

## **Heather Howard Interview** (October 2, 2018)

**Rick Sinding:** Hello, I'm Rick Sinding. It's Tuesday, October 2nd, 2018, here at the Eagleton Institute of Politics on the campus of Rutgers University. With me today for the Center on the American Governor is Heather Howard, who has served in a variety of governmental positions at both the state and federal levels and in both the executive and legislative branches. Her legislative experience includes service as chief of staff to then U.S. Senator [Jon Corzine](#), who subsequently became New Jersey's 54th governor in 2006. At that point, Heather became first the chief policy adviser to Governor Corzine and subsequently served as the state commissioner of the department of health and senior services. Heather, welcome to Eagleton.

**Heather Howard:** Thanks, Rick. Thanks for having me.

**Rick Sinding:** Let's begin by getting to know you a little bit. Tell us a little bit about your background. Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school? What did you study? How did you get into politics and public affairs?

**Heather Howard:** I'm actually not from New Jersey. I'm from New York, Westchester County—Scarsdale. I went to Duke for undergrad and then as soon as I got out of undergrad, I started to work for my congresswoman. I was really fortunate that she was somebody really terrific, Nita Lowey (D-NY). Now, at the time it was only her second term in Congress, but people may know her now. She's the ranking member the Appropriations Committee. She's a very senior member of Congress now. So I just was very fortunate to start on the ground level. I was a staff assistant, but I was really bitten by the politics and policy bug. It was really fun. That's a great place to be a young person, in Washington working on the Hill.

**Rick Sinding:** How did you just jump into that? How did you get a job in a congresswoman's office?

**Heather Howard:** She was my congresswoman and I wrote her and I said, "I'd like to work." And they said, "Will you be a staff assistant," which is basically the receptionist. So I was answering the phone. I used to answer the phone at home, "Congresswoman Lowey's office," thinking I was at work. But it was a great way to get exposed because you would hear the constituent complaints, meet everybody who came in, and then, of course, I grew within the office and then she was a great mentor, but I was really, really lucky.

**Rick Sinding:** And this was in the Washington office.

**Heather Howard:** This was in the Washington office, right, from 1990 to 1994.

**Rick Sinding:** Okay. And then?

**Heather Howard:** She was one of the very few women in Congress at the time. This was before the Year of the Woman in 1992. So it felt really special, too. Then I went to law school. I decided—in fact, even at Lowey's encouragement—that I wanted a graduate degree, so I went to NYU for law school and then I clerked on the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals for a Clinton appointee, Judge Martha Craig Daughtrey, a terrific judge. She sits in Tennessee on the Sixth Circuit. And I tried being a real lawyer. From there I went to the Justice Department into the Honors Program and I practiced antitrust health care law.

**Rick Sinding:** Explain what the Honors Program is.

**Heather Howard:** The Honors Program is the way that the Justice Department hires new attorneys out of clerkships and out of law school to start in the different divisions. And I went into the Antitrust Division because it was during the Microsoft trial when the Justice Department was suing Microsoft for antitrust violations. My theory was, go where the action is. I wasn't on that case, but it was vigorous antitrust enforcement. My theory all along in jobs—and what I tell young people—is, "Go where the action is." So I wasn't an antitrust person, but I knew it would be an area of robust litigation and I could learn a lot. So I did antitrust health care work, hospital mergers and physician practice. I didn't love it, but I got good experience.

**Rick Sinding:** How were you directed into health care, which obviously became a major part of your portfolio?

**Heather Howard:** Yes. I just was accepted into the Antitrust Division and placed there.

**Rick Sinding:** Okay. So you didn't necessarily have a predilection toward health.

**Heather Howard:** No. When I worked for Nita Lowey, I had worked on women's issues and reproductive health issues and so that was a passion of mine. But I was really going in saying, "I want to try being a real lawyer. I'm going to get this credential and see whether I like being a DOJ lawyer." And I lasted about a year and a half. I didn't love it. I would've stayed longer but I got a call from the White House from the Clinton administration saying there was an opening on the Domestic Policy Council, was I interested? And it was a fortunate situation—my old boss from Nita Lowey's office had recommended me for a position. So to me, in politics, you never can plan a straight trajectory. This came out of the blue and I, of course, jumped on it and went to work at the White House on the Domestic Policy Council. I did children and family policy for President Clinton. But as people now understand and have a better sense of, in the Clinton White House, Hillary Clinton—the first

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lady—also had staff. And sometimes they were part of the president's staff, but also reported to her. So I was a dual reportee. I worked for the president on the Domestic Policy Council and was a senior policy adviser to the first lady and worked with her. That was obviously an exciting job.

**Rick Sinding:** How does the timing of this coincide or not coincide with the Clinton impeachment?

**Heather Howard:** It's after that. <laughs> I missed all that. More interesting, I was there when [Hillary Clinton] was running for the Senate. And so that was interesting to see the lead up to her running for the Senate. And, of course, I was in a governmental job, but to be on the inside when that was happening was very interesting, too.

**Rick Sinding:** Well, she subsequently won her Senate bid. Why didn't you go to work for her?

**Heather Howard:** I thought about it, but I actually made this great connection to Senator Corzine. I had worked on children's mental health issues with the head of the NYU Child Study Center and it turns out Jon Corzine was on the board of the NYU Child Study Center.

**Rick Sinding:** This is at the time when he was still the chair of Goldman Sachs?

**Heather Howard:** Yes.

**Rick Sinding:** Okay.

**Heather Howard:** He was interested in children's mental health issues. And so the head of the Child Study Center said, "What are you doing next?" And we were sharing stories and he said, "You ought to work for Jon Corzine. He's really amazing." And I thought yeah, he seems great. I've watched his campaign but I don't have any connection. And he said, "Oh well, he's on my board." And the next day I had breakfast with Jon and Tom Shea and went from there.

**Rick Sinding:** And the rest is history, as they say.

**Heather Howard:** Right.

**Rick Sinding:** Well, let's go into that history a little bit. So this is 2000. Corzine is running for the U.S. Senate. He's a novice. A man that I worked for, [Jim Florio](#), was his opponent in the primary. Jim speaks frequently about how he was outspent by

35 million to one million or something like that. Corzine really jumped into this political world with both feet.

**Heather Howard:** Right.

**Rick Sinding:** Were you involved in the campaign or you came on after he was elected?

**Heather Howard:** No. I came in after that. But I sort of inherited as a staffer—he had had an ambitious campaign with a very progressive agenda, right? He had run on—you probably remember—universal health care, universal child care—he'd run on very ambitious proposals.

**Rick Sinding:** And a very progressive agenda.

**Heather Howard:** So we were then sort of, “Okay, what are we going to do about this now?” At the time the Senate was 50/50, so it wasn't really the climate—and, of course, [George W.] Bush had won the presidency, so it wasn't the time to be able to do a lot of progressive legislating. But you could lay down markers. And what I found was that Corzine was very driven by what was going on in New Jersey. The first bill that I wrote for him was a bill to ban racial profiling and that was really a reaction to what had been happening in New Jersey with racial profiling and the State Police.

**Rick Sinding:** The State Police was a major issue at the time.

**Heather Howard:** Right. I think that was something he cared very deeply about. One through line for him has been social justice and particularly racial justice. So that came together there. But another bill we wrote—a universal health care bill—you know, this is eight years before Obamacare, Corzine was talking about universal health care. But it was tougher times, given the makeup of the Senate.

**Rick Sinding:** Sure. What was your position at that point?

**Heather Howard:** I started as his counsel and then became deputy chief of staff and then eventually chief of staff, as you said.

**Rick Sinding:** Let's talk about the timetable of that. You were deputy chief of staff. Tom Shea was the chief of staff.

