

Deborah Poritz Interview (February 27, 2013)

Michael Aron: It's the afternoon of February 27, 2013. We are at the Eagleton Institute at Rutgers University for the Center on the American Governor. This afternoon, we are going to talk to former Chief Justice Deborah Poritz who served as Chief Counsel in the final year of the administration of Governor Tom Kean. And then when Governor Whitman came into office in 1994, Deborah Poritz was the first woman Attorney General of the State of New Jersey. Two years later, Governor Whitman made her the first woman Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court. **Let's** start by asking you to tell us a little about your background, where you grew up, where you went to school, graduate school, whatever.

Deborah Poritz: I grew up in Brooklyn, New York. I went to James Madison High School, which is by the way, the high school that Justice Ruth Bader-Ginsberg went to. **She was there four years before I was there. So we didn't overlap, but we had** a mutual friend who when I was named to the supreme court by Governor Whitman, sent me a letter. Our mutual friend told Justice Ginsberg that I was about to be the Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court. So she sent this wonderful letter talking about how we had both gone to Madison High School. Anyway, I grew up in New York, I went to Brooklyn College. I then went to graduate school at Columbia University; I had a Woodrow Wilson fellowship in English and American literature. I was married when I graduated from college and in those days, women followed their husbands. My husband decided to go to graduate school at MIT in mathematics and so I went to Boston with him. And I taught and was in graduate school at Brandeis in American literature. And when he finished and we moved to Pennsylvania, I taught at Ursinus College. I had two young children by then.

Michael Aron: Why did you move to Pennsylvania?

Deborah Poritz: He got his first mathematics position at the University of Pennsylvania. And so we moved to the Philadelphia area and then we came to Princeton because he had a position in Princeton with-- he was with the same place, **a think tank in Princeton. And I wasn't teaching. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do** and I ended up commuting to the University of Pennsylvania law school when my children were 10 and 12, from Princeton to Philadelphia.

Michael Aron: Were you a homemaker at some point during that time?

Deborah Poritz: Yes. When we first came to Princeton, I had stopped teaching at Ursinus College and I was at home. My mother came from Bangor, Maine; long line of Republicans in the family from Maine; and she-- **her brother's youngest daughter** came to live with us when we were living in Philadelphia and then in Princeton and commuted to NYU and got her degree and then went to law school. And I was trying to figure out whether I should go back to teaching or what I should do. I was home with young children at that point and law school sounded interesting as I heard about it from my young cousin.

Michael Aron: So you were, what, in your mid-30s?

Deborah Poritz: I was 37 years old when I went to law school and I was 40 when I graduated.

Michael Aron: So there's a lesson there for women in mid-life or early mid-life, I guess, that you can start late and still rise to the top.

Deborah Poritz: Young women lawyers ask me about what it was like for me when my children were young and I had a career. **And I say to them, 'No, no, I was home part of the time. I'm not a good example for you. What I am an example of is a woman who went back later and still was able to do a lot of the things that she wanted to do.'** So what I say to women is, **"I can't give you advice about handling work as an attorney and raising a family and how you work that out. I can tell you that if you held it off for a little while or if you stopped for a while and went back, that doesn't mean the end of your career."**

Michael Aron: You mentioned that your mother was a Republican. Were you a Republican by the time you went to law school?

Deborah Poritz: I wasn't really very political; my family wasn't although my uncles in Maine were. They were active; they held political fundraisers for candidates from Maine and they knew a number of prominent Republicans. But my immediate family in New York was not very political and I wasn't either. When I went to work in the Attorney General's office in the Division of Law when I got out of law school, we were not allowed to be political. We Deputy Attorneys General are not supposed to **get politically involved under the ethics code and they don't.** But I was interested in New Jersey politics and when I was there; after I left law school, I went directly to the Division of Law; when I was there, I met Governor

Kean because the Attorney General's office represents the Governor in cases that are brought against him as Governor.

Michael Aron: What year did you start in the Division of Law?

Deborah Poritz: I worked there one summer when I was in law school as a summer law clerk; and this is a woman's story. My children were still at home and the period of time that people worked over the summer is during July and August. But I finished law school at the end of May and my children were still in school in June. And so I went down to the Attorney General's office after I got the position and I said, "I'd really like to work June and July and have August with my children rather than July and August when my children are in school in June." And Erminee Connelly, whose father was a judge and who was then in charge of the summer program at the Attorney General's office said, "We've never done that; I don't know about that." And it went up and down the chain of command; I think it was Attorney General Hyland who said, "It's fine." And so that's what I did.

Michael Aron: Attorney General Hyland; so this would be in the Byrne years?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: Byrne was Governor?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: When you went to work full-time-- Well, let me go back a second. Why did you go to the Division of Law for a job as opposed to a private law firm?

Deborah Poritz: There were several reasons. I'm going to keep saying this, but again, it's a woman's story. I knew what it was like to commute to Philadelphia; I did that to go to law school and it was a long commute. And I knew that it would be a similarly long commute to go to New York or Newark where most of the big firms were located if I wanted to do that. I had heard that the Attorney General's Office was a wonderful place to start because if you were interested in litigation, you very quickly got opportunities to take depositions, do the things that you do as a litigator whereas in a large firm, you would really walk around helping a partner for a long time. So the combination of not wanting a long commute while my children were still at home, wanting more time with them and the opportunity to

work in a place where I could learn a great deal fairly quickly, the Attorney General's Office was a no-brainer in that sense.

Michael Aron: Who did you work with in the Attorney General's Office?

Deborah Poritz: Well, that summer I was very lucky. I was able to work with the Director of the Division of Law, Steve Skillman who later became a judge and who became a mentor and is probably one of the most brilliant lawyers, judges that the state of New Jersey has had and I learned a great deal. And he was working on a case that was going to the United States Supreme Court. And so I had the opportunity to work on briefs that were filed in the United States Supreme Court the first summer I worked there. And then when I applied to come back full-time, I knew the Director of the division; I'd worked for him and he knew something about me, so...

Michael Aron: Do you remember the issue of that Supreme Court case?

Deborah Poritz: Oh, yes, I do. It was the City of Philadelphia case and it had to do with interstate commerce questions and the movement of solid waste across state lines. The New Jersey Supreme Court, Justice Schreiber had said that states could regulate-- New Jersey could regulate the movement of garbage across state lines and direct where that solid waste was going to be deposited. The United States Supreme Court said, "Doesn't New Jersey know about the commerce clause?"

Michael Aron: That was a big issue back then, solid waste, where it was going to be disposed of.

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: So you became Director of the Division of Law after how many years there?

