

Bill Waldman interview (April 30, 2015)

Selected Interview Excerpts

... on the governing styles of Governors Kean, Florio, and Whitman

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(page 5)

... on Governor Whitman's values and dealing with controversial issues

I think it was Governor Whitman's own personal values and instincts that were amazing. Just one issue I remember about her. You know how controversial the immigration issue is today. We had an issue back then that was very controversial around welfare reform. The federal government said that if you're going to serve legal immigrants in these programs, meaning welfare and a variety of others, healthcare, you can do that, but you can't get any federal matching for that. So the states had to make a decision that if they wanted to continue to serve legal, not illegal immigrants, with the basic safety net services they were going to have to pay for it with a hundred percent state dollars. So that was clearly the governor's call as to what you're going to propose. So trying to be a good staffer, I tried to work up the numbers as to what it would cost, what some options were with covering some immigrants that were newer than others or here longer than others. So I laid

out some options for her. She stopped me in the middle of the presentation to her. She said, "Bill, when did your family come to this country?" And I said, "Governor, I believe my dad was first generation, actually. I'm only second generation. He came here when he was a little boy." She said, "I think my forebears probably came on the Mayflower. We're not sure." <laughter> But she said, "Weren't we all immigrants to this country at some time? Isn't that, the promise of our nation?" I was so impressed, I was so taken aback. So I could just throw away all the financial background about the other options. So yeah. I think it was the values and the principles that she stood on that I thought were very unusual, very progressive. She was fiscally conservative. I mean, she was responsible about funding. With me, and my department. And we came to a nice balance. (page 14)

... on comparing Governor Whitman to Governors Kean and Florio

Oh, it's hard to do. I really, and I say this sincerely, deeply admired all of them. They were different individuals, they were different strengths, but in terms of their integrity, their leadership, their caring about the state of New Jersey, I really enjoyed them all. Christie will always have a special place in my heart because of her personal characteristics and my accessibility to her during her term. (page 16)

Full Interview

Nancy Becker: Good morning. It is April 30th, 2015. I am Nancy Becker, at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, with Bill Waldman, former Director of the Division of Youth and Family Services and Commissioner of Human Services under three governors. We are here to continue our series of discussions on the Whitman Administration for the Center on the American Governor. Good morning, Bill.

Bill Waldman: Good morning, Nancy.

Nancy Becker: Let's start by asking you to tell us about yourself. Where did you grow up, where did you go to college and graduate school?

Bill Waldman: Oh, thank you. Yes. I grew up in Newark, New Jersey, actually. I was born in Elizabeth, but my family moved to Newark. I grew up there, went to middle school. Then the family moved to West Orange, New Jersey, in the suburbs, later. And I had the opportunity to go to, graduate from, West Orange High School. Went to Penn State as an undergrad. Ultimately came back to Rutgers University to get a master's degree in Social Work.

Nancy Becker: That's great. And tell us about your family.

Bill Waldman: Oh, I have three children and seven grandchildren now. Of the grandchildren, I have six boys and one girl.

Nancy Becker: Wow.

<laughter>

Nancy Becker: Let's talk about the beginning of your career. What was your first job out of college, and tell us what you were doing?

Bill Waldman: Sure. For a few months after graduation, I worked for my dad. My family had a business in Newark for about 40 years. And you know how difficult it is to work for one's parents. I had a friend who got a job as a welfare worker at the Essex County Welfare Board in Newark. And he said they were hiring. They paid the princely sum of \$5200 a year. I'll never forget that. That was actually very attractive to me at the time, and I figured I'd strike out on my own, at least for the summer, see what I liked. At that time I was going in the evening for a graduate degree in English at Fairleigh Dickinson University, but was very much touched by what I saw as a caseworker in Newark that made a deep impression. You know, in the '60s when it was a time of social movements and I got very interested in civil rights and the Vietnam War issues, things of that nature. And I kind of drifted from English and really got bonded with the idea of doing social work and helping vulnerable families in Newark. Got an opportunity at the Welfare Board to get a scholarship and stipend to help get a graduate degree, and never looked back.

Nancy Becker: That's great. And I know that you then worked for Middlesex County. How long between your first job and becoming a welfare director in Middlesex County?

