

Florio tells Dems

'warning' hit home

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By MICHAEL A. WATTKIS and DAN WEISSMAN

Gov. Jim Florio, still reeling from an Election Day onslaught widely viewed as a public response to his tax policies, last night told an estimated 1,370 Democrats the "warning" from an angry electorate has hit home.

But Florio, returning to the site of his own Election Day celebration just a year ago, was not the contrite Governor who a day earlier said the devastation Democrats suffered at the polls Tuesday was a personal rebuke of him and his \$2.8 billion tax and school aid program.

Instead, Florio told the black-tie and evening gown clad Democrats who paid \$1,500 each for their ticket to the first Governor's Gala that he's ready to "move forward."

Florio, in comments read at the dinner that garnered closed to \$2 million for Democratic campaign coffers, maintained the party is still strong and said, "Tonight I come here to thank you for standing by me, for believing in what we have done and will do."

Sen. Bill Bradley (D-N.J.), who survived a squeaker of an election

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against underfunded and virtually unknown Republican challenger Christine Todd Whitman, said the big crowd reaffirmed the Democratic Party unity.

"I feel different tonight than I did election night," he said. "Tonight there are no surprises."

Florio, meanwhile, dismissed the claims of the Hands Across New Jersey tax revolt leaders who contended at a news conference held shortly before the dinner in the same hotel that the election results were retribution for them.

Organizers of Hands Across New Jersey said results of Tuesday's election are "complete vindication" of the tax revolt movement in the state.

At a "post-election news conference," organizers and supporters of the grass-roots tax revolt organization said the results were that of an angry electorate that clearly wanted to send a message.

"Tuesday night was the beginning of the new era of the Garden State," said group co-founder Pat Ralston. "Legislators who fail to grasp the meaning of these upset victories should prepare their resumes now for No-

vember 1991."

Janet Coates, another co-founder, said the organization was able to channel the wrath of voters into a political storm. Those who failed to heed the warning are going to be blown out of office by a hurricane in 1991.

The group organizers called on Florio to repeal the \$2.8 billion tax and aid package until a complete audit of all state revenues is conducted.

During the Governor's dinner, Florio said the Democrats were victims of skepticism about the promises he made for property tax reform and stability. In the end result he is still confident of acceptance of his tax plan, Florio said.

"The 1991 campaign begins tonight," Florio said to the party faithful.

"It begins with a promise to the people that we will listen and stay true to their values. And I am confident that a year will end with a ringing affirmation because you are doing the right things—the things necessary to ensure that New Jersey stays a state of opportunity."

The event, held at the Ramada Renaissance in East Brunswick, is the



Kathy Powers, Essex County coordinator of Hands Across New Jersey, answers questions during the group's news conference. With Powers are group co-founder Janet Coates and her husband Tom



Gov. Florio and his wife Lucinda attend a Democratic Party fund-raising dinner at the Ramada Renaissance Hotel in East Brunswick

Democratic Party's version of the Governor's Ball that raised millions for the Republican Party the eight years former Gov. Thomas Kean was in office.

Democrat State Committee officials, who aggressively marketed tickets the last four months, abandoned the gloom of Election Night to proclaim the ball income surpassed the original \$1 million target.

The crowd, made up of familiar lobbyists, fund raisers and politicians from all levels of government, was lively. There was no pall, and describing the gathering, Florio, at a news conference with his wife Lucinda at his side, said, "This is, in a sense, a reaffirmation. These are people who are all successful, who want to build."

In a surprise move at the dinner, the Democratic State Committee announced it was donating \$10,000 to Trenton's Lifeline Shelter for women and children, which is facing a deficit

that is threatening its closure.

The Governor said the party has always been sensitive to people in need and the shelter for 30 women and children in Trenton is running at a \$9,000 deficit.

On the day Florio and the Democratic majority leadership in the Legislature backed down and agreed to repeal the sales tax on heavy trucks, Florio said, "I come here to thank you for standing by me, for believing in what we have done and will do."

Florio said the agreement to repeal the tax, made the day after the setback at the polls, was done at his urging because it did not bring in the projected revenues. The tax had become a lightning rod when the heavy truck industry said it was being driven out of existence by the tax because New Jersey could not compete with other states.

State Democratic Chairman Phil

Keegan said based on last night's turnout, the losses in this year's election were past history. "For me, in 1991, I am confident," said Keegan. He said scheduling the gala two days after election day was coincidence.

But Democrats in the crowd were still sobered.

Senate President John Lynch (D-Middlesex) said the obvious message was the tax and school aid program had to be modified.

"We saw the need for changes, and we now know we need them sooner than later."

At the same times, Lynch said, "The worst thing we can do is act in haste. We have been accused of that before."

At the Hands Across New Jersey news conference, Florio was chided for not apologizing directly to the people rather than to Democrats who fared

poorly in Tuesday election.

Organizers, however, said they were pleased Florio now recognizes the power of citizen action.

Ralston and Coates said they plan to review and compile the voting records of all incumbents for the election in 1991 and distribute them to their constituents.

The co-founders pointed to two faces in the state that bolstered the group's anti-tax posture.

"Jim Florio made the race between anti-tax Sen. Jim Cafiero (R-Cape May) and tax-and-spend advocate Assemblyman Edward Salmon (D-Cumberland), the referendum on his tax package," Tom Coates, the husband of Janet Coates, said of the race in the 1st Legislative District.

"In overwhelmingly re-electing Cafiero voters of Cape May and Cumberland counties have spoken with a re-

sounding 'axe the tax' warning," said Kathy Powers, group coordinator in Essex County. She said the "stunning upset" by Frank Catania over Assemblyman Cy Yannarelli (D-Passaic) proves the tax protest "extends from the very south to the very north in New Jersey." She noted Yannarelli had voted for Florio's tax increases.

Jim Brown, group coordinator in Monmouth County, praised voters' rejection of the affordable housing bond issue. He said the group "supports affordable housing for all our fellow citizens," but added "don't ask the voters to vote for a pig in the poke."

Brown said the organization is pleased the bill will be reintroduced by Assemblyman David Schwartz (D-Middlesex), "but we hope the next time around he has the decency to come clean and trust the people and not end-run them with lies and deceit."

Photos by Bob One