

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

RENU AGRAWAL: Hello my name is Renu Agarwal. I am the coordinating director of the Association of Indians in America-New Jersey Chapter's Oral History Project funded by the New Jersey Historic Commission. Today is December 06, 2002. Time is 10 p.m. I will be interviewing Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula_____. He is also a member of national AIA Executive Committee. He represents district 17 that includes Middlesex and Somerset Counties. His office is located at 888 Eastern Avenue,

So, Upendra, how long have you been involved in New Jersey politics?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Nearly 15 years. I have been involved in various campaigns at the local, County, State, and National level. I started at the grass root level and worked my way up to different party positions and volunteered in different campaigns. The way I started was working at the Indian-American Forum for Political Education, where I was working on different issues that were affecting the Indian-Americans in US, especially, in New Jersey. We developed position papers on various issues--glass ceiling, Minority and Women owned businessesdoing business with State, as well as Ivy League school admissions and immigration issues. Also I worked with Congressman Frank Pallone's office and I am proud to say that I was part of the formation of the Caucus on India and Indian-Americans.

RENU AGRAWAL: So, what motivated you to get involved in public service?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Indian Americans and Indian-American organizations were involved in various cultural and religious activities and I saw that there was a gap in that our political participation was minimal. I believed that without political power dollar power does not mean anything. This fact was established as it was shown in Uganda, Nigeria, etc..

RENU AGRAWAL: How has your Indian Heritage shaped your political views and values?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Well, in India we were all growing up reading the newspapers. We talked about and read about what was going on in different countries, and their politics. We were inspired by John F. Kennedy and Kryschev and Jawaharlal Nehru and their friendship. There were a lot of things happening in the world. The beginning of the space age and sending human beings to the Moon. We are always in India growing out. We were aware of lot of the things that are going on around the world. After coming here and you see the oldest democracy in action. This is the oldest democracy in the world and There was a lack of full participation in the U.S.A because people were taking their democracy for granted.. If you look at some of the elections and the percentage of people voting and percentage of people registered is really pathetic. I think that coming from India which is the largest democracy in the world. There was so much of freedom and there were so many parties--regional parties, national parties and people taking so much of interest in the political activities. I think that really made the difference in my political activism.

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

RENU AGRAWAL: Okay, so can you please tell me a little bit of your life in India?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Oh yes. I come from a relatively poor family. We are a family of three brothers including myself and three sisters and my father had many jobs. He was a cashier, he was a teacher. He is a very honest man and he always taught us very good values on how to be honest and honesty is the best policy. My mother is a music teacher and she has taught the classical Karnataka music and she also used to play Veena, a musical instrument. She used to teach and that is one way she raised us and we still have Veena back home. When I visit her, I see that she is still singing. She is 74 years old and I wish I had the gift and talent she has. But, I was and continue to be interested in the music. Well, you know growing up in India was quite interesting. I was born in Nellore in Andhra Pradesh which is about 100 km or 70 miles from Madras City. I lived in Nellore for a couple of years. My father and mother migrated to Madras. Madras is a bilingual city—Telugu and Tamil are the languages spoken there. My mother tongue is Telugu and I studied in Telugu medium. I got my High School Diploma from Hindu Theological High School. I went to Vivekananda College for my preuniversity. I studied maths, physics, and chemistry and then I went to Engineering College at College of Engineering, Guindy in Madras. It was a difficult going to get the education because of our financial condition. I was able to get scholarships to go to my preuniversity. Then, thanks to Govt. of India that I got the Merit cum Means scholarship to study my five-year engineering degree from Gindi Engineering College.

RENU AGRAWAL: So, you got your theology I mean did you learn religion?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Yes. You know I was No I was

RENU AGRAWAL: What kind of

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: No. Hindu Theological High School. Also I was raised a Hindu and in the school we always used to start with prayer. You have to have a face mark (dot) when you go to classes otherwise you get punished and following the Hindu values.....

RENU AGRAWAL: What is face mark, a dot?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: It is like a dot on the head and like you have it if you are a Shivaite, you put the Vibhuti (ashes) and you have three marks horizontal and if you are a Vaishnavite, put U or Y mark on your face using a red color material and if you are a Madhwitei you are going to put the chandan (sandal wood paste) with a straight mark. I was putting Vibhuti and then I was putting the bindi with Kumkum (red powder made of special root) actually and we used to chant a number of religious hymns. I used to recite Vishnu Sahasranamam and Aditya Hridayam memorize the whole thing I used to read that. I used to memorize Vishnu Shastra. I used to read that and I used to go to temples a lot and I spent a lot of time in the temple and was very religious. I studied Sanskrit and

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

the academic Telugu is almost 90% Sanskrit so it has given us a huge advantage. I always dreamed about studying Telugu. I love Telugu very much, that is my mother tongue and I wanted to study in Telugu literature, but that did not work out. I was raised in Madras. Madras is in Tamil Nadu state the language there is Tamil so I learnt Tamil and I am fluent in Tamil also. I went to Dakshin Bharat Hindu Prachar Sabha, an institution that promoted Hindi Language. The Sabha used to offer courses in Hindi and I got the equivalent of a BA in Hindi in Madras. I had a tough time to converse in Hindi because there was nobody to talk to in Hindi because nobody wanted to speak in Hindi in Tamil Nadu. So I used to go to Hindi movies to keep in touch with Hindi and I became a movie junky. I watched lots of Hindi movies and then when I moved to Bombay in search of work, I used to watch Hindi Movies almost every Friday, I used to watch one movie.

RENU AGRAWAL: Which movies are your favorite movie? Any Hindi movie

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: One I think is Yadon Ki Barat, Andaz, and Dost and there are lots of movies. I still watch a lot of them. Kishore Kumar is my favorite singer. I used to pretend I was Kishore Kumar and you know how I was able to get that. So I think I used to watch one or two movies a week. When I was working in Bombay I was learning German at the Max Mueller Bhavan affiliated with German Language Institute._____ and I used to do well. I was a bachelor then and my parents and immediate relatives were about thousand miles away, and I wanted to keep myself busy and so used to go to Max Muller Bhavan to learn German. I used public transportation, i.e., take the bus and travel almost 15-20 miles to go and learn German after work and then return home. I also was interested in going to Germany to do my PhD and that did not work out. Lot of things you plan, Man proposes God disposes.

RENU AGRAWAL: So how many languages do you speak? You speak Hindi

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Telugu is my mother tongue, Tamil and Hindi and then I understand Kannada and Malayalam not very fluent but I understand quite a bit. Then having lived in Bombay I picked up Gujrathi and Marathi and I understand Punjabi. Well Punjabi is of course has Hindi words_____. I picked up lots of Urdu while watching all these Hindi movies, I picked up Urdu. And German. Now I speak Spanish. Well, my wife is Cuban_____ and I have a working knowledge of Spanish.

RENU AGRAWAL: Well at least 15 languages here.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Wow.

