Marie Aronsohn: I'm Marie DeNoia Aronsohn. It is July 10th, 2013 and I'm here with Liz Murray. Liz Murray served in Christie Todd Whitman's administration in various roles. We're here today to discuss the administration for the Center for the American Governor at Rutgers Eagleton Institute of Politics. All right, Liz. Let's start today by asking you about you. Where did you grow up and where did you attend college?

Elizabeth Murray: I grew up in Lyndhurst, which is in Bergen County. I came to school here at Rutgers at Douglas College. I spent a lot of time here at Eagleton, both in classes and through an organization I was involved in that brought women who were involved in politics here to school to talk to people. I actually had the opportunity to drive people to the airport, including Shirley Chisholm, which is one of the things that was one of my highlights. I was an English major and then when I graduated I got a job with Kathy Donovan, who was in the legislature at the time.

Marie Aronsohn: What do you think drew you to Eagleton when you were a student? You were studying English. Were you just interested in certain issues or?

Elizabeth Murray: I think it was probably just the issues generally. I didn't have any particular interest, but I think it was the being around people who were making policy decisions and learning from them. The folks here have great relationships. They brought in really high-level people, people who were sort of involved in things across the board in politics, lobbyists, and appointed officials, elected officials, that sort of thing.

Marie Aronsohn: So you were hooked basically?

Elizabeth Murray: Yes. <laughs>

Marie Aronsohn: When did you first meet Christie Whitman?

Elizabeth Murray: In 1992, I think it was. I had been working-- I had worked on Dick Zimmer's campaign, who became a member of congress the year she ran against Bill Bradley, and I was called by the campaign when I was working in his congressional office in D.C. to come for an interview. So I met her. I went to work
for her. She had a political action committee that she set up prior to the campaign itself in '93 and I worked for a year there.

**Marie Aronsohn:** Did you work on the first gubernatorial campaign?

**Elizabeth Murray:** I did. Mm-hmm. I worked on both, '93 and '96.

**Marie Aronsohn:** And how were you involved in the campaign, what was your--

**Elizabeth Murray:** I was a policy director, so I was responsible for helping develop policy, questionnaires, those sorts of things.

**Marie Aronsohn:** What was your original take on Christie Todd Whitman?

**Elizabeth Murray:** I liked that she seems genuine, that she's a person who doesn't let the politics get ahead of the policy and that makes her a hard candidate to work for, but a very easy governor to work for. She was always clear, she was decisive. There was never any doubt as to the direction the administration was heading in.

**Marie Aronsohn:** Did you find that your first impression of her evolved as you got to know her? Was your first impression of her aligned as you got to know her along the way?

**Elizabeth Murray:** Yeah, I think so. You know, she--her mantra was always good policy makes good politics. I'm sure you've heard that talking to other folks, and that was really the guiding principle, and so if it fit that, it was okay to do.

**Marie Aronsohn:** But sometimes you mentioned that it made it a little bit harder to do the politics?

**Elizabeth Murray:** Well, sure. I mean you always want a candidate who's going to make decisions based on what's going to sell as opposed to what may be threading the needle in the way that you need to do often with public policy.

**Marie Aronsohn:** So Christie Whitman was not the first woman candidate you worked with...
Elizabeth Murray: No.

Marie Aronsohn: ..because you were with Kathy Donovan, but in the big picture, what kind of differences do you observe between working with men and working with women in that capacity?

Elizabeth Murray: As candidates you mean?

Marie Aronsohn: As candidates and then as elected leaders?

Elizabeth Murray: I think as candidates, at least back in those days, women tended to be asked more about their families and what they were doing at home and that sort of thing than male candidates were. There was always an assumption that it was okay that he was running for office. I also, and I don't mean this in a derogatory way, but my sense was that there's a different level of confidence that male candidates have, even in their early days as candidates, than women do. Women tend to grow into the role, if you will, that they're speaking skills improve and you can see them become more confident as time goes by. That happens to men too, but I think they start at a different place than women do.

Marie Aronsohn: That must be rewarding to observe.

Elizabeth Murray: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, it’s fascinating to see the growth in somebody in that way.

Marie Aronsohn: Can you mark a moment that you can recall where you saw Christie Todd Whitman move into that?

Elizabeth Murray: I do remember that. She was speaking at Rutgers in Newark. I don't remember the context. It may have been-- I think it was a program where they have the valedictorians from high school come, and so she came to talk to them, and I remember thinking she has grown into her skill for want of a better way of saying it, that she was confident, she was clear, she was that public speaking articulate, right. She's always articulate, but that public speaking has a different kind of hue to it, and so I felt she really had kind of hit the mark, as you put it.
Marie Aronsohn: Was it the culmination of just experience or did you owe that to something that had occurred that would have had her just step into it at that point?

