Starts with discussion of the 1977 campaign – pages 1-11

Pp. 11-12 How legislative leaders are chosen

Don Linky: It's December 9, 2010. I'm Don Linky. We're here on the campus of Rutgers University in New Brunswick at the Eagleton Institute of Politics. This is another, hopefully the final, in a series of interviews with Jeffrey Laurenti. Jeff was a key figure during the Byrne Administration on the Senate Democratic staff, particularly with Senator Joseph Merlino, and was involved in many of the key legislative accomplishments during those years. We'll be talking with Jeff about the Byrne reelection campaign and subsequent years in Trenton and beyond. Jeff, at our last session, we talked about the 1977 Byrne reelection campaign, got a little bit into the issues, particularly the income tax. When and where did you see the tide turning for Brendan Byrne?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, certainly the very fact that he won a primary, albeit against almost a dozen opponents <laughs> and barely with a third of the Democratic primary vote, but it signaled that this might not be quite the land of the walking dead that all of us had imagined, that he was dead meat even before announcing. And still, through the summer, the numbers were discouragingly lopsided in terms of Bateman versus Byrne. So there was the sense that surely these financial issues related to the tax package might begin to turn. We had not factored in, at that point in our campaign thinking, how the rebate checks that would be flowing in the fall might help clinch the argument, which I think they helped, too. But, in fact, it was that other element that Billy Musto, the state senator from Hudson County, who had cunningly made as part of the deal for his vote for the income tax that it should expire at the end of 1977. That is what basically put this issue on the agenda in a way that you couldn't simply complain about its having been adopted. You were going to have to say, "If not this, then what?" And that proved to be an insuperable obstacle for Bateman, even with his large advantage going into the summer and early fall of the campaign. And at that time--people today would find it almost inconceivable to understand the power of the print press in shaping the debate and the agenda and forcing the political class to have to address some issues--but you had virtual unanimity among all of the major papers that we have to press these two candidates on what they're going to do with regard to an income tax or a replacement. And that is what forced Senator Bateman and his campaign to have to throw something together that could pass minimal muster as a credible alternative. And to cover that, they recruited a figure that, for the Democrats, seemed to be an ideal punching bag. William Simon, Richard Nixon's treasury secretary, was going to provide the kind of intellectual heft to endow this plan with a sense of legitimacy. And instead, its flimsiness was
instantly the subject of scorn, not just by the Byrne campaign but by the entire New Jersey press. And I think that was the moment at which you began to see the electoral tide turning. And that was late September of 1977. Also was a time when Jimmy Carter made his one visit as President to New Jersey on behalf of the Byrne campaign. We had a big rally in my neighborhood in Trenton in Chambersburg with Carter and Byrne, a huge crowd unexpectedly. There was a wedding at St. Joachim's, the Italian parish. At that very moment, as the bride and groom are coming out, they are greeted by the President of the United States, who plants a first kiss on the bride, <laughs> claiming perhaps presidential first fruits. And so you had kind of warm tones in some of the public press coverage of the campaign at that moment, because Carter was still riding high.

Don Linky: So the wedding wasn't a strategic advance man's "I do."

Jeffrey Laurenti: <laughs> Not at all. Not at all. And as best as we could find afterwards, the couple was politically quite indistinct in terms of party identification. But you had this confluence of events and also, not unimportantly, an improving economy nationally that all served as background for this one central issue of the '77 campaign to be joined, and for the issue to be turned in favor of those who had had the courage to do what was right, to recycle a failed slogan from the legislative campaigns of Dick Hughes's second term that ended so ingloriously ten years to the day earlier in '67. And so I would say that the Bateman-Simon plan, or Simon-Bateman, whichever, as the Byrne campaign quickly branded it, became the turning point. And thereafter, week after week, we achieved every goal in terms of press picking up on the issues that we thought were important. And the Bateman campaign, which essentially was being propelled not by the decency and generosity of you, of its candidate, but rather the anger, the bile on the right for taxes of any sort, something that has remained a constant feature on the right. And that turned and curdled on them.

Don Linky: You mentioned the economy. I looked a while back, and I think when the campaign started in January or so, unemployment was actually over ten percent, even higher than it is as we sit.

Jeffrey Laurenti: You mean in New Jersey?

Don Linky: In New Jersey, as we sit in December 2010 currently, but that by November it went down maybe two, over two points. And I don't know if that was sort of translated into the voter feelings in the campaign, but that seemed to be a very significant improvement over the course of the campaign.
Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, my sense is that this was never an over issue. That is, the way in which the issues were joined between the two parties in the state election didn't really turn on the larger economic issues. But there's no doubt that when people are feeling more satisfied economically, that their disposition towards the people in power, who are coming up for their approval or disapproval in November, tends to improve. And if their circumstances seem to be getting tighter and tighter, they become more ornery and tend to be likelier to just vote for a change or just not to vote, particularly on the Democratic side. And in '77, you had an economy that was beginning to gather steam, as it did for the next two years, until the Iran oil cut-off in '79 sent things plunging. So that was all positive. And it was never directly linked to the issues of the day, but I think that was some wind in the sails for a campaign that surprisingly found its voice in those three months.

Don Linky: You pointed out that the press corps didn't seem to buy into the Bateman-Simon plan as a credible alternative to the Byrne tax program.

Jeffrey Laurenti: And the publisher corps, which is perhaps even more important, the owners of the papers.

Don Linky: Well, I wanted to make that distinction. How did the working press, who were presumably supposed to be writing objective news stories, convey that message that they were cynical about the Republican plan? Was it covert or was it only in the editorial coverage of the publisher community?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, I have to say that in my recollection--and remember, we're talking about a third of a century ago at this point in time--that in my recollection, what was turning this debate was the editorial coverage and its repetitiveness. It came back banging away on the inadequacy of the plans. Because the press corps at the state house writing the stories day after day, those covering the campaign day after day, felt an obligation to "He says, but on the other hand, she says," from the two campaigns. On balance, critical, because when you would then go, as any reporter normally would, to some so-called dispassionate, neutral, academicky kind of source, the skepticism about the flimsiness of the Bateman-Simon plan, as we ______ call it, always came through. But it was really the editorial attacks; so these were the publishers and the editorial boards that were the ones that carried this argument and helped beat it in. And then, of course, the campaign quotes the editorial board's judgments in its advertising to make sure that that 70 percent of New Jerseyans, who don't read the editorial page, nonetheless got the gist of what they were saying. Because the Bateman campaign couldn't find many, if any, newspapers editorially to endorse the scheme to be able to quote that would have statewide coverage or credibility.
Don Linky: Apart from the editorial coverage, did you see any attempts, particularly in the Star Ledger, which was the dominant political newspaper of the time, to skew their news coverage in terms of the headlines or what they featured most during the campaign in terms of pro-Byrne or pro-Democratic coverage or issues?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, I don't remember which papers had developed a reputation inside the campaign for being either just hopelessly slanting the news, the front page stories, or page three stories, against us, or which seemed always to pick up the themes just as we would have wanted them. And I don't remember the Star Ledger having gotten a reputation for being either favorable or not.

Don Linky: Within the campaign as the issues director, was there any overt attempt to influence particularly the Sunday headline story on the front page of the Star Ledger? I mean, within the State House, I think the Byrne staff always viewed that Sunday story as sort of critical, even outside the campaign, to influencing public opinion simply because the format was that they usually brandished the headline across the entire front page even if it didn't merit that significance. Was there any attempt, say on a Friday or Saturday, to release stories that you thought would merit that type of coverage?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Oh, I got to tell you that the issues side was not a part of the press management side. And so I was not closely engaged with what is it we're trying to get the Ledger to pick up on this weekend. I should add, though, that a fair amount of our time was also spent kind of creating the templates for the print advertising. We were involved in working with David Garth, who was the campaign's media guru, on the electronic and the broadcast ads as well. But we had set on doing a series, for all of the major cities in the state, of a tax flier about how this tax program impacted you as the owner of the average-valued, at that time, fifteen thousand dollar row house in Trenton or its counterpart in Patterson or Newark. So, tied to each of these major cities, this would be the Democratic voter base that was somewhat put off, particularly the blue collar whites, by the tax package, that were somewhat receptive to the beginning of the siren call from the right against government spending, as for those people, for minorities. And we had to show this electorate that, in fact, that tax package was for them. And so, we had pieces crafted for every major municipality, the big blue collar suburbs as well as the cities with the exact numbers for that town of its average house value and the impact on the tax bill for that average house. And that was something that was done by direct mail in all those places. All of this was converging on what we thought was the central, the pivotal issue of the campaign, what was supposed to have been the issue that would drive Byrne out of office became particularly, as Ray Bateman has recalled, he says, "When the rebate checks came out at the end of October, I knew I was dead." Well, the polling showed that he was already comatose by mid October. But that clinched an
argument that we had been painstakingly trying to make over the course of that campaign.

Don Linky: Now, you mentioned polling. Of course, there were many fewer public polls at that time. I'm not sure there was much beyond the Eagleton poll. What about your internal polling? What was it telling you? Anything that the public didn't know? Or any constituencies that were particular problems?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, we know already what the problems were in terms of public perceptions. And what they had shown internally—and you also saw this in the public polling—was that Byrne had not excited animosity at a personal level. There were no doubts about him as honest. There were not doubts about him as incorruptible, which is an asset. Doesn't win you reelection, as Jimmy Carter proved, but it's a good base if you can put the other pieces together. They did show that people had one huge gripe with him. It was not ineffectiveness. It was not ineffectuality. It was the income tax. And that, if you could dispel that, everything else could then come into play. If you could dispel the income tax, then the other pieces of what we believe were a terrific record—and we had done the major print piece for the primary—that built on how Byrne had accomplished what had been the major promises of his 1973 campaign. And for Democratic voters that actually did move votes, apparently. In the fall campaign, it was the tax issue, and you had to break through that. And once you did, it was enough of a record on so many other things that, wow, he then would look like somebody who really deserved reelection. And you saw the numbers moving by late September, particularly—and really only in September—they were dead in the water between June, the primary victory, and mid September. And then it was at that point that this began to kick in. Because what was Bateman's theme? His theme was basically anger at the income tax, and then there's nothing that he's going to do that's going to replace it that's better. The income tax suddenly looked like a less evil choice of two evils to people. And then you see the numbers moving in October. So by mid October, New York Times runs its poll that has Byrne having tied Bateman, which represented a huge movement in getting up to parity. And at that point, the Democratic party organizations around the state that had been deeply depressed at the thought of having to carry the unpopular Brendan Byrne weighting down their prospects in their freeholder elections and such, suddenly became excited, energized, motivated. So it was with that public confirmation that the Byrne campaign was actually sweeping forward, that you then had the rest of the party energized and out of its deep funk.

Don Linky: Before Byrne's numbers picked up, and even before the campaign started, there were rumors that perhaps President Carter would have an appropriate appointment for...
Jeffrey Laurenti: Find some need for Brendan T. Byrnes at the national level.

Don Linky: Yes. Now, did those rumors permeate the campaign organization or the Senate Democrats?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, certainly by the summer the sense was that we are stuck with this guy. Certainly once he had won the primary, we are stuck with this guy, and how do we ensure our own survival with him? There had been, you know, that talk you had heard at the beginning of the year. But it was also mitigated by the fact that, for Carter, Byrne, who had been an early supporter of his, had been unable to deliver his own state delegation at the national convention in 1976, been unable to deliver the primary vote for him in 1976. It was this hermaphroditic slate of Humphrey-Brown—yes, the same Jerry Brown who has popped up again in 2010—that engineered by a state party chairman who had turned on Byrne, Jim Dugan, had smashingly won the New Jersey primary even though Carter was already well on his way to the nomination. So there wasn't a sense that they owed him much. He was unable to carry the state for Carter in the fall. New Jersey was one of the big battle ground states. Hard to remember that as recently as the '70s and '80s, New Jersey was a highly competitive state in presidential elections, a real swing state. And Byrne could not deliver. So there was not much that the Carter administration owed Byrne other than sentimental loyalty. And I don't think it was too serious. I thought, certainly I would expect that the governor, if he had had any shot at something, would have already pulled the string between December of '76 and March of '77 in order to get out of a hopeless situation with some honor intact. The way Anne Martindell did out of the State Senate, confronting almost certain loss in the fall of '77 to Walter Foran in that State Senate seat.

