**David Applebaum Interview**

**June 2, 2014**

**Rick Sinding:** Hello. I’m Rick Sinding. It’s Monday, June 2, 2014, here at the Eagleton Institute of Politics on the campus of Rutgers University. With me today for the Center on the American Governor is David Applebaum who holds the distinction of, if I’m not mistaken, having the longest continuous uninterrupted service on the staff of first Congressman and then Governor Jim Florio. David, welcome to Eagleton.

**David Applebaum:** Thank you. Thanks for having me.

**Rick Sinding:** Or perhaps I should say welcome home to Eagleton. If I’m not mistaken, this is where you first met a young Congressman named Jim Florio.

**David Applebaum:** It is indeed. Back in 1982, I was a graduate fellow here at Eagleton and had the opportunity in my first class every Tuesday morning at either eight or eight fifteen to have a chance to get up close and personal with somebody like Jim Florio who at that point in time was a Congressman coming off the 1981 loss... to Tom Kean. It really was an opportunity for me. I had always hoped to be able to work for a governor and at that point in time my opportunity was to have a chance to sit up close and personal with Jim Florio in that class and it was a great opportunity.

**Rick Sinding:** He had run for governor and lost in ’81--

**David Applebaum:** That’s right.

**Rick Sinding:** When you say you’d always wanted to work for a governor was it with the expectation that eight years later you would end up working for somebody who was a governor?

**David Applebaum:** At that point in time, I thought Florio had the best shot of being the next governor after Tom Kean and the chance to learn from somebody like a Jim Florio was too great to pass up. The opportunity to work for a Governor Florio was something I thought about but at that point in time the other thing that graduate fellows really think about is how can I get employed, and I thought look, if you sit up close, if you make a reasonable impression you have a shot maybe at getting a job. And probably about halfway through the year after that course was over the Congressman came up to me and said, “Would you be interested when you’re done with your stint in a legislative assistant position?” and I just
said, “Yes.” And at that point having a job, you’re not even through your graduate fellowship, that was too great and so it was easy to say yes.

**Rick Sinding:** Was he teaching a class on a regular basis at that point here?

**David Applebaum:** I think it was early in his engagement here. He had been teaching for quite some time I think a little bit before that, maybe not quite so-- quite some time.

**Rick Sinding:** This was on a weekly basis that he was--

**David Applebaum:** It was on a weekly basis-- I believe it was weekly, certainly a routine basis, and he taught a class in public policy and it was typically those issues that were top of mind with him and top of mind with the state. A lot of it was environmental, a lot of it was healthcare, a lot of it was transportation policy, those things that he focused on with his subcommittee in Washington.

**Rick Sinding:** Let’s go back a few years before that. How did you become interested in government and politics? Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school? What got you on the track toward that kind of a career?

**David Applebaum:** Oh. I won’t go back too far but-- I’ll make it short. I was a senior in high school-- at Ewing High School just outside of Trenton and there was a course in community service usually offered to seniors. I took that opportunity and I worked for Common Cause as an intern at that point in time. Ironically, the person who was chairman of Common Cause at that point in time was a Congressman, Dick Zimmer, and the person who was running—

**Rick Sinding:** A young progressive Republican.

**David Applebaum:** Absolutely, thought the world of him, still do, but at that point in time he was the chairman of Common Cause and the president of Common Cause or the person who ran the organization on a day-to-day basis was another progressive Republican named Nancy Becker, and so it was a great opportunity. It was roughly the time that the income tax was going through the legislature under the Byrne administration so it was a very exciting time to be in Trenton. And for me-- my father had worked for the Office of Legislative Services for many years before that and then subsequently he actually served during the time of the Florio administration as well.
Rick Sinding: He was in fact one of the founders, was he not, of the Office of Legislative Services?

David Applebaum: He was one of the initial three members of the professional staff, the nonpartisan staff.

Rick Sinding: Along with someone named Alito--

David Applebaum: Along with somebody named Alito; that’s right. The Justice’s father, Sam Sr., was a founding member of that along with somebody else who’s well known in the annals of Eagleton, a guy named Lew Thurston, so the three of them really were the nucleus of the Office of Legislative Services, the sort of first nonpartisan political staff, and for me I grew up there. It was a chance to sort of walk the halls. I did my high-school and junior-high-school term papers there, worked on the old IBM Selectric..., had a chance to sit up in the gallery, and it was-- in my leisure suit and at that point it was a great opportunity and I was hooked. It was in the blood by then and so that was sort of the earlier days. Later in college I focused on government and politics, same sort of standard government and politics course, and then cut my teeth again on a couple of local campaigns at that point in time, one for East Ward Council in the City of Trenton, worked for a friend who I had worked with as an intern at the Public Advocate’s office, a guy named Anthony Anastasio. And then with the change of administration the thought was okay, what do you want to do for the rest of your life, and I thought well, I’m not sure but my father kept talking about his buddy, Alan Rosenthal, and what it might be like to be a fellow up at the Eagleton Institute. So I applied and got in here and then certainly the rest is more than history for me.

Rick Sinding: Even though, as you said at the outset, your interest was in going to work for a governor, it sounds logical that you ended up going to work for someone in the legislative branch, your father working in the Office of Legislative Services, Alan Rosenthal being one of the renowned national experts on state legislatures. You were inspired by a person who was a legislator, Jim Florio, a Congressman at the time. So off you go to work in the legislative branch in Congress, your first job. What was it? What did you do?

David Applebaum: It was really doing issue briefs and so if there was an issue coming up, that kind of thing, it was really an opportunity to just take a piece of legislation or take a policy that he was interested in at the state level and start to transform that into sort of issue briefs that ultimately became legislation. So that was really the primary job that I had in his office as a legislative assistant.