Bill Waldman: Well, I was at Newark for a good 11, 12 years, I believe. I graduated up through a variety of positions. I ran their food stamp program, Welfare-to-Work training, then went to Middlesex, became Director of Human Services there. Stayed another 12 years, enjoyed that very, very much. Built a department, really, from what was a one-person operation, human service ideas were new, to ultimately incorporate most of the human services functions and government in Middlesex.

Nancy Becker: That's great. Now, how did that experience lead to your position with the state? And please describe your position and your responsibilities when you moved from Middlesex to state government.

Bill Waldman: Yeah. I became very active when I was at Middlesex in statewide human service affairs. I was invited to serve on a whole number of advisory

committees. I got to know the then-commissioner, Drew Altman, who was really a wonderful individual and really inspirational leader and became very interested and close to the action. Drew asked me to join him to be, what do you call, the assistant commissioner for community relations, basically. Drew did not grow up in human services in New Jersey and felt that someone with my background and roots could be helpful in marketing programs and services. So I made a difficult decision to move on from Middlesex, where I lived, where I was very comfortable, to go to state government.

Nancy Becker: So were you interested in politics then, or did you view these positions as policy positions, or administrative positions, or as you said, an opportunity to make a difference?

Bill Waldman: I saw them as the latter, the opportunity to make a difference. I was quite naïve and unschooled in politics until much later in my career. And although I had seen my share of it in both Essex and Middlesex County, it became more sophisticated at the state level. But the idea of making a difference for so many people, particularly in a department like Human Services that touched the lives of over a million citizens in New Jersey, my view was, as a social worker, that that was a good way I could make a difference.

Nancy Becker: Bill, your experience in state government was interesting and unusual, because you worked for three governors, from 1987 to '98—Governor Kean, a Republican; Governor Florio, a Democrat; and then Governor Whitman, a Republican. And as we were discussing before, you're a Democrat.

Bill Waldman: Yes.

Nancy Becker: So explain to us how that happened and what that experience was like.

Bill Waldman: Oh, it was really a wonderful experience. I remember when Governor Kean asked me to step up to be acting commissioner. I said to him in the interview, "Governor, you know I'm a registered Democrat, don't you? Is that okay?" And he put his arm around my shoulder. He said, "Not to worry. That doesn't matter here." And it was the same in the Whitman administration. But my goal was to really make the department apolitical. And quite frankly, the three governors I worked for, their view of human services and their commitment to some of the most vulnerable citizens was not that different among administrations. So I felt very comfortable in all three administrations, so that the political connections didn't really define me. I just tried to do the very best I could and be respectful to the views and leadership of the governors I worked for.

Nancy Becker: Tell us about your job. If you can describe your job, which is often called the most difficult job in state government.

Bill Waldman: It was extraordinarily challenging. It was never boring. There was always a crisis. Sometimes I felt I was careening from crisis to crisis, but it was also an opportunity to think strategically and to try to make a difference for the governor I worked for and the state that I adored, New Jersey.

Nancy Becker: Now, how did these governors differ in their approach and their view of human services?

Bill Waldman: It was very interesting. There were more similarities than differences, in my view, in many ways. But there were different styles of operating among the governors. Governor Kean, the first governor I worked for, permitted commissioners a great deal of latitude. As long as you kept him informed. When I made the transition to work for Governor Florio, the point was made that we're a unified administration, and we should speak with one voice. I remember the governor looking at me and he said, "Waldman." He said, "I heard that in your department even divisions take different positions on legislation. So you have to understand, we have to speak with one voice." So it's a little different, more, a little, bit central control. I found Governor Kean very accessible. I remember meeting with him for the first time and being very anxious and telling him about the usual array of problems that human services was bringing. And I remember him comforting me. He's putting an arm around my shoulder, "Not to worry," encouraging me. He was very nice. Governor Florio, I didn't get quite as much access to, but I truly admired his deep commitment to policy issues. And Governor Whitman I found extremely accessible and very, very supportive. Many times she would encourage me to call her during times of crisis. There were times that things happened that even made me think about resigning. And calling her and sharing all that angst I had and her being very comforting, reassuring, but very committed to high principles of governance. So it was a pleasure. I admired all three, actually, but they had very different styles.

