

## **Bill Castner Interview** (November 27, 2018)

**Rick Sinding:** Hello, I'm Rick Sinding. It's Tuesday, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018 here at the Eagleton Institute of Politics on the campus of Rutgers University. With me today for the Center on the American Governor is Bill Castner who served for quite a long time both in the nonpartisan and partisan staffs of the legislative branch of New Jersey government and then, in the last year of the administration of [Governor Jon Corzine](#), moved over to become general counsel in the executive branch of state government. We think he's in a unique position to offer some observations about the administration of New Jersey's 45<sup>th</sup> governor, Jon Corzine. Bill Castner, welcome to Eagleton—or I guess I should say welcome back to Eagleton, because I understand you have a master's degree from here.

**Bill Castner:** I do. Please don't ask me what my grades were, but yes.

**Rick Sinding:** I won't, but I will ask you how it was that you came to Eagleton? What had you done previous to that? What provoked your interest in government and public policy?

**Bill Castner:** I took a course in high school at Toms River East High School called Political Legal Education, and as part of that class we were assigned to attend county freeholder meetings and town council meetings and we did a moot court. It opened my eyes to not just politics but local politics and state politics and getting to see, up close and personal, people getting things done at the local level was pretty energizing. And then setting foot in the New Jersey State House and seeing the rough and tumble of the legislature on a session day. So, you know, I kind of fell in love with politics.

**Rick Sinding:** Cool. So where did you do your undergraduate work and what did you do thereafter?

**Bill Castner:** I was a political science major at Rowan University. I interned for Senator [Frank] Lautenberg in his South Jersey office, which was my first political internship, answering phones and picking up dry cleaning—I don't know if interns can do that these days.

**Rick Sinding:** I know that he had an office, his main office—the state office—in Newark, but he also had a South Jersey office at the time?

**Bill Castner:** Yes. He was in Barrington, New Jersey, under Karin Elkis who's still around the political scene.

**Rick Sinding:** Ah, of course. Yes, she is. <laughs>

**Bill Castner:** The legendary Karin Elkis. So I learned a lot. And like I said, it was at a time when President [Bill] Clinton was up against a Republican Congress but in New Jersey, [Governor \[Christie Todd\] Whitman](#) had a Republican legislature and things were getting done. Regardless of whether you agreed with the governor's platform or not, you got to kind of see up close and personal that there was gridlock in Washington and policies being advanced in Trenton and it was a stark contrast that certainly captured my attention.

**Rick Sinding:** So your primary interest at that point was definitely going to be towards state government?

**Bill Castner:** Yeah and I had law school in mind and luckily, unlike high school, I paid my way through college and made sure I got my money's worth and did well academically as an undergrad. And so I got into Rutgers and Rutgers had a dual degree program with Eagleton and that was especially appealing to me.

**Rick Sinding:** So you went to Rutgers-Camden Law School.

**Bill Castner:** That's correct.

**Rick Sinding:** And came to Eagleton simultaneously?

**Bill Castner:** Yes, I started off as a full-time law student and then in what was supposed to be my second year of law school, came here to Eagleton, class of 1997. And because of the late, great Alan Rosenthal, I landed an internship with the nonpartisan Office of Legislative Services (OLS).

**Rick Sinding:** Well, to anybody who knew Alan Rosenthal, there's no question that you would have ended up in the legislative branch of government.

<laughter>

**Bill Castner:** Yes, I think he would have disowned me if I'd gone to the executive branch; that's fair to say. I went up to his office in December of '96 and I said, "I would really like an internship with OLS." So he kind of gives me the "hold on" signal. He picks up the phone, calls then-executive director Al Porroni. Says, "I got a kid here. He's pretty good. Can you find room for him?" And Al says yes. And as I told Jon [Corzine], I think he called me a kid because he couldn't remember my name.

<laughter>

And I frankly did nothing to really distinguish myself during my year here. But it turned out to be a life-changing internship. So I'll always be grateful to both Alan and Eagleton for that.

**Rick Sinding:** So you went straight from here and Rutgers-Camden Law School into the Office of Legislative Services.

**Bill Castner:** Yes, I stayed there full-time and went back to law school part-time. And then I had a clerkship with Sylvia Pressler, the head of the Appellate Division.

**Rick Sinding:** The combative head of the Appellate Division.

**Bill Castner:** <laughs> A liberal, legendary, brilliant jurist.

**Rick Sinding:** And the bane of Senator Gerry Cardinale's existence, as I remember.

**Bill Castner:** I think that's right. I think the senator tried to throw his weight around and Judge Pressler wasn't going to have anything to do with that.

**Rick Sinding:** Her renomination, as I recall, or reappointment, was one of the—along with the reappointment of Chief Justice Wilentz—was one of those moments in New Jersey history where the clock sort of stood still there for a minute.

**Bill Castner:** It's a great reminder. It almost led to the abolition of senatorial courtesy. Perhaps it should have. But, yes, the judge was tough as nails. Brilliant jurist. And then I clerked for [Chief Justice \[James\] Zazzali](#) his first year on the [New Jersey] Supreme Court, the year after. So I've been very fortunate despite a checkered academic record. <laughs>

**Rick Sinding:** <laughs> So after your internship at OLS, then you did the clerkship and then you went to work at OLS, is that the timetable?

**Bill Castner:** I stayed with my internship and stayed full-time at OLS. So I worked there for about 2-1/2 years.

**Rick Sinding:** Oh, okay.

**Bill Castner:** And then went straight from there to my clerkship with Judge Pressler.

**Rick Sinding:** Now to describe for those viewers or readers of the transcript who wouldn't be familiar with it, what is the Office of Legislative Services and how does it function?

**Bill Castner:** It's the functional equivalent of the Congressional Research Services at the federal level. You have a nonpartisan agency that is assigned bill drafting responsibilities for the legislature, fiscal research responsibilities for the legislature, legal advice to the legislature. So Alan Rosenthal was instrumental in the idea of trying to professionalize legislative staff. The legislative branch is supposed to be separate and equal, not just on paper, but in practice. And so Alan's thought was, look, in order to do that—you basically have these part-time legislators running around. You need a full-time professional staff. Sometimes that's partisan staff; sometimes that's nonpartisan staff. And so the legislature ought to invest in trying to modernize and professionalize its staff. And so OLS was basically born out of Alan's idea—you could see this in state houses, including Maryland, across the country, California—that in order to go toe to toe with the executive branch, let's make sure we have a full-time professional staff. OLS typically hires those with advanced degrees: attorneys, Ph.Ds. And I've said this before, at OLS you do extensive research on issues. You produce memos. You become wedded to an issue. You just can't take that extra step and advocate for or against issues. And that was an unchecked box for me while I was at OLS.

