Women, Education and Leadership at Rutgers
2015
Interviewee: Melanie Willoughby (MW)
Interviewer: June Cross (JC)

MW: Hi. I’m Melanie Willoughby. And I’m presently the chief government affairs officer for the New Jersey Business and Industry Association and a graduate of Rutgers College Class of 1976. First class of women of which I’m very proud.

JC: And tell me what it was like being the first class of women.

MW: Being the first class of women at Rutgers was an adventure. A really - a roller coaster and, and how to adapt very quickly and be really flexible in a world that had been totally dominated by men and in which coming in, you were not considered to be a benefit on the campus. Mainly because men had full run of the campus and women were now sort of invading their property.

We were in their rooms and which they could no longer now have that dorm room. We were in their gymnasium. We wanted shower curtains in the bathrooms and they were, they were a little upset about us even being in their classroom, because I think they felt they had to behave when we were now in the classroom and they didn’t really have to behave like they, they did before.

JC: So they had to get more of the quorum on their part or less of the quorum?

MW: I think the men or boys as we thought of them then felt that they needed to have more of the quorum in the classroom but because of the fact that now these were women in the classroom who could be a potential girlfriend so I think they really needed to be on their best behavior.

JC: I see and it was tough for them?

MW: I think it was tough for the guys because of the fact that, now, you had women who were competing with them in the classroom for grades. That was a new adventure for them, especially since they felt that they were coming to a single sex institution and now they were in a situation where the women were right there excelling right alongside of them.

I can remember I took my many classes where I was the only woman in the class and so it was really a challenge to, first of all, be the only woman and second of all, getting past the men accepting you, you know, as being not just one of them but belonging there.

JC: When you say it was a challenge for you, how did that show up? Tell me what that was like?

MW: Well, the challenge was that the men were not as interested in, in like collaborating, cooperating being your friend, and so that's really.. I was looking for a collegial atmosphere on campus, and I think that it took a little while for them to get passed that. But we know that we accomplished a lot when I was in Campbell Dorm on the Rutgers College Campus. And ultimately, our motto, became for the brothers and sisters of Campbell 5th Incest is Best. So clearly, we had made our mark. We're becoming best friends because my dorm floor was mixed. It was men and women.
JC: Yeah. [laughing] That sounds ... That's a great slogan. [laughing]

MW: Yes. That was our slo-

JC: Do you have pictures of that?

MW: I don’t. But it ... But the dorm floor of Campbell 5th actually produced many husbands and wives.

JC: Okay.

MW: I’m not sure they’re still together but they certainly were after they graduated from Rutgers College.

JC: And for you personally, what was the experience like?

MW: My experience at Rutgers was phenomenal. I grew up at Rutgers. I matured at Rutgers. I got a lot of the skills that I needed in order to be able to be successful in the political world and that's really what I was looking for. I wanted always to go into government and make a difference and, and so for, for me being at Rutgers, the state university, I got to meet a lot of really key people in the political world in Trenton. I became very experienced in student government because I was very involved from the time I was freshman and then became the first women student government president at Rutgers College.

Actually it was 3 men and myself who were running and so they basically cross each other out and I cruised to victory which it was fun. I loved it but being in that leadership role was a golden opportunity for me to really see what I was made of and being able to manage student government and work with the administration and learn all those skills that you’re not learning in the classroom, you’re learning certainly as you do it, and taking your bumps along the way.

JC: Do you remember what your slogan was?

MW: Well, when I ran for student government president, I actually didn’t have a slogan. One of my best friends, Debbie, was my campaign manager and she decided that my name was very popular on campus. Melanie Willoughby. A lot of people knew my name because of all the events and that I had run in student government but they didn’t necessarily know what I looked like but at the same time, they knew that I worked in the cafeteria throughout all my time at Rutgers but they didn’t necessarily know my name.

And so she decided to put it all together into this wonderful poster with my face and my name. Like Melanie Willoughby for student government president and that was brilliant because they were like, "Oh, that's Melanie Willoughby. I didn’t know that was Mel- I want to know Melanie Willoughby, she's ... Yeah, I see her all the time in the cafeteria." And so in the cafeteria when I was running, I was like, "Hi. I’m Melanie Willoughby." "Oh, yeah. I saw your poster."

And so that was extremely helpful. My campaigning was brilliant. My campaign manager was, is, just brilliant. She, I still see her. She's still a dear friend. Now that cemented that relationship which is lovely.
JC: What do you think Rutgers did for you that you would not have otherwise been able to do?