Deborah Poritz: I started there in '77 and I was Director in about '86.

Michael Aron: So who was the Attorney General who elevated you to Director of the Division of Law?

Deborah Poritz: I became the Director of the Division of Law when Mike Cole was my predecessor; he went over to be Chief Counsel to Governor Kean. Cary Edwards came in and Mike Cole had recommended me for the position to Cary Edwards and Cary Edwards, who really didn't know me very well, actually appointed me to the position. But I had known him some because I had worked a little with the Governor's Office and he had been Chief Counsel.

Michael Aron: I'll get to him in a minute. Did you have much interaction with him or Governor Kean as Director of the Division of Law?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: With both?

Deborah Poritz: Certainly more with Cary Edwards, but some with Governor Kean, in part because of the litigation that the Division of Law was involved in representing the Governor. And as the Director of the Division of Law, I would be the one to discuss that litigation first with the Attorney General and then at times with the Governor himself. So I did know him.

Michael Aron: And people may not realize how large the Division of Law is, but roughly how many attorneys?

Deborah Poritz: There were around 300 to 400 attorneys over that span of time.

Michael Aron: So you were the head of a huge law firm?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: Huge; maybe the largest in the state.

Deborah Poritz: Yes. I had started in the environmental section; I mean after working on the city of Philadelphia and solid waste, I had learned something about environmental law. I then was Assistant Chief of that section and then I became Deputy Attorney General in charge of appeals. As a former English major and graduate student in English, writing briefs was something I enjoyed doing and that was a large part of directing the appellate process for the division. Then ultimately

when Cary came, I became Director. I was Chief of the Banking and Insurance section for a while also.

Michael Aron: Were you close to Cary Edwards?

Deborah Poritz: We were good friends. Cary Edwards used to meet with senior staff in the evening at various restaurants and they would work late into the night. And when I became Director of the Division of Law, we made a deal that-- because I wanted to be home for my family, that he would not require me to come to those long evenings where the staff would discuss all kinds of issues having to do with whatever it was, the topic of the day, State Police or whatever, and I only went once in all the time I was there. But we did spend a lot of time together discussing matters of law.

Michael Aron: He was famous for having night meetings at the Princetonian Diner on Route 1.

Deborah Poritz: Yes, I only went once.

Michael Aron: How did you become Chief Counsel in the last year of the Kean administration?

Deborah Poritz: Cary left to run for Governor. The Counsel's position opened up in the Governor's Office as Mike Cole was leaving and the Governor who, at that point, as I said, there were 11 months left, he had always had a number of people in his cabinet who were independents, who were Democrats, and he always had really a wide spectrum of backgrounds in the people that he selected. I knew him; I was recommended to him by both Mike and Cary. And so when he said, "Would you like to come over," **I jumped at the chance.** I knew in those days, there was a tradition that the Director of the Division of Law was apolitical and could stay-- would most likely be given an opportunity to stay through successive governments, even though a change of party, I **knew that if I went to the Governor's office, that was it; I couldn't go back.** I knew when I made that choice that I was making as a choice to leave government at the end of the 11 months. But I thought that the opportunity to work with Governor Kean whom I admired enormously and to learn **how the Governor's Office functioned and to learn about the legislature** and it was too good an opportunity to turn down so I went.

Michael Aron: I suppose there was a chance that a Republican would've won the next governor's race and you might've been kept on, but--

Deborah Poritz: There was a chance.

Michael Aron: --the Democrat was favored, Florio was favored.

Deborah Poritz: It was highly unlikely and I knew that. I also-- by that time, my children were out of the house. The thought of commuting, if I chose to go with a law firm elsewhere, was not the same. **It didn't affect me in the same way. I ended up going to a private law firm in the Princeton area because there were people there that I had known from the Attorney General's Office and it looked like a good fit. But at the time that I left to go to be Chief Counsel, I wasn't sure; I just knew this was an opportunity I didn't want to give up.**

Michael Aron: And did it live up to your expectations?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: How so?

Deborah Poritz: Every way. Well, I still remember the first passed bill memo that we did for Governor Kean when I was Chief Counsel. And I knew what had to be done; I knew what a passed bill memo looked at. The office would analyze what was in the bill for the Governor, send it to his desk after it had passed the legislature; who sponsored it, what it was all about, who supported it, who had not supported it; and we laid it all out and I brought it into the Governor and the Governor took it home that night, looked at it. And the next day, he asked me to come into his office and he said to me, **"You didn't tell me what you think I should do."** And I said, **"Well, I laid it all out for you, Governor, so you could make your decision."** He said, **"I want your opinion,"** and I gave him my opinion. And then he said, **"When you do that, I want you to tell me whether it's good government to do this, whether it makes sense,"** and I'll never forget that; that that was his first really in-depth conversation with me about what went on at his job and what his focus was, **"Is this a good thing to do and why? How will it help the public?"** And it was extraordinary to me and I knew right then and there I had made the right choice to go there.

Michael Aron: Do you remember what the issue was?

Deborah Poritz: I no longer remember the issue, no. That was a long time ago.

Michael Aron: Who did you work with in the Governor's Office most closely?"

Deborah Poritz: Well, there were people in my office, Ross Lewin who was in the Attorney General's office with me and had worked with me came over to be Deputy Chief Counsel. We had worked together for a number of years in the AG's office and so that was easy; it made the transition easier. I had someone that I knew that I could work with. I worked closely with Peggy Howard.

Michael Aron: She was Policy Director.

Deborah Poritz: She was right under Ed McGlynn as--

Michael Aron: Deputy Chief of Staff.

Deborah Poritz: --Deputy Chief of Staff. And you may recall, in that last year revenues started to drop just before Governor Florio came in. And Governor Kean was trying to hold the line for the next governor and not have deficits that the new governor would have to deal with in the budget and it was really very difficult; it was a difficult time for everyone. And Peggy Howard chaired a task force that was looking at hiring and putting a hold on new hires at certain levels of government and reviewing those kinds of things and she needed legal advice about things she could do and couldn't do under the law. And so Peggy and I got to work very closely together and have remained friends since then.

Michael Aron: I think he named her Human Services Commissioner toward the end of his term. Do you recall that?

Deborah Poritz: When I worked with her, she wasn't Human Services Commissioner. She went with the Governor to Drew and was-- I don't know exactly what her title was there, but she--

Michael Aron: She was Cabinet Secretary, I'm told also.

Deborah Poritz: Okay, yeah.

Michael Aron: Yes, she's been a Kean confidant for many, many years.

Deborah Poritz: Many years. And I worked with Ed McGlynn of course as well as Peggy.

Michael Aron: He was the Chief of Staff.