**Heather Howard:** He was.

**Rick Sinding:** Shea then subsequently became the chief of staff when Corzine became governor.

**Heather Howard:** That's right.

**Rick Sinding:** Did you step in as chief of staff when Shea left to be on the campaign? That was the timetable?

**Heather Howard:** That's right, exactly.

**Rick Sinding:** Okay.

**Heather Howard:** I followed Tom and then he moved into the political realm. Well he also left to go run the DSCC (the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee) in 2004, which was the campaign arm of the Senate Democrats. Tom went over to run that. So even before Corzine ran for governor, he was doing national political work supporting Democratic candidates, which goes back to your point: that Jon jumped in with gusto. I mean within four years of being elected to the Senate he was running the campaign arm of the Senate and was so was actively involved, trying to help other senators and elect a Democratic majority.

**Rick Sinding:** Was that perhaps, a tribute to his ability to raise and spend money?

**Heather Howard:** Absolutely.

**Rick Sinding:** <laughs>

**Heather Howard:** I mean absolutely. No, and he would say that too, right? He knew a lot of people and was a good fundraiser. I don't know that he necessarily enjoyed it, but I think he was good at it. And that was a way to help the party. If you have a progressive agenda you need a progressive majority.

**Rick Sinding:** How did he make the transition from being the chief executive officer of a major financial institution to being essentially a back bencher in a body of 100 senators?

**Heather Howard:** You know, in retrospect, it wasn't surprising that he ran for governor, right? That maybe the Senate—he cares deeply about issues, so there was a connection there, but he's not a pontificator. And he's a doer so, you know, he really jumped in—for example, 9/11 obviously happened when he was in the Senate. We had so many people from New Jersey who perished. And I just remember how much he jumped into the case work of working with families. He really was a doer. And so I don't think his favorite part of the job was going down

to the floor and pontificating at length; he really wanted to “do.” So in retrospect, it makes sense. Now, he never complained. We would note that he was the last person on the dais on the Banking Committee. Gut obviously he was an expert in all of those issues. And he never complained. But you always wondered, you know, when Hank Paulson—or when the chairman of the Federal Reserve or the secretary of the Treasury is coming for the Banking Committee, you're the last person asking a question as they go down the line. And he never complained but I always wondered. Surely that was frustrating.

**Rick Sinding:** Some of his colleagues, who presumably did not have that same level of experience, must have shown some, if not deference to him, at least some interest in what he thought about these issues.

**Heather Howard:** Absolutely. He actually came very close with Chris Dodd (D-CT), who was the chairman or the ranking member of the Banking Committee and they worked together on a lot of things. And often [Dodd] would defer to him, but the Senate is hierarchical, you know, based on how many years of service you have. It just is what it is. It helped that he is self-effacing and is very generous as a person at sharing credit. Not all politicians are like that. So he certainly got along well with people, but I think he did want to be a doer and not just a talker.

**Rick Sinding:** At what point do you think he began to entertain the idea of running for governor?

**Heather Howard:** Oh gosh, I don't know that I could pinpoint that.

**Rick Sinding:** Do you think it was always in the back of his mind or do you think it was something that developed because he was now in the legislative branch and recognized that he could be more of a doer in the executive?

**Heather Howard:** I don't know. Because I think he thought, you know—like going into the 2004 election for example. We hoped that [John] Kerry (D) would win the presidential election and then there would be different opportunities—if there were a [Democratic] Senate majority, to either legislate or secretary of Treasury, right? I mean I think there was always, “How do I be more active” and “How do I contribute?” But I don't know about governor. Not being a New Jerseyan at that point—I mean now I've totally gone over to the Garden State. But then, I might not have been the first to have noticed it because I wasn't playing things out in the same way our political staff would've been.

**Rick Sinding:** Do you think that one of the reasons that he may have chosen to run for governor, in addition to the fact that he wanted to, as you say, be a doer, was the sort of dysfunctional activities that had taken place in the early 2000s, in

terms of New Jersey's governorship? Jim McGreevey (D) had been elected, and had resigned. The Senate President, [Dick Codey](#) (D), now became both the Senate president and the governor because we didn't have a lieutenant governor at the time. And it was sort of presumed that there would be kind of a wide open race for governor in 2005.

**Heather Howard:** I think that's the political opportunity, but I think underlying that was this sense of federalism and excitement about opportunities at the state level—of what you can do as governor and, in particular, as governor of New Jersey, as we understand how powerful the governor is in New Jersey in terms of how much you can do.

**Rick Sinding:** When you have money. <laughs>

**Heather Howard:** Well, I mean that's true. We can talk about that, how it's harder. But when you're in a Senate that's 50/50 and you're gridlocked and you've voted against the war [in Iraq], and President Bush has been reelected despite what you've done to try to elect your ally, that's frustrating, right? And so the opportunity to be at a state level where you have levers, a power, to do things—hopefully, we'll get to those—to really accomplish things, it's interesting. I myself have lived this, now, of having worked in the U.S. House and Senate and have thought those were the greatest jobs and then being convinced, “Wait a second, in this federal system the action is really in state capitals. There's so much you can do.”

**Rick Sinding:** Well, let's talk about what you can do or what you did. In 2005, Corzine is elected as governor. There is a transition now from one Democratic—more or less incumbent—an acting governor—

**Heather Howard:** Right.

**Rick Sinding:** —to another Democrat. That hasn't happened [in New Jersey] since, if I'm not mistaken, 1961, when a governor succeeded another governor of the same party. So you have a different situation in terms of the transition than you normally would. How involved were you in all of that activity?

**Heather Howard:** We had [transition] committees for each department. They did transition reports, and I was involved in those. And they did pretty ambitious reports for each department—probably overdid them. It was a very thoughtful approach. And that's certainly a lesson, that Corzine is very substantive and cared about each department. He wanted to know each department, what the status quo was, what the budget was, what the priorities were, what the opportunities were. There was a real focus. So we were involved in helping the departments' transition

and sort of trying to understand what was happening in the department. So I was less involved in the personnel—especially since I was newer to New Jersey at the time. But it was a very thoughtful and thorough policy and substantive transition, even though it was, you know, a Democrat to Democrat transition. There was a sense of, “Okay, what is our agenda going forward?” Not just continue the status quo.

**Rick Sinding:** And there was a new team of people coming in, regardless of the circumstances, who may not have been as familiar with the workings of state government as some of the folks who were there. So that kind of transition always takes place in terms of policy papers being prepared and groups of transition people in different—experts in different subject areas looking into what are the issues, what do we have to deal with, what are the policy priorities and then preparing for the incoming governor.

**Heather Howard:** Right.

**Rick Sinding:** Were you specifically on the health panel for this?

**Heather Howard:** No. We were involved in—several of the Senate staff from Washington moved up to New Jersey and so we were working on helping. It was in the top floor of the old hotel on State Street [in Trenton], the top floor of that building that's an old hotel? Do you know that building?

**Rick Sinding:** I'm trying to remember.

**Heather Howard:** It's on Calhoun and State Street.

**Rick Sinding:** Yeah. It started as a Holiday Inn.

**Heather Howard:** Yes. Exactly, it had been a Holiday Inn, right.

**Rick Sinding:** Oh okay.

**Heather Howard:** We had the top floor. And so there was that focus on how do we start—empower all the departments to be active? I mean Corzine's an activist, right, and I think that was there. But you raised something interesting there that I hadn't thought about exactly this way, which is that the transitions are new people coming in—he had several kinds of new people, right? He had some of us coming from the Senate. He had some of the longstanding Democrats involved in government in New Jersey, some holdovers. He also had the—

**Rick Sinding:** And the Goldman Sachs crowd. Yeah.



**Heather Howard:** —the Goldman people, right. So that was an interesting mix to bring those in: as treasurer, [Brad Abelow](#). Gary Rose was down the hall from me running the office of economic growth. So you had different influences which, you know, I think was really interesting.

