Marie DeNola Aronsohn: It is Thursday, June 26, 2014. I’m Marie DeNola Aronsohn here at the Eagleton Institute at Rutgers University continuing the examination of the administration of former New Jersey Governor Christie Todd Whitman. With me today is Eileen McGinnis who served as Chief of Policy and Planning for the Whitman Administration. Welcome, Eileen. Let’s start with a little bit about you. Tell us about where you grew up and your family.

Eileen McGinnis: Sure. Glad to be here. I grew up in Hudson County, New Jersey, bastion of democratic politics, so it was a sort of winding road to the Whitman Administration. And I was born in 1955 and I mention that because I think that the year people are born sort of forms a lot of how they think and what they want out of life. I was born in an Irish Catholic household. So, I grew up in a household where there was a photograph of John F. Kennedy and the pope over the black and white TV, and that really formed my life in lots of different ways because I always wanted to be a public servant. I sort of bought into that whole thing, ask what you can do for your country, not what your country can do for you, and that was really my lifelong dream: to be in public service. So I count myself as very fortunate that I did realize my career dream.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Tell us a little bit about your family, how many brothers and sisters, and were they all also interested in public service?

Eileen McGinnis: Not as much as I. I think really in sixth, seventh and eighth grade I knew exactly what I wanted to do, and sometimes I think about being a middle child, too, so I was always interested in issues of fairness-- and so I think that also was-- like I was always interested in issues of haves and have nots and how government can play a role in that in making things more fair. I think that even played into it. I’m the second of four. My sister just retired yesterday, actually, after a 35-year career as a teacher in Bayonne, New Jersey. She stayed there. And I have two brothers who are also now in Mercer County, and my parents now live in Ocean County. So everybody stayed in New Jersey.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: So your interest was public service and you became very involved in politics. Tell us about how that happened, how you first started.

Eileen McGinnis: Now, I was more interested in policy than politics, but to execute, implement policy you often do it in a political arena. And as you said I was the Chief of Policy, and being Chief of Policy I think is the best job in government because Chief of Staff-- I know you’ve talked to Chief of Staffs and Chief Counsels. It’s a different type of job.
Chief of Policy, really people refer to it as sort of the conscience of the office. It’s a little above the politics of it, and the way Christie Whitman ran the office she really looked to the office to bring the best and brightest ideas in the country to New Jersey. What was going on nationally, and that’s really not what other offices do. So we were fortunate. One of the things that she was proud of was the Drug Court, which Bruce Stout was responsible for, and that was an idea that was percolating across the country. The cultural trust, which Carol Cronheim brought to some parts of the country. There were lots of different things that were going on that were really brought to New Jersey based on what was good policy across the country. And I think Christie Whitman would say that, too, that part of the job that she liked the most was the policy making, not so much the politics of it. What always interested her was good policy, and that was my interest, too.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: When did you first meet her?

Eileen McGinnis: I met her actually after she was elected Governor through Jane Kenny, who was my boss when I got to the Governor’s office. Jane was also my boss when I worked for Governor Kean, so as you know people cycle through administrations. They leave at the end of four or eight years and then work somewhere else and then come back when their party comes back into power, and I actually saw that when I left the state and worked at EPA, exact same thing. People would cycle in and out, and people would wait for their party to come back in and then rejoin policy or political jobs.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: What was your work with the Kean Administration?

Eileen McGinnis: I worked in the office of constituent relations and Jane was the head of that. I hope some students watch these things because I would recommend that to anybody as a way to start out their career. You learn ins and outs of government, what different departments do. You learn social security is not a state issue. It’s a federal issue. A lot of people don’t understand what a state issue is as opposed to a federal issue or a municipal issue. And so I got a firm grounding in all levels of government there, and also I learned how to write very quickly and well under Jane’s— as you know, Jane was a student of literature and English, so I think all of us learned a whole lot under her. That stands me well now, I think, because I enjoy writing very much.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Going back to the time when you first met Christie Todd Whitman can you remember where you were a little bit? Give us sort of the scenario.

