

## **Interview with Governor Brendan T. Byrne 10-30-07**

Michael Aron: It's October 30th, 2007 . I am Michael Aron of NJN News, we're going to continue our series of interviews for the Brendan Byrne Archive of the Rutgers Project on the Governors. Governor Byrne is back with us this morning to continue our series of interviews with him and we're about to get started. Governor, we're going to begin.

Brendan T. Byrne: Let us begin.

Q: And as you were talking to the folks downstairs, it occurred to Don that you were talking to them about relations between a governor and a legislature and that that might be an interesting place to begin this morning. How did you view the legislature, after you got to know them, after you had been Governor for a while?

Byrne: Well first of all, in my day as Governor-Elect, we got a turnover in the legislature, a huge turnover and it went from big Republican to big Democrat and so there were a lot of new faces and again in those days, the Governor was recognized as the person who's going to choose the leadership of the legislature, and so Jim Dugan, who was the State Chairman, and a key guy, came to me with a list of who was going to be what and that's the way it went. I had the veto. I vetoed one. I'm not going to tell you which one but I vetoed one appointment but the rest of it had to have my approval or he would've done it my way.

Q: To what extent is that still true 35 years later?

Byrne: Yeah. And by the way, I had told Howard Woodson that if I won that election, he was going to be the Speaker of the Assembly. Howard Woodson was the first Black speaker of the New Jersey Assembly.

Q: First and only.

Byrne: Maybe. Anyway, and he was good. He was a good one. But the leadership was there, it was my choosing. I had difficulties with the leadership in terms of egos but by and--

Q: Who was the Senate president?

Byrne: Pat Dodd was the Senate President. Pat Dodd was from Orange , a bright guy, he's a very conscientious guy but every once in a while his nose would get out of joint and he was hard to bring aboard on the income tax issue. He had to be but he was hard to bring aboard on the income tax. I had to use the County Chairman to put some pressure on in both houses. Dick Codey will tell you that in order for me to get his vote for the state income tax, I had to give him an exit off Route 280 in Orange , which was a good idea. I mean, we needed that exit. But anyway, everybody regarded the income tax as a life or death issue and you couldn't really

bargain with people who saw themselves going down in defeat if they voted for the income tax. Tommy Deverin, for instance., an Assemblyman who was from a district which would benefit as much as any district from a state income tax, would not vote for a state income tax. I saw him recently, he said, "Governor, they would've taken me off the ticket if I had voted for it."

Q: He was from Carteret or some place around there?

Byrne: Yeah. Yeah, perfect district to benefit from a state income tax. He wouldn't do it.

Q: Working class district.

Byrne: He was in Tom Dunn's district, and Tom Dunn was really a right-winger when it came to a certain issue, although he was a Democrat. Tom Dunn, by the way, I spoke at a dinner for him when he was retiring. I said, "He's a great Democrat. Democrats for Reagan, Democrats for Whitman." Anyway. So the legislature, with all of the problems that I'm telling you about though, the legislature was there when I really needed them. We got 41 votes a lot of times for issues that wouldn't have happened without some collegiality.

Q: Was it tougher to deal with the legislature when you first were elected because there were so many Democrats? They had a Super Majority. Was it tougher to corral them together?

Byrne: Yep. When I first was elected, Nelson Rockefeller was still the Governor of New York and I went over to see him, spent an afternoon with him and he told me that the toughest time he had as Governor of New York was when he had the biggest Republican majorities in the legislature. What happens with large majorities is nobody feels obligated to vote on any particular measure so you put a bill on the board and the guy who sees it as unpopular, if him and his district will say, "Well you've got 66 Democrats, you don't need me." And so enough people say that, you don't have 41 votes. And that became a problem, especially the income tax.

Q: Did you feel that as Governor you had more power than any legislator in the state?

Byrne: Sure I had more power.

Q: And you were going to exercise it. You were first among equals, as it were?

Byrne: No, I wasn't even first among equals. I was first. First of all, our legislature in those days did not have the kind of legislative services and staff and so forth that they have now. I was working for Governor Meyner back in the 50s when the legislature had nothing. The legislature, by the way, used to meet at night, Monday night, and that was it.

Q: Really? Until when?

Byrne: I don't know but when I was in college, I remember when I was in college going down to Trenton and seeing the legislature meeting on Monday nights, and that was about it. So they didn't have the resources to develop their own policy or their own agenda.

Q: Collectively they are equal to the executive branch. No individual legislator.

Byrne: I understand that and I did understand it and I had a deal with them and I dealt with them but basically it was the Governor's program and it went through. It was not the legislature's program.

Q: Can a Governor be too deferential to the legislature?

Byrne: Well in some states the legislature is probably more powerful than the governor but in New Jersey, at least in my time-- no, you had to let the legislature know that you needed them, that they were part of the program. I would meet from time to time, I would go up to Passaic County and meet with the Passaic County legislators at a restaurant in Paterson or someplace and I would go to Bergen and meet with them and go down south. The legislators liked that because we got coverage in the local papers and I certainly showed them the deference from that standpoint.

Q: Do you think that still happens? Does a Governor still go to meet with the county legislative delegation?