Nancy Becker: So describe your job. Because I would like to have on the record the scope of what you were managing.

Bill Waldman: Very good. Surely. Well, at that time, not unlike today, it was a truly umbrella type department that housed a broad array of health and human services functions. I was responsible for the Medicaid program in New Jersey, which today is about a \$12 billion program. It was about \$7 billion then. We had to finance or oversee all welfare programs in the state of New Jersey. All the state psychiatric institutions and funding of a wide array of community mental health

centers and developmental disabilities. Similarly, we had what were called developmental centers, a larger number than now. And a wide group of contracts that we administered to various community-based organizations to serve people. We had about 20,000 employees at one time. I think that was a high watermark for size. But I also had Child Welfare, which of all the divisions more so than any other will break your heart. Because no matter how hard we tried, how much we invested in time and training, sometimes very sad things occurred like the deaths of children and others that you would feel personally responsible for. When those kinds of things happen, when you're serving such vulnerable populations, you can't help but ask yourself, "If I were a better commissioner, if I had led more strongly, if I required more training, maybe that child would be alive," or, "That family would still be together." It was hard. We also had Juvenile Justice for a while too. Now it's a separate commission of itself. So we had just an extraordinary array of governmental services that touched the lives of over one million citizens in the state. It was a heavy responsibility.

Nancy Becker: Yes.

<laughter>

Nancy Becker: When did you meet Governor Whitman for the first time?

Bill Waldman: Oh, that's interesting. I may have met her when she was a freeholder in Somerset County, I believe. I think I might've met her at a New Jersey Association of Counties event many, many years ago. And then, of course, got to work with her as governor. But I think it was while she was a freeholder in Somerset County.

Nancy Becker: When did she ask you to remain as Commissioner of Human Services?

Bill Waldman: Within the first couple months of her term. You know, many of us stayed on as acting for a few months, and the governor had to make the decision of what team she wanted to create and whether holdovers like me would be on the team. She called me in and we had a conversation, and she asked me to stay on. I was elated. I was sure I was going to have to find another job. I might not have the opportunity, but I was absolutely delighted when she asked.

Nancy Becker: Were you the only holdover in the administration? Were there others?

Bill Waldman: I think there were several others. There was Bill Fauver at that time, who had served many governors, Commissioner of Corrections. And there

was this delightful gentleman by the name of Art Brown that was the Commissioner of Agriculture, who I think started the New Jersey Fresh program. I remember him because he would often bring to cabinet meetings some of New Jersey Fresh produce, which was a treat.

<laughter>

Nancy Becker: He would bring it to the legislature as well.

Bill Waldman: He did that as well, too. Yes.

<laughter>

Bill Waldman: That was a lot of fun.

Nancy Becker: <laughs>

Bill Waldman: I'm not sure there were others. There may have been.

Nancy Becker: Were you concerned about Governor Whitman's priorities in Human Services?

Bill Waldman: In what I know of her and following her views, not necessarily her priorities. I was initially concerned about their proposal to reduce the size of government and reduce taxation. I frankly was worried about the impact that that would have on human services. It turned out that they were generously supported during her administration.

Nancy Becker: Was there a change in policy, personnel or administration from Florio to Whitman?

Bill Waldman: There was turnover certainly in leadership and cabinet-level positions. My department was generally recognized that there were mostly professionals there. I was always worried, because in government you have a number of what are called unclassified positions. And having lived through a number of governors, when the new governor comes in there's always an assumption that those positions are political appointments. And in fairness, there were always several in my department, not many, but most were individuals that we got approval to hire that were really outstanding in their field and we didn't seem to be able to locate the skills and competencies that they brought through the civil service system. So we had a few of those as well. And I was able to save some of those, which I was very proud of, and they continue to make contributions. And the people that were primarily political moved on.

Nancy Becker: Who did you work with in the governor's office on human service issues?

Bill Waldman: Oh, the array. Eileen McGinnis, Jane Kenny. Peter Verniero particularly. And I'm forgetting some names. Later the Governor's Counsel, whose name I'm blocking at the moment, but...

