

John Weingart: Hello, today is June 8, 2012. I'm John Weingart with the Center on the American Governor at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. I'm delighted to be able to welcome here today former governor of Massachusetts, Jane Swift. Thank you for coming. Now, you were governor from April of 2001 until January of 2003. So you were in the job only a few months when 9/11 happened. What was your role as a governor dealing with that kind of an emergency where Massachusetts was a major site in the events that unfolded?

Jane Swift: So it fundamentally changed my tenure in office. I, as you said, had only been governor for a short period of time, had given birth to twins and so, had actually...

John Weingart: And that was in August of July?

Jane Swift: No, I gave birth actually in May. I should remember that date. So I was just getting back to up to a very full travel schedule. And I think that the two most significant things were a focus on domestic terrorism and homeland security. And because two of the planes that took down the World Trade Center came out of Logan Airport, which is overseen by Massachusetts Public Sector Authority, we were very involved in both addressing risks and threats and security at home as well as commenting on things that I thought were necessary after 9/11 in our new normal.

So, for example, Logan Airport in Boston never had outsourced contracted screeners at all of our checkpoints. And post 9/11, that turned out to have been probably not a great idea. There wasn't a lot of consistency in the training, a lot of security checks. And so, I testified before Congress to have TSA be included as part of homeland security. Now, I travel a lot for job now, so I have to live by those things that you've created. So I can't be as upset about taking my shoes off at security as some of my fellow road warriors.

But on a serious note, I mean there were just numerous, numerous considerations that really dominated my agenda but for 9/11 would have never risen to a level of attention. We did significant reforms in how we oversaw our airport. The quasi-public authority, Massport, that ran the airport was in need of some restructuring. And we got some terrific people to do a private sector commission. You know, I got called in the middle of the night about white powder being found in a variety of places-- I no longer was able actually to check my own mail for a while after 9/11. The security of my family and myself increased significantly. I got a call at one point

Interview with Jane Swift by John Weingart; June 8, 2012

from the U.S. Attorney because they had some very active chatter about a potential attack on either Boston or New York Harbor. So it just fundamentally changed what I focused on. In addition to that, we were already starting to suffer some fiscal challenges because of the collapse of the dot-com bubble. But those were greatly exacerbated by 9/11. So post 9/11, the almost two years that I spent in office were entirely dominated by fiscal issues and having to rein in spending because of the drop off in revenue collections and public safety concerns at a complexity that most governors had never considered before.

John Weingart: I was wondering, there is so much day-to-day pressure and decisions and choices for a governor and so many things you're involved with. I wonder in retrospect or even at the time whether you felt like you were as prepared as you could have been for an event nobody could have anticipated as governor and whether that would lead to thoughts about how current governors ought to prepare themselves for emergencies or have procedures in place or responsible staff in place.

Jane Swift: So, yes and no. I did not personally have any deep expertise nor had I focused at all on public safety or terrorism issues. I was, you know, really focused on improving public education and economic development particularly for smaller businesses, focused on the environment and protecting family farms. Having said that, maybe because of that, I was extremely fortunate that the critical positions within my administration were populated with individuals who just were extraordinarily competent and well qualified for the job that they had. So the director of public safety, the head of the Massachusetts National Guard, the Attorney General, actually-- the Massachusetts Attorney General and I worked more closely together. The U.S. attorney was someone I had worked with on other issues earlier, head of our Massachusetts State Police. So there-- you know, I have, in the intervening 10 years, done some teaching in the Leadership Studies Department at Williams. And I do a little section on crisis management. And so, I do believe that who you assemble in critical positions is going to hold you in good stead for a crisis. So I guess one of my take-aways was to have a really, really strong subject matter expert in positions particularly where you as a governor don't have a lot of expertise because you don't know where the crisis will strike. And having folks who know a lot more than you on critical subjects who have your trust, to me, was the biggest takeaway. I fortunately had that not because I knew this ahead of time. But in retrospect, it served me very, very well.

John Weingart: I want to come back to the Leadership Studies question. So you became governor when you were lieutenant governor and the governor, Paul

Interview with Jane Swift by John Weingart; June 8, 2012

Cellucci became ambassador to Canada. I know to some extent what that experience was like, at least as it was publicly reported. But what did that lead you to think in retrospect about how a lieutenant governor should be prepared or whoever is second in line should be prepared for that eventuality? And were you briefed ahead of time? How much time was there before, you know, when the governor knew he was leaving that you could anticipate and prepare?