Don Linky: And of course the national situation also had ramifications in New Jersey because of the split on presidential politics between Jim Dugan as the state chairman and the Byrne people, who were pushing for Jimmy Carter. How did that reflect itself in the gubernatorial campaign, if at all?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, in '77, Jim Dugan was obviously aligned with Paul Jordan first, and then Jordan's campaign self destructed with the Jersey City municipal election that was so negative for his side of the was so negative for his side of the Jersey City fight that he imploded overnight with that. I don't know where Jim Dugan ended up. He had to find another port in the Hudson County storm during that gubernatorial primary, but he was also swept out in the 1977 primaries, because his slate no longer had a compelling slate leader. And Jersey City's new mayor elect, Tommy Smith, had another slate running against the Jordan slate in the partisan primary election for the legislature. And that is what gave us Wally Sheil and the others of that generation, and O'Connor, Bill
O'Connor. That's what swept them in in that primary. So, Dugan was now not only out as state chairman, not only out with the renominated governor, but was now out of the Senate, or about to be out of the Senate, swept out of his seat in the primary.

Don Linky: But did you have concern within the campaign that, given the flux in Hudson County, that that would affect turnout in Hudson, which has always been a significant core constituency for the Democrats statewide, and also that other Democrats in Hudson, like Dennis Collins, I think, were still on the fence and frankly I don't think ever came out to endorse Brendan Byrne?

Jeffrey Laurenti: In the fall?

Don Linky: In the fall.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, there was a huge effort invested into courting the Hudson County Democratic political establishment once the primary was won. In fact, it had begun even before, once Jordan was out, then began trying to court whoever had been part of the Jordan team to see who was ready to come back to the governor. Because the ideological fault line between those two was almost invisible. The Jordan campaign was essentially a critique of Byrne's ineffectuality and unpopularity rather than a critique of his political direction. So, those were relatively easy, those few in Hudson County who were ideologically motivated, relatively easy to bring back. You had a major effort to court Tommy Smith, because it wasn't at all clear that he was going to end up on the Democratic side in the fall, and there was quite a long period of wooing and such. The campaign, of course, was also doing its outreach through its media, including the print pieces that I was talking about, focused on taxes. We were going to try to reach to voters regardless because we thought there was a compelling message there, and that did click as well. So you ended up with prodigious Democratic majorities and across Hudson County on election night in November.

Don Linky: Now, you say that there was an effort to "court" the Hudson political figures. What's that mean? Does it mean taking them to lunch? Does it mean appointments?

Jeffrey Laurenti: That's a question better directed to Harold Hodes or Bob Mulcahy and others who handled the political side of the campaign and of the governor's office.

Don Linky: Well, on your turf, what about issues?
Jeffrey Laurenti: I'm simply doing issues.

Don Linky: Well, what about issues? Were there issues that they brought up that said, well, if you take a stand on X, Y or Z, we would be more amenable?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Not on issues. It was Liberty State Park. What more can you bring? It's pork rather than kind of high altitude issue discussion. One cannot say that the alienation of the Hudson democracy from Brendan Byrne during his first term was as a result of any dispute over issues. And even Senator Dugan's alienation from Byrne and his championing some other form of tax, the famous surtax scheme, was not an ideological one. It was motivated by his sense of having been overlooked and excluded, and I think that that is something that a lot of the political class felt about Brendan Byrne during his first term.

Don Linky: Well, one Hudson issue, I recall, was the Bayonne Bridge. Were you at all involved in the discussions about that?

Jeffrey Laurenti: <laughs> No. No. That was a Hudson local interest rather than statewide issue concern.

Don Linky: Going back to the polls, how sophisticated were they in terms of what specific constituencies you were strong or weak with in terms of blue collar Democrats, suburban voters? Obviously independents are always <inaudible>.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Blue collar suburban Democrats were the--and they have become, as we would then see after the Reagan election--had been and increasingly were to become the big concern starting in the Byrne campaign, we saw it. This was the beginning of the wedge that some of us would see in part as traceable to race, and the alienation of blue collar suburban Democrats, blue collar suburban whites from the Democratic party can be, I think, traceable to these developments in the 1970s, late '60s throughout the '70s, The Nixon silent majority and so on, the Tommy Dunn, Nixon Democrats of 1972, who would then become the Reagan Democrats of 1980 and onward. So, we were in the midst of what we now retrospectively see as the big realignment of the post-civil rights era. So, that is where we had the biggest trouble. We also saw, in that election, another further step of the more highly-educated, usually suburban white voters, beginning to creep towards the Democrats.
Don Linky: Well, you mentioned educating the voters on the tax program. Specific constituencies that were really helped were the commuters into New York City and to Philadelphia. How did you go about getting that message out to them?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, we did do flyer pieces. Those, however, were not mailed because you didn't have easy access to a list of commuters. But you leafleted the train stations for New York-bound commuters, because, as you say, the income tax package was a huge bonanza for commuters into New York City, who were getting a significant property tax reduction, and basically New York state had already claimed this money for income tax. So they were now at no real cost in income taxes, getting the property tax advantages. And that was something that was hammered primarily through leaflets at the train stations. That does seem quaintly old-fashioned a way of trying to communicate something, doesn't it? And ads, and some degree print runs I think in some towns, focused on that. And in towns where the local Democrats thought that there was a sufficiently large share of New York-bound commuter, it was also included in their local lit drops more generally.

Don Linky: Now, you mentioned the homestead rebate checks. Our research in the state archives has traced the idea, particularly back to Dick Leone, possibly Dick Coffee. Do you have any inside knowledge of who came up with the idea?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Of sending it out as a check?

Don Linky: As a check rather than credit?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Oh, no, well, that was in the legislature. And I don't know whether on the assembly side, Dick Coffee, who was my counterpart as executive director for the assembly Democrats, came up with it. But I think early on there was a sense you don't want this as a credit on the property tax, because the local officials would then feel they had leeway to raise taxes. We needed to keep the pressure on them to hold down taxes. This was the big concern from the start of the 1974-75 income tax debate, that if you're going to be using the income tax to reduce property taxes, how do you keep local officials from just using this as a bonanza to be able to add new spending when you know that the voters are sensitive about taxes? You're going to take the hit for the property-- for the income tax being imposed, and the local officials take the credit for doing all these new services with property taxes modestly lower than they were before, but that's because they should have been much lower. There was a sense in that first debate, '74, '75 on the income tax, that the way you do that is through an income tax credit. In effect, it becomes part of your income tax, and you get the credit back for your property taxes there. Even at that point, they weren't going to leave it as a credit on the property tax bill.
And by '76, when the revised plan was actually enacted, the sense was, you give them
the money back separately as: This is the state's rebate that, in effect, your state
legislators have ensured that you're getting back in return for that income tax. I don't
know who it was who had the thought to put the rebate check in an envelope marked
"Office of the Governor." That was the truly crafty innovation. I don't know where that
idea came from. But the notion that you had to send the money back as a check had
been bubbling up in both houses in the '76 intra-legislative debates about how you
ensure that the property tax relief is recognized by the voter and is not swallowed up by
local officials, who use it to feather their own political nests.

Don Linky: As an aside in his interview, Ray Bateman said that when he came home
late at night after a full day of campaigning and sat down at his kitchen table and opened
his mail and saw his own rebate check, he started writing his concession speech.
Whether that is an apocryphal story or not, I'm not sure.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, no, no, but we have heard that, and he has been publicly quoted
as saying, not [ph?] about writing the concession speech, but when he saw the rebate
check arrive at his house, he realized that this was now the nail in the coffin. The issue
had already turned. By that point, it was late October that the second tranche of the
rebate checks came out. Because there had been an earlier mailing, because it was in
two different installments, had been in May.

Don Linky: Before the primary.

Jeffrey Laurenti: By coincidence. That's right.

Don Linky: Yes. <laughs>

Jeffrey Laurenti: Mostly by coincidence. <laughs> And now this one, since the
momentum had already seemed to turn, as I'm sure his own polling had shown on the tax
issue, that this clinches the argument that, in fact, what the Governor and those who had
boldly stood for this whole complex tax reform package were honest in saying, "You're
going to get your money back."

Don Linky: Right. Let's move to Election Day. There was a torrential rainstorm,
particularly in North Jersey, on that day.
Jeffrey Laurenti: Your memory for meteorology is better than mine, and let's move past Election Day quickly, if we can, to into the second term.

Don Linky: But what I wanted to point out was that there was concern within the campaign--because I have personal knowledge of that--that the rainstorm, which also closed down the PATH system because of flooding, was going to so affect turnout, particularly in Bergen County, among commuters.

Jeffrey Laurenti: So they wanted to extend the hours and this and that, right.

Don Linky: That the campaign wanted to extend the election hours by executive order of the Governor, who was a candidate in his own reelection campaign. Do you recall any discussion about that?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Also that, as of Election Day, I didn't need to be at campaign headquarters. I was also, at that time, a Democratic leader in Trenton. We had voter turnout to manage in my own city, and so by the night before at the annual Shiloh Baptist Church rally, to which Byrne came, as is customary to motivate black turnout in the state's capitol. And then the next day, I was strictly involved in turning the vote out in Trenton rather than being one of those at the headquarters overseeing statewide what was happening. So I don't know.

Don Linky: Well, stepping out of my role as interviewer, I was in the state house, one of the few in the Governor's office.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Still working for the public.

Don Linky: Yes.

Jeffrey Laurenti: <laughs>

Don Linky: But I did get a call from Dick Coffee and Dick Leone at campaign headquarters asking me to draft an executive order to extend the hours by two hours, I think, until ten o'clock that night, which I pointed out sounded like sort of a Latin-American _____ to me. <laughs>

Jeffrey Laurenti: <laughs>
Don Linky: But I did draft the order. It exists somewhere. I haven't found it, but it does exist. Well, let's go into the second term now. First, I guess, is legislative leadership decisions. What do you recall about that?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Yes. Well, on the Senate side, Joe Merlino, who had felt he had been misdealt out after the '73 gubernatorial election in the making of a deal crafted with the incoming governor for legislative leadership, Howard Woodson, the speaker, and Joe LeFante as the majority leader. And that meant that since Mercer had one slot, and it was the first black speaker legislative head in any legislature in the United States since reconstruction, that meant that Merlino would have a very hard time taking the position of majority leader that he was hoping for. So, at that point, it was Essex and the returning, like a Japanese Daruma doll. Matty Feldman is back. After six years out, he's reelected Senate and bingo, he becomes majority leader. But that's where the blocks of Senate votes were, Essex, Bergen, Hudson in the Assembly, and then Mercer and Howard Woodson representing the rest of the state. So, Joe Merlino had to make do as assistant majority leader and chairman of the appropriations committee, and then two years later he led the fight inside the Senate to depose Pat Dodd, arguing that a two-year term is it, and you have to have rotation. And Matty Feldman was only too happy with that. And I don't think that Senator Dodd had cultivated the personal relations with the individual members of that Senate sufficiently to be able to withstand that. Because two years later, when Matty Feldman would have been interested in maybe staying on, Merlino invoked this two-year rule, which two years after that he quickly squelched, but he suggested that his two years up, he should move along. And he lined up very early to make a full four years. And out of that, by the way, came the pressures later on in the following decade for unlimited renewal of leadership. So, in the space of 15 years, New Jersey had gone from a pattern of weak annually-rotated presiding officers and leaders so that everybody had a chance to move up the ladder in and then out, to long term holding by legislative leaders and the creation in the '80s of legislative leadership PACs that gave them financial control over their members. It's a phenomenon outside the scope of our discussion at Bernstein, but it has become a huge feature of New Jersey's legislative politics since. And Merlino in the second Byrne term, by pressing and winning a second two-year term as Senate president, effectively broke irreparably the tradition of rotation as being expected.

Don Linky: And I think in one of our earlier sessions you mentioned that the departure from the rotation system helped strengthen the legislature in its relationship, particularly with the governor's office.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right. I would say, and I think, did we discuss at that point the constitutional amendment that Al Burstein had pressed for presentation of bills?
Don Linky: Yeah. I think we did.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Okay.

Don Linky: And we talked about the...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Misguided constitutional amendment.

Don Linky: But we did talk about the leverage that the governor had by holding bills, particularly to the end of the session. And you mentioned that the sort of counter-strategy of the legislature was to dump them all on his lap at the end.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, we did it on the Senate-- no. Not at the end. We adopted the practice--in fact, we had a Senate rule adopted, if I recall correctly--prescribing that the bills will be delivered to the governor X number of days after final passage in the discretion of the Senate president. So we could allow some bargaining. And this is what we had advanced as an alternative to the Burstein constitutional amendment, which has screwed things up royally, I think, and weakened the legislature's hand rather than strengthened it in many ways.