MW: I think that Rutgers provided me with a foundation for being able to grow and develop because it was a very large place. You really had to have a tremendous amount of patience, ingenuity about how to work the bureaucracy at Rutgers. There were brilliant professors who I really learned a lot from and Dr. Dick McCormick, who was the dean of Rutgers College, was one of my mentors who I adored and he really helped me a lot in guiding me with, you know, thinking about government and ethics and how you should behave as a leader, and he himself epitomizes that and so I really enjoyed working with him.

I also loved certainly what it meant to be able to get along with men in a very meaningful way that didn’t involve a relationship which I found to be very useful because of the fact that, you know it takes a lot of, I think, energy to be able to understand how to develop those relationships and make them strong and with respect and equal and have them want to be your colleague and work with you.

I remember Dr. Bob Oaks, who was the head of the security at Rutgers, and Bob Oaks was a marine, a former marine, and head of security and a very much a man's man. And he could not understand what women were doing at Rutgers nor what I was doing as a student body president. So, it took a lot to really win him over. That I knew what I was doing, that I was capable and competent and that I could take him at any time.

So that was the most wonderful relationship I got from Rutgers, besides Dr. McCormick.

JC: Do you remember the day that he finally got it, that you could take him at any time?

MW: Yes, actually, I do. I do remember when he gave me a really hard like pat on the back that almost like I was going to fall right over [laughing] but, but I didn’t, thank goodness, and he was like, "Melanie! You're great!"

JC: What had you done?

MW: I think that we were navigating parking on campus...

...but certainly in Rutgers because it's, you know, in New Brunswick, but yes, my relationship with Bob Oaks was very strong and I remember him extremely fondly.

So as a student government president at Rutgers we had a lot of interaction with the administration of Governor Brendan T. Byrne because the governor and his treasurer announced that they were going to raise tuition and, of course, that strikes at the heart of any student and parents about raising tuition and they're very unhappy about that.

And so we decided to have a rally down in Trenton and bringing students in from all over the state and from all of the state colleges as well as Rutgers. And so we had this big rally we organized down in Trenton as well as having a public policy forum at the university to talk about what the problems were with state government in being able to deliver on the promises for additional moneys for higher education. I remember the treasurer, Dick Leone, came and spoke and so we were about educating
the students and their parents at the same time that we were, of course, marching and demonstrating.

And so as a result I got to know a lot of people within the governor's administration but Rutgers because it's a state school also had a lot of students who were graduates who went on to be involved in politics who were my counterparts and I was able to get to know them. They were upperclassman going on and working in the administration so I knew them when they were students and now they were my contacts for moving on into the administration.

JC: Can you name any names?

MW: Well, one of them actually was Robert Torricelli who was a US Senator. He was also at Rutgers and he was someone that I got to know through student government and he went to work into the administration of Governor Brendan Byrne. He was actually working in his office when I came into work into the administration.

JC: Wow! So what, what was it about the student government that made you that set you off on this trajectory because you said you, you left. What happened when you left Rutgers? Let me ask that. So you left Rutgers. You were student body president for a year, your senior year?

MW: I was student body president for one year. And then when I graduated I was able to get a job as the legislative liaison for the Department of Community Affairs in the Brendan Byrne administration. And a legislative liaison is otherwise known as a lobbyist. Only they don’t call them lobbyist when they are within the departments. But our responsibility was to lobby the legislature for the policies of the governor. And so they had them in every department. And I was lucky enough to be able to come into the Department of Community Affairs which at the time was run by Pat Sheehan who had been the mayor of the city of New Brunswick, had very close roots to Rutgers. And with my contacts at Rutgers I was able to have that parlayed into a position in the Department of Community Affairs.

So I stayed as the head of Government Affairs, I grew to be State and Federal Affairs and I stayed through half of his first administration and the whole rest of his second administration.

JC: So tell me how being student government president, how you were able to parlay that into your career, where you are now.

MW: Being student government president gave me an opportunity to really meet a lot of people in the administration of Governor Byrne and to also I think impress a lot of those at Rutgers administration who really were interested in my being successful. And but between those two opportunities I was able to become the legislative liaison in the Department of Community Affairs and Pat Sheehan was the commissioner and she had been the mayor of the city of New Brunswick and so was very close to Rutgers and knew a lot of people in the Rutgers administration.