Deborah Poritz: Yes. And I learned a lot from Carl Golden who was Press Secretary then. I still remember coming to Carl Golden with a problem that I was afraid there was going to be some bad publicity on something-- some action that had been taken. Again, I no longer remember the precise action, but I remember Carl Golden giving me advice and telling me not to talk too much because I had had a tendency to do that sometimes.

Michael Aron: Carl was a key member of that inner circle and with the success of the administration.

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: So tell me a little more about the revenue problem you alluded to. Did it cast a pall over that last year of that last year of the Kean administration, your year?

Deborah Poritz: I think that's a stronger statement than I would make. It certainly changed some of the things **that might've been possible to do, but by that time, Tom Kean, I think, had established himself in so many different areas.** I mean, the environmental legislation that was passed when he was there that he sponsored was a lot of work. And what was done at that time on the unification of the courts although the actual legislation passed later. There were so many things that had already been accomplished so that if there were some things left that **perhaps didn't move as quickly, court unification was one of them,** because of the problems with the deficit and the dropping revenues, it was really I think a minor thing compared to what had been accomplished in the prior seven years. So I felt in terms of what I could do to contribute that that was a factor in it. But it was the last 11 months.

Michael Aron: He was already sort of a revered figure by that point.

Deborah Poritz: I remember then that the United States Supreme Court decided a case that had to do with minority set-asides by government, by the states for companies that were doing work in the states. And the system of minority set-asides that was in place then in New Jersey was essentially declared invalid although the Supreme Court case did not specifically deal with it, the New Jersey situation, it nonetheless was so similar that it was clear that it was invalid. And I remember Governor Kean meeting with representatives from the minority business communities from a number of cities in north Jersey. And to think about these were people who were very upset about what had happened, who were working very hard and trying to get the expertise and the background needed to qualify for minority set-asides to do state work and here, the whole system was declared unconstitutional. And I remember Governor Kean used to ask me to come to any of the meetings he had where there were legal issues involved. This was about a Supreme Court case as well as about the politics of this and so I was at the **meeting. And that's another thing I will never forget** about Governor Kean. People came into that room, maybe there were 30 people there angry. By the time half of the meeting was over, in the first 20 minutes, Tom Kean had been able to communicate to them how important their concerns were to him and that he would do everything he could do to make sure that they were able to continue to bid for and qualify for work for the state; that people were responding to him in an entirely different way. They believed him, they understood him; he could talk to them. It was for me another learning experience,

Michael Aron: That was part of his legacy - his connection as a Republican and a pretty moderate Republican to the African-American community as they--

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: So the administration ended and you did what?

Deborah Poritz: I went to a law firm in Princeton. It was a local firm that had a nice practice to do insurance and environmental regulatory work with lawyers that I knew there and that I had worked with at the state. And I did that for four years.

Michael Aron: Did you think you were finished with state government?

Deborah Poritz: I did. I didn't expect to go back, When I worked for Tom Kean, Chief Counsel was part of the Cabinet as was the President of the Board of Public Utilities. And Christine Todd Whitman was the President of the Board of Public Utilities that last year and so I got to know her. We met at Cabinet meetings, we met when there were legal issues and she was in the Governor's Office; and she would stop by Counsel's Office and so I knew her. And I was out in private practice when she decided to run. And I had been aware, watched, and been interested in her campaign when she ran against Bradley.

Michael Aron: That was 1990 when she ran against Bradley and she almost upset him.

Deborah Poritz: Yes, yes, I recall that very well.

Michael Aron: And made a name for herself statewide that encouraged her to run for governor three years later.

Deborah Poritz: That's right. And although we weren't good friends, when she decided to run for governor and because I knew her when she was at the Board of Public Utilities and even though I really wasn't a political person, I called up the campaign headquarters and I said, "I don't know much about politics, but I know a lot about insurance regulatory matters and I know a lot about environmental matters. And if you want position papers or research done or work to help with the campaign, I'll do it." And they put me on an insurance committee because there were big issues with automobile insurance going on and I did some work on the environmental issues. And so I was involved to that extent and I went election night to headquarters and I got to know some of the people. Some of the people that were working with her were people I knew from the Kean administration: Hazel Gluck and Judy Shaw and those people. And I renewed my friendships when I did the work that I did. And then I was asked by Governor Whitman to be Attorney General.

Michael Aron: That was a pretty big victory, first woman governor of the State of New Jersey, defeating an incumbent governor, Jim Florio. Do you remember anything about election night?

Deborah Poritz: I do. I remember the first returns coming in from the Camden area. And Governor Florio was winning hands down and people kept saying, "That's

the Camden area. Remember that's the Camden area. You have to wait for the other returns."

Michael Aron: He of course was from Camden.

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: Yes.

Deborah Poritz: Yes, yes. But I remember that well and when the shift started, when we started to see the numbers changing, it was really amazing. We were going to have the first woman governor.

Michael Aron: In the primary that year, she ran against your old boss, Cary Edwards.

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: Was that at all difficult for you?

Deborah Poritz: It was moderately difficult. **I had then, I have now; he's passed** away since; enormous respect for Cary. But in the time that I had worked at the **Governor's Office and gotten** to know Christie, it was just, for me, the choice that I would make.

Michael Aron: Because she was a woman?

Deborah Poritz: Because she was a woman, because she was on many issues, we were really very comfortable with one another talking about those issues. And maybe because I had a different kind of relationship with her. Cary Edwards was my boss when I was Director of the Division of Law. Christie and I met as members of a Cabinet working together and it was a different relationship. So maybe that had something to do with it.

Michael Aron: Did you sense before Election Day **that if she won, you'd be her** choice for Attorney General?

Deborah Poritz: No. I had no sense of that whatsoever. I expected to stay at Jamieson and in fact, Ross and I were in discussions with a major new client. I had no thought of going back to government.

Michael Aron: Do you recall how the offer was made?

Deborah Poritz: Well, maybe we should back up for a minute. Very shortly after the election, you recall the walking around money problem arose.

Michael Aron: Yes, the Ed Rollins controversy.

Deborah Poritz: Yes, yes. And Mike Chertoff was U.S. Attorney and Mike and the Attorney General both investigated the campaign.

Michael Aron: Who was the Attorney General at that time?

Deborah Poritz: I'm trying to remember who was Attorney General. I don't recall who it was.

Michael Aron: Maybe it was Michael Cole.

Deborah Poritz: No, it was not. It was not. This was the end of the Florio administration.

Michael Aron: Oh, it was the end of the Florio administration.

Deborah Poritz: And I just can't remember--

Michael Aron: Bob Del Tufo?

