national Republicans and it's getting more and more ridiculous as we know, the divisions, but Tom Kean was a moderate Republican. I had grown up in Jersey City so I never met a Republican until I went to college and I really agreed with a lot of Tom Kean's policies. I felt yeah, you're good to people that need help from the state, there are always going to be people that need some help. The social programs are important and yet we shouldn't be spending other people's money in an irresponsible way, so it seemed smart to me. And Christie Whitman had the same feeling about helping those in need and a lot of the social programs she was very committed to. She was so interested in urban areas and making sure they thrived. The work that I did for her in Camden we just got so close to doing something meaningful down there and that was really a shame that that all fell apart after she left. So I didn't think that they were dissimilar that much in policies.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** And Governor DiFrancesco was sort of the same.

**Jane Kenny:** Well, it was different with him. I think that was really a flaw of New Jersey's law. I mean you should not be a Senate President and a governor-- an acting governor or whatever, it's just wrong. I could see that doesn't work because we have three branches of government and he was definitely a legislator and that's where he came from. I think governing is a different-- it's just a different experience, and I know anybody that's gone from one to the other will say that. They'll spend time in the legislature and then they'll be in a cabinet position or be a staff person in the governor's office or whatever and I'll always joke with them and say, "Ha, ha. Now you have to take responsibility for what you're doing." It's just kidding because I always felt in the executive branch if you say something as governor, this powerful governor, you can influence policy overnight. Yet in the legislature you can sort of back a bill but then not really want it or care about it. So I think it's a very different set of standards that you bring and I think it's impossible to do both jobs, impossible. So that was a very different experience and I didn't particularly care for, not the person, but being in that predicament that here you have somebody who was trying to run the legislature and govern at the same time; I don't think it's workable.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Did you experience yourself as part of history, historic change, achievement in your role with Governor Whitman?

**Jane Kenny:** Really in the beginning a lot. I mean it just was very heady in the beginning to feel that here we had the first woman governor. The attention, obviously, was exciting and the fact that she always felt okay, it's good to get the

attention because we can get more stuff done in the state. If you're more visible, people take you more seriously because people are paying attention to you all around. Just being right there was fun plus one of the most fun things that I did was her second address-- her second State of the State we did at the Performing Arts Center and we all sat on the stage. I always wanted to be on that stage. I just didn't know that it was going to be in a chair <laughs> listening to a speech so <laughs> that was really fun. Yes, you did feel that it was historic-- I personally did. I was very, very, very excited when she got elected, and I told this story so many times, but I woke up my daughter, my middle daughter-- my older daughter was away at high school-- but I woke up my middle daughter who was I think five and I said, "Elizabeth, we have a woman governor" and she says, "Is that good, Mommy?" <laughs> and then my son asked "Can men be governor too?" So it was really meaningful to me, very exciting that there was an opportunity for women and all the women that we could appoint-- that we could look at. It was always interesting to me because wherever I have ever been they'd say, "We'd love to appoint women. We just can't find any." We had no trouble finding people. The people we knew were women, <laughs> professional women, women that had great experience in different things. We knew them so we could bring in those people to help.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** We've talked a little bit about this, but once Governor Whitman left office what happened to the changes in policy and personnel that had occurred in her administration?

**Jane Kenny:** What happened after she left office?

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** After she left. We haven't had a woman governor since then. Do you think that her approach to governing created a change that's sustained? What do you see it as?

**Jane Kenny:** I haven't really seen that happen. I think, to be fair, I think it happens with every governor. A governor comes in and then if they're lucky they have eight years-- they usually do in this state, I think Governor Florio was the first one that didn't-- and they put their policies in place, some of them do last because they become law. There's certainly a policy approach that every governor is entitled to. There are lasting effects. If you do some good things then you're really happy about those lasting effects and although they might not continue on, we still have Long Branch. We still have some of the good things that happened, some of the housing—

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Open space.

**Jane Kenny:** We have the open space preserved and we're still cleaning up brownfields but at least it's viable land now. We took down a lot of those buildings that were in disrepair, that were eyesores in the cities. That was something that changed—

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Tangible--

**Jane Kenny:** --tangible so there is the juvenile justice reform I mentioned earlier. We still have a pretty intact Medicaid system in the state. I don't know what's going to happen next but there are things that you work on that can stay. You can always change a law, you can always change a policy, and that's to be expected but I do feel we had our turn and we used it well.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** You've had a very interesting career since your days in government. Tell us about that.

**Jane Kenny:** Well, I stayed in government a little longer. I went to the Environmental Protection Agency in Region Two; I became Regional Administrator right after 9/11. Governor Whitman had been working on getting me there for quite a while and for lots of reasons it took her a long time to get me there so by the time she got me there 9/11 had happened and of course the face of our country had changed as we know it. The office that I would inhabit was filled with those people who watched it all happen and also had to go and test the water right away and the air and make sure that people could continue to walk around down there and how they should be careful on the pile. There were just so many things going on; it just really changed. So I got the call from the White House in the middle of October 2001 telling me President Bush wanted to appoint me to the Environmental Protection Agency, and I remember tears sprang into my eyes and I was telling my friend about it and she said, "Most people cry with joy when they get these jobs" and <laughs> I was like "Oh, my God," I was very moved by this, obviously like everyone else. But just being in government, I just really care so much about how it works. And I had spent some time talking to people there and I knew it was going to be hard. It's a hard agency anyway and I just knew it was going to be very hard. When I first started going to New York every day I had a special pass to go through the Holland Tunnel. I'd be in the tunnel by myself. I would drive in; a lot of the trains weren't working still. Usually that trip would take an hour. That trip would take me 35 minutes door to door. I'd be sitting in my office watching the sun rise over the East River and you could finally see the sun setting over the Hudson



