

Gov. Richard Codey Interview (April 9, 2019)

Rick Sinding: Hello. I'm Rick Sinding. It's Tuesday, April 9th, 2019, here on the campus of Rutgers University, at the Eagleton Institute of Politics. With me today for the Center on the American Governor is Dick Codey, who has spent, almost continuously, the last 45 years as a member of the New Jersey legislature, first, as an Assemblyman, and for the last 37 years, as a Senator. But I say, "almost continuously," because due to a variety of unusual circumstances, not once, not twice, but three times, he has been called upon to serve either as acting governor or as governor of the State of New Jersey. Senator/Governor Codey, welcome to Eagleton.

Richard Codey: My pleasure.

Rick Sinding: Let's start at the beginning of your career.

Richard Codey: A long time ago.

Rick Sinding: Actually, let's start at the beginning of your life.

Richard Codey: <Laughs> That's a long time ago, too.

Rick Sinding: I saw a biography that says that you grew up in your family's funeral home, in Orange.

Richard Codey: Yes, I did. We lived on the third floor. The elevator only went to the second and, for a while, the air conditioning only went to the second, as well. But my generation, the family on both sides—we are now, my generation, the first to go to college and live in a house. Before that, nobody had that opportunity, and my parents always stressed to us—the five of us—that we could buy a home, but then there would be no way you could get to college, and you're going to go to college. So my parents sacrificed, and so we lived in the funeral home, and I think a good deal of my success came from watching my parents serve people in a time of need. I saw how well respected they were in the community, how beloved they were, and so that was a lifetime of lessons. They taught us well. I always tell the story about my father: when I was 14, I was told I was going to work the parking lot. And he told me just one thing. He said, "Now, listen. If there's no parking spots left, and a priest or a politician pulls up, you're going to find one." So that was spheres of influence.

Rick Sinding: <Laughs>

Richard Codey: They can decide whether or not you get this funeral.

Rick Sinding: So you spent all of your upbringing in Orange? Or did the family move from that point?

Richard Codey: Yes, I lived there until the day I got married. So it was like 37 years.

Rick Sinding: Oh, my goodness.

Richard Codey: It was a long time, but it was absolutely great. We had a Main Street, so people came together, people of all backgrounds and believe it or not, we got along. And that was also a great lesson in life. In fact, when I got married and had kids and we moved to kind of the Orange/West Orange border. But in any event, I had two sons and so I would take them down to the Newark Boys and Girls Club on Saturdays, for about four months a year, and let them play in a basketball league, swim, whatever. I wanted them to be exposed to as much of a variety of kids, and generally, they were the only white kid in a group of a hundred, or whatever. And so today, nobody's going to sell them a Rolex on the street. <laughs> You know? That's for sure.

Rick Sinding: This would've been late '60s, early '70s?

Richard Codey: No, no, no.

Rick Sinding: Maybe a little later.

Richard Codey: I didn't get married until I was 37 or 38.

Rick Sinding: Oh, my goodness.

Richard Codey: So yeah. You're talking '80s.

Rick Sinding: In the '80s.

Richard Codey: Yes.

Rick Sinding: By that time, you were already in the legislature.

Richard Codey: Yes.

Rick Sinding: How did you get involved in politics? At a very young age, I might add.

Richard Codey: Yes. So here's how it went. Orange was "nonpartisan," shall we say.

Rick Sinding: There were places in Essex County that were nonpartisan?

Richard Codey: Absolutely. So you ran—

Rick Sinding: Oh, I see. The municipal elections. I got you.

Richard Codey: The form of government. So you ran as, ok, Richard Codey for councilman or mayor or whatever. There used to be, like, 25, 28 people, a lot of them very colorful, shall we say. And so somebody approached us, my buddies, about taking somebody's signs down, for money. So we took the money. Then we took another candidate's money, and the other guy's money, and so we made a good living out of it.

Rick Sinding: Classic Essex County story.

Richard Codey: So I decided that what we should do before the election is decide, in a vote, what five people—and they were all males, shocking, back in those days, the '60s—we would like to see win. So we would stop taking down their signs. That was our endorsement.

Rick Sinding: That's your entrance to politics? <Laughs>

Richard Codey: Right. <Laughs> My first endorsements.

Rick Sinding: What prompted you to run? Was the assembly the first race you ran? Or did you run for something else before that?

Richard Codey: I ran off the line. When I turned 21, you were allowed to vote back then. So I wanted to run, and I ran for county committee, which is not a public office but a party office, off the line against the organization.

Rick Sinding: The organization being the Essex County Democratic Organization? Was it the Harry Lerner Organization at the time?

Richard Codey: You got that right. So my district was, maybe, mostly white, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Protestant, black. So they put me on the "Jessie Gray for President" line.

Rick Sinding: <Laughs> My goodness.

Richard Codey: The party line was "A." I think we were on, like, the "N" line.

Rick Sinding: This would've been '72?

Richard Codey: '68.

Rick Sinding: '68, Okay.

Richard Codey: '68. So the day of the vote, at about 3:30, I borrowed a limousine from somebody who serviced my dad's funeral home and I picked up all the nuns. So they came in to vote, and there was a lot of them in those days. So the next thing I know, they were opening up the machines to see how I was doing and I was up a few votes. Well, within the next two hours, the organization was all over my district. So I lost by three votes. I never lost an election for public office. The next day, I went down to see the clerk, and I explained to him what had happened, and he said, "Kid, let me give you some good advice." I said, "What's that?" He says, "Next time, you're going to be the candidate. You showed them. So just keep your mouth shut and you'll be all right."

Rick Sinding: This was the county clerk?

Richard Codey: No, the local clerk.

Rick Sinding: Oh, okay.

Richard Codey: The local clerk.

Rick Sinding: Because the county clerk, who was known at that time as the "man with the golden hand"—

Richard Codey: You got that right.

Rick Sinding: —was Nicky Caputo, who always managed to find column "A" for the organization.

Richard Codey: Well, they still do, nowadays. <laughs>

Rick Sinding: <Laughs>

Richard Codey: If you've been watching, anyway. How they do it, I don't know. And the clerk at Essex County's a relative. He would never do anything wrong, I can assure you.

Rick Sinding: <Laughs> So flash ahead to 1974, which is the New Jersey—or rather '73, the New Jersey gubernatorial election. [Brendan Byrne](#), an Essex County Democrat, is at the top of the ticket. You were running for the assembly. Were you the organization candidate, at this point? Or were you still a maverick?

Richard Codey: Believe it or not, I was. And that was Watergate. But the general election didn't bother me. The district was all Democratic. So the Congressman, Congressman [Joseph] Minish, who was a friend of my family, wanted his son to be an assemblyman. And our Senator was Pat Dodd, a very well-liked young man, who got a lot of publicity for being a bachelor and having a, certainly, active life, shall we say.

Rick Sinding: A colorful lifestyle.

Richard Codey: Yes, absolutely. So he ran on the outside against us, and ran a good campaign. But we won convincingly.

Rick Sinding: How many assembly candidates were there in the primary?

Richard Codey: It was myself and my running mate, Eldridge Hawkins, an African-American raised in Orange, and myself from Orange. And as I said, we won, handily. But to be honest with you, in '73, if you ran as a Democrat and you were an idiot, a moron, whatever, you won.

Rick Sinding: Well, the assembly that year was 66-14, if I'm not mistaken or something like that.

Richard Codey: Yes.

Rick Sinding: Byrne's coat tails were enormous.

Richard Codey: Yes, there were some people who were elected as Democrats that, other than for Watergate, would never get elected to anything.

Rick Sinding: Yes, and in '75, there was a bit of a back to normal.

Richard Codey: It started two years later, and—

Rick Sinding: But you were in the majority.

Richard Codey: Right.

Rick Sinding: Throughout your eight years in the assembly.

Richard Codey: Interestingly enough, the minority leader was [Tom Kean](#).

Rick Sinding: Right.

Richard Codey: Who went on to become governor. Now, when I was working for my father, the gentleman who provided limousines for our funerals was from Livingston, and one of his accounts was the Kean family. So if my father wasn't busy and he had work, I chauffeured for his company. And he had the Kean estate. So on occasions, I would drive around and chauffeur [Tom Kean's] parents. So I got to know his father, who was a congressman, and his mom. I was never allowed in the house. <Laughs> I don't know if that was because I was a Democrat or my religion or whatever. <Laughs>

Rick Sinding: Or a limousine driver.

Rick Sinding: But I used to kid the governor about that, too, and I used to say, "We've got a lot in common. Both in politics, both from Essex County, so forth and so on, and both our ancestors came over here in a boat. The only difference is your family owned the boat." <Laughs>

Rick Sinding: <Laughs>

Richard Codey: We were downstairs. They were upstairs.

Rick Sinding: When you got elected to the legislature, did you come at it with a particular set of policy points of view? Did you have an ideology, would you say? I mean, were you a Democrat because you had a particular ideology? Were you a Democrat because Democrat is how you got elected in Essex County? Did you grow up in a political household?

Richard Codey: My father had an interest in politics. My uncle—not a Codey—got elected as a councilman or commissioner, or whatever. So it was kind of around me all the time, and I'd see the politicians coming in and out, of course. But, no. It was kind of rare in Orange to find a Republican. I mean, it was what it was.

Rick Sinding: But what prompted you to run for office?

Richard Codey: Because, you know, you see the elections in town and the candidates would have motorcades. So it was a lot of activity, and it was a big deal. So I became interested in it, and at best, I thought maybe I could be mayor or something. But, you know, I was also interested a lot in sports, particularly basketball. Because in Orange, we didn't have too much grass for football. Hockey was unknown to us, soccer. So the main sport really was basketball.

Rick Sinding: Well, and that's been a large part of your life.

Richard Codey: Yes, true. And my parents happened to be Seton Hall season ticket holders, as well. It did become part of my life, and to this day, I just finished—my eighth grade team won the Essex County travel league again, for the third time in a row.

Rick Sinding: And so you continue to be a feeder to the Seton Hall basketball program.

Richard Codey: Yes, and we've had some good players. In fact, Kyrie Irving. I didn't do travel with him. I did some AAU with him. He's done rather well.

Rick Sinding: Yes, rather well.

Richard Codey: Despite my little coaching efforts.

Rick Sinding: <Laughs> Would you say that you had an interest in government?