Eileen McGinnis: Well, I was brought on as a Deputy Chief of Policy, and one of the things about Governor Whitman was that she gave a lot of her staff a lot of responsibility very
early on, so we were able to bring ideas to her very quickly, and I was in a lot of meetings with her. You know, the rhythm of state government is fascinating, really, and I think when I taught at Eagleton I would always talk about this to the students because there are two real big speeches of the year, the State of the State in January followed by the Budget Message in March. And you would start preparing for the State of the [State] in September. So you would work with the cabinet members September, October, November, December, to try to bubble up some really good ideas that fit in with the governor’s agenda, announce that speech, and it was a tremendous amount of work, of course. We’d go to her house in Pontefract to practice and that was always fun, the weekend before the big speech was that day. And then immediately we’d start working on the budget speech, and then the budget. New Jersey’s proud to say, we passed balanced budgets by the constitutional deadline. And then the policy office would be responsible to pair with the legislative office in getting all those legislative initiatives done over the Summer and in the Fall, and then you’d start again in the Fall. So it was a nice rhythm. The year would pass very quickly and we were lucky enough to work in an era where it was possible to get a lot of things done, so it was a very active government. New Jersey often is unlike the federal government. I think the whole time I was in federal government there was one bill passed, an environmental bill, and that was the Brownfields Bill that had been 10 years in the making. So a lot of legislative effort on the federal level is to stop things from happening instead of making things happen. I’ve talked to students about this, the different experiences when you work for state or federal government.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: So I keep bringing you back to this one moment.

Eileen McGinnis: Okay, I’m sorry.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: No, this is very helpful. But I’m just wondering if you happen to recall the moment when you first met then Governor Whitman.

Eileen McGinnis: The memory that stands out is I was responsible for welfare reform at the time and the Governor had asked for a roundtable again of what ideas were around the country, and I believe I introduced her at that roundtable, and that’s my clearest memory of her. Oh, and I think actually I might’ve been pregnant with my first child at the time, and right around then she was asking me how I was feeling and just taking more of a personal interest.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: What were your first impressions of her?
Eileen McGinnis: I don’t think all of us in the beginning were somewhat in awe of her, truthfully, candidly. You know, if I had to use one word to describe her it would be civil. She’s a very civil person, and I think those of us who worked for her for many years learned that from her. I work now in the private sector, but I start meetings on time and I treat people very respectfully. A lot of things, the way I comport myself in my work life now I do it because I watched her. And things like not blaming people if things go wrong, taking responsibility if things go wrong, wanting to learn from experiences. So a lot of things, just sort of the soft skills of working in an organization I really did learn from her.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: During her second term you became Chief of Policy and Planning, correct?

Eileen McGinnis: Uh-huh.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: You replaced Jane Kenny.

Eileen McGinnis: Yes.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: What were your responsibilities at that point, and what did you think about having that position?

Eileen McGinnis: That really is the best position in state government. You’re working with a cabinet and trying to create an agenda to move things forward in New Jersey—to really serve the people in New Jersey in the best way. The best way of public service is what is best for the citizens of the state. It’s a great job because I got to work with a lot of talented people, and not every day but most days you get up and you’re able to move the ball a bit and do good things. And she had a very traditional, in some ways, Republican agenda focusing on taxes and lowering income tax, and property tax is always a perennial issue in New Jersey, decreasing the sales tax. So certainly taxes were a big issue for her, but they were an issue for her because she did and does believe they’re an engine to job creation. I think that’s what she’s most proud of in the state is the number of jobs that were created during her tenure. So it wasn’t tax reduction for an end in itself. It was really how it fuels the economy. But she did a lot of nontraditional Republican initiatives, probably things that I was more interested in, preservation of a million acres, which she tells a story about. She lives in Somerset County, Hunterdon. Pontefract— I’m not sure where it is in Somerset, but sort of doing that drive every day to Trenton she saw farms carved up, so that’s really how she got interested in that, and that’s what she asked me to focus on. She asked me to focus on the implementation of the Abbott decision. I was working with Leo Klagholz on that and then Dave Hespe. I worked on the Energy DeReg Bill. But what I focused on mostly
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was making sure the things that she announced in January were implemented and carried through because one of the things that she wanted to do was keep her promises, as she said. So I think she looked to me and to Mike Torpey and John Farmer. “This is what I said I would do,” because she’s a person of her word, “I’m looking to you to carry out what I said I would do.” So that was the responsibility of the job, really.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: That’s really a theme we hear quite a bit when we do these interviews. There was actually a list, correct, that you kept?

