

Governor Thomas Kean Interview (June 23, 2010)

Michael Aron: It's the morning of June 23, 2010. We are in Far Hills at the office of Governor Kean. I'm Michael Aron of NJN News. We're here for the Rutgers program on the governor, The Thomas H. Kean Archive. We began our conversations with Governor Kean in March of '09. This is our second conversation. We left off at the end of the Governor's Assembly career in the beginning of his run for Congress in the '74-'75 period. That's where we'll take up today. Governor, before we take a look at the race for Congress against Millicent Fenwick, a theme that seemed to emerge from our first discussion was the unexpected turns that your life and career have taken.

Governor Thomas Kean: Hmm.

Michael Aron: This whole thing was an accident, was it? <laughs> Maybe most lives are accidents, but you never intended to be governor of the state of New Jersey as a young man.

Governor Thomas Kean: No.

Michael Aron: Is that how life happens?

Governor Thomas Kean: I think it does for a lot of people, and I tell students that. So don't worry, <laughs> frankly, if you're not quite sure what you want to do with your life. And you're going to try something that may not be what you want to do. Don't worry about it. Try it. Because something else will come along. Maybe if you try two or three things. Some people try five or six things. Christopher Reeve told me once that his brother tried maybe 10 things. <laughs> He just couldn't find what he wanted to do, and he ended up at the age of 35 or 38 in a small country in Africa. Tried to help them with their economic situation and all of a sudden he figured, "This is what I was born to do. This is what I love to do." And he went back and got his degree from Wharton School of Economics. And he'd never been interested enough do anything like that before. They went back to Africa. And Chris said he couldn't been prouder of him. Because he was Peace Corps, he was taught for a while, and at prep school he did five or six different things and he couldn't really find what he wanted to do, and I think that happens to lives. It takes a while sometimes for people to really find out what they were meant to do.

Michael Aron: By the time you were in the Assembly, were you committed to a life in politics and government?

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, no. <laughs> No, no, no. No. In fact, if something more interesting had come along during that period... I mean, I was running a small business during that time and--

Michael Aron: A real estate business?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. Yeah, real estate investment fund. And that gave me time enough to do the legislature. And looking around, I almost took another job once.

Michael Aron: What was it?

Governor Thomas Kean: I was offered to be the head of the National Council of the Metropolitan Opera. And I've always loved opera. Would've given me an office in the Metropolitan Opera. <laughs> Travel all over the country with the auditions and all of that. Man, I came within about an inch of taking that job. <laughs>

Michael Aron: How do you feel about that now?

Governor Thomas Kean: Well, I probably was better off with what I did, but... <laughs> Although sitting in that opera house listening to _____ would've been <laughs> sort of fun.

Michael Aron: All right. Let's pick up then with your interest in running for Congress. When we left off, I think I said, "Gee, you challenged Millicent Fenwick," and you said, "No, she challenged me."

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: What year are we in now?

Governor Thomas Kean: Wow. Back in--

Michael Aron: It's the post-Watergate.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Aron: '74-'75.

Governor Thomas Kean: Just after Watergate. In fact, it's during, still Watergate.

Michael Aron: So would it have been '74 or '76?

Governor Thomas Kean: It would've been '74, I think. It was still, it was right in the middle of Watergate. And I think '74. And--

Michael Aron: You were the Republican--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: --leader in the assembly or a Republican leader?

Governor Thomas Kean: A Republican leader. Yeah. And what had happened was that the incumbent Congressman, it was Peter Frelinghuysen, Rodney's father, was retiring after a very distinguished career, but at a fairly young age. Congressmen don't retire usually. But he was doing it. And so it left the seat open. And the Republicans were very concerned that because of Watergate-- this was the year the Assembly-- oh, must've been-- no. You know what it was? It was after I was speaking. Because this was the year when the Republicans had been cut back to 14 or 14 out of 80. <laughs> And the Republicans were losing districts and counties and seats that they never would've thought of losing before, and they were worried about losing the Congressional seat. So they approached me, and the Morris County organization, with Peter Frelinghuysen Chief of Staff, and Rodney, came and said, "You got to do this. Because otherwise we're going to lose the seat." And I wasn't terribly enthusiastic about doing it, because I was never that interested in Washington. But they sort of convinced me that it would be interesting, and my father was still alive. And he'd been in Congress for 20 years and it was what he always wanted me to do. <laughs> He never understood the state. <laughs> Never understood why I liked to be in the state. He always thought I was wasting my time and I should be running for federal office. And so I

thought, "Well, it'd please him so much." And so I said I would agree to do it. And what I didn't know at that point is at about the same time, Brendan Byrne was in his first year as governor. That'll give you a key to the year. It was Brendan's first year as governor.