Richard Codey: Yeah, I did, and then understanding the Irish Catholic population back in the '60s. So when John Kennedy decided to run, my dad—his dad had come from Ireland, and my grandmother. So they had an intense interest in seeing somebody who was Irish and Catholic succeed. So I certainly followed that. And where I went to grammar school, when you got to the fifth grade, the girls got one wing of the building and the boys the other wing. And we were taught by Christian brothers, and most of them were immigrants. So they were really into John Kennedy, and so they were going through the primaries in the spring, and Kennedy had done well. But now, there was a big primary in West Virginia between Hubert Humphrey, who was a Protestant, and John F. Kennedy, who was Catholic. And West Virginia, at the time, was about 80-something percent Protestant. And so the trend and the view in the country was that Kennedy couldn't win West Virginia because he was Catholic, and the Pope would run him and tell him what to do. And he won. So it was great. And then, I didn't think about it at the time, of course, but then, the brother at the time, after Kennedy won, made us read "The Diary of Anne Frank." I guess he was pretty liberal at the time, obviously. So he wanted to teach us about discrimination, whether it was against Catholics or Jews or anybody else. And eventually, with my wife, we were able to view Anne Frank's apartment. So it was nice, and I was able to establish the Holocaust Commission in New Jersey, to teach students about—whether it's the potato famine in England, what the Nazis did, or any other kind of genocide.

Rick Sinding: Now, you served both of Brendan Byrne's gubernatorial terms in the assembly, in the majority.

Richard Codey: Correct.

Rick Sinding: In 1981, when Tom Kean was elected Governor, you were elected to the Senate and served in the Senate—well, served almost continuously, as I mentioned in the introduction, for the next 37 years. I think it would be safe to say that you first gained statewide prominence in 1987, when as the Chair of the Senate Institutions, Health and Welfare Committee, you took the name of a deceased convicted felon, got yourself a—

Richard Codey: Yeah, but I would say this, before you go there.

Rick Sinding: Okay.

Richard Codey: I got some notoriety [before that]. The Speaker at the time—back in the late '70s—when casino gambling became legal, he called me and said, "Hey, listen, kid. You're single."

Rick Sinding: Was this Chris Jackman?

Richard Codey: No, Bill Hampton.

Rick Sinding: Oh, okay.

Richard Codey: From New Brunswick.

Rick Sinding: New Brunswick, yes.

Richard Codey: He asked if I would chair this state committee and do all the casino legislation.

Rick Sinding: Oh. I'm sorry I missed that in your bio.

Richard Codey: Yeah, it's all right. So I flew all over the world learning about it.

Rick Sinding: So this would've been '76, '77?

Richard Codey: Yes.

Rick Sinding: In that period?

Richard Codey: Right about '77, I think it was. Because the referendum failed the first time. A lot of people don't know that. But in any event, I remember when it did pass, going down to the Chalfonte-Haddon Hall Hotel, which eventually

became Resorts, to meet with the president of Resorts. And I asked him how many people were staying that night, and he said there were two rooms occupied. One by me and one by somebody else.

Rick Sinding: Oh, my God.

Richard Codey: Right? And then, obviously, it took off and, eventually, I got to know Mr. Trump, when he came into Atlantic City back in the '80s. But during the legislation, everybody said—well, there were two sides: "Oh, the Mob's going to run it." And then, there was people who said, "The Mob should run it."

Rick Sinding: <Laughs> Right.

Richard Codey: They would do a better job. <laughs> So it was an interesting period of my life.

Rick Sinding: So were you a principal sponsor of the bill?

Richard Codey: Oh, yes. Yes.

Rick Sinding: So it was [\[Steve\] Perskie](#) in the Senate and you in the Assembly?

Richard Codey: Oh, yes, Mr. Perskie, who I admire and respect. But the one story about Steve was that he approached me one time and said, "You know, I think we should make the rooms a certain size." I had no problem with that. And he said, "Oh, how about this size?" So he told me later that one of his relatives owned a certain hotel and just happened to meet that criteria. <Laughs>

Rick Sinding: The Perskie family was—

Richard Codey: So, "Okay."

Rick Sinding: —pretty active in the Atlantic City area.

Richard Codey: Oh, yeah. So I spent a lot of time, even after going to gaming seminars all over the world, and that was a very interesting period of my life. I'll tell you this. So one time, I think it was in, maybe, the early '80s, and we were studying the issue of maybe changing the tax to make it higher. And there was a break in the action for lunch, or whatever, and people from Resorts were around. And I said to the treasurer, I said, "Listen." And they had been open a couple of years. I said, "How come you've never had Rodney Dangerfield down to entertain?" He said, "Who the hell is that?" I said, "Oh, he's a comedian," whatever. So I found out from a Resorts attorney who was a good friend of mine—Joe Sterns, a

great human being. He said the president asked the treasurer, "What were you and Codey talking about?" He said, "Oh, he wants some comedian to come down and be one of our acts." He said, "Who was it?" And he said, "Oh, Rodney something, or whatever." So he said, "What did you tell him?" "I just told him, you know, no." He said, "Really? Listen. You call that comedian and we're going to book him." So they booked him. So I went down, and I have this great big picture of me and Rodney in a white bathrobe, black socks, and a cigarette.

Rick Sinding: You or him?

Richard Codey: No, I wasn't in a bathrobe, thank God. <Laughs>

Rick Sinding: No, I meant the cigarette.

Richard Codey: No. I don't even smoke, either. So I found out that he was the first act they made money on.

Rick Sinding: It astonishes me. Now, I don't know the age group of the people who are going to be watching this or reading the transcript, of how many of them would know that Rodney Dangerfield would have been something of a household name at the time that you're talking about.

Richard Codey: Yeah, I think he—

Rick Sinding: It kind of does astonish me that the treasurer of the organization had never heard of him.

Richard Codey: Right. Well, "Caddyshack" really propelled him to great notoriety, shall I say. So where did you want to go?

Rick Sinding: All right. You know where I wanted to go. You took the name of a deceased convicted felon.

Richard Codey: Yes.

Rick Sinding: You got a phony Social Security number and card, and you applied for and got a job at the Marlboro State Psychiatric Hospital. I think it's testimony to what a low profile the chairman of a senate committee has that you can go undercover for two weeks—

Richard Codey: Well, that's true.

Rick Sinding: —at the Marlboro Hospital.

Richard Codey: Well, that's because we're dominated by Philly TV and New York.

Rick Sinding: Yeah, of course. But you uncovered some really grotesque situations there.

Richard Codey: Just let me tell you how I got there. So I'm working in the funeral home, and one of the jobs is to pick up dead bodies. So in those days, Greystone, which was about 20 minutes or so from—

Rick Sinding: Greystone is another psychiatric hospital.

Richard Codey: Psychiatric hospital in Morris County.

Rick Sinding: Much nearer to where you were living.

Richard Codey: Right. So you would be sent there to pick up dead bodies, often. They had thousands of patients back in those days. If you had Alzheimer's, you were there. All kinds of diseases that, you know, people shouldn't have been there for, or whatever. So in any event, I go up, and you go to the main office, and they give you a key and a patient—a young patient—to help you with the body off the slab. So this particular day, it was a young man my age, about 19. So on the ride down and back, he was telling me horror stories about what was going on up at Greystone. So when I got home that day, I was telling my mom, and I told her if I ever got in a position where I could help these people, that I would. So that's where my passion for people with mental illness came from. Now, as you're well aware, fast forward quite a few years later, and I get married and my wife gives birth to our first child. She [Codey's wife] became seriously, seriously, seriously mentally ill. But my passion began from being an undertaker's son. But then it put it in another world when my wife was a severe sufferer.

Rick Sinding: And this has become a major theme of yours, throughout your political career.

Richard Codey: Yeah, tomorrow I'll be down teaching school personnel about how to work with kids today. Because, listen, when you and I grew up, teenagers did not commit suicide. When generations behind us grew up, they did not commit suicide. In the last 15 years, it has exploded. Here in New Jersey, 1200 teenagers every year are admitted to hospitals for failed suicide attempts. Anywhere from 75 to 95 to 100 teenagers dead from suicide. So why does it happen now and not with past generations? So my foundation for mental illness [Codey Fund for Mental Health], we go around and talk to both students and teachers, administrators. And it's not definitive, but I don't know about your religion, but I was all-in Catholic. So we were known as a Catholic funeral home, but we did Protestants, Jews, African-

Americans, whatever. But primarily Catholics. So all five of us [kids] went to the local Catholic school, which is about a five-minute walk, if that, and next to that was the church, the cemetery, the rectories, convent, and everything else. So without realizing it, that church was a big mentoring thing for me. And let's be candid. Now my sons don't go to church. I don't know about your children. But whether you're Catholic, attend an African-American church, a Temple, or whatever, there are less and less people going to religious services, and they feel that—growing up, [church] is a good mentoring system for young adults. It's a hub of activities. You have more friends as a result, whether you go to public school or any kind of a Catholic school. Of course, Catholic schools are closing very rapidly.

The other issue we talk about is the issue of bullying. Now, when we were all kids, there was bullying that went on. But my generation and generations after me, you went home to the safety of your home. Now, that doesn't exist because the social media walks in the door with you, and so we have teenagers, young teenagers—some not even teenagers—sending out bullying messages. There was a young girl who got what's called "bombed," from so-called friends, about "You weren't invited to a party, ha ha ha," and she eventually committed suicide. We had a nine-year-old, recently, commit suicide. All that because of the social media bullying.

Rick Sinding: You've identified two almost intractable issues here. One is social media, the other being absence of religion. What can you or your group do about it? What can government do? What can anybody do about it?

Richard Codey: Right. So further, there are fewer block parties today in our country. When I was growing up, you had a boat-load—I was going to say something else—of social organizations. There was the Polish Organization, the Irish Organization, ethnic organizations, Knights of Columbus, Sons of Italy, and on and on and on. They don't really exist that much anymore. So there's less and less interaction for all of us, regardless of where we live, and that's not good.

You may find this strange. Just recently, Great Britain created the Office of Loneliness. Now, that sounds weird. I'm sure it does. But they felt they needed it because they were finding out people had less and less friends, less and less opportunities to socialize with other people of their same age. What are we going to do about this? And it was the leading cause of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and suicide. And let's admit it. My sons are 30, 33, and I asked them, "In high school, was suicide talked about?" "Absolutely not." Now, you talk about suicide and depression and anxiety. I didn't know anxiety or depression.

Rick Sinding: Or maybe you did, but you didn't know what it was.