I was very, very fortunate because she was a wonderful mentor. You know, a phenomenal leader of that department and she really helped me in understanding Government Affairs from her perspective. She had been a mayor she was now the commissioner of a major department and in a great administration. So I really, I really learned a lot from her.
Now a legislative liaison means a lobbyist essentially, although they didn’t call it that at at, because a lobbyist would not I think have been appropriate. But a legislative liaison meant that I lobbied on behalf of that department for the governor with the legislator so any types of bills that the legislature was interested in passing that impacted our department I needed to be active on.

So we were a department that, I always like to call the Statue of Liberty of state government because of the fact that it dealt with municipal governments and keeping them solvent. It dealt with the elderly. We had a division on women. We had a division on the uniform construction code which was housing and construction and making sure all houses were built to code. And so we were sort of a hodge-podge of a lot of different things but it was all about the community and how you deliver services to the community and we did have one more depart-division.

Actually, it was dealing with community services so we were all about how you pass on state money to grant programs to help the community strive. Um, so it was a, it was a department that was founded out of the 60s where the communities were so torn apart, uh, in New Jersey and it was trying to rebuild them and so that’s how the Department of Community Affairs came about.

JC: Okay. You also maintained your relationship with Rutgers even after you graduated.

MW: I was very devoted to Rutgers. Rutgers had done so much for me that I really wanted to give back. So it was actually a funny story because of the fact that Dick McCormick the dean said that, “You know, that Rutgers Alumni Association which had only men up to this point is going to have their first woman. And so it will be you.” And so the day that I graduated, he made sure they appointed me to the Rutgers Alumni Association. So I was on their board.

And so once again, I was this token woman with a lot of men were kind of resentful that Rutgers had gone coed and so I had to win them over and prove again that I was worthy of having graduated from Rutgers. and that, you know, we were a good thing for the college. So that was great fun and within 10 years I grew to be the president of the Rutgers Alumni Association. So I was the first woman to be president in the alumni association. And so the big joke was that the alumni association you see used to be all about football and what game are we going to.

And I was not interested in football. Oh dear. That was a no, no. But, so my feeling was that the alumni association really needed to be more of a full-service operation where the alumni were actually going to get benefits from being in the alumni association and have networking and career opportunities and really talk about how we could serve the alumni that we were collecting dues from and not just go to football games.

So I didn’t suspend the plane trips to the football games, but I limited them because I thought that was not the right choice. During my term there were no plane trips to football games but they reconstruct. We ...

JC: Plane trips, you mean the alumni association actually used to fly?

MW: Yes. So the alumni association used to pay for the alumni board to go to the away games. Yes, I know. But, you know, they were there to raise the banner but I thought that was something we should not
be doing and so I did away with it but then they brought it back, however, I don’t think they do it anymore.

JC: Yeah.

MW: Yeah.

JC: I'm sure there’s not enough money to do what you were doing now.

MW: Hmm, no. But for me, the alumni association was about service back to the alumni and that we were now having a very diverse alumni. We had women and men and men who were not just interested in sports but had come up in music and the band and who were, you know, interested in intellectual pursuits and I wanted to be able to broaden everyone's horizons even as alumni.

And to also give back so we should mentor the students and we should be thinking about how we do service to the community. So there was a lot of changes when I became president. And I'm very proud of them.

JC: Hmm. And then you went on to be on the Rutgers board of trustees.

MW: Yes...well, the, the alumni association actually gets to pick representatives in the alumni association to serve on the board of trustees of the university. So there's 2 boards. There's the board of governors of the university and then there is the board of trustees. And so the board of trustees is where you have a lot of your alumni representatives. And I was the first women from Rutgers College to be appointed to the Rutgers board of trustees and I served for 6 years which is the term.

And then I cycled off. But it was a great experience to really understand the whole university because I was just at Rutgers College and, you know, the university is so many parts and so big. And it was a great chance for me to really experience all the schools.

JC: So you talked about having to prove that you were worthy of being there. I mean that sounds like it takes a certain emotional toll.

MW: Let me think about this. So I think in the world of politics college, work, wherever there are a very strong ... Oh let me start this over again. How this ... how to characterize this because it's tough. Alright. I'll try this again. Okay.