Don Linky: Why so?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Because we always had, on the legislative side, the power to deliver the bills right away. And if there was something that you wanted to slap on the governor's desk and make him act on it right away, all you had to do was deliver it. This passivity about waiting for him to call for it was something that you could easily shake within the existing constitutional and legal framework. And we did it from time, very rarely, but occasionally, and then did it more often as this steam was building behind this crazy Burstein rule to have a mandatory delivery within 45 days. Was that what was put in? But then you couldn't force him to act quickly. So it was a foolish way to get to the same end.

Don Linky: Now you mentioned that you thought Senator Dodd hadn't cultivated the personal relationships within the Senate.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, that's my sense, that I didn't see where he had loyalists.
Don Linky: How do you do that? How did Senator Merlino do it?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, in part it's a question of personality. And Joe Merlino had the consummate insider politician's personality of both affection, gruffness, bullying, you know, the whole mix, but particularly, the affection and affectionate gruffness. And people-- I mean, hey, all of them there are politicians, and they know to a certain extent when you're trying to manipulate them because they have been trying to manipulate you in most cases. So they can see through that. But Merlino was a politician's politician in lots of ways. Matty was in many ways, too. Matty had a little more streak of a good guy and of not being willing to--well, I shouldn't say not being willing--agonizing over doing things that might seem not quite right. And Joe didn't seem to be the type that would agonize over those things. He could cut a deal when he thought it useful. And he could stand on <laughs> supposed principle or whatever when he had to. So, Joe had the political style that a lot of guys in the caucus would respond well to. And he could also be very solicitous, and he had, even back in '73, reached out to all of the candidates for the Senate, even those in seemingly impossible districts, who in 1973, a fair number of them actually won unexpectedly in the Byrne landslide over Sandman. And I don't think that very many others in Trenton, who were already in the Senate, had thought to do outreach to candidates before, hadn't been really how you established ties to them, before they're elected, particularly if they're in districts that aren't likely to win. So, those were part of the factors. Joe was gruff, but Joe delivered just as he would deliver for Byrne in terms of the legislative agenda in ways I don't think anybody else on the Senate side ever did, and probably would compare favorably to even the Governor's most energetic backers on the assembly side.

Don Linky: And, of course, beyond personality, the legislative leaders have more formal benefits to bestow, such as committee assignments or chairmanships.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, that's Senate President. Once you get that, that's the job.

Don Linky: Well, that's what I'm saying, the leaders, the Speaker or the Senate President, as well as the control over the board, the voting agenda.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right.

Don Linky: And today, as you pointed out before, they're probably the most significant power of money through the leadership, PACs, you know, political action committees.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right.
Don Linky: Anything else that, you know, gave them leverage over the members?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, at that point, when you're talking late '70s, you're still not talking about them having leverage over the members, except in the committee chairmanships, trying to. And even then, it would be hard to imagine a sitting committee chairman being dumped altogether the way that, in the current era, Senator Sweeney is president, dumped, the committee chairs who had stayed loyal to Dick Codey in last year's, in the 2009 leadership battle.

Don Linky: What about committee assignments?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, again, when we sat down to try to work out committee assignments, you: A) had a list of the committees that each member was interested in; B) we had created at that time a division of committees into two groups that would meet--each group would meet at the same time. So we were trying to create a system in which you would avoid conflicting committee assignments in terms of regular schedule. And this was somewhat awkward because you had some members who really wanted to be on two committees that were going to meet at the same time. And we had to try to steer them away from their second choice into one of the two committees in the second group. At that time, because we were very disciplined, we had only ten standing reference committees. And I think one of the major achievements in the legislature--I think we may have talked about this before--was the development of reasonably functioning committees during the '70s, which Ray Bateman during his tenure as president of the Senate had really led the way on. He had begun it, but it was still just embryonic, and when we took over at the end of '73, beginning of '74, then had conscious strengthening of that system. But you're trying to reconcile who sits on which committee. We're also looking to make sure that you don't have a hopelessly difficult membership. I remember the one troublesome committee for us was the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee, because it drew as members Senators Carmen Orechio, Tommy Dunn, and was it Joe Hirkala?

Don Linky: Russo.

Jeffrey Laurenti: He was on Judiciary. The Law and Public Safety one was viewed initially as second or even third tier, dealing with, you know, not the glamour issues in the field of law, but police fire and such. And so, it was viewed as something of a backwater. And then we began finding that bills would keep popping out that reflected a very hard liner conservative view because of the makeup of the committee. The Democrats were all among the kind of pro-police and fairly conservative, the blue collar suburban, if not urban, white constituency. And in the second Byrne term, when Merlino was president of
the Senate, we put Alex Mensa [ph?] on that committee just to make sure that there was a kind of liberal civil rights orientation view on that committee, wasn't going to be the majority, but it was important to have that kind of voice to balance it ideologically, and to raise the questions in committee. Because the other guys could be persuaded; they would just not have thought of it themselves, these considerations. In the second term Senate, we had 27 Democrats, we had had 29, plus Tony Imperiale in the Senate during Byrne's first term. And so, it was a good size majority, and we had, I think, a somewhat more liberal makeup to that 27. It was John Gregorio rather than Tommy Dunn, for example, out of the Elizabeth-Linden district. Not an ideological flaming liberal, by any means, but not quite as ornery as Tom Dunn could be or, you know, the Democrats-for-Nixon Tom Dunn. So we had a little more imagination leavening our caucus and our committees.

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**Don Linky:** Well, before we leave that, what about leverage in the control by the leader, the Senate president and the assembly speaker of the board list? The voting agenda of which bills get posted for a vote by the full house, full assembly or Senate. Do you recall any times when that was used to reward or punish members?

**Jeffrey Laurenti:** Well, sure. Remember, when you put together a board list, you know, the calendar of bills to be voted on, you are looking at first what are the major pieces of legislation that might be coming up that have to be considered on their own merits, regardless of who the sponsor is, or something that the governor's office wants, you know, legislation that's an administration backed or initiated bill. So, they're kind of in one category. Another category is bills that may be nice to have, but they're essentially the interest of the sponsor or of a particular interest group. And there you have a lot more leeway: A) what's the urgency for this to be done today rather than next week; or B) you know, you haven't been voting with us; I think this can sit for a while. Now, our usual procedure was to take bills after they came out of committee, and after a quick review, are there any problems now that we had Democratic staff, as Republicans now had as well, staff sitting at the committee meetings who could report back on what might be a political problem issue. But our normal practice was to put bills up for a floor vote within a session or two of their coming out of committee. But if there was a problem with a bill or if there was a problem with the bill's sponsor or if there was some other issue about who's really behind the bill who has been otherwise creating problems on other issues that either the governor or the Senate leadership would have, the bill could be held off, you know, Merlino might want the sponsor to have to ask for it to be put off.

**Don Linky:** Any specific anecdotes?
Jeffrey Laurenti: None comes immediately to mind. I'm just summarizing what I recall as how it was done. But the standard practice was, you know, within a couple of sessions of bills coming out of committee, we get them out. And there had to be a reason not to, somebody saying that, either there's a problem with the bill-- and that would often get frankly from you guys in the governor's office. And you all weren't always on top of things before they came out of committee.

Don Linky: Always.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Yeah, right. <laughs> Any more than we were. We began a process in the, while Joe was Senate President, of trying to get a handle on bills when they were scheduled for consideration in the committee, so before you have the committee's action. But this was always, like, you know, two millimeters deep a review, or usually. But, yeah, I think the process was improving over time. So, I don't know whether in the 30 years since one would say that the improvement has been steady and consistent. I think they've multiplied the number of committees in order to create more chairmanships for more Senators. Every Senator a chairman seems to have become an operative philosophy, so you need more committees to do that. This is going back, undoing the reforms that Bateman had put in in 1970. Anyway, yes, moving right along.

Don Linky: Well, let's move on to some issues. Some of these issues started in the first term, continued into the second term, but let's start with Atlantic City. The Casino Control Act is signed by governor Byrne, a triumphal board walk ceremony.


Don Linky: Right before the primary election.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Primary.

Don Linky: How did you feel personally about authorizing casino gambling in New Jersey?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Personally, who cared what I thought then? I was a young Senate staffer, right. I found the No-Dice groups' arguments persuasive in 1974.

Don Linky: The anti-gambling groups.
Jeffrey Laurenti: The anti-gambling. What I found persuasive was the prospect that that amendment could open the door to casinos anywhere. And that I thought was hugely problematic. When the governor came back with a proposed constitutional amendment two years later restricted only to Atlantic City, that I thought was exactly the kind of strict limitation that was needed. It was going to be a bold experiment in whether vice of this sort could be the key to reviving one of New Jersey's many old cities that had become largely reservations for the poor and for minorities and whether it would be an effective redevelopment tool. And I think the jury's still out on how effective it has been in that regard. But, you know, that, I thought, was a good idea, and I thought that the parameters that Byrne set for how you maintain public integrity of this very dangerous industry in terms of corruptibility were exactly what needed to be set. So I was comfortable with the outcome there.

Don Linky: Do you recall whether Senator Merlino's position was the same as yours?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, he supported casino gambling, the constitutional amendment in 1974 as well as '76, so I think he was a little less kind of concerned about the problems that might result if you left the door open to political pressures to have casinos elsewhere. I would say, by the way, that this was not an issue that for Italian working class neighborhoods involved any high degree of morality, the way for the earnest protestant clergymen and Senator Anne Martindell and others who headed the No-Dice campaign viewed it. That the popularity of bingo in Catholic parishes throughout the state <laughs> was evidence that this was not a moral issue in that sense.

Don Linky: Within the Senate, was there any horse trading, particularly in '76 when the referendum specifically confined casino gambling to Atlantic City, that said particularly in districts like Senator Merlino's with Trenton as a major base of his political support, or Newark or Camden, that said, "Well, if we're going to help you win Atlantic City, we need X, Y and Z in order to <inaudible>.”

Jeffrey Laurenti: No. That came up more in '77 when you had the Casino Control Act and the creation of some sort of redevelopment fund. And that was the place where you had the debates over how you spread the wealth beyond Atlantic City. Since this was not going to be an industry that will depend on Atlantic City gamblers or Atlantic County. In fact, looking back now, and nobody would have thought of it then, but given the perils to the casino industry in Atlantic City from Pennsylvania's, and even to some degree in New York's now, having fingers or toes in that water, if it would have been, well, an impossible, I guess, degree of foresight to have offered some kind of payment to the largest states that were senders of patrons in order to preempt, a bit, a prophylactic against multiple creation of casinos. We assumed that the kind of moral suspicion of
casino gambling would remain strongly entrenched in the state capitols nearby, and that we would continue to have the East Coast monopoly long into the future. And, of course, it didn't turn out that way.

**Don Linky:** Well, I recall that initially the reinvestment fund was targeted only to Atlantic City, the reinvestment.

**Jeffrey Laurenti:** Exactly.

**Don Linky:** But you said it was sort of a debate within the Senate.

**Jeffrey Laurenti:** That's right. And over time, you had that pried a little bit wider and wider for other cities. In the Casino Control Act, the principle had to be established that these funds are going to actually aid the cities we develop. Wasn't that the whole point? Isn't that why you begged the rest of the state to approve introduction of this potentially hazardous industry, toxic industry, spiritually and morally, into the state? So, where's the redevelopment going to come from? And then, over time, you had the use of that money being split between Atlantic City and other cities and then even diluted beyond that.

**Don Linky:** Looking back, and your earlier comment may have answered this, but how do you see Atlantic City? Success? Failure? Somewhere in between?

**Jeffrey Laurenti:** Somewhere in between. One is still now, 30 plus years afterwards, discouraged by the vast expanses of cleared land in Atlantic City on which there is no activity, no redevelopment at all. On the other hand, you do have a commercial district in Atlantic City that appears to be on its own two feet. Atlantic City as a resort appears now to have at least given itself a profile that is attractive to the middle classes again, who had written it off by the '70s as a ghetto-ized shore resort. You had major construction. You have a lot of employment, even if most of the employees still prefer to live on the mainland rather than in Atlantic City. So, it is a fascinating experiment that warrants even greater economic analysis for what's been accomplished and what hasn't and who has gained and how the benefits have been distributed. And, you know, I think that it was a signal achievement of Byrne's administration that the casino lobby was in one rare case channeled into a public policy purpose rather than simply the self interest of the gambling moguls. And in that sense, it's been a very positive experiment.