Richard Codey: I didn't know what it was. I didn't label it. I didn't understand. All I knew about suicide was that it was such a taboo that if we had a deceased who had committed suicide, an adult—they're the only ones that did—the Catholic Church did not allow a mass to be said or a Christian burial. So it was really something that was a real no, no, no, and there wasn't—in all due respect to the Church—sympathy there, and we would have to find a priest that might allow us to get away with it, with a church service or a burial. But it wasn't allowed.

Rick Sinding: Let's fast forward here, because we could go on and on, on these subjects.

Richard Codey: Let's see how fast you can get.

Rick Sinding: Yeah, we'll go as far as we can. I wanted to take you up to 1989, and just—

Richard Codey: Oh, you mean, when Seton Hall got to the final game in the NCAA tournament? <Laughs>

Rick Sinding: No. I meant when [Jim Florio](#) got elected Governor. <laughs>

Richard Codey: Well, Seton Hall got to the final game before—

Rick Sinding: '90. 1990.

Richard Codey: —Florio got elected. No, it was '89.

Rick Sinding: Against Michigan, right?

Richard Codey: State offices are never in—

Rick Sinding: Yes, right.

Richard Codey: It's always off years.

Rick Sinding: Oh, okay. I got you. Well, before we get there, to either Seton Hall or Jim Florio, what were your impressions? Because we're doing this for The Center on the American Governor. So let's talk a little bit about the governorships of Brendan Byrne and Tom Kean, who were the governors during your eight years in the assembly and your first eight years in the senate. What kind of relationship did you have with either the governor himself, or what kind of interactions did you have with the governor's office, during those two administrations?

Richard Codey: Okay. With Governor Byrne, he was friendly with my dad. They would often play tennis together. So there was a relationship there, and of course, I was his state senator, when he ran—I mean his state assemblyman. So I knew him well. I dealt with him quite often.

Rick Sinding: And of course, you had driven the family, as I recall. So that was another connection.

Richard Codey: And Brendan's father was a politician. So [Brendan] [wants a state income tax](#). We didn't have one. Now, I represented a poor district. For them, it was the right thing, but they didn't think so. There were not too many people in the state who wanted a state income tax. Understandable. But I realized it was good for my district. So for me, it wasn't a vote of conscience.

Rick Sinding: Well, it might've been a vote of conscience that simultaneously was—

Richard Codey: Right.

Rick Sinding: —a benefit to you.

Richard Codey: But it's not like—

Rick Sinding: You do well by doing good.

Richard Codey: It's not like abortion, and it's not like—

Rick Sinding: No, I understand.

Richard Codey: —assisted suicide, or recreational marijuana.

Rick Sinding: Oh, okay. Right. We'll get to that.

Richard Codey: Okay. That's all right. So in any event, he had called my party chairman, which I resented. If you want to talk to me, you talk to me, right? And the chairman at the time was a big, big powerful guy.

Rick Sinding: Is it still Harry Lerner, at that point?

Richard Codey: Sure.

Rick Sinding: Yes. Okay.

Richard Codey: And he called me and said—and listen, I don't really give a blank, but he called me. Okay. So I think it was [Bob Mulcahy](#) or [Harold Hodes](#) who mentioned, you know, "We need you on this." So I said, "Well, you know, I've got a big problem." "What's that?" "Well, you know, 280 was opened two years ago, and there's a big, big bottleneck in West Orange—at the bottom of the hill beginning in West Orange—because somebody forgot to put an exit in Orange." So the next thing I know, [Alan Sagner](#)—

Rick Sinding: Commissioner of Transportation.

Richard Codey: Right. He lands a helicopter somewhere close to my house. He comes to my house and says, "Here's a set of plans for an exit on 280 going West." Okay. So we've accomplished something. And eventually, the City of Orange named the exit after me.

Rick Sinding: <Laughs>

Richard Codey: And I'm, like, "Yeah, but it's an exit. I'd rather have it be an entrance." But what are you going to do? And I mentioned it to an assemblyman from Hudson by the name of Jack Elliot. I said, "Jack, go into the governor's office and tell them, 'Nah. I changed my mind. I'm not for it.'" And then let them approach you about something."

Rick Sinding: Horse trading.

Richard Codey: Yeah. So, eventually, he got something. He thought that was the greatest thing in the world. I said, "Jack, where I grew up, you know, we knew that."

Rick Sinding: <Laughs> And he was from Hudson.

Richard Codey: He was from Hudson!

Rick Sinding: He was from Hudson and he didn't know it?

Richard Codey: You really should've known!

Rick Sinding: That's a wonderful story about how business was done in the 1970s.

Richard Codey: Yes, but I would—

Rick Sinding: And may yet be done today.

Richard Codey: Governor Byrne and I would often talk, particularly about the casinos. We worked very, very well, and I had a great deal of respect for him. He was a gentleman. He was never a bully, never a boss. We worked well, very well. I have a great picture of the two of us in boxing gloves at some point. And we got it done, and when he signed the bill allowing the first casino to open, he said, "I want to send a message out there to the Mafia," or whatever it was. Organized crime, I guess, would be a better word. "Keep your stinky hands off Atlantic City." Which they did, for the most part.

Rick Sinding: What about Kean? I had mixed up the stories.

Richard Codey: That's all right.

Rick Sinding: You weren't a driver for Byrne. You were a driver for the Kean family. Now, he's from a different political party.

Richard Codey: That's correct.

Rick Sinding: But also from Essex County.

Richard Codey: Correct.

Rick Sinding: So how does it differ when you're now dealing with a front office that's Republican. And of course, now, you're in the senate, not the assembly.

Richard Codey: Right. But as you said, I had a relationship there. I can remember him calling me to vote for an increase in the sales tax, and I was, like, "I don't know." I felt bad, because I liked him. I didn't really care that he was a Republican, you know? But the leadership was kind of saying, "No." So, you know, I wanted to help him. So I worked it out to get somebody to help him get the increase he wanted.

But I really worked very well with him. I chaired a committee, and he knew that he could call me on issues. And one time, we had a big issue with the casinos, something they wanted and they didn't get it, and I was part of the reason—a big part of it—and he called me. He says, "Dick, I couldn't tell you how happy I was that that proposal didn't go anywhere." So we got along very, very well. I'll be honest with you. When he was running, I didn't think he could beat Florio.

Rick Sinding: In '81.

Richard Codey: In '81.

Rick Sinding: Yeah.

Richard Codey: I went to an event in West Orange about a week before, and there were maybe 80 people there, and he lives in Livingston, right there. I didn't think he could win. I was wrong.

Rick Sinding: Well, by 1,797 votes.

Richard Codey: Yes. That's about as close as you can get.

Rick Sinding: Yes. Now, Florio's first six months [in 1990]. Not even first two years; let's talk about the first six months. Auto insurance reform, assault weapons ban, Quality Education Act, a bunch of taxes because of a deficit for the current fiscal year and a presumed deficit much larger for the next year, a huge, huge amount of taxes. How did you approach the votes on those highly sensitive and highly controversial issues?

Richard Codey: So he wanted a new way to distribute money from the income tax. Again, for my district, it was the right thing. So myself and another state senator, [Dan Dalton](#) from South Jersey—

Rick Sinding: And a former Florio staffer, when Florio was in congress.

Richard Codey: Right. We both felt that he shouldn't do all of this at once. And he also raised the sales tax, as you remember. I don't think you mentioned that.

Rick Sinding: <Laugh> All the taxes. Sales, income.

Richard Codey: Yeah, but one of the taxes was on toilet paper, and we're like, "Governor, no. That's not a good optic," or whatever. But he didn't listen to me and Dan, and [John Lynch](#).

Rick Sinding: And John Lynch, who also felt the same way.

Richard Codey: Right.

Rick Sinding: [Joe Doria](#), who was the Assembly Speaker.

Richard Codey: Even stronger than us, shall we say. But Florio didn't listen. So, obviously, he was getting crushed. And the interesting thing about Governor Florio, now, here's a guy who's from Brooklyn. Not exactly Princeton, right? And gotta figure street [smart], right?

Rick Sinding: Yes.

Richard Codey: But, so we would have these meetings with him—I was part of leadership—on Mondays, when we were in session. But when you'd walk in the room, he'd never say to you, "Hey, Dick, what did you do with your kids this weekend?" Or "Hey, the Giants did pretty well," or "They stunk," or whatever. He'd go right into, "Now, on this assault weapon ban," or on this particular bill. So it was hard for him to, kind of—it was always issues and never people. And I said to him, "Why don't you just forget about issues and talk to people about their lives, what's going on, what's going on with their kids?" But he could never do that. It just wasn't him, and he didn't have any particular interest that lined up with the average person. He and his wife were bird watchers. Not that there's anything wrong with that. But that's not a big colony out there. You've got to find things that you can connect with, with people.

What I used to do, when I had a tough race back in the '80s, back in the days when people actually picked up their land phones, I called thousands and thousands of people, asking them what their issues were. And a lot of them were kind of put off. How many times does a state senator call them direct? But I'd engage them in conversation. I'd say, "Mrs. Jones, is the Acme store still down there? Does Mr. Kurt still own the drugstore?" "How's the playground?" Or whatever. So you made a connection with them. And sometimes they'd say, "You know, this street's got to get paved." So the next day, I'd call the mayor. And then—see, what I would do was, a letter to Mrs. Jones was already on the outside, on the inside thanking her for the conversation last night. So I would write her name, and then it would be delivered maybe the next day. So very often I would go into a house, and I'd see a letter from me framed. In a poor community, that was a big deal.

Rick Sinding: Retail politics.

Richard Codey: Absolutely, positively. I made 3,000 phone calls in about 4 months when I thought I'd have a tough primary, and people said, "You could never win that race." And I did. It was because of those phone calls.

Rick Sinding: Most congressmen now spend about the same amount of time on the phone—

Richard Codey: Yeah, but they're—

Rick Sinding: —but they're looking for money.

Richard Codey: —raising money, right, not making that personal connection. I can remember calling a woman, an Italian-American woman in Madison, when I got my

new district where the Democrats wanted me to lose because I wasn't going to listen to the power brokers. I called her, and somehow we got talking about sports, and she was fanatic about the baseball museum, and she told me she had them change 10 things. This is a woman in her 80s. I'm like, wow. So we never even talked politics. And she was a Republican and her whole family, they're big Republicans. So they all had signs up for me, and a couple years later the family called me and said, "Mom's dying, and she'd love to see you." So I went and saw her, and she talked about sports, and she said, "If my family needs you, you'll be there for them."