MW: Okay. When you're breaking down barriers that have existed for centuries, women being viewed in a way other than as a wife, mother, girlfriend. It is I believe very hard to do that and do it in a way that is going to bring the men to respect you and feel that you are confident and they're equal. And that I think takes a lot of fortitude and continuing to have to be better than they are at what they do.

But at the same time, not break them when you do that, then it is not achieving your goal which is to work with them. So it's how not to be the bitch. It's how not to be the “Oh she is so aggressive, I really don't want to have anything to do with her” and then they're not going to be cooperative and want to be on your team. And so when you're trying to lead a team, you need to have them right there with
you by your side and you can't have them feeling that I'm not going to be on her team and really trying to thwart you.

So I think that the breaking down of the barriers is very hard when you're the first one and the only one and there's really no other women around you to, to help you with this, guide you, because there wasn't anyone ahead of me in that. It was me, myself and I with many of the roles that I played. So it was I think many of the men were my mentors in helping me with that about, "You know, Melanie, you might have been a little too strident there. No, you know, you know how to get to the general." Actually, the general was the executive director of the alumni association who was a marine. I had a lot of experience with marines.

And who was a marine and who had very, they had very different ideas about where a woman's place is. And it certainly wasn't at Rutgers and it also wasn't running the alumni association and it wasn't being someone who is in charge. And I think that you have to really be able to balance their egos and balance their own needs and try to do it all and do it in a way that they're not going to feel threatened but you're still in charge.

Now, if I could tell you right now in simple words how I did that, I do not know really. I don't remember. But it did ... It was a process that I went through because there many times when I would get my mentors come and say, "No, no. No." That you're not going to get anywhere that way. And I would say, "But, but it's, it's what I want. It's how I feel." Well perhaps that was a little too strong, Melanie. A little too strong, you know. You need to be a little more convincing, controlling. You get, you know, more done with sugar than you do with a hammer."

JC: You get to attract more bees with honey than with vinegar.

MW: Right. Right. Right. Exactly. You know, I, I think that it, it was it got much better when there were more women.

JC: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

MW: But then, once there were more women but then, they were looking to me to be the guiding light, to be their mentor of how to make this work. And that was also a big responsibility that I felt very acutely on how to do that. So for me, I wanted to be able to you know, have a lot of women involved and open up the doors both at Rutgers and now, there's more women going to Rutgers than there are men.

You know, the alumni association which has had many women presidents, you know, the college itself, you know, where there's women in leadership and that's, you know, those barriers have been broken, not as far as we'd like to go in terms of the glass ceiling of the corporate CEO office, but we're making great strides and, you know, I'm just really glad that I was there at the beginning because it was a lot of fun.

JC: Yeah. Did you ever consider going to Douglass or did you ever cross over to Douglass or.. How did you perceive Douglass College when you were there?
MW: I never wanted to go to Douglass and all of my friends who went to Douglass know that. So I have no problem saying I didn't. Because I did not want to be in an environment of all women because I felt that I was going to have to learn how to work with men really well and if I went to a school that was all women, that was not going to be helpful to me.

Now my friends who did go to Douglass said that they went to Douglass to learn how to become strong within themselves so that they could go out into the world. And my feeling was you better learn that in college because you don't want to try that experiment in the world and so for me, experimenting at Rutgers was far better as I learned about how aggressive I was and how I needed to temper the way I am because my natural inclination is to be pretty strong. And that people, you know, sometimes just don't take it to. I don't understand it myself but they don't take to it.

JC: Just do it your way.

MW: I just want to do it my way or not. It ... [laughing] So yeah but I had to learn how to temper that.

I think Rutgers was the best place for me. And because of the fact that it was where I could develop my political skills. It was where I could learn about New Jersey politics which is what I wanted to be engaged in. And I didn't really consider any other school. I'll tell you a story. My guidance counselor, Edith LaPerry, who I loved to death at Howell High School, you know, one day is running after me down the hall- because I was a president of the student council so I was very involved in lots of things that she had to catch me.

And she's running down the hall, "Melanie, Melanie, Rutgers is going coed. You need to go to Rutgers." Like, "What?" She said, "Yes. You have to apply to college and you need to go to Rutgers. I'm getting the application now. That's where you're going." And I was like, "Okay. Fine. That's where I'm going to go." And that's where I went. I only applied to Rutgers. She said, "They're taking 200 women. They want the best and the brightest in the state and you are a natural. So you're going to Rutgers." There was no questioning Mrs. LaPerry. I was going to Rutgers. And that's where I went and I'm just thrilled that I did that.

