THE INTERVIEWER: Okay. For the record, we're sitting here in New York City on Thursday, the 12th of November in 2009 and we're very grateful to Governor George Pataki for taking some time to talk with us for the CSEA 100 Project. So, Governor, thank you very much.

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Well, thank you. I'm looking forward to the opportunity.

THE INTERVIEWER: Great. You know,
my typical first question, and you've already kind of jumped into it in our conversation, is to ask people about when they first became aware of an organization called CSEA, so I wonder if you would --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: You know --

THE INTERVIEWER: -- tell us that.

GOVERNOR PATAKI: -- I remember very well when I first became aware of the CSEA and it was when I first started as a staffer with Senator Bernie Gordon from my home town of Peekskill, and I was very close to him. We had grown up in a small town together. He was chairman of the Judiciary Committee and I was one of his counsel, and he was running for re-election and he was going down to

meet the CSEA to ask for their endorsement for re-election and he said, "Pataki, why don't you come along. You know, you might wanna do something politically some day and it wouldn't hurt."

And I had known State workers and had tremendous respect for State workers since I was a little kid, and I grew up in a very rural background on a farm, and that farm was alongside a State highway that the State had actually taken from my grandparents for -- by eminent domain and we used to have our cows go out on the side of the highway and I know this sounds strange, but -- and the State worker, and I'll never forget. I was like seven or eight years old. His name was Charlie -- and he said, "Why don't you let the cows stay off for a while and when I come by to do my job I'll use this sickle thing and I'll cut it and you can have the hay.

And so for the next couple of years, you know, we'd always -- my grandfather and father'd have me out there with a rake after Charlie from the State had cut the grass, getting
GOVERNOR GEORGE PATAKI

the hay for the cows, and I just remember. I had
so much respect for him because he worked very

1 hard, he was doing my family a favor that was not
2 at all in any way inconsistent with his job with
3 the State, and the only thing he ever wanted was a
4 glass of water on a hot day, and since I was a
5 little kid that memory has stayed with me.
6
7 And then when I went down for the
8 endorsement meeting with Senator Gordon, you know,
9 I didn't know what to expect. I had not been
10 involved in politics, certainly not at that level,
11 and I just saw the people and they were my
12 neighbors, they were the parents of my friends,
13 they were just really good people who did their job
14 with a great deal of pride, and I immediately felt
15 a strong connection to those workers, having come
16 from a working-class background.
17
18 THE INTERVIEWER: Sure. Now when
19 you were in the Legislature, what was your
20 relationship like? You kinda continued this whole
21 set of town meetings and that kind of thing with
22 CSEA folks?
23
24 GOVERNOR PATAKI: Oh, yeah. I
25 continued to work with -- not so much State people,
26 but my local people. I was a very active local, in
27 my district, and I would work with the local

1 officials and I'd work with the different union
2 groups, and I always had a good relationship with
3 them and always tried to be respectful and see
4 where we could find common ground. Sometimes I
5 could support the issues, sometimes I couldn't, but
6 that's the nature of the democratic system.
7
8 THE INTERVIEWER: Sure. When you
GOVERNOR GEORGE PATAKI

first ran for Governor in 1994 --
GOVERNOR PATAKI: M-m h-m-m.
THE INTERVIEWER: -- what do you
remember about CSEA's role in that campaign?
GOVERNOR PATAKI: You know, I'm a
Republican, so everybody had told me, oh, you gotta
be very suspicious of --
THE INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.
GOVERNOR PATAKI: -- the State
unions and everything, but I also had my own family
background. I was a life member of the
International Brotherhood of Firemen & Oilers and
my grandfather was a strong union man, so when I
went in I honestly didn't know what to expect, but
what I found was a very fair and open-minded group
of people who wanted to hear me out and wanted to
give me a chance, and wanted to hear the criticism