Eileen McGinnis: Yes, and I was the keeper of that list.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: You were the keeper of the list, all right.

Eileen McGinnis: Yes, yes.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Now, just backtracking a bit your family, you mentioned JFK and Democrat. How did you end up in the world of a New Jersey Republican office?

Eileen McGinnis: Because I think some people relate to this, especially women. In a lot of Democratic strongholds you have to wait your turn. You know, there’s a lot of people who want to get there, and women aren’t always at the top of that list. And really what I wanted to do more than anything was to be part of governance. That’s what I was interested in, and the Republicans took me in before the Democrats is really what it was. You know, I didn’t really know any Republicans until I was like 19 or 20. It wasn’t the world I grew up in. But I tried to knock on those doors and no one opened the door, and the Republicans opened the door. I interviewed with Gary Stein, who was the Chief of Policy for Governor Kean, and he was the one who first hired me, and he knew at the time I was a Democrat, so it was interesting that the Republican administration was willing to open the door for me, and that’s not always the case.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: What do you think it was about you that led them to bring you in?

Eileen McGinnis: You know, I think what he told me when he hired me is he thought I was a very curious person, which I think I am. In the policy office you sort of have to be a jack of all trades because you’re responsible for a wide portfolio, so I think that’s what happened. Gary’s a terrific guy. I keep in touch with him now.
Marie DeNola Aronsohn: That’s great. So when you were moving the ball forward, as you put it, were you working through the legislature as well?

Eileen McGinnis: Usually, yeah, I would work with someone in Counsel’s Office. We would pair up in teams, either Mike Torpey or John Farmer or somebody who was responsible for a specific legislative initiative. And I don’t know if you saw a couple weeks ago when Jay Carney left the White House and the Chief of Staff came out and gave him a big hug, and I saw that on TV for just a quick second, and I was reminded of the bonds that you really do develop during that time for good and bad reasons. You know, one of the bad reasons is that you do feel you’re under siege a lot, so I think that sort of brings people together. But also you bond because you were in the trenches and you’re trying to move the ball forward, so you’re in the same battle together. So even though I don’t see a lot of the people besides Jane, when I do see them it’s like I was with them yesterday, and I’m very, very fond of all the people I served with.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: That’s a high intensity work culture, right?

Eileen McGinnis: Very high intensity, and you share a lot of values, too, though, and you’re proud of your accomplishments. And I think people who worked for Christie Whitman, and you’ve probably heard this in other administrations, I’ll speak for her administration, are very, very fond of her in part because she treated us so well, gave us a lot of responsibility, gave us the opportunity to try to improve the world in our own little world, and just was very respectful. And, again, I was reminded of this a few months ago during the whole G.W. Bridge thing where our current governor I believe called one of the aides stupid. She would cut her right arm off before she made that kind of statement of anyone, never, never-- it just wouldn’t happen. Now, that’s not to say over the years she wasn’t disappointed in people or decisions, but she would handle it privately, respectfully, you know, ethically. Even after all these years people do appreciate that’s the kind of person she was and is.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: It creates trust.