Rick Sinding: Were you in the district office or in Washington?
David Applebaum: In the district office. And for the governor I think he’ll tell you that there are different models in the Congress that members look to. Some focus their staffs on the state and they have larger staffs in the state. Some have larger staffs in D.C. if they’re more interested in I don’t want to say being a career legislator but my sense, and he may disagree, is that his goal was never necessarily to be a career legislator; it was to be a policymaker. It’s his first love and it seemed like it was just sort of a natural inclination on his part to become a policymaker back in his home state, New Jersey. It’s something that he had always wanted to do even as a legislator and so it was natural for us to sort of go along with that, great experience working in the Congress, wouldn’t have missed it for a day, great experience to learn the issues of New Jersey, wouldn’t miss that for the world. It’s my home state. I was born in Trenton. It’s something that I cared about, it was in my family as well as with me, and so being able to ride the governor’s coattails was a great opportunity.

Rick Sinding: Or in this case the—

David Applebaum: The Congressman’s—

Rick Sinding: --Congressman’s coattails.

David Applebaum: That’s right.

Rick Sinding: Let’s stick with the congressional period for a while here. How was the district office set up? You say you were working on issue briefs and policy briefs. Were there other people working on constituent service--

David Applebaum: Yes.

Rick Sinding: --and solving VA problems and so forth, just to use one example that’s in the news lately?

David Applebaum: Yes.

Rick Sinding: Was there a clear line of distinction of who was responsible for which of those areas?

David Applebaum: Generally. There was a staff that was really focused on outreach in the communities. There was a staff that was focused on constituent service; that’s all they did.
was get inquiries in whether by phone or by letter, following up. At that point in time, computers were in their infancy but even then we had a pretty good database going of-- and certainly were able to get back to them in fairly short order. So it was yes, standard liaisons through constituent service with the federal agencies. Whether it was a VA problem or a welfare problem, whatever that might be, there was a staff devoted to that and there was a small staff in the district office devoted to policy issues. In many cases those were focusing on local problems. We were cursed at that point in time, and certain areas of New Jersey have these, of having a number of superfund sites, toxic waste sites, obviously a significant concern to the communities, any community that has them. You’re concerned about health effects, what the longer-term environmental effects were, and for somebody like Congressman Florio who was focused as much as he was on environmental issues there’s a reason why, obviously a natural inclination to be concerned about those issues, we all are, but also because he had real-life problems in his district every day from local constituents, folks who were concerned, harmed, had potential health effects. And so that became the policy driver for things that he did in Washington and that’s what we did.

**Rick Sinding:** You’re in the district office in Camden County. Right?

**David Applebaum:** Uh huh.

**Rick Sinding:** And he’s off in Washington. How much direct interaction did you end up having with him during say the first couple of years that you were working for him?

**David Applebaum:** Some. He was very hands-on. A lot of the-- when you least expect you get that phone call saying, “Hey, could you get me a brief on such and such?” and he did spend a considerable amount of time not so much in Washington even though he was the chair of a subcommittee even then but he would also spend time toward the latter part of the week or the beginning of the week in the district and on the weekends. We had town meetings routinely, local community meetings all the time, and so he was there and we were there. When he was back in the district and we were moving around for town meetings or local meetings we would be on call to accompany him to those meetings during the course of those days, and so it was a great opportunity to get sort of firsthand not only interaction but also firsthand knowledge from somebody who was now talking about what’s going on in Washington back home and also getting the feedback from back home that then translates into legislation and policy issues down in Washington. So there was a great opportunity for us to just talk, chat. He’d call up and ask questions; we’d get back to him.

**Rick Sinding:** Throughout the period that you worked for him in Congress, were you always in the district office?
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David Applebaum: Yes.

Rick Sinding: You were there for the ’84, ’86 and ’88 reelection campaigns to Congress. Did you get involved in the campaigns or was there a clear delineation between the congressional staff and the campaign staff?

David Applebaum: There was certainly a legal delineation. If you were going to work on the campaign, you had to take time and you would take a leave of absence. There was certainly a staff that worked on the campaign but that was outside the congressional office, but anything that we did on the campaign ourselves we would take time off. So in the evenings on our own time we would go to the headquarters. We would do letters, stuff mailers, those types of things. That was part of the routine and it was part of what we did on our own time.

Rick Sinding: But you never took time off from the congressional staff to work on the campaign staff.

David Applebaum: Not until 1989. That was not for-- that was not a congressional year.

Rick Sinding: Let’s talk a little bit about Jim Florio’s management style or his relations with staff during that period in Congress. He developed a reputation, unfortunate or not, of, if I were to be unkind, I’d say for chewing up and spitting out staff members. There was a significant turnover of staff members on Jim Florio’s staff. He became known for that. Tell us why.

David Applebaum: For better or worse, some people don’t necessarily like to work hard; some people do. At that point in my career, I was a young staffer. Frankly, I had the energy. I’m older now, I have less energy, but at that point in time it was really an opportunity to just learn and so I was happy to do it and expend the energy. If you’re not willing to work in the Congress, it’s not a place for you to be. You’re not going to get wealthy. You’re-- it’s not going to make your career necessarily but you will learn a lot. And so what I saw of Congressman Florio and Governor Florio was not necessarily the sort of chew them up and spit them out; it was you have to work hard.

You were a staff of-- I think a total complement was 18 or 22; it was 18 full time, 4 part time. You don’t have a whole lot of staff to cover an entire district, that’s both Washington and in the district, and so you’ve got a lot to cover. The Congressman had a very full agenda of issues; he had a full agenda of places he needed to be. At that point, toward the larger-- or the latter end of his congressional career he was also thinking about how does that...
translate into me potentially becoming governor and running for governor. And so the span of focus really grew beyond just necessarily the district and we would move around the state a little bit and talk about the issues of the day both in New Jersey and in Washington. And so you have to work hard, you have to be willing to work hard, and I think that’s the differentiation between chewing up and spitting out and just working hard. If there is anybody who would suggest it was otherwise, I’d be surprised but in this case he was always hardworking but kind, always had a good word, was never, never belligerent and just was one of the most decent people I’ve ever had the pleasure of working for. And I mean just as an example, both in the Congress and as governor he would call perhaps late at night, maybe he had a question, somebody asked him a question, was concerned about his schedule perhaps for the next day, and he’d call up and he’d always-- if he got my wife he’d apologize for calling late, he’d get me on the phone and he apologized for being late, just a decent, honest, hardworking and a very-- a generous guy.