**Rick Sinding:** Is that what convinced you later on to become a member of the partisan staff?

**Bill Castner:** Yes, absolutely.

**Rick Sinding:** You found that inhibiting?

**Bill Castner:** Absolutely. I wanted to not only draft the bills but help advance good public policy as well.

**Rick Sinding:** So you moved from the nonpartisan staff to the partisan staff. Was that a direct move or as I recall reading your bio, there was something—was the Fair Share Housing Center in between?

**Bill Castner:** I went to OLS. I did the two years of clerkships and I did work for—had a cup of coffee at the Fair Share Housing Center based out of Cherry Hill, which litigates the Mount Laurel doctrine.

**Rick Sinding:** Right.

**Bill Castner:** It sues primarily suburban municipalities that are not in compliance with their Fair Share Housing obligations. And from Fair Share, that's when Democrats took over the legislature for the first time in ten years. So then Majority Leader Joe Roberts offered me the position of General Counsel. So I left Fair Share to join the general assembly in January of 2002.

**Rick Sinding:** So you went from OLS to Fair Share as a staff attorney?

**Bill Castner:** OLS, clerkships, and then Fair Share as a staff attorney, that's right.

**Rick Sinding:** I see. Okay. And how long were you there?

**Bill Castner:** Oh, only about five months. My big legacy is I renegotiated a really good contract on the copy machine. So they were very grateful for that and they put my picture on there.

<laughter>

But I worked for Peter O'Connor who was one of the architects of the Mount Laurel doctrines, one of the original litigants in Mount Laurel. While I was at Eagleton, I was assigned a book called "Our Town" and there was a woman by the name of Ethel Lawrence who was sitting in the back of Jacob's Chapel in the early '70s when the mayor of Mount Laurel showed up and said, "If you people can't afford to live in our town you're just going to have to leave." And that so enraged, rightfully so, Ethel Lawrence that she went to Legal Services, Peter O'Connor and two other attorneys, and that was the genesis of—

**Rick Sinding:** And the result is South Burlington NAACP v. Township of Mount Laurel.

**Bill Castner:** Great memory. Yes, Mount Laurel. Yes. And after all these years, towns are finally settling. They're entering into agreements voluntarily with Fair Share. It's a great success story.

**Rick Sinding:** But I should note that Fair Share Housing Center is still going strong after all these years.

**Bill Castner:** Absolutely. They're in the middle of a lot of settlements and a lot of developments. There's so much concentrated poverty in New Jersey. We have among the most segregated schools. We have a housing policy that historically has warehoused poor people in the cities. And so to the degree suburban cities are stepping up and providing housing opportunities for the underclass, that's a great positive.

**Rick Sinding:** And yet, not to do too much of a sidebar here, but I remember one of the very controversial things about the way in which New Jersey has responded to the Mount Laurel ruling is by setting up these regional contribution agreements (RCAs) whereby the suburban municipalities can send their responsibility to the inner city and the housing for low and moderate income people goes there.

**Bill Castner:** That's exactly right. So it was formerly a practice—

**Rick Sinding:** Doesn't that undermine the whole idea of integrating the suburbs?

**Bill Castner:** It does. It was compared to the practice during the Civil War of those being drafted buying their way out of the draft. So you'd have affluent suburban municipalities paying off cities that are in dire need of additional funds to accept their low housing obligations. Then Speaker Joe Roberts sponsored A500 to abolish RCAs and Governor Corzine signed that into law, A500. And so RCAs, which were described by Speaker Roberts as being odious, are currently unlawful in New Jersey and I think there are additional housing opportunities because of that.

**Rick Sinding:** Okay. So you went to work for Joe Roberts in—this is 2002, if I'm not mistaken?

**Bill Castner:** That's correct.

**Rick Sinding:** So it's the beginning of the [Governor Jim] McGreevey administration.

**Bill Castner:** That's correct.

**Rick Sinding:** And you served first as general counsel and then through the McGreevey administration and followed of course by the [Codey](#) administration. And then in 2005, you're appointed as the executive director of the state assembly. Just, I guess, as—or 2006—just as Jon Corzine is coming into office. Am I right about the timetable?

**Bill Castner:** I believe that's accurate.

**Rick Sinding:** So you were there for what I will refer to as the great conflict. The first budget, which was the Corzine budget against the Roberts budget. It was a period of real, real distrust between the assembly Speaker and the new governor. There was a North/South split. There was a legislative/executive split. You're on the side of the assembly Speaker. What are some off the cuff recollections of that time and the relationships that were going on between the assembly and the governor's office?

**Bill Castner:** It's privileged information. I can't answer that.

<laughter>

No, that was an incredibly tense time.

**Rick Sinding:** Of the same party, I might note. That's worth noting.

**Bill Castner:** Those are the worse types of fights. Intra-family fights are the worst kind. And sure, you always have executive versus legislative branch. The legislature always has a chip on its shoulder.

**Rick Sinding:** Especially with the new governor coming.

**Bill Castner:** Some would say inferiority complex. And the executive branch always kind of walks around and pounds its chest. So it's a recipe for disaster. And then when you have a senate that views itself as the upper house—you know, the assembly always calls it the other house, not necessarily the upper house. And then you have the senate versus the assembly, and the assembly, which of course is up for election every two years in New Jersey, senate typically up every four years in New Jersey. So you have a sense where you have assembly members looking around at the executive branch and looking at the senate and saying, "Hey, wait a minute. They're playing poker with our money."

**Rick Sinding:** You also had a senate at that time that was led by Dick Codey, the senate majority leader, who had been the acting governor after McGreevey had resigned and who clearly was interested in running for governor himself in 2005.

**Bill Castner:** Yes.

**Rick Sinding:** But he had stepped aside when it became obvious that Corzine was going to be the Democratic nominee. But there were certainly some ruffled feathers there and you wouldn't say that there was good blood between Corzine and Codey at that point. So you had sort of a triangle of conflicts that were taking—the perfect storm of that first budget fight which resulted in a shutdown of state government for the first time ever. Were there any winners that came out of that?

**Bill Castner:** Oh, I would say so. Putting the political dimensions aside—which is very difficult to do in New Jersey—at its heart it was a policy argument of, if we're going to increase the sales tax, should that money be exclusively dedicated to property tax relief; [we have the] highest property taxes in the country. Should that increase be tucked away for property tax relief, with sky high property taxes strangling seniors, strangling the middle class in New Jersey? Or should it be used,

from the governor's perspective, for stabilizing a New Jersey budget which has been put together with duct tape historically. And so at its heart it was a beautiful policy debate. Alan Rosenthal, one of the only people who applauded the legislature, or more specifically the general assembly, standing up and trying to assert its autonomy against an executive branch and saying, "Wait a minute. We're accountable to the voters. We don't believe the voters will react favorably to the idea of raising a sales tax and seeing that money just being squandered into a bureaucracy that the voters don't have a lot of faith in. If we're going to do this, this ought to be for property tax relief."