Jane Swift: So for the mechanics of doing the job, I was extraordinarily lucky because Governor Cellucci and before him, Governor Weld, with whom he served as lieutenant governor, really approached the executive office in a team spirit. And so I sat in-- even before Governor Cellucci knew he was leaving, I sat in on every cabinet meeting. I sat in on every judicial selection. I sat in on every interview we had and was consulted in appointing cabinet members. So from the outset, did I know it was going on, was I ready to, you know, know where I had to stand and sit and sign and make decisions? Absolutely.

I think the area where I was ill-prepared and I would counsel future lieutenant governors, but I often counsel young women, is in making sure that I was always considering the potential ascension and doing the kind of networking and consulting of other individuals so that I would have been politically better prepared and better positioned when the governor left. I made a mistake early in my time in statewide office as lieutenant governor. And I think a lot of women make this. And I also had my first child was born shortly before I was elected. And so, as a working mother, I had this concept as well that if I just did the, you know, mechanics of the job really, really well, if I read every briefing book, if I knew every issue, you know, if I was just so well prepared, then that would take care of everything. I'd be a great lieutenant governor. And the truth is, there are a lot of other soft skills and activities that I should have been engaging in, key constituency groups that I should have been going to lunch with, individuals I should have been inviting into my office to seek their opinions so that I could have a broader view and frankly, a broader core of support if I were to move ahead in government. And I didn't do that. I didn't spend a lot of time courting the Boston media and sort of building the political war chest of, you know, goodwill that I needed when I became governor.

I really felt even-- after 9/11, I really felt I knew sort of what to do. I knew my position on the issues. I knew many of my colleagues in the legislature even though I was relatively young. I had been in the building, as they say, for some time. The Senate president that I served with was someone I had worked with on education issues. The speaker of the house was someone I had worked with on a number of different issues when I was in the state legislature. So, you know, I had the

Interview with Jane Swift by John Weingart; June 8, 2012

relationships. I had the knowledge. I had the subject matter expertise. I knew all the cabinet officials. I had helped to appoint them. They shared our agenda. It was really more in the, you know, building a reservoir of good will and people who wanted to see me succeed, defining my narrative and who I was separate from the governor that I didn't attend to when I was lieutenant governor. And I think that was a mistake. Having said that, that's a tricky road for a lieutenant governor.

John Weingart: I was going to say, it's really easy to seem presumptuous or disloyal or something.

Jane Swift: Exactly. I think you have to be careful. But I think there are things that you can do skillfully so that whenever it happens, whether, you know, there's an open seat and you decide to run. But I never even thought about it never mind did it.

John Weingart: But when you became governor, did you make staff changes either right away or over time?

Jane Swift: I made some staff changes. I was very cognizant of not having a mandate. Many of the members of the cabinet were folks who I had input into hiring. I did not-- there was, you know, a lot of planning because I knew for a good period of time that the governor was likely to leave, so quiet planning. And I did not do any wholesale changes. I did change out some of the direct staff. And I think that's important.

John Weingart: Direct staff, like your personal staff?

Jane Swift: Exactly. I brought actually with me a lot of folks who had worked with me in the lieutenant governor's office. I think the most important thing there is to decide which way you're going to approach it, you know, am I going to keep them or am I going to change them. And then whatever you do, you have to live with. You know, if you keep people, you have to trust them. So I think sometimes there's a tendency to say, you know, I have no authority to replace everybody, so I'll keep them. But then you try to work around them because you're not really sure if they share your agenda. And I think I didn't have many incidences of that. But I think that's the most dangerous route, is to keep people even though you intend to sort of find other places to manage from for their responsibilities.

Interview with Jane Swift by John Weingart; June 8, 2012

John Weingart: So, there are various schools of thought about whether-- or very different approaches to relying on the cabinet and giving them sort of somewhat free reign or having your own personal staff that focuses on issues. How did you look at that and was that any different than the way Governor Cellucci had looked at it?