Byrne: I think that a Governor does. Either that or has them up. I mean, you start off by having them at the Governor's Mansion. They like that, and I would have, for instance, when I was putting the income tax together I would have pool parties on Sunday afternoons and the legislators would bring their kids to swim and cook hamburgers and we'd have an afternoon of it, and there are people today who remember that that's the way it works. So they start out by wanting to come to the Governor's Office. We'd have sessions at the Governor's Office or events or social events at the Governor's Office and it did develop a camaraderie. But then they also wanted you to come to their district and meet them at their district and make the local papers. It was a nice blended thing.

Q: Rightly or wrongly you gained a reputation as Governor in your dealings with the legislature as kind of take-it-or-leave-it. Fair comment or not?

Byrne: No it wasn't quite take-it-or-leave-it. I mean, if they had some suggestions. But I had a program and maybe we need more of this. I think the Governor should start out with things he wants to get done and then try to get them done. You talk to legislators, you outline the program to them, you make your suggestions, you have your hard times with them. This is why we're here. Well why do you think--

Q: Do you think the governors of more recent times have just sort of improvised and have not had a program?

Byrne: No, but frankly we had some tough issues and the issues you have to fight for and issues you had to lose your popularity on. But why are you going to be Governor if all you want to do is sit there and be happy for four years?

Q: I don't mean to move the conversation too much into the present. We want to talk about your administration, but the current Governor is trying to push monetarization. Is he doing it the right way?

Byrne: He thinks he is. I've talked to him about that. He thinks he is. He thinks he has to get by this election and then have an objective, evaluation of monetarization.

Q: That's a tough program like the income tax, is it not? Aren't there parallels between what he's trying to do and what you're trying to do?

Byrne: No, I don't think monetarization is-- there are more alternatives in monetarization. The income tax was absolutely a live-or-die issue with legislators. You had to get them to accept the concept of an income tax. We spent two years working out different formula and other alternative. They would come to me often with an alternative to the state income tax. Matter of fact, Ray Bateman in '77 had an alternate to the income tax, even after I got it passed. So what I think a Governor has to do is determine what he wants and then be willing to make adjustments but not alternatives.

Q: Since you left office, legislative leaders have become more powerful politically partly due to the use of their PACs for fundraising.

Byrne: Yes.

Q: Is that a good or a bad thing?

Byrne: Well I think it's a good thing. I mean, first a legislator can run a pretty good race even in unpopular times. Dick Codey got himself elected, not because he's got enough money to do that, plus the kind of popularity that's unprecedented.

Q: His?

Byrne: His.

Q: To what do you attribute that?

Byrne: His personality, his hands-on type of approach to governing. He's genuinely interested in people. I mean, Dick Codey is as strong a political persona as you could design.

Q: If Jon Corzine chose not to run in '09, you could see Dick Codey coming back as Governor?

Byrne: Well there's a lot of speculation that if Clinton wins the presidency that Jon Corzine is going to go down to Washington and that Codey will take over. Who knows.

Q: So Codey is your idea of a very successful New Jersey politician?

Byrne: He's a lot like Dick Hughes, yep.

Q: How so? How is he like Hughes?

Byrne: Warm and fuzzy.

Q: Were you warm and fuzzy?

Byrne: Nope.

Q: What were you?

Byrne: I was a guy who got things done. We ran in 1977 without at all suggesting that I was a nice guy. I had television appearances with Ray Bateman, my opponent, in which I would say, "If you want to vote for the nicer guy, you vote for him." That was not me. What I was, and we projected it this way, you've got to respect what he's done and I did a lot of things that I thought deserved recognition. And they did, right? They wound up realizing that the state was better as a result of the state income tax, for instance, and a couple other things that we did. By the way, some of the things we did at the time, I've told you this, were not popular. Building the Giants Stadium in 1974 was not a popular thing to do.

Q: Why not?

Byrne: Because people didn't see any payoff with it.

Q: How could they not? Pro football coming to New Jersey .

Byrne: No, it was projected as building something in a swamp, the field was going to go under. It was a joke. It was regarded as a joke.

Q: People feared a waste of public dollars?

Byrne: Yeah, and money that could be used otherwise. I'm telling you, and you can look at what was going on at the time. Neither of us really advocated building that stadium in the campaign of '73. If I had lost that election, the Giants Stadium would never have been built. Sandman was

not for it, he was from South Jersey , it was irrelevant to him and did not support it. Matter of fact, even I in campaigning in '73 would come up and say here's how much it costs, here's how many touchdowns they made, here's the cost per touchdown. It was an appealing type of negative approach.

Q: You say that Codey and Hughes were warm and fuzzy and you were not. At the risk of embarrassing you, I would say that today you have a warm and fuzzy persona in the world of New Jersey politics. You're a beloved figure, frankly, in the world of New Jersey politics today.

Byrne: That's all because I made that one remark about people are waving at me with all five fingers. I do have a sense of humor and I've always had a sense of humor. I had a sense of humor when they said I didn't. They just ignored the lines, yeah, when I first was--

Q: You were funny back then?

Byrne: Yes.

Q: They just didn't get it.

Byrne: No, they didn't pay any attention to it. There was a gas shortage, I said that I was going to row down to Trenton from Princeton on the Delaware and Raritan Canal . That was funny. Nobody paid any attention to it. By the way, I was the first Governor not to go to his inaugural in formal clothes.

Q: Were you?

Byrne: Yes. Street clothes. I mean, my suit. A lot of things that--

Q: What was your mindset behind that?