Eileen McGinnis: Exactly. That’s a good way of putting it.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: As head of Policy and Planning you had a big role in really shaping her legacy. Can you talk about that a little bit, some of the policies? I know you mentioned that open space was such a signature policy for her.
Eileen McGinnis: Well, I certainly think charter schools which is now a fabric of our life in New Jersey that we don’t hear about it as much. But many Democrats have told me, who sent their children there, that could not have happened in a Democratic administration because the unions would’ve been all over it. So that was brave of her to do, and I think the state’s better off for that. Certainly it remains controversial but I think people have accepted it for the most part. I really believe the emphasis on job creation is part of her legacy, too. I think she’s the most proud of that, but there’s little things, too, that I’m reminded of. She was part of an effort to close some of the big institutions we have for the disabled. That was not an easy task for her because, again, a lot of unions were involved. Parents were justifiably afraid of what was going to happen to their adult children, but she thought it was the right thing to do. So when I read about what’s happening in institutions— and that was brought to her attention not only by letters that she read but the policy office said to her, “Compared to other states too many of our disabled population are spending time in huge institutions. We need to do a better job.” And I think some other governors might’ve said, “I’m not taking that on,” but, again, she thought it was the right thing to do, so I think that’s part of her legacy in a small way. But certainly being the first woman governor. I don’t know when it’s going to happen again. I hope it happens again in my lifetime, but I wouldn’t be surprised if it didn’t happen again. So that’s certainly a big part. And also encouraging so many other women like myself, Judy Shaw, you know, lots of women, Debbie Poritz, to assume powerful positions, and they in turn showed that it can be done. Now I am president of an energy services company and it was founded by women. And my CFO is a woman. My director of operations is a woman. My director of HR is a woman. So I said a few minutes ago how I learned a lot by watching her during the time I was with her, and probably that’s another effect. I do like to promote women into positions.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Do you trace that back to the fact that you worked with her?

Eileen McGinnis: There’s lots of ways and I also went with her to EPA, so I was with her for quite a while. So you do a lot of watching of how people behave, and she as a good role model for all of us.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Do you think the fact that she was the first woman governor had impact beyond this circle, beyond you and your colleagues?

Eileen McGinnis: I don’t know if Jane told this story while she was here, but her son, Greg, who’s now 22 or 23, said to her, “I didn’t know men could be governor,” because his formative years she was there. So I think it affects people. And I have two daughters and they grew up practically in the State House because they were in and out, so their formative years that’s what they knew. So I think people don’t even know how it affected them, and it comes out in little ways.
Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Yes. Did you feel you faced different expectations because she was the first woman and because you were a woman in this position of power?

Eileen McGinnis: You know, the legislature continues to be sort of more male dominated. I think New Jersey has better presence now, women presence. So I think that was always difficult. The year after the governor left New Jersey she was serving in the cabinet and she was getting a lot of negative criticism here. I can't even remember why, to tell you the truth, but I remember calling up Governor Kean and asking for some advice about why was she getting so criticized. I think it was fiscal issues. I really don't recall. So I had an interesting conversation with him. He said that his first year after he left he thought everybody was criticizing him and nobody was coming to his defense because a lot of his former aides were in positions where they couldn't help him. So I said, “Well, why do you think it’s so- so harsh right now,” and he said he thought it was because she was a woman and that she hadn’t come up through the legislature, so they felt there was sort of a broad brush. But some people had more of a free reign to criticize her. So he was trying to help me figure out why this was the case. So I think it does come into play. She was never one to ascribe things to, “Well, they’re doing that because I’m a woman.” Actually, in the whole time I’ve known her I’ve never really heard her say that.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: What do you think were some of her greatest strengths? I think you’ve mentioned a number of them already, but in the context of looking at the administration as a whole?

Eileen McGinnis: You know, I hope this era isn’t gone, but I think people like her and Governor Kean, Rodney Frelinghuysen they wanted to serve the public for the truest, best reason, not for ego, not self-gain. I think she really came out of that era in part because of her mother and father, but she really came into public service to improve things. I think that was a strength. She’s smart. She’s curious. She’s well read. And by nature she has right now-- because I run into people and they say, “How is she doing?” You know, she has what most of us want in life. I mean she has a very happy marriage. She’s been married to the same person for 40 years or something, two children who are doing well, a handful of grandchildren. Kate and her husband built a house right across from the Governor’s so she got to see her grandchildren every day. She’s active in her church. She’s very healthy. She bikes. And she’s on several boards and involved in several nonprofits, teaches occasionally. So by temperament she’s not a person who looks back and has regrets. You know, she’s happy. She’s very content.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: It sounds like her priorities and service align very much with your own.
Eileen McGinnis: I think people gravitated toward her with those values.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: What do you think were her major accomplishments?