Michael Aron: '74 then.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. And Brendan, Millicent Fenwick and Governor Cahill had been the director of I guess Consumer Affairs. And because Millicent was sort of a bipartisan figure and bigger than life, she never thought that he wouldn't keep her. She thought she was there for life, I think, if she wanted to. <laughs> And Brendan called her in at some point, and in about March, and said, "Millicent, I so appreciate your staying on until I could find a replacement." And it was a shock to her. And she started to think, "What am I going to do?"

Michael Aron: Excuse me one second. She was larger than life even back then? Is that because-- who was she? I know she was a Vogue model in the '30s.

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, yeah.

Michael Aron: But why was she already a larger than life person in '73?

Governor Thomas Kean: Well, she had been a character around the state, she had been active in Republican politics a number of ways. She served the state legislature for a number of years. And I'm not saying-- she's not what she became later on, but in the area which she represented, Morris, Somerset, those counties, everybody knew Millicent. <laughs> And she used that job as Consumer Protection Head to enhance that. I mean, she would take, you know, if there're four people gathered together, Millicent come and speak to them. So she'd spoken at every little club, particularly around those two counties.

Michael Aron: Did you know her?

Governor Thomas Kean: Did I know Millicent?

Michael Aron: Yeah.

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, we're very close friends. Yeah.

Michael Aron: Like her?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, very much. Because we'd worked in legislature together and we agreed on almost everything. <laughs>

Michael Aron: Was she in the Assembly when you were in the Assembly?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes. Oh, yeah. And she voted to make me leader. Voted to make me Speaker. <laughs>

Michael Aron: So the party asks you to run for Frelinghuysen's seat, and then she-

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: --on her own?

Governor Thomas Kean: Well, she honestly said this to me. "Look," she said, "I've stepped aside for men all my life." <laughs> And she said, "I'm looking now and there's no way that my senator's going to retire from Somerset County. The two Assembly seats are taken. I want to be in public life. And this is open, so I'm going to run for it." I went _____ and said, "We shouldn't run against each other." Millicent said, "I'm just not going to step aside again." <laughs> Stepped aside too often. And I said, "Well, I understand that." So I guess I was too far advanced then. I had a staff, I'd raised some money, I was too far gone to really-- I probably might've stepped aside at that point, but I was too far into the race. And so we agreed to do a primary. In which she turned out to have a tremendous advantage, because there are only two towns from my legislative district in the district. Congressional district. And she had all of Somerset County and I guess maybe a couple of towns in Morris out of her legislative district, plus, she had the Consumer Affairs running around. So her name recognition was-- I thought my recognition was pretty high because I'd been pretty prominent legislature, but wasn't as good as hers at that point, in this particular part of the state.

Michael Aron: Do you know roughly what she beat you by or...

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. It was a recount. <laughs>

Michael Aron: Oh, it was?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. <laughs> Yeah. We counted.

Michael Aron: '81 wasn't your first recount?

Governor Thomas Kean: No. No. I had the experience with a recount before. No. I lost I think it was by 76 votes.

Michael Aron: Okay.

Governor Thomas Kean: Out of about 30,000 cast. And I know why I lost. Lost because of one town.

Michael Aron: What town?

Governor Thomas Kean: Middlesex County. A little piece of the district. And the major was all for me. He said, "You got a lot to do in Morris and Somerset. Just do that, and I'll take care of my town." And so, yeah, "The council's for you, mayor's for you, everybody's for you." So I didn't pay any attention to it. And that's why I lost. I lost that--

Michael Aron: Do you want to say what town it was in Middlesex County?

Governor Thomas Kean: I don't remember. Shoot. I thought I'd never forget. I think it was Middlesex itself. Town.

Michael Aron: Uh-huh. Middlesex Borough.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, I think it was. But I lost it by, I don't know, couple hundred votes maybe.

Michael Aron: Was it a tough defeat?

Governor Thomas Kean: No, not for me. Because it wasn't anything I terribly wanted to do, <laughs> in honestly. Although you never like to lose, and you particularly don't like to lose because, people, in an election, it's not just yourself. People will work very, very hard for you and they give of their time and they take time off from their jobs, and people did that for me in that campaign. And so they worked terribly hard and I'd never gone to the headquarters at night to concede, or I didn't concede. Turned out to be a tie almost, but I thought I was going to concede. And a couple of women were crying. And I thought, "You know, this isn't about me." <laughs> People had worked very hard and believed in me. "And they're so upset, I can't not be upset." But it was a kind of campaign we should have more often. I remember at one point the paper asked Millicent, "What would you do if you lost?" And she said, "Tom Kean would be blessed if he were our Congressman." <laughs> And you don't say that about your opponent very often. So we had that kind of relationship. I mean, we were friendly before, we were friendly afterwards, we stayed great friends until the end of Millicent's life. And we disagreed on very few issues. I think I may have been a little tougher on Nixon than she was. But that was about it.