RENU AGRAWAL: Can you tell me what kind of games you played in your childhood?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Well, in India Cricket is a very popular game and I used to play cricket and a lot of times I used to play barefooted you know in hot summer in 100-

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

115 degrees temperature we used to play cricket and also play field hockey under black top we used to play hockey running around with a hockey stick. I played football that is called soccer in America. I used to play soccer a lot and I developed interest for ball badminton and was able to play for my Engineering College ball badminton and I played cricket for my High School. I represented Hindu Theological High School in cricket and other than that I also played lot of the local games like Gilli-Danda. I was very good in that actually so good that people used to envy me a lot and some other sports like playing stones, making arrows, bows and arrows all kinds of yeah goli (marble) of course I used to play marbles and I was very good at that also. I am a natural left-handed so I was able to play with my left hand. Carom board is another indoor game we all used to play and then we had chess. Of all the games I used to play, the chess game I used to play which I learnt from my brother. Chess was invented in India and it is about a strategy of war game that was started a long time ago.

RENU AGRAWAL: What was that ball ...?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Ball badminton, yeah this is the fuzzy_ ball made with acrylic fiber and that you have a string racket and here also you have a shuttle cock (with a solid and feathers to provide flight) Shuttle cock you play indoor and ball badminton you play outdoor and ball badminton is one of the wrist movements. Also I used to play ping-pong we called the table tennis. I used to play that also. I was a more known as an outdoor athlete as I was never home always playing sports in the hot weather, come home with dirty clothes.

RENU AGRAWAL: So you went to Madras to do your college?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Right, I did my preuniversity at Vivekananda College. I did my Electrical Engineering at College of Engineering, Guindy, Madras.

RENU AGRAWAL: Were you involved in _student_____ Government in college at all?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Not really, I was active and did get the opportunity to run for office and I tried and then I did not go through the whole thing because my interest is having education and I wanted to focus on education but I had lots of opinion about things. That is how I executed my leadership.

RENU AGRAWAL: Hmm hmm.
205

RENU AGRAWAL: Okay, what do you miss about India, what kind of?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: One of the things is that we come from a joint family system.

RENU AGRAWAL: Hmm, hmm.

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: I have brothers, sisters, and also my grandmother--my father's mother, she is to live with us. We had a joint family system.. Because my mother was very adventurous. She wanted to construct a house and we didn't have money. She had some jewelery and then she raised money using that as collateral._____ She wanted me to go out to the village and get some money. She had 2 acres of land given to her by her father and she wanted me to go out and get some money for constructing the house by selling the annual crop.. I want to share the story with you about what had happened.. When my uncle, maternal uncle, i.e., my mother's younger brother, he came to Madras visiting and he asked me, "Upendra, why don't you come to visit the Venkampet, that is our home village?" I told him, "No. I don't want to go to the village, because Summer time is when you have a lot of friends with whom you can play Cricket and other sports in Madras. So, I told him, no I cannot go uncle, and then the next day, my mother told me "Upendra,I want you to do me a favor. I would like you to go to the village and get money for me from your grandfather." So, I had to go. I was only 12 years old and even in this country, people don't travel around the age of 10-12 years by themselves. I traveled almost 100 miles by train and went to Andhra Pradesh, by myself, and then I got to the Kavali, the my uncle's place. I My uncle was right there and he is a sharp man and he is a Life Insurance Corporation officer. He was very suspicious, then he said, "Upendra, you told me yesterday that you are not coming because you were so busy in Madras, what happened?" I didn't want to tell him the information about why I came because he also came for money and actually I am a potential competitor for him. I told him that I had changed my mind and I thought that his advice was good, I say let me accept your invitation delayed. Then what happened was that from Kavali, I had to travel about 30 miles to go to the village Venkampet where my grandfather, maternal grandfather were there, but they--my aunt and uncle, my mothers' older brother wouldl not send me..

RENU AGRAWAL: Hmm.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: They thought I was too young, 12 years to travel to the village by myself.. Basically, you have to take a bus from Karvelli to Gudlur and from Gudlur you have to either walk about six miles or you take a bullock cart. Because of the monsoon season, they were unable to make arrangements, So I was worried because I was there to get some money for my mother and I was sitting here waiting for a travel companion. I had to come up with a creative way, so I went to the post office, bought a postcard and wrote a letter to my grandfather. I wrote, "Grandfather, you are really so wonderful to our family and this is the time of need and you have to come through for my mother. She wants to construct a house." and it was a wild card approach. I sent the postcard hoping that he will have everything ready when I get a chance to go there. Finally, I convinced my aunt to arrange somebody to accompany me to the village. After 5-6 days, she arranged somebody and then I got to the village. There, my grandmother, i.e., my mother's mother, pulled me to the side and said "Hey, you are very lucky. Your grandfather sold some rice and he has collected the money for you." I was very thrilled. Of course, because I was 12 years old carrying that kind of cash, it was not a big amount

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

by our American standard. But at that time, that was a lot of money for us and so I had to get it tied around my waist and so that nobody else could see it when I traveled back. Then, a very funny thing happened. When came back there was no locker for me to keep the cash, and I could not afford to lose it, so I took my older aunt in to confidence, I told her keep the money for safety.

RENU AGRAWAL: Hmm.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: “Don’t tell anybody about the money,” I told her, but my other uncle, he extracted the information from her. He was mad and he started telling everybody, “Look at this fellow, a 12 year old fellow, he tricked me, and he has all the know how to deal in secrecy.” He keeps telling that story even after 20-30 years. But, I thought what it showed was the trust and the caring my mother, putting my ability to get things done. When I was 12 years, I was able to travel 100+ miles to get the money and I took the train, even though there was pick pocketing on the trains and all that Indian trends, But the way you tie the money around your abdominal area and then bring it, it was fun. I was able to bring the money back and we constructed the house and that money was like a down payment for our house.

RENU AGRAWAL: That’s the way you _____ enjoyed actually.

206

RENU AGRAWAL: So, tell me what kind of house was it? Was it a brick house or mud house? I know you lived in village.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Yeah!, when I was, yeah, initially before we had the brick house, we were living in a house which had mud walls.

RENU AGRAWAL: Humm humm

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: And thatched roof.

RENU AGRAWAL: Humm humm

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: And there was no electricity for sometime. When I was studying, we used to usually have street lamps for studying for sometime. We also were depending on the well water and sometime during the rains, when the monsoons failed, then we got the water _____ and we used to have less water. Once, I had to climb down over 25 feet into the well to break rocks looking for the source of water.

RENU AGRAWAL: Humm humm.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: And I used to grow the vegetables because we had land that was fertile.

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

RENU AGRAWAL: Humm humm.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: I used to have my own garden and I used to grow drumsticks. My mother used to get up at 4 o' clock in the morning and it was very dark at that time, so I used to get up at 4 o' clock also to support with her work such as drawing the water from the well and we used to heat the water using wood. She taught me how to cook and when I was seven years old. Since then I knew how to cook vegetarian food.

RENU AGRAWAL: You mean using the drumsticks in your cooking.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Oh! Yeah, I mean I learned a lot cooking vegetables and lentils and dal and all that stuff and I used to get involved in making pickles and all that stuff. Also I used to do laundry and hand washing clothes. I was quite happy that she trained me so much. She had three daughters and three sons and I was quite helpful to her. We used to have rice and vegetables as main meal. I can do all those things around the house.

RENU AGRAWAL: Humm humm. Drumsticks, drumsticks grows on, is it a tree?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: It's a big tree. As I said _____ branches of drumsticks. The tree is very tall _____. I used to climb up of the tree because sometime as the tree grows taller and you cannot reach them from the ground and we didn't have ladders like here. So, I used to climb up the tree to get the drumsticks down. I also had a coconut tree. There is a special technique for climbing a coconut tree because it had no branches.