Eileen McGinnis: Well, certainly tax reduction and job creation. Really she was focused on the employment rate. I think because of where she grew up and living on the farm I think environment was very important to her, so it was preservation of open space, a lot of coastal issues. She was for smart growth. She was very involved in a lot of those issues, took some heat for them but cared about those issues because she really felt New Jersey was a better state if we weren’t so congested. She was interested in tourism and in the arts, so I think those were her major accomplishments. She cared very much about the budget. You know, she had a surplus when she left government. She cared about policy very much, and she cared about the details, too.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Talk a little bit if you would about job creation and the approach that you took in your role. What steps did you take to contribute to that success?

Eileen McGinnis: Well, I think she worked with a lot of people in the private sector to let them know they were welcome. You know, sometimes CEOs don’t feel welcome in certain states. Larry Codey from PSE&G was a good partner, and he worked with her a lot. I think from watching him I really learned for the first time what a good—not good—a great corporate citizen is like. This is somebody who was a CEO of PSE&G where I spent the day yesterday. And it’s funny how circles of life—when my grandfather came here from Ireland PSE&G was really a place where a lot of immigrants got their first job, and he was a lineman in Jersey City. And so I was there yesterday talking to some people and I mentioned that, and they were saying that they hear that a lot. But Larry, who worked with the Whitman Administration a lot, did a lot of private/public sector initiatives. I learned from him when you are in those positions you give back to government as much as you can or work with them as much as you can. But to answer your question more directly she had a Commerce Secretary, Gil Medina, who was very active with the private sector, and things like tax credits. I think a lot of CEOs care a great deal about transportation, so I think she focused on that, getting people to and from work. They cared about the harbor, getting goods in and out of the state. So I think she was very in tune to what they cared about, and that was the transportation of their own people, transportation of goods, a good economic climate, and school systems. A lot of CEOs decide relocation factors based on the quality of schools, so she was in tune to how CEOs thought and what was important to them and tried to address them. But she actually was very (I didn’t keep this list, but she’d keep a list) involved in the number of jobs created on a quarterly basis, and that was one of the metrics she assessed herself by.
Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Wow. What would you say were some of her weaknesses?

Eileen McGinnis: You know, probably the retail politics I think she really didn’t love. I think probably to be most effective you have to get into the game. The fact that she wasn’t a legislator so she didn’t have that. And truthfully she worked a long day, but she really wanted the scheduling off on Friday nights. She wanted to be home. She got a lot of joy, she would tell me, to open up a box of spaghetti that night. You know, after being governor and on all week I think she just wanted to be home. She would go to evening events, but she wanted to be home at a decent hour and see her husband. I think she paid a price for that. The politics matters. So I think that was probably not her strength.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: The time that she would go home on Friday? In what way do you think she paid for that? In what way do you think that affected--

Eileen McGinnis: I think when you’re governor of New Jersey, such a big job, people want a piece of you. And I think she’s a private person and she doesn’t always want to be a public persona. She’s not a Bill Clinton. She’s not always on. She likes to read and think and spend time with her family. She’s not a politician’s politician that way.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: What would you say were her failures? Were there failures? I know I just asked you weaknesses, but anything specific because she didn’t work with the legislature in the way that a real political animal would. Did certain policies go by the wayside that you think she was disappointed about?

Eileen McGinnis: I still got more of the federal level, I think. But the White House really drove the legislative agenda more than EPA did. I think she wanted to get more done on the federal level, but it takes 10 years for something to get done at the federal level. It’s not the same timeframe as the state level. On the state level I think she got a lot done in terms of job creation and improving the economy and then some of the smaller but important issues that were important to her like drug courts and the disabled and those issues she did really care about.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Looking at her administration as a whole assess it for us.

