

**Interview with Governor Brendan T. Byrne
by Michael Aron**

January 25, 2011

Michael Aron: It's the morning of January 25th, 2011; I'm Michael Aron of NJN News here for the Rutgers program on the Governor, the Brendan T. Byrne archive. We are in Roseland, New Jersey at the offices of Carella Byrne. We're in Governor Byrne's personal office here; for our final interview with the Governor in this series that we started five years ago back in 2006, we're going to talk about the end of the Byrne years, and what has the Governor focused on after leaving the Governor's office. Before we get to the end of things, you wanted to tell a story about Jimmy Carter; go ahead.

Brendan Byrne: I was very close to Carter, first Governor to support him. Now he gets elected. My great ambition is to play tennis on the White House tennis court. So now I figure I got the President is one of my best friends, I'm going to play tennis; never got the invitation to play tennis. The story I heard, and it's probably not true, but the story I heard was that Jimmy Carter took tennis lessons from a man by the name of Frank Brennan who had also taught Billie Jean King and was from New Jersey. The story is that Carter asked Frank Brennan, did you ever see Brendan Byrne play tennis? And Brennan says, "Yes." Carter says, "Do you think I could beat him?" And Brennan says, "No." So I never got the invitation. I like that story, and whether it's true or false, I love telling it, and the punch line is, when Ronald Reagan gets to be President, I tell Ronald Reagan that story. And Reagan calls an associate over and says, "Next time Brendan Byrne is in Washington, make sure he gets to use the White House tennis court." And the punch line to that story is, Reagan got two terms and Carter got one.

Michael Aron: Did you get to use the tennis court?

Brendan Byrne: Oh yes.

Michael Aron: Okay.

Brendan Byrne: Yes, yes. Reagan didn't play tennis but I got to use the court. So there.

Michael Aron: Is it an indoor court?

Brendan Byrne: No, no it's an outdoor court.

Michael Aron: In the back?

Brendan Byrne: And the important thing you have to keep in mind, if the ball goes over the fence, you don't go after it, you stay where you're supposed to stay, and the Secret Service pops up any time that you look like you're straying.

Michael Aron: Before we rolled the tape, you started to tell us about the first President you met.

Brendan Byrne: Probably Eisenhower and I'm vague on when I met him. I think I met him at a Governor's conference probably in Williamsburg, Virginia and he came in and spoke to the Governors, and Meyner was the Governor but I was in the audience and on the way out, he came by my table, and I shook hands with him.

Michael Aron: What did you think of him?

Brendan Byrne: I admired Eisenhower; I was in World War II and I remember Eisenhower telling us we're going into France, and I figure that may affect me; and it did actually ultimately. But anyway, I admired him as a General, as a leader, he had a great style, and I think he was a good leader.

Michael Aron: We want to talk about the end of your Governorship, but there was one thing that also came up in our discussions before we turned the tape on this morning, and that's a pivotal meeting in 1973 in the Spring or right as you're deciding to run or not; you just decided alright you're going to do it and you meet with Fitzpatrick of Bayonne, what was his first name?

Brendan Byrne: Francis.

Michael Aron: Francis Fitzpatrick, he's the Mayor of Bayonne.

Brendan Byrne: The situation at that time was, that Hudson County had a triumvirate of county leaders, all of whom allegedly had equal say; Paul Jordan, Frank Rodgers, and Francis Fitzpatrick. And I had, when I made my interest known in making the run, I first went to Frank Rodgers who was a friend of my father's.

Michael Aron: He was the Mayor of Harrison.

Brendan Byrne: And he was the Mayor of Harrison; a long time Mayor. And then I had a number of friends who knew Paul Jordan, including Bernie Hartnett was key.

Michael Aron: He was the Mayor of Jersey City?

Brendan Byrne: Jordan was.

Michael Aron: Yeah.