because the buildings were gone, the fires. The pile was still burning. There was the smell of chemicals in the air. There was water everywhere. It was like a ghost town. The first thing that the people did when I got there in the human resources department was fit me with a gas mask 'cause I was taking a tour and the guy was practically crying that did it. He said, "I never thought I'd have to do this to a regional administrator."

They were in a golf cart going around what used to be the busiest part of New York City, going around the footprint of the World Trade Center and what had been there, and talking to the people that were working on the pile. And they set up a tent very quickly with the Red Cross and the Salvation Army for the workers. So much of the energy of that agency was going towards that so that was a very enormous managerial problem because there were so many things to do. I went to a woman that I had worked with very closely who had retired recently and I felt so good because she talked about all the different RAs that she had-- regional administrators that she'd worked for. She said "Jane got us back on our feet and got us to show that we had to continue with our work." And I just felt very gratified that she felt, and others felt, I could do that because it was just such a tough time. But we were also working on the Hudson River. There were a few other things, and the White House was pretty involved with some of the things we were doing, and Governor Whitman really wanted me there. Before 9/11 happened she felt that GE was supposed to clean up the Hudson River, a lot of PCBs had been dumped in the river, and there was a fight going on for about 25 years. It looked pretty bad at that point because EPA was being rather heavy-handed, shall we say, with GE. GE had a lot of ammunition to say, "They're not being fair with us and they're not working fairly with us." So I was able to go in and work with them and got them to sign the record of decision. I still get calls from EPA when they say, "Guess how many PCBs were removed." Even Lisa Jackson told me that Christie Whitman and I should be proud of that. I think it was very, very meaningful work and I really loved the people I was working with. They just were fabulous.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** I guess the flip side of that part of it was the criticism that the governor took as EPA administrator about ground zero, the site.

**Jane Kenny:** Right.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** How did you--

**Jane Kenny:** Well, I wasn't there when that actually happened but I did have to go before Hillary Clinton and they had a lot of hearings. The career people felt, and

the scientists felt very strongly, and they had told her and she had said exactly what they told her to say, "If you're on the pile, wear a mask" but the air that had been constantly tested around that pile was at the standard that was all right for the public to breathe. So she didn't say anything wrong but the word "safe" is very hard and it's very hard to communicate risk, very, very difficult; it's very complicated. So a lot of the people that were doing the rescue effort refused to wear masks and I know that the fire people-- because I had the Division of Fire and Safety in the Department of Community Affairs-- they are trained when they go into these terrible burning buildings; they are trained in what they're supposed to do to protect themselves. It was an emotional response. In fact at my very first meeting-- and I wasn't regional administrator yet-- I wasn't sworn in so I wasn't permitted to say anything. I went with the acting regional administrator who was a career person and the deputy who was a career person, a scientist. We went to Mayor Giuliani's office and we met with the people there and we begged them to put the fire out. We knew we had the capacity from a scientific and technological point of view to put that fire out. They knew that the people who worked on the pile (it was a toxic mass, a toxic soup) were not wearing masks and they begged Giuliani who was put in charge by the Stafford Act-- the Stafford Act is powerful and New York City was in charge and New York City did a great job. But there were certain things that emotionally they couldn't do I guess because they refused. And they were telling us-- and this is in late October, five weeks later-- that people really believed that there was so much room down there under the World Trade Center that their loved ones might still be down there walking around. They knew their way around and we just couldn't do recovery. It had to be rescue. If they had gone down there with the machinery to put the fire out it would have been upsetting the police and the firemen and all the people that felt their brothers and sisters really might be able to be rescued.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Heartbreaking.

**Jane Kenny:** It was; it was heartbreaking. I remember I couldn't believe it. I was so upset about everything anyway but then to think that we could have avoided a lot of the issues that came after that.

**Marie DeNoia Aronsohn:** Is there anything else about the Whitman administration that you'd like to share with us now? I know we've talked quite a bit but anything that perhaps you didn't get to tell us about that you want to at this point?

**Jane Kenny:** No. I think we covered a lot. I just feel very fortunate that I had the opportunity to work for different governors and it is obvious by the fact that she's my business partner now. I really enjoy working with Christie Whitman. I think she's one of the finest public servants I've ever seen in action. I think John Farmer was the one that wrote this wonderful article about her when he first heard that Sarah Palin was picked to run as vice president. He had heard a female was picked and a governor and he got really excited for a minute but then he knew it couldn't possibly be Christie Whitman because she never-- and I'll use the word "pandered"- - to big 'P' politics. She always in the end did something following her own moral compass, a very strong system of beliefs that unfortunately doesn't allow you to win primaries. I think that that really summed it up. When I read that I felt yeah, that's what happens, and it's a shame for all of us.