Gov. Jim Florio, still reeling from an election Day onslaught wide
viewed as a public response to his tax policy, faced yesterday an esti
mated 1,370 Democrats the "warning" from an angry electorate has his
home.

But Florio, returning to his seat of his own Election Day celebra
tion just a year ago was not the contrite Governor who a day ear
lier said the devastation Democrats suffered at the polls Tuesday
was a personal rebuke of him and his $1.8 billion tax and school aid
program.

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

Florio, in comments read at the dinner that garnered closed to $1
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."

See, Bill Bradley (D-NJ), who survived a squeaker of an election

Democratic Party's version of the Gov
ernor's Ball that raised millions for the Repub
lican Party the eight years for
mer Gov. Thomas Kean was in office.

Democrat State Committee of
icials, who aggressively marketed tick
ets 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 lobbyist, fund raisers and politicians from all levels of government, was lively. There was no ball, and describ
ing the gathering, Florio, at a news con
ference with his wife Lucinda at his side, said, "This is a sense of a reaffir
mation. These are people who are all successful, who want to build."

In a surprise move at the dinner, the Democratic State Committee an
ounced it was donating $10,000 to Ten
ton'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 chil
dren in Trenton is running at $3,000
deficit.

On the day Florio and the Demo
cratic majority leadership in the Legis
lature backed down and agreed to re
peal 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 re
peal 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 be
come a lighting 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 turn
out, the losses in this year's election were just history. "For me, in 1991, I am
certainly," said Keegan. He said schedul
ing the gala two days after election
day was coincidence.

But Democrats in the crowd were
still sobred.

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

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

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

At the Hands Across New Jersey
election news conference, Florio was chuffed for not apologizing directly to the people
rather than to Democrats who lared
poorly in Tuesday election.

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

Rashid and Coates said they plan
to review and compile the voting rec
ords of all incumbents for the elec
tion in 1991 and distribute them to their constituents.

The co-founders pointed to two
aces in the state that bolstered the 1991 anti-tax campaign.

"Jim Florio made the race be
 tween anti-tax Sen. Jim Caffiero (R-
Colonia) and the referendum on tax
package," Tom Coates, the husband of
Janet Coates, said of the race in the 1st Legislative District.

In an overwhelmingly re-electing
Caffiero voices of Cape May and Cam
buland counties have spoken with a re
sounding 'axe the tax' warning, said Kathy Powers, group coordinator in
Ocean County. She said the "stunning
upset" by Frank Catania over Assem
bleman Cy Yannarelli (D-Passaic) pro
ves 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' re
jection of the affordable housing bond
issue. He said the group "supports af
fordable housing for all our fellow citi
zens," 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 Assemblerman David Schwartz (D-Mid
dlesex), "but we hope the next time a
round he has the decency to come
clean and trust the people and not en
run them with lies and deceit."