**Rick Sinding:** What he set up: Tom Shea was the chief of staff, then there were two or three deputy chiefs.

**Heather Howard:** Three. Right.

**Rick Sinding:** I guess [Maggie Moran](#) and—

**Heather Howard:** Jeanine LaRue and Patti McGuire.

**Rick Sinding:** Patti McGuire. Yes.

**Heather Howard:** So Maggie was Cabinet Affairs, in operations. Patti McGuire was legislative relations.

**Rick Sinding:** Legislature. Right.

**Heather Howard:** And Jeanine was constituents and outreach. But, you know, that doesn't do any of them justice, obviously, but that's roughly how it was. And then there was a press office that [Ivette] Mendez ran—no, Anthony Coley, sorry, ran it first, sorry. Ivette was communications director and Anthony Coley was press secretary.

**Rick Sinding:** Right. Okay.

**Heather Howard:** And then I oversaw the policy shop. We had between six or eight people and I had a deputy, Julie Kashen, who had been the legislative director in the Senate office.

**Rick Sinding:** That's a fairly small policy staff by comparison. Previous administrations had an Office of Policy and Planning—

**Heather Howard:** Right.

**Rick Sinding:** —with different people responsible for being kind of the Governor's Office liaison to different cabinet positions.

**Heather Howard:** Well, I think—I mean a couple things happened. One, some functions were taken over. So if you had Gary Rose doing Economic Growth, you

had that taken care of itself, sort of. And there were cabinet affairs staff who we worked closely with. In fact, we would have a daily meeting and cabinet affairs would attend that meeting. I should've mentioned also, we had the Washington office under us, and it was just one person running it. But we would have a daily meeting/call. He would call in, Rick Kessler, and it would be, "What's going on with the day?" So much of the policy is done, as you mentioned, through the agencies. I mean it quickly became clear that given the financial situation we were going to have to find ways to do things to achieve policy goals that weren't going to cost anything, and that's always hard. It's easier to spend money to expand programs, to start, to stand up new programs. It's a lot harder to do things that don't cost money.

**Rick Sinding:** Well, and in fact, upon taking office, Governor Corzine faced an enormous budget deficit, the likes of which had never been seen before. We're talking about several billion dollars, not several million or hundred million.

**Heather Howard:** Right.

**Rick Sinding:** And he had to take some fairly drastic action. How, from a policy perspective—did you feel as though you were totally hamstrung in terms of what you could do in those first six months or so, about doing any major policy initiatives while there was so much uncertainty about the finances?

**Heather Howard:** Fortunately no. I mean I think what we would do is we immediately started doing what are called "fish bowls." I don't know if you know that term and maybe you did something similar but just called it something different, but the treasurer would bring in each department—usually the commissioner and the key staff, including the budget staff and policy sat in that—and you would go through the budgets for each department. In a normal year, that starts in the fall, where you're working towards the governor proposing a budget in the winter.

**Rick Sinding:** But not the year that you've been elected. <laughs>

**Heather Howard:** Not the year when you come in in January and you inherited that.

**Rick Sinding:** Absolutely.

**Heather Howard:** So we were sort of, you know, hair on fire doing it then. But within each department we were trying to think about positive initiatives and we actually, even within a really bad budget year, had a pot of funding that we were sort of trying to carve out for initiatives. There are a couple that come to mind.

One, there was an expansion of after school care. There was a real focus on kids with special education needs, particularly autism, because there had been this growth in the number of kids being diagnosed with autism. And you may know this; New Jersey has the highest rate in the country. So as some issues came to prominence we were able to say, "Look, we need to do this." And interestingly, another one that I think is important to note is that we increased family planning funding. So that 7.5 million that people are sort of familiar with because Governor Christie line item vetoed that funding and then Governor Murphy this year restored it, we actually had increased it to 7.5 million in that first budget because that was one of Governor Corzine's priorities. It had been lower than that. So they were small. I don't remember what the increase was, but it was 7.5 total, so it was maybe a couple million dollars. So these were small but we considered them down payments on broader [plans]. Early childhood education's going to be a priority, we know education is a big priority. We were obviously signaling that we were going to get to redoing the school funding formula. Women's health was a priority.

**Rick Sinding:** You were under a court mandate to do that [re-do the school funding formula].

**Heather Howard:** We were, but so had governors been—

**Rick Sinding:** Yeah. Just every other governor since Cahill. [laughs]

**Heather Howard:** Right. If it were that easy why had no one done it before? Right?

**Rick Sinding:** Yes.

**Heather Howard:** I mean I think that sometimes we have to remind ourselves that redoing the school funding formula was a Herculean task. We had staff detailed from agencies coming over to help. The Department of Community Affairs was engaged because there's such a municipal impact to school aid. Lucille Davy was the educational commissioner and did a tremendous job and Janellen Duffy in the Governor's Office was the education staffer in the Policy Office. But that was all hands on deck. Throughout the process actually, we also had the AG's office, the DAGs—the deputy attorneys general—were part of the process.

But that first budget was really, "Where can you find savings, even those that were small?" I still remember the Department of Transportation—one savings was going to be that the state was no longer going to pick up deer carcasses on state roads. That would have to be the responsibility of the municipality.

**Rick Sinding:** That was proposed, by the way, several years earlier, numerous times. And Senator [Robert] Littell (R) from Sussex County was always there to make sure that there was enough money put back into the budget for deer carcasses to be removed.

**Heather Howard:** Yes. That was a big issue in the more rural parts of the state and it was probably only a couple million dollars anyway. It wasn't a lot of money. But literally you're trying to find anything that you can cut.

**Rick Sinding:** Yeah.

**Heather Howard:** I mean we got very involved in the budget in trying—thinking about hospital funding. Hospital funding is a large—it's discretionary, but politically a very important part of the state budget. At the time there was about \$650 million in charity care funding and we proposed what became known as a bed tax. I don't if you remember that.

**Rick Sinding:** I do.

**Heather Howard:** Often what happens in health care is you're trying to maximize federal revenue coming in. Health care is usually second only to education in state budgets and it's an opportunity—there's a lot of federal money that comes in and you're always trying to find ways to maximize that federal revenue. And so we had what we thought was this great idea that we'll increase this tax on hospital beds and then when you bring in the money, you get federal matching money and so you actually get more money. But guess what? To do that you have winner and loser hospitals and we learned very quickly how hard that is.

**Rick Sinding:** But I should point out, at the same time, you faced a situation where clearly the legislature, even though it was also in the hands of Democrats, was testing the new governor.

**Heather Howard:** Right.

**Rick Sinding:** And there was a definite—I mean you had a government shutdown. You had a shutdown at the end of that first budget year, which was the first in New Jersey history. It lasted several days and was largely attributable, at least looking back on the clippings of the time, to the fact that the governor and the legislative leadership were at loggerheads about who was really going to call the shots about this thing.

**Heather Howard:** Yes. That's right. And I think, you know, Governor Corzine was new to Trenton, right? He was not a creature of Trenton, and was he going to be

able to navigate Trenton? And he did, but they [the legislature] obviously thought they smelled blood and thought they could roll him. You know, and I think if somebody's watching this I would recommend they watch—Eagleton recently did a [fascinating forum](#) on Governor Corzine's first budget and one of the key takeaways for me was how smartly he did handle it. And it was really tough and it was not a foreordained conclusion that he was going to win that fight. But it was a combination of sticking to his principles. He was very clear. Every day before the shutdown—and even before the shutdown—he was clear about saying, "We have a fiscal crisis. We can't kick the can down the road." I mean I think his messaging was clear.