Deborah Poritz: No, Bob Del Tufo I know quite well. It wasn't Bob; it was a younger man. I just don't remember.

Michael Aron: Okay.;

Deborah Poritz: But the investigation really interrupted the Governor's-- all of the things that you do in a transition: the need to look for Cabinet officials, to interview people, to appoint people, to have transition teams, and learn about what was going on, deploy getting into the different departments. What governors do during transitions really came to a halt for a while. This investigation was very intense. There were people going through papers, audits, interviews, depositions--

Michael Aron: The allegations, just for the sake of somebody watching this someday, the allegation was that Ed Rollins, a national Republican political consultant who ran Christie Whitman's campaign in the general election had somehow been able to distribute money to black ministers to suppress the black vote--

Deborah Poritz: To suppress the black--

Michael Aron: --for Jim Florio.

Deborah Poritz: --vote, which was expected to be a Democratic vote. That's correct.

Michael Aron: Okay

Deborah Poritz: And that money was given out to the ministers in various cities in north Jersey to make sure that happened.

Michael Aron: And Rollins and Whitman both denied it.

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: And so you got dragged into this investigation.

Deborah Poritz: Well, what happened was a group of lawyers came together as a team to represent the various individuals-- **the Governor, the Governor's husband,** Justice Veneiro who was then the Treasurer for the campaign, I believe, and others in the investigation; to attend depositions, to help people turn over papers, to do all the things that lawyers do representing people who are being investigated by a U.S. **Attorney and an Attorney General. And I don't know all the details of this, but what**

I do know is Hazel Gluck who was at transition headquarters when the group of attorneys got together, was either in the room or looked in the room and saw not a woman attorney around this large conference table and said, "We have a woman governor, guys." Can you hear Hazel? "We have a woman governor, guys; we need some women attorneys on the team." And Hazel called me and said, "Get down here." And so I came down and we worked together and I ended up representing the Governor, herself and her husband. I still remember a deposition of John Whitman who's representative wasn't the Attorney General, but the representative from the Attorney General's Office from the Criminal Division was questioning John about his relationship to the campaign. Did he have an office, was he an officer of the campaign, to what extent was he involved within-- I mean it was quite clear that if the authorities could establish an official relationship with the campaign and if they ever found one, which they did not, any evidence of walking around money having been given out, that John would also be tied into it. And so they asked this question over and over again and John kept saying, 'I had no title. I had no office.' And it would get asked again and finally -- I was trying very hard to be as polite as I could be, but I finally said after the fourth or fifth same question, "Asked and answered," which is a way of saying enough. And John held up his hand and he said, "No, no, I wanna answer this time." And he was asked, "What was your role in Governor Whitman's campaign," and he said, "I was the wife."

Michael Aron: <chuckles> That sounds like John; I remember John. You bring up Hazel Gluck; she was a key ally of Governor Whitman's. How would you describe her role in Governor Whitman's rise to the governorship?

Deborah Poritz: Well, she was a seasoned politician. She had worked in the Kean administration.

Michael Aron: She had been Commissioner of Transportation and Insurance.

Deborah Poritz: Correct. And when she was Commissioner of Transportation, I was in charge of the Banking, Insurance, and Public Security-- I guess I met her when she was the Commissioner of Insurance. I was in charge of the Banking, Insurance, and Public Securities section. And then when I was Director of the Division of Law, there was a transportation issue involving the marina down in Atlantic City and which of the casinos that were moving to the marina or building the marina or going to build a bridge and a highway there. And I worked with Hazel on some of the legal issues associated with that. So although I wasn't political, we were friends, Hazel and I. I saw Hazel as a really smart woman who was a hands-

on commissioner and could learn whatever she had to learn if she hadn't known it at the time and knew what the political system was all about and it was a pleasure to work with her.

Michael Aron: She was trouble.

Deborah Poritz: I got to know her then.

Michael Aron: I'm sorry; I cut you off. She was a lobbyist by that point. She was a pretty successful lobbyist, I believe.

Deborah Poritz: Well, by the time she was working in the campaign then... yeah, yeah, I think she was already doing that. She had a kind of experience and an understanding of the system that was very down-to-earth and real. And you always knew when you went to Hazel you would get that kind of answer; there would be no kind of skirting the issue, jumping around the issue. She would tell you what she thought.

Michael Aron: And she didn't take a position in the administration. Her partner Judy Shaw, her friend Judy Shaw--

Deborah Poritz: Judy was Chief of Staff. I thought Hazel was Commissioner of Transportation at one point or she-- she never--

Michael Aron: She was doing too well in business, I think, to--

Deborah Poritz: To do that. Yeah, I don't remember. I do remember that Judy Shaw was Chief of Staff.

Michael Aron: So you helped with the Ed Rollins controversy which-- do you remember how it was resolved?

Deborah Poritz: It was resolved that both the U.S. Attorney and the Attorney General in New Jersey said that there was no evidence of the use of walking around money.

Michael Aron: And that probably took three weeks to a month to--

Deborah Poritz: It took long enough to slow up all of the work that had to be done for the transition, but then it moved very quickly after that.

Michael Aron: Do you recall being asked to be the Attorney General?

Deborah Poritz: I do.

Michael Aron: Tell us about that.

Deborah Poritz: Well, I recall getting a telephone call--

Michael Aron: From?

Deborah Poritz: I don't know whether it was Hazel who called me, but I was asked to come down and talk to Governor Whitman and I did. And having been in the--

Michael Aron: This was at the State House, yes--

Deborah Poritz: No, this was still at transition headquarters.

Michael Aron: Yes.

Deborah Poritz: So I came down to transition headquarters and we had been working together back in the Kean days and we knew one another. And one of the reasons that I, even though **I wasn't political, had offered support for her because I** knew her and respected her. This was a kind of different-- I came down to be sort of interviewed to be Attorney General. It was a good interview and having been Director of the Division of Law, I knew a lot about what it meant to be Attorney General. So I felt very comfortable. And Governor Whitman, she also knew a lot about how that office worked; I mean, that office provided lawyers for the BPU; she had worked with people there. So there was a frank exchange of ideas about what had to be done and how it should be done.

Michael Aron: Did she offer you the job on the spot?

Deborah Poritz: No, I think it was right afterwards, but it was very soon afterwards.

Michael Aron: Were you surprised?

Deborah Poritz: After the interview, I was hopeful.

Michael Aron: Did it add an element that you would be the first woman to hold that position? How did you feel about that?

Deborah Poritz: Yeah. Having been there, I knew that there were parts of the Department of Law and Safety that would perhaps not be pleased with a woman Attorney General or at least would stand off and at best, reserve judgment.