Elizabeth Murray: You know, I don't know what looked different to me, but I think it was just experience. I think—and she was, at that time, sort of migrating toward becoming the standard bearer for the party and so I think that was a piece of it too, that she was sort of stepping into the role in addition to just the practice and getting the skills.

Marie Aronsohn: We understand that you were the keeper of a journal called Promises Made, Promises Kept. Tell us about that.

Elizabeth Murray: At the end of the campaign she was very much about, as I said earlier, that guiding principle, very much about making sure that she was not seen as the kind of candidate who said one thing and then did something else. She objected to that personally, was my impression, and then just thought that it ruined people's perception and faith in their elected officials. So we put together a book. It was a couple inches thick and it was everything from the materials in position papers that she had put out to questionnaires for whether it was the CR Club or the Black Issues Convention, newspapers, anything that she had said on the record was included in that and we gave it out to cabinet members at the beginning of the administration really kind of as a guide for what they should be thinking about as they approached their new jobs.

Marie Aronsohn: So basically, you were able to check off as she kept-- as she fulfilled the promises she had made, you were able to sort of say when and describe how she had done it?

Elizabeth Murray: Right.

Marie Aronsohn: That's quite a record. Did you use it at all in the campaign, her re-election campaign? Did you reference it?

Elizabeth Murray: Yeah. You know, the campaigns, as you know, tend to be sort of bigger picture issues, right, so not down to the level of detail that the book got into. But you know, certainly on the big subjects, taxes, education, core curriculum standards that she wanted to pursue, those kinds of things, she had either done those or made tremendous progress toward them, holding the line on budget growth was a big priority for her in the beginning of the administration. So I mean,
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we didn't do everything. There were some things you get into office or you get close and you get more education by people who are experts and you go well, maybe that's not the best idea. But in the main, the idea was to look at those things and try to put them in place.

Marie Aronsohn: When did she ask you to join the administration?

Elizabeth Murray: Right after the campaign I started on the transition— on the transition staff, and so that is part of where I worked on that and then when I went into the administration, I went out to the Department of Banking. I think there was some feeling among some of my female mentors, and they were right, that I should get some experience out in government to sort of understand how government works before coming back to the governor's office, and I think I was only out there for about six months, but you really do get a feel for how the bureaucracy works and how government operates.

Marie Aronsohn: Interesting that it was the Department of Banking. You're an English major, not a numbers person, I assume.

Elizabeth Murray: That's fair to say.

Marie Aronsohn: How was that for you?

Elizabeth Murray: You know, when you're at a management level, you really don't get in the weeds on banking audits and that sort of thing. It was really more about making sure the trains were running on time and that we were getting the budget materials done and we were meeting our budget and those kinds of things. So it was much bigger picture than that, the concerns of the employees about being out in the field and who gets lunch hour and who doesn't and how that works. It was really much more run of the mill stuff. There were people who had a great deal of expertise in how to look at bank books.

Marie Aronsohn: Do you recall any major issues coming up in those first six months as you were out there?

Elizabeth Murray: Not really. That's when— my sense was, at least at the time, that that was one of those places where the trains run on time because the people
there know how to run the trains and your job is really just to make sure that they're doing that.

**Marie Aronsohn:** So then you returned to the Governor-- well, then you came into the Governor's office, and tell us what capacity you worked in there.

**Elizabeth Murray:** I was a policy advisor in the policy office, and I worked on a range of things. I didn't have a particular area of expertise but I think I was useful as this sort of institutional knowledge. I had a fairly good feel after a couple years of working for her to know where she'd head on something and then I did a lot of firefighting. So if something would come up in a department, I'd work on those kinds of things.

**Marie Aronsohn:** Anything you can remember anecdotally?

**Elizabeth Murray:** Yeah, I remember working on Right to Know issues at one point. I don't remember timing, whether that was in the beginning of the administration, and I remember putting together a tour of facilities serving youth and juvenile detention. I think she did six or eight stops at the beginning of the administration. She did some tours of things that she thought were important that she wanted to focus on and so that was one of the things I helped with.