**Rick Sinding:** I believe he talked about the fiscal crisis in his Inaugural Address.

**Heather Howard:** Yes. He had laid the groundwork and then he had this "kick the can down the road" [phrase] which, you know, became annoying after hearing it a thousand times, but it was really an apt metaphor. "We've got to stop kicking the can down the road." And then I think Tom Shea and Maggie and Patti McGuire deserve a lot of credit for how they handled the shutdown in the sense of some of it was optics: rolling in the cot—

**Rick Sinding:** Did you sleep at the State House?

**Heather Howard:** I didn't sleep in the State House, but I was there for about 20 hours each day. I still have pictures. My son was three at the time and he has vague memories of being brought to visit me because I didn't see him for a couple days. Yeah. I mean it was intense and it was ugly. It got ugly because—

**Rick Sinding:** And the hospital bed tax was one of the things that bit the dust in that negotiation.

**Heather Howard:** I still have a button that says, "No Bed Tax." And so yeah, that was tough. But I think it was that combination of sticking to his guns, sticking to his principles, and the messaging. And then obviously very smart—this is where Tom, Maggie and Patti deserve credit—a very smart political strategy that if folks are interested I would definitely encourage you to [watch \[the Center on the American Governor panel\]](#), because it was really interesting to hear about all the strategies that went into it: to align with the Assembly Republicans, the use of intermediaries. I mean I think even reflecting now on the fact that the Governor's Office has moved down the street because the capital is under construction, the fact that we were in the capital and people were in and out, the nature of the Governor's Office you probably remember—a lot happens informally. And I think the current administration is missing that by having to go down the street. It's just that there's a barrier.

**Rick Sinding:** I'm sure. I even remember during the first couple of years, I guess, of the Florio administration, when the Assembly and Senate Chambers were under renovation and they were meeting in different locations.

**Heather Howard:** Oh, same thing.

**Rick Sinding:** And that made it difficult to have that informality that you're talking about.

**Heather Howard:** Yeah. I would even say at the staff level I also—Patti and I met weekly with [Bill Castner](#) and Kathy Crotty—you, I'm sure, remember Kathy Crotty, who was the Senate Majority staff leader—and Bill at the time was the Assembly staff leader. We talked about policy bills coming up. At the staff level a lot of things moved and I think when we look back a lot was accomplished. But you're right this was happening at sort of the meta level, this testing at that first budget of who's—and if [Corzine] had not succeeded there, we knew that he would really be hobbled for the rest of his term.

**Rick Sinding:** Now in addition to a legislature/governor conflict there, it seemed that there was also a fairly significant North versus South—

**Heather Howard:** Yes.

**Rick Sinding:** —particularly when it came to taxation, that what kinds of taxes the legislature was going to embrace or not seemed to depend entirely upon whether it seemed to benefit North Jersey or South Jersey. Did you get a sense that that was a major issue?

**Heather Howard:** Yes. I had a real political education in the politics and regions of New Jersey. I live in Princeton so I feel like I'm not of the North or the South, but I really—and in fact, I still remember we lived through the Yankees/Phillies World Series and it felt like Princeton was the dividing line of where fans were. But yes, there was quite an education about that. Now, fortunately, we had pretty skilled people—Tom Shea, Maggie and Patti and Jeanine—pretty skilled political people who could read those. But yes, I had to get up to speed on that and understanding. Even later on in my job as commissioner of health and senior services, you always had to be aware of that North\South dynamic.

**Rick Sinding:** I don't want to jump ahead to your position in health and senior services, but it seems to me that going from policy staff to administrator of an agency you necessarily had to become more political or understand the political dynamics more.

**Heather Howard:** Right. That's right. As policy staff you're a little bit insulated and you get to then—we were having daily staff meetings, so you hear that and you're trying to think about how it affects what you're doing. But, you know, it comes up even in the context of, "Okay, he should do an event about X issue." Where are you going to do it? Who are you working with? Those kinds of issues you get pulled into. And who's going to be up there with him?

**Rick Sinding:** But as the chief policy adviser that's not your bailiwick.

**Heather Howard:** No. I mean so I'm saying, "Well, we could do this and we could highlight this." And then maybe you're asking somebody do you a run and, say, find a school district that benefits. Other people are usually putting political parameters on. Yeah, I think that's right. You're operating within political parameters that other people are setting. And I'm going to have to say with Corzine I never felt the political pressure from him on any of this stuff. I mean he really cared about the issues. I'm sure we'll talk about that, maybe sometimes too much.

**Rick Sinding:** Well, that's actually a good transition. Let's talk a little bit about his management style. How engaged was he in these kinds of conversations that you're describing now?

**Heather Howard:** We had daily staff meetings and he often came to staff meetings. He was pretty engaged. I mean he's pretty substantive, wants to read stuff. You know, I remember from my time on the Hill, some people would have bosses who would tell them they never wanted to see a briefing memo that was longer than a page, right?

**Rick Sinding:** Yes.

**Heather Howard:** And—

**Rick Sinding:** I believe we have a president that—

**Heather Howard:** <laughs> Right, exactly. But Corzine's not that. Corzine is very substantive and would want to know and wanted to be thorough, right, as his management style. So he cared about the details and usually cared about the outcome. I mean I think back to—I'll give you an example. When we'd been in the Senate, Medicare Part D, which is the prescription drug benefit—that bill had come through Congress and been enacted. He had voted against it because we thought it might not be good for New Jersey and the majority of Democrats voted against it. So the history, on the record, was that he opposed it. Then becomes governor and enough time had lagged that it's actually being implemented, so we got to see both sides of it. And I still remember when it first went live, there were a lot of problems.

Not nearly as many as with healthcare.gov, but it's interesting to analogize. There were a lot of problems with implementation, people's cards weren't working at pharmacy, they weren't getting coverage, they were—

**Rick Sinding:** That's still happening, by the way.

**Heather Howard:** But Secretary [Mike] Leavitt, the former governor of Utah, who was the secretary of HHS, was going around trying to solve problems and putting out fires and he came to Trenton to meet with Governor Corzine and I still remember Governor Corzine saying, "Well, what do we need to do to fix this?" And us even working with the Feds and saying, "Okay, we'll cover the cost of the prescriptions"—we the state—"if you'll make us whole at the end." We had this agreement that on the back end we'd be reimbursed by the Feds, but because it wasn't coming through from the Feds, we didn't want seniors at the point of purchase and pharmacies to not be able to fill the prescriptions. We stepped in to do that, with state dollars, on the promise that the Feds would repay it.

I look back and think gosh, I don't think that would happen now with a lot of people. And some of that was a testament to him. He didn't go out and do a press conference and say, "See, this law that I voted against, in this administration which I don't support, can't implement a benefit and seniors are getting hurt." Instead actually, I think we did a press event with Leavitt and talked about how we would work together to make sure seniors were protected. So to me that was a good example of where he wasn't grandstanding and it was how to get it done and he was pretty engaged in, let's get the Department of Health over here—that was when I was at the Governor's Office—like how are we going to make this happen? So yeah, pretty I would say pretty engaged.

There are couple other issues that where I got to see really how much he cared. Another one was the death penalty. Another one that was probably not a big political winner in the state—eliminating the death penalty. Governor Codey deserves credit. He had set up, you may recall, a commission to study it and sort of set in motion the process of reconsidering the death penalty in New Jersey.

**Rick Sinding:** And they came back with a very, very strongly worded recommendation.

**Heather Howard:** They did. And I think, you know—the right people on the commission, thinking about it in the right way. Reverend Howard, I think, chaired that commission. But then when it came time to work legislatively, Corzine was all the way in. Maybe now when you look back it doesn't seem as big a deal, but New Jersey was the first state to abolish the death penalty in a while. Then there's been



a wave since then. New Jersey was really the leading edge and not many governors would've gone out on a limb for that, I think.

Another example I would put in that category was paid family leave. So we have the federal law, the Family Medical Leave Act, which provides people with the ability to come back to their job after they've taken leave for a child or an elder—out of caregiving responsibilities. But you don't get any of your wages, right? It's unpaid. So that's a real problem for people who aren't of any means. So we enacted—we were only the second state to enact a state level Paid Family Leave Act. And so that was also done in those first two years. Again, to me that was the benefit and that was a through-line back to his time in the Senate, of focusing on progressive issues. We wish we could amend the Federal Family Medical Leave Act at the federal level and make it paid family leave. That's not happening anytime soon. But you can do at the state level what you can't do it at the federal. Both the death penalty and that and paid family leave are examples of that.