**Rick Sinding:** Even though there were massive layoffs taking place at the same time and the budgets in all of the departments of state government were being cut? That would not be enough to satisfy the voters that this money wasn't really being squandered by bureaucrats?

**Bill Castner:** The general assembly thought that there were alternative ways to balance the budget without having to resort to a broad-based sales tax increase. And the governor felt very strongly that, "No, that's smoke and mirrors. That involves a lot of one-shots. I was sent here to clean up New Jersey's budgetary mess. I have my professional background. I know a thing or two about numbers and so no, I'm standing my ground. I'm not going to go along with the typical Trenton budget of let's just patch this up and cross our fingers and hope we have a balanced budget by July." And the general assembly's saying, "Look, you know, we have a seat at this table, too, and we have to pass the budget. All revenue raising bills have to originate under the state constitution in the general assembly. We have a say. We have a constitutional say. And we see the polls. Guess what happened last time a sales tax was increased? The Democratic Party was sent off to Siberia for quite some time. So there's got to be a better way than increasing the sales tax." So at its heart, it was classic legislature versus executive and I'm sure we'll get to this, but in the wake of a bloody, bloody shutdown and intra-party battle, a special session on property taxes was born. And so my immediate answer to your question was there anything positive that came to it, if nothing else the fact that the party was forced to come together in the wake of a brutal shutdown and identify areas in school finance, municipal consolidation, public employee benefits, constitutional change—that was a great positive that flowed from the shutdown.

**Rick Sinding:** It sounds to me as if—reading your body language—that on the one hand on the substance of the argument you were in some sympathy with the governor on the policy side. On the structural side, you were also supportive of the legislature using its influence as much as it possibly could. But am I wrong in thinking that you had a preference for the governor's policy position?

**Bill Castner:** In retrospect—



**Rick Sinding:** Yes. I'm asking you this in retrospect, of course. <laughs>

**Bill Castner:** Oh, at the time I had my war paint on. This was a black-and-white issue. <laughter> This was the executive branch trying to impose its will on the general assembly.

**Rick Sinding:** And I can understand that from a strategic point of view that was your job and you would be dedicated to it.

**Bill Castner:** Yes.

**Rick Sinding:** But yeah, in retrospect?

**Bill Castner:** In retrospect, the governor made the right call. I mean, this was not Speaker Roberts' objective, but there were—and I said this at a recent panel here at Eagleton—I think there were those who wanted to relegate the executive to a subordinate interest of the legislature, an objective that exists to this day in New Jersey.

**Rick Sinding:** Oh, yes.

**Bill Castner:** And so for the governor to view this perhaps as not just a one fiscal year balance the budget thing, but a broader power play, was, I think, the right decision on his part. And the end compromise was—in terms of dedicating half of the penny to property tax relief, not the entirety of the proceeds. It did end up being a fair compromise. But yeah, in retrospect, I think the governor both on policy grounds and political grounds made the right call in standing his ground and I believe Speaker Roberts made the right call in not rolling over and [instead] saying that, you know, I represent a caucus that has a seat at the table and we're just not going to be rubber stamps to the executive branch.

**Rick Sinding:** Were bygones pretty much bygones thereafter? Or did the hostility continue thereafter?

**Bill Castner:** Well, by virtue of fact the governor hired me as his chief counsel. <laughs>

**Rick Sinding:** Well, but that's three years later. I'm talking about in the immediate after that.

**Bill Castner:** To the governor's great credit, immediately after this—now perhaps it's because the governor had the upper hand and so he had the luxury of now being magnanimous and bringing the party together. But no, the legislature went

straight to work with the executive branch. Myself, Kathy Crotty, the governor's senior staff, all got together, mapped out a procedure for a special session on property taxes with the idea of producing serious, concrete, substantial proposals, part of which ended up being a big part of the governor's legacy.

**Rick Sinding:** They certainly were a theme of what he talked about throughout his governorship. But how much actually came out of that special session? I don't recall that there were any municipalities that consolidated. I do recall that there was a substantial change in the school funding formula, but that came somewhat later if I'm not mistaken. And was there any dramatic change in property taxes that came about as a consequence of this special session?

**Bill Castner:** So there were 98 recommendations from the special session on property taxes. We joked that we didn't make it 100 because we didn't want to make it easy for the press to calculate the success or failure rate.

<laughter>

But in my opinion—in the governor's final state of the state address in January 2010, he cited the fact that he had slowed the rate growth of property taxes, unlike any of his predecessors. That was a direct result of the special session. He cited the fact that the Office of Comptroller was born. That was a direct result of the special session. He cited the fact that the New Jersey Supreme Court for the first time in my lifetime blessed a school funding formula. This was not a dictate for the Supreme Court to have parity of funding between the Abbotts and non-Abbotts. The governor blew up the prior system that awarded school funding based on zip code. That was a direct result of the special session on property taxes. Dual office holding, although there was a grandfather clause, was a direct result of the special session on property taxes. So there were a number of great positive accomplishments. I think what happened, though, is the report, just like anything else in Trenton—you know, is the comptroller going to be elected state-wide? No. So that was viewed as a “watered down state comptroller.” So you started off with 98 recommendations. As they went through the legislative process, in the eyes of many columnists and editorialists and reporters, these were watered down to meet the needs of the Democratic majority. So in my view, I don't think the process and the exercise got enough credit. But in retrospect, yes, I think it was a seismic event.

**Rick Sinding:** Do you think that it's generally the way in which the public and the press view anything that ends up in compromise these days?

**Bill Castner:** Yes, I guess you could say that and that's the press's—the fourth estate's—job, right? But I think it was remarkable for the party to be at odds, result

in a state government shutdown, and then get together and have a joint committee process and a historic process that led to pretty substantial reforms.

**Rick Sinding:** And the midterm of Corzine's administration, the 2007 election, bore no relationship to the midterm of the previous administration that you were talking about, namely the [Florio administration](#), where the increase in the both the income and sales taxes had resulted in a sweeping victory for the opposing party. That didn't happen in 2007.

**Bill Castner:** It did not and it's really interesting. As I recall, Quinnipiac did a poll several weeks before the shutdown asking New Jerseyans whether a sales tax was necessary to balance the budget, and roughly two-thirds said, "No. Absolutely not. They could cut waste and—"

**Rick Sinding:** Waste and abuse, right? <laughs>

**Bill Castner:** Waste and abuse, right. Then, shortly after the shutdown, Quinnipiac asked the same question and two-thirds of voters said, "You know what? It was necessary." So not by design, but the shutdown created in the public's mind the idea that there was a fiscal crisis and that this was actually necessary, is my opinion. You know, Governor Florio and [Joe Doria](#) will tell you this. When he [Florio] increased the sales tax, that was done probably the third week of June. It wasn't even led up to the July 1<sup>st</sup> Constitutional deadline. And so, this was not done by design but in my opinion, the shutdown provided political cover to legislators. "Oh, my God, they must have had to raise the sales tax. They were on the verge of shutting down casinos." So, in my opinion, that was one of the main distinguishing factors.