Eileen McGinnis: You know, I know people in prior administrations who worked both at the state and federal level. They are intense atmospheres. I think sometimes people don’t get along and there’s a lot of intrigue or fighting. I say with all honesty the group I worked with, Mike Torpey and John Farmer, and the deputies I worked with, Bruce Stout and Brian Baxter, I think we all came to work every day supporting each other and having each other’s
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back. So I think, again, this comes from her value system of treating people respectfully and civilly, that there was that trickle-down to all of us.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: That sounds like a successful organization in a lot of ways.

Eileen McGinnis: Yeah, I think so, and I think a lot of us who moved on to other jobs carried that with us.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: In terms of the administration’s contribution to the state what do you think?

Eileen McGinnis: Well, certainly history will show that she was the first woman governor and handled that huge responsibility ably and well and with civility. I think people may disagree with some of the things that she did or didn’t do, but I think people will understand, acknowledge she did the best she could for the citizens of the state. There was never any doubt that she was in it for anything else than to serve the citizens of the state. And I was driving with her one time and I was listening to the radio on the way to meeting her and I was talking to her about this radio show, how the interviewer was interviewing college students who went to school in New Mexico and all different parts of the country and they were saying why they missed their state. And the student from New Mexico said she’ll miss the sunsets, and so I was saying something, “I guess people wouldn’t say that in New Jersey, that they’d miss the sunsets, necessarily.” She went on this long, passionate response about how wonderful the state is and the number of languages that were spoken here and there’s mountains and there’s the coastline. And after listening to her you really got a sense that she really loved the state, and she still does. I mean she’s still here. I bring my dogs-- at the time she had four or five Scottish Terriers. I don’t know if you know-- oh, that’s right because--

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: I do. I actually have one now because of her.

Eileen McGinnis: Exactly. So I have two now because of her. She gave me one and then I bought the other one. So as I said she influenced us in all sorts of ways. So sometimes I bring the dogs and we just walk around. And as I said she’s just very content and looks back on the time with a lot of pride.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Did you experience yourself as being part of historic change?
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Eileen McGinnis: Yeah, I think both Jane and I did and certainly Hazel and Judy and all the women who were there during the first administration felt they were part of making history and wanted to live up to that responsibility.

Marie DeNola Aronsonh: After Governor Whitman left office and went to the EPA what happened to the changes in policy and personnel that occurred that she saw through?

Eileen McGinnis: You know, we left on a Friday and Monday we were in Washington, D.C., and so it was such a whirlwind when we got to EPA. I tried to keep up, but it was just such a different world. I really didn’t keep up for a year or two while I was at EPA, so I can’t really answer that question that well.

Marie DeNola Aronsonh: You went with her.

Eileen McGinnis: I did. I was her chief of staff at EPA.

Marie DeNola Aronsonh: Tell us about that, when she asked you that question. What was that like?

Eileen McGinnis: I think she wanted several of us to go with her because she was comfortable with us. She asked me if I wanted to go and some people in the Washington office, and I jumped at the chance, so I was very grateful to go with her. And so we had hearings a month prior to her. EPA administrator is a tough job, and so a lot of people felt either EPA was ignoring the science or-- their advice to her was respect the science. Respect the science. So it was a very frenetic time because you’re just sort of jumping in right away. And then what happened was--I think this happens in every change of administration--the Chief of Staff at the White House stops all the regulations that are in the pipeline because they justifiably want to take another look at them. So EPA had about 100 regulations that were stopped. So she had to look at those again, and it was this constant drip, drip, drip because I think the country was still reeling from the close election. So whatever any cabinet member did was looked upon very closely. And one of the first things that she had them look at was the amount of arsenic allowed in water supply. And what she was hearing from the western governors was that it was going to be an economic issue, very costly to address this issue. So she decided to put it on hold and sort of everything went kaboom. So everything that she was doing was very, very controversial, and it was difficult for all of us to help her navigate all those minefields because she was getting most of the criticism from her own party in Washington. But, again, she never blamed anybody. She was just sort of moving ahead trying to do the best job she could. But that was difficult, that first year moving through all those regulations, and there were a lot of them.
Marie DeNola Aronsohn: And the ground zero issue, how was that for you, dealing with that?