**Rick Sinding:** There were a couple of other health related issues that came up in the first couple of years of the administration, when you were still in your policy position. One was the scandal involving the University of Medicine and Dentistry in New Jersey.

**Heather Howard:** Yes.

**Rick Sinding:** Let's talk a little bit about that.

**Heather Howard:** Yeah. That had been going on even before we came in, but then it really heated up. And I think Governor Corzine, one of things he did—so for your listeners, for your viewers—

**Rick Sinding:** And your viewers. <laughs>

**Heather Howard:** Yes. There had been corruption at University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, which some people would not even remember because it's been dissolved, actually, and its component parts absorbed into Rutgers and Rowan and the New Jersey Medical School in Newark, but at the time there was pretty widespread corruption at UMDNJ in terms of the contracts being given and the staff. And what Corzine did that was so important is that he appointed [Bob Del Tufo](#), who had been the state attorney general, as you know—

**Rick Sinding:** Right, in Governor Florio's administration.

**Heather Howard:** —for Florio, right—to your point that things keep coming around. Corzine appointed him to chair the board. There had been a monitor

imposed by the U.S. Attorney, Chris Christie, but [Corzine] appointed an aggressive new chairman of the board to say, "We're going to clean it up." That was really important, to send that signal. I think it really helped right the ship. And then I think Governor Christie deserves credit for taking it to the next level, which is maybe realigning the assets in the state. But that could not have happened if they had not righted the ship.

**Rick Sinding:** And were you heavily involved in that discussion because of your background in health?

**Heather Howard:** No, because it wasn't really about health policy. Stuart Rabner, who was then the chief counsel and later attorney general and now Supreme Court Justice Stuart Rabner, was handling it. That was very much about ethics. As commissioner of health, I did sit on the board and so I got to see it from that perspective—when I was the governor's representative, the commissioner of health has a seat, so yes. But I would say that "ethics" I was less involved in, but I certainly observed that there was clearly a whole new ethos of ethics that Governor Corzine infused into his administration, and the high symbolism of hiring Stuart Rabner as his chief counsel was not lost on all of us. In every staff meeting, Stuart Rabner is sitting there as you're talking about these issues.

**Rick Sinding:** Yes. Another sort of health related issue that arose was the decision to sever the Division of Youth and Family Services from the Department of Human Services and make it its own agency. Were you involved in that?

**Heather Howard:** Yes. What was known as DYFS at the time was part of Department of Human Services which was the largest state agency. And we had also been under court order, sadly, for how the abuse and neglect and protection of children in New Jersey was being handled by the state. There had been some very high profile tragedies of kids dying in state custody. And so we were under a court order and we had a monitor: Advocates for Children, children's rights lawyers in New York who were outside monitors. But—and this goes to Corzine's management style—he said—I remember him distinctly: "We have to cleave this off the Department of Human Services. The Department of Human Services has so many responsibilities. It is so large, the commissioner—" and he had actually appointed as commissioner Kevin Ryan, who had been the child advocate. And Corzine said, "Kevin is the perfect person to be fixing this, but he's running so many divisions, running such a large department, it just can't happen from a management perspective that we're really going to fix this. We need to cleave it off and create a new department." So working with Kevin Ryan and Kevin actually became the commissioner, we created the Department of Children and Families. And I still remember before the press conference, talking to Kevin about what we were going to say and we decided we're going to say, "Failure is impossible. This is the core

function of government. We have to get it right." But it really goes back to Corzine saying "From a management perspective, if you don't focus on the issue you can't solve it." And it being buried in a larger department was going to prevent us from ever really getting our hands around it.

**Rick Sinding:** I'm wondering if you can imagine what it was like before the Department of Human Services was created. It was the Department of Institutions and Agencies, which was Human Services and DYFS and the Department of Corrections, all as part of one department. Can you imagine trying to run that? <laughter>

**Heather Howard:** Right. No, exactly. It just means you're dealing with putting out fires and you're not really dealing with the core issues. So yeah, that is quite something. I think the progress we've made now, which continued, on our child welfare system, is something we should be really proud of.

**Rick Sinding:** There are two other failed initiatives. One was an attempt to get state workers to pay more toward their healthcare, which was subsequently repealed. The other was a bond issue to raise a significant amount of money for stem cell research that was turned down by the voters. You must have been involved in those two initiatives.

**Heather Howard:** Especially in the stem cell initiative and that was really painful because stem cell research was something that was near and dear to Governor Corzine's heart. It had a lot of political support. There was a lot of emotional support behind it.

**Rick Sinding:** And there had been a small appropriation before that.

**Heather Howard:** There had been funding that Governor Codey had started that we had continued for research at Rutgers. And we had some very prominent and really brave advocates in New Jersey. And it was something that we felt was important on a human level to do this research, but also we thought it was an opportunity for New Jersey to be a leader from a bioscience perspective. If we could create the stem cell institute here in New Brunswick, that it could really help from an economic development perspective. I think what we didn't foresee—and it really foreshadowed what we ended up seeing later—was the backlash from people with taxes generally, concern about taxes generally. This appeared to be another tax. It's not that people didn't support stem cell research—

**Rick Sinding:** Although bond issues by and large pass in New Jersey. Well, most of them are for open space.

**Heather Howard:** Yes. And I think this felt different to people, or maybe we didn't talk enough about it, who knows. But was this the start of something coming, a backlash? I don't know. But I mean, yes, that hurt because it felt like both that it was going to stall progress on the research, but also it was this missed opportunity for New Jersey to be a leader. But in all this, you know, again to take it back to the leadership style, I think one thing that makes the Governor Corzine really special is his connection to people. And I'm reminded of Tricia Riccio was one of the advocates. She had a son who was paralyzed and was one of the advocates. And Corzine really connects well with people. And I'm thinking also about 9/11, the people who lost family members and the connection he felt to them and that they felt to him, because of that personal connection he has and you don't necessarily see that. When you see him giving a speech, you don't see that personal quality that he has and that's certainly why I liked working for him. When I moved up here, I was not from New Jersey, but he convinced me come to New Jersey, we're going to do great things. There are actions at the state level—and again, I was a little bit of a fed person, I had worked at the federal level. I wasn't sure how I was going to feel about this. But his personal style and that connection is what drew me. I had confidence—I knew he was going to want to do the right thing and he was going to work hard and he was going to be a good boss.

**Rick Sinding:** Well, in April of 2007, all of that almost came to an end. Governor Corzine was involved in a very serious traffic accident. He wasn't wearing a seat belt. He was going 90—well, his trooper was driving him at 90 miles an hour and he ended up in critical condition. Subsequently over a period of two or three months had a very, very slow recovery. How did government function? How did the central office function in those two or three months?

**Heather Howard:** Gosh. It was really hard. I was at Drumthwacket that night. He was coming back. He was supposed to be having a meeting and he was running late for the meeting—which is why they were speeding—for a meeting at Drumthwacket, the governor's residence, with Don Imus and the Rutgers women's basketball team. So that sort of gets lost to people who weren't living it. And Don Imus had said something offensive about the coach—

**Rick Sinding:** Cost [Imus] his job, as a matter of fact.

**Heather Howard:** Yes, it did, on the radio. So Governor Corzine was going to host this meeting. And so I was to be there for the meeting, and we got word. And it was—we were all—it was very, very scary. And thank goodness for the great doctors at Cooper and he—his recovery was miraculous but I have to tell you it was very hard. He was weak for a long time and you can see that in the pictures when you look back. But to those of us who knew him, he's very robust. He's six—he's a big guy, sort of a bear of a guy. And he's a hugger and high-fiver and he's a very

physical person. And he was very weak. He was on crutches for awhile, and you could just tell he lost a significant amount of weight. He was weak for awhile and that was very painful to watch obviously. And he lost that robustness, that energy that he had had. Now, in those first couple weeks, we had an acting—we didn't have a have a lieutenant governor.