Rick Sinding: When you did issues briefs for him where they literally briefs? I’ve read a lot of briefs that are 25 or 30 pages long. My own experience with Jim Florio was that he wants to cut through a lot of the nonsense and get right to the point. Is that basically the instruction that you had in terms of preparing briefs for him?

David Applebaum: I got smarter as I got older and a little bit more experienced. My view of doing an issue brief was providing the kitchen sink and so that ten-, fifteen-, twenty-page brief, which is not brief, you’re right, really did not fit the bill necessarily. Then I got a little bit smarter and would start to put a summary at the top of the ten-, fifteen-, twenty-page issue brief and finally-- and, to be honest with you, the governor had-- and the Congressman had an incredible thirst for knowledge. He didn’t necessarily mind it within the scope of time that he had but I think we got smarter as we got a little bit toward the latter stages of his days in Congress of making sure that we kept a brief a brief and tried to keep it to two or three pages, keep it to bullet points, factual backup-- whatever he would need as factual backup. And that comes with time and experience and understanding who it is you’re working for and writing for.

Rick Sinding: How early on did the famous “TTM memos” begin?

David Applebaum: <laughs> I will show you. When he was still my professor here he sent me a note and I think it was on a paper. It may have been something around midyear after I had already said yes to coming on board. He had sent me a couple of things in a manila folder and he said, “Please review and TTM.”

Rick Sinding: And you had no idea what it meant.
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David Applebaum: Huh uh, <laughs> none at all, but I got the idea pretty quickly. At that point I think I picked up the phone and called Joe Salema and said, "I don’t understand what the acronym means" and he explained it to me and from then on I think I figured it out.

Rick Sinding: For the audience that has not seen any of the previous discussion on those, TTM means “Talk to me”

David Applebaum: Yes.

Rick Sinding: --and was usually a summons to go and discuss things in greater detail than what you had done, but this came on a paper that you wrote for him.

David Applebaum: It was a paper I wrote and then subsequently he also sent a little manila envelope and said, "You sort of made the mental commitment. If you haven’t made a commitment in writing to come on board, here are some things I’m interested in. When you get a chance just talk to me—

Rick Sinding: He put you to work even before you were on the payroll.

David Applebaum: Yes. Obviously, he did but that’s okay, and-- but typically what we would do is we would during the course of a week accumulate our TTM s and then find a time at the end of the week when he was back in the district to go spend a half hour or 45 minutes just sitting with him, walking through all of those, and that was the routine.

Rick Sinding: Do you think he always intended to run for governor in 1989 or was there a clear point at which it was obvious that this was going to be the year that he was going to run? First of all, he had to decide not to run in ’85.

David Applebaum: That’s right. Yes. I think after ’81 it was a fairly clear inevitability that he was going to run for governor at some point in time. Whether that was an opportunity that came up in ’85 or if it was ’89 or if it was later than that, who knows? You can’t necessarily dictate what the circumstances are at the time. The best you can do is what he did, which is position himself to run for governor if that opportunity presented itself and you just kind of make your own opportunities many times. So it was continuing to move around the state, talk about the issues, keep in touch with political organizations and continue to build your own political organization and that’s what he did; we did it all the time. Part of that involved this area at Eagleton where we would touch base with Eagleton professors on
occasion, where we would talk to folks like Carl Van Horn or any number of folks who would have opportunity and have the access to key policymakers from around the state, folks that they’ve worked with on issues whether they were here or elsewhere. And so we’d take a Thursday night and go up to New Brunswick and sit in a restaurant and just chat with a professor or somebody who was engaged in policy just to learn, just to understand what the issues were, not to form a political agenda necessarily, that came later, but to really get a better understanding and a better feel for the issues of the state, and so Eagleton played an important role in all of that even back then.

Rick Sinding: Leading up to ‘89, were you ever involved in discussions with him about whether he should or should not run or was that a decision that he made himself?

David Applebaum: Well, let’s put it this way. He may have made that decision with others. The good news was I didn’t have to be part of that discussion. It seemed to be fairly well-- at least in my mind a predetermined outcome that he was going to go but maybe there were more in-depth decisions that were-- and discussions that were going on with Joe Salema and others that were part of the sort of political inner circle that were engaged in making those decisions.

Rick Sinding: You used the phrase “the political inner circle.” You clearly did not consider yourself to be part of that.

David Applebaum: Yes. I don’t know necessarily that I was at that point in time. I just looked at myself as somebody who did more policy work than political work, it’s just the role that I played, but I think at that point the Congressman had a very well-established group of political folks that he relied upon including Joe Salema that-- and-- as well as an external group, pollsters, consultants, folks like that who had a pretty good feel for what the environment in the state was-- political environment in the state was. And by the time 1989 came around, having run a statewide campaign, hadn’t-- having seen what happened in 1985, continued to work that for the eight-year period, he was pretty well established as a candidate with an organization by 1989.

Rick Sinding: You became part of that organization. You left the congressional staff at that point and went to work on the campaign.

David Applebaum: Yes.

Rick Sinding: In what capacity?
David Applebaum: Policy. We literally in West Orange, which is where the headquarters was, had-- in some bank building-- it was a fairly sterile environment-- we had one room that was devoted to policy and it unfortunately looks like my office at home now. It had piles everywhere and those were the early days when you were working off of the old MacBooks, the single-- everything all in one with the floppies, that kind of a gizmo, but it was huge and you can throw it in a backpack and carry it around with you. So every day Brenda Bacon and I would start in South Jersey, we’d get in Brenda’s car, and we would drive the hour and a half or two hours to West Orange. I’d get into a conference room with two other people and we would sit there and write policy briefs and it was just a blast; it was the best time I can remember. We were free to put together briefs, pull together as much information as we could.