Eileen McGinnis: So I was there at that time, and I’ve seen this in several novels and references to it because as you recall the sky was so blue that day. So the government shut down and so all of us walked for miles because the metro was out. She had moved with the cabinet to a safe place, and so it was very quickly after that. Of course we listened to the scientists and they told us what she announced that it was safe. So it was a very difficult time because, again, she was under a lot of pressure. We didn’t know at the time, but we listened to what the scientists-- you know, EPA, 70 percent of the agencies are either scientists or engineers. It’s a very professional agency. So we did the best we could, but it was a hard time for her. As you know, her son was on Wall Street at the time.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Oh, gosh, yeah. Well, you’ve had a very interesting career since then.

Eileen McGinnis: Uh-huh, I have.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: Tell us about it, if you would.

Eileen McGinnis: So I left EPA after several years and then formed a consulting group with Governor Whitman, Jane Kenny, Jessica Fury and Susan Spencer Mulvaney, five of us who had worked-- five women who worked at EPA together. We did a lot of consulting on energy and open space issues and smart planning (she just wanted to focus on policy). And then one of the clients that we were a consultant to was a woman who owned a company called CMC Energy Services, and I was the main point on that, and she asked me if-- as we were walking up in Newark one day she asked me if I’d be willing to-- she was 84 at the time, and she said that she couldn’t do it anymore. Did I want to assume the position? And, again, I said, “Yeah. I’ll do it.” I think if I knew then what I knew now I might’ve waited at least a day, but I said, “Yeah, sure. I’ll do it,” and then called Governor Whitman right away. And I was nervous about calling her because we had been together for so long. And she said, “Oh, no. You have to take this opportunity.” Again, very gracious and not thinking of herself. And so I left and I’ve been there ever since, so it’s been great.

Marie DeNola Aronsohn: That’s great. Is there anything that we haven’t asked you about the Whitman Administration that you’d like to put on the record with us?

Eileen McGinnis: Well, I guess for students, graduate students wanting to go into a career like mine-- since I left government I’ve taught policymaking at several institutions including Center on the American Governor, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University http://governors.rutgers.edu/
this one. So I taught at Columbia and College of New Jersey and Rutgers, and I enjoy teaching at Rutgers the most because I think Rutgers does a fantastic job of educating children who are the first in their families to go to college. I forgot about that. And so the course I taught was from four to seven, and a lot of kids around ten to seven would start getting their things together because they were going to jobs. They were jobs like stocking shelves in drugstores and lots of different things. And sometimes I’d have to go into New Brunswick and I’d drop some of them off. So I would describe them as sort of scrappy, which I think is a good attribute in a student. So, anyway, I would talk to them about what it was like in the federal government versus the state government. And as I said, state government if you’re lucky enough to be where I was at the time you can move the ball forward, not every day but most days, and do something good. The federal level, while you’re making policy for the entire country, which is one of the things I learned when I was at EPA. I some parts of the country jobs are so much more important than any environmental issue. They don’t really care about the environment. They care-- as we do in the northeast because we have a luxury of caring, but they don’t. So that was a great learning experience for me to realize how geography trumps policy lots of different ways. But state government is really where there’s a lot of action if you have a governor interested in doing a lot of things, and you can have a lot of fun. And you’re working with people who are committed, and I can’t really overvalue that. Lots of former chiefs used to come in and see me when I was in the governor’s office who worked under different administrations, and they would sometimes say, “Oh, this was the best job I ever had,” and at the time I was thinking, “God, that’s sad. I hope that doesn’t happen to me.”

But now I understand it more because it was a very special time, and you just have to value that for what it is. It’s not sad. It just is what it is. It’s a special time in your life working for a special person, and you value it for what it is because I’d have to say after 20 years of speaking to those people saying, “I hope I never say that,” I’d have to say that myself. It was a very special time, and I appreciate it very, very, very much.