**Rick Sinding:** Right.

**Heather Howard:** We've corrected for that problem because there was some confusion. I mean it was all hands on deck and luckily we were all rowing in the same direction. But, of course, nobody knew what was going on for a while. We knew his condition was serious but we didn't know how serious. And we were trying to protect—I think they were trying to protect the family, of course. But how do you talk about it, how much you're willing to say publicly when the family is going through this, this just horrible process of—everybody is on pins and needles. So it was hard. Having Governor Codey as Senate president be able to step in was great because he had done it before.

**Rick Sinding:** Did Codey become acting-governor during that period?

**Heather Howard:** I'm trying to remember now.

**Rick Sinding:** Formally? I don't actually recall whether that happened or not.

**Heather Howard:** Yes, he did. I don't know for how many days but I remember dealing with him. I'm trying to remember what the issue was, but yes, he did. So we had somebody and at least he knew the drill; the staff, he knew us, we knew him, we knew his staff. So, it was as seamless as it could have been. I'm confident we didn't drop any balls but it was a harrowing time. It was really tough. And I'm glad we have a lieutenant governor by statute now because you wouldn't want to go through it again. But even when he came back, it took him a while to get back to—I mean, he was weak and it was hard. He's the hardest working person I've ever worked for and you could still see how much it affected him.

**Rick Sinding:** Sometime later that same year, the commissioner of health resigned. Did you go to the governor and say I'd like to be commissioner of health? Or did he come to you and say I'd like to make you commissioner of health?

**Heather Howard:** No, he asked me and I was torn because there's sort of this sense in Trenton that you want to be near the action and power, right, and be in the governor's office.

**Rick Sinding:** Yes, but there's also a tradition in Trenton that you don't say no to the governor.

**Heather Howard:** <laughs> Yes, that's true. And also I think for me the hesitancy was there's a difference when you go from being staff to being a principal.

**Rick Sinding:** Absolutely.

**Heather Howard:** It's different skills. You have to go through a confirmation process. And you have to—it tests different skills and do you want to be that person? And do you want to be way from the other stuff you like? He had just done the school funding formula, which was so exciting, but we obviously had high hopes for other things. I wasn't that involved with asset monetization, but there was going to be—you know, with the budget in the background, there was a hope still if we can ever sort of crack the nut there, that we could do more.

But no, it was so clearly the right decision. It was exciting and he said, "I want you there. I want somebody I trust." And I wanted to do it because I knew what a good governor he was and that he would be a good governor to work for and it was really exciting. I inherited a terrific staff. I brought in just a few people but mainly inherited a terrific staff and really, really, really enjoyed it. It was hard. It was hard in a totally different way. You had almost 2,000 employees and you're riding the elevator and somebody stops you and says, "I don't like my parking spot." The budget at the time was \$3.7 billion and so you're dealing with how to—that sounds like a lot of money but actually you're scrimping everywhere because of how tough the budget is. And then you've got some of the political issues like Charity Care funding, which is so important to so many hospitals, which are the largest employers in every legislative district. We had H1N1—the swine flu, which became H1N1. So you're dealing with a lot of different things incoming in a way I couldn't have anticipated.

**Rick Sinding:** This was your first and I guess only experience in your own executive capacity.

**Heather Howard:** Right. Right, it is different when you've got a large department—you have a certain number of direct reports but you have a large department—and your goal is to move things along. Your goal is to implement the governor's agenda. But there's also so much of what the Department of Health and Senior Services do that is not political, that is the work of cancer prevention, of licensing, inspecting hospitals.

**Rick Sinding:** In fact, there's very little that the department does on a day-to-day basis that's political at all, right?

**Heather Howard:** You know, at one point we had an abortion clinic that failed inspections and it was in the news. And Governor Corzine called me about it and we had a conversation about how this clinic needed to meet inspection; that women needed to have services in a clean and healthy environment. And we talked about how that clinic—and he didn't interfere. He said, "Do what you have to do." It was in the news so he asked me about it but he said, "Do what you need to do." You have to hold this clinic to the standards.

**Rick Sinding:** So much of running any state agency is dealing with the crisis of the day, right?

**Heather Howard:** Right. So there will be a death in a nursing home; what was going on that nursing home? And had it met its inspection standards? Right? I would say that sort of the biggest issue that we dealt with the entire time was hospital distress. During Governor Corzine's time, nine hospitals closed. And as we've mentioned, hospitals are large employers. People want to have a hospital near them. There's a lot of research now that sometimes hospitals closing may mean you have better quality at the remaining hospitals, because they see more volume. But, we were dealing with it from—it started when I was in the governor's office: Hoboken Hospital, which is near where the governor lived. There was a lot of pressure on him to save the hospital. And so there's the question of, do you bail out a hospital? What kind of hospitals do you bail out? So—this was still when I was in governor's office—we created a commission to look at the health of our hospitals and we asked Uwe Reinhardt, who was a health economist at Princeton. You may know him. He sadly passed away last year, but he was a world renowned health economist at Princeton. And Governor Corzine called Shirley Tilghman, the president of the university, and said, "Will you lend me Uwe Reinhardt to chair this commission." And we had this all-star commission that basically analyzed the health of the healthcare industry and came up with criteria for when we should step in and save a hospital.

To me that's another example of Governor Corzine's focus on policy, because otherwise we were dealing with hospital closures from a crisis perspective. And that was too often political: which hospital do you save? Rather than having a criteria of, "This hospital is not an essential hospital. We shouldn't be investing scarce sources in propping it up." Instead we should be making sure the people of the community have access to services, but it may not be a hospital. It may be a satellite emergency department. In Passaic County, they went from five hospitals two, so there were fewer hospitals, but also the two remaining hospitals were both Catholic hospitals. So what do you do then? Are women going to have access to the full range of services if only two—you know. So we actually gave a grant to Planned Parenthood to open up in Paterson to ensure there was access to reproductive

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health services that might not be available at the hospital, if the hospital is not going to provide them. So it was trying to manage in a little bit of a smarter way.

**Rick Sinding:** Well, going back 20 or 30 years earlier, isn't this this what the Certificate of Need process was supposed to be all about, to determine which hospitals needed which equipment or which services they were going to perform, so that it was all done on a more rational level?

**Heather Howard:** Yes. So you understand. Some states have what's called Certificates of Need which is when the State Department of Health decides when different health care services are available. So you might open a new hospital or close a hospital, but you need state permission to do so. The problem is that a lot of the decisions get made even before Certificate of Need: how the Charity Care formula is designed; which hospitals benefit; and whether a hospital is starved or fed sometimes gets decided out of Certificate of Need. And also Uwe Reinhardt said it well. We had half-hearted regulation. Our Certificate of Need didn't touch everything. So, for example, if the hospital wants to have a cyber knife, you don't need the state's permission. So we had sort of this arms race of hospitals investing in very expensive equipment. And then what research has shown is that if you buy a cyber knife, what do you then do? You use a cyber knife. <laughs>

**Rick Sinding:** Whether it's needed or not.

**Heather Howard:** Yes. It drives utilization of services. And so, this is all pre-dating Obamacare where we've started, fortunately, to rationalize and that's the stuff I work on now. I think in a way we were anticipating some of that.

**Rick Sinding:** There was a more punitive law passed during this period which required the state to name hospitals that had—let me see if I have the exact wording here, "Responsible for making certain categories of medical mistakes and prohibiting them from charging for preventable errors." It sounds like a pretty draconian step.

**Heather Howard:** No, I mean I think that was really about transparency and that was something AARP was really involved in, that you need to report to the public which hospitals have higher rates of errors. I mean, if you're literally operating on the wrong part of the body or you're leaving equipment in the body—those things were happening and so that was part and parcel of a nationwide push to have more transparency.