Nancy Becker: John Farmer? <laughs>

Bill Waldman: Yes. I did work with John. I worked with the Chief of Staff, several of those. But what I liked about it was a good, strong team. And people I found to be accessible, people who were reasonable. I did have issues with the Treasury Department, as I'm sure other cabinet members did as well, too. Because I was always advocating for more, and, you know, Treasury's role was to contain costs.

Nancy Becker: Right.

<laughter>

Nancy Becker: There were some very significant achievements in human services policies during the Whitman administration. At our Center on the American Governor's seminar on these issues you called them "Christie's greatest hits." Please tell us how you were successful in achieving-- and I'm going to do it one-by-one, and then spend as much time as you want-- welfare reform, Medicaid reform, and KidCare and increasing options for the disabled. So let's take them one at a time. <laughs>

Bill Waldman: Sure. Let's start with welfare, as some may remember the time when President Clinton and the congress passed really a draconian new law on a new form of welfare reform. Then it was the job of every state to adopt it and pass a state law to implement in the way the state would want to do it. But basically the law required more personal responsibility, and was focused more on work, paying out cash, and had other very strong rules. So many states varied, but in New Jersey we had quite an episode, an interesting experience in government crafting it. What I admired about Governor Whitman's approach to that was it was bipartisan, which is something that is unfortunately lost in today's environment. And at the time, because it was such a hot issue on the front burner of politics at the time, the legislators themselves were all introducing individual bills. And she said, "You know, we need to get agreement with the legislature to stop with the individual bills and create a bipartisan committee, to work together and to craft something that's in the best interest of New Jersey." And she did. And I worked with that committee. It was bipartisan. It was-- I remember Wayne Bryant on the Democratic side, Joe Charles on the Democratic side, several other legislators on

the Republican side, and we sat down and worked together. Some wanted more work, some wanted more educational opportunities, some wanted more sanctions or penalties. Some wanted the opposite of that. But we again reached a compromise that I think reflected New Jersey's values, the governor's values and had universal support. It was kind of a tough love program. It stayed strong on personal responsibility, but it also provided opportunities for people, such as childcare payments, extended healthcare coverage, for those that were willing to step up and get into the world to work. So it was a wonderful process. I wish things got done like that today. And we did have some intense discussions.

Nancy Becker: And was there an educational component of that also?

Bill Waldman: Yes, there was.

Nancy Becker: And a transportation subsidy, if I recall correctly.

Bill Waldman: There was a transportation subsidy. The issue was, some states chose not to pay for education or count that as work. We did. We permitted people to go on to college, for example. That was one of the agreements. We paid for transportation to work. One of the issues for people transitioning from welfare to work was they may have gotten a job that was usually not a high-end job in terms of salary. So many of the jobs people got did not pay for childcare, for example. And did not pay for, did not have, good medical benefits. So thinking comprehensively about, "How do we transition people to work so they get off welfare and stay off welfare?" We figured they needed a bridge, a transition. So this governor, Governor Whitman, was comfortable extending childcare for two years after people got off welfare, and extending Medicaid or health insurance, for two years. That was a huge hope. The other issue was very interesting, that I think made ours very successful. By the way, we reduced the welfare rolls to less than half of what they were.

Nancy Becker: That's what I was going to ask you about—the impact.

Bill Waldman: And, you know, at the time, the economy was booming, which was certainly a factor in our success. So many industries came to us and said, "Look, we need new workers." "And by the way, don't train them too much, because your training isn't that good. We'll train them. We just need people that can speak enough English to be like a sales representative, to learn enough about math to operate a terminal, and we'll take it from there." So we geared our programs that way, we partnered with industry, and we had a really good success rate, people moving off.

Nancy Becker: That's great.

Bill Waldman: It was exciting. It was great opportunity.

Nancy Becker: Medicaid reform?