**Don Linky:** In retrospect, were there mistakes made in drafting the legislation that we can see now that might have been confronted then? Brendan Byrne has said that his biggest mistake as governor was not creating a Meadowlands type Commission, regional
agency over Atlantic City. I guess other points that have been made that possibly by restricting the casinos to the boardwalk and to the marina section rather than allowing them to go throughout the city inland might have had broader redevelopment potential. You mentioned that many of the employees don't live in the city itself, possibly a residency restriction in the initial legislation for casino hires might have made some difference, that most of the development has occurred--well, particularly in housing and retailing on the outskirts of Atlantic City.

**Jeffrey Laurenti:** Galloway Township. Right.

**Donald Linky:** Egg Harbor and so forth. Anything else? Or do you think that, you know, at the time, as Brendan Byrne has said, he was so focused on keeping the casinos clean that these other issues became subordinated.

**Jeffrey Laurenti:** Well, it's also the case that in the legislative bickering over how you set up the control commission, what its powers will be, that to have added to that a regional planning dimension might well have further delayed this. And I think that that, of all the litany that you've just cited, is the one piece that could have been achieved, should have been achieved. I don't think you can put a residency requirement on where casino employees live. We couldn't even get away with it now for policemen on the payroll of municipal governments or firemen. I think that the issue that the redevelopment fund should have been addressing more--and this might have been easier if you had a regional planning requirement and process--would have been the focusing of money on building housing and neighborhoods that middle range people would want to live in in Atlantic City. And you now have, with the clearance of so much of the kind of the first row of the monopoly board, you know, streets of the lower end of housing, cheap end, the Baltic Avenue, Mediterranean Avenue side of the board <laughs>, you have still plenty of opportunity to do that. And can they do it? Or is now when the casino industry itself is at a queasy moment, will that be investing in housing that just won't have a market? But you can create--I hate to say in a town like Atlantic City you might have to think about--you can create gated communities with some of that space to provide the assurance of security that some people would cite, and fill in, there are these terrible holes of vacant land, large expansions of vacant land in the middle of Atlantic City. I'm sorry. Moving on.

**Donald Linky:** Moving on. Let's push past Atlantic City. Another major issue in the second term, but also was talked about in the first term, was the Pinelands. And you had a very significant role in that legislative battle. What do you recall?
Jeffrey Laurenti: That this was an issue that even during the campaign, if I remember this right, in '77. So the issue was percolating at that time, but had not yet become a cause. I remember Merlino in, I think, it was in a meeting with Governor's Council. Saying, you know, "We want a bill. You know, you've been thinking on it, working on it. I want a bill by such and such, or I'll put my own bill in." Which we viewed as a threat. God only knows what Joe Merlino would put in a bill. And then, one is stuck with having to-- on the Governor's side, trying to work around that.

Donald Linky: In fact, he wrote a letter to the Governor that we have, actually, the original, illegally.

Jeffrey Laurenti: <Laughs>

Donald Linky: To Governor Byrne, saying, "I, you know, want a bill."

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right. And that was, also, indicative of still the habits of deference [ph?] within the legislature. That the Governor and the administration draft a bill that we will sponsor. Rather than just do it ourselves. Because if he wanted a bill, he could always have asked Legislative Services to draft it. But, essentially, we were a small shop. So whereas, you, on the Governor's side, would have the advantage of a larger bureaucracy to troll for ideas from. And yes. You would've considered more issues, perhaps, than we might've. And, basically, he wanted an administration bill, knowing this was not going to be necessarily an easy sell. We had tried in '74 to put events legislation controlling land use along state highways, and as an individual legislator's bill, even as a legislative leaders' bill. The State Highway Land Use Review Board ______ SHLURB, by its acronym. Which was intended to prevent SHLURB, if you will, the proliferation of shopping centers and such that congest major roadways, so much of the state. Even when it's a legislative leaders' bill, if you're carrying that spear alone, the audiences of opposition are able to choke it off quickly. And Joe almost viewed it as, after a while, a joke. Every time he would get the bill called up for a committee review, he would have all the representatives of the shopping centers and the other development interests showing up at the committee hearing in order to squelch this bill. So, you know, we knew that a bill that even the majority leader, even the Senate President, put in on something that affected the vital property interests of so many people would have very limited traction if it weren't backed by the Governor actively. Hence, turning to you all, or turning to Brendan and saying, "Governor, I want to put a bill in. Give me a bill. Or I'll do my own half ass job."

Donald Linky: Yeah. Just to tie up that thread, the results of the Development Review Act in the first term, that was a Woodrow Wilson School special. But Professor Daniel
Jeffrey Laurenti: And what became of that? Because I don’t recall it ever surfacing up...

Donald Linky: Well, the only way it got introduced was when the Governor asked Marty Greenberg to introduce it. And, as far as I know, it never got further than being printed.

Jeffrey Laurenti: <Laughs>.

Donald Linky: In any ________...

Jeffrey Laurenti: He asked the wrong guy to put it in there.

Donald Linky: Well...

Jeffrey Laurenti: If it had gone to Joe...

Donald Linky: I think that was just a favor.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right, right, right.

Donald Linky: But in any event, let’s move back to the Pinelands. One of the major issues, I guess, in the beginning was what were the Pinelands? I mean, this was, sort of, an amorphous area of New Jersey. And how did you ____________...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right. When you go to Wharton State Forest...

Donald Linky: …draw the line?

Jeffrey Laurenti: When you go to Wharton State Forest, you know this is the Pinelands. But then, the drawing of the lines, beyond what’s already state owned, to encompass an entire region would inevitably become much harder and, in many ways, subjective. And
this was something, frankly, that we relied much more on your balancing of the many interests involved. Because on this we, frankly, didn't know which corner of Cape May or County, or which corner of Atlantic County should be in, should be out. We were always suspicious of Steve Persky's proposed little tampering with...

Donald Linky: His thumb.

Jeffrey Laurenti: <Laughs> Yes; right. Right, on where that line-- "Oh, you've moved it." By moving your thumb ever so slightly. So that we were not involved in, except in trying to rebuff once you all had a sense. Once the Governor's administration had a sense of what needed to be in that zone. And I presume that this was also worked out in _____ track with what Florio was going to be pressing as Federal Legislation, from time to time. But they needed to some how how both be on the same track. But that we never got close to.

Donald Linky: Well, let me interject myself again into the story, which is prohibited by the rules of oral interviews. But the way we finally drew the lines were that we found-- and I think I may have found-- that Rutgers had done a delineation of the Pinelands for the Department of Interior, under a hefty grant. Which was supposed to be, I believe, the aquifer in the water area of the Pinelands. Which was a very expansive map, which, personally, I felt was simply a start. It gave us a map that someone had drawn.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right. And a basis for a map of the...

Donald Linky: A basis for a map that I just figured once it went into the legislature would get narrowed down to that little core area in the beginning that was called the core area, I think, in the legislation. But that never happened. And I was amazed that it never did. And what's your recollection of the process?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, that there were lots of objections about being included. I remember Brian Kennedy, Republican Senator from Coastal Monmouth County, whose district included Wall Township. A small piece of which was within the aquifer determined Pinelands area. Railing about, you know, that this doesn't belong here. Although, when you drive down to that part of Wall Township, it's a lot of scrubbed pines. It was actually not simply by aquifer, but also by soil type. Legitimately viewed as part of this ecological zone. And I think the distinction that eventually emerged-- and now, this is hazy recollection-- between the core and-- because there is a distinction, isn't there?

Donald Linky: Protection area and preservation...
Jeffrey Laurenti: And preservation.

Donald Linky: ...area.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Exactly. That became the way of accommodating these concerns. But as I recall, despite all of the bitching and moaning and caterwauling over the expansiveness of the lines, that the lines were not changed very much, in contrast to Tom Cain's CAFRA bill, Coastal Area Facility Review Act, of 1972. Where the lines were heavily negotiated and arbitrarily changed for political passage. And on Pinelands protection, Steve Persky, who was the most adroit of the opponents, because he wasn't at heart an opponent-opponent. And was, in some ways, some might view as a little slippery, in terms of trying to carve out exceptions and such, while still purporting to be in favor of the overall concept. Unlike some of the Republican opponents. In the end, voted against it, of course, because he always insisted he was going to vote one way or the other. You're never going to see an abstention on his part. And voted against it. But was a very active and more successful because he seemed supportive in so many ways at getting attention to complaints. Whereas, others were not-- can we cut the film just for a second?

Donald Linky: Sure. What other memories about the Pinelands battle-- when the bill finally passed, I believe, it was in the middle of the morning, like three o'clock in the morning. But what other, I guess, negotiations or problems did Senator Merlino, as a sponsor, particularly run into?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, one of the big issues had been can you get the line moved? And on that one, we've managed to fend off the pressures.

Donald Linky: Was the strategy that if you started negotiating on that it would never stop?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, absolutely. Absolutely. And what's the rationale? There was a rationale for the overall line. All right. And so what's the rationale for deviating from the line, for trimming it away? And invariably, the reason was somebody who had a property interest was looking to get out of it. You had the Joe Maressa concerns about-- well, "A," about property. And his law business, you know, was much involved with land use issues in the region. Not that that would necessarily have affected his views on the issue. But the sense of loss of local municipal control. And that would ring true ideologically outside the region, as well, among some more conservative minded people. But it was also fairly clear that Democrats from the northern half of the state didn't care.
If this was something the Governor wanted, you know, they'd be happy to vote for it. Well, happy -- they'd be willing to vote for it. So it had acquired a head of steam. The Governor was strongly behind it. It was the signature issue of the start of his second term. And it was not unstoppable, frankly, you know, once you had that head of steam built behind it. And this was one that, in contrast to the environmental issues earlier in the decade that had led Charlie Marchanti [ph?] and the AFL CIO to align themselves with business, rather than with the environmental side. This was an issue that didn't really involve, either, industrial workers or their potential futures the way air, water, pollution controls might. And it didn't involve -- well, it did involve the building trades, which were Marchanti's core. But the AFL, I don't recall having had any dog in this fight.

Donald Linky: How much personal experience or knowledge did you or Senator Merlino have with the Pinelands at the time? Remember, I had never been there when the issue came up.

Jeffrey Laurenti: I had already, from '75 on, started going -- you know, doing an annual canoe trip or two in the Pinelands. And then, creating the invitation list and getting more people on. And in fact, it was taking Jerry Stockman, who was the new Assemblyperson, installed in our Trenton base district -- that is Merlino's legislative district -- on for a canoe trip in the Pinelands. That gave him a sense of passion about it, since he was going to have to move Merlino's bill in the Assembly. We did not have another sponsor, did not have an Assembly sponsor. This was a bill that started in the Senate. And then, was just going to make its way over there. So we took Jerry on this canoe trip to make him feel he was an expert. And it did allow him, I think, to speak with a little more passion about it. But yeah, that was about it. I mean, Joe would remember driving through the Pinelands in the 1930s and '40s to go to Atlantic City or something. It was hardly a deep connection. And he never became a hiker or a canoeist there, even after it was preserved. But for people in Mercer County, it was close enough that you knew of it. It's not like people in the northern part of the state for whom this was quite distant. We were not that far from the edge of the Pinelands protection area.

Donald Linky: I recall being on one of those canoe trips. And Diane Quinton was my canoe partner. And as soon as we got into the canoe, we capsized.

Jeffrey Laurenti: <Laughs>

Donald Linky: <Laughs> And spent the remainder of the day drying out.
Jeffrey Laurenti: Oh, funny. Because as I say, we've organized this. And, you know, now we have a fair complement of people that we get out of the UN Diplomatic community to come along. And forgive this aside. Ben, you can let the tape run for this. One of our memorable moments was when we had the Chinese naval attaché at their UN mission along for the trip. And his canoe capsized. <Inaudible>. At that time-- this was mid '90s that we didn't have too much to fear from the Chinese Navy, yet. But this year, on our annual outing, for the first time in 30 years-- and my wife would learn canoeing at summer camp, when she was, like, a preteen or whatever. Our canoe went over for the first time in 30 years. And she was beside herself.

Donald Linky: Okay. Well, let's move on to the, I guess, final days of the bill of consideration. And do you recall who the swing votes were?

Jeffrey Laurenti: I'm sorry, I don't.