Michael Aron: Why do I think State Police when you say that?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

<laughter>

Michael Aron: Just guessing.

Deborah Poritz: I remember the first meeting that I had with the State Police, the higher up officials, the colonel and the lieutenant colonel and the captains. And they all came in uniform and they all sat around this huge U of a table. And I just had this feeling when I came into the room, there were no women in those positions in those days. So I was the only woman in the room. And as you know, the Attorney General is the civilian head of the State Police in New Jersey. And so I was their boss. And I walked into that room and we had a discussion and I had this-- **I kept thinking as we were talking, 'They're saying, 'what is that little woman doing in this room with us.'"** But we worked on it.

Michael Aron: Who was the Colonel in those days, do you recall?

Deborah Poritz: I don't remember who the first colonel was because very shortly after that the colonel stepped down and there was a committee appointed and Colonel Williams was chosen. It was-- John Degnon **was on that committee; don't** know whether it was Peter Perretti, but there was a small committee--

Michael Aron: Was Pagano still--

Deborah Poritz: No, it wasn't Clint.

Michael Aron: Okay, all right. Aside from the State Police, how did the staff at the Department of Law and Public Safety respond to you?

Deborah Poritz: Very positively. It was like going back home in a lot of ways because even though I had worked in the Division of Law, the Division of Law provided legal help. The lawyers there were lawyers for the Departments of State Government, but also for the other divisions in the Department of Law and Public Safety. So the divisions that were in the Department of Law and Public Safety, bureaus, securities, professional boards, civil rights, all part of the Department of Law and Public Safety had been advised by the Division of Law. So I knew what went on in those divisions. I was coming back to a place I knew, that I had really enjoyed working in for many, many years and where a lot of the senior people were still the same people that I had known earlier.

Michael Aron: So it was an easy transition?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: Do you have any idea whether there were other women Attorneys General in other states at that time?

Deborah Poritz: Yes, I do. There's an organization, the National Association of Attorneys General, and it met regularly and I did become a member of the organization and I did attend the meetings. They were educational meetings. People met to talk about issues that their states were facing that Attorneys General were handling. And so it was a good experience. There were at that time in the organization maybe eight, nine women. There were 54-- I forget now because the Attorney General of Guam and **Puerto Rico, wasn't just the 50 states, were in the** organization. So there were very few women. Those women went on to do some

extraordinary things, Cabinet officials in Washington, governors of their states. Chris Fogar [ph?] was in the organization at the time I was there; she was governor of Washington -- or later became governor of Washington. So I met a very interesting group of women, but we were a small minority in the organization at that time.

Michael Aron: Do you remember what may have been the biggest issue you worked on in your two years as Attorney General?

Deborah Poritz: The issue that I spent a lot of time on had to do with juvenile prisons and the juvenile justice system. And Governor Whitman and I talked a lot about this and she was a strong supporter and really encouraged me to do some of the things I did. And what we did was there were issues that appeared in the press at the time about juvenile prisons and how they were being run and whether they were really being run in a way that would help young people to be rehabilitated to continue their educations, and what forms of punishment were, and how that system was working. And we formed a task force that I chaired as Attorney General, pulling together all of the players in the system from the heads of juvenile prisons to the head of education programs to the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections. The players that we thought would have something to say about what would a model system look like, what could we do to improve this system. And we met over a period and came up with a proposal to separate the juvenile justice system from the larger corrections system to try to focus more attention on juveniles and to see if that would be a way to get more money into the system for the kinds of education we wanted to have for these kids. We were sending them back out on, the kids, out onto the streets and they were committing crimes the next year or two and they were becoming adults and committing crimes as adults. And the thought was, **if we can catch them when they're still young and they come** into the system that we might be able to do something to really help them. There were major concerns about young women in the system, about young girls that were in and out of the system and who were becoming pregnant and their children were going into foster care. There were so many problems in that system and I spent a long time as Attorney General working with people to try to create a better system to write legislation to get it passed, which we did, and to see if we could improve the system. And Governor Whitman was with us every inch of the way,

Michael Aron: I remember that issue and covering it as a journalist and the creation of the Juvenile Justice Commission was one of her legacy items, I would say.

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: And I some years later toured Jamesburg where there was a major facility of the Juvenile Justice Commission.

Deborah Poritz: I had toured Jamesburg when I became chair of that Commission to see what it looked-- and I went to the prison down in Bordentown, we had a juvenile facility and--

Michael Aron: Howard Beyer, a former Superintendent at Trenton State Prison ran Jamesburg by the time the Commission had taken it over and I did a half-hour walkthrough of it; it was kind of impressive.

Deborah Poritz: Yeah, I know. Megan Kanka was raped and killed when I was Attorney General. **Megan's Law was written when I was Attorney General and I defended Megan's Law** in federal court and in state court when I was Attorney General, that short span of time all of that happened.

Michael Aron: What kind of memory does that leave?

Deborah Poritz: Maryanne Bielomowitz was prosecutor in Mercer County and the prosecutors report to the Attorney General. **There's a prosecutors' association; the Attorney General meets with the prosecutors regularly to discuss matters of mutual interest, the rules-- ranging from court rules to the way the prosecutors operate, to the instances in which the Attorney General would take over criminal investigations in the county with statewide significance and under what circumstances that might occur.** And so I knew Maryanne as a prosecutor in Mercer County. And I got a telephone call from her that night telling me that Megan Kanka was missing, they were searching for her, they had not found her yet.

Michael Aron: I'm sorry; let me stop you there. Is it customary for the Attorney General to be apprised of a missing child?

Deborah Poritz: In this instance they knew fairly early on a lot about what had happened and this became a significant case almost over a span of hours. There were a lot of investigatory authorities looking for the child right in Mercer County right near Trenton and Maryanne **thought I wouldn't know that this was going on,**

And then she called me, I can't remember, it was somewhere around 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning to say that they had found the child.

Michael Aron: And it took a number of months for the legislature to respond with Megan's Law and the Governor pushed Megan's Law.

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: And it was the first Megan's Law in the country; there would subsequently be about 49 more, I believe--

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: --and a national Megan's Law. And you defended the law. Who was challenging the law?

Deborah Poritz: Trying to remember the--

Michael Aron: Jack Furlong was the attorney--

Deborah Poritz: There were a number of defense attorneys and I can't remember. It was more than one challenger and there were also some organizational challengers. I don't remember whether it was the defense attorneys' organization or-- but there were a number of challengers.

Michael Aron: People sort of went too far in branding sex offenders for the rest of their lives.