Bill Waldman: Oh, yes. Medicaid is still the largest program in state governments across this country. It's the same issue that we all face with healthcare. During Whitman's administration she inherited a massive program. I would say it was out of control and I took some responsibility for that in previous administrations, because the rate of inflation and costs, were double digit. Many poor people got their primary care in emergency rooms in hospitals. Or in what I call Medicaid mills. Private providers that would see and bill for hundreds, if not thousands, of patients a day, with substandard care, in my view. And we had to fix that. And the opportunity came to get a waiver from the federal government to convert what we had, which was a fee-for-service system, where we paid a flat amount for each service into a managed care system. That reform was very controversial. In fact, some of the HMOs at that time, health management or health maintenance organizations, managed care companies, didn't like the idea or didn't think that our recipients would fit into their program. So we had a tall task in front of us. We had about 400,000 lives covered by Medicaid, that represented basically poor families that were on welfare and also got Medicaid. The task was to enroll them in a market-smart way to Medicaid, in a way that they'd get a comprehensive amount of care that many of us were entitled to, but also at a controlled cost rate. So we did that. We created a market with 17 competitive HMOs and enrolled over 400,000 lives in a managed care program.

We got enormous resistance on this. Many of the healthcare providers that were doing well with the Medicaid program wanted to be carved out, because in the old Medicaid program you could use the political route to adjust rates. When we made it a market-based approach, then the marketplace and companies set the rate. So it was a very hard adjustment for many, a difficult fight. But it basically worked. And one of the things I'm proud of is that we got an award from the federal government. Recognition that rather than just putting people in HMOs that we designated, we actually sat down with every family in the state and gave them the option of which one, and told them which ones would fit best with their family and gave them a choice. And we had the lowest rate of what's called default enrollments, where people were just shuttled into a standard program. I guess the other thing I'm proud of with that, and the governor I know was proud of, is we did a survey of Medicaid recipients to see how they liked it. And it was amazing the response we got. Many of them had the same kind of complaints we might have using managed care, about prior authorizations, but basically they said, "We're so glad we went to this system, and we now have our own doc. We have our own doctor that knows our family, that cares for our family. We don't have to get a

different doc in an emergency room at an area hospital every time.” So I think we controlled costs through that reform, but importantly we improved access and quality of care.

Nancy Becker: That’s great. KidCare, which was an abbreviation for a significant program.

Bill Waldman: Yes, yes, it was. During Governor Whitman’s administration, a federal law passed that was an addition to the Social Security Act. It was Title 21. It was popularly called KidCare. We adopted it here in New Jersey. We called it New Jersey KidCare. And what the federal government did through that program, they expanded the federal matching for Medicaid under that title, and created a program that you could use Medicaid or private company options for health insurance for low to middle-income families. The Medicaid cutoff was extremely low. You just about had to be on welfare to qualify, but we knew at the time there were many middle-class working families that didn’t have access to decent care. So those options about how far up in the low-income, middle-income, working-class families we could go. We picked the highest amount. So New Jersey and just only a couple other states, said that people should be eligible for this up to 350 percent of the federal poverty level. What was good is the governor insisted that we keep in the personal responsibility, so those above a certain level had to do co-pays and premiums and deductibles just like all of us do in healthcare. It was the idea of making a bridge from the poorest people, who couldn’t afford anything, and a way to keep their healthcare all the way up to at work insurance.

Nancy Becker: That’s great. And then increasing the options for the disabled. There was a lot of de-institutionalization occurring at the time.

Bill Waldman: Yes, there was. De-institutionalization was a process that’s been going on for many, many years. And it’s always been very, very controversial. But rather than just follow an ideology, what we did with the governor’s support and approval was take a look at who’s in our institutions, how they’re used, how many we really need, and given today’s technology and improved care, how many of those individuals currently residing in state institutions could be successful in the community with the right kinds of services and supports? And determining what services and supports there were. So we, like many states, had a very large stock of institutions that involved huge antiquated physical plants, some of them on a thousand acres with literally scores of buildings. Some of them had cemeteries that they operated, as a matter of fact, and people lived and died there. So we took that look and we determined after a thorough strategic analysis with a lot of community input that we didn’t need two of our major institutions in the state. There were enough people residing in those institutions and others that we could

place in the community with supports and thereby close down the plants. As much as that's accepted in policy today, even confirmed by a U.S. Supreme Court decision, it is still very controversial. For several reasons. One, clearly unions are not happy with this, because it does eliminate a whole lot of union positions. Two, sometimes vendors and merchants in the area are usually very upset because we had well over a thousand employees in each of those institutions. They created business opportunities for locals. Some of the local municipal officials were often employees in our institutions as well, particularly in the smaller towns. So it was a tough call. And...