Michael Aron: I believe there was somebody who would later become one of your inner sanctum who worked on her campaign against you. I can't--

Governor Thomas Kean: Roger Bodman.

Michael Aron: Was it Roger?

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Roger was her driver? <laughs> Yeah. Yeah. No. Somerset County was then run by a chairman called Luke Gray. Luke Gray was one of the best county chairmen in the entire state. In the sense that he had his organization pull together and when Luke said "March," everybody said, "Yes, sir." And they all marched in the same direction. So I remember once she announced and Luke had said, "This organization is totally for Millicent Fenwick," I couldn't get into things. I mean, they'd almost try to bar me at the door of almost public meetings or else I would walk in and nobody'd speak to me. Everybody'd go to the bar when I walked in. <laughs> Turn my back, turn their back. I mean, it was a experience for me of what happens when a organization has a good candidate, and Wilson was a good candidate but somebody they're totally loyal to. It was very, very hard. It was interesting, because some of the things that happened in that campaign laid the seeds because under that organization it was Ray Bateman and Millicent Fenwick and a lot of very good people who were important in the state at that point. But they were considered at that point to be in

modern language the Liberals of the party. Or Rockefeller Republicans or what have you. Which I was sort of too. But the Conservatives all supported me because I was running against the establishment and they were all anti-establishment. So all I had in Somerset was this cadre of very strong Conservatives who just supported me to the end. And just basically told Luke Gray where to go because they thought he was supporting Liberals. And that groups stayed with me. And that group stayed with me, ran for governor. So I had this core of some of the conservative support in the state who stayed with me until I ran for governor.

Michael Aron: Did they stay with you through your governorship?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. Oh, yeah. They're friends. They're good friends. Even if I didn't... They'd get a little annoyed with me every now and then. Some of the things I did they weren't terribly supportive of, but there was always enough in what I did for Conservatives not to have a problem with me. I never had any Conservative primaries or anything like that. I mean, they basically supported me all the way through the governorship.

Michael Aron: When you say they were anti-establishment, so they were against Millicent Fenwick, it almost seems like the echo of today with Tea Party versus establishment.

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, yeah.

Michael Aron: Is it similar?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: Was it similar?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes. But without the publicity and without the... And it wasn't as big, frankly. They were, oh, just people who had a-- in those days they're more fiscal Conservatives. And less what you call now social Conservatives. But they cared very much about dollars and spending and so on and they thought that the leadership of Somerset County was leadership of the state and spending more people's money than they ought to and that they were-- let go of the president. They thought there were too many taxes and too much spending and

they also thought they were elitist. They thought that in this part of the-- we're sitting in part of Somerset County now, that this part of Somerset County was the rich _____ folks.

Michael Aron: <laughs>

Governor Thomas Kean: And the other part of Somerset County wasn't represented.

Michael Aron: You were a sitting Assemblyman when you ran for this--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes.

Michael Aron: --congressional nomination.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: So you stayed in the assembly until when, do you recall?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. I was there 10 years. I was elected in--

Michael Aron: '67 to '77?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah. And I, at that point, I'd been in the minority for a couple years because of Watergate. And I stayed one time in which I think I about more than doubled. Wasn't hard to do after that big loss at Watergate, but I about doubled. And I really ran the campaign to get some of our old districts back.

Michael Aron: That would've been '75.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah. And I worked hard on that, and I raised money. First time I think I-- now it's just common to-- legislative leaders have pacts and everything else. Nobody had done it before. I raised a bit of money myself. And then didn't give it-- the other thing that used to happen is the senior Republicans all used to get the money, if there was any money around. Because

they were the ones with clout. So it didn't matter if they had safe districts. They'd still get whatever state money was out there. I didn't do that. I raised some money and gave it only to the districts who were trying to get back.

Michael Aron: Were you the Minority Leader in the Assembly?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes, I was Minority Leader. Yeah. And so we raised the money, spent it, a lot of it, on cartoons. Had a cartoonist <laughs> make cartoons of the Democrats and what they were trying to do and put them in the local papers in the districts. And there were a lot of--

Michael Aron: How did that work?

Governor Thomas Kean: --radio ads. Oh, people like that. I mean, people notice things like that. They may not read the rest of the paper, but they notice the cartoons. <laughs> The advertisements and so on, so it worked out. And so we got back a good many seats we'd lost. We didn't have majority again. But we weren't going to become majority again until I won in '85. But it got back as decent, decent minority. And it was fun being Minority Leader for a while. Because it was a different position. Frankly it's easier to oppose <laughs> than to support and it's very easy to put the rocks in the machines and stop it from running. And particularly when you know the rules. And because I had been so long the Speaker and Majority Leader and all that, I knew the rules of the Assembly better than anybody else. And I could bring that place to a hold any time, and I did. And I've got annoyed Democrats for this or that. And plus, which the Democrats were very nice to me, because I'd been nice to them. They remembered when I'd been Speaker and Majority Leader and I'd given them a fair amount of staff. And I'd given them privileges. I'd given them whatever they wanted, usually, to be an effective minority. So it was very hard for them not to deny me any of the same thing. And I think because a lot of them were close friends of mine, particularly people like Howard Woodson, who was the Speaker, I didn't have any problems really dealing with them, and when I really wanted a bill they'd help me get it through.