Brendan Byrne: Yes. And by the way Jersey City was involved in their own municipal election. But anyway, I think I got his support. Now the third member of the triumphant was Francis Fitzpatrick. And Francis Fitzpatrick I kept hearing did not want me as a candidate, because I was too close to Bob Meyner, and they all disliked Bob Meyner because in 1960 Bob Meyner kept New Jersey from endorsing John Kennedy and remember Meyner hung in there in the first ballot in the 1960 convention and so we could not take credit for making John Kennedy President. Hudson County never forgave Meyner. And so when my name was mentioned, he had been with Meyner; Brendan Byrne had been with Meyner, so we're not interested in him. It took some doing to convince people that Brendan Byrne was his own man and that was literally a last minute situation. I had tried to meet with Fitzpatrick; he wouldn't meet with me. I even the closest I came was he had a city magistrate by the name of Byrne, they took one phone call, because it was my Byrne, he thought it was the Magistrate. And that was a short conversation. Anyway, it comes to the Monday after Easter I think, when I finally get a meeting with Fitzpatrick. And at that point, there's only about five days left before the filing deadline. So I get the meeting, I go over and I got Don Lan and Ken McPherson with me and we meet with Fitzpatrick. I meet with him alone I think with Jim Dugan, and he asks me this question: "Would you rebuild the Bayonne Bridge if you were Governor?" And I said, "No," because I knew he was going to ask me, and I studied the issue and I knew that I couldn't rebuild that bridge, not under the terms of what was doable. So I say, "No," and he says, "Well we're not interested in you." So I leave. And three of us go to dinner at a local pub in Bayonne, and

while we're at dinner, McPherson calls Dugan and the telephone conv- I don't know what it was, but as a result of the telephone conversation, I get invited back to Fitzpatrick's house in Bayonne after dinner, and I go back to the house with Lan and McPherson. I go back to the house and it's raining; I meet him on his porch. And as soon as I sat down, he said, "You got the nomination." And I said, "I've got to understand what that means, I said does that mean I got the line in Hudson County?" He says, "You got the line in Hudson County." It was over. And then I wound up-

Michael Aron: The Primary was over.

Brendan Byrne: The Primary was over. And then I wound up alleged- in theory at the time I was going to run against Cahill who was going to beat Sandman and when Sandman beat him, the Fall election was over too because I think when the New York Times endorsed me right after Sandman won that primary. Not because it was me, but because it wasn't Sandman.

Michael Aron: Apparently there's more to the story of the Bayonne Bridge when you ran for re-election in 1977, was it an issue?

Brendan Byrne: When I ran in '77, Fitzpatrick was no longer Mayor of Bayonne, I forget his name.

Man 1: Dennis Collins?

Brendan Byrne: Dennis Collins was. Yeah and Dennis Collins was convinced that I was not only going to lose, but that I was a drag on the ticket in Hudson County, and so he announced that from his standpoint the tickets, the ballots started with the legislative candidate. He clearly indicated he was not endorsing me for re-election.

Michael Aron: Did the bridge have anything to do with that or no?

Brendan Byrne: I'm not sure. No matter what, you know how my wife will tell me if she's not going to the movies because she doesn't like the movie, she says, "Oh <inaudible>." I think he was determined not to let me drag the ticket, no matter what my pos- if I had the support of the bridge or a whole bridge, you know or a- it wouldn't have made any difference.

Michael Aron: Now it's 2011 and we're finally getting around to raising that bridge because we have to.

Brendan Byrne: Yeah different bridge, by the way.

Michael Aron: Oh, is it?

Brendan Byrne: Oh yeah. It's a different- it's a bridge that will allow the traffic that the other bridge would not have allowed.

Michael Aron: You flew over that bridge when it was blown up?

Brendan Byrne: That may be a possible ...but I don't really remember that. I don't think I did. But what I did do was when I blew up a casino in Atlantic City, they blew up a hotel that <inaudible>.

Michael Aron: The Marlborough-Blenheim?

Brendan Byrne: Yeah. That the architectural writer in the New York Times was a big supporter of it and criticized me for it and it held up the progress on it. I was there when they blew up the Marlborough-Blenheim.

Michael Aron: The architecture critic of the New York Times held up the progress by protesting?

Brendan Byrne: I think her editorial criticism of my-

Michael Aron: Ada Louise-Huxtable.

Brendan Byrne: Yeah.

Michael Aron: She was the old architecture critic from the New York Times.

Brendan Byrne: Yeah you know, I thought that was impeding progress, and it was not an attractive building anyway. That could have got us into the subject of, if a Governor wants something done, most of the times he can get it done.

Michael Aron: Well let's talk about that.

Brendan Byrne: Example.

Michael Aron: Go ahead.

Brendan Byrne: Example. I wanted some money for the McCarter Theatre when I was Governor.

Michael Aron: The local theater in Princeton.