Donald Linky: Okay. But in any event, it just barely got through. In fact, Brendan Byrne, in one of his interviews, has said that he was so concerned on the final day of passage. That when he went back to Marvin, he told, I think, Harold Hodes that if the bill passed, he wanted it called immediately. Because he was afraid the bill would be recalled after passage. And that the legislature would reconsider its vote and reject the bill.

Jeffrey Laurenti: You mean, this is on the Assembly side?

Donald Linky: On the Assembly side.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Because I don't recall them adding amendments.

Donald Linky: But that he was so concerned that the support was so fragile. That there were-- and I don't remember if that ever happened in the legislature. Where a bill that was passed was brought back for a second vote after passage. But he was so concerned that he wanted to sign the bill as quickly as he could after the second ________...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, we recall that the assembly, "A," had not been anywhere near as engaged in the thinking about the shaping of the legislation. And really it was an issue of sustaining political momentum for it. Once you got it through the Senate, which is where the knives had been sharpened. But where the knives would've then, been parried [ph?]
successfully, so that they did not carve anything out in any significant way. And in the assembly, if they were going to leave it to a newly appointed assemblyman. Because Jerry Stockman was inserted in the assembly in, kind of, one of these political revolving door deals. The assemblywoman, who had warmed Howard Woodson's old seat, really wanted to be Superintendent of Elections at the County. And when that opened up, she was put in there. Stockman was then designated by the county committee. So he was an appointed assemblyman, not even elected as part of the freshman class in that term. And here, he's carrying the load for this big bill. It was plainly not as well set up in the assembly. And the thought was, simply, you're trying to push it through there, based on the work in the Senate. I don't even know if it had much committee consideration, at all, in the assembly, or whether it was taken without reference. That I don't recall.

Donald Linky: Again, looking back, as with Atlantic City, success, failure, midway, Pinelands?

Jeffrey Laurenti: A huge success. This was a huge success. Yes. Inevitably, over time, we've had some nibbling away at it. And, particularly, during Republican administrations that was always the risk. Where the zeal to preserve, as always, competing with the lust to develop. Or the lust to exploit, you might say. And I think that there's a bigger danger right now with the Christie administration. Which is the least attentive to environmental concerns, of any of the Republican administrations we've seen, since 1960.

Donald Linky: In one of his interviews, we asked Governor Byrne whether he saw the Pinelands and Atlantic City as together a strategic land use planning move. That the development pressure from casino gambling would have eaten up the forest in the Pinelands, if you hadn't put in this protection and preservation program to the west. And he said no. He did not see it in the bigger picture. He saw them separately. How about you?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, clearly, they were taken up separately. And the latter, the Pinelands Protection Act-- or Preservation Act-- Pinelands Protection Act was not seen at the time as a measure to channel development flowing from these new casinos into Atlantic City. Because it didn't do that. I mean, you still have Galloway Township. You still have the suburban towns on the mainland near Atlantic City ready to fill up. And, frankly, CAFRA already should've had that area under control. I mean, that's the big scandal.

Donald Linky: But it did, sort of, keep it over that line. Rather than going further west, where the land, presumably, would've been cheaper or become cheaper over time.
Jeffrey Laurenti: Right. The reason...

Donald Linky: <Inaudible>.

Jeffrey Laurenti: ...way it would've been cheaper is because people would rather be somewhat closer to, either, their work or to the ocean, generally. And, certainly, it backstopped that risk. But I don't think that it was ever-- it certainly was never consciously, and I don't think even unintentionally. It is a major complement to Atlantic City.

Donald Linky: Before we move on, any other final thoughts on the Pinelands? Another major issue in the second term was the creation of New Jersey Transit. And you said, unlike the Pinelands, you weren't as personally involved in that. But any thoughts? Or, again, has that been a success or failure?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, there's no doubt that a state run, state coordinated, integrated transportation system, for a state as highly transit reliant as we are-- which, I mean, we're still overwhelmingly automobile oriented. But relative to any other state, any place other than New York City itself-- precisely, because we feed in so many into New York City-- we are as urbanized and as transit dependent as you will find anywhere. Having New Jersey Transit as a major public agency has been hugely important. Because we were pushed to that by the bankruptcy, literally, of a system of state subsidies for bus and rail operations that had started in the '60s that were ballooning in the '70s. So, in effect, we were providing, you know, state guaranteed capitalism. And it was an incoherent system. The notion of competitiveness in a money losing sector is a bizarre one by any economic standard. But you still had to overcome, "A," powerful interests, but, "B," a powerful idea lurking in the public subconscious that the state doesn't belong in business. And you had to see public transit services as public services, rather than private business. And since these had always been private businesses, although, Amtrak had kind of paved the way. When Richard Nixon accepted Amtrak, it was kind of a signal that, at least, rail travel now for passengers was, perhaps, legitimately a, at least, quasi-public service, and needed to be provided for. The difficulties were largely in the assembly. The bill started in the assembly, as I recall. And I recall the young assemblyman, Dick Codey, having been particularly concerned about the private operators. On the Senate side, Frank Herbert of Bergen County took over responsible for the bill, introduced it. And was, is an exceptionally articulate devoted guy, who we worked well with. I guess, you've had-- is he still alive, Frank Herbert?

Donald Linky: I think so.
Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, he'd be worth talking to on this. Because he may have clearer memories...

Donald Linky: We did talk to Cary Edwards extensively about his role in New Jersey Transit. And he said that Lou Gambaccini, who was the Transportation Commissioner, and sort of the godfather of the concept...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Absolutely.

Donald Linky: I think, went up to, either, his office or home and spent an afternoon with him, briefing him on the legislation.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right. And Gambaccini was absolutely crucial to the passage of this legislation. Because you had Republican ideological concerns, the whole notion of government getting into business. And Gambaccini, precisely, because he was not in contrast to the first term Transportation Commissioner Alex Agner [ph?], a political appointee, but a certified gold star professional in public transit. Gambaccini had the credibility that would be persuasive to a fair number of Republicans. This was not a partisan scheme. And this was not something, "A," that Brendan Byrne was going to try to run for an impossible reelection. Anyway, the Democratic Party isn't going to be able to make this into part of its litany of, you know, why Democrats do better for people in state government. And you could overcome some of the concerns that those who were not ideologically rabid on this issue of public/private would be able to come along and see that it made sense. Tom Gagliano was in the Senate then. He, ironically, ended up later as head of it. And I don't recall whether, in the end, he voted for it or not. He may not have. I think he was among the Republican opponents.

Donald Linky: I don't know. In any event, another issue that really began before Brendan Byrne's election, during the transition, was the sports complex in the Meadowlands. Again, looking back on that I don't think there was too much legislative activity in the second term. But the development...

Jeffrey Laurenti: No. The legislative activity...

Donald Linky: ...continued.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right. The legislative activity was in the lame duck session of the 1972-73 legislature. In which Byrne endorsed the moral pledge guarantee. And the
Legislature adopted it. And you had the Democratic caucus in the Senate gagging at it. Because they had opposed location of the sports authority when Cahill proposed it in the first place in 1970. And now, just what the had warned that these guys are going to have to come back and get state money. A new incoming governor was saying yes, he wanted that to be guaranteed.

Donald Linky: And, in fact, we found a memo that Dick Leone wrote, during the transition, to the governor-elect. Saying why are we spending so much time on this issue? Essentially, I guess, saying he wasn't very excited about salvaging the Cahill financing plan for the giant stadium, et cetera.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right.

Donald Linky: So that was another, I guess, issue that Governor Byrne...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Could the Governor...

Donald Linky: ...personally pushed...

Jeffrey Laurenti: That's right.

Donald Linky: ...past his advisors.

Jeffrey Laurenti: So he was entitled for that decade to have his name on the arena, until Mrs. Whitman [ph?] had it stripped off.

Donald Linky: Well, let me pin you down on that. Were you supporting his name being put on the arena?

Jeffrey Laurenti: That was done after he left office?

Donald Linky: No. It was in his last year ______...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Yeah, right. I thought it was quite improper...
Donald Linky: Which was very unpopular with the public. And...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, I thought it was quite improper, too. Of course, even funnier, was the Secaucus Station. Everybody thought that Frank Lautenberg's political obituary had already been written when he left the Senate in 2000. So all right. It's safe to put--he's virtually dead anyway. Put his name on the station at Secaucus. And talk about another daruma doll...

Donald Linky: Of course, in fairness, at the time that the Byrne Arena was named, it was also supposed to be the Cahill Racetrack and the Cain Aquarium. And then, their names came off. I think Tom Cain asked that his name be taken off. So Brendan Byrne was left as the only Governor with his name on one of the facilities.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right. But you have other Governors' names on-- there's a Hughes Justice Complex ________...

Donald Linky: In any event, the Meadowlands, success, failure, midway?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, the Meadowlands, we're talking about going back to Dick Hughes' time.

Donald Linky: Right.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Quite successful over time. Could've been stronger in some ways. But it couldn't have been stronger out of that legislature, the '68-'69 legislature. That Hughes was able to brow beat 3 to 1 Republican majorities into adopting that remains one of the most astonishing political achievements in 20th Century New Jersey history.

Donald Linky: Well, of course, one of your heroes, Paul Ylvislaker, was also the key person for Governor Hughes on the Meadowlands concept. Initially, how do you recall it? Do you recall the Meadowlands as being this megalopolis concept, the new city? Or was it more narrowly, as it's become...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Preservationist.

Donald Linky: ...preservationist and a few...
Jeffrey Laurenti: We're focused.

Donald Linky: ...public projects, yeah.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right. Now, hey, I was a teenager at the time. So you're asking what's my recollection, as a teenager, who was still, even at 17, 18, a news junkie, about the debate as it entered the public prints. That, yes. A vision of a new city was being talked about. Also, environmental sensitivity, because people were beginning to talking about environment in the late '60s. And I think that the important turn for the better had been that second route becoming more important. And the clusters of urban development, rather than a whole new city, replacing that initial mentality about a new city arising from the swamp. That environmentalism did kick in as a major issue that put the brakes on directing the planning process and development controls in that direction.

Donald Linky: So, generally, you think it's been a positive long-term development for New Jersey?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, let's see.

Donald Linky: Or at least ________...

Jeffrey Laurenti: By contrast, how does Route 22 going west from Union County look as the alternative model of, you know, growth wherever somebody wants to build something? It's, no, a lot better.

Donald Linky: Well, let's leave the high plain and go back to politics. Brendan Byrne is nearing the end of his second term.

Jeffrey Laurenti: You're skipping over so much.

Donald Linky: What am I skipping over?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, let me just take up two items. One, the fact that in the 1979 legislative elections...

Donald Linky: Budget?
Jeffrey Laurenti: And then, the budget. We'll get to the budget. But first, the fact that you have a serene election scene. And, again, now, this is second midterm, second term, all right? The Democratic majority in the assembly is trimmed a bit. But, by and large, Byrne's party just sails through. That is quite remarkable. Hughes, at the midpoint in his second term, suffered this terrible reverse of 3 to 1 Republican majorities ousting 2 to 1 Democratic ones. And Byrne had an almost magically touched career as a party leader, in spite of being viewed as the most bumbling and incompetent Governor to lead his party. The Democrats did damn well.

Donald Linky: Why?

Jeffrey Laurenti: I think because the second term-- I mean, the more interesting question is why the first term midterms didn't have a tax backlash that really caught on.

Donald Linky: Was more severe.

Jeffrey Laurenti: You know, the Democrats lost, perhaps, a couple more assembly seats. Well, no. They lost many more, because they had such a bloated number to begin with, 66 down to 48, I think it was. And in the second term, had gone from 54, roughly, to again around 50. I think it's because the issues in the second term did not strike a kind of cord of either deep ideological opposition. So this New Jersey Transit, for example, issue did not carry any ideological weight, the way now the Tea Partiers have been bemoaning General Motors and regulation of Wall Street and all that and government socialism. It didn't trigger that kind of reaction with the New Jersey electorate. The economy was getting rougher in '79 because of the far away events around. And the first phase of that late '79, early '80 recession was beginning to hit. But it didn't create a distemper, yet. And you had still new accomplishments that looked to be very good, Pinelands, New Jersey Transit to some degree. The other question to ask is why Byrne got through vetoing death penalty bills left and right, in a time when supposedly the death penalty was so urgent. And it never showed up at the polls as a factor in any legislator's reelection campaign. Or for that matter, scarcely was a factor in gubernatorial campaigns.