RENU AGRAWAL: What is the technique?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: What you do is put a belt around your waist the tree, so that it hold you when you climb up with your feet, with a flat foot as you climb up. That way you don't fall down.

RENU AGRAWAL: Thank you.

207

RENU AGRAWAL: So then which year did you come to US?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: I came to US in 1974. Actually, I was working in Bombay in 1974 and I applied for admission to one college--City University of New York City and wanted to become a graduate student. Even though I got admission, but it was difficult to get a student visa. Of course, as my luck would have it my visa was rejected two times and the third time I was successful in getting the visa and I came to New York on September 12, 1974. I was living in Kew Garden Hills in Queens and went to City College and did my Masters in electrical engineering and it was an interesting year. At that time, the Watergate hearings were going on and lot of interesting things. I was trying to understand what was going on. I was going through cultural shock having raised in a

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

smaller city and town as compared to New York City. New York City was quite a city and I was amazed seeing all these cars flying by at 55 miles an hour or 60 miles an hour. Also coming from southern part of India, which is very conservative, what you have in New York was much more liberal. When we were in college in New York City, I used to get chance traveling by the New York City subways and seeing people kissing in public. It was very difficult at first. It took a while for me to get adjusted.

RENU AGRAWAL: What kind of social or cultural adjustment you had to make in order to settle down here?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: You know when you speak English, you tend to speak English the way you speak your mother tongue. My mother tongue is Telugu and the way you speak in Telugu is quite fast, so I used to speak English very fast. One day when I was walking down in the Queens, New York and I asked a mailman for directions to place. He did not follow what I was asking for and I had to repeat it three times before he could understand what I was saying. Then I realized that not only I have an accent, I also spoke very fast. So I had to cut down my accent and slow down the way I used to speak. I, then started making adjustments to my accent. A strange thing happened to me in New York City. Whenever, I used to meet people, they used to say, oh you speak English very well and after a few times, I began thinking that this is the way people greet each other. _____ When I met other Americans, I greeted them by saying, "you speak English very well" and they started laughing.

One of the adjustments I had to make was following my religious practices. I used to go temples a lot in India because they were accessible at every street corner you have a temple. Here in the U.S., you don't have such access and so we used to have pictures of gods at home and I used to do my prayers in the apartment that's one adjustment.

Of course, it's a very lonely life here, because we were used to so much of dependence on the society, and your neighbors and relatives. Here you do not have that. In the 1970s, the number of Indian immigrants were rather small and so whenever you see an Indian on the street, I used to meet and introduce myself and of course, now the things are lot more different.

In terms of availability of Indian groceries, we had to go to special places to get the things. Because I am a vegetarian, and was used to Indian meals, I had to travel distances to get the Indian food. In India, we had everything right within your walking distance.

208

UPENDRA: First time I experienced snow.

SPEAKER: About what do they, did you follow what you they did in India also? Did you know anything about it there? Was they covered there or...?

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

UPENDRA: We have had coverage about Watergate.....so we were not that collectively new about some problems but I don't recollect a lot of things from that time. I came here in 1974 by that time _____ **00:25** President Gerald Ford was the president and we talked about President Nixon. _____ **00:34**

SPEAKER: How did you like? When did you come? Do you remember the date?

UPENDRA: Yeah, I came to New York on September 12, 1974 and I came by Lufthansa. I flew from Bombay and went to Frankfurt. My flight arrived in Frankfurt late and the connecting flight left. Lufthansa management decided not to put us up in the hotels in Frankfurt. They send us to Montreal, Canada. I got my immigration process done in Montreal. Then, I took an Eastern Airlines flight which was consequently a domestic flight. I came to New York City by the Eastern Airlines from Canada..

SPEAKER: When you landed, what was your first impression, when you left that city from the aeroplane or you landed here, what did you think?

UPENDRA: It was already becoming familiar since I have seen Canadian airport. I remember, the Montreal Airport, especially, the size of the John F. Kennedy airport when compared to Bombay Airport was phenomenal. Then you look outside and then you see all these cars going so fast and especially, Grand Central Parkway, _____ **01:52** Long Island Expressway. you have seen these things in the movies and they are real now. It felt like you are part of the movie. You see all these huge cars traveling so fast and then you start seeing the people and most of the people were light-skinned and Caucasian, and it was totally a different feeling. Everything was clean and I think it was quite an interesting experience. I was a little shocked although I was tired having traveled almost all day from Bombay to Frankfurt, Frankfurt to Montreal, and Montreal to New York and it was very interesting.

SPEAKER: I know your wife is Cuban-American, how did you meet her?

UPENDRA: I went to City college for my Masters in Electrical Engineering and on the college campus, you are allowed you work legally. I got a job in the library and one of the jobs I had was _____ **02:54 in the mail room**, meaning I used to take books from one library on campus. I used to take carry those books them in my handbag to deliver them. I went to the Architecture Library and saw this young lady sitting there and I looked at her and I said to her, "Are you Indian?" She thought I looked very young for her, she looked and said, "Who are you?". I was standing and talking to her and I found out that she was Spanish speaking Cuban. I told her, "Oh, I would like to learn Spanish." Then one thing led to another, and we developed friendship. She was not taking it seriously because she thought I was too young. You know I was 24 at that time, she thought I was 18 years old much younger than she was and she didn't take me very seriously. But I was very persistent.

SPEAKER: So when did you get married? Which year? How long did you date her?

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

UPENDRA: Actually it was very interesting that she liked dating me. She left Havana, Cuba and was in Spain before coming to USA. She left Cuba in 1974 on January-February timeframe and I left India also in 1974 September 12 and both of us ending in New York City and meeting each other in New York. Actually, we met in 1976 and in the same year and we were married on November 20, 1976.

SPEAKER: Tell us about your family life.

UPENDRA: Well, initially my wife was familiar with Indian way of life and she knew about Indian culture. I feel she had her heritage, her great grandmother had one side she had Indian blood but she was raised in a Spanish style and so she was treating me that way with Hispanic hospitality. So I used to help her and then the big thing was I was supposed to learn Spanish from her and I was supposed to teach her English and she learnt a lot of English because I don't think I have learnt as much Spanish from her, but it comes to the family life. We did not have much time before we had our first child. _____ **05:25** from 1976. Our first child was born in September of 1977. So we had a very busy life style. She used to work in Plenum Publishing Corporation in New York. and I finished my Masters degree in September 1976. I started working for CBS Television network as an Audio-Video Maintenance Engineer. So I started doing work in the engineering field and CBS was my first job. And further my family life, we were living in the same apartment complex as her mother and grandmother, they were living on the fourth floor and we were living at the third floor. She was a very very lucky girl. She used to go upstairs and eat her dinner and when it comes to my dinner she did not know how to cook. So I had to teach her for self survival. When she was pregnant with my son she could not deal with the Indian spices and, I used to cook and she used to come and throw up. Afterwards, she used to disappear when I was cooking she wouldn't come for a couple of hours until I finished eating. So she had an excuse not to cook for me, but we were I think good food and all the things. We had the compatibility and her family was wonderful and they accepted me as one of their family members. Initially, her grandmother used to tell her, "oh, you are marrying this fellow, he is going to take your kids and go back to India. Then you will be without kids or you may be taken your way." They were afraid initially. After a while, they realized otherwise and that is when they became happy.