Michael Aron: You say you kind of liked being the Minority Leader.

Governor Thomas Kean: For a while.

Michael Aron: For a while.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: You could throw rocks in the machine.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: Makes me think of your son, who is Minority Leader in the state senate now. He was Minority Leader when a Democrat was governor. Now a Republican--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: --is governor. Does his role change significantly when he has a Republican governor?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. I never had a Republican governor as Minority Leader. I had a Republican governor as Speaker. And as Majority Leader. And that day arose essential. I mean, you put the votes together for the governor and the governor's legislation, and that's not always easy. Sometimes it's impossible. I mean, I tried to put the votes together for Cahill's income tax. <laughs> Was not easy. Fact, it was impossible. And at the end, we actually had more votes than people thought for that. But in the end, the governor called me into his office, said, "We haven't got the votes, have we?" And I said, "No." Because the Democrats weren't really supporting us at all in the income tax. And so he said, "Look. I don't want people defeated over this. So you tell the people who want to not vote for it in the end, I'll understand." I said that in caucus. I said, "I know you've been with me all along and, fine. But if you don't really want to--" we had about 76, 77 votes, I think, and most of them left. <laughs> Left a very small group of us voting for the income tax.

Michael Aron: Between '75 and '77, you started thinking about running for governor?

Governor Thomas Kean: No. No, not really. Until the very end of my term. The first thing I decided to do was leave the Assembly. I didn't see us getting back into majority for some time. And that turned out to be true. Didn't get back until 1985. I didn't want to be just an opposition leader. It got to be not fun anymore. <laughs> And so I decided to leave the Assembly. That was the first decision. And

there were some things I cared about a lot that I'd never been able to do. Mainly in <inaudible> I was interested. I was very interested in the environment and had written most of the environmental bills in the previous 10 years. And education. And I wanted to go out with a bang and not a whimper. I thought, "I've given 10 years of my life to this, and I'm not prominent enough now as Minority Leader to make much waves for anything. And I can't get things I really care about through because I'm in a minority. So how do you make an impact?" I thought, "Well, running for governor whether you win or lose you can make an impact, and you can get things talked about <laughs> that might not be talked about otherwise." And so I decided really on that basis only to run for governor. And it was difficult because the Republican presumptive candidate was somebody I had worked with very closely in the legislature. Was a good friend then, is a good friend now, Ray Bateman. And Ray and I didn't disagree on a lot of things. Ray and I'd been very friendly. He'd been the leader of the Senate Republicans. I'd been a leader of the Assembly Republicans. And I was very this way, that way about whether to run because of Ray, mainly. And when I said I was going to declare, Ray said, "Would you come see me?" And I said, "Sure." I thought, "He's going to tell me it's bad for the party. Have a primary. He's going to tell me he really thinks he can win without... He's going to tell me all that stuff. And by time he finishes I'm probably going to say, 'Okay, Ray, I'll support you.'" He never did it. I went into his office. Said, "You've made up your mind. You really going to run?" I said, "Yeah, I think I am." He said, "Fine." <laughs> That was it. That's the end of the conversation. And I think at that point he could've talked me out of it.

Michael Aron: That's kind of like the stories about the politician who forgets to ask for your vote.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. <laughs>

Michael Aron: Right?

Governor Thomas Kean: That's right. Well, I can understand. I guess when somebody says publicly they're really going to run for governor you don't think you're going to probably be able to talk them out of it, although I think he could have. At least he would've had a good chance of it. I went there thinking, little uncertain, if he really puts a arm on me whether I want to do this.

Michael Aron: Which, part of your thinking, you say you wanted to get some attention on some issues. That was part of your thinking also that you would run

and get yourself known and the next time, perhaps, you would be a more formidable candidate.

Governor Thomas Kean: It worked out that way but no, not at all. Because at that time, Brendan Byrne was one of our more popular governors in history after the income tax. And everybody assumed that the winner of the Republican primary was going to be governor. I assumed that if Ray Bateman beat me in the primaries, he probably was going to, because I had no party support really that year, that he was going to be the governor of the state for the next eight years. And who knows where I'd be at that point? So no. So I didn't think that at all. I thought, "This is my last chance to make some points that I want to make about what the state of New Jersey should be doing, where it should be going, education, environment are important. What are some of the things we should be doing in that area?"