Byrne: You look funny in formal clothes. I mean, you look at pictures from Dick Hughes and Bob Meyner's inaugural, they look silly.

Q: You were modernizing the Governorship.

Byrne: Yeah.

Q: Yes?

Byrne: Yeah. And we got rid of the car, the limousine. I was the first Governor not to have that big limousine.

Q: For inauguration or for every day?

Byrne: Everything. The Governor had the limousine. Always.

Q: What kind of limousine? Cadillac?

Byrne: I don't know. Cadillac. Yeah, it was the kind you see now with kids going to proms.

Q: Everybody's a governor for a day, right?

Byrne: Yeah.

Q: Some people say your humor publicly became more obvious after your reelection. Was that because you became a more confident person?

Byrne: No, I may be biased. I really think that after the second election that people began to pay more attention to the funny things I said, and I would take it a little-- although I was willing to take a risk with my humor. I remember when I campaigned in 1977, I would tell a story about the guy who was a successful fisherman and he was asked why, and he said, "Because when I get up in the morning to fish, if my wife is lying on her left side I fish on the left side of the boat, if she's on the other side I fish on that side of the boat," and he was asked suppose she's lying flat on her back and he said, "I don't go fishing." Dave Wilentz called me. Dave Wilentz was a very popular friend and political mentor and he said, "You can't use that story." But I did. I used a lot of things like that that were sort of funny. But it was only in the second term, and after I left office that people said well, he's sort of funny, and they would pick up the line rather than the policy.

Q: Let me ask you about another thing that you were addressing that group this morning about, and that was selection of judges. I was struck by your saying that the difference between your era and today's era that in your era the people you appointed had to take a pay cut, whereas today many people who are appointed to the bench get a raise. What does that say?

Byrne: That says we're not getting the quality of judges that we got in my day. Everybody will tell you that. Any good lawyer in New Jersey will tell you that the quality of judges in my administration was top flight and they can't say that today.

Q: And why was that? Because you were a prosecutor and knew the value of a judge?

Byrne: Several things. One, I was a prosecutor and was in court, there was a judge and I knew the trial lawyers in the state and I knew who was a good lawyer and who wasn't. Second, I didn't owe anybody anything so that I could appoint those people, whereas now I can say to a senator if there's a really good person who wanted to be on the bench, and the response I get is that we can't get any support. There's a lady I recommended for years who is a brilliant lawyer, member of the Law Journal board, a member of Mensa and I have recommended her for judgeship a number of times. She can't get a senator to go out front for her and she's not on the bench.

Q: How did they get their senators to go out front for them 35 years ago?

Byrne: Because I had set up a system. Until he died, Joe Weintraub had a veto of any potential judicial candidate. If he said this candidate is no good, that was the end of it.

Q: That was your informal system.

Byrne: Yeah.

Q: It wasn't anything formalized?

Byrne: No. And everybody knew that and the Bar Association also had a say on appointing and vetoing.

Q: Well, they still do apparently.

Byrne: Yeah but I think they were a little tougher in my day because I had set a standard. People I knew who had no support politically went on the bench.

Q: How did you get them through? How did you get their senators to sign off on them?

Byrne: There was this or nothing. I remember I had discussions. I'll give you an example. Chippy Coleman, who was this guy I knew played basketball for Dartmouth, had an excellent reputation, lawyer in Monmouth County and a successful lawyer. I appointed him to the Superior Court. Al Beadleston said to me, "Now all of the judges in Monmouth County start in the County District Court," which was not in existence, that was really a lower court where you did slop work.

Q: Beadleston was a Republican leader in the Senate?

Byrne: Senator and a leader, yeah. So this guy would not have taken it and so I appointed him to the Superior Court and Beadleston would not move it. Eventually through Senator Brian Kennedy, who was totally opposite from me politically, but we became good friends, talked to them in Monmouth County into doing it my way. Chippy Coleman became a judge, an outstanding judge, and that was replicated a number of places.

Q: Was it difficult to get first-rate lawyers to take a pay cut and go on the bench or was it so prestigious that they all wanted to do?

Byrne: Yeah. You couldn't get anyone you wanted but you could get some. You could get some. You know, the guy who's making five million dollars at Lowenstein and even today isn't going to take a judgeship right away.

Q: Is a judgeship as desired today as it was back then?



Byrne: It's desired by a lot of people. You could get judges. If you put it out to bid you could get judges for practically nothing but to get the top people that you want, you can get them, I mean, Stuart Rabner is an excellent example of a judge who could be making a lot more money in a Wall Street firm or even in a top New Jersey law firm, but by and large you got lots of people, including some good-- there are some good lawyers in New Jersey who, for instance, work in the Attorney General's Office. The Attorney General herself is a very good lawyer who would be commanding a top salary on Wall Street. But aside from that group, the average lawyer in New Jersey is not making anywhere near what they project as the starting salary for lawyers out of law school. Lawyers making \$200,000 to start is not the ordinary lawyer in New Jersey .

Q: How do you view the tradeoff that these people, like Stuart Rabner and Attorney General Anne Milgram make between the very high salary and the opportunity to both influence public policy and see your name in the paper on a regular basis? How do you view that tradeoff? How does a person--

Byrne: It is a choice you make. I mean, I'm no Stuart Rabner but I was offered a number of very good jobs when I was a young lawyer and I was trying to decide money versus fun and I <inaudible>

Q: Is that what it is? It's money versus fun.