Brendan Byrne: Yeah I asked the Council of the Arts to give me the money. They wouldn't do it. It was for air conditioning or something. So all I did was take the money out of their budget and put it as a line item and got the thing done. You can do that. I remember another situation where I thought that Rutgers University ought to stop spending a huge amount of money on outside counsel and hire an inside counsel. Rutgers was offended, Sonny Werblin said I couldn't do that, I was interfering with the government of a private university and I had no right to do that. So what I did there was I took all the money that Rutgers was spending on private counsel and took it out of Rutgers budget- appropriation to Rutgers, that's the only way I could get legal advice. But the Governor has, and New Jersey especially, tremendous power. And if he really wants something, and it's legitimate, I mean you know you can't overstep it, but if you want something where there's a difference of opinion, the Governor can get his way.

Michael Aron: Do you think the New Jersey Governor is really more powerful than any other Governor?

Brendan Byrne: Probably; probably because he's got all of these things going for him. He's got the point of power, he's got the veto power, he's got the conditional veto power, you can't fool around with him.

Michael Aron: Let's turn our attention to the end of your second term.

Brendan Byrne: Yes.

Michael Aron: When you're a two term Governor and you're in the last year of your second term, what's going through your mind at that time?

Brendan Byrne: First of all, Harold Hodes, who was my Chief of Staff, used to talk about lame duckedness, and he would have an agenda, and we got more things done in our last year, we still had the legislature on our side, I could still get nominations you know, confirmed, and so I don't think we ever felt handicapped or helpless in that last year. We were maybe the last after Kean was elected and was the Governor elect, maybe during that time, there were nominations held up.

Michael Aron: Is it a case of trying to get as much done as you can before you're shown the door?

Brendan Byrne: Yeah we had a pretty strong agenda. I remember spending the fall of 1981 going around meeting Legislators in their home districts, getting the local newspaper support and having an agenda. So we did not give up, as I say, I didn't see a resistance until after Kean was elected. And then the local Senators would start listening to what Kean wanted, which at that point was natural. I mean when I won the primary in '73, I was recognized as the Governor of New Jersey.

Michael Aron: When you won the primary.

Brendan Byrne: Yeah.

Michael Aron: Because everybody knew you'd win the general.

Brendan Byrne: Yeah. And Cahill didn't like Sandman, didn't really support him, and so I was the Governor starting in July.

Michael Aron: You brought up Rutgers a little while ago. Looking at the higher education community, what was your relation with the President of Rutgers, Edward Bloustein, when you were Governor?

Brendan Byrne: I thought it was pretty good, he thought it was pretty bad, and I loved his wife. His wife was a doctor and a very smart lady and Ed Bloustein always wanted more money, that's what the President of the University is supposed to do. We had some difference of opinion as to whether he as President of Rutgers ought to serve on corporate boards. I think he was on the Paramount Pictures board. I thought there was a conflict there, but they're doing it all the time now. He and by and large I think I was supportive of Rutgers.

Michael Aron: Was he a good university President?

Brendan Byrne: Sure. Sure he was. And a leader, and respected, and the students liked him. But if I wanted, you know something like inside counsel and I was spending state's money unnecessarily, I thought, what I would say as the, "It's my money. It's my, the taxpayers money."

Michael Aron: In 1981 when you were clearly having to leave office, so many Republicans and Democrats entered their party primaries to be the nominee in '81. Did you get involved in the Democratic Primary?

Brendan Byrne: Tried to. I tried; there were three or four candidates pitching for the same boat. In other words, I think Tommy Smith and John Degnan and Ken Gibson at the time, you know, all looking for the same sort of centrist vote. And I remember trying to talk to a couple of them about getting out.

Michael Aron: Who did you try to talk to to get out?

Brendan Byrne: I remember specifically Tommy Smith.

Michael Aron: Mayor of Jersey City.

Brendan Byrne: Yeah. And Tommy you know, once you get into that you think you have a chance, you know, only four people can win, and I'm one of them. <Laughs> Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? So anyway, I was not able to do that and-

Michael Aron: John Degnan was Attorney General at that point in time.

Brendan Byrne: He was not Attorney General at that point in time.

Michael Aron: He resigned in order to run for Governor. But he had been Attorney General towards the end of-

Brendan Byrne: And a great one.

Michael Aron: And he was part of your inner circle.

Brendan Byrne: Yes he was.

Michael Aron: So were you working for him?

Brendan Byrne: What I tried to do was be objective because they were all good friends of mine.

Michael Aron: Joe Merlino was another one.

Brendan Byrne: Huh?

Michael Aron: Was Joe Merlino another one?

Brendan Byrne: Yeah.