SPEAKER: Did you celebrate any Indian festivals?

UPENDRA: We used to go to the temple and celebrate. Actually when we got married, we had married in both styles and we got married in a Catholic Church and also had an Indian style wedding. About the festivals, it is not the same way because all my relatives are in India and I live with my wife and children here. So whenever our friends used to invite, we used to go to their house. for celebration of Diwali or Navratri or all those such festivals. Then a lot of the things we used to do together and watch on Indian Television programs. With friends, we used to celebrate also.

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

SPEAKER: How much time does your wife spend on religion? _____ **8:02?**

UPENDRA: Well I think she is not religious and of course. Christmas is one festival which was a Catholic festival and that Easter is only other significant festival. Other than that in America you have Thanksgiving, a _____ **8:21** special occasion we still have time for a family get-together. Other than that there are not as many festivals. Unlike India, where we used to have festivals every month.

SPEAKER: So when did you get involved with public service?

UPENDRA: As I said earlier, I was initially working with a Indian community and doing a lot through political forum and the focus on India and the Indian-American, but one thing I wanted to tell you that I was challenged by all of my friends that _____ **8:58** I really didn't know politics and the only way you can assure me that you know politics is that you are involved in mainstream politics. Then I decided that I always had this liking for the Democratic Party. I called _____ **9:13** Democratic Party and said that I was interested in becoming a member of the party.

SPEAKER What Democratic Party?

UPENDRA Well you know, if you look at the Democratic Party at that time _____ **9:27** that the party included a lot of minorities and _____ **9:33** Indian Americans to come to US and you know a lot of other democratic Presidents like Kennedy who came to India and one of the things that I liked about the Democratic Party was that the inclusion aspect of it and I got the seat in minority _____ **9:57**. So, I called a state democratic chair as the party asked me to contact my county Democratic Party and called the democratic chair, the County of Somerset _____ **10:05** is largely republican public and the Chair was very happy to receive a phone call because there were not too many democrats in the county. Immediately, he gave me the opportunity to become a member of the executive committee. Then he suggested that I should join a local Democratic Party. I enjoyed the joining the John F. Kennedy Democratic Club. When they were holding the elections all the positions were taken. There was one position, which was left and that they required a secretary can write meeting minutes. I said okay, I will take it and became the Recording Secretary. _____ **10:48**. The following year the Democratic Party lost four of five contested council seats. In fact, we used to have elections in the month of May and the Municipal Chair quit the position in June right after the elections _____ **11:04 11:10** and nobody wanted to be chair because democrats were losing for 12 years. The county chairman suggested my name and I got elected in absentia.

SPEAKER How did you get elected when everybody was there?

UPENDRA They asked me and I said I will think about it and I did not say no. I did not say yes. When I came to the meeting a few minutes late because I was held up in traffic _____ **11:38** I got there as soon as I walked in _____ **11:42** they clapped and they said

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

the Mr. Chairman, here is your seat. _____ **11:45** I was chosen. andnd was elected in absentiathat is how I became the chairman of the Democratic Party.

SPEAKER There were not many democrats at _____ **12:05** then how did you get elected and finally became Mayor?

UPENDRA At that time the population was low it was about 41,000 people.....about 32,000 people did not declare their party affiliation. and the township had a slightly higher number of registered democrats. Actually they have _____ **12:26** inside when I was top over the entire _____ **12:29** county and the Republican and Democrats were 3,600 people. What happened is that the elections were held in the month of May and Democrats were more interested in November elections and so the turn out was low.. They did not show much for the local _____ **12:45** election, only the presidential or gubernatorial elections. Maybe they will come out in the local elections held in November but May elections are special elections that are held and most of the people did not know that elections were held in the month of May. And so, Democrats used to lose and Republicans were in control for 12 years and party in control _____ **13:08** would raise money easily and difficulty _____ **13:13** is much greater for Democratic party in raising the money and that is what happened. So, even though I saw the opportunity, there was very little support.....I had an opportunity to do something since becoming the chairman of the party. I said why not change the elections from May to November and that is why the initial referendum we had to collect about 2,500 signatures. I studied the law known as Faulkner Act _____ **13:37** the type of government we had and we began collecting the signatures. We needed people almost 60-70 volunteers to work together. To collect the required signatures. _____ **13:48** e _____ **13:59** That cost extra 50,000 dollars over 2 years and also the percent of people who are coming out and voting in November is 40-50% as opposed to 17% in May and newspapers like to have your editorials supporting that idea and we were be able to get that question passed almost 3:1 and that changed the entire Democratic political scene in Franklin Township. Subsequently the the Somerset County. _____ **14:34**.

SPEAKER Can you tell us about some interesting stories from different national democratic conventions you have attended as a past democratic delegate?

UPENDRA After I read the story about _____ **14:54** I found it quite interesting that inside _____ **14:58** the elections change from May to November and the following year I became a Campaign _____ **15:03** Manager.

UPENDRA And the following year I was the campaign manager, put together diverse ticket and I had five candidates. I was reluctant in the next flight, following the flight that if I am going to _____ **15:13** Republic _____ **15:16** democrat and subsequently it was democrat control. _____ **15:19** year. So the Democratic Party of the state level and looked at best of my ability.

SPEAKER Hmm.

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

UPENDRA They did also, they have given me a special consideration to get on as a Delegate to the Democratic National Conventional in 1996. It was held in Chicago.

SPEAKER Hmm.

UPENDRA And actually there was state conference in place in New Jersey and the Democratic State Chair _____ **15:45**, asked me to come and do speak talk about how I was able to be successful on the local level. _____ **15:52**. They called it a power luncheon speech. Usually, the state conference chose only elected officials for speaking and I was not an elected official, but he created this special occasion—luncheon speeches. I liked that opportunity and I spoke. I talked about how I changed Franklin Township to be under Democratic Control I spoke about the elephant. I said that, usually coming from India, I liked elephants, those were democratic elephants, but I didn't like Republican elephants and Associated Press reporter came to me and said that he wanted to do a story about me. And I asked, "Why?" _____ **16:30** He said I was Democratic Party's Posterboy. _____ **16:32**.

SPEAKER _____ **16:36**.

UPENDRA And these are the _____ **16:36** stories. You know, I believed _____ **16:38** that Democrats have got a good future in this County.

SPEAKER Yeah.

UPENDRA Well, I like the 1996 convention and the Courier News _____ **16:49**, they asked me to write a column.

SPEAKER Hmm, hmm.

UPENDRA What happens is that during the conventions usually, the prime time has heavy television media coverage. But during the daytime, there are lot of events are happening, various different organizations and different elected officials holding breakfast and lunch meeting and there were no coverage for them. And so, the Courier News asked me that I should write the column about the daytime happenings _____ **17:19** and wrote the columns. I had a column for nearly a week.

SPEAKER Hmm.

UPENDRA: Everyday after convention, I used to call one of the radio stations in New Jersey about my impressions about the evening convention., The convention gave me an opportunity to meet people, especially, Democrats from all over the country and even some of the Republicans. _____ **17:40**. Actually, I took a cab ride _____ **17:45** with the governor of American Samoa Islands. I met so many people and they were not that many Asians at that time and I was one of the, I think after a long time, one of the Asian Indian Americans going to the convention and so people, there was lot of excitement and we

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

used to mingle with the crowd and everybody since then, they are looking around for getting the attention of the media, media with the cameras and then lot of newspaper reporters because everybody is excited, want to get their names in the newspaper and television. The secret is that if you don't look at them, they may come to you. So, if look at them, they avoid you. Trying to get a lot done in the day. So I did get lot of coverage in the newspapers and we still look back at that time _____ **18:46** and all those newspapers at our convention on the floor and around. Star Ledger newspaper _____ **18:54** had printed that picture in which I was doing Macarena at the third row and that was also in the pictures of the year, the annual edition.