Michael Aron: Did you get to make those points?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. But nobody paid a lot of attention to them. They put a lot of attention-- you know how campaigns are. I mean, you do position papers and work hard on them and issue those position papers and the story the next day is somebody's had a scandal somewhere or <laughs> somebody's done something in your campaign you didn't expect. Or somebody's taken a poll and that's the lead and little paragraph on the last page is your 15-page position paper.

Michael Aron: <laughs>

Governor Thomas Kean: So it wasn't quite as I expected it to be.

Michael Aron: Is that a criticism of the media or is that just human nature the way that happens?

Governor Thomas Kean: Well, I think it's both. Yeah, the median, understandably, is going to try to sell newspapers. And you don't sell newspapers probably through a 20-page papers and what we should be doing about higher education in the state. It's just a little too esoteric for people and doesn't make a good headline. And so now I guess, we'd have put it out today's world, we would've put it out on the web and people would read it there and <laughs> all that. But newspapers were only way you had in those days to get anything out. And so we put out position papers, but they sort of sunk like a stone in the ocean.

Nobody knew they'd even been even there before, and it was disappointing. But the campaign was fun in many ways. And again, it turned out I did develop loyalists. I mean, people who really thought I'd be a good governor came out of the woodwork. I remember the whole Republican party, except my own county, opposed me, think. Two county chairmen out of twenty-one that year.

Michael Aron: What two?

Governor Thomas Kean: Eugene McCaffrey, who became later in my cabinet, who was down in Gloucester County. And my own chairman, John Renna [ph?] in Essex, and those were the only two. But places like Bergen, where the whole organization went against me, a local school board member, was chairman of the school board in Ridgewood. His name was Mar Drachama [ph?]. Said, "I think you'd be the best candidate." An old buddy of mine from the Army stuck up his hand and said, "I want to work for you. Remember me?" And I said, "Yeah, we've been good friends." Gary Stein. And people sort of surfaced. And they were not political, most of them. Another guy who had never run for office before but thought I'd be a good governor, said, "You have to have a ticket in the county. I'd be helpful by going on your ticket. I will, but don't really want..." Name's Cary Edwards. But all these people sort of surfaced who later became <laughs> very important to me. And they were so good friends that we ran even in Bergen County. We held the organization even, which was remarkable in those days. And that happened in a number of other counties too, and the basis of those people who came out and supported me that particular election, most of them did form the crux and the basis, plus, which, again, and this is very important to me, the Conservatives. <laughs> They all supported me. Or most of them supported me. And a number of them stayed with me even though when I ran for reelection I was running against some people who were normally more conservative than I was and ran on a more conservative ticket. They became loyalists, and some of them were in support of me right through the next election.

Michael Aron: Anybody come to mind in that group?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. There was a guy from this county. I'm trying remember his name. He's passed away now, an Irishman. But he just was dogged. He'd work all day long. Somebody who believe in. Was terrific. And I think Frank Holman in Ocean County was a tough former young Republican, Conservative.

Michael Aron: You named him State Party Chairman.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Aron: Oh. Actually when you were--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah. He and I met in a diner in off the Toms River, off the Garden State Parkway. I'd never met him before. Somebody said, "Oh, you ought to get together." He'd been chairman of the Young Republicans down in Ocean County. And he said, "The whole organization's gone out against you here." I said, "I know." And he said, "Let's talk for a while." And we talked for a while. And he said, "You know, I like you." And he said, "I think we can put together something here, down here in Ocean County." <laughs> And he put together basically the Conservatives and some others. And we won the county convention. Underground. Because Ray took it for granted. He had the whole, like I did for that small town there running against Millicent. He had the whole organization for him and the county chairman, and he thought that was not a program. Ocean County has a convention every year, and the mayors are all delegates. I went to see every mayor. Took every mayor out to lunch or dinner or what have you in the whole county. I found out who was representing senior citizens. I went and saw them with them. I saw almost--

Michael Aron: Did you enjoy that part of it?

Governor Thomas Kean: I enjoyed getting to know people. I mean, people are great and getting to know people and trying to tell them on a cause is not a bad thing to be doing. And I did enjoy it. Sometimes you don't. I mean, sometimes you run into some people who are just not great people. <laughs> Want to support you, but support you for the wrong reasons, or support you if you promise them something, and so on. It's sort of irritating, but that's not the majority. That's a small fraction of people. And mostly they're good people who want to do right things and they're trying to support you for the right reasons and they become loyal to you in remarkable ways. And it turns out they'll do things for you that you never would expect in terms of their own time and energy. Some cases resources. And that almost always surprised me. <laughs> When I'd hear that somebody had taken time off from their job and working the last week of the campaign full-time for me somewhere. You know, I just thought, "Well, my goodness. That's really extraordinary that somebody would give up a week of pay and a week of everything else and go give up a week's vacation and go work for you." And a lot of people did that.