Nancy Becker: And providing options for people to live in communities. I mean, placing those residential, small residential facilities, that also created opposition.

Bill Waldman: It surely did. It surely did. I guess you'd call, they used to call it, NIMBY, not in my backyard. And many people said, "Yes. That's a good idea," but when we placed a group home or supported housing program next to people, it often caused quite an uproar. Picketing, political pressure, all kinds of things happened across the state. One of the things I'm proud of is that the governor saw the righteousness. That's too strong a word. But that it was good policy. It brought out, it gave people who were locked up in institutions, who were told when to get up every morning, what to eat every morning, what to do every day, it gave them an opportunity to fulfill their life potential. Not everyone. Some people had to stay in institutions. So she was willing to spend the political capital, and a lot was spent on that. I remember once the governor brought me to a Republican caucus to explain it, and one of the state senators looked me in the eye and said, "Why the hell didn't you do this when you worked for a Democrat? Why do you have to do this now?"

Nancy Becker: <laughs>

Bill Waldman: And the answer was that "the governor has the political courage and is willing to spend the capital to do what I believe is the right thing."

Nancy Becker: Which is great. So you talked about talking to the Republican caucus. Did you work with the legislature on these issues?

Bill Waldman: Yes, we did. We presented them with a master plan that we had created about our future, as to how many institutions New Jersey would need. We planned to close the current ones as well. Had a lot of individual meetings to get the advice and participation of a variety of legislators. We were clear that we were determined to do something. One of the concerns, which the governor creatively addressed, I thought, was the folks and the communities around Marlboro were probably most upset, because there was the town of Ocean Grove, beautiful little

town, you may know, that unfortunately had at that time a disproportionate share of patients previously discharged from other efforts. They felt that this was unacceptable, that we would dump all the residents out into Ocean Grove. I remember the mayor of, I think it's Neptune Township, which Ocean Grove is part of. He insisted that I come to a meeting to speak to his town council about that. I said, "Look. As long as it's not a hanging party." I think I used those words because tempers were really high. Well, it turned out I had a meeting—went from a meeting with the town council, to an open meeting in the great, Grand Auditorium, with several thousand people. I remember getting cursed at for about two to three hours.

My integrity was questioned, everything. But we did meet with a lot of legislators. We had public hearings. It was a very transparent effort, I believe. We didn't make everybody happy and it was very intense. But ultimately with the governor's support we went through it and we then decided not to lose sight of this. What would be the impact on the patients themselves? The de-institutionalization, it was called, in the '60s and '70s. Frankly sometimes people were dumped out of institutions without community support and bad things happened. They wound up in jails, homeless shelters, passing away from untreated medical conditions. So we committed to do a survey of the patients six months out to see where they were and to get their view. It was almost universal that people felt they were in an equal, or at least equal, and in almost all cases better arrangements. So it worked for them. The governor with Ocean Grove and Asbury Park made a compromise that I thought was very creative. They had a legitimate concern. In Asbury Park, in particular, they had some very substandard large boarding-type facilities that everybody knew were a disaster. So with the governor's support we created other alternatives. We actually closed those, relocated every resident successfully to nearby good facilities and dedicated the land to affordable housing. So that was a nice solution that the governor was willing to do to accommodate the concerns. And I know Ocean Grove is thriving now. And the people who have been discharged from Marlboro did very well at the time.

Nancy Becker: That's great. Did you work with the legislature on your other major issues as well?

Bill Waldman: We did. There was always a bipartisan effort. And you know what? There was an ability to do so freely, without political considerations, without getting lots of prior approvals to talk to someone from the opposite party. It was kind of an open process to bring them along. And I found that many of the legislators, when they heard the whole story of what generated this, it wasn't political, it wasn't ideological, it was practical. It was in the best interest of the state and the million

people we served that we ultimately got some concurrence. I remember going to see Democrat as well as Republican legislators and laying it out for them.

Nancy Becker: And who did you work with? It's interesting, because you were certainly given a huge amount of freedom to work with legislators. Who did you work with in the governor's office on the legislative strategy?

Bill Waldman: Whoever was director of Governor's Counsel at the time.

Nancy Becker: Okay.

Bill Waldman: There were several of them. They were all very good. They were all very supportive. They were clear about limits and they were very reasonable to work with them.