SPEAKER: Hmm. Did you do salsa?

UPENDRA: No they were not doing salsa. My wife always like me to learn some salsa.

SPEAKER: So, tell us about your first political campaign.

UPENDRA: Well, one of the things is that in 1995 is the one when we had the referendum question passed in 1994. In 1995, I became the campaign manager for five candidates and then I got them elected in landslide victory.

SPEAKER: Hmm.

UPENDRA: One of the candidates passed away in 1997.

SPEAKER: Hmm, hmm.

UPENDRA: Around March/April time frame.

SPEAKER: Hmm.

UPENDRA: And there was a vacancy and because the councilman came from the fifth ward where I live. I gained the support of organization of Democratic Party to get appointed. So, some difficulty in the politics and all that. I was successful in getting appointed to the Franklin Township _____ **20:08** council on June 10th, 1997. Then that appointment was only good for six months, because it was an unexpired term. There was election in the November 1997. So I became a candidate for November, so I started campaigning beginning on June 11th. One other interesting thing was the people always skeptical about my electability because of my last name _____ **20:34** which is not a Judeo-Christian name. But I thought, if last name is only the problem I could overcome that. So I came out with an easy way to remember my last name. I began telling _____ **20:43** telling people that imagine driving a Chevy _____ **20:47** and drinking a cola (Chevy Cola), so I was able to get the attention of the people. I also walked the entire fifth ward and knocked on doors. On June 11th, I started walking, everyday, I walked for about two hours and week days, evening, and weekends. I was also working for longer times on Saturdays and Sundays, It took 4-6 hours, knocking at doors, introducing

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

myself. I visited about 2000 houses, they were many who were surprised to see somebody coming and visiting them because they haven't seen their councilman in the last 20 years, I was the first one. So getting that personal contact. I take one thing great pride, in that I was able to politics or no politics, twice in that I was able to make campaign politics. During 1995 elections with the senior citizens of Franklin Township in spite of the repeated trials for 20 years. They were denied in Senior Center. I promised them we will build one and in 1995, after the election, 1996 and 1997, we worked hard and raised about \$200,000 and then we had the 10% down payment for total project cost was about \$2.2 million dollars and we got it built in 1998 when I was deputy mayor. We had the building, ribbon cutting and I am happy that and till today, I think the senior citizens remember that how much I put my commitment for their issues and I'm one of their friends. I continue to serve a lot of the senior related issues, the senior and advisory committees. Right now, I am working on trying to help them create affordable senior housing and we came out with an idea that raised the non-binding referendum question on the ballot that we want taxpayers money from Franklin, so that when we can have the senior citizen from Franklin Township, the first, you know preference, so they have a place to go. So the project is in progress right now.

209

RENU AGRAWAL: Tell us about your issues you fought for and which helped you to win and get elected.

UPENDRA: Yeah, in 1997, I got appointed and then I had to contest in November election. One of the key issues at that time was that the Franklin Township emerged as such an attractive town because of the proximity to highways and the hospitals and the train stations. It was sprawl, and one of the issues, maybe issues at that time was open space reservation and I wanted to make sure that the open space reservation. Also the street lighting in the district was an issue and I wanted to make sure that the lighting survey was done and adequate street lighting was put in. When we look at the local issues, people always complain about potholes in the roads, and paving and all that sort. So, those are some of the issues, I have done, and to the Senior Center I already talked about and trying to get some those are friendly, citizen friendly Council men. So I was able to attract the people out there, listening to their concerns and issues, able to act on them, and trying to help. We tried to stabilize property taxes and lot of other things, which is even though is not a local issue, you can always do so much in terms of keeping this spending in check and then thereby the tax rates, and then tax levies you can stabilized that and that is one of things that I was able to do. In 1997, when in November election, I had a very comfortable margin, actually my opponent was a woman. She was banking on that my name (because of my name), I won't get elected. So she put her campaign street signs way ahead of time, i.e., three months in advance. But, people already knew that what I stood for and how I care about the issues and I had a comfortable amount of vote margin, and I was very happy in 1997, when I got elected. In 1998, I became Deputy Mayor and in the Senior Center I had my name, as well as the people whoever was responsible for building that center. Another important thing is that

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

in 1997, as soon as I was appointed the chairman of Franklin Township Bicentennial Celebration Committee.

RENU AGRAWAL: Hmm, hmm.

UPENDRA: Franklin Township was formed on February 20, 1798. So, February 20, 1998, I had a planned for fireworks to celebrate this. People thought I was crazy because February was cold, a lot of snow, etc. I said nothing to worry, we will have fireworks and it so happened that it was a bright 50 degree day and we had fireworks and we heard that people liked it very much. Also another thing, I did was that Franklin Township is 46 sq mile and with 22 miles of Delaware and Raritan_____ canal and when you enter Franklin Township, you needed to create an identity. So, as a part of the bicentennial, we put together about 20 different programs already discussed. Chamber of commerce had multicultural festival, where you get different cultural people coming and putting together cultural program. We had a classic car shows and all that and we also created a sign-- "Welcome to Historic Franklin," and then we got the businesses to sponsor the sign, so that it created an awareness where you are when you are in Franklin Township.. Some of the Republicans in the Somerset County made these comments. They were saying, "Look at this person born in India and came to US and he is helping us celebrate the colonial history of United States. Here we are and we don't care as much for the colonial history as this fellow from India." I had a lot of energy and so I worked very hard for two years on the bicentennial. Somebody born in India coming and becoming the Chairman of the bicentennial celebration and it was something else. There were books that could have, there were couple of precious books with photographs of the Franklin history and there was book also about lots of tax, but only pictures. When Governor Whitman, took a bike ride from Trenton to Franklin Township along the D&R_____ canal and she visited the Franklin, I gave her bicentennial _plaque._____ There is a picture I had taken with her and that picture was published in that book and so I was able to make my mark on the history of Franklin Township.

RENU AGRAWAL: Okay, now tell us about your campaign for Assembly Election.

UPENDRA: One of the things is that Franklin Township as historically has been in the 16th legislative district, which is the heavily Republican District. In the year 2000 census and the republished Asian-American population increasing to 160,000 and going above 200,000. There was a need for getting Asian-American in that legislative position, getting Indian American in particular getting into a position on the State Legislature. So there was redistricting occurred in 2000 and Franklin Township consisted from 16 districts into 17 district, which has got five Middlesex County Towns, and Middle town added Franklin Township near about 207,000 people. I realized that Franklin Township being the largest town, chiefly being the largest in the district and that there will be a chance for Franklin to have a candidate. And so, I had to do some internal politicking and then I had lot of opposition, I had eliminated all the opposition before I got the nomination of the party.

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

RENU AGRAWAL: Hmm, hmm.