1 I had of the prior administration and what I
2 thought.
3 And at the end the CSEA decided to
4 stay neutral which, for me, was a tremendous
5 victory, and I just was very pleased with the
6 reception; that people were open-minded, they were
7 fair, they listened and they gave me a chance, and
8 that's something that will always stay with me.
9 THE INTERVIEWER: There was a very
10 interesting situation when you first became
11 Governor because you had run on a platform of
12 downsizing the State work force and --
13 GOVERNOR PATAKI: uh-huh, uh-huh.
14 THE INTERVIEWER: -- trying to cut
15 government, and so there was sort of a contentious
16 relationship publicly with CSEA, in particular over
17 some public policy decisions, yet there was also a
18 contract that was coming up for renewal and on a
19 very pragmatic level you were working with the
20 union trying to come to some conclusion.
GOVERNOR GEORGE PATAKI

Could you talk a little bit about the --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yeah. You know, I think there's always inherent tension between the executive who has an obligation to all of the people of the State and the leaders who represent the workers of the State because their obligation is to try to get the best possible contract for their workers and, of course, there's tension and, of course, there's gonna be battles. But so long as you keep talking, so long as you respect and listen to each other, I'm a great believer that you can always find common ground and, in fact, the State was broke. In fact we needed dramatically to lower the tax burden or we weren't going to have any private sector jobs, and without private sector jobs you didn't have the revenue to pay the public employees, and I made that case as strongly as I could. We had our battles, but at the end were able to find common ground and achieve a decent contract.

And over the time I was Governor we reduced the State work force significantly, but we had almost no layoffs, because we -- I would just explain, you know: Look, we cannot sustain this level of work force. We're gonna have to reduce it. How can we do it? And we'd work together, things like early retirement incentives or a hard hiring freeze where we didn't replace people as opposed to mass layoffs, and throughout my entire time it wasn't easy but we were able to reduce the size of the State work force in a way that resulted in virtually no layoffs, and that's a tribute to
the flexibility that the union leadership showed
and my team's willingness to listen and to work
together.

THE INTERVIEWER: Even apart from
the role of the union in that relationship, I
wonder if you would just talk a little bit about
the challenge for a Governor where you're trying to
lead the State --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: M-m h-m-m.

THE INTERVIEWER: -- you have public
policy objectives --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: M-m h-m-m.

THE INTERVIEWER: -- but to that
State work force you're the boss.

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Right.

THE INTERVIEWER: So it's a very
different --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Right.

THE INTERVIEWER: -- relationship.

That's right, and
you are the Executive, you're the one who proposes
the budget and negotiates the contracts that they
have to live under, and it inherently does create
tension. It's the same as -- maybe not exactly the
same, but it's analogous to when the Governor has
to deal with local governments. You know, you want
to accomplish the same thing. They want more from
the State and the State oftentimes is not in a
position where you can give them more, so it can be
very challenging and it was lots of times, but so
long as you stay open-minded and talk, I always
believe you can find common ground and most of the
time we were able to do that.

THE INTERVIEWER: It seemed during
your first term that there was an evolving
relationship with CSEA to the point where in your
second term CSEA actually endorsed you --
GOVERNOR GEORGE PATAKI

19	GOVERNOR PATAKI: Right.
20	THE INTERVIEWER: -- for re-election. I wonder if you would talk about how that change occurred and what your memories of it --
24	GOVERNOR PATAKI: You know, when I

1 first got elected people understandably didn't know me, and I ran as a strong fiscal conservative as I believed that we had to lower the tax burden and reduce the size of the government, so there was a great deal of skepticism among the public employees and the public work force, and those first couple of years were very difficult.

8	You know, everyone knows I'm very committed to the environment and to open space. I cut those programs. I wanted to do more to help education. I cut education programs. But what I said the whole way through is we have got to get a strong private economy so we can generate the revenues so we can do these programs, and as the revenues do come back, as the private sector jobs do come back, we will look to work with you to see how we can work cooperatively and build from where we are.