**Rick Sinding:** That's very interesting because a lot of people think that the only reason that New Jersey ever got an income tax in the first place was that the Supreme Court closed the schools for four or five days.

**Bill Castner:** I hadn't thought of that. Under [Governor Brendan Byrne](#).

**Rick Sinding:** He did it at the beginning of July when schools weren't in session anyway, but it was a clear indication that something critical would happen if you didn't have a budget passed by a particular date.

**Bill Castner:** You have to make the case to the public. The legislators have to make the case to the public, especially on something that is going to hit him or her in the pocketbook. So I do believe that's historically analogous.

**Rick Sinding:** But the budgets that succeeded that first donnybrook were relatively tame affairs between the governor and the legislature. Except that Governor Corzine continued to roll out very, very big picture sweeping change kinds of ideas. And I guess it was the fiscal 2008 budget, in early 2007, calling for this major asset monetization program. I had [Brad Abelow](#) explain that to us. He had been the state treasurer, so he could explain it. But I'm wondering if you would describe in sort of layman's terms, how the legislature perceived this initiative and why, not to put too fine a point on it, it was dead on arrival in the legislature.

**Bill Castner:** I think it was really no more complicated than looking at the potential, the sheer percentages, the possible percentage increases of the tolls. And they were looking at really potentially massive numbers. Legislators are risk-averse. They don't like controversy typically. They have a formula that gets them elected and reelected every two years and to the degree there are those—you know, I attended a town hall in Toms River and short of pitchforks, <laughs> this was the epicenter of rage. I mean, think about it. Think about the economy at the time. You have unemployment creeping up to 10 percent and people are really hurting financially. Now you're coming to the table with something that arguably would stabilize New Jersey's finances for quite some time but at the same time would result in massive hikes in tolls.

**Rick Sinding:** Was there no way in which that could be introduced so that it would be very, very small for the first year and then marginally larger at five years and ten years, so that you're looking at the out years that are well beyond anybody's particular immediate interest?

**Bill Castner:** I think that could have been an end game. It never really got to that. Of course I was with the legislature at the time, and it seems like the backlash at these town halls just resulted in the front office pulling the plug altogether. It's a very interesting question, though. I could absolutely see—you have a situation where half of our toll roads are populated by out-of-state motorists. And so the governor was right to try to capitalize on that revenue stream.

**Rick Sinding:** And of course, that's always been one of the arguments for increasing the gasoline tax, that as people come through New Jersey they're buying our gasoline but they aren't New Jerseyans.

**Bill Castner:** That's exactly right. This was not an entirely novel proposal. Indiana had launched a similar initiative.

**Rick Sinding:** Around the same time, hadn't Illinois sold one of its toll roads to an Australian company?

**Bill Castner:** I believe that's right. So it never really got to, "Okay, this was far too sweeping. How do we come up with something that's perhaps less radical?" It never got to that stage.

**Rick Sinding:** It was just tolls and boom, that was the end of the story.

**Bill Castner:** Yes. And the legislature didn't really pile on. This was more of a public backlash. This wasn't like the budget battle where you had legislators openly criticizing the governor's proposal. It was really in my opinion the public backlash that caused the administration to reconsider the proposal.

**Rick Sinding:** Now in April 2007—in Governor Corzine's administration it will forever be remembered as the time when he nearly lost his life. Very seriously, critically injured in an automobile accident. He was out of commission for quite some time. I know that [Senate President Codey](#) stepped in and helped out in the front office and the people who worked in the front office at that time speak very glowingly about the relationship that developed there. What influence did it have on the assembly? How did the assembly function at the time when the governor was basically not there?

**Bill Castner:** You know, it did have at least temporarily a paralyzing effect when the governor was disabled at Cooper Hospital and everyone was wondering is he going to survive. But as the news became better and better, it did shift back to business as usual and I'm going to hazard a guess and say it wasn't a terribly long period of time in which—all eyes were on the governor's health and his recovery and his timetable for a very short period of time and then it transitioned back into, I would say, routine business.

**Rick Sinding:** Now by this time, you are definitely a creature of the legislature.

**Bill Castner:** By the way, though, the political dimension there was you had South Jersey Democrats saying, "Oh, my goodness. We're going to have to deal with Dick Codey again." There has always been the hostility sort of, you know. And Jon Corzine's at Cooper Hospital. Cooper Hospital's saying, "Let's keep Governor Corzine aside because of South Jersey's previous dustups with Dick Codey, so." <laughs>

**Rick Sinding:** Oh, my. So the North/South split is still in evidence at that time.

**Bill Castner:** No question about it.

**Rick Sinding:** Interesting. So you were in the nonpartisan office, then you're in the partisan office for the first three years of the Corzine administration. How was it

that Governor Corzine called upon you to be his Chief Counsel? Did he approach you? Did you approach him? Was there some overture on somebody's part? Did this come out of the blue?

**Bill Castner:** If I recall correctly, Brad Abelow had lunch with me at a restaurant called Settimo [Cielo]—it just closed recently—and kind of said, “Would you be interested if this opportunity presented itself?” At that time, it looked like Lisa Jackson was going to be picked by President Obama to run EPA.

**Rick Sinding:** And Brad had been appointed chief of staff. He had moved from treasury to chief of staff. He was leaving and Lisa Jackson was going to succeed him and actually, I think, did so for about five days <laughter> before President Obama did tap her to be EPA administrator. So he's looking around for somebody to come over to the executive branch.

**Bill Castner:** Yeah, I think so. And you know I never really asked the team why they settled on me or was I third string or fourth string or a fifth stringer or what. But I did hear that the governor was interested that I was so passionate about affordable housing and gun violence prevention and that he liked that I sort of had a political mind and also arguably—maybe debatably—a substantive objective in terms of my work in government, as well. Now, that could have been completely made up. <laughter> Perhaps Governor Corzine had no such thoughts. But that's what was relayed to me. And then Ed McBride—now Judge McBride—who was then chief counsel, the position I walked into, we met at Ponzio's on Route 70 in Cherry Hill and he said—I remember this, he phrased it very carefully, "If you were to be extended an offer for the position of chief counsel, would you accept it?" You can't have the governor on the phone making an offer for a position of chief counsel and then having it rejected.

**Rick Sinding:** And having somebody say no. <laughs>

**Bill Castner:** That's exactly right.

**Rick Sinding:** Yes.

**Bill Castner:** So I actually had signed a contract to join a law firm, a major law firm in New Jersey.

**Rick Sinding:** So you were about to leave the legislature in any event.

**Bill Castner:** I was. I had a kind of loose sense of Speaker Roberts' timetable [for retirement]. He's the one who brought me into government. I didn't see a scenario in which I would stay after he left, so, yes, I was ready to hop into private practice.