UPENDRA: And definitely my luck would have it, I had three candidates who were opponents in the primary and one African-American and two Caucasian Americans. I was able to defeat them with a 2:1 margin in the primary. Initially you know people of my opponent used to say, "Oh! He does not have the recognition and all that but they were surprised." I was able to work very hard and I found out that lots of people knew me and more than I thought and, so I was able to get elected in November election. I also had 2:1 margin and I was selected with nearly 27,000 votes_____, so my runningmate Joe Egan and I were able to win in 2:1 margin and thus began my Assembly Politics.

RENU AGRAWAL: So what kind of support you received from other minority communities, like Afro-Americans, Japanese, Chinese, Malaysian community, etc?

UPENDRA: Yeah, if you look at the demographics of the district that the district has the 51% Caucasian.

RENU AGRAWAL: Hmm, hmm.

UPENDRA: And 19% African-American, 16% Hispanic American, 14% other and the Asian, the Indian population, South Asian population, or even the Asian-American population, it is the much smaller percentage. In order for me to get elected, I needed to get the acceptance with some of the African-Americans and Hispanic Americans and of course some Caucasian Americans definitely. I was able to get the support because of my positive campaigning and hard work, My grass root campaigns with all these communities, I had the support of all these communities and for example, I had to meet with 20 African-American ministers from around the State with each of them I spent at least an hour for to show them that why I am liable candidate. I can represent the African-American community as good or better than anybody else. So I had to establish that. It took a lot of hard work and people believed in looked at by track records and what I was able to accomplish for helping the minority community. In fact at the township level what I had accomplished was a yardstick for people to measure and so these people, usually they want to see what you have done.

RENU AGRAWAL: Hmm, hmm.

UPENDRA: And so I was able to build that support.

RENU AGRAWAL: Hmm, hmm.

UPENDRA: And that's how I was able to get elected.

RENU AGRAWAL: Thank you.

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

210

RENU AGRAWAL: Okay we were present at your swearing ceremony, but I would like to hear in your own words, how did you feel. How was that feeling? How did it feel to be first Asian-Indian, to be sworn in the New Jersey Legislature____[00:23]? What kind of excitement, feelings, emotions and.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: The excitement begins ahead after the election and all kinds of recognition and people calling congratulating me and lots of excitement. And January 8th 2002 was the day I got sworn in and of course I have been to Trenton War____[00:47] memorial building before, it is nothing like this. So, I was allowed to bring ten family members as guests on the stage with me so I can take the oath of office____[00:54] I wanted to show the diversity of my family here with my friends who all helped me in various elections and they stood by me in times of difficulty. I have the 10____[01:12] the people who work in my campaigns, I had the Jewish, black, white and all different communities and the people. Whoever I invited came and there were a lot of people, I didn't have the enough tickets invite them to the stage. But it was something very very special and that you stand there and you go through the rehearsal, what you need to do and then the seating arrangement. And I did get a very prominent seat and then the speaker gave me the opportunity to being quite visible and then I have the large number of people who came and stood with me and I was getting sworn in. It was a wonderful experience and then right after that when we had the joint session of assembly and senate. The speaker wanted me to lead the joint session in the pledge of allegiance. I really felt very very proud that it is really historic that I had this opportunity to not only represent the symbolize the community Asian-Indian American Community, but also being the first in state of New Jersey and this is a very unique opportunity and I also felt the responsibility that I have the trust to bestowed upon me.

RENU AGRAWAL: You have been the Assemblyman for nearly one year now. Could you share some of your interesting experiences with us?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Yes I mean, actually, I of course felt that Trenton is only 30 miles away from here and setting off to district office was one of the most challenging task and that I had the office set up as you said earlier, I used imaginary ____[03:19] and the building, it look like it was built for me because the building was almost brand new and there were no other tenants. And I was the first tenant. I am still the first tenant in that building and I was able two computers from the state and I asked them for more computers, I was able to employ two full-time people and then two part-time then I had many interns who have come and work with me. And I was probably was taking about the committees and all that later, but it is a legislative process learning how you introduce legislations and how you go about getting the consensus and getting people to agree with you, it is a very interesting process and as they say if you do not want to see two things being made, one is sausage and the other is legislation. So, I think that was really true, because when people look at the people, lot of the people. there were too many legislations and this time right now there are 5000 legislations____[04:31] in both the

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

houses in the assembly alone and there are a lot of bills and sometimes it appears to me if the legislature is not there _____[04:42] things will run smoothly. It is an interesting experience that you get to meet a different legislators from other parts of the state and issues they face[04:54] are so different anywhere from healthcare, education, and open space preservation or what a management or transportation have. All issues are very complex issues and lot of times people think we have lot of power we can do lot of things but this is the way you look at it, is that there are 120 legislators, 40 senators, and 80 assembly people and all of them have agree and then the government has to sign then only it becomes law, until that time it is just a piece of paper and it is how to maneuver the legislative process, it is a very learning experience. Also you come across lot of people and then you see you always think that this is a very interactive, very open public process and what you find out is that lot of this bills went before they get to the committees, lot of decisions are made behind the scenes and when you see them at the committee meeting all the discussions are very minimum and same thing in the holding sessions _____[06:12] whole lot of bills, lot of these things need to be done, if you agree with somebody else if you don't agree with bills and you want to such as amendments. All these things are done before when you get to the committee meeting of the voting sessions, that is a very interesting experience. Also, when you are a legislative people want to know what are your ideas? What you want to accomplish and it is very difficult in the first year you are trying to find your way with two different places in the state house. At the same, also learning different issues and trying to see, there are always two sides to any issue no matter which way you go, you are going to make somebody unhappy and learning that balance and see how you be true to yourself and try to do the right thing to study the people. At times it is very challenging that you have to look at the bigger picture sometimes you have to compromise on certain thing in order to get the other things get accomplished.

RENU AGRAWAL: So how do you _____[07:23] how do you get communicated with each you say it is like you have a meeting or you do e-mails or hardcopies. I get that lot of decisions are made before lot of discussions takes places. So, it is like you hold group meetings, how is it done?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: We do have caucus meetings, and pre- _____[07:42] meetings that you said before the voting sessions you go in, but I am saying, if somebody introduces a bill and you look at it and you don't like something then you pick up the phone and call that particular legislature, the prime sponsor. Also, you can write letters, you can send e-mails all these mechanisms of communication, but the idea is that knowing what the issue who did it in fact and you also will phone calls from the lobbies and the people are affected parties asking for certain things. For example, issues like guns and all that you know there are certain issues business-related issues. There is always going to be somebody is going to be on one side and some other people will be on the other side and knowing and how do you truly represent your district knowing you get lots of e-mails and phone calls of the constituent letters and for that matter, and then you try to keep up with those things and making the right decision and trying to do the right thing that is

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

RENU AGRAWAL: So, you get the information, like public opinion through letters and all do you reach out public or you?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Of course, you have to read newspapers and you watch, and then you talk to people and maybe go out to the meetings and if there is an issue and this particular group interested group is there, you reach out to them find out what they think about it and so it is a combination of all those things. It is not a single thing and you also talk to see if the leadership in the assembly and senate also the governors administration talk to people. Because, I was trying to introduce a bill and the commissioner of environmental protection, he was having some issues and they wanted to meet with me and he wanted to go with all the bills. And at the same time, I got a call from the commissioner of agriculture and he wanted also meet and he wanted and I meet with the commissioner of DEP, he wanted to join in, trying to organize all that. So, it is not you may look at it is that they will find you, but they do have a bill, they need your support and for a bill all your support opposite those and you get lots of letters and lots of communication neither is the New Jersey Education Association nor is the ____ [10:26] or the labor union or whether it is Hospital association. They will find you and they will come to you and say we want you to introduce a bill or they will say we want you to oppose this bill, support this bill, and cannot certainly bombarded with that.