Michael Aron: And Jim Florio who was the Congressman who would ultimately win. But go ahead you were saying you tried to help Degnan?

Brendan Byrne: Well what I did was I tried to be objective and say good things about them all. In the last two or three weeks of the campaign, Degnan came to me and said, "That's not enough, unless you come out for me and get out on the streets with me, I don't have a chance." And so I did. I went out on the streets with Degnan for the last, I think three or so weeks of the campaign. I thought he'd be a great Governor and he would be, and still would be.

Michael Aron: Florio won. Do you remember where you were on Election Night that night, in '81; were you with Degnan at his- were you in Camden?

Brendan Byrne: I have a-

Don Linky: Working with me.

Michael Aron: Don says you were at Morven with him.

Brendan Byrne: I was?

Don Linky: That was <inaudible>.

Brendan Byrne: I don't remember.

Michael Aron: Okay. So Florio won; how were your relations with Jim Florio?

Brendan Byrne: Good. You know he's not my warmest friend, but I have a great respect for him, I've come to appreciate Jim Florio. He has come around to be a great advocate of the Pinelands as the Chairman of the Pinelands Commission for a number of years; has got a solid record as Governor and has won the Profiles in Courage award.

Michael Aron: From the Kennedy Library in Massachusetts, yeah, for his gun control work, right?

Brendan Byrne: That's right.

Michael Aron: Yeah, Tom Kean beat Jim Florio that year, what were your relations with Kean like during the transition?

Brendan Byrne: We were very close. When I was Governor, I put Kean on the Parkway Commission and gave him the kind of exposure that he took advantage of in campaigning. He would be one to introduce somebody at events at the Parkway and he was a good candidate and a good Governor. Our families have always been

close. When I left office in '82, the first invitation I had to be on a corporate board was from Bob Kean.

Michael Aron: Which board, Elizabethtown?

Brendan Byrne: Elizabethtown Water Company and we've been close ever since. And when Kean was Governor he put me on the Sports Complex.

Michael Aron: Sports Authority.

Brendan Byrne: Sports Authority, yeah. Yeah.

Michael Aron: Did you enjoy that?

Brendan Byrne: Oh sure, sure and I stayed on that until I left office and became a part owner of the New Jersey Devils. And I thought it was a conflict to be on the Sports Authority while I owned at least a small piece of the New Jersey Devils.

Michael Aron: So you resigned from the Sports Authority?

Brendan Byrne: Yeah.

Michael Aron: About how many years did you serve on the Sports Authority?

Brendan Byrne: Three or four years.

Michael Aron: What else did you do when you left office?

Brendan Byrne: I got on a bunch of boards.

Michael Aron: What boards?

Brendan Byrne: Prudential.

Michael Aron: The ex-Governor automatically gets on boards?

Brendan Byrne: Oh no.

Michael Aron: No?

Brendan Byrne: No. I think Meyner, Cahill and I were appointed them.

Man 1: Chief Justice <inaudible>.

Brendan Byrne: None before and none since. But I was on the Ingersoll Rand board. Elizabethtown Water Company. Bell Telephone Company.

Michael Aron: And how did you enjoy being on a board after being Governor?

Brendan Byrne: I enjoyed it, it was a great education; I should have had those experiences before I became Governor, because you get a great insight into corporate governance. I mean I'm not the first Governor to say that, that I should have had my corporate experience before I became Governor and I did learn a lot.

Michael Aron: And did you come back here to this law firm?

Brendan Byrne: The day after I left office I became a member of Carella, Byrne, so forth.

Michael Aron: Oh that's right, you had not been part of this firm prior to-

Brendan Byrne: No but Charlie Carella's family and my family had some connection and Charlie had worked for me in the Prosecutor's Office. As a matter of fact there was a famous Charlie squad composed of five or six men whose first names were Charlie and they were the Charlie Squad, they were the organized crime people, and he headed it.

Michael Aron: When you came back to the firm, did you practice law?

Brendan Byrne: Sure.

Michael Aron: What kind of law? Commercial law?

Brendan Byrne: Mostly trial lawyer; I don't look like it but mostly a trial lawyer and early on I met Tom Carvel, and he was the ice cream man. And I wound up doing all of his local litigation, New York and New Jersey and so forth and we got to be great friends and as a matter of fact, as I sit here, tomorrow I'm going to a meeting of the Carvel Foundation of which I'm a member. I've been almost ever since I left office. He was a great guy, he was a good citizen.