Nancy Becker: How was the Whitman administration able to achieve enactment of these, sometimes, controversial issues? You did begin to tell us that. But clearly what you've described is not what is considered traditional Republican policy.

Bill Waldman: Right. I think it was Governor Whitman's own personal values and instincts that were amazing. Just one issue I remember about her. You know how controversial the immigration issue is today. We had an issue back then that was very controversial around welfare reform. The federal government said that if you're going to serve legal immigrants in these programs, meaning welfare and a variety of others, healthcare, you can do that, but you can't get any federal matching for that. So the states had to make a decision that if they wanted to continue to serve legal, not illegal immigrants, with the basic safety net services they were going to have to pay for it with a hundred percent state dollars. So that was clearly the governor's call as to what you're going to propose. So trying to be a good staffer, I tried to work up the numbers as to what it would cost, what some options were with covering some immigrants that were newer than others or here longer than others. So I laid out some options for her. She stopped me in the middle of the presentation to her. She said, "Bill, when did your family come to this country?" And I said, "Governor, I believe my dad was first generation, actually. I'm only second generation. He came here when he was a little boy." She said, "I think my forebears probably came on the Mayflower. We're not sure."

<laughter>

But she said, "Weren't we all immigrants to this country at some time? Isn't that, the promise of our nation?" I was so impressed, I was so taken aback. So I could just throw away all the financial background about the other options. So yeah. I think it was the values and the principles that she stood on that I thought were very

unusual, very progressive. She was fiscally conservative. I mean, she was responsible about funding. With me, and my department. And we came to a nice balance.

Nancy Becker: That's great, which is a good segue. So let's talk a little bit about Governor Whitman. In your estimation, what were her greatest strengths?

Bill Waldman: She had a vision of the New Jersey that she wanted it to be. I think her greatest strength also was creating a team. So we all felt a sense of ownership of how well the entire administration did. Sometimes in other situations, being in leadership groups and teams, there's this competition among staff or cabinet officers as who's better than who, who's done more than who, who's done what? And sometimes there's even, there's a great German word for it. I think it's schadenfreude.

Nancy Becker: <laughs>

Bill Waldman: Yeah. Where sometimes we can almost get gleeful if someone else was in trouble. There wasn't that there. There was really a team spirit that she built. I think the other strength was that she was willing to listen, be open to other opinions. And frankly, many times I clashed with the state treasurer about a variety of big programs, and she would have us both in. We'd both make our case to her. We had some intense discussions. She would make a decision and I respected that decision if it was in support of my view or not. But the idea was when we walked out we were going to support that decision. But just the openness and access or willing to hear, an open mind, being a good team leader and having a vision were I think some great strengths that she had. And her values. I would add her values.

Nancy Becker: What were her greatest weaknesses?

Bill Waldman: Ah, it's hard sometimes. You know, they're hard to point out. They're really hard to point out. Sometimes in politics I think you have to be vindictive to make a point. I never saw that in her. To me that's a strength. Maybe to politicians that would be a weakness. Some say politics is the art of rewarding your friends and punishing your enemies. And I've worked in other governments where that was, <laughs> I mentioned, that that was an operating credo. But that wasn't about the governor. I guess I could say sometimes strengths can be weaknesses in the political area. And that's if she had any, they were those. <laughs>

Nancy Becker: Would you compare her to the other governors you worked with during your career?

Bill Waldman: Oh, it's hard to do. I really, and I say this sincerely, deeply admired all of them. They were different individuals, they were different strengths, but in terms of their integrity, their leadership, their caring about the state of New Jersey, I really enjoyed them all. Christie will always have a special place in my heart because of her personal characteristics and my accessibility to her during her term.

Nancy Becker: From your perspective, how would you assess her administration as a whole?

Bill Waldman: I think it was, on balance, an overwhelming success over time. There were issues that in retrospect a lot of us would've done differently, perhaps, at the time, having more information about how things played out. But I think it was a great success, certainly from the purview of my department. I think we reformed entitlements in New Jersey, we reduced our reliance on huge state institutions that were backwards. We really reduced poverty during the governor's term and we certainly spread the availability of affordable quality healthcare throughout the state. So from my perspective, working closely with other departments like health, on initiatives, I think it was a very, very successful administration.