**Marie Aronsohn:** What was it like to work with her?

**Elizabeth Murray:** She's a very interesting person. She's very clear, she's very direct. She knows what she thinks and I always felt like people were heard, there was always an opportunity to sort of speak your piece. I never had the feeling that although I was fairly junior, that she minded talking to junior people. I mean, some people prefer to deal with the principal or the person who reports directly to them, but my sense was that she wasn't like that. She could often be fun and silly and, you know, and tease and that sort of thing, and you know, she was the sort if she's teasing you, she likes you. <laughs>

**Marie Aronsohn:** That's good. Tell us about your job at the Board of Public Utilities.

**Elizabeth Murray:** I was Chief of Staff at the Board of Public Utilities for about two and a half years and I'll say it's really the most fascinating job I've ever had. I
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think probably what I knew about the Board of Public Utilities was that when the lights, you flip the light switch, the lights come on and when you pick up the phone, there's dial tone. But there's a great deal of work that the people who are there do. Their expertise is tremendous and my job was really to, I sort of viewed it as brokering between the companies who had an interest, a need to make money and a point of view, and the folks in the government who felt like their job was not only to help them do that, but to protect customers and make sure customers were paying a fair rate for the utilities. So I worked on telephone issues and electric issues and water, sewer, pretty much everything, cable, a fair amount of that came across my desk in very general ways.

Marie Aronsohn: Rewarding?

Elizabeth Murray: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I mean, I think government is generally rewarding. You're in a position to do things. While you may affect just a handful of people, you're in a position to change things, to make things better for people you hope.

Marie Aronsohn: Do you think that Governor Whitman made a difference as a woman for women?

Elizabeth Murray: Oh, yes. Absolutely. She was not shy about that in the way you see some, at least nowadays you see some women shy about sort of owning the fact that they are a woman, maybe the first. One of the things I remember about her is from the time she was a senate candidate, she went every year to Girls State and Boys State and she was their main speaker right through her governorship. My sense was that her purpose there was to show both boys and girls that women can do these kinds of jobs. I remember a staffer, her advanced guy, who was with her said, the most fascinating thing to him about it was that she was walking from the back of the auditorium to the front at Girls State, the girls were reaching out to touch her. Not to shake her hand, but just, they could feel that-- it was different than if it were a man coming through. And this is a guy saying this. So you could see the difference that she made and she didn't shy away from those issues that moderate Republican women are sometimes taken to task for like abortion issues and those kinds of things. She owned those in a way that sometimes made some of us go, wait a minute. <laughs> It might be better if you approached it this way. But she thought what she thought and she wasn't shy about it. It had some consequences for her, but she felt strongly about that and she had a lot of women in the administration. You know, both in the cabinet roles but also in
her kitchen cabinet, her advisors tended to be fairly evenly balanced, men and women.

**Marie Aronsohn:** So the consequences you're referring to when she was so outspoken about her positions, you're talking about political consequences?

**Elizabeth Murray:** Yeah, political consequences. Sure, I mean, everything from people being angry with her and funding a third-party candidate in the '96 election to just the consequences at a national level. She was early on viewed as somebody who had the same kind of potential that the current governor has, but for that moderation, that north/east Republican look that she had, so there were consequences but again, good policy makes good politics. Her sense of integrity was and is second to none really.

**Marie Aronsohn:** Well, what were her greatest strengths and her greatest weakness? I think you’re telling us her greatest strengths, but would you want to add to that?

**Elizabeth Murray:** Just to follow up on the thought, integrity. There was no room in the administration for shenanigans and to my knowledge nothing ever happened that would cause her embarrassment or was inappropriate in regards to taxpayer resources or anything like that. It was the one thing that everybody was clear on. There was no room for that and so I think that makes a big difference in how everybody operates and it's nice that everything's clear. There's no gray. So you don't have to worry about getting a call from somebody who wants to you to X, Y or Z and being in trouble for saying I'm sorry. I can't do that. If you have a good reason, it's a policy reason then that was good enough. So there's something to be said for that in my opinion.

**Marie Aronsohn:** How did she communicate that so that it was so clear throughout the administration?

**Elizabeth Murray:** I guess a couple ways. I mean, having been around her a while, she was very clear herself about it but she also had people around her who were very clear, people like Peter Verniero, Mark Musser. She was just very clear that they were vested with responsibility for keeping things above board. Everything was a bright line for them. There was never any question about what was permissible or not. So I think it was a combination of her setting the tone and then people around her carrying that through.
Marie Aronsohn: Would you share with us any of your observations of her greatest weaknesses?

Elizabeth Murray: Well, you know, as I said earlier, I think her commitment to good policy cost her as a candidate and you can argue about what's good policy but she wasn't making decisions based on what was going to make her a successful candidate. She was making decisions based on what she thought was right for the people of the state and so that had consequences as we talked about. So whether that's a weakness or not, I don't know but it created an Achilles heel in some ways.

Marie Aronsohn: How would you assess her administration as a whole thinking back?

Elizabeth Murray: My feeling about her administration is that she has gotten sort of painted with some of the excesses of people who came after her. You know, were there mistakes? Certainly. But I think a lot more got done on the whole than people may be aware of or have thought about and I'd like to think that she made a difference for people in education. We're still talking about core curriculum standards today and we still talk about the size of the budget today. In many ways, she started that conversation, she started the conversation about tax cuts she was able to use her national stage to continue to drive that message back here at home.