19	And, you know, as I said, there was a lot of skepticism at first and I understand that skepticism, but the whole way through I tried to keep my word, and when the opportunity existed to do something positive and cooperative with the public employees, more often than not we were able to do that, so we went through our difficult periods but it was always with the understanding that I believed it was necessary to go through
those difficult periods so we could work together
going forward.

THE INTERVIEWER: Sure. Now in 1999 there was sort of an unprecedented thing that happened and that was that CSEA State employees rejected a tentative agreement --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: M-m h-m-m,
m-m h-m-m.

THE INTERVIEWER: -- with the State and it set off about a year-long very contentious, public fight with your administration. I wonder if you would talk about what you remember from that time.

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Oh, that was a tremendous battle. You know, it was very disappointing when the workers voted down the contract we had negotiated, and that just put us all in a tough position. You know, I didn't want to be in a position where the State would reach a final deal and then have to go beyond that final deal, particularly as it appeared to me that the economy was going to be slowing down.

And, of course, the union leadership understood that the workers had rejected the deal and had to get something better, so it made it extraordinarily difficult and we had a very tough year and we both stuck to our guns and held true to our principles and it was -- it was very challenging for all of us, but I think one of the reasons for all the difficulties we were able to get through it is I always respected the State workers and their leadership and whenever there would be -- the press would ask me, well, you know, you had this battle going on, I would always start right out by saying our State workers are the best in the country. I have enormous respect for them and I hope we can reach an agreement, but it has to
be within the fiscal realities that the State can
afford.

And I think the whole way through
the union leadership and the workers understood
that it wasn't that I was trying to do something
against their interests. I was just looking at the
bigger picture, so as hard as the State workers and
the union leaders fought, I think they respected

the fact that this was nothing other than a
difference -- a legitimate and honest difference as
to what was necessary to move the State forward.

THE INTERVIEWER: Well, I want to
talk a little bit about the public confrontation
over that, but I know that when we had Linda Angelo
in to do the interview, who was your --
GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yes, my labor --
THE INTERVIEWER: -- the Governor's
Office of Employee Relations --
GOVERNOR PATAKI: Right.
THE INTERVIEWER: At the time, she
said that there was always very good back channel
communications --
GOVERNOR PATAKI: Absolutely.
THE INTERVIEWER: -- going on
between the Administration and CSEA throughout that
whole time.
GOVERNOR PATAKI: Absolutely. We
always talked and we always, I think, respected the
concerns that the other side had and, you know, you
can have difficult times and real challenges, and
we sure did for over a year there, but it doesn't
mean that you should treat the other side as being
horribly wrong or doing something wrong. Both
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2 parties had to act in what they saw as the
3 interest -- in my case, for the entire State and
4 the taxpayers, and the CSEA leaders view in the
5 interest of their workers and ultimately we got it
6 done.
7
8 THE INTERVIEWER: Well, what CSEA
9 ended up doing in that fight was dogging you all
10 across the state.
11 GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yes.
12 THE INTERVIEWER: We would show up
13 sometimes a little more vocally, sometimes just a
14 little more visibly.
15 GOVERNOR PATAKI: Oh, I had pickets
16 everywhere. I had pickets everywhere I went.
17 THE INTERVIEWER: We even -- I think
18 we even had an AFSCME contingent when you went out
19 to Montana --
20
21 GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yes.
22 THE INTERVIEWER: -- show up.
23 GOVERNOR PATAKI: I remember when I
24 went out to Montana meeting with the workers out
25 there and going over to shake their hands and
26 thinking, these are the most polite picketers I've
27 ever been with -- (laughter) -- in my life.
28
29 THE INTERVIEWER: That's it. And we
30 also had a mascot for that campaign called "Peanut
31 Man." I wonder if you --
32 GOVERNOR PATAKI: Right.
33 THE INTERVIEWER: I wonder if you
34 would remember --
35 GOVERNOR PATAKI: I did. I do.
36 And, you know, to be perfectly honest, it didn't
37 bother me. It really didn't bother me because the
38 CSEA and the union leadership were doing what they
39 thought they had to do, and it was never where, you
40 know, members were tryin' to disrupt a public
41 meeting or prevent me from speaking. They were
very vocal, they were very present everywhere, but
that's fine. You know, that's part of the
give-and-take of democracy and that's part of the
natural difference of opinions that people with
different views are going to have.
And so long as you can respect each
others differences, there's nothing wrong with it
and, you know, I'd almost every chance where I
would land somewhere or drive somewhere and the
pickets would be there, I'd go over and shake hands

and say hello, and the people were respectful.
They weren't supportive, but they were respectful,
and they understood that I respected them and
somehow for all the difference we would ultimately
get through it.