Rick Sinding: Now, you're describing a level of personal detail that a legislator can have in a district that's a little more difficult for a governor. We're comparing this style to Jim Florio's style.

Richard Codey: Absolutely. Yes, but either that's your style, or it isn't, whether you're on a bigger stage or not. Now, before I came down here, as you can understand, I have a foundation for people with mental illness. I got a call from somebody from the district. "My son's in another country. He's hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital. How do we get him back? How do I get him into a good psychiatric hospital here?" And then very often me and my wife will get calls from all kinds of people, in lower stations in life and some of the biggest big-shots in the state of New Jersey: "My wife's got a problem." "My son has an issue." "Can you help me?" And we help them. And we're happy to do that, whether they want to come in and sit with us in our living room and we let them cry and tell them where they're at mentally, and we tell them, "Listen, it's—." The thing is, we would like to say to people, one is that suicide is a permanent answer to a temporary problem and that it's okay not to be okay, but it's not okay not to ask for help. So you're here asking for help, and that's what you have to understand. It's not going to go away tomorrow, the next day or the next week, but with the medications out there, and if you stick to it and you want to get better, you will get better.

Rick Sinding: When you were urging the governor in the Florio administration to take it slow, I guess would be the best way to describe it, did it occur to you—did you think it was likely or even probable that in the following election you were going to find yourself in such an enormous minority for the first time in your legislative career?

Richard Codey: I thought it was possible, as things were going along, and then when you looked at some, like the [Bill] Bradley vs. [\[Christine Todd\] Whitman](#) [U.S. Senate] election polling that was relatively close. [Bradley] still thought he was going to win. He did, not by a large margin. I mean, I thought it was possible. I don't think I thought about it a lot. But he didn't lose by that much, Florio.

Rick Sinding: No, but in 1991, in the midterm, the Democrats did.

Richard Codey: Oh, yeah. He was not on the ballot.

Rick Sinding: Right, and the Democrats lost big time. This must've been a closer election for you than just about any other one that you've had.

Richard Codey: I would think so. I don't know if I've ever won without at least 65 percent. Maybe yes, maybe no. That year, I don't know what it was, but we won fairly easy. [Codey received approximately 68% of the vote in the 1991 general election.]

Rick Sinding: You were one of a relative handful of Democrats who survived that midterm election.

Richard Codey: That's absolutely, positively true.

Rick Sinding: Now you find yourself, well, basically for the rest of the 1990s in the minority party.

Richard Codey: True.

Rick Sinding: How different is it to be in the minority party than being in the majority party?

Richard Codey: Well, somebody once said you don't have to worry about being ethical or right. <laughs>That came from a Republican.

Rick Sinding: You mean when you're in the minority?

Richard Codey: Yeah, you can just say whatever you want, right.

Rick Sinding: Just say whatever you want.

Richard Codey: But I took it seriously.

Rick Sinding: But even in those days, compared to today, the New Jersey legislature was not nearly as fragmented or as partisan as it is today.

Richard Codey: Well, that's because the unfortunate appearance of the bosses hadn't—they were creeping in, but they hadn't taken control. So you could operate with your conscience.

Rick Sinding: Now, it's interesting, because certainly at the time that you entered politics, New Jersey was very much a state of bosses. Then that subsided after Watergate.

Richard Codey: You're right. But there was a big difference. Those bosses didn't bother you about normal legislation. They didn't bother you about their personal interest in legislation. They didn't bother you about taking over the legislature. And they didn't bother about you voting their way. They cared about judges that came out and a few appointments, and that was it. Their base of business was county government and freeholders, not state legislators. So that was a relatively new phenomenon that slowly but surely crept into this system of government in New Jersey, and it's been an absolute incredible disaster.

Rick Sinding: Well, you've had—well we'll get to that. Let's remain chronological before we get into some of the conflicts that you've dealt with. For the last two years of the Florio administration and then throughout the Whitman administration, you're moving up. You start as the assistant minority leader after the midterm of Florio.

Richard Codey: With John Lynch as the—

Rick Sinding: Right, he was the Senate president. Now he's the majority leader.

Richard Codey: President for a while.

Rick Sinding: Then you move up to minority leader, and would that have been with the Whitman election, or would that have been later, second year?

Richard Codey: There was a little bit of a fight there. I was John's assistant. Then John wanted to move out, meaning Lynch, and at that point in time Mr. Norcross had moved in, and was making a stake.

Rick Sinding: We're talking about George Norcross. I hesitate to say this, but when you're referring to the bosses coming in, were you referring to Mr. Norcross in South Jersey?

Richard Codey: Absolutely. It is what it is.

Rick Sinding: Just to be clear.

Richard Codey: Well, first of all, he really started a little bit before that. I was the assistant to John. He wanted one of his people, a young man by the name John Adler, Senator Adler, to become the assistant and not me. He got friendly with

Lynch, I'll leave it at that, who was a friend of mine, and he convinced him with all kinds of things that he wanted Senator Adler, not me. So they thought I would fold.

Rick Sinding: Was there any particular reason other than geography, as far as you know?

Richard Codey: Geography has got nothing to do with it. It's all about power.

Rick Sinding: But Adler being from South Jersey and you being from the north.

Richard Codey: No, no. Listen. As long as he can control you, that's what counts.

Rick Sinding: Doesn't matter where you're from.

Richard Codey: Doesn't matter where you live, not relevant. So I said, no, I'm going to fight it. Okay. I was in a meeting with him, which I was not too impressed, because he was acting like a bully, whatever. So we ran into each other in Atlantic City, and basically it was an, "F you," "No, F you," and we were separated. So they didn't have all the votes, so we came to a compromise that it would be three minority leaders, and I would be the number-one minority leader.

Rick Sinding: So this is the beginning of a longstanding feud that continues to this day.

Richard Codey: Yeah, I mean, listen. I don't like bosses telling people how to vote, controlling them through their jobs, their incomes. I think it's wrong. It's everything that I'm against and people should be against as well, and it's just gotten worse and worse and worse and worse. I mean, we [in the legislature] haven't gotten a pay raise in a long, long time, and in my opinion that's because certain bosses want certain legislators to be accountable to them for their income. Why else? Everybody else getting raises, right?

Rick Sinding: Do you want to provide any other examples of this?

Richard Codey: Yeah. Well, we just had a round not too long ago of staff increases and everything else, well-needed, and we're still at a level that we've been for maybe 15 years.

Rick Sinding: And is George Norcross the person who's responsible for that, or does he have colleagues who are similarly inclined?

Richard Codey: Listen. Let's be candid. Good, bad or indifferent, he was the second most important person in the [Chris] Christie administration. He might've

been a Democrat, but that doesn't matter. In fact, one time I was at an event for Brendan Byrne, and it was myself and Governor [Don] DiFrancesco, Governor Whitman, myself and Governor Christie. When I got up to speak, I pointed to Governor Whitman, and I said, "Well, she's responsible for making Donny DiFrancesco the governor of the state of New Jersey, and it was Jim McGreevey here who was responsible for making me the governor of New Jersey, and there's Chris Christie here, who is responsible for making George Norcross the governor of the state of New Jersey."

Rick Sinding: Did it get a good laugh?

Richard Codey: Oh, absolutely. And I'm sure under his breath he was cursing me. But there's no secret. I mean, hey, listen, if he wants to try to be that person, Mr. Norcross, and if somebody lets him, then the bulk of the shame is on the elected official. You let that become too much of an influence. Was it a good thing? I don't think so. Mr. Norcross has the right to lobby for any of his interests. If you look at where the money has been dispersed, it's to the least population. But he's fighting for his area. I don't fight, quote-unquote, for my area. I got to protect my district, of course, but I'm sympathetic to any other area that needs help, and whether it's in Camden County or anything else, I don't care where Mr. Norcross lives. I got to do the right thing.

Rick Sinding: You mentioned Governor Whitman.

Richard Codey: Yes. I liked her.

Rick Sinding: You're in the minority. You're minority leader throughout her governorship, so you don't have a lot of power, but you still do have some influence over your caucus.

Richard Codey: Well, I'm the person that is expected to be critical.

Rick Sinding: Right. And you were.

Richard Codey: Not that much.

Rick Sinding: Now, Donny DiFrancesco was the president of the Senate at that period.

Richard Codey: What was interesting there—

Rick Sinding: How did the two of you get along?

Richard Codey: Fabulous.

Rick Sinding: That's what I thought.

Richard Codey: The biggest problem for [Whitman] was the Republicans, not me. I would criticize her on issues, but it was a feeling within the Republican legislature that she was kind of above that, and I always—I liked her. I feel I'm friendly with her and very respectful. I actually hired one of her relatives to be an intern, fine person, and when I became governor, interestingly enough, I called her, because McGreevey used to just criticize her every day, because everything was her fault, so forth and so on.

Rick Sinding: Well, he had run against her in '97, and then 2001 became governor.

Richard Codey: Yeah, but my thing was, when I became governor, that I would not criticize former governors. And I did not. And I called Governor Whitman especially, because Jim [McGreevey] had really gone after her, blamed everything on her. So I just thought that if I were her, and Codey's the minority leader—so she knows I'm a big sports guy. Pick up the phone and then say, "Dick, Seton Hall's playing Saturday. Do you want the governor's box at the arena?" You got to pay for her, but pay for the food. Never happened. Or, all right, Dick is in the building today. It's not a legislative day. Ask him if he wants to come down and have lunch. So, now, to me, that's what I'd do but she didn't do it. I think lacking that kind of street savvy or whatever hurt her, but I thought she was very decent people and when I became governor, I called her and said, "Listen, I know Governor McGreevey criticized you. That was his style. I'm not going to criticize you or any other former governor, so I hope you can come around when you should and feel free to feel that I'm not going to badmouth you. I have no reason to, and I respected you certainly as the first woman to become governor of the state of New Jersey and have no angst against you whatsoever. I could care less that you're a Republican."

Rick Sinding: Let's talk about the first time you became acting governor for, if I'm not mistaken, three and a half days. Is that right? This is one of the—

Richard Codey: Weirdest things in the world. <laughter>

Rick Sinding: I mean, you can hardly describe it.