Byrne: Yeah. I was offered a job as Chief Counsel to Hoffman-La Roche when I was a fairly young lawyer.

Q: Before you were Essex County Prosecutor?

Byrne: While I was Essex County Prosecutor. The Essex County Prosecutor salary was \$17,000 a year and with Hoffman-La Roche I could virtually name my salary and I decided to stay with things that interested me and where I thought I could make a difference. And that's what lawyers do. You don't become a lawyer just to make money.

Q: There are fewer lawyers now serving in the legislature than when you were in office. Good or bad or indifferent?

Byrne: What is that?

Q: There are fewer lawyer legislators today than there used to be. Is that a good thing or bad thing?

Byrne: I'm not quite--

Q: Of the 120 legislators, in your day many more of them were lawyers than today.

Byrne: Maybe.

Q: What do you think about that? Lawyers know how to make laws, or presumably they know how to make laws, and so there's a natural--

Byrne: No, I don't think being a lawyer is a sine qua non of being a legislator, and I think some of the better legislators are not lawyers. Codey's not a lawyer and nobody knows more about the legislative process than Codey. So from that standpoint, I'm not sure that-- and by the way, I think fewer of the top students are becoming lawyers these days. They see Wall Street beckoning and they will choose the Harvard Business School over the Harvard Law School .

Q: What do you think of the concept of the Citizen Legislator? Some people say that initially legislators were supposed to be farmers and part-timers and bring their expertise to Trenton and that it's become too professionalized. What's your view on that question?

Byrne: Well the trouble with part-time legislators who get into it and want to get in and out of it, there isn't the kind of follow through that you'd want to see from professionals. In other words, I'm a legislator, I'm here for a couple of terms, and then I'm gone--

Q: You don't think that works as well as people who build up experience and seniority?

Byrne: Well I don't know. I don't know. That's a universal criticism of the legislator who goes gung-ho and then loses interest. If you keep your interest that'd be great. Guys like Pozycki [with the Common Cause. I don't think he's a lawyer. He may be but I'm-- he is a lawyer. But anyway, he's the kind of guy that has some persistence. This is 2007, by the way.

Q: Some people have proposed a full-time legislature with much higher salaries, but tight restrictions on other income. What's your thought on whether that's a good idea?

Byrne: First of all they almost have legislators full-time now. This is 2007, they're in every Monday, they're in every Thursday, they're in various other committee meetings. So making them full-time, first of all people are doing two or three full-time jobs now. But anyway, we're talking about my time. We're not talking about now.

Q: You mentioned that the legislature back then had fewer resources than today, that the office of legislative services was skimpy if not non-existent. Was it better when the legislators had to do more work on their own, more research on their own?

Byrne: I come from the viewpoint of the Governor, and I started in government in 1955. I started with Bob Meyner and I started as Assistant Counsel to Joe Weintraub. Joe was his personal counsel. At that time the legislature would meet on Monday and I would on occasion, representing the Governor, could go sit with the minority leader, we didn't have the majority. I

would sit with the minority leader, I would have a list of the bills that were on the board, and I would have a list of positions on those bills and so by and large the Democratic minority in the Assembly, mostly I sat in the Assembly, by and large they would vote the way the memorandum that I had told them to vote. That got the Governor's position established. Now the trouble with it in those days was we didn't have a majority of Democrats so I can't give you it from that standpoint. The way the Republicans worked at that time, by the way, was that the Republicans would meet in caucus and whatever the majority of the caucus voted was the way that everybody was obliged to vote on the bill. So if it won by one vote in the caucus, the whole Republican majority would have to vote that way, even if they had enough Democratic votes to turn the bill the other way.

Q: That's very different from today.

Byrne: Yeah.

Q: Were the legislators individually that you dealt with and minority legislators, were they more familiar with the issues then than now when they have all this staff to prepare stuff for them?

Byrne: First of all I remember there was a nice lady who was an assemblywoman from Hudson County and I remember going up to her one time, this is back in 1975 and saying, "Irene, we need you."

Q: Do you remember her last name?

Byrne: Brown. Irene Brown. "We need your vote on this bill," and she told me pointblank, "The Mayor hasn't told us how to vote yet." And there's a famous story about Billy Musst on a bill, being up on his feet opposing a bill and getting a note saying that Mayor Kenny wants you to vote for this bill. I said, "Now, I've given you all the reasons why you should be against the bill, let me tell you why this is a good bill." So regardless of the research, the point is that in a lot of cases, the decision wasn't even made by the legislators who were voting on the bill.

Michael Aron : Let's talk about your second term a little bit. I think that we spoke at great length about your reelection the last time we got together. Let's talk about some of the things that you focused on in your second term. I have a list here that you made: New Jersey Transit. Was that first term or second term?

Brendan T. Byrne: Second term.

Q: Talk about that, would you?

Byrne: Yeah. If you look at New Jersey's transit today, you'll say that it was inevitable, that this is the way it had to be and it's the only way that transit would work. That's hindsight. When we

put together New Jersey Transit, it was a fierce fight to get the votes, to get the bill to be the way we wanted it, to get the leadership for it. Let me go back a step. Here's what we had before I did the bill. We had what was known as a commuter operating agency in New Jersey . I was a member of it when I was on the Public Utility Commission. David Goldberg sort of ran it as Transportation Commission, and we would give money to Public Service Coordinated Transit to meet their deficit because mass transit was being run out of <inaudible> or else the fares would be out of sight.