Michael Aron: Who was your team in that campaign? Who ran the campaign or who was your advisor?

Governor Thomas Kean: My campaign manager, it was Tony Cicatiella. Tony Cicatiella had come into the state to run my campaign for Congress. He was from Ohio, and he represented the Food Council. Nationally. As a representative, what have you. I spoke. I don't know. I guess it's from the legislature, at the Food Council breakfast. And Tony said, "I'd never heard somebody speak like that. And it's interesting what you said and how you said it and so on." And when I ran for Congress, I was looking for somebody to come in and run the campaign. And Tony had been attracted by that one speech that I'd given to the Food Council, and he came in and said, "I'd be a volunteer for the position of campaign manager," and--

Michael Aron: He still likes your speeches 35 years later.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. <laughs> Yeah. He became one of my closest friends. And lived in our house for a while after the campaign. He had no place to live. And he moved in and he didn't have any money rent so he painted our front hall. <laughs> That kind of thing.

Michael Aron: Anybody else in that era?

Governor Thomas Kean: I took a guy off the press corps, called Greg Stevens, who had been the most impressive reporter I'd known. And we haven't talked, I don't think, about the Ford campaign. But that was my first big political job on the state, and I had to pick people for that and I had picked Greg Stevens for that. And--

Michael Aron: Greg had been at the Woodbridge News Tribune.

Governor Thomas Kean: Good for you. Woodbridge News Tribune was right. And what impressed me was when I was out to convention, and that convention was the closest convention in a long, long time, and Reagan almost beat Ford.

Michael Aron: '76.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. At the convention.

Michael Aron: Where was that convention?

Governor Thomas Kean: It was in-- was it Detroit or-- I get confused.

Michael Aron: Detroit was '80.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: Was it '76? I mean, was it San Francisco?

Governor Thomas Kean: It was '76.

Michael Aron: Oh, well.

Governor Thomas Kean: Can't remember was it was. Yeah.

Michael Aron: Okay.

Governor Thomas Kean: I get confused which cities these conventions are in. Wasn't Miami. It was the year before. But anyway, what impressed me was that the press was all-- because it was so close. And New Jersey was a little, I mean, I thought I knew exactly the number of votes I had for Ford. But there was still some undecided delegates and so on. And I remember one time I was taking some delegates over to see Nelson Rockefeller. The idea, he was going to try and convince them to get off the fence. And so we get in the car. The press was all swarming around. And so we're just going, and I was a station wagon. And Greg Stevens said, "If you put the back down, I'll sit on that." <laughs> He hung with his legs over the... <laughs> And I thought, "He's risking his life to get a story." <laughs> Go through traffic. And I was thinking, "Anybody who's got that kind of energy," impressed me. Because he was a guy who really just would go the extra mile working for a tiny paper in the state. But he was frankly a more energetic and a better reporter than the rest of them.

Michael Aron: He's credited with your turnaround in your first year, your first, second year in your political fortune once you became governor. Rightly so?

Governor Thomas Kean: In part, certainly. I mean, he turned out to be a great Chief of Staff. And no. He was an extraordinary, extraordinary help, because he took all the political side away from me. I mean, at least he never took it away from me, but he handled all that. All the county chairmen and so on, which I didn't have a lot of time for when I was trying to run the state. He did all that stuff, and so he kept the political stuff. He got Frank Holman to be Stair Chairman at that point and they just ran the political side. Told me dinners I had to attend, where they really wanted me, and I could worry about running the state. That was a great, great help. No. There were people in that campaign, in that Ford campaign, that moved then right into the--

Michael Aron: Let's go back then to the Ford campaign--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: --a little bit. How is it that you became head of the state effort to-- I guess I was going to say to reelect Ford, but Ford was never elected.

Governor Thomas Kean: Well, yeah. It surprised me, because I assumed, and that's what usually happens, that the State Chairman, the state organization, was going to run the presidential campaign.

Michael Aron: Who was State Chairman?

Governor Thomas Kean: Webster Todd, who was Christie Todd Whitman's father. Who was one of the nicest people you could ever meet in the world. Everybody loved him. But the Ford people in Washington had a supposition that he was weak. And that he had not run a good organization and they didn't want anything to do with <laughs> running the campaign. So my father had been a friend of Gerry Ford's in Congress. They'd served together for 20 years and were close, personal friends. And I'd been the leader of the legislature. Thought I was one of the young, coming Turks in the state and so on. And I guess they knew about it through my father and through other reasons and they called me and fellow who was Ford's Chief of Staff named Dick Cheney, called me and said, "We'd really like you to be the campaign manager." And I said, "What about the state organization?" He said, "We want you to be the campaign manager." And I said, "What kind of authority will I have?" He said, "We will give you a budget and full authority."