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: So you personally argued--

Deborah Poritz: Yes, I did.

Michael Aron: --the case before what level?

Deborah Poritz: I first argued it in Superior Court in the state system and before Judge Politan in the Federal District Court in Newark in the federal system. It was on parallel tracks in both systems. In fact, Faith Hochberg was U.S. Attorney at the time and they were in the federal case and **Stuart Rabner who's now Chief Justice** was second chair with her in that case; I met him then.

Michael Aron: Did you argue together?

Deborah Poritz: Well, Faith and I argued the case and I argued the case in State Court. And then it went up to the New Jersey Supreme Court and I argued it there and it went to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals and I argued it there.

Michael Aron: So you argued in the State Supreme Court in front of Chief Justice Wilentz?

Deborah Poritz: Yes, it was Chief Justice Wilentz. I had argued in the State Supreme Court **before that when I was at the Attorney General's office a few times.**

Michael Aron: Oh yes?

Deborah Poritz: Yeah, an environmental case, a case that involved a challenge to rules requiring people who were on certain forms of welfare to leave motels where they were housed after 90 days; you may recall that. I argued that case--

Michael Aron: I was in those motels

Deborah Poritz: --before the Wilentz court. You were in those motels?

Michael Aron: With a television camera.

Deborah Poritz: Okay.

Michael Aron: That's what I meant.

<laughter

Deborah Poritz: We were teasing you.

Michael Aron: Okay.

Deborah Poritz: Anyway, I argued that case-- one of those cases; there were several. And I argued a couple of environmental cases. But yes, I argued before Wilentz in the Megan's Law case.

Michael Aron: Okay. And shortly thereafter Wilentz developed cancer, a kind of virulent lung cancer.

Deborah Poritz: No, brain cancer.

Michael Aron: Brain cancer.

Deborah Poritz: Brain cancer.

Michael Aron: And withdrew from the bench while he was still alive but in failing health.

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: And then what happened to you?

Deborah Poritz: I was in Senate chambers in the Senate President's office, Donnie DiFrancesco, talking about some laws that the Senate was dealing with and the Attorney General's Office was interested in. And I can't remember, if that was the thing that brought me there or I had just stopped by to see Senator DiFrancesco, but the phone rang and it was the Governor. They had tracked me down; they had called over to the Attorney General's Office who said, "Oh, she's over at the legislature," and then they found me at Senator DiFrancesco's office. And I was told that the Governor wanted to see me right away. So I didn't go back to the Justice Complex; I went next door to the State House to the Governor's office. I knew that Chief Justice Wilentz was in the hospital, but I had no idea what this was about. And you had asked me, "Did I know or think that I might want to be Attorney General?" It had never even crossed my mind. When I went next door, Governor Whitman said, "I would like to nominate you to be Chief Justice.

I've just gotten a phone call from Chief Justice Wilentz and he is stepping down..." I think it was as of July 1st; "... and I would like to nominate you." And I still remember I was overwhelmed and of course I said, "Thank you," and "Yes." And I called my husband and my husband said, "You said 'yes' before you told me."

<laughter>

Deborah Poritz: I said, "Yes, I did."

Michael Aron: You didn't even have to think about it?

Deborah Poritz: No.

Michael Aron: It's the highest honor an attorney in the state of New Jersey can receive.

Deborah Poritz: I think so. I had worked some with Chief Justice Wilentz, not before the court. When I was Attorney General, an issue arose about the officers-- we had probation officers and parole officers. In New Jersey, the probation officers worked for the court; the parole officers work for the Department of Corrections. And there was a move on the part of the parole officers through their union to become part of the law enforcement union and to essentially become law enforcement personnel. And I met with Chief Justice Wilentz a few times with union representatives and we discussed the various issues. And then when I was on the Supreme Court, I had to recuse myself from a case involving the probation officers. **Barry Albin wrote the opinion and said that "law enforcement officers could not work for the Judiciary, that the Judiciary had to be absolutely impartial, and could not have law enforcement or defense couldn't have the public defender, for example, working in the Judiciary because there would be an appearance of having one side or the other too close to the Judiciary."**

Michael Aron: How did you regard Chief Justice Wilentz?

Deborah Poritz: A man with a giant intellect, I mean an extraordinary brilliant man, a man who'd been in the legislature and I think understood what the legislature was about. He had worked with Governor Kean in the legislature; they'd been there together and knew one another. I don't know whether they'd known one another before that; they might have, but they certainly worked together then

and had enormous respect for one another even though they were in opposite parties and had different views about a lot of issues, they respected one another and liked one another. I had said to you earlier that whenever Governor Kean had a lawyer or a legal issue that was involved in a meeting he had with someone, he **would always ask Governor's Counsel to sit with him. He met with Chief Justice Wilentz alone.** Sometimes he would ask me to come in at the end of a meeting just **to meet the Chief or say "hello" or whatever, but he always met with him alone;** they were friends. I think that Governor Kean had the same respect for Chief Justice Wilentz that those of us that knew him had for him. Most people who talk **about his opinions and the court under him think of him as activist; I don't.** I think of him as being very concerned on the one hand about fundamental rights issues, about education, about the great-- **what I'll call the great constitutional values.** But on the other hand, after having been in the legislature, being very concerned about legislative reaction, how far the court should go in a given case, what the boundaries were, the relationship between the departments. But I have great respect for him.

Michael Aron: Did Christie Whitman give you any kind of-- **I won't say marching order because a governor's not going to give a** Chief Justice marching orders, but did she lay out any kind of vision that she wanted you to fulfill on the court?

Deborah Poritz: No, no. By the time that she was nominating me, we had worked together for several years. There were some things that were discussed, whether at cabinet meetings or in smaller meetings in the **Governor's office that I** took a different position on than other advisors and sometimes she went with those other advisors and not with my advice. We never disagreed on an action when there was a legal issue and it was a question of legal advice.

Michael Aron: Did it hurt when she didn't side with you on an opinion of some sort, a non-legal opinion?

Deborah Poritz: Hurt's the wrong word. If you truly believe that the position that **you're proposing to the governor is the right** way to go, then you have concerns when the governor makes another choice. You may understand that the other choice is being made for very good reasons. And sometimes these questions are **closely poised; they're not easy questions.** And the Governor had insights I didn't have in terms of relationships that she had with people in the legislature, people in **the cabinet that I didn't work with closely; new things I didn't know.** She was pulling all of this information together and making decisions. And if sometimes that **decision wasn't what I would have done, you can't be hurt by it; you can worry and**

hope you're wrong and that she's right because that's what she's doing. But most of the time we agreed.