**Rick Sinding:** Had he already announced that he was going to be leaving or stepping down?

**Bill Castner:** He had not. So I was going to leave about a year before he ended up retiring from the general assembly to go to a private practice. This opportunity came up and it was a complete no-brainer. The firm was completely supportive. And look, I saw enough of Governor Corzine up close to know he was a man of integrity, in it for the right reasons. I was not a fan of then U.S. Attorney Chris Christie and thought that he would be, frankly, devastating for the State of New Jersey as governor.

**Rick Sinding:** And it was clear at that point that a Corzine-Christie campaign was coming up.

**Bill Castner:** Absolutely. I mean, he [Christie] was campaigning for governor while sitting in that office. <laughs> You know, you don't call Karl Rove as a sitting U.S. Attorney if you're just in it for the law and order component of it, so, yeah. No, I was very alarmed by Chris Christie's reign as U.S. Attorney and to the degree I was signing up to make sure the administration was doing everything it could to put Jon Corzine in a position to succeed, that was highly appealing to me.

**Rick Sinding:** How much dealing had you had with Corzine directly at this point?

**Bill Castner:** Not a lot and when the interaction was there, it was probably adversarial on the shutdown. I got good advice once, which is—I ended up doing the redistricting exercise and I said to a prominent Republican friend of mine, "I don't know if I like this exercise because I have a lot of friends on the Republican side of the aisle, and I feel like I'll infuriate them if I succeed in my mission." And the advice I was given was, "You should always zealously represent for your client. You'll end up getting more respect from the other side of the aisle than you will just trying to make everyone happy." And I feel that was the case perhaps with Governor Corzine, where he saw that I was zealously representing the Assembly's interests and—

**Rick Sinding:** And as long as you would zealously represent his, he'd be happy with it.

**Bill Castner:** That's right. Bring in this Irish kid to fight on behalf of me, and maybe that'll help. At least that's how I looked at the matter.

**Rick Sinding:** Had you dealt with Brad Abelow, and before him Tom Shea, and [Heather Howard](#) when she was the policy director? Had you had direct dealings with the inner circle of the Corzine team before this?

**Bill Castner:** Yes. I wouldn't say intimately, but yes, day-to-day dealings absolutely. Sure.

**Rick Sinding:** And those were cordial, I take it, even though you might be on different sides of the aisle?

**Bill Castner:** Oh yeah. From my perspective, yes. You can ask them and I'll read the transcripts. <laughs>

**Rick Sinding:** I'll ask them. <laughs> So you accept the job going into a year where the markets have collapsed, and so there is financial chaos—even more than there usually is in New Jersey. And number two, you're going into an election year. As chief counsel to the governor, your responsibility basically is to give him legal advice, as well as policy advice. How much does the fact that it's an election year enter into or impede the job that you have to do as counsel to the governor, within the confines of the running of government itself?

**Bill Castner:** Well, the stakes are so high that certainly as chief counsel you're walking into that position—in my opinion, the governor presided over a scandal-free administration. So my first concern is making sure that whatever's within our control, we're going to have a scandal-free 2009. Government is not going to be a distraction to the governor while he's running for governor. We also want to make sure—at the end of the day in my opinion good policy is good politics. So the governor ought to have a platform in 2009 that will be appealing to the public, consistent with his ideology and past accomplishments, and frankly put his opponent on the defensive and perhaps draw some ideological contrasts with respect to the direction Jon Corzine wants to take New Jersey versus his opponent as well. So absolutely, although what I thought was a shrewd move was the governor's campaign headquarters was a five-minute walk away from the State House, so on a lunch break I could ethically walk over there to the campaign team. I thought the succeeding administration made a mistake in terms of their campaign headquarters being, I think, in Somerset County, where you don't have that access, so the blurring of the lines between campaigning and government—in my opinion they probably played too fast and loose with that in the next administration. Under Governor Corzine, though, he had a very bright line. But at the same time, no, it's malpractice to be chief counsel and to not look at the policy issues and legal issues with a prism towards, "How is this going to affect the ability for the governor to return to his job?"

**Rick Sinding:** I've not heard it phrased quite that way before. Usually there's this wall that is established that says, "I can't have anything to do with the campaign and therefore I'm not going to have anything to do with small-p political decisions."



**Bill Castner:** Yes, I think the distinction there is campaign work is prohibited in government, but that's not to say that the work you're not doing—you're keeping an eye towards what the political fallout of governmental decisions would be. And that's where I would draw the distinction. You're not making fundraising calls in the New Jersey State House. You're not stuffing envelopes for Corzine for Governor. But as you're identifying issues that ought to be presented to the legislature, "What type of impact is this going to have?" If you're talking about dealing with different constituencies and angering different constituencies, in the back of your mind absolutely you're trying to balance interests and make sure that you're not creating liabilities for the governor.

**Rick Sinding:** You presumably have that same calculus in mind throughout the entire four years of the governorship.

**Bill Castner:** I think you have to. I think it's not realistic to have a different perspective.

**Rick Sinding:** So what happened on election night of 2009? Why do you think the governor lost?

**Bill Castner:** Well, I think dealing with one of the worst recessions since the 1930s. Mayor Bloomberg out of nowhere almost—I think he came within four points of losing New York City. Virginia changed party hands, although there were two non-incumbents running at the time, from Democrat to Republican. And I believe that there was the recession, anti-incumbent, "Let's give the other team a try." It was unexpected, though. I expected the governor to win. On Sunday nights—weekend, not government time—I would be at the governor's house in Hoboken and listen from the political team, and the polling—the governor's numbers never really moved. People by then had made up their minds. About 43, 44, 45 percent of New Jerseyans approved of what he did, and the question was really, are enough people going to question what Chris Christie would be as governor? Is he going to be a proxy for going back to the George Bush policies? Where is he going to be on health insurance mandates? Where is he going to be on guns? Where is he going to be on the state Supreme Court? Where is he going to be on women's rights? And will that cast enough doubt in voters' minds to get the governor over the finish line? And frankly both the governor's pollsters and the legislature's pollsters had the governor winning going into Election Day unless [Maggie \[Moran\]](#) had some secret polls that she'll reveal. I was in the legal war room on election night with Angelo Genova, and we fully expected the governor to win, so it was devastating. It was devastating. I took a peek into the war room where most of the political consultants and operatives were, and I could tell not long after eight o'clock by the looks in their faces that something was not right. And so that was completely a punch to the gut.

**Rick Sinding:** Now you, after having spent the last decade or so—a little less than that—in central parts of state government, are now looking at a transition to a Christie administration, where presumably you're going to be involved in helping the incoming chief counsel learn his or her job. Was it Jeff Chiesa?