Jane Swift: It wasn't different at all except that I tended to have more meetings with my entire cabinet. But I think that was also a function of the time. So as I said, you know, all of a sudden, public safety and terrorism issues were dominating my agenda. I wasn't the only who knew that-- I didn't have a lot of experience in that. It was pretty obvious by looking at my resume. And so, I think it served me well to establish very regular meetings and consultations with that core group of people. They weren't really my entirety of my cabinet. But they were a sub-group of the cabinet with some other local federal officials that I met with regularly. And I think that helped both to reassure the public that I was getting good advice but it also gave me really good insight and advice in, you know, just policy agenda items and information on those to move forward. We also then had a very serious fiscal crisis. And I'm a Republican. I believe in a fiscal crisis the most important thing you can do is to cut back and live within your means very quickly. The longer you wait, the worse it gets. And I don't think that in the midst of a fiscal crisis is a good time to raise taxes.

Having said all of that, I don't care what party you're in, it's never easy to cut. You only hear from the groups of people who are impacted negatively. And so, that is a difficult exercise. And I did choose to really embrace my cabinet and give them targets and say, you know, this is what I need you to do. But I'm not going to say you must get rid of this program and you must, you know, shrink that program by five percent. Here's what we need to do and let's approach it together. And so, that did empower them. And I think that helped to make the really difficult decisions that were in front of us.

John Weingart: So how often would you have the whole cabinet meet together?

Jane Swift: We met-- so I'm trying to remember. It's been a long time. We had weekly staff, you know, meetings, sometimes twice a week. I think the cabinet met every other week. But when we were in the midst of budget issues, it was more frequent than that.

Interview with Jane Swift by John Weingart; June 8, 2012

John Weingart: Let me go back to your current work in Leadership Studies. Do you think of skills, background, training necessary for leadership in the public sector and particularly as governor different in those jobs that are-- in what ways are they different or similar to other leadership positions?

Jane Swift: So I think they're very different. Part of the reason that I got involved with Leadership Studies is that I was an often guest speaker to talk about the differences in managing the public sector versus the private sector. I think a few things. I think how you communicate and communicate your priorities is extremely different. How you are held accountable for your job performance is also extremely different. So if you're in a good organization in the private sector, you either have a board of directors. So now, I'm in the private sector, I'm the CEO of a company. I, you know, do calls with my board every month. I do-- you know, we do in person board meetings every quarter. They have an executive session. I get feedback. I establish performance management objectives every year. And I know how I'm progressing against those. It's very structured.

One of the hard things in public sector leadership is, you don't have a set of agreed upon performance management objectives. You have those issues that you have elevated as being important during your campaign and hopefully you have a mandate. But you don't get the same kind of feedback. Certainly, polls serve at something of feedback but that's really not a replacement for the kind of direct job performance and leadership input you get in the private sector. So I think that is something that requires a lot of strategic thought. How do I know if I'm doing a good job, who are the people I pay attention to, who do I consult, how do I get advice. The other thing is for the most part at the gubernatorial level, governors are leading really large organizations - and really large organizations that are covered incessantly in the press. And so, that creates an issue of alignment with your cabinet and with the people who work for you because you don't speak to people who are in policymaking positions on a really frequent basis. And you obviously try to be very clear to your cabinet. You try to be very clear in your communication through the press. But if you're in a state like Massachusetts or New Jersey or New York where the legislature and public policy and state government is covered, you know, by multiple news organizations, there's going to be lots of stories that are going to be off messaged. That's not just an issue for a governor in terms of how they convince the public to view them.

But it's also an issue for how they continue to manage this massive organization that they need to keep moving forward because your cabinet secretary hears from you once every two weeks and hears from your direct staff a couple times on

Interview with Jane Swift by John Weingart; June 8, 2012

issues. But they're out there doing lots of things that add up to sort of the essence of what your administration does. And they see an article in the newspaper where unnamed sources are supposing that something or other is happening. That impacts them. That impacts their view of what they think they should be doing or the issues they think they need to address on your behalf. So that's sort of how you keep your direct reports, your cabinet and how you keep policy setting officials at the lower levels than that aligned when you have all this noise is maybe one way to think of it going on. I think it's one of the real core challenges to public sector leadership. But, you have somebody who's running a multibillion dollar organization have some of the similar issues of how do they cascade priorities and culture down through. But they don't have that omnipresent media commentary that influences that communication to deal with. And when they do sometimes, you see how ugly it can be. If you're a public company that all of a sudden is in a scandal and you do have that sort of period of intense media scrutiny, it can be a daunting challenge for governors of big states and certainly, you know, other executive leaders higher up in government. That is just a pervasive challenge.