RENU AGRAWAL: So you had sponsored 43 bills and cosponsored 117 bills. Tell us about some of the important issues you are trying to address as an elected public official in New Jersey.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: See, one of the things is that I am here to give you a little bit of background on what committees, I am on. I am among the Environmental and solid waste Committee, Telecommunications and Utilites ____ [11:13] Committee and also, I am vice chairman of the Commerce and Economic Development Committee. I am a member of the Commission of Science and Technology and also member of the Commission of Commerce and Economic Growth. I am a the member of the World Languages Instruction Committee. I am also the New Jersey representative to the Council of State Governments/Eastern Regional Conference on Energy and Environment. Based on these things, I am trying to focus on my background this technology engineering and trying to focus on technology related issues, telecommunications and utilites whether it is power, cable, all those industries, they are all engineering related trying to focus on that. Involvement is very important, I have been a Mayor as well as Ccouncil Member in Franklin Township ____ [12:05] concentrate on the land use issues that is management watershed management. So I have some bills in the assembly regarding that we have Six-Mile Run Reservoir site, which is state owened land it is about 3600 acres in Franklin Township and also trying to protect all water ____ [12:28] category within waters when the streams are feeding into rivers and we want to make sure that the contamination of those water is prevented. And those are some of the areas. Also, I have to introduced bills on _Brownfields and remediation ____ [12:48] and how to identifiythem, not only to identify them where they are located also identifying what

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

kind of contaminants are there for some business to go in and acquire that land and do the remediation that information is very important and lot of _brownfield____[123:09] sites in New Jersey, so we want to make sure that those are either underutilized contaminated site brought back to use. So that way, at various levels of remediation we can bring them to commercial uses. So, that way, if you look at the inner cities in the urban areas there is number of contaminated sites and we need to be conscious of environmental justice and so need to create a rehabilitation of those sites. And, I am also looking at trying to give incentives to business so that we are able to try to come up with the economic____[13:48] stimulus, I could put in the bill for 10 million dollars to appropriation to support Technology Incubators, Springboard financing under the banner of the Commission on Science and Technology. I have been fortunate to work with the business community whether it is the business and industrial association or commerce and industries association. Where I have worked under the support from the business organizations. Anything, you do you want to make sure that there is a balance and you do not want to tip the scales too much in one direction or the other and so those are the issues of concentrating on one of the issues that really bothers me, of course three top issues right now, one is the property tax stabilization, right now the taxes are, New Jersey tax structure should be 1/3 should be income tax 1/3 should be sales tax, and 1/3 property tax. Unfortunately, in New Jersey we have the property taxes anywhere from 60%-80% depending on the municipalities and ____[17:57] how do you achieve a balance. If you look at the tax files of income tax, there are about 14% of the filers pay almost 80%-90% of the taxes, income taxes. So, when you increase the income taxes____[15:16] try to lower the property tax . The same people are going to be hit with, but we need to figure out ways to no only coming over the tax rating. We also need to under the issue cutting the cost. New Jersey is a home-rule state, we will 566 municipalities and more than 610 school districts and there is lot of, we need to explore ways of funding education ____[15:45], shared services and eliminating the duplication. And we want to make sure that our tax dollars are spent properly towards the education and right now we don't have that balance. So, these are the types of issues whether it is environmental issues, open space preservation, farmland preservation, property tax. We also have a crisis in terms of malpractice insurance, we are addressing that, also automobile insurance. These insurances, right now the issues is not so much of affordability. The issue right now is accessibility, availability and lot of insurance company want to leave the state of New Jersey because they claim they are not making enough money and in the case of malpractice insurance, lot of the surgeons, they are not able to specialize in certain fields because of the extremely high malpractice insurance. So, for example if one as I said gynecologist and obstetrician and obstetrics there is exposing more risk, so people want to give up practicing as obstetrician and they want to stick being gynecologist. Right now, in Pennsylvania, they cannot deliver babies and they have to go out,____[17:10] That would happen in the state of New Jersey unless we are interested in the issue of malpractice insurance crisis.

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

(2600)

RENU AGRAWAL: Can you tell us about the bill number A510, which establishes the New Jersey Civil Rights Act? How is it different from United States Civil Rights Act?

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: I think US Civil Right Act provides the guarantee and the protection of civil rights is the cornerstone of our state and federal constitutions. It covers all the states incldin New Jersey. We wanted to make sure that we have a law that civil rights are important in the state of New Jersey. A510 provides a mechanism in the law which would provide individuals with a remedy. and was introduced in the assembly this year. The guarantee and protection of civil rights is the cornerstone of our State and federal Constitutions. It is the sponsor's belief that there needs to be a mechanism in the law which would provide individuals with a remedy whenever one person deprives another person of any rights, privileges or immunities or interefers with another's civil rights. This bill provides the citizens of this State with that protection.

RENU AGRAWAL: So you mean we never had any civil rights act.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: No not in New Jersey, specifically. We did not have it and that's the surprising thing to me. In US everybody talks about civil rights, and, this is the first time a bill was introduced and in part of the civil rights in the wake of what has happened to _____ people who are immigrants, who are coming from Indian subcontinent and what has happened and when you look different and you have different ethnicity there is always a responsibility for you. Fighting for your civil rights is important, people talk about the racial profiling and people were affected and people who came out and fought against it the African-Americans and lots of Hispanic-Americans. There are some Asian Indian-Americans who were also affected by racial profiling. Because we did not talk much about it and that issue was not raised and publicized. This is where we need to build bridges with the other communities and together, we have to fight for those issues. And lot of young Indian children and youngsters did get pulled over because they look different and for nothing else.

RENU AGRAWAL: Tell us some of the important issues related to the New Jersey Indian Community you would like to address.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Yeah, one of the important things right now is the economy. There are a lot of the Indian Americans employed in the IT, information technology community, they are having number of problems. One other problems is that, people who are here and H1 visa and they are dependent with the visa and with the homeland security related rules lot of the people are not able to get driving licenses and so that is creating a problem for enjoying this country. There is no public transportation and they depend on driving and that is one of the areas even though the department of motor vehicles employees are not equipped to deal with immigration issues. But, they are denying driving licenses because they have been looking for social security numbers for

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

that. Then we also looking at the IT companies how they are struggling. If you look at the state of New Jersey, and the percent of business NJ State does with Indian-American IT companies is negligible even though the American companies are leading in the IT industry in terms of doing outsourcing or placing the people working on site involved. Of course, the other issues were that of the healthcare, issues related to transportation, etc.. Overall an Indian community shares with other communities and of course we do have this jealousy, hate crimes and _____ discrimination, etc.. There are many complaints that the state employees at the department of environmental protection, department of transportation there are lot of people facing this bias and discrimination_____.