Michael Aron: You were the Minority Leader--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes.

Michael Aron: --in the Assembly at the time?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. Yes. Yes.

Michael Aron: Okay.

Governor Thomas Kean: And he said, "Every decision you make, we'll back up. And you'll be total charge of the campaign. All decisions." So I said, "Okay." And we got ourselves little headquarters in Woodbridge, and got Tony and Greg Stevens. Guy called John Labouchere [ph?] later became a congressman from Long Island. And few others. Eleanor Todd, Web's wife, to work in headquarters. Christie's mother, who was terrific. And knew all the women in the state and could just <laughs> get on the phone and everybody who could move anything, Eleanor knew who they were and how to get to them. And I got a lot of experience running that campaign. So whenever the candidate came in to the state, as he did a number of times, because New Jersey's supposed to be a swing state, I was in full charge of where he went, what he did, how it was handled.

Michael Aron: He was President of the United States at the time.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes. So it was very exciting. I mean, he would come into the state, I'd meet him at the airport, get in the car and tell him where to go. And--

Michael Aron: Did you like him?

Governor Thomas Kean: I liked him tremendously. Gerry Ford was one of the nicest people, and I believe had he been reelected would've turned into one this country's great presidents, because he was learning and getting better every month. And people told me that. I'd work with a number of presidents from the White House, Republicans and Democrats, said Gerry Ford grew more in that job than anybody they'd seen. And they said, and I would agree, that had he had a chance for a full term, that he would've been a very, very good president.

Michael Aron: He ran against Reagan in a primary in New Jersey?

Governor Thomas Kean: And nationwide.

Michael Aron: And nationwide.

Governor Thomas Kean: And almost came very close to-- in fact, if New Jersey delegation had split as it was supposed to originally, because the state party decided to do a sort of delegation that hopefully wouldn't result in a primary in the state, and then let the delegates themselves decide who they want to vote for. Now, people knew that probably Webster Todd and some of the others were all going to swing, probably stay with Ford, but there was a whole bunch of people from the counties that nobody knew how they were going to go. And that was a delegation we had to deal with, and that was my job was to get--

Michael Aron: To keep them for Ford at the convention.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. And I'll tell you, there was a moment in New Jersey that nobody knows about that could've changed history. I went to see every one of those delegates. The Reagan people had no informed presence in the state, so they didn't really know these people at all. They didn't have anybody who had been a leader in the legislature or anything in the state. And they had a campaign manager, was a guy, I remember a guy, from Bergen County, who really, he hadn't been active, so he didn't know the state at all. And so I went around to see. And I was basically running in a clear field. Nobody else was doing this. I went and saw each of the, talked these people, into why they should support Ford, why they should support me, why they should support the organization. And I knew a lot of them because I'd been around politics in New Jersey as Minority Leader for a long time. I'd been in all their counties and all their districts. And so anyway, I went and got so I thought we had good least three-quarters of them for Gerry Ford. And I got a call from Reagan's campaign manager. And said, "I know that you're running the Ford campaign and all of that and we don't want to get in your face really. We're not really going to contest New Jersey, barely, but Governor Reagan would love to meet with the delegates. And he's going to be within the state flying in and out. He's coming to Newark Airport, going to do something in New York, but he'll be in New Jersey for an hour or so. And would you consent? Because I know if you tell the delegates not to come, they probably won't come. Will they come?" And I said, "Fine. I'd be honored to have Governor Reagan in the state and meet with the delegates."

Michael Aron: Was that a tough decision?

Governor Thomas Kean: No. He's a presidential candidate. I'm going to stop people from hearing the presidential candidate? <laughs> I thought that was wrong. And so I wasn't worried about it much either, because I'd gotten their commitments. So Reagan came into the airport. Delegation almost all came. In one of those little rooms at one of those airport hotels. And Reagan walked in and gave one of those speeches people found out later that Reagan could give. I didn't remember how good he was. But he was terrific. But I said, "Well, fine." And he left. Then I started getting calls. I'd lost half delegation, and all Reagan had done, speak to them and shake their hand? There was no follow-up or anything? I'd lost half the delegation. And that would've been enough to give Reagan a nomination. So I get back on the road. <laughs> My car. Went back to every one of those <laughs> delegates, re-talked them around, re-talked them into why they should, and we got them all back. But it took probably a month of visiting to do that. And the Reagan people had no idea what his impact had been. No idea that they'd gained delegates. No idea that the New Jersey delegation was in sweat.

Michael Aron: Hmm.

Governor Thomas Kean: Had they realized it, had they followed up, I think Reagan would've been the nominee. And history might've been different. Would have been different.