Michael Aron: Where did he live?

Brendan Byrne: Mostly in Yonkers, New York; in that area. But anyway, I did a lot of litigation for him; I tried a long, long case for Witco Chemical Company and did a fair amount of court work; New York and I became a member of the New York Bar and tried some cases in New York.

Michael Aron: Did you have to take a Bar exam?

Brendan Byrne: There was a small window where you could be granted reciprocity and I took advantage of it, I think I was still <inaudible>.

Michael Aron: At what point did you become the funniest after dinner speaker in New Jersey?

Brendan Byrne: Tomorrow maybe, I don't know. <Laughs>

Michael Aron: Well you've been honing that reputation for a couple of decades now, so how did that all happen?

Brendan Byrne: If you ask me, which you just did, I think I was always funny. I mean I think I could always see humorous side of life. I remember as a kid, being down on the shore with my parents, I was a little kid, and I got a cup of tea and I looked at the tea bag and it looked like it had been used before and I said, "This tea bag has gotten quite a workout," and my father laughed and I think I was able to see the funny side of things from the get go. And that's basically what I do, is I see

some humorous side of things like when we went to- one of the legislative correspondent shows, where all the former Governors spoke, and Governor Meyner spoke just before I did, and he started rambling about the Governors he had known in of New Jersey, Silzer, you know, guys like that. And then he goes on and on, and Kean is the Governor, and you know we're supposed to keep it short. So Meyner went on and on and on, and so when I got up to speak next, I said Governor Meyner has asked me to cover Governors Livingston through Wilson.

Michael Aron: <Laughs>

Brendan Byrne: But the point is, you've got to see the funny side. One time at a Legislative correspondent show the correspondents did a skit where they suggest that I couldn't read beyond the sixth grade level. And when I got up, I said that's not true, that I can read out of state newspapers too. They didn't think <inaudible>.

Michael Aron: That's very good.

Brendan Byrne: But I've always been able to see a funny side of every situation, and that's good.

Michael Aron: Did you get an agent at some point, did you make a real-

Brendan Byrne: I'm not a comedian, I'm not a comedian. I just, I've been compared more to Will Rogers, but I've discussed humor with a lot of people. I played golf a couple of times with Bob Hope and we would discuss humor. And I think the thing I can do well, apparently, is timing. I've been compared to Jack Benny. You know, Jack Benny's humor was not in what he said, but how he reacted.

Michael Aron: Permit me one quick aside. I was in Atlantic City 15 years ago at a luncheon, I told a Brendan Byrne joke, it fell completely flat, and then I went over to another meeting where you were speaking, and you were telling the same joke, and the audience went into an uproar, it was all in the telling.

Brendan Byrne: Well these were all job seekers.

Michael Aron: Do you have a favorite story that you always trotted out, or a favorite joke?

Brendan Byrne: I don't do this anymore, but if I tell the line about how things have gotten better for me, and people are now waving at me with all five fingers, and if I don't get a laugh on that, I sit down; because that's a funny line.

Michael Aron: I told a Brendan Byrne joke two days ago at a public gathering, I attributed it to you; the one about the politician who goes to too many rubber chicken dinners one week and comes home drunk and falls into the floor of his foyer and his wife looks down and says, "And what do you have to say for yourself?" And he says, "I have no prepared remarks, but I'll gladly entertain questions from the floor." I'm living on your jokes.

Brendan Byrne: Is that right? That's good. But there are, if you can make it a habit, to just see a funny side of whatever the situation is, it helps. I don't know.

<crew talk>

Brendan Byrne: There is some timing for Jack Benny and I've learned a little bit from Jack Benny.

Michael Aron: Was there some kind of story about Bill Cosby and you and politicians and comics, maybe I'm-

Brendan Byrne: No, Cosby and I played tennis a number of times, and he came to see me when his daughter was trying to get into Princeton and I tried to put a good word in for his daughter, because they didn't take her, but I think she went to Holyoke or something. Not Holyoke, but someplace just as good as... anyway. But Cosby-

Michael Aron: I thought there was some funny exchange between you and him.

Brendan Byrne: Yeah there were a couple. I used to have a Brendan Byrne state of New Jersey tie; it was a blue tie with a little gold New Jersey outline on it, and I would give that to people who would make jokes about the fact that the gold thing looked like mustard and Cosby did a whole routine one time on my tie.

Michael Aron: Didn't Bill Faherty of the Chamber of Commerce come up with that tie?