Marie Aronsohn: Did it feel like you were part of historic change or achievement when you were in her administration?

Elizabeth Murray: She probably won't like me to say this, but I felt like the piece of history I helped contribute to was sort of helping her break the glass ceiling, and multiple glass ceilings. I remember we were in the Senate chamber when she named Debbie Poritz, she swore in Debbie Poritz as Chief Justice and Bob Bostock wrote a brilliant speech and she described it as that sound of glass you hear cracking in the background is the sound of another glass ceiling shattering and her voice caught. I never ever heard her be emotional before. So you just knew that she not only had broken a glass ceiling for women in elective office, but that she was committed and continuing to do that in other venues. So my sense is that she'd like to be known as a great education governor, or a great tax cutter and she was those things too but the glass ceiling is really in many ways in my feeling probably her greatest contribution. There are kids who grew up having no idea that a man could be governor because of her.
Marie Aronsohn: Some of the many people that we've interviewed from the administration feel that Governor Whitman has never been given the credit for what she achieved. Do you agree with this?

Elizabeth Murray: I do. My feeling is that partly because of her leaving before the term was over, partly because of, in my judgment, the way things were handled for that last 12 or 18 months, she sort of was painted with that broad brush. I think that then having moved onto EPA and then some of the stuff that happened there. I think the good stuff that happened where we would have had kind of a fair and frank post mortem, really never had an opportunity to happen, and so I do agree with that. I think that.

Marie Aronsohn: So when she left to join the EPA and her successor took over, you feel as if that the way that successor administration operated, so Don DiFrancesco and company operated, diminished the legacy basically that she created?

Elizabeth Murray: I mean, that's my personal feeling. You know, I don't know what others think but there was less focus on the things that she was interested in like keeping a rein on the size of the budget and taxes and those kinds of things, and I don't know what other kinds of things happened but my feeling was that in many ways people did have some regard for her, you know, the way she managed the budget and taxes and that sort of-- I think she just gets sort of cast in that in that same broad brush.

Marie Aronsohn: Do you think she could have done something to protect that legacy in retrospect?

Elizabeth Murray: Maybe, but it-- it would have required doing things that are just not in her nature like getting people out there talking about what she did and sort of creating a campaign so to speak in the very smallest sense of the word and that's just not who she is so that wouldn't happen.

Marie Aronsohn: Were you at the table for the pension fund issue, because that's one of the policies that seems to haunt Governor Whitman.

Elizabeth Murray: Yes, I was.
Marie Aronsohn: And what was your opinion of that? Is that-- coming together?

Elizabeth Murray: As we discussed, I'm an English major. <laughs> So I remember feeling at the time that I didn't really have a good understanding of it but I felt like there were people at the table with a great deal of expertise who do understand these things, who thought it was a good idea, and it may still be a good idea. I think that we failed in explaining it properly and in hindsight, I wish that we had made sure that there were communications people at the table who had a really good understanding of the program who could-- and then we really spent time thinking about how we would communicate it. We communicated it as, it's like refinancing your house, and it really was nothing like that. Having now refinanced a house -- <laughs> and so, you know, it's-- in my opinion, it was a reasonable thing to say, let's essentially prepay our pension obligation. I'm sure that there's a reason for this, but the idea in my mind that we consider pensions fully funded when they are funded to the level that would assume that everybody who's in the pension fund retires today is not feasible for taxpayers, and so it was aiming at that issue. But I think we didn't communicate it well.

Marie Aronsohn: You've had an interesting career since the end of the administration. Tell us about what you've been doing.

Elizabeth Murray: After I left BPU I went to Cablevision, cable operator in the northern part of New Jersey and I did regulatory affairs. So I did a little bit of customer issues when they sort of bubbled up through BPU, looked at regulatory issues, those kinds of things, and then I moved over to Comcast and I do something similar, but on a bigger scale so I have responsibility for New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio and I mostly work on the telephone side of our operation, and so I do everything from pole attachments, which are scintillating, let me tell you, and to sort of the back office stuff that deals with how telephone calls get traded between unrelated companies.

Marie Aronsohn: So clearly your work-- your work in politics in the Whitman administration has prepared you for this.

Elizabeth Murray: Yeah, I think so in a lot of ways. I mean not only substantively but just in sort of having an understanding of how policy makers think.

Marie Aronsohn: Anything else you'd want to tell us about your experience in the Whitman administration?
Elizabeth Murray: I think that she successfully surrounded herself, I don't include myself in this necessarily, but with people who understood her, who shared her commitment to the public and to doing the right thing and who genuinely cared about kind of moving the state in a positive direction and you don't always see that in people at the top.

Marie Aronsohn: Thanks, Liz. That's great.

Elizabeth Murray: Thank you.