THE INTERVIEWER: Now, this all sort
came to a head with your State of the State
address in 2000 where there were about 20,000 State
employees out surrounding the Capitol and you had
all kinds of troopers out there --
GOVERNOR PATAKI: Oh, I remember
that very well.
THE INTERVIEWER: -- the grounds,
and kind of a real media circus --
GOVERNOR PATAKI: It sure was.
THE INTERVIEWER: what do you
remember about that day.
GOVERNOR PATAKI: I remember --
obviously I remember that day and I do remember the
thousands, the tens of thousands of protesters and,
again, it didn't bother me. It's the nature of
democracy that, you know, you had the State workers
who hadn't had a contract, you had me speaking who
was holding firm against their contract demands,
and that's part of democracy. And, you know, my security guys were all worried, you know. My goodness, we had all this going on. I was never worried 'cause I knew that this -- these were people expressing their viewpoint, expressing their displeasure with my stance in the negotiation, but they had their right and it truly didn't bother me because, you know, I was the Governor.

But I've been in the minority. I've been in a position where I disagree with people who are in power and have a position different from mine, and I never had qualms about standing up and expressing my disagreement with those in power, so I didn't have any problems with the CSEA and the State workers standing up and expressing their disagreement with my principles, and it was actually pretty good training because a few years later I think we had 37-, 38,000 protesters at the Capitol one day from the SEIU, and I had been through some similar things, so that was another experience that I actually thought was a testament to the strength of our democracy as opposed to any real crisis.

THE INTERVIEWER: Well, this is sort of an aside, but I've always thought that part of the reason there was such a police presence for that demonstration was that the Amadeau Dealo (phonetic) trial was going to be taking place --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yeah.

THE INTERVIEWER: -- in Albany the following week, and that this was almost like a dry run for the security forces.

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yeah, and I -- you know, the one thing that did upset me was such omnipresent security because I know the State workers. I don't know 'em all, obviously, and I
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knew they were going to be vocal and expressive, that they disagreed with me, but I also knew that they weren't going to be violent and they weren't going to try and be disruptive, and they weren't. And that's -- it's a test of our freedom and our democracy, and I think that both sides came through that test very well, and as I expected.

THE INTERVIEWER: That demonstration was --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: You know, actually, I think back on this and I think it was just tremendous. I really did. You know, that

both sides had sufficient confidence in their position to be vocal and outspoken and yet, as you said earlier, the whole way through we were able to talk, we were able to seek common ground. We didn't find it for a long, long time and had respect for each other's positions.

And, you know, sometimes people shout at each other but they don't listen. Sometimes people have differences of opinion and they end up hating each other. You look at the politics in Washington today and it's just so divisive. For all the demonstrations and differences it never got that way. You know, there never was a time when we couldn't talk. There never was a time when we couldn't understand the other side's position, and I think it's a tribute to our State workers, to the CSEA leadership and to New York.

THE INTERVIEWER: Well, that demonstration really was sort of a head to this whole confrontation because shortly thereafter an agreement was reached that was ratified by the membership, and it also led to some very meaningful reforms for State employees of the Pension System.
and was tied at least in some way to establishing a 
COLA for the --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yeah.

THE INTERVIEWER: -- Pension System.