**Bill Castner:** Jeff Chiesa, and David Samson was the chair of the transition.

**Rick Sinding:** Oh, yes. So what was ahead of you in January?

**Bill Castner:** Well, I assumed they were going to keep me on as chief counsel. I was certainly qualified. <laughter> But that didn't materialize. That didn't quite materialize. I have to tell you that transition period was not a pillow fight. The governor of New Jersey serves a four-year term and that term does not end in November. And so the governor [Corzine] felt very strongly that certain appointments should be filled, certain judicial vacancies should be filled, certain legislation should be signed into law.

**Rick Sinding:** So you were busy. On the substance of government.

**Bill Castner:** And it was very tense. Governor Corzine and Governor-Elect Christie I believe had one face-to-face meeting. It was positive, and then the appointment of, I believe a Middlesex County sheriff to perhaps the Sports and Exposition Authority resulted in some sort of meltdown, and it went downhill from there. It was perhaps a harbinger of things to come, because they did not enjoy—I believe that Governor Corzine called Governor Christie to wish him a Merry Christmas and didn't get a return call, so it was a very, very toxic transition. In retrospect it was quite interesting, the Christie team coming in saying, "We're not going to do business as usual. We were sent here to drain the swamp, so to speak, and we're not going to handle appointments the way you guys did." A very, very condescending type of view towards the Corzine administration, and perhaps that's a mentality they shouldn't have had.

**Rick Sinding:** It's interesting. I remember meeting David Samson when I was in the Florio administration. I think he was a Democrat at the time. If he wasn't, he certainly behaved like one. I never thought of him as being a particularly partisan person.

**Bill Castner:** No, I wouldn't say he was partisan. Absolutely. It was sort of—if I had to extrapolate, this idea of "This place," meaning the State House, "is a cesspool, and this governor was sent from the U.S. Attorney's office to do things differently and clean things up." That of course didn't happen.

**Rick Sinding:** <Laughter> Without talking about that too deeply, let's talk about what you have ended up doing since then.

**Bill Castner:** I've kept out of trouble luckily. <laughs>

**Rick Sinding:** I know you were appointed to the state commission of investigation.

**Bill Castner:** I was.

**Rick Sinding:** I know that you served as the counsel on both the legislative apportionment and the congressional redistricting panels. That must have been interesting. Explain the differences between how New Jersey does this sort of thing and how, for example, our neighbors in Pennsylvania, who keep getting their maps thrown out in court, have been doing this for the past several years.

**Bill Castner:** I think New Jersey has a superior system in that most states have legislatures draw their own maps, and New Jersey—it's not a truly independent commission. It's more of a political commission, I would say.

**Rick Sinding:** But with equal representation on both sides, right?

**Bill Castner:** Equal representation and an 11th member, who essentially serves as an arbitrator.

**Rick Sinding:** Who's usually a dean from Princeton or Rutgers or something like that?

**Bill Castner:** Each of the 11th members has had an academic background, and Alan [Rosenthal] of course was the 11th member the last go-round. Both parties agreed, to his credit. He was not appointed by the Chief Justice. Both parties agreed to Alan as the 11th member.

**Rick Sinding:** Much, as I recall, to the Republicans' later regret, even though Alan was a registered Republican.

**Bill Castner:** I'm not sure he was at that point. I think he was a registered Democrat.

**Rick Sinding:** Had he changed? When I first met him, he was a registered Republican.

**Bill Castner:** His last vote was for a Republican congressional map 10 years earlier, so I think the Republicans viewed him as an honest broker, which of course he was. So I think New Jersey has a better system. There are proposed constitutional changes that actually are being discussed right now that I think are objectionable, but I do believe that having an 11th member, having a balanced commission and trying to get both sides to meet in the middle is definitely a superior alternative to legislatures drawing their own maps, which we've seen in Pennsylvania and we've seen outrageous cases of gerrymandering. You can't divorce political considerations from drawing maps perhaps, nor should you, but you can mitigate.

**Rick Sinding:** What about the initiatives that I think passed in three states this November that are going to place redistricting entirely in the hands of an independent commission?

**Bill Castner:** It seems like the winds are blowing in favor of reform and independent commissions. I do believe there's a level of public awareness on redistricting, which had been a relatively obscure topic. I think through [Stephen] Colbert and late-night commentators, right now there's a level of awareness that, "Wait a minute. In the State of North Carolina Democrats are getting half the votes statewide, and yet it's, what, 10-3 or 13-3?" Maybe you can fix that in the transcripts. [North Carolina currently has nine Republicans in the House of Representatives and three Democrats, with one race still undecided as of March 2019 due to allegations of election fraud. Both Senators from North Carolina are currently Republicans.]

**Rick Sinding:** And with 2020 coming up and the census, which will determine how districts are redrawn following that census, it obviously has become a very timely topic.

**Bill Castner:** Well, that's the classic definition of gerrymandering, is politicians picking their voters, not voters picking their politicians, right? So I think New Jersey doesn't have a perfect model, but it's a model that's better than most. We won the apportionment battle, which was state redistricting, Democrats. We lost the congressional map, and two years ago to this day in November 2016, this was a six-six map still in New Jersey. And in January 2019 we are looking at an 11-1 map, and I think that's the impact of President Trump and the views of the Republican Congress by most New Jerseyans.

**Rick Sinding:** Clearly. Now, you went to work thereafter for Gibbons.

**Bill Castner:** I did.

**Rick Sinding:** Was Gibbons the law firm you were going to go to work for previously?

**Bill Castner:** It was, yes.

**Rick Sinding:** I should point out that Gibbons, a major law firm in Newark, is also very actively involved in public affairs and public advocacy activities.

**Bill Castner:** And public interest as well. Thanks for saying that, yes. And one of my mentors, Chief Justice Zazzali, was and is at that firm as well.

**Rick Sinding:** I remember John Gibbons, actually.

**Bill Castner:** Yes, the legendary John Gibbons. I got to work with him, and, boy, talk about a titan.

**Rick Sinding:** What did you do at Gibbons? Was it mostly public interest work?

**Bill Castner:** Well, I ended up running their Trenton office. I didn't start off as a registered lobbyist, but the firm asked me to do that and to run the Trenton office and to run their government affairs, so I ran the Trenton office. I was heavily involved in business development. I was involved in the sports betting litigation.

**Rick Sinding:** Is this on behalf of clients of Gibbons? Is that how that works?

**Bill Castner:** Yes, sure. We had about 52 clients in our government affairs section, everything from major hospitals to Fortune 500 companies.

**Rick Sinding:** I think this is something a lot of people don't understand about lobbying. The assumption is there are organizations that have their lobbyists in Trenton, and then there are freelance lobbyists who take on whatever interest will pay them, but there are a number of major law firms that have offices in Trenton that represent the interests of a wide variety of clients who are engaging that law firm both for legal advice and—I don't want to call it political influence—but to try to direct legislation or regulations.