Michael Aron: You served as Chief Justice for 10 years, right? 1996 to 2006?

Deborah Poritz: Yes, almost exactly 10 years.

Michael Aron: And you left because you reached the mandatory retirement age?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: What were the major decisions in that decade?

Deborah Poritz: A number of fundamental rights cases came to the court when I was there. You know, a **court can't choose what comes, but it's interesting to me** that the great issues of our time get there eventually. If the country is discussing worrying about, other states are dealing with issues like gay marriage or-- it comes to the New Jersey Supreme Court eventually. I would say the gay marriage case in which I both concurred and dissented. I would say the Boy Scout case in which the United States Supreme Court overturned my majority opinion 5-4.

Michael Aron: On the issue of?

Deborah Poritz: Whether the Boy Scouts could remove a scoutmaster or someone in the Boy Scout hierarchy in a position who was openly homosexual.

Michael Aron: You ruled that they?

Deborah Poritz: The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the Boy Scouts could not under the law against discrimination in New Jersey. And the United States Supreme Court said that the Boy Scouts were a private organization and could exclude on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, whatever.

Michael Aron: So gay marriage, Boy Scouts, what else?

Deborah Poritz: Another important decision was the Democratic Party case involving the Torricelli, when the court said by order first and then I authored a unanimous opinion of the court saying that the Democrats could choose a candidate even at that point in the election.

Michael Aron: The statutory deadline for replacing someone on the ballot had passed, but Senator Bob Torricelli withdrew from running for reelection because of allegations surrounding him that were hurting him badly. The Democrats substituted Frank Lautenberg for Bob Torricelli. The Republicans challenged that.

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: And the court unanimously held that the public has a right to a choice in an election. Was that basically what--

Deborah Poritz: Yes. You framed the question that the statutory deadline had passed. At issue in the case was how to interpret the statutory deadline.

Michael Aron: And you interpreted that there was an overriding public interest in not adhering to the statutory deadline.

Deborah Poritz: No. There is a principle of legal decision-making that a court should avoid a constitutional determination if at all possible if there's a way to arrive at a statutory decision. What the court held, based on what I will call constitutional underpinnings, wasn't a constitutional decision. The court didn't say, "The Constitution requires..." The court looked at a whole series of precedents. Every single one of them in New Jersey saying that when you have such a deadline, you have to interpret it as Directory as opposed to mandatory as saying this is what we would prefer to have, an orderly election. But the court interpreted that that period up until the point where you couldn't have an orderly election was open in the interest of having voter choice. So it was a statutory interpretation with constitutional underpinnings. I would say that after that opinion came out, I read a Stanford Law Review article that was very interesting that said that almost every state court in the country that had had to deal with that kind of an issue held the way that the New Jersey Supreme Court did.

Michael Aron: Nonetheless it was your most controversial opinion as Chief Justice. Is that fair to say?

Deborah Poritz: Yes, that's fair to say.

Michael Aron: And Republicans in particular carried a grudge about it for quite a long time. Fair to say?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: How do you feel about that?

Deborah Poritz: Sad.

Michael Aron: Yes?

Deborah Poritz: In this following, I wouldn't change a single word of the opinion. That is I believe that it was based on precedent and that it was almost in many ways a straightforward opinion that interpreted what the courts had done before and what the courts around the country were doing and that the interpretation that said voters should have choice was the right way to go. I believe that today. **We don't live in a totalitarian country where one person is on the ballot and that's the person you vote for or you don't vote. We live in a country where we believe that voters should be able to choose among candidates.** And I think that both as-- if I were in the legislature making policy, I would want that to be possible, but that the courts have an obligation to uphold precedents and principles and constitutional norms. **What I feel sad about is that there were friends of mine, people I'd worked with in the Kean administration in the legislature and other places who were sufficiently upset by what they perceived to be a politically-motivated opinion or whatever; I don't know how they could say that; there were seven of us that voted the same way, both Democrats and Republicans on the court; that they were uncomfortable with me.** And when I would meet people, it was uncomfortable and that made me sad.

Michael Aron: Were more women judges appointed to the bench when we had a woman governor?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: To what degree?

Deborah Poritz: To a great degree. I today think that one of Governor Whitman's extraordinary accomplishments as a woman governor-- and women can get to high places and then forget about other people like them; not everyone does that. She **didn't forget and she looked around for** the best women she could find because there were so few women in positions of any kind throughout government, in the Judiciary even. And I really think that she made a major contribution in doing that. She had some wonderful, wonderful women that came into the Judiciary then. There were people that-- Tom Kean had appointed women and minorities; Governor Florio had. But the real-- the numbers jumped when Governor Whitman was there and it made a difference, it really did.

Michael Aron: Was she a role model for women?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: Yes?

Deborah Poritz: Yes.

Michael Aron: How?

Deborah Poritz: Because she-- the way she conducted herself, that she was both able to talk to people. I think she still has some of the qualities that Tom Kean had in being able to directly reach people. **Because she'd gotten to be Governor; she had done this thing that no woman had done before her; that she cared and didn't just take that and take it as a personal gain and then didn't think of** the others who were coming behind her. All of those things, I think, made her a role model.

Michael Aron: Did having a woman as a leader affect who held power during the campaign and the transition and who exerted power when she was Governor?

Deborah Poritz: There were certainly many more women. Again, Tom Kean had had women in the Cabinet: Christie Whitman was one of them; at the end, I was one of them; Molly Coye, who I think was an Independent when she was Commissioner of Health; Hazel was there. **So it wasn't new, but it was a** continuation and an amplification is the best way I can describe it. And I think women worked with men, women worked with women, men worked with men. When you start working together and you have a lot to do and the press of the

issues that come to you when you're Governor, when you're a cabinet officer is so compelling and overriding, gender stops mattering; you work together. And when you work together that way, you realize that it doesn't matter at all. I mean, you may not be thinking it while you work on some project, whether it's juvenile justice or an insurance issue or whatever it is. But when you come up for air after you've worked so hard and you realize the women and the men that have been doing this have been doing it together and nobody's cared about gender or-- it's a job; it's things we have to do.

Michael Aron: Do you think that she or you faced different expectations because of your gender?

Deborah Poritz: Sometimes.

Michael Aron: What kind of expectations?