Richard Codey: Well, it's hard to describe, but the new legislature gets elected and sworn in a week before the new governor. So since DiFrancesco was the governor, and since he was no longer a legislator—

Rick Sinding: And he was the governor because Christie Whitman had resigned to become the U.S. EPA administrator, and DiFrancesco, for the final year of the Whitman administration, functioned as the acting governor, because the Senate president became the acting governor.

Richard Codey: Yeah, but I actually changed this later on in life.

Rick Sinding: We'll get to that.

Richard Codey: I did him a big favor, and myself.

Rick Sinding: So this is the 2001 election.

Richard Codey: So in 2002, the beginning of 2002, there's a week where you have no elected governor whatsoever. So, in a freak of nature, the Senate became 20-20. So who's the governor for a week? So John Bennett and I sat down.

Rick Sinding: He was the Republican leader.

Richard Codey: Absolutely, and that had never happened before. So how do you run the Senate if there's two people in charge? So we took months and months and months and wrote a book about what we're going to have to do to do this and never opened the book. We didn't have to open a book because I liked John. He liked me. I respected him. He respected me, and we never had a cross word whatsoever and became good friends.

Rick Sinding: And you functioned as co-presidents of the Senate.

Richard Codey: Right up to this day.

Rick Sinding: Well, for that two-year period. You didn't function as co-presidents up to this day. You functioned as co-presidents of the Senate for those two years. You are friends up to this day.

Richard Codey: Right, co-president. But then we were also essentially co-governors.

Rick Sinding: During the period between—

Richard Codey: The one week.

Rick Sinding: —the new legislature being sworn in and the new governor being sworn in.

Richard Codey: Right. So he said to me, "Dick, can I take the first three and a half days?" I said, sure, what do I give a blank, right? But John really took it very seriously. I kind of took it very humorously. You know, three and a half days.

Rick Sinding: Wasn't the attorney general also governor for an hour or something?

Richard Codey: The attorney general was for a half-hour or so. I don't even know if he knew it. Who cares? So one time John and I are in the governor's mansion, and we're doing whatever the big show was back in 2002 in the morning. A cable show. We were on. So they said, "Well, we'd like to have them on for some more discussion as well," and John said, "I'm not doing that." So whoever the host was at the time said—I said, "I'll stay on for another 15 minutes. I don't give a rat's ass." So at one point they decided, "Would you take questions?" Yeah. So somebody calls from South Carolina and says, "You know, governor, I've been through your state, and the food at your rest stops on the Parkway stinks." I said, "Okay. So where you from?" "South Carolina." "Well, here's the skinny, sir. Those of us who live here, we know the food stinks, so it's people like you from South Carolina who eat there, not us, so take it for what it's worth, okay, pal?"

Rick Sinding: You had fun with this job, didn't you?

Richard Codey: By the way, I said to him, "Listen. You deserve it. Any state whose nickname is Gamecocks, come on." <laughs>

Rick Sinding: What else did you do in your three-and-a-half days as acting governor?

Richard Codey: Me and my sons watched "Blazing Saddles" in the governor's mansion.

Rick Sinding: You actually stayed at Drumthwacket?

Richard Codey: For one night.

Rick Sinding: Very nice.

Richard Codey: One night only.

Rick Sinding: For the first two years of the McGreevey administration, you and John Bennett shared the Senate presidency. How did you do that? Did you do it on alternating sessions?

Richard Codey: Yeah, we took six months at a time, something like that, but it didn't matter, because we agreed on everything.

Rick Sinding: Really?

Richard Codey: No, really. I mean, it may sound whack to you, but we never, ever had a cross word between us.

Rick Sinding: But what about policy?

Richard Codey: Same thing. When we disagreed, we disagreed. So he got to post a bill that I didn't particularly care for, and same with me. I could post a bill that he didn't particularly care for. He just voted against it. What do I care? As long as he's voting his conscience, it's fine with me. Good guy, great guy, and we got along superbly.

Rick Sinding: How did you end up getting to the majority leader and then Senate president? How did you get to the Senate president's position, given the rivalry that you had acknowledged before with Mr. Norcross?

Richard Codey: Well, at that point in time, he wasn't as strong as he was later on, and he and John Bennett got into a fight. He wanted John Bennett to do something in regards to a hockey rink down in Pennsauken for him and something up north for a hockey rink as well, and they couldn't agree, and there was—Mr. Norcross would dispute it, but there was some physical confrontation in John Bennett's office. And he said, "I'm going to get you. You'll never win again." From John's side, he got all kinds of information against him that was wrong, but the Asbury Park Press printed it, and John lost, and that was it for John in the Senate, and I became the president of the Senate.

Rick Sinding: Did you have a challenge for the Senate presidency internally?

Richard Codey: Internally?

Rick Sinding: Among Democrats?

Richard Codey: No. No, the boss didn't have those kind of votes at that particular point in time. Didn't stop him from trying. Even as we were marching into the assembly chambers to elect, they were working hard, because I'm not going to listen to what a party boss wants. I'll listen if it's about the right things.

Rick Sinding: But there was not a challenge mounted?

Richard Codey: Formally, no.

Rick Sinding: There was nobody nominated?

Richard Codey: No, not at all.

Rick Sinding: Now you're Senate president.

Richard Codey: I'm working with McGreevey.

Rick Sinding: The unusual situation in New Jersey at that time, which was that there was, well, already Donny DiFrancesco had been an example of this. There was no lieutenant governor. There was no second-in-command in the executive branch.

Richard Codey: That's correct.

Rick Sinding: And so the Senate president becomes the acting governor if the governor, for one reason or another, leaves office. Christie Whitman had left office. Now Jim McGreevey was leaving office, and you were simultaneously the Senate president and the acting governor. Now, when you left that office, there was a bill introduced to say that anybody who had served in that capacity for more than 180 days would henceforth be called governor rather than acting governor.

Richard Codey: Now, would you say I had a selfish interest in that?

Rick Sinding: That you had a selfish interest in it? Did you sponsor the bill?

Richard Codey: Yes.

Rick Sinding: Yes, then I would say so. <laughs>

Richard Codey: You're right. But I also included Mr. DiFrancesco in that. But, more importantly, we were one of the few states that kept that antiquated thing, so I'm dealing with the state of Connecticut, who had at governor the same kind of situation in New Jersey, and one other state around us. So it was only six.

Rick Sinding: That didn't have a lieutenant governor?

Richard Codey: Yeah. So in every other state if you became governor, regardless of how you became governor, you were governor. So, I mean, I'm a street kid. I'm not stupid. And I actually shaved off the name when we signed the bill into law, and Leonard Lance, who was a good friend of mine, Republican minority leader, helped me shave it off, which is a good thing. I mean, when I got sworn in to office,

Leonard Lance swore me in at my house. Under the circumstances, I didn't want to have a big party about it, because it was rather weird how I became governor, to put it mildly. So it was six o'clock on a Sunday night, and it was going to be in my house with Senator Lance swearing me in, Republican minority leader, my wife, two sons, an AP photographer. At four o'clock I asked my wife, "Where's our Bible? I need to be sworn in on a Bible." So she said to me, "What Bible?" I'm like, "We don't have a Bible?" No. Well, all right. So here's what I'm going to do. I lived on a street where the priest from Seton Hall Prep lived. I was a facilitator of them buying West Orange High School. There were two high schools. They wanted to close one, the one near me, and so they did, and they took that over and moved off the campus of Seton Hall University. So I called Monseigneur Kelly, fantastic human being, and I said, "Father, I'm getting sworn in tonight at six o'clock. Would you come down and say a prayer?" He said, "I'd love to." I said, "Just—

Rick Sinding: By the way, could you bring a Bible? <laughs>

Richard Codey: "Could you bring a Bible?" I mean, it is what it is. He laughed.

Rick Sinding: I dare say he's probably never gotten a call quite like that before in his life.

Richard Codey: How about that? But I got my Bible, and that's what counted.

Rick Sinding: That must've been a very strange time. Let's talk first of all about the time between the time that Governor McGreevey announced that he was resigning and the time that the resignation actually took effect.

Richard Codey: Well, what happened then—so when he announced it, the political boss, Mr. Norcross, was dead against it. He knew that he couldn't tell me what to do, and a couple others joined with him. So I called a lot of people and said, "Hey, listen, I'm ready to do this." And most people said, "Hey, we're going to be with you." But it did not stop them from trying to get him to resign and—

Rick Sinding: Get him not to resign?

Richard Codey: Get him to resign [immediately instead of in November] so there'd be an election right away. So I had a meeting with him about 10 days after his announcement in his office in the governor's office.

Rick Sinding: He had announced in August that he was going to leave in November.

Richard Codey: Right. So this was early September, and I went in, and he started pounding the table, and he said, "Those bastards are never going to get me to resign. They can drag my body through the streets of Trenton, and they won't get me to resign." So, essentially, that was the meeting: "I want you to know that you will become governor in November for at least 13, 14 months."

Rick Sinding: Was there a transition?

Richard Codey: No. Here's what it was.

Rick Sinding: Did you and he discuss?

Richard Codey: No, no at all. So there were about 100 press people outside the governor's office, so I went out, and I said [to the press], "All these transition issues and so forth and so on." Okay, and all he wanted to talk about was those bastards trying to get him out. So I told my staff, "Here's what we want to do. We're going to make believe we got a transition going on, okay?"

Rick Sinding: Now, this is your Senate staff?

Richard Codey: Yes. But a lot of [the issues] were just bullshit, and to a great degree they can be. So what I did, though, was I went around to every cabinet member in the cabinet, finding out what was going on, and interviewed them. For example, the commissioner of health, I found out that there's thousands and thousands and thousands of licenses that are renewed or given out for the first time out of that department, and the commissioner was signing all of them. So I said, "Commissioner, do you really do this?" He said yeah. "Seems like an incredible waste of time instead of having a machine do it, and it's all right, I mean, the qualifications today," and so forth and so on. He said, "No, I really enjoy it." So, okay. So I said, "I got to bring in somebody else." So I brought in Dr. [Fred] Jacobs, a pulmonologist from my district. I was a little concerned he wasn't involved in politics, but he became a star and I was really extremely happy with him.

Then I brought in the commissioner of corrections. I didn't even really know the guy, so I said, "Commissioner, we'll make this really quick. If there's a riot in my term as governor—and a riot is described by how many prisoners injured, prison guards injured—you're going to be fired. You understand that?" "Yes, I do, sir." So, of course, some eight months later there was a riot, and, shockingly, the numbers on those who were injured on both sides came in one short on each side. So he stayed the full term. <laughs>

Rick Sinding: How did you inform the incumbent health commissioner and corrections commissioner that their services were no longer required?