Nancy Becker: Her legacy certainly has not been given as much credence as we've found in these interviews and the seminars that we've done.

Bill Waldman: Right, right, right. That's true.

Nancy Becker: You decided to leave state government before the end of the Whitman administration. Tell us why you made that decision and what you did then afterwards.

Bill Waldman: Sure. As we discussed at the outset of this discussion it was a very intense job. One of the things I've learned in my career is sometimes you get to the point where you've given the best you have to give and it's time for someone else to step up with newer ideas, newer thoughts, newer energy. I was a little bit tired, to be honest. Still a relatively young person, but I got offered to be Director of the American Public Human Services Association, which is the premier national organization representing state government, state government officials and advocating human service policies at the national level. So it seemed like a logical career step at the time. It was a good time to move on. It was in the beginning of the second term that the governor had, and in weighing all those considerations I took a job in Washington, D.C., as head of that association.

Nancy Becker: And Christie followed you before the end of her term.

Bill Waldman: Yes.

Nancy Becker: You have continued to have an interesting career since you served as human services commissioner. So following on service to the American Public Welfare Association, or I probably got that name wrong.

Bill Waldman: It's good.

Nancy Becker: Tell us what else you've done since that time.

Bill Waldman: Well, in terms of direct employment, I came back to teach at Rutgers, which was an extraordinary opportunity for me because it gave me the opportunity to give back. And I had a career starting in 1965 as a welfare worker. Actually it will be 50 years this September. I wanted to pass on the lessons I had learned, the experiences I had, to give them those insights and strengthen their careers. It was a very powerful draw. And even though I'm not what you call a traditional academic, I don't do a lot of research or publication, I loved the atmosphere, I adored students, and I found it very fulfilling job. At the same time though I got drawn into a lot of community activities. So I wound up, for example, chairing the board of the Mental Health Association of New Jersey, the National Council of Alcoholism and Drug Dependence in New Jersey, and the Essex County Family Justice Center, which is a wonderful program about domestic violence, to keep people, victims, safe and with the services they need. And lots of other organizations. People always tease me about how many community boards I'm on, but the insights you get during the wonderful opportunities I've had to serve in government and the private sector are just, I feel that they're valuable and I could pass those lessons on. So kept myself pretty busy.

Nancy Becker: Now, how long have you been at Rutgers teaching?

Bill Waldman: My goodness. I started here in 2001.

Nancy Becker: Wow.

Bill Waldman: At the beginning of the year.

Nancy Becker: Long time.

Bill Waldman: So it's—it is 14, almost 15 years pretty soon.

Nancy Becker: Great. Is there anything else about the Whitman administration that you would like to tell us that we may not have asked?

Bill Waldman: Oh, I think you've asked me a good array of questions about it. I think I've given you the flavor. There was some lightness that was fun. I remember an episode where the governor insisted we do a retreat—I don't know if you've heard this before, it was very funny—in a survival training type program.

Nancy Becker: I don't think anybody's ever told us about this. So it would be great.

Bill Waldman: So this is one designed for team building, actually. So we went to a big state park in Monmouth County and we had all these exercises we had to do in small teams. <laughs> Which was actually to get people up in trees. Oh, it was really hilarious. I remember Bill Fauver, who's a large person, and I, lifting up Deb Poritz <laughs> to put her in a tree so she could look out at the rest of the group. You had to feel comfortable leaning backwards and falling with your team members behind you to catch you. It was a little bit physical but it was more—it was just so much fun. I remember at one Cabinet meeting, at the National Guard headquarters, the head of the National Guard, the general, I believe it is-- who heads it, was part of the cabinet. And they offered us an opportunity to, if anyone wanted to go for a ride in the F-16 fighter jet they had. So all of us knew enough about that kind of ride to know there are g-forces and it was challenging. So the governor, I think, was the only one, and maybe one other person, to do it. And she was teasing us about being scaredy-cats. It was just the lightness of humor and personality that really balanced out the rough edges that you have in this kind of work in government.

Nancy Becker: So thank you, Bill. It was great talking to you.

Bill Waldman: Thank you, Nancy. It's really been a pleasure. You brought back some wonderful memories.