

PROFILES IN CITIZENSHIP: **CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN**



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Christine Todd Whitman has had a lot of opportunities in her life, but the luxury of being politically indifferent wasn't one of them. Not for her was the option of saying, "Politics doesn't matter. It has nothing to do with me." Since the day her parents met (at the Republican National Convention, of all

places, in 1932), her fate was sealed. How do you disdain politics when it's the mainstay of every dinner-table conversation, when you go to political meetings as a little girl with your mom, and when you attend your first political convention at the age of nine (and have been to every single one of them since)?

Nope, political apathy wasn't in the cards for Whitman. Growing up listening to the debates between her ultra-conservative dad who believed that government should stay out of people's lives, and her more socially conscious Republican mom who saw a role for government to help people improve themselves, she forged the moderate philosophy that has taken her from New Jersey freeholder, to two-term governor of the state, to President George W. Bush's first director of the Environmental Protection Agency, and back to private life.

Whitman articulated that philosophy in her 2005 book, *It's My Party, Too*, a passionate effort by a pro-environment, pro-choice, fiscally conservative Republican to reclaim the party she loves from the extremist forces she thinks have hijacked its traditional principles. "It's amazing that those who seem to be the most conservative can't seem to find enough ways to get the federal government involved in your life," she says wryly.

Sitting in the huge paneled barn of an office she uses today, with its heart-stopping views of the fields

that extend beyond the New Jersey home she grew up in, she talks about the necessity of moderation and compromise in governance. Even her voice is measured—matter-of-fact and judicious—as she recounts the barriers that extreme partisanship threw in her way at the EPA. "It's when you want to take people by the hair and shake them and say, 'Look, if you say you care so much about this issue, then quit yelling and start solving problems'."

Problem solving is what she is all about—it's why being governor suited her to a tee. "Just being in the executive branch to start with is more satisfying to me than the legislative. . . . [A]s governor you really can, in this state particularly, see a problem, say, 'That's the problem I want to solve, here's how we're thinking about doing it. . . .' And then you can get it done."

Her stint at the EPA was maddening to her precisely because her efforts to get things done were hampered, partly by politics (in her book she recounts how some of her efforts were undermined by the Bush administration) and partly by the fact that the environmental legislation passed by Congress left her little room to maneuver. Before taking the job, she hadn't realized "how constrained the agency is by the enabling legislation. How specific Congress was in the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act as to what the agency could and couldn't do. And so your ability to be innovative is amazingly narrowed. And when you try