Q: Were these buses or trains?

Byrne: Oh no, this was buses. Trains were something else. But the buses were being run on a deficit. We would give fare increases but even the fare increases wouldn't keep up with the need.

Q: So these were private bus lines that you gave money to subsidize.

Byrne: Yeah. Public Service Coordinated Transit, which was well run by the way. A guy by the name of Harper ran it, ran it well, but you couldn't do it. So we would give him subsidies and that's the way it was working and the subsidies basically let us finance the buses but not run the buses. And so at some point it came to where we had to take over the buses. There's a lot of opposition to that, the labor unions especially. So we had to get a bill together creating New Jersey Transit. I had to find somebody with real credibility to run it and Lou Gambaccini was the ideal candidate.

Q: Who was he at the time?

Byrne: Lou Gambaccini was running PATH which was the railroad between North Hudson County . It was the PATH. Everybody knows what the PATH is today, it's a bunch of trains. He was running it. He was a professional.

Q: Did he work for the Port Authority?

Byrne: Yes, he worked for the Port Authority. I got him to agree to run New Jersey Transit. I got the bill introduced. It had fierce labor opposition and we had to make some compromises.

Q: Why was Labor so concerned?

Byrne: Because they had a better deal dealing with the private sector than they would dealing with government. So we had to, as I said, make some compromises. But we got it through. I got Lou Gambaccini to run it. He was good, he was the key for--

Q: Did you make him Transportation Commissioner or did you install him as the operating executive at New Jersey Transit or both?

Byrne: I forget.

Don Linky : Commissioner.

Q: Commissioner?

Byrne: I made him the Commissioner but he also ran the--

Don Linky : New Jersey Transit.

Byrne: New Jersey Transit.

Q: Do you recall whether it was a tough, long fight to get the bill passed?

Byrne: It wasn't a long fight but it was a bitter fight and it was a protracted fight but not long and it worked. And then we got the New Jersey Transit to take over the railroad.

Q: They too were private at the time?

Byrne: Yeah, the Pennsylvania Railroad was still in existence. Even on the Public Utility Commission I was fighting with the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Q: What years again were you on the PUC?

Byrne: From 1968 to 1970.

Q: And you were fighting with the Pennsylvania Railroad?

Byrne: Yeah.

Q: Over their service?

Byrne: This is an interesting story. At one point, I open up a docket at the Public Utility Commission about the condition of the Pennsylvania Railroad Station.

Q: In Newark ?

Byrne: In Newark . And I got sued. I don't have any jurisdiction over there. And they appealed it to the Supreme Court of New Jersey. Now remember, the issue was can I make the Pennsylvania Railroad clean up the station through my powers as the Public Utility Commission? So I'll never forget, that case was argued in the New Jersey Supreme Court and when Chief Justice Weintraub opened the briefs. He said, "The next case is the Dirty Railroad Station case" and we had it won. But they fought me tooth and nail.

Q: What was the condition of the station?

Byrne: It was dirty, it was sloppy, it was neglected, it was <inaudible>--

Q: Did they obey the Court after that? Did they clean it up?

Byrne: Yeah, a little bit but I eventually took it over anyway. I also opened a docket when they had several accidents on PATH. PATH ran the trains into Penn Station too and I got a call from the counsel for the Port Authority saying I didn't have any jurisdiction to do that either, and I said, "Do you got a subpoena? You don't think it's valid, don't come." And that intimidated them enough so that they worked it out with me. But anyway, that's what happened and that's the genesis of New Jersey Transit. It could've gone any other way in my opinion, and we did the fight and you know, you wonder sometimes why legislators have to be bribed or cajoled in order to vote for a bill. You would think if you got a bill that was really a very positive kind of bill, like New Jersey Transit or the Pinelands even, that people would support it. But nothing happened.

Q: Is it change? Is it fear of change?

Byrne: No, it's partly because every legislator has a constituency and it's not a statewide constituency for each legislator. So you have various problems with various legislators. A legislator may have a number of union workers in his district and they don't want New Jersey Transit so he's not going to vote for them.

Q: That's the way the system was designed, right?

Byrne: Yeah.

Q: Is it a good system?

Byrne: Well if I were Governor, I wouldn't want a legislature bothering me. Well you have to reconcile the various interests and the various considerations. Yeah, that is the way it works. Winston Churchill had it right.

Q: Could you talk a little more about the role that railroads have played in New Jersey politics?

Byrne: Before my time.

Q: Before your time?

Byrne: Yeah. I mean, I've read enough New Jersey history to know that the railroad tax was a big source of revenue for the state before we had income tax and sales tax. The railroad tax was a big deal.

Q: The companies were taxed or tickets were taxed?

Byrne: No, no, the companies were. It was property. It was the property that was taxed and so you had a big issue in Hudson County with the railroad tax and a number of prominent lawyers made their reputations fighting the railroad tax one way or another.

Q: Were most of these railroads out of state when they were headquartered in New York or elsewhere?

Byrne: Well they owned property in New Jersey . They owned railroad property. There was a lot of railroad property in Jersey City especially and it was expensive railroad property. So how you tax that railroad property was a big issue.