Rick Sinding: In areas that he was asking about or areas that you all thought would be important to him?

David Applebaum: It was both, and part of it was his agenda but it’s his agenda honed over time based on what the issues of the state, the key issues, were. At that point in time, a lot of it was environmental. A lot of it was issues that he focused on when he ultimately became governor, auto insurance reform, welfare reform, education spending reform. Those types of things were certainly top of mind during the course of the campaign, urban renewal, things that could help some of the distressed areas of our state. I can recall specifically working on Atlantic City policy before he would go down and do sort of the key labor speeches down in Atlantic City. I don’t know where those issues briefs are today but—

Rick Sinding: It would actually make a very valuable part of the archive of the Center on the American Governor.

David Applebaum: They may be in it, I don’t know, but we’ll see if we can dig those up, and I remember just sort of spitting them up and sending them back and forth. We’d send them to Brenda [Bacon], we’d send them to Harold Hodes, Harold was involved back then as he always is to this day, and so it was a-- for a young guy still cutting his teeth it was a great opportunity to really be in the boiler room of the campaign.

Rick Sinding: Did you consider at that point that you were working for Doug Berman who was the campaign manager or were you still working for Jim Florio or both or how did you divide the responsibility? How much were you directed specifically by the candidate as opposed to by the campaign?
David Applebaum: Yes. I think Doug spent most of his time focused on broader political strategy and less on what the policy and substance was. There were polls that you could look at; there were issues that you could hear about; there were issues that he knew about simply based on the years of experience that he had with the state. That was pretty well baked. Doug was more focused on making sure the political organizations were set the way they should be, his day-to-day agenda was set the way it should be, his schedule was well defined, that kind of thing, making sure the trains ran on time. It would be a rare day that Doug came in and said, “I need three policy briefs on these following issues” and it just wasn’t necessarily an area that he focused on or needed to focus on; Doug could be free to go do the things that he needed to do to run the campaign.

Rick Sinding: Who else besides you and Brenda were working on these issue briefs on policy--

David Applebaum: There was a young lady who really was fresh out of college named Teresa Polhemus and Teresa subsequently came on board with the administration and did a variety of things there, but I mean it was just pumping it out and a very steep learning curve for somebody like Teresa who had not been with the Congressman before but really was given an opportunity to learn and, believe me, I was grateful to have the hands. And we’d have interns pop in and out who could help us do things as well, it was-- but it was a very lean shop.

Rick Sinding: Were these issue briefs specific to particular parts of his schedule, appearances that he would be making where he would need an issue brief to speak on a particular subject or were they broader-issue-oriented policy directives toward what would ultimately become administration policy?

David Applebaum: Both. So we would have the Jim Florio seven-point plan on environmental protection, which would be a set of bullet points that covered what Jim’s agenda would be, the governor’s agenda would be if he were elected governor on seven or eight or nine key issues. Those would come from the issue briefs and those would come from-- they’d be massaged message-wise from polling and things of that nature but for the most part we would do those, we would do the seven-point plan for environmental protection, for business development, for healthcare, for welfare reform. We had a whole battery of these things that we put together and they could be rolled out and sent to different interest groups and organizations as need be.

Rick Sinding: Or a particular point could be emphasized during a speech to a particular audience.
David Applebaum: Absolutely, and so-- that’s exactly right. So if he was going out and having a talk or if he was going to a specific conference we would pull out that information and he’d say, “I have a five-point plan” and at that point we could put that into his comments, and we could certainly modify and massage those depending but the base points were always there; they were consistent throughout.

Rick Sinding: Those of us who lived through that period and some of us who in fact covered it from the journalistic side-- and this has actually been confirmed through conversations that we’ve had with others who were involved in the campaign-- it became pretty obvious by around August or September of 1989 that unless there was some catastrophic occurrence to change the outcome of the election that Governor Florio was going to win. And there are a number of people who at that point began to sort of transition in their minds if not necessarily in title into a preparatory phase for the governorship. First of all, does that dovetail with your own recollection--

David Applebaum: Yes.

Rick Sinding: --and secondly did you begin to make that transition as well?

David Applebaum: Only mentally-- the answer is yes, that is true. There was a group of folks I believe that really did start to consider the transition process.

Rick Sinding: I think Steve Perskie came on--

David Applebaum: I was going to say Steve was really the sort of nucleus of all of that stuff toward the end of the actual campaign and then of course during the transition period itself. I continued to do the policy work for the duration of the campaign. We just-- you could put it on autopilot I suppose but that was not the direction we got from the campaign, which is you’re running for governor; keep your eye on the prize and make sure that you get this job done. And so we stayed in that closet in West Orange until we were done <laughs> but yes, as soon as the campaign was over we transitioned over to a transition office on West Eighth Street and--

Rick Sinding: What was your role there?

David Applebaum: Same thing, policy, but at this point we had the luxury of-- not a luxury of time, we had about two months, but we had the luxury of a little bit more resource-wise and we had the true benefit of somebody named Carl Van Horn who was on
the transition staff and we worked together on getting the transition books from the different agencies, making sure they were on the right format, making sure they got to the governor. Carl was the resource that he is today, just a genius when it comes to that, and really helped in an organizational way beyond what I could ever do. And so it was really just piecing together the key agency documents so that Congressman Florio, the legislator, could become Governor Florio, the chief executive of the state of New Jersey, hard to do in two months. He prepared for that for a long time.

Rick Sinding: He had been preparing for it for eight years--

David Applebaum: That’s true. <laughs>

Rick Sinding: A personal question if I might.

David Applebaum: Sure.