Richard Codey: Personally. No, the corrections guy I kept, because I told him what he had to do.

Rick Sinding: Oh, I see. I thought you brought a new one. That was the current corrections guy. I got you. So with the exception of the health commissioner, you kept the McGreevey cabinet?

Richard Codey: No, no, no.

Rick Sinding: No? Were there some who left?

Richard Codey: Yeah, and I spoke to them, and I thought, "Hey, listen. I have nothing against you, but the fact that you were attached to Jim, they're going to bother you and pester you about questions, and you're better off finding something else somewhere." Most of them understood. I would get one or two, some people call me and say, "You know what? Yeah, you're right," and I got some really talented people who really made well, even after I was no longer governor. I was extremely proud of them for doing what they did, and the fact that they were good now shows, because they went on to really great careers in government and business and even lobbying, of course. So, yeah, we had a good cabinet.

Rick Sinding: How much turnover was there?

Richard Codey: Half and half. So there was the commissioner of—let me see. Business economic development. I think it was Ginny Bauer. Is that right? Good woman, smart woman. So my staff's calling me and said, "Governor, she called and said there's going to be a new announcement about a new slogan for New Jersey, and she would love to have you at that announcement." I said, "Okay. Yeah, we got time that day." So the next day when I came in, I said, "Listen. Somebody do me a favor. Find out what our new slogan is and how we arrived at it." So they said it was a New York firm that we paid \$250,000.00 for the slogan. I'm like, "Okay, so what's the slogan?" It's, "Try us. You'll like it." And I'm like, "Really? Really?" I said, it reminds me of when I was single, and she turned me down, and I said, "Well, try it for one time, and maybe you'll like it." So I said we're going to throw that out, and we're going to have a contest. So everybody in the state of New Jersey could come forward with their opinion of what they thought it would be, and so wherever I would go for that six weeks or whatever, people would say, "How about this one?" I said, "Well, send it in," or whatever, and even the press in New York got into it, and I said, "You're not supposed to vote. You're not in the state." So it took on a life of its own.

Rick Sinding: What came out of that?

Richard Codey: We brought it down to the final five or whatever, and then there was a vote on that. I forget what the winner was, but people just enjoyed it, and that's good. [The winner [was announced](#) on January 13, 2006: "New Jersey: Come See for Yourself."] And everybody had their own idea. Some were really bad, and it was tough to tell them it's really bad.

Rick Sinding: I remember the very first "New Jersey and you: perfect together."

Richard Codey: Well, I got to be honest. If I had the balls, I would've done a commercial with [actor James] Gandolfini, okay, at the Turnpike tollbooths with the silhouette of the cigar, smoking, and he would turn, and then he would say, "New Jersey: You got a problem with us?" I thought that would've gained more attention than anything else.

Rick Sinding: It surely would have.

Richard Codey: By the way, he was not the easiest guy to get along with.

Rick Sinding: I'm sure. Tell me about how you balanced your responsibilities as governor and as Senate president. How could you do both jobs simultaneously?

Richard Codey: Well, the governor always agreed with the president. And the president always agreed with the governor. <laughs>

Rick Sinding: That's an awful lot of power to have in one individual.

Richard Codey: Absolutely. Listen, I was fully aware of that. But one of the best things I was able to do was Albio Sires, who got to be Speaker of the Assembly—

Rick Sinding: The New Jersey Assembly.

Richard Codey: That was the New Jersey Assembly, and it was with some influence from the bosses or whatever. So I sat down with Albio. I said, "Albio, I need you." And we were friends, and he said, "Dick, I get it." But with all this talk about temporary governors and everything, and it was a cry for, "Do away with it." But of course everybody in my caucus thought they could become governor just like me. I mean, I don't know about that, but that's what they thought.

Rick Sinding: Who was the assistant majority leader at that—or no, who was the majority leader at that point in the Senate?

Richard Codey: Bernie Kenny. Great. Fabulous.

Rick Sinding: Widely respected.

Richard Codey: Ballsy guy and had my back at every angle. So I told him we need to do something. So I went to Albio. I said, "What do you...?" So he said, "Guv, listen. I can help you. I need one thing." I said, "What's that?" "Since I'm a minority, a Cuban, I need to have a lieutenant governor, because that can be a steppingstone for minorities." I said, "Albio, I don't think anybody in my caucus wants it, okay? And you can understand why." He said, "I get it." I said, "But I'm going to get it done for you." "So, Governor, when you want something, just let me know." He said, "I'll stretch it out, and I'll listen to both sides. But I just think that you and I, when it comes to government, are in agreement." I said, "I get you. Capiisce, okay?" So, because of him, a lot of the things that I wanted to do that were good and lasting got done because of our relationship. So when those people tried to embarrass me or stop things, I know at the end of the day he had my back. For example, I wanted to balance the budget, because Jim [McGreevey] was using one-shot things, and Wall Street was saying it's horrible. One-shot deals shouldn't define a budget.

Rick Sinding: Well, in fairness, he wasn't the first governor to be doing that.

Richard Codey: True. Very, very true. So I wanted to cut down on the rebates. I didn't care if I got a political shot from the residents. It was the right thing to do. We needed to balance our budget. And when the budget passed, I called in John McCormac, who was my treasurer, who is a great human being, did a great job for me, and I said, "John, I want the name of all the people on Wall Street who're going to read our budget." And he said, "Why do you want that?" I said, "I'm going to call them." He said, "Well, the treasurer does that." I said, "This time, the governor's going to do it. John, I'll bet you half of these people live in our state." So I called each and every one of them, and I asked, "Are you a resident?" And I said, "Here's what I've done. Check it out." So I got upgrades, and I don't know, but I would say the fact that I called them and I asked them for a little state pride—and a lot of the things that they criticized McGreevey for weren't in my budget. And we got upgrades, and I don't think—I don't know if anybody ever got upgrades after me, whether Corzine did. Christie sure as hell didn't. All he got was [downgrades], and he was pleased with it, so it is what it is. But that's one of the things I did, and I was extremely proud of that accomplishment.

Rick Sinding: You're the incumbent governor in 2005, and it's widely assumed that you would be interested in running for governor on your own terms as a candidate for election to governor. But you didn't, and there has been much speculation regarding why you made that decision. Want to tell us about it?

Richard Codey: What was the speculation? I can tell you the truth. <laughs> The problem was that I didn't take over until 18th of November [2004], something like that.

Rick Sinding: So a year out. A year before the next gubernatorial election.

Rick Codey: So in any event, the idea of if I'm going to run or not is not my first order of business. I wanted to show that I can govern, that I'm going to govern and I'm going to be active and hands-on and restore credibility to us as well. At the same time the bosses were—they wanted [\[Jon\] Corzine](#). They wanted his money. I didn't have any money, okay, to give bosses. I also found out much later <laughs> that they also got some contracts from people. People made money in business—legal, whatever. So and the other thing was there was a poll came out from [Maurice] Carroll's poll.

John Weingart: Quinnipiac.

Richard Codey: Quinnipiac. What's their nickname? I used to know the basketball coach.

John Weingart: Maurice Carroll.

Richard Codey: Yeah. No, I know. That was the assemblymen's dad. But in any event, they did a poll and his headline was, "Nobody really knows Codey." So I call him up and I said, "Hey, whoa." I mean 37, 38, 40 percent did and that's pretty good. I'm [only] governor a couple days for God's sakes. So I said, "You ruined me on that headline." So within the next month, I think my name recognition almost doubled. And it was also showing that people liked me and identified with me.

One of the first things I did, which was a big decision for me, was the Bergen Record and the Star-Ledger called and said, "Could we have a reporter follow you from the moment you wake up on your first day as governor to the time you put your head on the pillow?" I said, "I don't care." So they came to the house. I got up. I was still in my pajamas and a bathrobe. Walked outside, picked up my papers, came back inside and ate my Cheerios. Went upstairs, showered and shaved, got ready for work and we left and I went to the Greystone Psychiatric Hospital to have breakfast with the patients. And I wanted to say a large part of my administration will be on a focus on people with mental illness, so I thought it was a great day to shine on them. And then I signed into law a special council on mental health to make recommendations of what we can do to improve health of those in our state that are mentally ill. And at one point Michael Aron, who I liked and respect a lot, asked a question, and those were the days when there was a gaggle of reporters <laughs> around: "Is it fair for you to select as one of your most important issue

something that's personal to you?" And I kind of went at him because I thought it was inappropriate. And I consider him a friend but I didn't like it. And from there I had lunch with the Republican leaders of the assembly and the senate, [Leonard] Lance and [Alex] DeCroce. Did a few other things. Left Trenton early to go to my son's parent conference meeting, which he said that, "There was no need to do that, dad." But I did it. Came home, my wife served me spaghetti and meatballs and then I went out to a function or two and came home. And then the other thing I did was I coached my kid's teams and other teams and I decided as much as I could I would continue with that avenue in my life, continue to help with Seton Hall basketball as a cheerleader and other things as well. So I wanted to keep as a normal life as I could. I did not use troopers to go to the drugstore, to the ice cream store, to dinner that was around my house.

Rick Sinding: You stayed at your home, though. You didn't move to Drumthwacket.

Richard Codey: Stayed at my home. My wife never used the troopers to go to work, which was about a mile or two away. Interesting, though, I was only governor about a week and my son's playing for Drew University, so we go up, me and my wife, to see the game.

Rick Sinding: Was Tom Kean the president of Drew at the time?

Richard Codey: Yes, he was. And I said to him, "Listen, you're doing this 9/11 Commission. Your god damn tuition is high and you're not here. Can I have a reduction?" <laughter> "Come on, Tom. You're in the money. You're down in Washington." So he laughed. Oh, by the way, now they just reduced it 25 percent, long after, you know, me. And by the way, I put my businesses in a trust. So I had Kevin up there for 52,000 and my other son was going to MKA with Kyrie Irving for 25,000 a year.

Rick Sinding: That's Montclair Kimberly?

Richard Codey: Yeah.

Rick Sinding: Yeah.

Richard Codey: I had to borrow money to pay the tuition and more importantly, my property taxes and everything else. But people should have no sympathy. Nor will they. <laughs> But it was interesting.

Rick Sinding: So back to why you decided not to run for this job as a full-time job.

Richard Codey: Okay. Did I veer off that?