Donald Linky: How much of his success was due to Republican disorganization or incompetence?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, I wouldn't say that as a minority party in the legislature that they were particularly incompetent. Let's face it. What has fueled Republican so-called competence at the national level-- I still don't see it at the state level in the legislature--
has been having a lot of money behind them. That gives you an ability to shape the
debate outside the halls in a way that working through the medium of print press and
such little broadcasts and news attention as you got, you wouldn't have. I think that, you
know, where Byrne was, was a little bit ahead of where the public at large was. But,
basically, quite in tune on the big, you know, agenda of issues. And, again, Byrne's was
a scandal free administration. And in New Jersey that's always something that you light
an extra candle of gratitude in church for.

Donald Linky: Did you also see a change in his style and, sort of, management in the
second term that wasn't apparent in the first term? He did change the structure of the
Governor's Office, appointing a Chief of Staff, a Policy Office, and so forth. But, also,
was there a new sense of self confidence after his reelection victory where it...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, first...

Donald Linky: ...became apparent?

Jeffrey Laurenti: There was a sense of wonder among legislators that Lazarus has
been resurrected and is still there. So that very fact gave him street cred, when through
his entire first term he was dismissed as somebody who didn't know the game.
Somebody who was a total incompetent and political nincompoop. In the second term,
some how this guy won, and he brought more of us back in than we had before. At least,
on the assembly side. He must know something that the rest of us don't. He must have
a real feel for the electorate. So his stature had risen enormously. And, also, the issues
of the day were not so politically toxic. You didn't have the taxes, which had so poisoned
his first term. So people in the legislature were also more tolerant of his style. And they
weren't being pressed against the wall on things that were truly dangerous, politically, in
their minds. So it made the relations much easier. He was asking them to do things that
might be troublesome to particular constituency groups or donors or whatever. But it
wasn't like taking on the taxpayer wrath at a time of economic hardship beginning to
start. Because what we now know is the vise that has shrunk average people's incomes
terribly was starting to be felt with the 1973 recession, '74 recession. Which is what
curdled public opinion when you brought up the income tax in '74.

Donald Linky: Did you also perceive as, I believe, some of the Governor's staff did, that
he was somewhat more comfortable in his political skin in the second term? Whereas, in
the first term, he would have one word answers at press conferences, or even in
leadership meetings. But in the second term, he loosened up that famous sense of
humor. It became more apparent that he seemed somewhat more relaxed.
Donald Linky: Was that more relaxed style apparent or not? Or was that something that was only something internally that the state saw...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Oh, no, no. It was in his second term that the famous Byrne wit that is now so legendary in New Jersey politics actually became part of his public persona. I would actually trace the moment when it began to become part of a public persona to before the election, at the Legislative Correspondents' Dinner in 1977.

Donald Linky: Helicopter?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Yes. <laughs>. "When your daughter's got the car, you have to go by helicopter," and all that.

Donald Linky: We should give some context to that remark for people looking at this. He had been criticized extensively for over using the state police helicopter to go to events. And his daughter, Susan, had been in the newspapers for having a state car while she was in college in Washington, at Georgetown. Also, having a couple of accidents with state cars...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right, exactly. It was the accidents, <laughs> driving the state assigned car. So when at the Legislative Correspondents' Dinner, Byrne managed to turn the roast that, of course, is always delivered at the Governor and other state officials, back on the press corps, to some degree. He famously said, "Well, when your daughter's got the car, you have to go by helicopter" ___________.

Donald Linky: Yeah, "What's a guy going to do?"


Donald Linky: Of course, that was sort of a canned joke.

Jeffrey Laurenti: It may have been. It may have been. But it was self-deprecating, still, to some degree. And his more relaxed style, partly a function of not being under the gun himself. Not being the despised "One-Term Byrne," but somebody who had proved his political acumen. And now, was dealing with issues that were important that would be a
major legacy for the state. But didn't involve the toxicity of some of those of the first term. That all of this could come out and, I think, even Republican leaders in the very rare joint leadership meetings that included the minority party leaders. That the Republican leaders came to appreciate him much more in that second term, too. Just a more relaxed guy, and a guy who, you know, had a sense of purpose. He had survived the toughest election that one could imagine. And now, he wasn't coasting. He was still doing lots of big things. And nobody now really had it out for him. They didn't need to blacken his reputation or damage his standing with the public.

Donald Linky: Let's spend some time on the budget and fiscal problems. The income tax gets...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, let's not spend too much time.

Donald Linky: No. But the income tax gets passed. The general voting public probably thinks, "Well, gee, the state has so much money." Not understanding...

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, and we had told them. We had told them that this is what is going to solve New Jersey's budget problems. You know, you're doing a big package that puts you on much steadier ground. And then, three years later-- or four years? It was Fall '79. Yeah, three years after the income tax is passed, we're now staring [ph?] for the next budget year. For the budget the Governor will have to present in February of 1980, another budget gap. How are we going to handle this? And a decision was made that this is something that we have to deal with quickly. No legislative hearings, no long process. The last thing we want is for a public debate about where New Jersey's fiscal policy is headed. So what is it that the shortfall is? What tax measures can we put in that will overcome it? And let's just do it in the lame duck session, when no one-- you know, too, just four weeks after the '79 midterm assembly elections. No one will remember this by the 1981 elections. That was the calculation. It was an increase in the corporate income tax, corporation business tax. There were three allied measures that all hit the business community. Not severely, marginally. But we knew that there would be, of course, a hue and cry that at a moment when the country is facing recessionary pressures, you're going to be, once again, hitting business. And that the Republicans would want to push this into the next session, when you could drag it out, drag it out, and tie it up with the budget. With unaccustomed discipline, the Democratic majorities in the legislature agreed to ram this through in a, basically, two-week period between Christmas and New Year's. So we had to have guys give up their holiday travel plans, introducing the same bill in both chambers. I think we may have done it in both chambers. But it had to originate in the assembly. And then, this would avoid an additional session's wait when it would come to the Senate. And, actually, we got them
passed in the Senate side in the morning of the reorganization day for the new legislature. And, you know, we were prepared, if we had to, to pull the plug on the clock in the Senate Chamber. Which would arguably not have rescued the legality of it. We did a maneuver that I'd never seen before and I haven't seen since, and I did not again see afterwards. Which was to, after an opening speech by the mover of the bill, who was State Senator David Friedland.

**Donald Linky**: Of hallowed memory.

**Jeffrey Laurenti**: Of hallowed memory. Yeah, he would present the bill after one Republican senator had spoken against it. It may not have been Friedland who presented it. Friedland was the point guy who, then, jumped up after one Republican senator had voiced objections to then, call the question. In other words, to cut off debate and move immediately to a vote. This touched off furious outrage among the Republicans. But Merlino immediately called for a vote. And we had the votes to call the question and then, voted on the bills, one after another. So we got through those before 12 o'clock, the supposed witching hour, when this Senate, this legislature, had to close down. And thus, Governor Byrne was able, a month and a half later, to present a budget that was balanced. And there was no blood on the floor and no agony over taxes. It was all done quickly, with a dispatch that Democrats in the US Congress might have done better to have emulated when they were dealing with the health plan. Rather than letting it drag on and on and on and accumulating enemies, as it went.

**Donald Linky**: Unless there's another issue you wanted to talk about in the second term, let me, again, move back to politics. You mentioned that the Byrne administration was scandal free. But there was a scandal that indirectly impacted the administration, the Abscam scandal, which also more directly affected Senator Merlino's political career and your subsequent political choices. I guess, describe how you recall the scandal becoming public and what impact it had in Mercer County and in other areas of the state.

**Jeffrey Laurenti**: Right. The Abscam scandal followed, if we're talking about strictly Mercer County politics, the one huge reverse that shocked Democrats in that long-time democratic stronghold county. And that was the loss of the county executive seat. So you had a Republican county executive coming in, former Assistant Prosecutor, Wilbur Mathesius. And so the county Democrats who had become dependent on the patronage machine of traditional machine politics were now off a bit in the wilderness. And at the end of January, if I recall correctly, you then had the headlines about the Abscam sting operations, and the floating [ph?] of names of people who would've been involved in it. Including Frank Thompson, who was at that point a 25-year member of the House of Representatives. From a district that, through all of its reconfigurations had Mercer
County as its core. And Dick Coffee related to me after the scandal broke his concern that the Democratic Party had stood, in Mercer County, on three legs. Thompson as the, kind of, high profile liberal democratic star in congress in Washington. Joe Merlino for blue-collar Italian Mercer County voters. And Howard Woodson in the black community. Three major political pillars. And his own county and the organization, which now had been knocked out by the county executive loss, Thompson suddenly in trouble. And while the accusations lay out there for a while, I remember at the county convention in 1980 where that would provide the organization endorsement for candidates going into the primary. We had a somewhat contentious seeking out of a candidate for freeholder to replace one who had just defected to the Republican side and was now going to be running for County Clerk on the Republican side, and whom would win that year, a bad year. Somebody who had been aligned with Trenton Mayor Arthur Holland, who had been beaten back when seeking freeholder nomination four years before. Many of us-- I was Trenton's democratic leader-- tried to persuade Dick Coffee that this is a moment, after last November's defeat, you have to reach out. And we don't know what's happening at the congressional level. And we had the county convention. He allowed Tony Carabelli. He did not seek out an opponent of his wing of the party to try to keep Carabelli out. Our argument was we have to reach out, now, to bring in the disaffected reformist non-machine Democrats that were associated with Mayor Holland and Tony Carabelli and them. But at that convention, Frank Thompson did not appear personally. And I had been turning over in my mind-- here barely 30, and so you're on thin ice in any event if you're going to raise unpleasant questions. But to my mind, the question was these issues out there. We just want to know, did you take the money or not? But, of course, he wasn't there. So to whom would one pose the question? Would you really have had the courage at a party session to have broached that issue? Which we should've broached. Because it turns out that for all of the love that Thompy's [ph?] campaign people believed that the voters of the county had for him, once he was indicted in September of 1980, it didn't matter any longer. He's saying you're going to wait until your day in court. The voters aren't going to wait. And ended up electing somebody whom Thompson had handily beaten two years before, who has been there for 30 years now, Christopher H. Smith. Sorry. You asked a question. This is way off the Byrne line. And that certainly was not a reflection of Byrne's administration, at all, as you point out. The Abscam was a reflection, instead, on the venality of-- or the kind of weaknesses of the political class when offered temptation. That they thought they were on this side of the law. Because none of them was ever asked to do anything in return for accepting a gift. And that was Thompson's essential legal defense.

**Donald Linky:** Well, it did affect Byrne in the sense that he had gone out so forthrightly that Atlantic City was not going to be tainted by scandal, like the Las Vegas Casinos. And, in fact, the Abscam, at least, implications did impact the Vice Chairman, Kenneth MacDonald, of the Casino Commission. Byrne did push through quickly a restructuring
of the Casino Commission that made the commissioners full time. And did some other, I think, reforms that was intended, you know, to deal with the issues raised by the scandal.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right. That's true.

Donald Linky: So there was impact.

Jeffrey Laurenti: There was some; right. I mean, the bigger concern was that you had two big New Jersey democratic fish that got hooked, Thompson and Pete Williams.

Donald Linky: As well as Angelo Errichetti.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Right. How could we forget Angelo Errichetti?

Donald Linky: <Inaudible>.

Jeffrey Laurenti: And state senator.

Donald Linky: And state senator.

Jeffrey Laurenti: That's right. That's right. So New Jersey was represented with distinction in the Abscam scandal.

Donald Linky: As it would be in subsequent years, periodically.

Jeffrey Laurenti: <Laughs>. That's right. That's right. Only John Murtha managed to beat that up.