John Weingart: I wonder if there were experiences you had in your youth or before you got into your position as governor or lieutenant governor that led you to a particular position or to focus on a particular issue. And I'm thinking of an example that I know of in New Jersey. Governor Tom Kean had, when he was in graduate school, seen Lincoln Center being constructed in New York City and seen the impact it was having on the neighborhood which led him-- was one of the things that led him to push for a performing arts center in Newark. I mean you certainly had family experiences right at the time you were being governor...

Jane Swift: Actually, ironically, I'm heading tomorrow to my 25th reunion at Trinity College, which is a great liberal arts institution. But it was my arrival on that campus almost 30 years ago that probably drove me to be as passionate as I am about high quality education experiences being accessible to all folks. I came from a family who was really committed to education. It was always expected we would go to college. But we lived in an aging blue collar, industrial city with, as it turned out, I didn't know at the time, fairly mediocre public schools. And I showed up on campus at Trinity intending to be an English major and took my first two courses in English and struggled mightily with my writing. I had been by far the best writer or one of the best writers in my high school. But my skills weren't as sharp as some of my peers who had been prepared at either better public schools or some of the most elite private schools in our country. And that did have-- make a very formative impression on me. I've spent the last 20 years in and out of government trying to figure out how we drive excellence to every corner of our education system, public schools, charters through school choice, access to higher education.

Interview with Jane Swift by John Weingart; June 8, 2012

It is still the case, I believe, that one of the fundamental differences in our country that makes us great is the ability for folks to have unlimited opportunity. And you get that unlimited opportunity through a high quality education. The availability of a high quality education is really hit or miss in our country today. And, the economic challenges we're going through right now, I believe, are the tip of the iceberg of having a large swath of our work force not having received the skills they needed to help themselves and us to be economically successful. So for me, it was probably that day I realized-- and a lot of kids like me who grew up in small towns realized I get to college and, you know, I realize two things: that there were people who were way richer than anything I ever knew existed . But, you know, I don't believe I had ever heard of a BMW car before I arrived on campus. But also, that wealth and the type of privilege that they had had afforded them a lot of opportunities that a lot of my peers didn't have. On the flip side of that, I also felt extraordinarily lucky to be there in getting that same education and felt that brought with it an obligation to give back.

John Weingart: I'm just going to ask one more question because I know you're pressed for time. But Alan Rosenthal, who teaches here and is an expert on state legislatures, has written a book recently about governors called "The Best Job in Politics." And I was thinking, knowing you were coming that in Massachusetts, several people who came before you and after you apparently didn't think so, so that you had both, as you mentioned, William Weld and Paul Cellucci, who were governors, who in one case tried to and in other case, received an ambassadorship, but both left office before their terms ended. And then you had Mitt Romney who served one term and didn't run for re-election. Were those just personal circumstances on their part?

Jane Swift: So I actually disagree. I think it is the best job. And I think they would agree to. Part of how they categorized it as being the best job is it opens up opportunities to even better jobs <laughs> that you might not have had if you weren't governor. But I do believe-- people ask me a lot if I'm ever going to run for anything again. I have had the best job in government. It could be searingly brutal and painful. The amount of public scrutiny with something that I don't think I was-- I know I wasn't prepared for and I'm not sure if anybody could be. And it was a little more jarring in my life because it happened at the same time as I was going through some fairly significant life-changing experiences like having children. But having said that, I still get an opportunity because I did that to do great and meaningful work so that I didn't choose to leave to go onto another government job. But I absolutely work every day to continue to try to improve public education through my private sector work.

Interview with Jane Swift by John Weingart; June 8, 2012

But I also think I got to make an impact on how kids in our foster care system are able to access a college education. We put in place one of the best education reform systems of any state and we're named a national model. And it's still largely driving public policy in Massachusetts today. And Massachusetts has among some of the best public schools in the country. It's not a job that's done by any means yet. But we have some real accomplishments. I met some really cool people. I got to do some really interesting things. So I do think it is a fabulous job. And I think it's a fabulous job in many states because you get that nice balance of being close enough to be able to impact issues where you can see the difference you're making. But you are at enough of a level and have enough power that those impacts can be pretty amazing in their reach and sometimes pretty lasting.

John Weingart: Okay. Well, thank you so much for your time.

Jane Swift: Thank you.