Rick Sinding: You had come from being on a staff of as you said 18 or 22. You had been with the Congressman for a long time. You had developed a fairly close personal relationship. Now he was becoming governor. There was a much larger staff. I would imagine that your own day-to-day dealings with him were not as frequent as they would have been during the time that he was a Congressman. Did you feel at any point there that gee, now that I’m becoming maybe a smaller fish in a bigger pond that this isn’t going to be as enjoyable for me as it was when I worked so closely with this person who I admire so much?

David Applebaum: Oh, there’s probably always that thought in the back of your mind. I think I was comfortable enough in the nature of the relationship that I wouldn’t be either cast aside or lost and he had asked fairly early on, “What would you like to do?” and I said—

Rick Sinding: Policy.

David Applebaum: I think all I said at that point was, “I’d like to stay close” and he said, “Well, what would you think?” and I-- he said, “What kind of a title would you think?” and I said, “I don’t know, executive assistant,” and he said, “Yes, okay.” I don’t know what that is. I just said, “I think it’s somebody close” and so I—
Rick Sinding: But always assumed that you would stay on his personal staff as opposed to move to one of the agencies or take a cabinet position or anything of that sort?

David Applebaum: Yes. That may not have been in his mind; it was in my mind and that’s how it worked out so when I started with the administration I was-- I held a title called the executive assistant to the governor. I’m not sure what that really meant. I know in previous administrations it meant chief of staff; I know that I was not that. I mean that was a position that was held by Steve and then subsequently Joe and Rick-- Joe Salema and Rick Wright, but it was one of those where it was sort of close in and it was designed to be-- make sure that Governor Florio has the information he needs, has the folks that he needs, folks-- the appointments that he needs. I worked very closely with Tina Lado at the time. Tina-- I sat in an office right next to the governor’s small personal office and Tina was right outside that door in her office.

Rick Sinding: She was the governor’s personal secretary.

David Applebaum: She was. And so the three of us sort of worked-- somebody called it a gatekeeper; it certainly not gatekeeper. Nobody was going to keep Jim Florio from seeing who he wanted or keep anybody out and that wasn’t the purpose of it. It was really to serve as sort of a filter for making sure that the right information was there and that’s what I did at the outset.

Rick Sinding: It must have been difficult at that point to figure out how you would not be redundant with what other people were doing and how did that delineate itself? You had Brenda Bacon doing certain policy areas, Carl Van Horn doing other policy areas, and then you had Steve Perskie as the chief of staff. There must have been some sort of delineation of responsibilities. The governor himself must have directed you to do specific things.

David Applebaum: The governor directed a lot of people to do a lot of things, and so what was critical at that point in time-- and by the way that was a style that worked for him in the Congress and it’s a style that generally worked for him as governor too, and what makes it work is not necessarily looking at an org chart and seeing the position box over here interacting with this box over here. What made it work was the relationships and personalities. Most of us by the time he became governor had worked with each other for many years and so the transition I don’t want to call it seamless but was relatively easy. We knew each other; we had worked with each other.

Steve Perskie had worked with my father for many years when he was a legislator and my dad was in legislative services so we had loosely known each other over the years and so--
and Brenda I’d worked with for many years; Carl I had known as a professor here at
Eagleton and we worked closely together here. So it was easy and certainly more fun than
you could ever imagine because you’re working with people you like and you have a lot of
respect for so we didn’t bump into each other as much as you might think by redundant
positions.

**Rick Sinding:** It was fun for the first six months at least.

**David Applebaum:** <laughs> I-- people ask me to reflect back upon the four years and
my usual response is after the first six months I along with everybody else had our heads
beaten in every day and we wouldn’t have traded the experience for anything over the
course because we had a chance to do something that we cared about deeply, the issues
that he stood for were issues that we cared about deeply and we still do, and he was just a
great person to work with and to work for and, as I said, I would not have traded it for the
world.

**Rick Sinding:** How did getting beaten up change his style if at all? Those first six months
there’s no question that history will record that it was a decisive period. There was a series
of rather dramatic roll-outs of different policy reforms and then he had his head handed to
him. Did it deflate him? Did it change the way in which he behaved toward staff? Did it in
any way change do you think his attitude toward what he foresaw doing for the rest of his
term as governor?

**David Applebaum:** The governor was a very-- and is a very strong-willed individual and
so I do think during the time that I had known him in the Congress he was for the most part
I think for the entire period in the majority and so you’re used to running the show. You’re
either a committee or a subcommittee chair or you’re in the majority; you can have your
bills passed. Now you’re in a situation where it’s a little bit different. You’re now sort of
midterm, things have changed, you’re not as popular as you were, and I think what it did
was it became both for him and the senior staff a realization that as much as you may have
an aggressive agenda you’re not going to get it as aggressively as you once thought you
could and you’re going to have to compromise. And I think he always was cognizant of the
fact that he might have to do that but I don’t know that it’s in necessarily his nature to want
to do that, but he became a better governor by virtue of understanding that the legislature
was a partner in all of this.

**Rick Sinding:** He certainly would have understood that--

**David Applebaum:** From-- as a legislator.
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**Rick Sinding:** --from his legislative experience.

**David Applebaum:** Yes. It was in him for sure, it was part of the genetic code, but it’s another thing to be confronted with it when you’re governor, and legislators and most people really don’t necessarily have appropriate preparation to be governor. It’s one of those things that you kind of learn as you go. He certainly learned by virtue of the first six months’ worth of experience. He had some good support around him to help but again you can’t teach that stuff; you’ve got to understand it for yourself. It’s sort of political adage number one: You can’t tell people they’re wrong; they have to find out for themselves. You can tell people they’re wrong, they’ll hate you for it, but I think he-- he's-- he certainly understood and his political instincts were sharp enough and-- they were very sharp to understand that he needed to compromise. And I think over that period of time he became a much better governor and was still able to get a good number of things accomplished during the latter part of his term as much as the earlier part during that first six-month period.