Q: During what era? From when to when?

Byrne: Oh even before my time. There was nothing before my time. In the 30s, for instance. Before the war.

Q: By the time you were involved, were railroads powerful or were they waning?

Byrne: They were powerful but they weren't critical. We did have a sales tax at some point and the railroad property became less valuable.

Man 1 : Do you want to take a break?

Byrne: Yeah, let's take a break.

Q: Governor we were talking before we broke about New Jersey Transit. How important a part of your legacy is that?

Byrne: Frankly, I think if we were serious about this, we would run New Jersey Transit trains, especially the suburban routes, out of Essex , Morris, and Bergen County . We would run them every 20 minutes. If we knew that you could get a train every 20 minutes into New York and out of there, it would substantially cut down on the automobile travel and need for new roads and a need for new tunnels and so forth. We're not in a position to make that commitment and if we did make it, it would look like a failure for a while because it would take a while for people to get used to it. But you go to London and we do, we go to London and we get a train every eight minutes at worst. So it works. The trouble with New Jersey Transit is you go to New York tonight and you miss a train back, it's an hour before you see another train, or maybe you don't get another train until the morning. So all we need to do in New Jersey Transit is run the trains and it'll work.

Q: Do we need to expand the lines or are the lines sufficient if we had more trains running?

Byrne: First of all, the way the lines are now, you would take care of most of the crowded conditions that we have on the highways, just what we have now. I think expanding them, we had that fight with Millicent Fenwick when we wanted to extend PATH down to Somerville . She fought it tooth and nail, thought it would bring the riff-raff into Somerset County . But if you get people onto trains it'll work and if you have the trains running frequently, it'll work.

Q: Do you rank the creation of New Jersey Transit right beneath the income tax and the Pinelands or does it go farther down?

Byrne: No, frankly I rate New Jersey Transit as something, which was inevitable. Mickey Mouse could've been Governor, and some people think he was. Anybody as Governor would have had to recognize that need is my point. But Pinelands, nobody but me.

Q: We're going to get to the Pinelands some more at a certain point in time, but for the remainder of our time here today, I want to ask you about something that we were talking about earlier this morning before the camera was rolling, which is that a Governor gets to meet a lot of interesting people. You talked about the fun of being Governor. You meet people high up in the world of politics, high up in the world of entertainment. When you look back on your governorship, who springs to mind that you met? Who did you meet?

Byrne: First of all, I met the Queen of England and I rode with the Queen of England from Newark Airport alone. I rode with the Queen of England from Newark Airport to the Bayonne Docks, where she had her yacht. There was a period of some, almost a half-hour where we were alone and that was sort of a--

Q: Were you in her car or was she in your state car?

Byrne: I think it was her car. It wasn't mine. And we talked about certain things, including the Irish situation and what that climate was in New Jersey at the time, and I asked her what she thought she would be doing if she weren't the Queen, and she said that she could never conceive herself as other than the Queen of England. It was interesting. And I also got to know Grace Kelly, and Grace Kelly and I got to be reasonably friendly. Grace Kelly's father's middle name was Brendan. It was John Brendan Kelly so that was sort of a--

Q: How did you get to know Grace Kelly?

Byrne: I got to know Grace Kelly through Anita Colby. How did I get to know Anita Colby, I don't know. Anita Colby was a major model back in the 30s and was sort of a movie star. I got to know Anita Colby, Grace Kelly, and Sidney Kingsley all around the same time. Sidney Kingsley was a Pulitzer Prize winning playwright. Wrote "Detective Story", "Men in White," a number of first-class plays and I got Sidney Kingsley to start the first Film Commission in New Jersey . It's



been very successful ever since. I think Celeste Holm, who I put on it at the beginning is, as we speak, still on it. She's 90 years old, she's still on the Film Commission and they've done a tremendous job of bringing film and talent into New Jersey .

Q: Did you see Grace Kelly in New Jersey or you...?

Byrne: Both. Matter of fact, I'll shorten this a little bit, Grace Kelly wrote me a letter longhand my last year in office I think and said that she was coming over with her son to look at colleges and one of the colleges was going to be Princeton and she would be in Princeton and would love to see me for lunch. I had suggested that to her at one point. And so she came over, I had a luncheon for her. It was a disaster because I served lobster and she was allergic to lobster. I had it outdoors and it was hot, and she was allergic to bees. But anyway.

Q: Are you sure she wasn't just allergic to New Jersey ?

Byrne: No, no, her family was a New Jersey family but I think they had a summer home in, I think, Sea Isle City or some place. But we got to be pretty friendly.

Q: You liked her?

Byrne: Oh yeah. I had also met her, she came up to Waterloo Village one time. It happened to be the coldest day of the year and she once commented to somebody that she has spent the hottest day of her life and the coldest day of her life with Governor Byrne. But Grace Kelly, interesting person and I knew her father. Her father owned the racetrack, the Atlantic City Racetrack, and I knew her brother who had been the Olympic champ in and was a councilman in Pennsylvania , in Philadelphia for a while. Matter of fact I spoke at his victory celebration, his victory dinner in Philadelphia . So I got to know the family a little bit.

Q: What presidents, I think we've spoken about Jimmy Carter. You had a real relationship with Carter.

Byrne: Yeah.

Q: Any other Presidents you encountered when you were Governor?