**Bill Castner:** I think a sophisticated law firm like Gibbons, an AmLaw 200 law firm—in order to provide comprehensive services to your client, one should not rule out trying to change the regulatory process or trying to change the legislative process. That has to be on the table when it's something that's adversely impacting the client. So I agree with you. I think perhaps it's not really seen as another tool that can be used by lawyers to represent the clients' interests.

**Rick Sinding:** How did you end up going from there to Blue Cross Blue Shield?

**Bill Castner:** So I represented Blue Cross Blue Shield while I was at Gibbons on the issue of out-of-network reform. These are surprise medical bills. This is the idea that you've gone to a physician who's in your network and a hospital that's in your network, and you still get slapped with a surprise medical bill, which in some cases—

**Rick Sinding:** From the anesthesiologist, who isn't in your network, for example.

**Bill Castner:** Typically from specialists and super-specialists who are out of network and not in the hospital's network. There's really a crisis in New Jersey, leading to bankruptcies and horrible stories and one of the major cost drivers is the reason why we have second-highest healthcare insurance in the country. So Horizon engaged Gibbons to try to assist with advancing out-of-network reform. I got exposed to their senior leadership team, including the then-CEO, Bob Marino, and they wanted to establish a new position of senior vice-president of corporate and government affairs. I don't know if I have that right. I think senior vice-president of corporate—I forget.

**Rick Sinding:** We get the picture. <Laughter>

**Bill Castner:** Yes, and so it was an incredible opportunity. It was an incredible opportunity financially. Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield is the fifth-largest Blues plan in America, a Fortune 250 company, publicly traded, 3.8 million members, half of the market in New Jersey, half of the healthcare economy in New Jersey. So to be in a corporate-level suite under the leadership of someone like Bob Marino was really an amazing opportunity.

**Rick Sinding:** I was going to say your first foray into the private sector, but it really isn't the private sector, is it? I guess it is, but it's a heavily regulated healthcare sector.

**Bill Castner:** It is. That's a fair assessment, and so I had to absolutely get acquainted with the alphabet soup associated with health insurance. Yeah, a challenge. That was the other reason why it was appealing to me.

**Rick Sinding:** Now you've got a new challenge.

**Bill Castner:** I do.

**Rick Sinding:** Governor Murphy has appointed you as his senior advisor on firearms? Do I have that title correct?

**Bill Castner:** That's accurate.

**Rick Sinding:** What does that mean?

**Bill Castner:** New Jersey has among the strongest gun violence prevention laws in the nation, and not coincidentally we have among the fewest per capita gun violence deaths in the nation, so this is not a complicated proposition. The less access to firearms there is, the fewer gun violence deaths there are. So Governor Murphy, who ran on—campaigns on—gun violence prevention and in a short period of time has delivered, for reasons I can discuss with you, wanted to have a single point of contact on firearm policy, litigation, legislation, regulation, working with the AG's office.

**Rick Sinding:** And this is an area, in addition to affordable housing, that you had been directly involved in during your earlier time both in the legislature and in the executive, right?

**Bill Castner:** To his credit, Governor Corzine dispatched me to get a one gun a month law through the legislature. It had stalled. So the reason why you don't see typically gun shows in New Jersey—you don't see really billboards for gun shows in New Jersey—gun shows sometimes have a lot of loopholes for background checks. They don't happen in New Jersey because we have a one gun a month restriction. You can't go to a show and stockpile ten AR-15s. It also is a deterrent to straw purchasing and illegal gun trafficking. People buy ten, 15 handguns, throw them in their trunk, and all the sudden they're on the streets of Paterson or Elizabeth or Newark or Jersey City. New Jersey became one of the few states in the entire country that has a one gun a month restriction that passed. The governor [Corzine] signed it in August 2009, and it was a great way for me to not only serve the governor but work on a policy issue that I believe is really important. I do believe future generations will look back at the carnage that's occurring here and the fact that you can buy firearms like you could buy bubble gum and say, "Just as a civilization, what were you doing? What were you guys thinking? How is this even possible?"

**Rick Sinding:** Yes, I saw something the other day—the timeliness of this will probably be lost by the time anybody sees this or reads this—but romaine lettuce has just been removed en masse from every supermarket in the United States for about a week or two because four people around the country have died. And I saw a posting somewhere that we've removed romaine lettuce from every shelf in the country because four people have died. Meantime 375 people have died from an AR-15, and yet they're still available at gun shops and retail stores. I thought that was interesting.

**Bill Castner:** Go online and good luck trying to buy lawn darts on the Internet. But if you go on armslist.com you're able to purchase a wide array of firearms with ease. It's a scary proposition, and the governor [Murphy] has said, "Look, California, Massachusetts, they're a leader in this, they're a leader in that." Governor Murphy said to me, "I want New Jersey to be a leader in every respect." So we're looking at innovative ways, not just legislation. We're looking at ways to bring action against the industry, some of which our attorney general has already initiated against ghost gun manufacturers and 3D printers, and there's more coming down the pike against the industry, an industry that has turned a blind eye to the public health crisis of gun violence. There's a six-bill package the governor has signed into law. He created a name-and-shame executive order. Most of our crime guns come from outside of New Jersey. They're not bought inside of New Jersey. They come from Pennsylvania and Georgia and North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia. The governor has awarded, with the legislature's help, \$2 million to Rutgers University to establish a gun violence research center. Congress has taken an ostrich-like approach to gun violence research, so it's up to states like New Jersey, in our opinion, to fill the void. And we're exploring even additional legislative initiatives in the area of violence intervention programs, ammunition regulations, smart gun technology, and cracking down on illegal firearms. So it's an ambitious agenda. New Jersey can only do so much. Like I said, eight out of 10 crime guns come from outside of New Jersey. But let's do some aggressive, innovative, experimental measures to try to crack down on this epidemic until we finally perhaps have a climate in Washington that could perhaps point to a state like New Jersey and say, "Look what New Jersey's doing. We need to follow suit at the federal level."

**Rick Sinding:** Is this now your full-time job?

**Bill Castner:** No, it's not. I'm a private attorney representing the state of New Jersey as a firearms advisor.

**Rick Sinding:** So you're a consultant.

**Bill Castner:** I'm still consulting for Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield, yes.

**Rick Sinding:** How does that work in terms of Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield's relationship with the state in terms of its regulatory structure?

**Bill Castner:** Yes, so I need an ethics screen in which I cannot speak to anyone in the administration on anything related to Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield and vice-versa. I am not speaking to Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield about administrative initiatives. I had to go through and get sign-off from ethics counsel to make sure everything was above board.