JC: Great. Wow. So from your first year at NJBIA you've sort of, you cycled off of the boards, you look at the future of Rutgers and the challenges and opportunities that face it and its ability. Well, it's becoming almost all universities are majority women now. What are the challenges and opportunities you see for the university looking ahead?

MW: Well, right now, in my position at NJBIA, I actually work very closely with Rutgers and all of the higher education institutions because we are very active in the innovation world, meaning that we would like to build great research capacity here in New Jersey so that all the businesses that presently think that they can get great research at other universities in other states that they should stay here. They shouldn't be leaving.

And I don't want them going to Massachusetts. I don't want them going to North Carolina, San Diego, even Utah. I really want them staying in New Jersey and working with our great universities. And Rutgers is our gem. it's really you know, grown and developed and has great research capabilities but it is just not as well-known as it needs to be and I really want to put it on the map. So NJBIA has an
innovation of coalition that we have built to try to ensure that businesses know about the research
capabilities of our great universities here.

And so that's why I'm pleased to have now a new relationship with Rutgers. That is all about how I can help it build and grow and then that provides more entrepreneurship opportunities for students and then the patents are developed and stay here and that helps our economic growth and it's really just like a cycle of life of, you know, you create more entrepreneurs. They create more great science. They create more product. It stays in New Jersey and we have a better flow of the economy.

So when women came to Rutgers, um, back in 1972, um, the, there was certainly a competition between the Rutgers women and the Douglass women because it was felt that the Rutgers women were smarter. And we weren't there for MRS degrees. We were there for being great accomplished women and that the men at Rutgers were interested in dating the women at Douglass more than the Rutgers women because of the fact that the Douglass women were more interested in the future married life than necessarily the Rutgers women.

It didn't mean the Rutgers women were not dating. Clearly, the motto of our dorm floor in my freshman year which was, you know, the Brothers and Sisters of Campbell 5th incest is best, but clearly that was not about getting married. That was more about having sex. I think it was more what we were involved with at the time. But it was, there was definitely a difference between the two. And that sort of rivalry continues certainly through the 4 years that I was there.

I don't believe that that exists. You know, there's a lot of changes that have gone on, consolidation of the colleges and you know, even the living arrangements have changed so dramatically because on the Douglass campus I believe men can now live there. But the, you know, the dorms that in Rutgers were coed. So you could have a man going in your bathroom because, you know, he just felt like it, you know, and you're like, "Okay. Fine. You know, whatever." [laughing] So ... And because they didn't take out the urinals so they can't go anywhere. I mean they kept the bathrooms totally intact. We just had the shower curtains to ours. So if they want their shower curtain they could come to ours and take our shower curtain.

JC: What other things that women have to fight for during those 4 years, 72 to 76?

MW: Women had to fight for the right to have a gynecologist on campus. We had to fight for the dispensing of birth control pills. We had to fight for the shower curtains in our bathrooms. We needed time at the gym. We wanted women sports which took a while to get. We wanted women studies without having to go to Douglass because women studies was at Douglass. But we'd like it at Rutgers. That's when you still had courses that were duplicative, you know, across the campus, the various campuses.

So safety also became an issue with more lights on the campus because, you know, Douglass campus was much more lit than the Rutgers college campus. And so we wanted, well, the safety. So also the types of clubs that, you know, we would have at the Rutgers College were, you know, that would be for, for women. So it- there were lots of things that they haven't thought about. They were like, "Oh we're going to open the admittance for women." And they'll come in and they'll like, "No. We have a few more things that we would like that we demand." So that also was where I really got to know the administration really well because I would go in with our list of demands, you know, to the president
of the, well the head of the college and then the dean of students and, yeah. So we were loud. We were boisterous. We were rowdy. We were demanding.

JC: So you heard ... But you're also in the alumni association of the board. So were you around during the conversation about unifying the faculty and taking Douglass of making Douglass?

MW: No. I was already off the board of, you know, Rutgers University board of trustees. I was already off the board at that time but I certainly have a lot of friends who are very involved in that. And they felt very strongly about keeping the identity of Douglass. So you know, I have mellowed somewhat overall these years. Hard to believe but I have mellowed.

And in mellowing, I realized that, you know, everyone needs a different type of environment for themselves to be able to grow and develop. And for me, it was being immersed in an all-male environment because I knew that's what politics was going to be like and that's what I needed. But it's not for everybody and, you know, other women were going to develop in a different way and I understand that now. I didn't understand that then. Didn't want to understand that then. But I do now.