Rick Sinding: Yeah, a little bit.

Richard Codey: <laughs> So—

Rick Sinding: I don't know if you did it purposely. <laughs>

Richard Codey: No, not purposely. I got no problem. So I went around to different chairmen and stuff. So, you know, he [Corzine] was giving them whatever he could give them. I don't know whether it was \$50,000 or \$75,000 a year he could give and other things, which I couldn't do. So a lot of them lined up with him and I had not yet gained the kind of popularity that I did later on, so basically they signed on [with Corzine]. I still had a desire to say, "F it, you know. Let's run." But there were some people in my circle who were, you know—

Rick Sinding: Advising you not to?

Richard Codey: Yeah. Some straightforward, some not. But the issue they had, it was, I don't want to use the word, but, "Dammit, you're pretty popular right now." And then when Craig Carton, the "Jersey Guy" on radio went after my wife saying postpartum depression is bullshit. She's got to go in the kitchen and bake some cookies, so forth and so on. So the next day—

Rick Sinding: This was on 101.5?

Richard Codey: 101.5. And if you've ever been to radio stations they're about as big as some people's bathrooms. Very, very tiny. So I had decided when I found out about this that since my show, "Ask the Governor," was the next day at seven o'clock—his show ended at 6:55 and then there are commercials for five minutes—that he and I would run into each other, obviously. So there was a reporter there from the Ledger, which some people think I planted. Total bullshit. I didn't. I just assumed she was there because reporters do go to the station when the governor's answering questions so they can write their own stories. So I told my troopers, "Listen, I don't know if I'm going to be governor too long, but nah, I'm not going to take this bullshit from this guy." So he came out. I confronted him right in his face and I said, "If I weren't governor, I'd take you outside right now." He said, "What are you going to do? Punch me?" Or whatever. And before I knew it the troopers split us up. The next day, he's on the radio beating the living hell out of me and he's going to file terroristic threats against me and so forth and so on and going on and on and on.

And as a result of that—and one of the nice things that really came about that is there's a story I'll tell you real quick about myself and [New York City] Mayor [Michael] Bloomberg. I had never met the man. My opinion of him was eh, I don't know. So I read where just before I became governor the head of the Sports Authority, [George Zoffinger](#), had sent him a letter saying you're not allowed to land your helicopter here at the Sports Authority anymore to see Jets games or Giant games. And here's a bus schedule. <laughs> So I called [Zoffinger] up and I said, "Listen, I may not like this guy, you don't like this guy, but he is the mayor of New York City and he's going to be allowed to land his helicopter at our heliport. That's the way it's going to be." I picked up the phone, called [Bloomberg's] press spokesman and said, "You tell him that I said everything's good. Don't worry about it." Five minutes later he's on the phone to me, "I really appreciate that," so forth and so on. And he said, "Why don't you and your wife come over and have dinner with me and my girlfriend Sunday night." I don't want to go. But I figured I had to go. So we went and we had a lovely time. And he was really down to earth. And I really liked him a lot and we became really good friends as a result of that and still are today. We don't talk like we used to, but we had a lot of fun with him. And when he was mayor, [George] Pataki was governor. Pataki's about 6'4. I was about 5'10 and half and Mike's about 5'8, so we used to stick him in the middle so no-one could see him when we had to do events. <laughs> And he'd MF us a lot.

But he was really a very, very, very good guy to deal with and he would press me a lot on bringing a smoking ban into the state of New Jersey, which our friend from down south was against because he had—I won't say he interest, but he was kind of protecting the casinos on this issue. So what I worked out with Assemblyman [Joe] Roberts was a ban, but you could smoke on the floor of the casinos. And I thought that was a really good step for the state of New Jersey to do that because you look at all the health indicators and smoking is just a horrible, horrible, horrible disease that kills our residents every day. And thank God today less and less and less New Jerseyans are smoking today than ever before.

Rick Sinding: So you decided not to run for governor in 2005.

Richard Codey: Correct.

Rick Sinding: Jon Corzine's elected. You're back on the ballot for Senate.

Richard Codey: Right.

Rick Sinding: And going back to being Senate president.

Richard Codey: Right.

Rick Sinding: Well, let's talk a little bit about—before we get there—the period of McGreevey's governorship when you were co-Senate president. Again, we've now going through Byrne, Kean, Florio, Whitman, McGreevey would've been your fifth governor.

Richard Codey: Yes.

Rick Sinding: We spent a little bit of time on Whitman. What about McGreevey? What kind of relationship did you have with the McGreevey front office? Well, McCormac, obviously, the treasurer, you had a very good relationship with.

Richard Codey: Yeah, but Jim and McCormac didn't have that good of a relationship.

Rick Sinding: That's interesting.

Richard Codey: He didn't rely on McCormac as much as I did.

Rick Sinding: Now you and McGreevey had been colleagues in the Senate as well.

Richard Codey: Yes. Right. But Jim was the kind of a guy that went to every event. I mean if there's two people on a street corner, he stopped and got out. In fact, the mayor of Newark called me and he said, "Dick, are you going to endorse McGreevey?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, tell him if he stops coming into my office I might endorse him." <laughter>

But I would tell you this, I was in Boston in '04, I guess it was, and I got a call from [Jamie Fox](#)'s chief of staff, God bless him. And he said, "The governor would like to have dinner with you tonight." I didn't know whether it was one on one or whatever. I didn't know what was going on. So it was about eight of us and he said to me, "Dick, sit next to the governor." I said, "Okay." So during the course of the dinner he said to me, "You know, a lot of people let me down." I think he was correct, but [he] brought them aboard. <laughs> Whatever. I didn't think that much of it until I found out, which was a total absolute shock to me. So all that that was going on in back—

Rick Sinding: Really? You had no inkling at all?

Richard Codey: No. They were sitting and talking about this, he and his people, for weeks.

Rick Sinding: I don't mean about the resignation but I mean about the reasons for the resignation. Because certainly there were widespread rumors about it.

Richard Codey: No, what was going on when I was in Boston having dinner with him was that when he was in New Jersey, he and his staff and others were having conversations about this threatened lawsuit from his former lover.

Rick Sinding: Oh, right.

Richard Codey: I had no knowledge of that whatsoever.

Rick Sinding: I see.

Richard Codey: I did get a call the night before he announced he was going to be leaving, from a news source. I came in late with my son and my wife said, "Hey, this guy called and said return his call whenever you come in, don't worry about it." And he said, "Well, we've got a really good source that McGreevey's resigning and you're going to become governor." I'm like, "Listen, I just had dinner with the guy. Don't worry about it. Forget about it." And my wife was going for surgery the next morning. Not major surgery, but was going under anesthesia. So I brought her up at Saint Barnabas and my office was right down the street. "Hey, Doc, here's my number. As soon as she's out, give me a call. I'll be right up." So I walked into my office and my staff says, "Whoa, you know what's going on?" I go, "What are you talking about?" "There's a rumor that McGreevey's going to resign and you're going to become the governor." And I'm like, "Well, I got this phone call" and what the hell? You know, then I get a call from a certain legislator and he said, "Dick, Jim wants to call you at about 12:30." I said, "Is this blank real?" He says, "Yeah." So McGreevey calls me and he says, "I'm going to resign right after the election so you'll be governor for at least 14 months." He said, "I'm going to announce it at four o'clock."

So I put down the phone and I said to myself, "Holy blank. This will define my life and it's either going to be good or it's going to be bad." And I was not happy. My parents had both passed away recently and I thought I was going to be able to relax a little. And, you know, I didn't have an idea of running for governor. He would run again. And I knew what my enemies would do. They'll try to dig up every freaking dirt in the world, which was entirely correct on that point of view. So yeah, I wasn't overly happy. But both my sons were teenagers. They were working at basketball camps separately. So I called my older son, Kevin. I said, "Kevin, McGreevey's gay. I'm the new governor. Talk to you later." <laughter> But it is what I did say to him. The other one I couldn't get. But the other one, unfortunately, came home that afternoon and he sees like 50 reporters on our front lawn and thought his mother had passed away.

Rick Sinding: Ah, yeah, right.

Richard Codey: Which was tough.

Rick Sinding: Oh, my God.

Richard Codey: Yeah. We couldn't get through to him but, you know.

Rick Sinding: Were your kids happy for you? Were they as freaked out as you were?

<laughter>

Richard Codey: That's a great question because I still don't know. <laughter> I mean Kevin was away at college, for the most part. He was home for the summer, obviously. And Chris was in high school. But I had decided that we weren't going to use the governor's mansion. In fact, at a press conference somebody asked me that a couple days later and I said, "Listen, I was born and raised in Orange. So if you're born and raised in Orange you were looking to get out of public housing and I didn't do it. So—

Rick Sinding: <laughs> I remember reading that quote.

Rick Sinding: —no, we're not going to be doing that." And I just thought for my family that that would be the best thing and it would be a happier life for myself and for them as well. My wife wanted to continue to teach and lead as normal life as you possibly could, understanding that you're still the governor and so it's not a normal life. You know, you go outside and people recognize you and stuff like that.

Rick Sinding: Couldn't go undercover to Marlboro Psychiatric Hospital.

Richard Codey: No, not that anymore. But people were exceedingly nice to us.

Rick Sinding: Now I've got to assume that the Corzine years were awkward for you in a couple of ways. Number one, that he was the reason—well, that he had clearly rounded up all the support that he needed in order to run for governor and then you chose not to. So I don't know whether there was resentment there but there certainly would have been reason for you to not be on the best of terms with him. That's number one. But, two years into his administration, he's in an automobile accident that almost kills him. And again, as Senate president, you become—

Richard Codey: Take over.

Rick Sinding: —acting governor with his whole apparatus that you now have to work with.

Richard Codey: Oh that was something else.

Rick Sinding: And I think that has got to be an absolutely fascinating time for you.

Richard Codey: I never blamed him for it [running for governor]. His staff pushed him that way. And what I understood later on was that as I got more popular, he got more nervous that I would run. And at that point I did want to run. But I never blamed him and I never thought he was a bad person.

Rick Sinding: And you knew him as the U.S. Senator.

Richard Codey: Right.

Rick Sinding: You must've had some interaction.

Richard Codey: Right. But I also in some small way resented that, because, you know, you have somebody who worked for the party for a long time, qualified, but a guy comes along with money. And that's legit. And I think he understood that. Whatever.

Rick Sinding: Certainly everybody who wanted to run for Senate—

Richard Codey: Had to go, you know.