**Rick Sinding:** So you can represent Blue Cross Blue Shield in anything that doesn't have anything to do with state government.

**Bill Castner:** That's correct.

**Rick Sinding:** Let's go back to Jon Corzine's personal management style. You spent a year in his office relatively close to him personally. What was your impression of his overall approach to the management of the executive branch of state government?

**Bill Castner:** Impressive. Detail-oriented. I have a mental image of the governor with his binder during budget season and literally pinpointing line items in the appropriations act. You really don't see that sort of attention to detail from principals like the governor.

**Rick Sinding:** Is that because of his background in finance?

**Bill Castner:** I think so. I think he's a numbers person, absolutely. And I think he enjoyed it. I also—the governor was constantly checking-in. "What's out there? What are you hearing? What's going on? What are you hearing from this party boss? What are you hearing from this Assembly member? What's the press up to?" He'd be on the road and check in a lot and want to know really what kind of was going on, what was the issue of the day, what's emerging, what's the chatter about. The governor had good instincts. I remember when I first signed up, Tom Shea told me, "You know, it's amazing. There will be 10 people in the room, and nine will say 'Do this.' And the governor will say, 'Do that.' And then we'll all be scratching our heads—and he'll end up being right." <laughs> And I found that experience to be true. Really, really strong instincts.

He was defined externally, in my opinion, as someone who really didn't "get it" politically, and I find that to be completely false. I think the governor had completely strong political skills. I think perhaps he would even say he didn't love the political component of the job, but he was good at it. He understood mapping out and understanding the political consequences of the governmental decisions that he was making. Now, you can make the case that, "Well, then how the hell did asset monetization ever come up?" But that was—look, the governor just got done with a near-fatal experience, and please tell me if my chronology's wrong here, but he came out of that and said, "Look, I signed up for this to make some major changes and change the course of New Jersey." So I think he went into that exercise eyes wide open, knowing that this was a highly controversial idea. That's why the number of public sessions were set up. So I don't even think that's an instance of being political tone-deaf. I think the governor knew full well he was

proposing something controversial, and he wanted to do it anyway. I think the governor had very, very shrewd political skills.

**Rick Sinding:** The overwhelming feeling that I've gotten from the people that I've interviewed so far is that Jon Corzine had very, very good interpersonal skills and that in fact whatever tensions there might have been with the legislature—you would be a good person to ask about this—were not personal, that there were differences but there was not personal animus because he was such a gracious, conversational and pleasant person to be around. Would that fit with your experience?

**Bill Castner:** I strongly agree with that. The governor was also engaged—and this was Maggie and Tom's area—in party-building for quite some time. I mean, the resources that he dedicated to a lot of county party committees. I remember looking at a spreadsheet of a competitive legislative race, and it had major funding sources, and one said "labor," one said "business," and there was a separate line item for Jon Corzine. That's how much of a contributor he was to helping out Democrats, and so I think that helped him with goodwill. I think his personality: a very disarming, very thoughtful, pensive personality. So you're right. This wasn't like, "Oh, God, this guy Governor Corzine's trying to manhandle us. What a jackass." No, there was never personal resentment.

**Rick Sinding:** Do you think there was any resentment about the fact he was perceived as having bought his way into politics both in the Senate and later for governor?

**Bill Castner:** Yes, I think that's fair to say. I think you have a lot of legislators who, first of all, are envious of the executive branch in general, okay? The executive branch is typically a threat to the legislative branch, number one. Number two, you have legislators who think there ought to be some sort of Horatio Alger way to get to the front office, and you have to endure the indignity of having rubber chicken dinners for a quarter-century before you've earned the right to occupy the front office.

**Rick Sinding:** Unless you have \$38 million at your disposal.

**Bill Castner:** Right, so if someone comes in relatively unknown and just by sheer wealth has a chance to be a statewide player, absolutely that breeds resentment. I think that's happening right now with Governor Murphy as well and it breeds that type of resentment, unfairly so in my opinion.

**Rick Sinding:** Anything else in retrospect? Anything I should've asked you that I didn't? Any off the top of your head recollections, anecdotes or fill-in-the-blank

answers about the administration of Jon Corzine? What should he be remembered for? How will you remember his administration both personally and as an observer of New Jersey politics?

**Bill Castner:** Well, we'll go off-camera for some of the great anecdotes. <laughs> The director's cut. It was a privilege to work for Governor Corzine. He was ethical, smart, principled, in it for the right reasons. His policy accomplishments are strong. He abolished the death penalty. The Roman Colosseum was lit up the day that he abolished the death penalty. On an issue close to me, he restricted gun purchases in the state of New Jersey, paid family leave, school funding formula blessed by the New Jersey Supreme Court for the first time in my lifetime, pay-to-play reform, dual office holding, office of comptroller. When you look back at the governor's record in four years, the governor perhaps doesn't get enough credit for—he would constantly insist on racial diversity and gender balance in appointments, and that was something I was intimately involved with with judicial appointments. He believed very strongly in independent judiciary. He fought very hard for the renomination of Justice Barry Albin. There were Republicans who wanted to stop him because he cast a vote in the Torricelli-Lautenberg case that the Republicans viewed as harmful to them, and the governor fought hard to make sure Justice Albin was renominated. But, no, at the end of the day I just really admired the governor, very much looked up to him, have very fond memories of being at his place in Hoboken or watching him in action in Drumthwacket or being at home and seeing the cellphone ring and seeing it's the governor and getting to brag in front of my friends, "Oh, hi, Governor." That alone is worth signing up to take the chief counsel job.

And, by the way, there was no puffery. Even to prepare for this, reading the governor's last State of the State, he called balls and strikes. He didn't try to exaggerate his record. I think he tried to be upfront, perhaps to his political detriment, about the challenges New Jersey has with its current budgetary climate. I think that position has been vindicated. And he leveled with New Jersey. He didn't try to pull wool over people's eyes. He was in it for the little guy, and I love that in his final State of the State that he also signaled his support for children. He expanded the family care and basically imposed universal healthcare coverage for kids. As I said, a historic school funding formula in the state of New Jersey. Paid family leave. I remember my cousin saying, "Can you thank the governor? I was able to take off more work than I would've been able to to attend to my newborn. Can you thank Governor Corzine for me?" That's really cool to hear when that happens. I would've loved to have seen Governor Corzine a second term. I think he had the state on the right track. I think he was the victim of a brutal economy and voter anger, and that happens in politics. That's what you sign up for. It's the big leagues. Welcome to the NFL. But that is a proud part of my resume, that I was chief counsel to Governor Jon S. Corzine. I was proud to have him at my wedding,

and I just think that he's ethical and is on my Mount Rushmore of those that I worked for.

**Rick Sinding:** Well, we're very pleased to have had you here today. Thanks very much, Bill Castner.

**Bill Castner:** My pleasure. Thanks. It's an honor.