Brendan Byrne: He had a different- no he had a tie for the bank, when he was with the Fidelity . But it didn't inspire jokes like my tie did.

Michael Aron: You have a Phil Rizzuto story?

Brendan Byrne: With the tie? Oh..

<crew talk>

Brendan Byrne: Yeah that was with the mustard. A lot of people, I gave that tie to a lot of people, and got a lot of great reactions. Who was the manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers for years and years?

Michael Aron: Walter Alston?

Brendan Byrne: No, after that. Anyway, he- I gave him a tie one time, and I saw him again a couple of years later, and he said that he wore that tie to one of those restaurants and they were out west where if you went in the restaurant wearing a tie they'd cut it off, he said he was wearing my tie in that restaurant and they cut it off, so I had to send him another tie. But that makes a good talking point.

Michael Aron: How are your legacy items doing today? The Pinelands, Atlantic City, New Jersey Transit?

Brendan Byrne: The Pinelands you have to watch every day because the Pinelands when you lose, you've lost. And people who say, well we have to have balance in the Pinelands, means they're going to develop half the Pinelands and I think that Governor Whitman was a real danger to me in that area because she talked about balance all the time. I think they stopped her from some of the stuff. As we speak here, I have not seen a firm enthusiastic commitment by this Governor to the Pinelands so I worry about it.

Michael Aron: This Governor is Governor Christie.

Brendan Byrne: Yes. And I talked to him and the Lieutenant Governor all the time about the need to defend the Pinelands and they have been chewing away at it, eroding it; I mean for good causes as they see, you know, expanding Stockton State College for example into the Pinelands. You can't argue about that's not a good cause, but it's a little more of the Pinelands gone and every time something goes, the perimeter shrinks. I do worry about the Pinelands.

Michael Aron: Atlantic City? Casino Gambling?

Brendan Byrne: Not worried about Atlantic City because I think there's a feeling that I said it would be honest, it is honest. It is honest. But to say they're so honest that we don't have to watch it any more, it would trouble me, and I think it's troubled a lot of people and so I would think that we ought to have a constant vigilance in Atlantic City because it can deteriorate.

Michael Aron: The fact that gambling is on the way down in Atlantic City?

Brendan Byrne: Anyway. <Laughs> Yeah. Not as on the way down in Atlantic City as just Atlantic City has a smaller piece of the pie. And I understood when I did Atlantic City, first of all, it was the only alternative I had, in Atlantic City. I think I told you that before we did Atlantic City, we went out to Disney World, or Disneyland or whatever and see if we could entice them into making Atlantic City a Disney World. And they told us, look in Disney World, we don't make money until after Thanksgiving. The month of December is our <inaudible> and for you to say do it in four months or five months in Atlantic City, doesn't compute for us. So we finally went for casino gambling.

Michael Aron: I don't know why I picked New Jersey Transit as the number three legacy item but I did, is it something you created right?

Brendan Byrne: It's something I created. Looking back on it, you would think absolutely it had to be a chip shot, but the union fought New Jersey Transit tooth and nail, tooth and nail and we had a- fortunately, and one of the things I really had going for me in New Jersey is that I had both houses of the legislature for eight years. I never had to deal with a dissident branch and really was able to keep my Democratic majorities in discipline, so that when it came to New Jersey Transit, first of all, I got a good sponsor on that and <inaudible>.

<crew talk>

Brendan Byrne: Yeah, Herbert. Senator Herbert. I think of him all the time. Anyway, we had a good bill, we refined it a little bit to take care of some of the union problems, and we got it passed, and it's been well done, it's been well done, it's been well held. And we had some very profitable, you know, distinguished people leading the charge -

Michael Aron: Cary Edwards on the Republican side, I'm told.

Brendan Byrne: Yeah, but anyway, I had a guy by the name of Lou Gambaccini who is my Transportation Commissioner. Gambaccini was not a political choice, he was a professional, a total professional and I picked him out of the PATH operation and made him the Highway Commissioner.

Michael Aron: So New Jersey Transit is a thriving enterprise at the moment in your view?

Brendan Byrne: Well there's always a contest of how much money we're going to put into this, whether we can build all the things we should be building. I think New Jersey in order to really make it, has got to have the kind of transportation available 24 hours a day. I mean, I go into New York to a dinner and a show, and I drive in and I drive back. I could take a train in, but I can't take a train back without waiting an hour or maybe if it's too late, hours. So if we have the reputation of having a train every 20 minutes, especially in the near suburbs, you're going to relieve a lot of the tunnel <inaudible>

Michael Aron: The Sports Complex is another part of your legacy. It seems to have peaked and now be somehow either on its way out or in transition, how do you see how the status is there?