Deborah Poritz: I think that it's both a question of expectations and a question of whether you belong where you are. And let me say something about that because I found myself starting to do this; I never talked to the Governor about this, I meant to; that is, when you're putting together a small group, you're Attorney General and you want to look at an issue, it might be a statute that is causing difficulties in criminal prosecution or whatever, and you look around for the best people in your office that know about criminal law and can look at this. You put together a little group of people to do it. I found myself over and over again choosing women. I really had to stop and think there are a lot of talented men in this office and I can't do this in a way that is exactly what I used to complain about, men choosing from their club, the old boys' club. I was unconsciously starting to create an old girls' club. I remember one of the assignment judges who used to meet with the Chief Justice in regular meetings. And when I first got there, there wasn't a woman assignment judge. Chief Justice appointments, there wasn't a single woman head of a courthouse anywhere in New Jersey. And I remember walking into that first meeting; it was sort of like walking into the State Police when I was Attorney General and thinking, "This is an old boys' club." But it really wasn't; in fact, there just hadn't been women in the system very long. I mean, that was one of the great things that Governor Whitman was doing. You had to have women as new judges coming up in the system, as presiding judges before they got to be head judges. And you can't even be a judge until you've been a lawyer for 10 years in New Jersey so it takes a while. It was starting to happen and by the time I left, there were a number of women assignment judges because there were women that were in places where you could look at them. But to go back, the unconscious-- one of

the assignment judges said, "I've been appointing lawyers to--" Judges get to appoint lawyers to be special masters and to have these, I don't know what to call them, positions in the courts for the litigants that are paying positions. They're also pro bono positions, but-- and one of the assignment judges said--- I suddenly stopped myself one day and I said to myself, "You're appointing people you know and they're the old boys and you've got to stop doing this." That was what I remember experiencing, realizing I was falling into that same trap, appointing the women I knew, that I had become friendly with when I was in the Attorney General's Office or whatever and that I was going to be doing the same thing that I complained about, as I said earlier, and that I had to be fair and I had to have some balance and that I should have women of course but that I should also not make a club out of it.

Michael Aron: Give us your assessment of Christie Whitman as Governor.

Deborah Poritz: I think that we will in the future look back at the kinds of things she did and appreciate them more than perhaps we do now. She did things that to some extent are under the radar. So for example, the appointment of women judges, the appointment of women in government to the positions she did, the breaking open of government to women and minorities had started but that she really moved forward with. Those are things that I don't think the public fully learns about or appreciates. They're part of what makes government much, much better, but they're not the kinds of things you see in headlines that gets the public's attention.

Michael Aron: She appointed the first African-American to the State Supreme Court. Is that correct?

Deborah Poritz: She did.

Michael Aron: Harris, right?

Deborah Poritz: No, Jim Coleman.

Michael Aron: Right.

Deborah Poritz: James Coleman was the first and she appointed him, those kinds of things. I think when we look back, the scholars, the others that look at them

and who aren't looking at headlines will look at those things. And she did get headlines about Jim Coleman, but that goes away fairly quickly and we forget about those things. We'll remember her for those things. I think she was a moderate, strong governor who was dealing with a legislature that was in many ways behind the times, that is was not as open to women. And she dealt with a lot of those issues with-- whatever she did back in her home whatever was making her tense or upset, she dealt with the Cabinet, with others with great presence, with a kind of calm and an equanimity and helped us all to be able to go out and do our jobs and even when it got difficult.

Michael Aron: She did have a lot of presence.

Deborah Poritz: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Aron: Did you see yourself as part of an important change or historic shift?

Deborah Poritz: I was never a feminist. I wasn't-- I didn't set out to change the world or to be the first woman to do some of these things. What I did, whenever I did anything, I tried to do as well as I could do; that was the way my parents raised me, you have to do the best you can wherever you are. But you can't help, but you know, you're aware, people remind you almost every day that you're the first woman to do this. And I used to say and I still say, "It will be great when we don't say that anymore because that's distracting." On the other hand, I knew that women, a lot of women were still searching for ways to do things and they felt they weren't getting the opportunities they needed and I was seen as a role model and that I had a responsibility to respond. I know that Governor Whitman felt a lot of that, that she was such a powerful role model for so many women. And there's, whether you've asked for it or not, there's a responsibility that come with that.

Michael Aron: She left the governorship a year early to join the Bush administration as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. What's your view on how her reputation changed after having made that transition? Did it change?

Deborah Poritz: Well, you leave your own state and you become a national figure and of course it changes. I don't think it's possible to maintain the same relationships in your state or to have the same aura or to be looked-- viewed in the same way back in your home state. So, yes, it changed. That was a time when a

lot of things were changing, getting into Iraq. There was-- I mean, there were international tensions. There were issues that she encountered that I read about; I **didn't see her a lot then that had to do with the environment and that were difficult issues.** I feel reluctant to talk about some of these things because I was seeing them the same way you were. I **don't have any special information to give you that would be worth saving.** I wasn't in the group of people that saw her a lot during those days. **That's why I'm hesitating as much as I am.**

Michael Aron: Understood. How about you? How did your life evolve after leaving the bench?

Deborah Poritz: I don't think that there is a position that anyone can hold that is as challenging, stimulating, that is so engrossing, that asks so much of you and yet in an environment in which you just want to keep trying to do it as well as you can do it as being on the New Jersey Supreme Court and it was hard to leave that. I remember meeting former Attorney General Katzenbach in the supermarket close to my 70th birthday and Nick Katzenbach said to me, **"It's too young. When they said 70 in the Constitution, they thought people died by the time they were 70. Look at me; now, we live until we're 90."** <laughs> **"You shouldn't have to step down."** I said, **"Oh, if only you could control things."** It's hard to leave and others that I've talked to that have left have had the same reaction. **But you do other things. I have really enjoyed teaching at the two Rutgers Law Schools. That's the most like being on the court because on the court you had law students that you worked with; they were your clerks. And so I get to do that in a way all over again. And we deal with important issues in class, the great issues and the great cases that have already been decided. On the New Jersey Supreme Court, we dealt with those and then we decided some.**

Michael Aron: And you're at Drinker Biddle and Reese.

Deborah Poritz: I'm at Drinker Biddle. I give advice about appellate work for the most part. I cut back when I started to teach. Rutgers has some requirements about how many hours you can put in as a private attorney so I cut way back. **And I chair the Board of Legal Services and I'm Vice Chair of the Princeton Health Care System Board. And I'm on the Board of the fund for New Jersey. And I stepped down from the Board of Overseers of my law school, Penn, because I was running around too much.**

Michael Aron: Is there a last comment you want to make about the Whitman administration or Governor Whitman? You've said a lot already.

Deborah Poritz: I don't have more to say than I've said. I think that we will-- the public will appreciate Christie Whitman more as years go by. I think as the first woman governor she did some rather extraordinary things. So I would close there.

Michael Aron: Thanks very much, Chief.

Deborah Poritz: You're welcome. My grandson calls me "Chiefy."