A couple other things we did: we improved governance at hospitals. We discovered, as I went around and talked to hospital execs and to boards of trustees, that often a hospital board is made up of—its people have served for many, many years and



don't have expertise in healthcare or finance. And so we required hospital trustees to go through training. And something we did that I think didn't get enough credit for: we said that hospitals could not charge uninsured people more than what Medicare pays. Because the people who get hurt the most when they don't have health insurance and go to a hospital—the hospitals can charge them whatever they want, right? I have insurance, so my insurance company is negotiating on behalf, but if you don't have health insurance you can be charged anything. And so, we said a hospital can't charge you more than a percentage of what Medicare pays. We were trying to patch a system that had a lot of flaws. Now, Obamacare has moved us ahead but at the time we were doing what we could.

**Rick Sinding:** You also presided over the health department over a period of time when state aid to the hospitals was sharply reduced, when because of the budget crises year after year, there were unpaid furloughs for state workers. There were significant concessions that were asked of state employees. And you had, as you said, a cohort of several thousand people working for you. What was morale like during that period in the agency?

**Heather Howard:** Yeah. Let me correct one thing. We actually did not cut Charity Care. It stayed stable when I was commissioner.

**Rick Sinding:** No, not Charity Care.

**Heather Howard:** Right, yeah, that happened later. After Obamacare came in, there was this sense that hospitals were doing better and you could cut Charity Care. But yes, we did cut—I think the staffing stuff doesn't get enough attention. I mean the staff basically went for years without raises. And then we even stopped having coffee available in the hall coffee station. I mean, it was just so severe. I remember people saying, "Come on, this is not fair." And so I would say morale was tough. I tried to visit every—the department of health has its main building in Trenton but then has satellite offices nearby in Quakerbridge and some up in Newark. And I tried to visit all of them and talk to people. And I heard it loud and clear, people frustrated with the fact that they had not gotten raises. And also that state employees were getting vilified all the time. You know, like, "I'm out inspecting childcare centers. I'm inspecting nursing homes. And yet we're the bad guy?" So that was hard. I mean I was feeling like I had to convey, "I believe in you. We know you're doing good stuff." I actually asked Governor Corzine to come over to the department and talk to staff so he could convey his appreciation for them. And, you know, you only have so many tools when you can't give people raises, but you try to recognize what people are going through.

**Rick Sinding:** How did you feel on November 4, 2009?

**Heather Howard:** Wow. I mean I didn't see it coming and maybe that was my fault. But that was a really, really hard night because it felt like we still had a lot more to do. And it was just one year into the Obama presidency so it really felt like we finally had an opportunity to do more, too. When I think back to what we would have done in my area, we would have been implementing the Affordable Care Act and being a leader in other areas. So, the missed opportunities. But also for him, feeling his pain, yeah, that was very, very painful.

**Rick Sinding:** I should go back to about a year earlier, in fact, when President Obama was elected and was the president-elect and it was widely speculated that Governor Corzine was under consideration for the treasury secretary-ship. I don't know, perhaps you do, whether it was offered to him and he didn't take it or whether was never offered to him.

**Heather Howard:** I don't know. You'd have to ask him that but that's an interesting question.

**Rick Sinding:** Should he have taken the job?

**Heather Howard:** I mean it was in the middle of the financial crisis, right? So that would have been both exciting and really challenging. Think about that. They had just saved Detroit, but were trying to turn it—instead we ended up focusing in. I think there was a real focus on the stimulus.

**Rick Sinding:** And using the stimulus money in New Jersey.

**Heather Howard:** Smartly, to really jump start the economy. Yes, so there was a real focus on that. As I said, there was that one-year overlap when Obama was president and Corzine was still governor where we tried to do as many things as possible. And yes, definitely, there was that money flowing out. Remember you had to prove you had shovel-ready projects?

**Rick Sinding:** One of which, as I recall, was the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) tunnel <laughs>.

**Heather Howard:** Yes, I went to that groundbreaking. I still remember that. But, you know, that goes way back. I mean, that goes back to Corzine's time in the Senate. He was on the committees that authorized transportation projects, so when the big transportation bill—I think it was called T-Loo, it's called ISTEA and T-Loo—anyway, the big transportation bill goes through. Corzine wanted to be on the Environment and Public Works and Banking Committee because they were the authorizing committees.

**Rick Sinding:** And [Senator Frank] Lautenberg was pushing it on transportation at the same time.

**Heather Howard:** And Lautenberg, too, right, of course. And Lautenberg from the—he was on the Corporation Committee—perspective and he was a great ally. Oh, I have stories there, too.

**Rick Sinding:** That's good!

<laughter>

**Heather Howard:** But he got language in the bill to fund the tunnel and I remember there was a big issue when the bill was in conference, whether or not it was going to stay in the House version. And we drove over to the House to find—gosh, I don't remember his name, the committee chairman—who wouldn't return Corzine's calls because I'm sure he knew what it was about, right? He was getting calls from everybody, "Where's my bridge?" "Where's my whatever?" So we drove over there so that Corzine could find him in the members' dining room and buttonhole him, to say not just that this is what I need for my constituents, but that this is critical to the Northeast region, to the U.S. economy. And Corzine could make that point really well. And I still remember him persuading the guy to keep it in the final bill and getting the authorization. So that was that critical part of securing the federal contribution to what was going to be—it was going to take a lot of money going in, but you needed that core federal contribution, which, of course, now [in 2018] we don't have. We've had two things happen. One, we've had Governor Christie cancel it so then there is delay and now it costs more. And now we've lost the federal contribution. I remember being at the opening, at the shovel—the digging in with the shovel—and we'd be opening in 2018 or 2019. So to anybody watching taking New Jersey Transit, you know, it could be a very different world now in New Jersey Transit. Unfortunate.

**Rick Sinding:** Sounds to me as though your heart is still very much into the broad areas of policy and not necessarily limited to healthcare.

**Heather Howard:** You know, I love the healthcare stuff. Now I'm on the faculty at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton and I teach classes about the implementation of the Affordable Care Act and state and local health policy. And so yes, that's what I'm really passionate about. And I work with states. What's been great is I work with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which is the largest healthcare foundation in the country and they're based in New Jersey. And I work with other states in helping them implement health reform. So I'm still very much in that but, yes, I care about these broader issues because I've seen how they connect and I've worked on them and seen the levers. And I have seen the ups and

downs, right? And have seen the possibilities. More recently, I've gotten engaged in gun violence research because I think that's a public health issue. So yes, this all still excites me.

**Rick Sinding:** When you look back on the time that you spent with Jon Corzine, from the Senate all the way up through and including until the end of his governorship, what would you look back on and say were the greatest accomplishments? And what would you look at it as the greatest disappointments?

**Heather Howard:** Well, a couple of things. One thing we haven't talked about is him creating a new generation of leaders. And maybe every governor says this so it's not—you know, I think about all the Governor Florio people who are contributing in so many ways. But when you look at Governor Corzine's record, you have Anne Milgram. You have Stuart Rabner becoming chief justice of the Supreme Court and such a distinguished jurist. And you have Anne Milgram, who was the attorney general after Stuart Rabner, who is now going on and doing amazing things. She's writing textbooks about human trafficking and she's at NYU law school. And you have the chief counsel—oh he's going to kill me, I can't remember his name [Ken Zimmerman]—who is now working at the Soros Foundation in New York. You've got all these different people who've gone on to national positions. Obviously Lisa, at DEP—

**Rick Sinding:** Yes, Lisa Jackson.

**Heather Howard:** Lisa Jackson was the DEP commissioner and then went on to run the Environmental Protection Agency and is now doing worldwide environmental work for Apple. Every once in a while I'll see something and I'll say, "Hey, did you see so-and-so did something." You know, "Anne Milgram was on this podcast recently and did you see that?" And so, I think creating that new generation of leaders because of people he elevated is an exciting legacy. In terms of accomplishments, I think the school funding formula clearly; figuring out how to redo the school funding formula in a way that was fairer and invested in the schools that really needed it. And reimagining where that need was, so not just the 30 cities that have the highest rates of poverty but a lot of those inner suburbs, ring suburbs, that also had similar rates of poverty, where poverty had grown—reinvesting and re-jiggering the funding. That was both substantively incredibly meaningful but also, politically quite a victory because anytime you're doing anything with funding formulas, with winners and losers, it is very hard.