Donald Linky: That's right. In any event, this is 1980, Brendan Byrne's last year in office. Full year is 1981. Democrats and Republicans are organizing to run to succeed him, including Senator Merlino. When was the first time you discussed with Joe Merlino his plans?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, this is actually an issue of great embarrassment. Is it David Marinus [ph?], who was a reporter at that time for the Trenton Times. The Trenton Times
was owned by Kay Graham of the Washington Post for a period in the 1970's. It was an effort to try to bring the Post out into regional centers, where you could have young reporters learning the craft. And then, they would step to the big time with the Post in Washington. And David Marinus did a story, in which Merlino had been quoted as saying that, you know, "Brendan Byrne had better make up his mind as to whether he wants to run"-- this is in '77, so this is the Fall of '76-- "or I'll run." And he asked me about this. I said, "Oh, he must just be pulling somebody's leg." And when this appeared in print, Merlino was furious. Because I had never heard he had gubernatorial ambitions, that he saw himself sitting in the front office, rather than the Senate leadership office. And this was my rude awakening, or sudden awakening that that might be a possibility. And come 1980, he now begins talking about setting up a campaign committee and lining up consultants and surveying the field. Because the field is going to include some-- forgive the term-- well, I won't use the term, "retread." Some who were going to come back, make a second run after challenging Byrne in '77. And you had two congressmen in that category, Florio and Roe. They both would have been formidable, simply because you get more attention as a member of congress than you do as a state legislature. As the field developed further, you had Ken Gibson, Mayor of Newark, who put his hat in the ring. Which meant for the first time, instead of African-American voters being competed over by the candidates for statewide office, they would be largely corralled by a black candidate himself. So the other candidates were all going to have to be pitching more to a more suburban democratic audience, or whites in the cities. There were still a fair number of them voting democratic primaries at that point. There emerged out of Byrne's administration an interested candidate, his Attorney General, John Degnan. So you had a field that was growing. And Merlino thought that, as Senate President, he had a platform. He chose an issue, handgun control, ban on handguns, that would galvanize some attention. And put on the agenda an issue that he calculated would have many other candidates kind of shying away. But that would be dramatic in appealing to liberal voters. And that would put Jim Florio, in particular, on the spot, in terms of whether he's going to step away from the NRA, or with them. So, you know, it was a campaign that, in part, and only in part, reflected on the legacy of Byrne's eight years. A major portion of which, at least in terms of legislative accomplishments, Merlino would put his stamp on. And on those kinds of things, a chosen candidate of the administration did not have a claim. You know, did not have a name on the bill or was, you know, not the progenitor or whatever. I think that one of Joe's satisfactions in losing the primary was that he beat out Degnan.

Donald Linky: Did Senator Merlino have any thought that Brendan Byrne could keep John Degnan out of the race?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, I am sure that he thought that if Byrne cared enough, and that if Byrne were willing to support him, Byrne would be able to keep Degnan out of the race. After all, he's his attorney general. Now, admittedly, the attorney general serves for a full
term, and can't be dismissed or couldn't be dismissed. But it would be hard to see Degnan being able to find any kind of entry point if he's running against the wishes of, and against the endorsed candidate of, the Governor who put him in this job.

Donald Linky: And, of course, as attorney general, he somewhat undercuts Joe Merlino's issue of gun control a little bit with people who care about law enforcement, I guess.

Jeffrey Laurenti: We didn't have that sense. I don't think anybody had the sense that an attorney general, which for a lot of people doesn't seem to be law enforcement. It polices crime safety. Attorney general seems to be a lot more higher level issues, you know, paper law. Because I don't think that John had developed a kind of, you know, a cop's defender of guys on the street persona.

Donald Linky: Now, when Dick Coffee explored a gubernatorial candidacy in '73, I believe we've heard that his strategy was to try to line up some North Jersey county. And when he couldn't, you know, he basically folded his tent and backed Byrne.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, once Byrne...

Donald Linky: Did Merlino have that strategy?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Once Byrne had lined up the, I think it was, basically, Essex-Hudson. Once you had Essex-Hudson, where does Coffee go? And it was nowhere. Basically, the spot on the political spectrum of moderate liberal that Byrne was going to occupy in that '73 primary, is where Coffee would've been. Byrne had additional public appeal, the man who couldn't be bought, you know, public prosecutor and all that. In a time when, thanks to Watergate, people were looking for proven integrity. And more importantly, he had Essex and Hudson, the two biggest blocks of democratic primary voters, who tend to be willing to follow the party line, party column in the primary votes. So he had no place to go. And that was a reality blow when Coffee couldn't find an organization in the North to support him. By 1981, remember Byrne had changed the rules. The gubernatorial candidates no longer ran on the county party line.

Donald Linky: And that was viewed as something to help Degnan's candidacy.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, it was also viewed as-- it may have been. But it did change the rules somewhat. It isn't clear who was going to control blocks of votes anyway. Instead
of the county party endorsement mattering, what was seen as mattering was the potential electorate that you could connect to and the, kind of, base you already had. Because Dick Hughes was the case of somebody who had no visible base with the public. Byrne had no visible electoral base with the public the way Florio and Roe had. At least, a base of voters who knew them well and would support them. So this was a different kind of primary race, without party organizations tilting the balance. You needed organizational support where you could find it. And Merlino was looking to create, in his case, an image of somebody who got things done. You know, that he would claim the Byrne legacy of accomplishment, as opposed to somebody who was a mere administrator implementing it. He hoped that there would be some Italian cache in the northern parts-- well, throughout the state. Because Italian New Jersey was now, pretty much, already being defused. And in the sense, moving north, Florio was the other obvious claimant for that.

Donald Linky: Was there any regional target? Middlesex, for example, I guess, Bill Hamilton was a candidate in that primary. Was there any attempt by Joe Merlino to get Bill Hamilton out of the race and have a Middlesex-Mercer combination?

Jeffrey Laurenti: I was not part of the political strategy. I remember I was Executive Director of the State Senate.

Donald Linky: Above the battle.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Above the battle. And Merlino, in fact, reproached me halfway through the-- at the end of winter, for just stepping back and letting the campaign staff run the campaign. But I felt that it wasn't appropriate for me. And they're higher [ph?]. It's their job. I'm not trying to second-guess them. But he clearly was concerned that, you know, they approached things from their political consultant perspective, as to what works, what doesn't, what you should say, what you shouldn't say. <Inaudible>. So yeah, I was not involved in the political outreach for that campaign. Retrospectively it might have been better for me to have been more involved with that because when I-- when a few years later make my own moves beyond the Mercer County level, politically it would have been better to have developed some of those ties.

Q: In the primary, Jim Florio [ph?], becomes the nominee, did you have any role in the Florio campaign?

Jeffrey Laurenti: No. No. And Jim is the nominee was one that I didn't have a sense that many inside the Burn [ph?] felt compelled to or felt an urgency about working for. It was somebody that had challenged Burn four years before who had seemed politically
more conservative both when he was in the legislature-- remember, he was one of the Democrats in the state assembly in 1974, who voted against the income tax even though he had the City of Camden in his district. So there were lots of reservations that people who were in Burns’ wing of the party had about Jim. Merlino had helped focus attention on the NRA connection that nobody'd paid attention to. And Jim in his fall campaign, where he had this huge lead, made the calculation that this should be a referendum on the Reagan administration and that this, since you were going to win anyway, this would catapult you into national prominence as somebody challenging what seemed to be the headlong rush of American policy, at least to embrace the new Reagan ideological package. As it turns out, challenging Reagan head on, was a source of alienation of part of the electorate that would have-- that was initially drawn to him. And we saw that in crudely ethnic terms among Italian businesspeople who seemed initially supportive of Florio, one of our own, but were more attached to the notion of Reagan’s free market crushing unions and all that. And you saw in places like Middlesex County that-- in the November election, the blue collar, suburban, white voter, that there was a marked leaching away decaying. If I recall correctly, Florio carried Middlesex, but by the narrowest of margins in that elections, which was symptomatic of where his large base-vote, his large vote which had been always been among slightly more conservative so-called ethnic democrats. How that was lost, by banging on their-- by running against the Reagan Democrats, the current champion.

Q: Did the Florio--

Jeffrey Laurenti: I detected no distress in the governor’s office the morning after or a week after when it became clear that Florio was behind by the 1700 votes that would give the governorship to Cain. There were no tears being shed. It was not being viewed as a big ideological shift. You’re going to have a more pro-business budding moderate [ph?] Republican governor. People thought they could live with that and Florio had not been a liberal champion anyway. So at that moment, I mean, on our side, the legislative side, we didn’t want to be deal with the republican government, even if <inaudible> one thought you could work with. But the governor’s office, Burns’ office, it’s not as if Florio represented a continuation of the Burn legacy. So I wouldn’t say it was <inaudible> for you thought, but oh, well, cycles happen.

Q: Did the Florio strategy of focusing on federal issues raise maybe a broader lesson for New Jersey campaigns later? And I’m thinking maybe about the Whitman-Bradley senatorial campaign where Bradley tried to ignore the interstate tax package that Florio implemented as governor and almost got beaten in a very surprising--

Jeffrey Laurenti: Absolutely. A stunning--
Q: Or is that making too much of New Jersey politicians <inaudible> Washington as the deciding issue for the voters.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well in the case of Bradley versus Mrs. Whitman, of course it was the reverse. It was this is a federal race, federal issues, we don’t need to talk about state issues. But that and Bradley was somebody who wouldn’t deign to deal with state issues like that in any event. And voter fury or rage being so intense, so red hot, that you weren’t paying to get away with evasiveness easily even if you were Bill Bradley. I meant it’s an interesting interrelation, but you didn’t see any house candidates in 1990 suffering from the Florio backlash-- anti Florio backlash. So yeah, and then looking through the ’80s, not much interrelationship at all. I mean, congressmen carry a little extra burden going into a state election and I think increasingly republican congressmen do because all the pressures on them in Washington are to go right. And so it’s very hard now to be a congressman from New Jersey, Republican congressman from New Jersey and then be able to come back and run statewide successfully in the fall. Chris Christy’s [ph?] success I think is partly a factor of not having had a Washington record. It was a record strictly as a US attorney, and that’s a no-brainer. Putting politicians in jail is always a plus with the electorate. And yet he’s the most conservative governor that they have-- most conservative governor that’s been elected. I mean, they gave us Shundler, gave us Sandman, that were warnings to them normally not to go in that direction.

Q: Let’s move on with the political chronology. Joe Merlino has lost the gubernatorial primary and Florio had lost, very narrowly, the gubernatorial election.

Jeffrey Laurenti: So what becomes of-- final priority, the crowning glory of Brendenburn’s career as governor, passing a congressional redistricting map <inaudible> that holds promise of creating a 10 to 3 or 11 to 3 delegation. So the redistricting battle that took place in the lame duck session at the end of 1981 in which the democrats adopted a map confected by, I believe, by Peter Curtain and Peter Lindenfeld or Tom Lindenfeld rather, the son, in the assembly back rooms in consultation with Democratic members after the scary experience of 1980, particularly for James Howard and Momath [ph?], that became a subject of political Rorschach [ph?] tests. What do you see when you look at these images? They flying swan, the fishhook, the legendary creations of that map. Mattie Feldman describing it as a work of art and such and the battle over getting it signed. It seeming to have been in a last minute snag, but because we had already passed-- it was initially intended as an amendment to the map, Burn actually had in his pocket something to sign when the original one got snagged just before the legislature went out of office when we had Anthony Russo because Adam Leven objected to something. Wouldn’t budge and the redistricting map, the original bill seeking to push through, failed of passage. And then Burn whips out the other-- what had initially been the amendment
to it, to that, to move a few towns in Burlington County around. <inaudible> and then signs that and it turns out to be legally valid.

Q: And how did that affect Mercer County?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, in terms of Mercer County, because it gave Adam Levin his district, the Elizabeth Union District Westfield where Levin lived, was part of the fishhook that reached down through Princeton to then take in Freehold, Manalop, and Marlborough. So it took Princeton, but it had already been lost from fourth district. The district was configured basically to elect a Democrat in the fourth district so that whatever chances Chris Smith might have should be totally extinguished.

Q: And of course Chris Smith had succeeded to Frank Thompson’s seat.

Jeffrey Laurenti: That’s right. So the district in which Smith won in 1980 was an average 53/54% democratic performance district. He’s energetic, young, not viewed at the time as particularly astute politically, already written off on all the Washington lists. By early 1982 I think he was the youngest member of the house. He was 27 and all that. But nonetheless working like a beaver all around the district. So you give, assume, a kind of 5, 10% incumbency edge for— well, 5% edge for new time— first term member in congress. He would have been competitive, but the district is drawn which went much more along the riverfront in Burlington County to make a much more heavily blue collar Democratic district, was now 57% average Democratic performance. Which meant that, even if he was doing everything right, it would be very hard on incumbency to be able to build up enough to hold the seat in a normal year. And, of course, that was the year the unemployment spiked and was a significant Democratic pick up here. Not huge; 27 seats were picked up in the ’82 House elections.