2700

RENU AGRAWAL: I think you know this was brought to my attention that the group was trying to collect the statistics on that. Actually, in 2000 December I had a rally at _____ State House and fighting against the discrimination of the state employees and not only the state employees of Indian, as well as Asian American who are not denied career advancement and when they ask for it and they were harassed. This was the issue, I wanted to bring to the attention of the elected officials.____ Now that we have a new administration, I have been trying to work with different commissioners trying to address that issue. Unless we speak up to everybody that there is a problem and the problem is not going to go away. We have to take courage to talk about and to criticize the reality what is going on and one of the things the friend of mine, Ved Chaudhry that he has been working with New Jersey State's Advisory Board to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, trying to gather data about the Indian American employees in the state and their qualifications and how they are not able to advance. Although _____ we are trying to make the report public, that report has not been released for the last three years. I had testified a couple of years ago. In addition, I even testified this year. This is something we have to be bold in speaking about it. Though, I think these are some of the issues whether it is the _____ feeling of being left out, employment-related issues, business opportunities of the Indian American Companies. These are some of the issues we need to address. Also, if you are here on a H1 and your children or your spouse could be on H4 visa.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Hmm.

RENU AGRAWAL: And that they go to State colleges.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Hmm, hmm.

RENU AGRAWAL: Even though they are studying here in High School for three or more years. When they go to the State college they have to pay out-of-state tuition.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Hmm.

RENU AGRAWAL: So I had introduced a bill A2633.

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Hmm, hmm.

RENU AGRAWAL: Other states_____ California, Texas, Utah, and New York allow in-state tuition for those students. My bill enables students who go to high school for three or more years here, in New Jersey, to in-state tuition at public institutions in the New Jersey.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Hmm, hmm.

RENU AGRAWAL: This will also help a lot of the H4 visa holders.

RENU AGRAWAL: Can you tell us why you sponsored the Bill No. A1766 which provides tuition assistance for children and spouses_____ of New Jersey residents killed _____ commission of a bias crime_____ committed in retaliation for the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Yeah, September 11, actually opened the eyes of the Americans, and not only Americans, it also opened the eyes of many new immigrant communities. One other thing, I have done is that the spontaneous reaction to what has happened after the September 11 destruction of the World Trade Center. Then some people started committing crimes, hate crimes, against the people who look different and they did not know the difference between a khalsa turban or a mullah turban_____ people, because they are coming from the Indian subcontinent until there was lot of hate crimes that were committed, as well as in the intent for us to raise the awareness of hate crimes. People could be, related to the victims of September 11 directly, but there are also people, who are subjected to hate crimes as a result of September 11 tragedy and so I am doing what I can to help the victims. I don't know how far I will succeed in getting this bill through, but I wanted to bring the awareness that there is an issue that America and New Jersey both need to be aware of.

javascript:ShowBill('A1766') Provides tuition assistance for children and spouses of New Jersey residents killed in the commission of a bias crime committed in retaliation for the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: It can have any future too, something?

RENU AGRAWAL: Right, I mean you know, we have a budget deficit_____.

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Do you have something to protect.

RENU AGRAWAL: No, what happened to Japanese Americans, they were citizens_____ and there are lot of of situations like this--the hatred and blame game..People will try to stereotype and attack one particular community and the other. I think we have to keep that in mind and protect our rights.

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

UPENDRA CHIVUKULA: Okay.

20701

RENU AGRAWAL: Upendra, I know you are a very busy man. How do you keep balance between your public service commitments and personal life?

UPENDRA: One of the things is that, I have a wonderful wife, who is very understanding and my children have been quite understanding also. The way I deal with that is to try to include my wife and children in many of the political events I go to. And it is definitely a problem in terms of not spending enough time at home with them, but they do understand that I am doing some public good and sometimes we all have to make our sacrifices. The way I look at, it is that my daughter is with me most of the times in many of the political events and my wife joins me on some events also. It is a severe balancing act and what I do that I try to set aside some time where we try to do things together. Whenever we get opportunities taking vacations together, instead of flying, we try to drive, so we have this captive time with each other. Recently, we went to Michigan to visit our son. We may be towards the end of his month, going to Florida. We will be driving and we will be spending some time together. Also, when I come home after the day in my public life, I share some of the stories. Sometimes my wife says, "You are talking too much about politics," and sometimes when I don't say anything she asks, "tell me what is happening in politics."

I think it is never going to be a perfect balance, but you try to do the best you can, but you know. There are a lot of NRI Indian families and there is a lot of give and take. So one needs to be able to try to bring some balance between the family and political life. I try to do the best I can.

RENU AGRAWAL: Ha ha ha.

UPENDRA: So it is tough with them and you have to try to go with the flow many of the time, many times.

RENU AGRAWAL: How good is your Spanish?

UPENDRA: My Spanish is quite reasonable. I think people are cautioned me that if I want to go for higher office they must be good in Spanish that's what people were telling me and so I think I know I get to watch novella those are _____ soap operas in Spanish.

SPEAKER 3: Do you know President Bush speaks?

UPENDRA: No. President Bush does not speak fluent Spanish. But, his brother Governor Zeb Bush does.

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

RENU AGRAWAL: Who is your political hero?

UPENDRA: Well, you know growing up in India, of course, Mahatma Gandhi and his nonviolence movement. also, Dr. Martin Luther King in US fighting for the civil rights not only for African-Americans but also, for each and everyone of us. I think that recently we have President Clinton who had the charisma and intellect_____ with which he was able to deal with many of the issues. President Jimmy Carter, who is doing outstanding community work with Habitat for Humanity and has been on various peace missions in the 80s and he got the noble prize for peace. There are number of heroes, I think. I do have Mrs. Kanak Dutta, who has been my political mentor and I like to remember her also as my political hero.

RENU AGRAWAL: Okay, what message would you like to give to the next generation?

UPENDRA: The key message is that success in the political process and the time it takes to get a return on your investment of your time is quite long. Because of our next generation should not look for shortcuts, but, work hard and be persistent. It is like the example of growing trees, but you may not enjoy the fruit. But, at least you have the satisfaction of planting the tree so that somebody else benefits. Politics is like a relay race, so whatever actions we are taking today may not benefit us right away, but our future generation, the youngsters will benefit. I think the important thing is that one needs to be engaged in the political process in whatever capacity they can. You can be getting your community of family or friends to be involved in the electoral process, trying to get appointed to different political appointments, and if you really feel that you want to make a difference by running for office, you may do so. But, it is not for everybody to run for office. And, you don't have to be elected to office to make a difference.

There are lots of issues for example there is a bill in the States senate, its S1349, which really hurts the business process outsourcing to many countries, especially, India was mentioned in the bill. These are the type of bills many of the our community members don't know even know about. It is keeping track of the things that are happening and raising awareness and concerns to the politicians about how this country is built on capitalism and how it is built on competitive principles and not promoting exclusionary trade_____ measures. These type of bills senate bill S1349 go against all those things and as a community we need to pool our resources together and we need to raise awareness about this type of anti-business bills.

These things in politics take time and you know the things needed to succeed are knowledge, hard work, and teamwork. I think as a community we need to work together and one of the key things I would really like to live by-- If I don't have anything good to say about somebody, I don't say anything. I think that's what we need to as a

INTERVIEW OF UPENDRA CHIVUKULA

community. We should speak bad of our community outside of our community preferably.

RENU AGRAWAL: Oh! Thank you so much Upendra. I have got a _____ India.

UPENDRA: Thank you.

RENU AGRAWAL: And wish you the best and I am sure you will go places and then really I will see you in Washington someday right. Thanks a lot.

UPENDRA: Thank you.