**Rick Sinding:** Especially in public education. There is no question about it.

**Heather Howard:** Especially in public education. Unless you have a ton of money to expand the pie, which we didn't, it's very hard. So that, and I think his

progressive agenda, some of which he was really ahead of the curve on: the death penalty and paid family leave are examples. And as I mentioned, family planning. You know, it's forgotten that actually it was Corzine's investment that brought family planning to the fore that Governor Christie then defunded. So those, I think, are some examples.

In terms of disappointments, sort of the unfinished business of what we would have done and how we might have taken advantage of an Obama presidency in a second term. Obviously the budget—the budget fixes that have eluded every governor and the core structural problem that we have in our state budget. And that is preventing us figuring out transportation and education and healthcare, so that that is still lingering. But also I should say, too, that his legacy of running—especially after the period beforehand, the concerns about ethics in government, righting the ship and sending a strong message about the importance of ethics, is very important.

**Rick Sinding:** What have you been doing since 2009?

**Heather Howard:** I've stayed in healthcare in the sense—of course, what happened—

**Rick Sinding:** You mentioned the Woodrow Wilson School.

**Heather Howard:** That's right. I'm at the Woodrow Wilson School.

**Rick Sinding:** But you've been up to other things, as well.

**Heather Howard:** I have. But just sticking on that for a second, in 2010, the Affordable Care Act is enacted. President Obama signs that into law. And really my work has then been on helping to implement that. So that's eight and a half years ago now but it's such a complex federal law. It's taken years to implement. And even now it's surprisingly resilient but not settled. And one of the questions I always ask my students is how do you judge when a social policy has become enmeshed in the social policy fabric. And it's not there yet. I mean, obviously Medicare and Social Security, nobody would talk about repealing those. We're still talking about repealing and replacing the ACA, right? So that's what makes it so interesting to help states with. I've recently traveled to Virginia. The State of Virginia is now implementing Medicaid expansion. The new governor elected last year, same time as Governor Murphy in New Jersey, is implementing the Medicaid expansion and helping Virginia learn from other states. So I really love—I go into a state capital and I'm in a room with mismatched chairs and a sign that says, "No Free Coffee" and I'm feel like I'm home, right? I'm back in state government, right? So some of that. I love being back in state government.

I also got involved, as you know, because you're a constituent, locally I ran for the Princeton Council, which is the local governing body. And I actually ran first for the Princeton Borough Council. We used to have a donut hole of Princeton Borough and then the donut was Princeton Township, so I was on the borough council. And then I was involved in the effort to consolidate the two municipalities.

**Rick Sinding:** The first and only successful consolidation in the State of New Jersey in 50-something years.

**Heather Howard:** That's right. So we went from 566 municipalities to 565 municipalities. And now I serve in the governing body for the combined entity. We have about 30,000 people who live in town. This is my last term now. I'm not running again because it's been—I'm a big believer in the importance of new blood. But it's been a really exciting experience to see at the local level how this plays out. I also felt it was important—I have a teenage son now—to convey to him the importance of civic contribution. And I guess like you said, I thought, having been a principal now, maybe I'll run. That's a new muscle I hadn't flexed. What's it like to run? What's it like to be in a debate and have to answer questions about property taxes? There are no easy answers.

**Rick Sinding:** The only difference being that there are no Republican opponents in Princeton <laughs>.

**Heather Howard:** Right, but we have spirited primaries.

**Rick Sinding:** Yes, we do.

**Heather Howard:** I even remember saying to Corzine at one point, "Now I see. I see why it's not so easy always to give the perfect answer, when I've said, 'Wait, I wrote that out for you. Why didn't you say X?' I see that when you're up there, it's not always so easy." Yeah, I have more sympathy now.

**Rick Sinding:** Is there a fraternity or a sorority—I guess it would be both—a combined fraternity and sorority of either former health commissioners or cabinet officers or Corzine veterans of which you are a charter member?

**Heather Howard:** Yes, all of the above. So first, there is an association of health commissioners, ASTHO. I was a member when I was commissioner. And now there's an alumni association and I've gone to their events and I keep up with—it's really nice to know people and to be able to share war stories sometimes. And then the Corzine world is more informal but, yes, we stay in touch. And you feel such a connection. It's like you've been in the trenches with people, right? We've recently—Eagleton hosted the first event examining Governor Corzine's legacy and

talking about that first budget. And so many cabinet members and staff came back and that was really meaningful to be able to see people. But also a number of us have stayed in touch with Governor Corzine, just in touch with him, that personal connection. So I still see him sometimes. A lot of emails, "Hey, did you see this? Does that remind you of that," which is really nice.

**Rick Sinding:** What didn't I ask you that I should have?

**Heather Howard:** Right, so maybe what was Trenton like? I don't know. You're a great interviewer. I don't want you to think. I mean what do you think?

**John Weingart:** You started to tell stories about Corzine and Lautenberg.

**Heather Howard:** Oh, I mean what I remember more, so we—then-Senator Corzine—we were in the hot zone when the anthrax letters were sent to Tom Daschle. Our office was. We shared the air vent system with Daschle's office. So we had to evacuate our office for three months when they were cleaning out those offices for anthrax, because we theoretically had been exposed when the letter had been opened. So we ended up, at the staff level, we shared offices with [\[Senator Robert\] Torricelli](#) and his staff. So that was amazing experience, to see how very differently another office works and how different a Member is, and how different a Senator is and different staff. Everybody should have to do it because we worked really well. And I think to then-Senator Corzine's credit, he got along with whoever the other senator was. That wasn't always the case.

**Rick Sinding:** It certainly wasn't.

**Heather Howard:** And I think that is to his credit that he worked well with others and he was just great. But I have to say, it really should be required of all Senate staffs—the two senators from the same state—because we just were on top of each other, which breeds familiarity. And then it was, "A bill is coming up. Well, you write the memo and I'll write the memo for the next one." We shared work. It was really collegial.

I will say working with Lautenberg was really fun. He had great staff who were so savvy about how to talk about issues in a way that connected with people and how to use press. I mean this was before social media—showing my age—but I think presaging social media. I still remember when President George W. Bush signed into law the Partial Birth Protection Act, an anti-abortion bill, and the bill signing—maybe you know where I'm going with this—was President Bush signing it and 15 men behind him, all the sponsors of the bill. Not a single woman in the picture. And I remember Senator Lautenberg blowing up that picture and going down to the floor and showing that.

After the war, you know, Corzine had voted against the war and he agonized about that vote. I still remember even his speech, as he was coming to that conclusion, as he was writing his speech out long hand. But something that Senator Lautenberg did is he had posters, pictures of lives lost in the war that he had outside his office. And he argued, "We've gone to this war, we need to be thinking always about the people who are dying over there," in a way that no other senator would do. I mean, just the way he talked about issues. He was such a fighter. It was fun. I mean it was fun to see when they would interview judicial candidates, to see that interplay of picking candidates for New Jersey and the interplay and the different styles. So we really, in New Jersey, have been blessed with having some very interesting senators.

<laughter>

And at the staff level to be able to see that was interesting. But going back to Corzine, anybody who visited Senator Corzine's office will remember that he didn't have pictures of himself up in the office. He had pictures of famous New Jerseyans and that was a very conscious decision. It was very interesting because some of them were interesting, like who knew Alfred Stieglitz was a New Jerseyan? Well, maybe you did but, you know, some of them were the obvious suspects like Bruce Springsteen, but then there were the less obvious suspects: Norman Schwarzkopf and his father, who had been the superintendent of the state police during the Charles Lindbergh kidnapping. But also, the pictures were not of him with the pope or whomever. Right? It wasn't about him. It was about New Jersey so that was just—I don't know how much that people who came to the office noticed that but it, to me, was an important message.