Q: Did you have input in your Democratic role within Trenton and the county in the drawing of the map? Has it affected your constituency?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Not in my role as Trenton Democratic chairman, not in my role in Mercer County, yeah, with Mercer County Democracy, and frankly the— it wasn’t my but Joe Merlino’s interest that were guiding where he was. And his judgment on the— on that map which was incorporated, and frankly was— even that was not a big concern because it didn’t need to be Joe Merlino. It was the mood among democrats statewide would have been— this is one seat that we want to get back. We just want to make sure we get it back.
Q: Were you surprised at his interest in the seat?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, he didn’t show any interest in the seat really until the end of his term. I mean, it was—now what is it that was going to do and then suddenly we get the sense that he’s interested in that seat. And yeah, I’ll be frank. I had the long thought at some point, when that seat opens up, I would like to run, but it opened up much sooner than I would have been ready for since I had not laid, outside of Mercer County, any kind of groundwork for it, but I was happily working as a supporter of somebody else. And certainly, if Joe was interested, although it seemed to me a much bigger challenge even with that district, because I had been tracking Chris’s town hall—town meetings and, in early ’81, I observed how he seemed to establish some rapport with voters that came out and he was beginning to create a connection. And even in Mercer County, in white, blue collar areas of Trenton and Hamilton township, people kind of liked him in spite of his being a down the line, vote for Reagan’s policies. And today, after 30 years, we see them as having been disastrous for the country.

Q: When Joe Merlino does decide to challenge Chris Smith--

Jeffrey Laurenti: Greg Yeats, brother of Charl--

Q: Charlie Yeats.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Emerges as the other candidate, the Burlington County candidate, and they were the second biggest piece of the district, Mercer having the largest share of votes.

Q: And did you discuss with Merlino strategy or were you more on the sidelines at that point?

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, I participated in some of his early strategy sessions with Roger Green, who was I think an early advisor to him on this. I don't know if Fran Ryan who had been really big, his campaign manager, in 1981 for governor, I think She was involved with the congressional run as well, but that was pretty early on. And then I did the regular bit, certainly backing Joe vis a vie Craig Yeats, and through the primary campaign and helping out somewhat on the issue track for the general election campaign, but Tony Couaillo [ph?] who was chairman of the democratic congressional campaign committee, when I ran a couple of years later, remarked to me that when we saw him, Mitchell [ph?], I thought, “This is going to be a tough road because this is the
very image of a state house politician." And the match vis a vie Smith would not be a cake walk.

Q: As I recall, Joe also made a few remarks that were viewed as demeaning during that campaign.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, no, just one, but unfortunately it was at the most pivotal moment. Joe had infuriated the Hamilton Township Republican party by-- in his personal style, by and large ignoring them or being frequently critical of them. And when he pushed through-- this is a piece of legislative accomplishment that we haven't discussed because it was not an initiative of the governor, but one that the governor supported, Burns supported. And he pushed through the reform of the utility tax distribution, because at the time of the surging oil prices, energy prices, huge increases in electricity bills, what had always been the hidden tax--

Q: Grocer Sapon [ph?] tax.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Gross receipts, which were allocated among municipalities based on the relative share of the value of the utilities property, meant that you had huge amounts going to the towns with generating stations, most notoriously what we branded Kuwait on the Delaware, __________ Creek with the Salem nuclear reactor, but also in Hamilton Township. And Hamilton Township had a generating station. That meant that it was getting huge increases in revenue that the local administration could spend freely because it was like free money to them, while you had other towns, including right next door, Trenton, were in their constant state of fiscal crisis. So Joe worked out a deal, of all people, with John Gregorio, mayor of Linden, which is the center of generating stations and the oil refinery industry, that he would put in the bill out of fairness to redistribute a share of the growing utility tax revenues on a more need based and population based formula. So the net effect was that, in Hamilton Township, which was the single biggest town outside of Trenton in the entire fourth district, the new Republican administration, instead of having endless money to play with to create new parks and to do this and that without any impact on the tax rate, they now had to make budgetary choices. And they chose to brand their first tax increase as Merlino's responsibility. And that became the campaign in Hamilton Township, which had now become a swing town. Was still Democratic leaning, a lot of blue collar democrats in 1982, and that is where, on election day, Smith won by a two to one margin, by 10,000 votes in Hamilton Township, which was the margin by which he won district wide. So that issue was important, but what drove the stake through the heart was self-inflicted. I guess Harri Curi's [ph?] in your gut rather than your heart, but self-inflicted stake through the heart the week before that election, 1982, the one campaign debate between Merlino and Smith. When the debate
ends, and of course Smith knowing that Merlino had thin skin, he was trying to get under his skin during the debate, as the candidates walk off the stage and Merlino’s being interviewed by press, Smith comes over and tugs at his sleeve and says, “Joe, Joe,” as if to protest something, and Merlino wheels about and says, “Beat it, kid. Can’t you see I’m talking to the press? When I go to Congress, I’ll make you a page so you learn how Congress works.”

Q: And, of course, the press ran with that quote.

Jeffrey Laurenti: He’s said it freaking right in front of press people, so that was the story on the front page of the district newspapers the next day. It was devastating. Now, the other interesting thing, when you look at election result, because this goes to congressional incumbency, was that Smith ran 10 point, even outside of Hamilton, something like between 6 to 10 points ahead of regular Republican performance in every part of the district that he had inherited from the Thompson District where he had won two years before, the district that he had worked. He ran at or a bit behind regular Republican performance. It’s a bit behind regular Republican performance in the parts of the district that had just been grafted on, the new parts, where they didn’t—people didn’t know him any more than Merlino, and they did know the 10% unemployment and the agony for blue collar America for Reagan first few years.

Q: Well, later you yourself pick up the--

Jeffrey Laurenti: It’s much too far away from the--

Q: It’s a sore point in the chronology.

Jeffrey Laurenti: Well, not a sore point, but that’s another interview for another time and don’t need to--

Q: Okay, but--

Jeffrey Laurenti: I will say only this, that my bolster for the ’86 campaign against Chris Smith, at the end of the campaign, calling me at the last tracking polls were clearly showing that this was not going well. We had closed the gap through the end of September, but we had spent all our money in September trying to get over the hump within a 10 point--get under 10 points distance and we were still like 15 points behind. So then all the money doors shut down out of the national networks other than the pro-
choice networks. We were very committed to that campaign. But Mark Penn, my polster, calling to say this is going to be bad added, I must say, it's a sign to me about how the New Jersey newspaper, the print press, really doesn't factor much into voter thinking for a congressional race because I've never seen a campaign in which the press picked up and framed the issues in a debate the way my candidate had set them out as the proper terms for what this campaign is about, the way this, you know. I've seen all the press clips and all the press clips would seem to point to your message having been picked up as how the race should be defined, but it seems that voters don't get their information from New Jersey newspapers for a race like this.

Q: Before we close, how do you feel today with the Republican governor who's openly critical of some of the issues and accomplishments that you had such a significant role in developing during your time in the state house such as school reform, school financing reform--

Jeffrey Laurenti: Transportation improvements.

Q: Transportation, low income housing, affordable housing. Is this a depressing time to see this sort of backlash against some of these <inaudible> milestones?

Jeffrey Laurenti: I don't see this as a backlash of the New Jersey public against-- this is not what Christy [ph?] had run on. What were the themes of Governor Christy's campaign? They were cracking down crime and against taxes basically. And all this part of the package that we all knew was lurking there, I think there's been a bit of a surprise how aggressive, some would say bullying, he has been in pressing his agenda, but I don't see this as the public's shift. What I find very depressing, that we had leadership of the mind-- of the breadth of mind now that we would normally associate with Mississippi or another backwater state at the helm of what has been one of the great forefront states in terms of effective government delivering an opportunity and a better society. And that he is able to so narrowly define what peoples interests are I think is of a piece with the kind of crimped and crabbed tea party mindset that is putting, not just New Jersey, but America's future very much at risk. This is a country who's-- that faces decline because of the-- and possibly a precipitous decline, because of the ideological blinkers and bile of a major political party that has lost its traditional moorings and become basically a party of resentment against educated elites. Not against wealthy elites, against educated elites. And that doesn't bode well for the stated, does not bode well for America.

Q: Apart from your criticism of the partisan Republican stance, whether mistakes in the liberal agenda of the '60s and '70s that, in retrospect, could have been corrected, for
example, in school reforms, particularly in New Jersey which will be shown more successes in terms of improvement and student performance in the cities for example.

**Jeffrey Laurenti:** Well, you may recall that-- we hadn’t discussed this in our conversation before. Maybe we did. But in the first term of Governor Burn, the thorough and efficient education law which was essentially masterminded really in the legislature, a long drawn out process, Steve Wiley having led this and the consultative process that the education establishment viewed with such impatience, all this T&E goal setting that they thought was a worthless exercise. And there was a good deal of backlash against going through an exercise was a lot of spinning of wheels. And in the 1977 appropriations committee deliberations, as much as a kind of prank, but to show dissatisfaction with then commissioner Fred Burks focus on process rather than results, Joe Merlino and Charlie Yeats offered in the appropriations committee to reprogram a chunk of education money for a different kind of incentive program, a dollar an egg. <laughs> You have the state giving to poor children or middle class children what wealthier children was imagined always got. If you did well on your report card, Daddy gives you some money or something, but this would be the incentive. It was a joke, of course, but it spoke to what was a concern that the focus on funding and process did not have a competent focus on what’s happening in the classroom. So I think that there, you know, there is an argument to be made that there could have been more done. But you would never have had a successful way of parrying the conservative argument that putting money into the cities is money down a RA therapies hole that-- because it’s a racist argument fundamentally that what they mean is black kids aren’t going to perform no matter what money you put in. But they had since the Marberger years been adamant that we don’t want to talk about racial integration. And in fact, nationally, racial integration as a way of dealing with racial isolation has been off the agenda basically since the late Nixon years. And we just never challenged that. It was too hot in the ‘70s and ‘80s. and that still is arguably one of the real telling issues. What else, because it is now 1:00 really.

**Q:** Okay. Just finally, in your role since you left an official state position, how do you see New Jersey government and politics over the subsequent years, weaker, stronger? Is the governor’s role weaker than it was when you were there in the ‘70s and how has the legislature performed? We’ve had a series of scandals and corruption, just final long-term thoughts.

**Jeffrey Laurenti:** Yeah. Fundamentally in terms of the political system, the shift in campaign-- the shift in how you get elected to the legislature, which has been dramatic over the last 40 years has driven politics into a state centralized model, much as we see nationally where democrats running in the south still have to depend on nationwide funding networks. Republicans running in the north have to rely on nationwide funding networks that polarize them. I’m not sure that ours are quite as ideologically polarized,
but certainly interest group polarization and the leadership having control-- a substantial amount of control over who gets money therefore who gets elected. The fact that legislative races are essentially now conducted in a half dozen districts; maybe eight districts are viewed as swing or competitive. These are the battleground districts and, except in a huge landslide year, and we haven’t had a huge landslide year since the 1991 rejection of Florio’s tax program gave the Republicans two thirds for veto-proof majorities. You’re really nibbling at the edges of each election cycle normally. And legislators over time have actually developed some incumbency advantage. You look back in the 1960’s, incumbent members of the legislature had to present advantage over non incumbents running with them, almost invisible. They could be blown out in an instant if there’s a landslide at the top. Even when Cain had an unprecedented landslide, a 70% reelection win, yes, he picked up control of the assembly, but when Burn won with 68%, he had 66 seats, and when the Republican assembly came in under Chuck Hardwick’s speakership following the Cain blowout election on Peter Shapiro in ’85, he had 48, 50 seats. So legislators now dig in deeper. They have more autonomy if they’re in a safe district to run off where they want because you can’t call a county chairman to run— to get them in line, but they are much more vulnerable to leadership if they are from one of these potential swing districts. And I think that that has changed the dynamic. It weakens the governor’s ability to line up legislators. It’s not like the Hugh’s days when you called Dennis Carey or-- if he answers your call, he didn’t on the income tax phone, the Essex County chairman then, or even Burn occasionally might seek a county chairman’s help in the first term I think. Of course, he lamented in the “77 campaign, “I put half of the county chairmen on my payroll, and now they don’t do anything.” The county chairman today is irrelevant to legislative process and passage in legislation. And the media picture is even more complicated now with the public’s information sources being, if anything, much narrower. Papers which weren’t getting too much across to begin with, now don’t even have reporters covering either state or the local politics in any depth, so yeah, a transformed scene.