**Rick Sinding:** During that latter part after Carl Van Horn left, you became director of policy. It sounds as if it’s a title that was made for you given the ten or twelve years of preparation of doing policy. First of all, did that change your relationship with the governor and in fact what policy areas did you focus on during I guess the last year of the administration?

**David Applebaum:** Yes. Again much of that was environmental policy. It didn’t change the nature of the relationship at all. It may have been a change in title but it’s okay. I mean Carl and I and Brenda during that period of time worked together and so there was really no change in operation; there was no change in the nature of the relationship during that latter period of time. We just kept doing what we were doing, but environmental issues, the issues that had always been important to him, were issues that were important. I don’t recall specifically which items or issues were driven during the last year of that particular period of time. My brain doesn’t give me the option of going back that far.

**Rick Sinding:** I think one of them was welfare reform although that may have been slightly earlier.

**David Applebaum:** I think it was.

**Rick Sinding:** One area in which you were more or less intimately involved was the [GMRC, the Governor's Management Review Commission](http://governors.rutgers.edu/). There is an endless trail of memos from you and Carl to Mike Scheiring at the GMRC and then to the governor about what was transpiring there. Tell us a little bit about what that initiative was all about and why if at all
it differed from what Governor Cahill had done, what Governor Byrne had done, what Governor Kean had done.

**David Applebaum:** We-- I think every administration when they come in comes in with certainly the best of intentions but also the expectation that somehow you can do better than the previous one. In this case you had an administration, the Kean administration, that had had a great run, they had done some very good policy things, but they also served during some fairly generous times from an economic perspective. Now you’ve got a governor who’s coming in right at the cusp of an economic downturn. I’m not sure anybody fully understood the depth of the downturn that we were about to get into, but the first inkling was okay, let’s take a look at state government; here we are after eight years of a previous administration; let’s see what we might be able to do better. And so you get a Stanley Van Ness and you get a Governor Cahill and you get a panel of really smart folks to help, comb through state government, spend the time, try and find out ways that are-- that seem to be either bloated or excessive or whatever that might be, if there are areas that you might be able to do administration a bit more efficiently let’s focus on those, and that’s what we did. I’m not sure that ultimately we did things better or more efficiently than anybody else did in previous administrations; it was just a different outcome and a different process at a different point in time.

**Rick Sinding:** You did eliminate a number of boards and commissions; you consolidated others. You did move some pegs and holes in a way that the governor at least in a couple of his state of the state messages heralded as saving a considerable amount of money. Was that rhetoric or was that--

**David Applebaum:** No, not in the least, and I don’t mean it to sound that way. I think the previous efforts actually accomplished some things as well so it was not necessarily meant to demean the GMRC process; it was meant to tout all of these processes that have taken place including those before. Yes, there was a focus on boards and commissions. I think there was a general sense that there were tons of those; many of them were redundant. It is always difficult to make decisions like that but those were decisions that over time needed to be made, and having a third-party independent review effort take a look at those and when you’re dealing with a Governor Cahill and a Stanley Van Ness, two folks who were really sort of heralded as being of independent mind and great integrity, it really did help.

**Rick Sinding:** Had you worked for Stanley at the Public Advocate’s office way back in the day?

**David Applebaum:** Yes. I was an intern in college with Stanley Van Ness in the commissioner’s office. It was a great chance for me to--
Rick Sinding: Those were the formative years of the Public Advocate’s office.

David Applebaum: It was, and some of the folks that were there then, who are still involved in public service necessarily but they’re involved in public-interest law, I mean they’re still around to this day. It’s just an amazing testament to the enduring nature of the Public Advocate and to Stanley—

Rick Sinding: Stanley used to say that he was the only cabinet officer who had to sit with his back to the wall because he never knew what the other cabinet officers were going to do to him because he was always suing them.

David Applebaum: <laughs> That’s-- I’m sure that’s true, a great, great man. Obviously, Governor Cahill, his legacy has been around for a long time, a great, great governor and a great man and somebody who had incredible integrity as well. And so we were very fortunate to have both of them really serving as sort of the anchors of that effort.

Rick Sinding: Bill Cahill was a South Jersey Congressman who became governor but he was a Republican. He and Jim Florio had a lot in common. Do you think that Governor Florio had a particular affinity for Governor Cahill? Did they spend a lot of time together? Did they talk a lot about governing, about politics, about issues?

David Applebaum: I know they talked periodically but I think the governor is a great student of-- Governor Florio is a great student of history and I think he truly tried to understand what it’s like to be a governor from the southern part of the state. It’s different, it doesn’t happen frequently, and so there was a natural inclination to reach out and to talk to somebody who was well established in South Jersey, as well established as the governor was-- as Governor Cahill, and so I think they considered each other good friends and folks that could share experiences and from which the governor could learn-- Governor Florio could learn from Governor Cahill.

Rick Sinding: Let’s go back to those first six months. You were part of the senior management team. The senior management team spent a lot of time plotting strategy, rolling out first the fairly uncontroversial automobile insurance reform that was widely hailed and heralded, then the assault weapons ban which made an enemy of the National Rifle Association but was clearly a very popular move with the public, but then began a series of events and actions and reforms that were not as popular. Were there differences of opinion on the senior staff about whether and in what order and how aggressively these reforms should be unveiled and instituted?
David Applebaum: I certainly didn’t sense that there was disagreement on how they would be unveiled. They needed-- coming into the administration they all needed to be dealt with at some point and the issue associated with education funding and the income-tax issues and in this case the raising of the sales tax those were issues that I think the general consensus was they needed to be addressed early in the administration, move beyond those, get the benefit of those, make sure that the communities that needed to benefit from them benefited from those and then spend the next three, three and a half years implementing. I don’t know that what-- my concern or my sense is that what was not viewed, and I’m not sure that anybody can view it, was the depth of the economic downturn that came thereafter and the political angst that comes with that. And clearly there was political angst that came from that and it manifested itself in the midterms as well as ultimately what happened in 1993, but I’m not sure that there was a huge amount of disagreement as to the issues to be grappled with; those were cast well in advance I think of the administration. They were issues that the governor campaigned on and felt very strongly about and equally the issue of dealing with distressed communities and education funding. Those were issues as well that he ran on and spoke volumes about moving into the administration. So I think the short answer is no. I don’t think there was a whole lot of disagreement. It’s easy to look back on the experience and say, “Well, we should have done something differently.” All administrations I suspect do that, those that are successful and those that are not, but at the right time I suspect that folks say we did things the way that the governor wanted to do them and they came out in the right order.