Brendan Byrne: To the extent that the Sports Complex isn't needed, it's fine. I mean the Giants are still here without the Sports Complex; the Jets are still here without the Sports- they wouldn't have been, if we didn't have the Sports Complex. So it serves, to the extent it serves its purpose fine. Let's let it go.

Michael Aron: So it's not a sad-

Brendan Byrne: Benjamin Franklin said, "Be not the first on whom the new is tried or be the last to lay the old aside."

Michael Aron: So it doesn't make you sad that the Sports Authority is in decline?

Brendan Byrne: No.

Michael Aron: Okay and I guess one last piece of your first tier legacy items, is the creation of the income tax, which has been raised many times over the years, but I'm sure you still think that was one of the best things you did?

Brendan Byrne: Well they've had 30 years to repeal it.

Michael Aron: <Laughs> They haven't done that have they?

Brendan Byrne: They not only haven't but they- the first thing they look at when they're in trouble is the raising the income tax, and it was a very modest tax. I think it raises a billion dollars and a lot of that went back into tax rebates.

Michael Aron: We're going to take a little break now, and then we'll figure out how to wrap this up.

Brendan Byrne: Okay.

Michael Aron: We're rolling again and again while we were off camera, good subjects started to come up, including other Governors and let's start with Ella Grasso of Connecticut.

Brendan Byrne: Well you got to talk about Ella Grasso and Hugh Carey because I was the peacemaker between those two Governors and my favorite story there is we had this odd even license thing in the gas crisis. So now we have agreed that we would do this as a tri-state effort. In other words, when it came time to ration, we would do it together, among ourselves. So now we're in Providence, Rhode Island at a weekend conference and we're at a cocktail party, and I say to Ella, "You know, maybe it's time to institute the odd/even." She said, "Probably so." I said, "Let's go talk to Hugh Carey." She says, "I'm not going over there." So I run over to Hugh Carey and I said it's time to start this. Let's talk to Ella. "I'm not going over there." They hated- not hated each other, but they couldn't stand each other.

Michael Aron: They were both Democrats, right?

Brendan Byrne: Oh yeah. But they both had a little bit of an ego and a couple of times when Carey was running things; Grasso would walk out of the room, or vice versa. But they had some petty stuff, and when it came down to things that mattered, they were on the same page. But anyway, couldn't get them together. And so I had to run here, "How about Tuesday? How about Wednesday?" It was fun. But Ella Grasso I thought was a good Governor of Connecticut as Governor was concerned and Hugh Carey and I were very close; very close and we would do things like bail each other out, when the Concorde was coming into New York, a lot of pressure from Queens on Hugh Carey to stop it, and so Carey said that he was going to get the Port Authority to stop it. He didn't really want that to happen. And so I bailed him out, I said, "If he gets the Port Authority to do that, I'll veto the minutes," so now he's off the hook. We worked that way, but Ella was such a doll and treated government responsibilities the way they should be treated.

Michael Aron: The name Jerry Brown came up, who is now the Governor of California again, but what was your story of that?

Brendan Byrne: I knew him when he had hair. But Jerry Brown was, by the way, what Jerry Brown did, Mike Dukakis of Massachusetts tried to mimic. He did a lot of things Jerry Brown did and not as success- but anyway, Jerry Brown was good for California, and I think he'll be good for California again.

Michael Aron: But you say you were Chairman of the National Governor's Association?

Brendan Byrne: I was Chairman- no, of the Democratic Governors Association. And Jerry Brown-

Michael Aron: In your last year as Governor.

Brendan Byrne: Yeah and also the first year of Reagan's presidency. So I got to a lot of Republican events in Washington because I was the token Democrat. Anyway, Jerry Brown was regarded as a little out of the mainstream of Democrats and they did not want him to succeed me as Chairman of the Democratic Governors. It was none of my business, I didn't care, I was gone. But I remember being in California one time, and being at some event and when I came back to my hotel, sitting in the lobby, was Jerry Brown waiting for me, to talk to me about who would succeed me. Anyway, that's Jerry Brown. There were a bunch of great Governors that I served with, including Ronald Reagan was Governor the first year I

was Governor, and President the last year I was Governor. It made me feel like a non-achiever.