Rick Sinding: —in 1990 felt the same way.

Richard Codey: I didn't think it was right. Doesn't make him a bad person for wanting to run. He wasn't born with wealth at all. But any anger that I had was more towards the bosses and the people that took the money or took the contracts or the jobs.

Rick Sinding: Is there anyone else besides Norcross who falls into this category?

Richard Codey: At that level, no.

Rick Sinding: Okay.

Richard Codey: Not at that level. But he felt, obviously, that he could control him [Corzine]. And to some extent he was right. I remember he wanted, meaning Norcross, wanted a medical school for South Jersey.

Rick Sinding: Right.

Richard Codey: Okay. Not that I was necessarily opposed. But the way Jon did it, he did it through some regulations and the only way it could be stopped is through the senate and the assembly passing resolutions against it. Now the assembly wasn't going to pass any resolution against it. Joe Roberts from South Jersey was there. But I said to Corzine, "Jon, why would you propose this in June? Why don't you see how that guy performs for you in the election in November and then decide?" I said, "What do you think? Really? Why don't you just wait?" Because I knew that there might be a setup that he would be going the other way and obviously I was right. It was still tough to convince Jon that a lot of people screwed you, pal. And they were from your party. But they didn't care about the party; they cared about themselves. And, of course, Mr. [Chris] Christie is—a lot of his investigations and everything were political. Put him aside, I think for prosecutors to have political ambitions is the worst thing in the world. Because it's not about justice, it's about what's best for me, how do I get the best publicity for me to run for governor. So whether it's Christie, Spitzer, Cuomo or all the rest, it's bad. Very bad. At the same time Christie was talking about running or whatever, there was a gentleman from—a U.S. Attorney out of Pennsylvania—who said, "I have to resign because I'm having thoughts of running and a desire to run for governor. And the right thing for me is to resign." And that's class because he was right.

Rick Sinding: Back to Corzine. When he became governor, and you're Senate president, what kind of working relationship did you have with him at this point?

Richard Codey: I had a good relationship with him. The problem was his staff who saw me as a rival, or whatever, and so that lingered on. And, of course, they were the ones who convinced him, "Become governor, [then] you become president." So that was a problem. And then when he got hurt, they would do everything to shut me out.

Rick Sinding: Really?

Richard Codey: Even though I was governor. So it was a very uncomfortable time for me because I couldn't bring in my own staff. I didn't know how long the guy was going to be laid up or anything else.

Rick Sinding: So would you say that during that month that you were acting governor when he was laid up in the hospital and then doing rehab, that basically his staff ran the Governor's Office and you continued to be Senate president?

Richard Codey: Yeah, to a large degree. Now, of course, when there's flooding all over, my ass got sent out for people complain about it and stuff like that. But the

everyday processes of government was being done by them. The DEP person, she told me she was told not to invite me to an event. Stuff like that, childish, whatever. But see, Jon was not a street guy. He's a very bright person but he was born and raised on a farm in Illinois, didn't have the same kind of childhood that I did. Not that mine was better or worse but, you know, so a lot of guys got over on him, even though he ran Goldman Sachs and did a pretty good job of making money for himself and a lot of other people. <laughs>

Rick Sinding: When you won reelection to the Senate in 2009.

Richard Codey: That was in a different district?

Rick Sinding: The year that Christie—no that was before the 2010 census.

Richard Codey: Okay. When Christie ran.

Rick Sinding: Right, when Christie was elected in 2009.

Richard Codey: That's correct.

Rick Sinding: You won reelection to the Senate. But when the Senate reconvened in January of 2010, you were on the losing side of what NJ.com described as, "A sweeping political power play that ousted you as the Senate president."

Richard Codey: Absolutely.

Rick Sinding: Talk about that.

Richard Codey: And I saw it coming. So Mr. Norcross and allies that allied with him either through business interests or strictly political interest were lining up. And they had tried for years and years to get me out of the Senate and I was offered every job under the sun, highest paying job in government, run the Sports Authority, do this or whatever, but just get the hell out of our way, all right? So I wouldn't do it. And I knew that would be a tough fight but listen, my father once told me, "Listen, when it comes to political bosses, if you take a job from them, they're going to have you by your onions and your heart and your mind will follow. So don't ever do it." And I never took a job. Never, never, ever. I would never put myself in that situation. But other people have and do and some are good people, but they owe their financial allegiance to somebody else or whatever. And so he went all over the state flying the helicopter around, getting the votes. And there were some people came to me and were extremely upset. But they said, "Dick, things that would happen to me that I can't have happen, you know," or whatever. And I never got mad at any of them, who got this and who got that because they

were going to be against me. I wasn't giving out jobs or anything else for votes. I did a good job and I had one person the week after the vote come into my office and slammed the door and they said, "I effing apologize. They're bastards." <laughs>

Rick Sinding: Would you say you have a good relationship with your colleagues today in the Senate?

Richard Codey: I would say yes. Now, the unfortunate thing that's happened in the Senate is that if you don't agree with those who run it, in ways you get punished. Something I would never do. If you weren't for me for president of the Senate or this or whatever, I didn't punish you. And when the Congress reconvenes, do they listen to their state chairman as to who to vote for, for the speaker or the Majority Leader in U.S. Senate? Of course not. But right after I lost, I wasn't entitled to an office, despite what I had done for the party, particularly going back to 2001, where I developed a new system of redistricting that helped more minorities get elected and more Democrats get elected. I was told I have to sit in the back.

Rick Sinding: You're not supposed to admit that it was to get more Democrats elected. <laughs>

Richard Codey: No. They happen to be minority. Listen, any time the Republicans want to run minorities in districts that they can win in, do it. They only run them where they can't win. So that's a whole other story. I like a lot of Republicans. They're my friends, but it's time to change. So in any event, I wasn't given any committee assignments in terms of being a chair or whatever.

Rick Sinding: How did you get along with Christie's office?

Richard Codey: There were some people there that I liked. Christie, I saw as a bully. People did not, but they sure do now. I don't like bullies. I hate bullies. They shouldn't run government and it was sad. The guy's got a brain but it was all about getting his way and obviously the moment he became governor he thought about becoming president. And there's no doubt about that and there's nothing wrong with that whatsoever, but you can't tell me people weren't gone after in the U.S. Attorney's Office for political purpose, nor would you be able to tell me that the same thing happened when he was governor. The things that went on—that some people got away with crimes that were aligned with him, [and] people who didn't really commit a crime but went down because it was good for him politically. So I think it was a very, very sad time. I would've loved to have worked with him but I'm not going to do what he tells me every time. And as I said, I saw things and I saw people and their families hurt that were good, decent, honest people but were

being used as political sacrifices. He knew I felt that way and it is what it is. As I said, it's unfortunate. You know, when I see his wife or his kids, I'm a gentlemen.

Rick Sinding: What do you make of the current climate in Trenton between the Senate president and the governor?

Richard Codey: <laughs> Well, I did say the other day that 90 percent of all Democrats were in favor the millionaire's tax. So that means that the only opposition is from Democrats in legislature. I mean it is what it is. <laughs> I mean, we all voted for it, all of them. You know, when Christie was in office that was more like a—makes that look like a stunt. Oh, we know it's never going to pass. He's not going to sign it so, we'll vote for it now and not later. Listen, I don't care if they moved it from one million to three million or whatever, but we need the revenue. We need the revenue to do other things and we gotta have it.

Rick Sinding: Is this a North Jersey/South Jersey thing?

Richard Codey: It's got nothing to do with geography.

Rick Sinding: Okay.

Richard Codey: It's all about personal politics. That's a crock, a crock. Most of the population is up north. The people who contribute to the state treasury are almost all up north. But that doesn't matter to me. I want to do what's right for the state. I can be parochial at times when I have to be if I see an injustice, but what was going on is not about injustice. The only injustice was perpetrated by those who thought that they would use injustice for their own personal gain.

Rick Sinding: Would it be safe to say that you're frustrated in your current situation?

Richard Codey: No.

Rick Sinding: That after having served three times as governor, having served for many years as Majority Leader now you don't have a title? You're in the Senate—

Richard Codey: No. No.

Rick Sinding: —but it sounds as though it's not a particularly enjoyable time to be in the Senate.

Richard Codey: No. Because I had the balls to stand up. And I wish more would do the same. So as long as I've got breath in me, I want to do the right thing. I'm

not trying to be pompous or anything else. I'm not always right on all the issues, but I just want a legislature that wants to do the right thing for the people in the state of New Jersey and not for anybody else.

Rick Sinding: One final question since this is for the Center on the American Governor. Byrne, Kean, Florio, Whitman, DiFrancesco, McGreevey, you, Corzine, Christie, Murphy—10 administrations you've been through.

Richard Codey: Well, Murphy's only been—

Rick Sinding: All right, nine and a half.

Richard Codey: <laughs>

Rick Sinding: Are there ways in which the relationship between the legislature and the governor has changed? Has the Office of the Governor changed over this period? And if so, in what ways has it changed?

Richard Codey: Yeah.

Rick Sinding: And how does the interaction between the legislature and the governor—how has that shifted over that 45 year period?

Richard Codey: Well, there was a time back when Whitman was governor and she didn't get along with the Republicans who were running the legislature. But that was both their faults, that they didn't communicate more. And she should've learned to cultivate those relationships. So that had nothing to do with political bosses at all. I still think she was a good person. But now you had eight years where the Democratic majority capitulated to Mr. Christie, who's considered the worst governor in modern history. Why? I'll let historians decide why that happened and how that happened. And now, a lot of them are upset that Murphy comes along and wins the apple-cart and that pissed a lot of people off in my party. He won. He won it fair. He won it square. Not as an outsider—I've known him since '99. But, you know, when are we going to just sit down and do the right thing? I don't know. I just don't know. But I think a lot of people getting tired of the same old game. But who knows whether it will change. I'm not going to change.

Rick Sinding: I think I have to say after these two hours or whatever that that's fairly obvious. <laughs>

Richard Codey: Has it been that long? Holy blank. Oh my Lord. Oh bejesus.

Rick Sinding: <laughs> Any other final thoughts that you'd like to share or—

Richard Codey: Yes, I got a funeral [to get to].

Rick Sinding: —other than the fact that you have to go?

Richard Codey: I gotta run a funeral visitation. <laughs>

Rick Sinding: All right. Well, thanks very much, Dick.

Richard Codey: Okay. Thank you.