Byrne: When I was Governor, Nixon was President and I never really got to know Nixon as President. I met him later after we both left office and I lamented to him that we had never gotten to know each other. He arranged the luncheon. It's just the two of us with his son-in-law. So I did get to know Nixon at that time.

Q: Well he was a resident of New Jersey at that time, correct?

Byrne: He may have been, yeah.

Q: Upper Saddle River .

Byrne: He was a big Giants football fan and I would see him over at Giants Stadium once in a while.

Q: What was your impression of him, the most disgraced ex-President of our time?

Byrne: He was a guy who, when I got to know him, was looking for friends, I thought. I still felt sorry for him, and I never did tell him that he got me elected Governor.

Q: Watergate.

Byrne: Yeah. Anyway, that was Nixon.

Q: Do you remember what you talked about at lunch with him?

Byrne: When I had lunch with him, I made it a point to get several books out which were published before Watergate so I could find topics that would not infringe on Watergate. So we had a very pleasant time and we did not go into-- he did ask me why he thought Jimmy Carter had lost to Reagan and we got into a discussion of that and so forth.

Q: Do you recall anybody's theory? His theory, your theory, as to why Jimmy Carter lost to Reagan?

Byrne: Yeah, that Jimmy Carter didn't stand for anything. I think that was the basic problem with Jimmy Carter and I think we sort of agreed on that. Jimmy Carter would be for something or find it too expensive then he would back away from it. You can't look at Jimmy Carter's administration and say that this is what he did or even what he tried to do, and failed. He's not the Jimmy Carter of the income tax or Jimmy Carter of the this or that. Anyway, that was Jimmy Carter. I got to like Jimmy Carter. He thought I was a handicap to him because I was in a state where I was messing things up and doing unpopular causes so that he sort of shied away from me in campaigns. But that was Jimmy Carter. Anyway, Jerry Ford I really didn't get to know much. My kids did. My daughter, Susan, would go to the White House and I remember her telling me, "Gee, Daddy, when you see a movie at the White House they serve you popcorn on a silver tray." But she got to know the Ford kids.

Q: Why was that? I mean, you're a Democratic Governor, he's a Republican President. How did that happen?

Byrne: You would go to social events at the White House and social events were less partisan. So yes, we got to know-- and I got to like Jerry Ford. I remember introducing him at a dinner after we both left office. I was sitting next to him, people were coming up asking him for an autograph and I said to him, "Do you want me to try to scoot these people away?" and he said,

“No, I enjoy this and I’m told my autograph is worth \$30,” and I handed him my program and asked him for an autograph. But that was Jerry Ford. Ronald Reagan I got to like. Famous story with Ronald Reagan is I go to an event at the White House after he’s elected. He becomes President, I’m the head of the Democratic Governors Association and so I get invited as the token to White House functions, and I see him and I tell the story about how I always wanted to play tennis on the White House tennis court and that Carter kept putting me off. So he calls his aide over and says, “Next time Governor Byrne is in Washington , make sure he gets to play on the White House tennis court.” And they arranged it, I played on the White House tennis court, Reagan, and I keep saying that’s why Reagan got reelected.

Q: He kept his word?

Byrne: Yeah. So I did have four Presidents, which is unique for a Governor, to serve under more than two Presidents. That’s what I did.

Q: Let’s talk about Reagan for a second. You would say that Carter didn’t stand for anything and you had spoken earlier this morning about how a Governor has to have a program. Reagan had a program, right? Was he a successful President with a program?

Byrne: Well ,first of all, Reagan was liked and that made a difference. He made you feel good about America . Not us Democrats but it made people feel good about America and he’s credited with maybe more than he’s entitled to be with relations with the Russians “tear down the wall” but it was good PR and it came about.

Q: Who do you think has been the most effective President during your lifetime?

Byrne: During my lifetime, Franklin Roosevelt.

Q: How so?

Byrne: Because he got a lot of things done. He got us out of the Depression, he got this series of courageous programs through, risked his popularity, and then got us through the war. There may have been some mistakes along the way but I think Roosevelt was a President for our time and deserves to be recognized among the great Presidents. John Kennedy was the most inspirational President. I think people like me became interested in participating in government because we saw that John Kennedy had a vision and John Kennedy made us feel good about America and we wanted to be part of that. So I still quote John Kennedy in a lot of situations.

Q: We were discussing Ethel Kennedy and Robert Kennedy. Did you know them?

Byrne: Oh yeah. Still do. I still do know Ethel. I see Ethel sort of frequently, not in the last year or so, but Ethel and Kathy-- when Kathy ran for Governor, I helped her out a lot.

Q: Governor of Maryland ?

Byrne: Yeah.

Q: She was unsuccessful?

Byrne: She was indeed. But I thought she had the kind of vision that her father had.

Q: What's your recollection of her father and did you know him?

Byrne: I knew him not when I was Governor because he was gone. I knew him as a guy who had the vision of making a difference.

Q: You think he had the vision from the beginning? Because people say he evolved and became a visionary by the end after having been more of a street fighter at the beginning.

Byrne: Well, I think he knew how to play Massachusetts politics. But I really think that he wanted his-- I see things that are and ask why, you know, and ask why not. No, I think he really had that kind of romantic, visionary view of what the country ought to be.

Q: How about Jacqueline Kennedy. Did you know her?

Byrne: Met her, said hello to her, that was about it.