Michael Aron: Did Jerry Brown get to succeed you or no?

Brendan Byrne: No. No.

Michael Aron: Was Bill Clinton Governor at that point?

Brendan Byrne: Off and on.

Michael Aron: Off and on.

Brendan Byrne: As a matter of fact, Bill Clinton lost that year, my last year I was Governor. And he called me, and he asked me to support him for the job of National Chairman of the Democratic Party and I did. I did. Then he withdrew without telling me, and I called him and I gave him hell. One quick story, when I married my wife Ruthie, we were in Washington one day and I called the White House, and I said, any chance, it was like 4:00 o'clock and I didn't have anything until 7:00 so I called the White House, and I said, "Any chance the President can say hello to me and meet my new wife?" I get a call back and they say, "Come over here at 5:45." So on the way over I say to Ruthie, "When I introduce you to the President, he's going to say, 'Let me tell you about the time Brendan and I had lunch at a Chinese restaurant.'" So we get to the White House, we get in the Oval Office; I meet the President, introduce him to Ruthie, and he says, "Let me tell you about the time your husband and I had lunch at the Chinese restaurant." And he remembered what street that Chinese restaurant was on. I never did. Ah, yes, Bill Clinton and I were pretty close.

Michael Aron: Do you recall what year you married Ruthie?

Brendan Byrne: '92 I think.

Michael Aron: '92. Ruthie has been at your side at so many public events in the last 15-18-19 years, tell us that story.

Brendan Byrne: We have different versions of that story. She remembers meeting me when I was the Governor frankly, I don't really remember meeting her other than, anyway. She's a very bright lady, a very pretty lady, and a very active lady, and she's kept me involved in public life since we were married and responsible for a lot of the good things that have happened to me.

Michael Aron: And the rest of your family, all those family you took into Morven with you. What's become of all of them?

Brendan Byrne: Well first off all, what's become of Morven -- because they used to play football in the main hallway at Morven and there were a few crystals missing from the chandeliers from intercepted footballs? And Billy and I used to play stick ball in that main hall, it was a good place to play stick ball and he would be the New York Yankees and I would be the Saint Louis Cardinals.

Michael Aron: Why the Saint Louis Cardinals?

Brendan Byrne: Because it's been my team since 10 years old. Dizzy Dean; as a matter of fact, I called Dizzy Dean all the time; my favorite Dizzy Dean quote is, "It ain't braggin' if you done it." And I've used that and Dave Wilentz heard me use it one time, and thought it was the best quote he ever heard. Anyway, where were we?

Michael Aron: I don't know but that's a good quote for your two terms as Governor.

Brendan Byrne: Yeah, thank you. <Laughs>

Michael Aron: Your children...

Brendan Byrne: Tom was the Chairman of a Democratic state committee during Clinton's time as President, at least part of it. He enjoys public life and would like the opportunity to participate more, and he would be good; he's very successful and his wife has been very successful, she just gave a million dollars to Princeton. So anyway, I don't worry about him anymore. Anyway, Timmy who was always, almost the opposite of Tom, as rash as Tom gets, to me is very quiet, He's with Cleary Gottlieb, which is a big New York law firm, he does very well there. Nancy has been married the last couple of years to Peter Reinhardt who is with

__Hovnanian. Nancy was in charge of travel and tourism for the state for a number of years; got frustrated with that job and quit. Although it paid her a fair amount of money, nobody else I know quit a job like that. And Barbara, who has got three kids now is a former world champion rower, lightweight rower, beautiful girl, did some modeling when she was in school, so we don't worry about her. And Billy who was a good baseball player in school is now worrying about his kids because his wife has a good job and he does better with the two girls and loves the girls . Anyway, that's the family.

Michael Aron: What do you want to do with the rest of your days?

Brendan Byrne: Live.

Michael Aron: <Laughs>

Brendan Byrne: No I'm still doing the column with Tom Kean and I enjoy it. I still do things like this, where I get interviewed. Since all you good well-paid press people are not in the business any more, they call on me more and more and I think that happens to all of us, they call on us as a morgue for what went on in the _old days_, what happened when? The reporters aren't around for that any more, so we get a lot of calls.

Michael Aron: Well we'll keep calling and-

Brendan Byrne: God willing!

Michael Aron: God willing is right. And it's been quite the fascinating to hear your stories and relive your career with you.

Brendan Byrne: Thank you. Great state. Cut!

Michael Aron: <Laughs>