MW: So during my time at Rutgers, we were just trying to get intramural sports for women, because Title IX hadn't come along yet. And so it's not that, you know, we wanted to have dodge ball like I had back in high school. But I wanted to ensure that, you know, women had, you know, athletic time but it wasn't as big until, you know, later on in the years after I graduated.

JC: Yeah. How much do you think the changes that came about in the 70s were influenced by the sort of the tumult of the like 68 and 69, the unrest, then takeover at, on the newer campus.

MW: And they took over their ROTC building and burned it down at Rutgers.

MW: During the 60s and the early 70s, it was a very tumultuous time in our society. We were seeing the rise of the civil rights movement, the rise of the women's movement, feminism, the whole issue of how women were going to be treated in society and their exploration of what their rights were and I think the Feminine Mystique written by Betty Friedan was very chilling for a lot of women sort of seeing themselves in that book.

We also had the freedom now of birth control pills I think which was huge in freeing women from a double standard which certainly was prevalent on campus when I went to Rutgers. Also the drinking age was 18. You were in the middle of the Vietnam War. And actually, the Vietnam War ended when I was a junior. But there was just so much tumult in society and so politics was also, they're very tumultuous as well. So I think that all propelled people to start questioning the establishment, questioning the authority figures, questioning their own identity and how they fit in and so there was a lot of questioning of like why is it that only men are running the world.

And we could also be part of that. And I think that when they finally admitted women to Rutgers it was after Princeton, who already admitted women, Harvard, a lot of other single sex institutions that already made a change. And, you know, recognize that it was time.

JC: Oh certainly did your time. [laughing]
MW: I came around at the right time. I was very fortunate to be coming at the time that Rutgers went coed.

I'm the first in my family to go to college. But my two brothers were younger than me definitely went to college at Rutgers. I was very proud of that. And it was important that for my family that, you know, I go to the college. So it was ... We were also, you know, we needed to go to a state school because we weren't able to afford anything other than that.

And so that was fortunate for me. I got a number of scholarships and was able to afford to go at a time when it wasn't $40,000 to go to school. Um, I spent $575 for my tuition at Rutgers. That was a lot of money then.

JC: 4 years.

MW: For one year, $575. $575 for tuition at Rutgers. It's unheard of now clearly but it was a lot of money then.

JC: It was a lot of money then.

MW: In 1972, it's a lot of money then. I mean you could buy a 5-room, 5-bedroom home for $19,000 which my parents did. They bought a 5-bedroom home for $19,000 back then. So you ...

JC: What do your parents do?

MW: My father was a truck driver and my mother was a retail clerk. So you know, it was a very hardworking, you know, lower middle class and wanting to have their children better themselves.

JC: What Rutgers has done for a lot of students...

MW: Yes. Rutgers actually has been that kind of institution to provide a better life for a lot of families that did not have a higher education for the parents but certainly had that for their children. And that provided opportunities for both myself and my two brothers.

Rutgers was a great preparation for the position I have now because it was a state university and if so, it was a political university who depended on a lot of money from the state and had a lot of connections to the administration of the university. So I got involved in politically at the university. I ran for student government. I grew to be the president of student government and I was involved in all kinds of student activities.

And so as a result, I really got the foundation of understanding how politics works how contacts are your way to being able to secure a great position and it's who you know. And it's making sure that who you know respects you and thinks you're great so that they are willing to recommend you and that's what I was able to build at Rutgers college through the administrators I knew and then because of the people in the Byrne administration that I got to know because I was president of student government. So I was able to parlay that into a job in the Byrne administration after I graduated.

JC: And from there?
MW: And after working in the Byrne administration, when the governor can only have two terms so I moved on from there and I became the president of the New Jersey Retail Merchants Association, which runs the lobbying activities for all retailers in the state. And that was a phenomenal activity because retail’s a really gutsy, risk-taking industry and I love working with the retailers because they were the kind of scrappy risk-taking people that I thought were just terrific.

And they're sort of the like in every town and, you know, people take it for granted but it is hard being a retailer, really hard. And I just love working for them and representing them. So I was able to do that for 17 years so that was a great training ground for me with understanding how retail works, have a great respect for them and shopping. I love shopping. So it was perfect for me to represent the retailers all the time. [laughing]