Q: How about foreign leaders other than the Queen of England? By the way, what was your impression of her? You told a lovely story that she couldn't imagine being anything but the Queen of England. What was your impression of her?

Byrne: That she was the Queen of England. That was about it. I mean, Margaret Thatcher I met and had dinner with her at whatchamacallit's house in Washington , Katherine Graham's house one night, and she was somebody who you watched and you--

Q: Was she Prime Minister at the time?

Byrne: Yes, and I used to watch her press conferences too. No, she was all right.

Q: Any other foreign leaders spring to mind?

Byrne: Oh sure, the Prime Minister of Italy would come over and I would take him to the race-- he loved the racetrack and I would take him to the Meadowlands and we'd spend the whole evening.

Q: Who was the President of Italy at the time?

Byrne: Don't ask me. I think it was...

Q: I retract the question.

Byrne: Huh?

Q: I retract the question.

Byrne: Yeah. And there were other lesser leaders. I would see the Prime Minister of Ireland. Who was that? I'll think of his name because I got to know him pretty well. Charlie Haughey.

Q: Haughey.

Byrne: Yeah. I knew him before he got indicted, and he was a charming guy.

Q: Did he get indicted?

Byrne: Yeah.

Q: Did you go to Ireland when you were Governor?

Byrne: Yes. Oh that's another interesting story because the Irish government had invited the Governors of the 13 original states to come to Ireland and we came over and it was sort of a celebration because this was the celebration of our independence from England, and Ireland liked anything that had to do with breaking off from England. So we went over and the 13 original Governors went over, we had a great time.

Q: Was this in that bicentennial year?

Byrne: Yes, 1976. Off that I went to visit my grandmother's birthplace.

Q: What was your grandmother's birthplace?

Byrne: It was in County Mayo, town of Castlebar. They had a big celebration for me and we had a very nice time. Anyway, while we were over there as a group, we had a dinner at the ambassador's residence in Phoenix Park and he had a beautiful back lawn, expansive back lawn, green. So I organized a footrace in the back lawn. Had Ella Grasso, Governor of Connecticut, start us and the rest of us went off. So she starts the race and it's a false start, so we all have to stop, and Mike Dukakis, who was then running for President, falls and dislocates his shoulder, spent the rest of that weekend with a bad shoulder. I got blamed for that. But anyway, it was a memorable occasion.

Q: Why would Governors engage in a foot race?

Byrne: Because I made them.

Q: Did you think you could win?

Byrne: Yeah. I had run for Princeton as you remember.

Q: No, I didn't know that. You ran track at Princeton ?

Byrne: Yeah. And so I thought--

Q: Long distance, short distance?

Byrne: No, the shorter the better. 60-yard dash was the best. I think anything longer I lost ground. But I would run 60 and 100, 220, even a 440.

Q: A sprinter, as a student, a marathoner as a politician maybe?

Byrne: Yeah. One of the articles when I announced for Governor in '73, one of the articles started out, "Brendan Byrne ran for Princeton and nothing else." And now he's running for Governor. Anyway. So yeah, that was why we ran the dash.

Q: What do you know about your family history in Ireland ?

Byrne: A lot about it. My grandmother on my father's side actually lived with us for my first ten years and I got to know her pretty well. I got to know a lot about Ireland . She would use an expression, "It's very blowy and slippy out today" and I thought that was unique to my grandmother but I got over to Ireland and I was in the airport and there was a sign that says, "The floor is very slippy today." So yeah, a lot of things. She had a poem, "It is a shameful sight to see children of a family fall out the street and fight." She would give us that poem anytime she saw that we were having disagreements among ourselves. No, I knew her pretty well. I knew enough about Ireland so I could find her street when I went over there. Then my other grandmother, who I didn't know as well but I knew, was from County Roscommon and I found some of her relatives when I went over a few years ago. She had a relative by the name of Reilly who was a nun over there and I got to know her.

Q: Were these ancestors of yours farmers or trades people? Do you have any idea?

Byrne: Yes. My father's family ran a butcher shop in Castlebar and I think my maternal grandmother's family were farmers in Roscommon.

Q: At what point did these families come to America ?

Byrne: Civil War. I remember my grandmother telling me how she came over here as a young girl during the Civil War and how they were hiding slaves in New York and she saw that taking place.

Q:Hanging slaves?

Don Linky : Hiding.

Q: Hiding. Hiding.

Byrne: Hanging.

Q: Hanging?

Byrne: Yes.

Q: Why would you hang a slave?

Byrne: Read the books on that. They resented the fact that we were in a Civil War to free the slaves.

Don Linky : Draft riots.

Byrne: There's documented history about this. Some professor from Princeton wrote a book on this.

Don Linky : McPherson.

Byrne: Yeah, McPherson was it?

Don Linky : McPherson.

Byrne: I asked him about it and he gave me a...

Q: You say your ancestors came over around the time of the Civil War. Would the famine drive them over as it drove many Irish over?

Byrne: Yeah, I think there was still famine problems but it wasn't the beginning of the famine. The famine was in the 40s and they came over in the early 60s so it's almost 20 years they endured the difficult times in Ireland .

Q: I think on that note we should stop for now.

Byrne: Okay.

Q: We're probably at the end of the tape.

Byrne: There I go again.

Q: I think it's a good time to stop.

[End]