GOVERNOR PATAKI: You know, I always
believed in that, from the time I was a legislator,
and I can remember, not CSEA, but I remember my
junior high school teacher who I just loved coming
up when I was in the State Assembly and showing me
his retirement check, and it was less than $100 a
week, and here's a guy who had spent 40 years
helping the young people of our state to get
educated, and at the time he retired he had a
respectable pension, but with inflation over the
years it had -- it meant that his pension was
essentially meaningless.

And my father worked in the post
office and retired from the post office and they
had that inflation adjustment, so I always thought
it was the right thing and a fair thing to do so
long as it was consistent with the finances in the
Pension System, and the Pension System was in fact
not just fully funded, but more than fully funded,
so that I thought it was the right thing to do for
those who spend their lives working in a capacity
to help the people of our state, and it was also
fiscally appropriate to do given the finances of
the State.

THE INTERVIEWER: Well, again, to
give some credit where credit is due, this was
something that the public employee unions had been
working on for about --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: For a long time.

THE INTERVIEWER: It was achieved
GOVERNOR GEORGE PATAKI

11 while --
12                  GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yes.
13                  THE INTERVIEWER: -- you were
14 Governor, and I just wonder if you remember how
15 that came together because it's always difficult to
16 bring many disparate parties together in something
17 as complex --
18                  GOVERNOR PATAKI: You know, I
19 don't --
20                  THE INTERVIEWER: -- as the pension
21 plan.
22                  GOVERNOR PATAKI: -- remember the
23 details as to how that happened, but I do know
24 something from my time in the Legislature. I

1 thought it was the right thing to do so long as the
2 State could afford it. And, you know, back at that
3 point we had many years where the State workers got
4 zero increases in the contract and, you know, the
5 State workers had given up a lot to help us get
6 through very difficult financial times and the
7 State was doing well at that point.
8                  And I thought it was both
9 financially prudent and the right thing and I know
10 I met with a number of the different leaders of the
11 public employee unions who -- with whom I always
12 had a respectful dialogue, and we were able in the
13 context of a good State budget and a good contract
14 with the public employees and other reforms that
15 were made to be able to do this and I'm proud of
16 that.
17                  THE INTERVIEWER: Let me just shift
18 gears quickly because I don't want to monopolize
19 your time, but obviously one of the most
20 significant events in all of our lifetimes was
22                  GOVERNOR PATAKI: Right.
THE INTERVIEWER: And in addition to all of those who lost their lives, there were 44 State employees --
GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yes.
THE INTERVIEWER: -- working in offices there and I wonder if you would talk a little bit about that experience.
GOVERNOR PATAKI: You know, September 11th, obviously, was a horrendous day (phone ringing) for all of us and will always --
(Off the record discussion as phone was answered.)
THE INTERVIEWER: We're just gonna talk a little bit about September 11th.
GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yeah. Obviously none of us will ever forget that tragic day and the police officers, the firefighters, the EMTs, were just unbelievably courageous, but so were all New Yorkers and so were all the people who were there. And we lost people from the Banking Department, we lost people from Tax & Finance and we had very emotional memorial services over the course of the next few weeks for them.
But what was really inspiring to me every single day from September 11th on was how people, for all their pain and all the sense of loss, just kept understanding the need to keep doing what they had to do to bring us together and bring us through. A lot of people don't realize, but the Banking Department not only lost people, but was -- lost its offices and lost everything, and the stock markets were down, the Mercantile Exchange was down and we were facing a potential financial risk to the banking system.
And that day the State Banking Department workers pulled themselves together and were working out of temporary offices and dealing with true emergencies where you needed to move billions of dollars to keep the financial system going and they just understood, for all the loss, the magnitude of the importance of their job and they did it and that was true of all the State workers.

And it wasn't just doing their job. If it took to midnight, they were there. And not just the Banking Department, but all the State workers, and I just -- to this day, you know, I have tremendous sadness and I always will about September 11th, but I also have tremendous pride in how we responded.

You know, you've seen in other catastrophes where people and governments have fallen apart. We didn't. We came together, and we came together in a way that was critical for not just our state, but our country.