Rick Sinding: Let’s go back even earlier to the campaign where Congressman and candidate Florio said during the course of the campaign that he did not see any need to raise taxes. I remember one journalistic pundit at the time making the prediction that no matter what happened the next governor of New Jersey was going to be a former Congressman named Jim and one of the very first things that he would end up doing would be to raise taxes. It was widely known in Trenton, certainly among the political cognoscente, that there was a budget deficit looming and that some taxes were going to be raised. Do you think that Jim Florio made a tactical mistake by saying during the campaign that he wouldn’t raise taxes and then being held accountable for that when he became elected or was saying that there was no need to raise taxes, something that had to be said in order to get elected?

David Applebaum: I don’t think the latter. I think-- in the case of saying no need for new taxes, I think the campaign and the Congressman at the time truly believed it. It was one of those situations where you don’t have access to all of the information. As good as the access might be or at least you think it is and as good as the information is that you think you have, you are not dealing necessarily with legislative services staff and your own state treasury staff when you’re running for office.
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**Rick Sinding:** But journalists who didn’t have that kind of access were certainly making that observation at the time. Why was it widely known among them but not among people who were involved in Jim Florio’s campaign?

**David Applebaum:** No. I understand what you’re asking. I think part of it is it’s not so much that you have to say it; it’s one of those things where you really are going based on what the information is that you’ve got and we had no particular reason to believe otherwise. And certainly when you’re running there’s a tendency to want to say things that you don’t necessarily— that you can’t live up to so it’d be easy to say-- it’s easy to say absolutely ironclad not. What he said was, “I don’t see the need”-- or “I see no need to raise new taxes” and it’s one of those things where I’ll take a look at the situation that exists. Folks can interpret that any way they choose but I think-- until you see information otherwise I think you go on with the best of intentions and the expectation that once you gain the opportunity to see the information and you gain the opportunity to look at state government you may be able to and hopefully can start making some cuts strategically where it will not necessarily result in you having to raise taxes.

**Rick Sinding:** A lot has been written about the fact that in order to get elected people need to say certain things and by saying those things it makes it very difficult for them to govern once they’ve been elected and it seems that that’s something that continues to this very day.

**David Applebaum:** No-- probably. Look. If he said, “I see no need to raise new taxes” and he didn’t have to raise new taxes, that’s a great thing. Unfortunately, you don’t get to choose when you govern and in this case he came in and he said what he said during the course of the campaign and the circumstances clearly dictated otherwise, and you do not-- I think the magnitude of the problem was really not known at that point in time notwithstanding the brilliance of—

**Rick Sinding:** Of--

**David Applebaum:** --of the media.

**Rick Sinding:** --journalists.

**David Applebaum:** That’s right.
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**Rick Sinding:** Let me ask you a couple of general questions about whatever transitions you may have seen in Jim Florio as a person from the young Congressman who you went to work for to the later stages of his governorship. Were there any significant changes in his demeanor? Were there any significant changes in his manner, the delegation of responsibility, the time it took him to make decisions, the nature of how much he delegated versus how much he kept to himself? Did you see any significant change in his management style over those 20 years? I guess it wasn’t 20 years; I guess it was only 10 years.

**David Applebaum:** Actually when we were-- ’83 to ’93; yes, it’s ten years.

**Rick Sinding:** It just seemed longer I suppose.

**David Applebaum:** <laughs> Not to me, maybe to you. No, generally not. I thought over the course of that time he was very consistent. I think over the latter part of that time there tends to be more-- I think we all mature over time. I didn’t see much change in his management style, in the way he delegated responsibilities or things of that nature, but what you had a chance to see was a comfort in management. Again when you’re a legislator you’re not a manager. You may manage your office but that’s usually delegated to a chief of staff and you get to play legislator, the same thing when he’s-- when he was a member of the general assembly.

Once you’re a governor it’s a whole different ball game and I think over time, particularly toward the latter phases of his term, he felt far more comfortable-- he may not say this but far more comfortable with himself and with how the job is supposed to be managed on a day-to-day basis and almost an inner comfort with himself, and so-- but it did not to my sense manifest itself in the way that he interacted with staff. It’s just his own sort of comfort level with himself and it’s one of those things that sort of led us all to believe that Governor Florio in a second Florio administration would have been a more mature governor. That doesn’t mean he wasn’t mature as a person but there’s a mature style associated with it and a comfort level that you have with a job that only comes with time. As we were talking before, I don’t think there’s necessarily-- you don’t walk into the job as governor necessarily; you’re being prepared to serve as governor. Very few people if any really have that and so it takes a little bit of time and a second term gives you that opportunity to get a comfort level with yourself as well as with what the management role is.

**Rick Sinding:** He came awfully close to that second term. Did you stay on the state payroll or did you move over to the campaign for the--
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David Applebaum: I was on the transition staff. There was a little transition staff that we had here in New Brunswick. I stayed on that for a little while and then eventually went off into—

Rick Sinding: I’m talking about during the campaign--

David Applebaum: Oh.

Rick Sinding: --during the ’93 reelection campaign.

David Applebaum: I actually stayed in the governor’s office during the course of that time again volunteering my time when I could off to the side but certainly not the role that I had in the 1989 campaign so I was one of the few who stayed back and actually sort of stayed in the governor’s office and did the day-to-day stuff.

Rick Sinding: Then after election night ’93 came the transition. How long did you stay working in that arena? You worked on the transition staff with the Christie Whitman group to make the transition to the new administration.