THE INTERVIEWER: And I know it didn't really get a lot of attention but you were very much in personal contact with a lot of State employees and literally went to --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Absolutely.

THE INTERVIEWER: -- went to talk with them and, you know, understand what challenges they were facing.

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yeah.

VOICE: I hear somebody knocking.

THE INTERVIEWER: Your interaction with State employees --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yeah.

THE INTERVIEWER: -- in the aftermath.
GOVERNOR GEORGE PATAKI

GOVERNOR PATAKI: You know, it was very important to show to the State workers, not just to those -- to the family members who had lost loved ones, but to the workers who had lost their friends and their colleagues, that I understood and the State understood what they were going through and the sacrifices they were making, so we didn't just have the memorial services. I visited the offices, I went and saw people and I just thought it was an important part of helping us to get through that, and the Banking Department, the Tax Department, the Health Department.

I mean New York City's lab went down contaminated with anthrax when we had the anthrax thing, so everything had to be done out of the State Health Department and, you know, the State Police, the National Guard, it was just incredible how whatever people were called on to do, however extraordinary it was, they did it and I thought it was important that I be there with them to let them know that I appreciated it and the people of the state appreciated how hard they were working and the sacrifices they were making.

THE INTERVIEWER: What do you think people ought to know about CSEA? Anything that surprised you over the years?

GOVERNOR PATAKI: You know, I think the important thing is that the CSEA represents not a different group of people. They are our friends, our neighbors, they're the Little League coaches, they're the people who volunteer at the local fire department, and they take great pride in their work and they take great pride in our state, and that's one of the reasons that I just, for all the
challenges we face today, have so much confidence
in New York because I have met so many of the CSEA
members, not just the leadership but our workers,
and they're good people. They care and they want
to do what is right for our future.

THE INTERVIEWER: Well, Governor
Pataki, we appreciate you taking the time. I
wonder if you would just indulge us for a moment.
I wanted to show you two or three photos --
(Sound of knocking on the door.)
GOVERNOR PATAKI: Sure, sure.
THE INTERVIEWER: -- and if you
could comment on them?

VOICE: Let me grab that microphone
out of the way, sir.

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Let me just --

I'll be right out.

VOICE: Want me to open the door?

GOVERNOR PATAKI: No, it's okay.
VOICE: For picture-taking purposes?
THE INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yeah. I'll be
right out. Two minutes.
(Laughter.)
THE INTERVIEWER: Start with this
one. Attitude.

GOVERNOR PATAKI: And I think that
was important.

THE INTERVIEWER: Right. Super. I
wonder if you would just -- just for a moment, let
me get a photo of you while --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Sure.

THE INTERVIEWER: -- you're looking
at that.

GOVERNOR PATAKI: It makes me laugh.

Brings back the memories. We had some real
GOVERNOR GEORGE PATAKI

19 battles.

20 THE INTERVIEWER: Look this way.

21 Now I'll try some -- maybe a little

22 wider shot here. If you just want to lean in a

23 little bit? That's good. A few more like that.

24 Lean in a little more. Great. And then do you

GOVERNOR PATAKI: That really does

make me laugh. I can't help it.

THE INTERVIEWER: I was gonna say

(inaudible).

VOICE: Can we do one more?

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Yeah, battles

never bothered me, and it's just part of the

process and if you believe strongly in what you

believe in, you're gonna have those types of

fights.

THE INTERVIEWER: Absolutely.

Actually --

GOVERNOR PATAKI: It's easy to roll

over for either side.

THE INTERVIEWER: That's me.

(Laughter.)

GOVERNOR PATAKI: And it just -- I

think shows that we both were very principled, you

know, which is why it took so long and we had such

a battle.


THE INTERVIEWER: Let me grab my

microphone there --

VOICE: Thank you.

THE INTERVIEWER: -- Governor, and I

just quickly ask you to sign these particular

photos?
GOVERNOR GEORGE PATAKI

GOVERNOR PATAKI: Sure.

(Discussion off the record.)

(Interview of Governor George Pataki was concluded.)