David Applebaum: It was about a year and—

Rick Sinding: That long?

David Applebaum: It was about a year and the Whitman administration was kind enough to ensure that the resources were there for us to do that. A good part of that was just sort of transitioning him out of being governor but part of that was also involved in pulling together some of the archival material that ultimately became part of the Florio archive here as well as at the state library so we spent a lot of time doing that.

Rick Sinding: You stayed on Jim Florio’s staff for another year after--

David Applebaum: Yes, about a year.

Rick Sinding: --his governorship. How did he make the transition from governor to former governor?
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David Applebaum: Remarkably well. He’s a resilient guy, he’s certainly not a defeatist, and he clearly had in his mind the importance of staying engaged in public policy. He wanted to teach and he did. He wanted—

Rick Sinding: And still does.

David Applebaum: He wanted-- that’s right and here, which is where he wanted to be. He wanted to continue to move around the state and talk about state policy and stay relevant in state policy. I think for those of us that have known Jim Florio there would never be the concept of him not being relevant in state policy circles. He certainly didn’t expect that to be the case and it wasn't and isn’t today; he is as active on the policy front as arguably he ever was. And so he continued to move around the state. I think he relished the teaching role. He comes from a teacher’s college, he always considered himself a teacher, and I think it’s part of what he does now that he loves best.

Rick Sinding: Do you stay in close touch with him now?

David Applebaum: We stay in touch periodically. I get a chance to see him here-- mostly here, not necessarily at Eagleton but here around town. We get together every once in a while and we make sure that we stay in touch family-wise around the holidays as well as for dinners here and there so he is a pleasure and a state treasure and so it’s-- it is a true joy.

Rick Sinding: Tell me what you’ve been doing.

David Applebaum: These days… for lack of a better term I do regulatory affairs for a major energy company called NextEra Energy. NextEra is a company that is lovingly known in the state of Florida as Florida Power and Light but around the country it is known as NextEra. It’s the nation’s largest developer, owner and operator of renewable, wind and solar, as well as the major energy provider in the state of Florida and one of the major independent energy companies outside the state of Florida around the country.

Rick Sinding: How did you get into this?

David Applebaum: Hmm. I blame Scott Weiner.

Rick Sinding: Yes, I figured you would.
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David Applebaum: Right, <laughs> Scott? When I left state government I worked for-- a little bit for Governor Florio. After that I went back to work for Congressman Rob Andrews in the first congressional district as his chief of staff for a couple of years, something you didn’t know.

Rick Sinding: I did not know that and you saw my eyes started to get wide. It’s starting all over again.

David Applebaum: Something on film he didn’t know—

Rick Sinding: With the expectation that Rob was going to be the next governor--

David Applebaum: Yes.

Rick Sinding: --coming out of the first--

David Applebaum: The thought was again always thinking-- trying to think a step ahead, never necessarily accomplishing that, I thought look, Congressman Andrews is a bright guy, he certainly has an opportunity to become a governor if that’s what he so chose—

Rick Sinding: You certainly knew the district.

David Applebaum: --and I knew the district so it was coming home and I worked for Congressman Andrews for a couple of years and during that period of time I was contacted by my old colleague in state government, Scott Weiner, who said, “When are you going to get out of politics and get a real job?” and he at that point in time was working for a company called Ballard Power in the fuel-cell business and he said, “Would you be interested in working? I have a little office in Princeton and I’ve got a bigger office in Vancouver, British Columbia, and give it a thought and give it a try.” And at that point in time I had a young family and needed to think about other things in my life than necessarily working in the political realm on a daily basis, and I think my concern was like a lot of folks who leave politics, who leave the mother nest-- the mother’s nest, what are we going to do; are we going to be able to be relevant in the private sector.

And Scott’s comment to me, and I’ll never forget it, is “The skill sets that you developed in the political world will serve you well in private industry” and they have, and so I went to work with Scott at Ballard for a couple of years, a year and a half, worked with him. He then
made the transition to another independent company called SIIF Energies, an independent power company in New York City. I worked with him for about five years and then at that point in time he moved on to some other things and I had run into some folks from Florida Power and Light who said, “Would you be interested in coming to work for us?”

**Rick Sinding:** Specifically in regulatory affairs.

**David Applebaum:** In regulatory affairs so it was legislative affairs, regulatory affairs, doing things that I was trained to do here at Eagleton and frankly was trained to do in the governor’s office, and so it was an easy transition; I thought it would be hard. It’s maybe a lesson for a lot of students of politics to think about too. The skills that you develop here are very relevant in whatever you choose to do. It’s people skills; it’s understanding how people think and people work. And so that’s what I do today. I have a region that I cover that goes up to Canada and out to the west coast of Canada and that goes all the way down to North Carolina, and it is a great amount of fun but I get to use the skills that I used here in New Jersey and in the governor’s office every day.

**Rick Sinding:** Do you miss government and politics?

**David Applebaum:** I love what we did; I really do. When I see the interaction between what I do today and state government there is a part of me that would love to do it and that says we can really do a good job at this thing and love to make this better or that better. I’m very at peace with what I’m doing today. There are things that I miss and I’ll always miss. Politics is in the blood, you just can’t filter it out or cycle it out, but I’m very happy doing what I’m doing today and don’t necessarily think that coming back into state government would be great. State government in many respects and particularly the political side of it is-- and this may sound terrible-- it’s the province for younger kids-- for younger people. They’ve got the-- it’s not because they necessarily have the mental maturity to do it; they’re not necessarily as evolved. If I knew then what I know now, I could be whatever, but in this case they have the energy to do it and it takes a ton of energy and a ton of devotion and sacrifice, and I think as you grow older you need to focus on other things.

**Rick Sinding:** I thank you for focusing your time on your years of experience with Congressman and Governor Jim Florio and thanks very much for coming.

**David Applebaum:** Thanks for having me.