Michael Aron: Would've been different.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah. But it was an interesting campaign. Because two things happened. One is I learned how to squire a president or nominee around, which I was going to do a lot more time went on. And Ford was so darn honest. You couldn't tell Ford to say anything political. And I remember he was coming into Atlantic City in that campaign. And that was the year that gambling was on the ballot for Atlantic City. So I picked up Ford in Philadelphia driving to Atlantic City for a speech. And I said to him when I picked him up at the plane. I said, "You know, there's this issue on the ballot in New Jersey for gambling." And I said, "Because you're speaking in Atlantic City the first question's going to be, 'How do you feel about gambling?' And your answer's very simple. 'It's a state issue. I'm not going to get involved in state issues. I'm running for president. I have nothing to do with that.'" And I said, "That's an honest answer." Finally said, "Yes, I understand that." And so we got a little closer to Atlantic City. I said, "Mr. President, I just want to remind you. This gambling issue, do not get

involved in it. It's just a state issue. And then go on to questions about the national." "Okay. Fine." So Ford gave his speech in Atlantic City. As I knew it would be, the first question out of the box from the press was, "Mr. President, we've got a gambling referendum on the ballot. How do you feel about gambling?" Ford said, "I really think it's morally wrong."

Michael Aron: <laughs>

Governor Thomas Kean: "And it's going to victimize small people who don't have the <laughs> wherewithal to resist it. And so I think its social policy's a very bad thing. I'd certainly urge people to vote against it." <laughs> And I went, "Ah."

<laughter>

Governor Thomas Kean: To do it in Atlantic City, which was--

Michael Aron: Did it hurt him?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes. But we carried the state anyway. And Dick Cheney called me I guess the day before the election and said, "You've been one of our best state chairmen. I can't tell you what a wonderful job you've done. We've taken our final tracking polls, but you're not quite going to make it. They're going to take New Jersey."

Michael Aron: "They" meaning Reagan or "they" meaning the Democrats in the fall?

Governor Thomas Kean: Democrats. Democrats in the fall. They're going to take--

Michael Aron: Carter?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes. Carter was going to take New Jersey. But Brendan Byrne was very active for Carter, working very hard for Carter. And, "But thank you anyway very, very much, and don't worry about it because our polls show we're going to carry Pennsylvania. So you have a good chance at the election." Course, election day came, we carried New Jersey and lost Pennsylvania. <laughs>

Michael Aron: So you won then?

Governor Thomas Kean: We won it. And unexpectedly, even against the polls. But we worked very, very hard. We had people out in the street. We had all sorts of things. Did things that nobody else had done up to that point. I had one of my nephews coming in and volunteer every morning at five o'clock in the morning. And every day we had him taking a statement because we had surrogates coming into the state. Or I would make a statement or whoever. And it would be a statement why Ford should be elected or why Carter shouldn't be. And we'd turn it into an actuality. And at five every morning we'd feed it out to all these, at that point, hundreds of little stations around, radio stations, around New Jersey, who were really looking for something local in their news. And almost all would run it. So we were in drive time every morning with some. We did that kind of thing, which I don't think anybody else was doing at that point.

Michael Aron: In hindsight, Ford was so hurt by that comment in the debate about Eastern Europe not being under Soviet nomination.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: In your memory of that campaign, was that a major mile post or gap?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. Yeah. It was very difficult. I mean, everybody, all of us who knew Ford, knew what he meant. He didn't mean that. But he said it. And the last time he came into New Jersey, I had him up to Union, and there was a town and campus hotel or something I had him speak in up there. And I asked every ethnic editor of every newspaper-- the Italian Tribune, the Polish _____ and so on. We had about 40 of them. Or 50 of them, maybe-- if they'd come and meet with the president. And they all said, "Yes." And so Reagan came in. I said, "I got the ethnic editors." And the staff said, "He hasn't got time. He's late in his schedule and hasn't got time to do it." And I said, you know, he made this remark. "I've got every, you know, you can have the week before the election, you can have the front page of every ethnic newspaper in the state whose editors are going to have time with the president." I said, "That'll make a difference." They said, "Well, thank you for doing it. We just haven't got time." So Reagan finished speaking, and I said, "Mr. President--"

Michael Aron: Ford.

Governor Thomas Kean: Ford. I'm sorry. I keep saying Reagan. Ford.

Michael Aron: Yeah, Ford.

Governor Thomas Kean: Ford. Yeah. Ford. I said, "Mr. President, your staff tells me you don't have time to do this. Let me tell you what I've done. I've got these 40 or 50 ethnic editors. Every ethnic paper in the state waiting two rooms away who want to spend half an hour or 45 minutes with you and ask you a few questions on your remarks in the debate and other things." I said, "If you do that, I will guarantee you the front page of almost every one if not every one of those newspapers a week before the election." And Ford said, "Great." And I said, "Your staff tells me you don't have time." He looked behind at one of the staff members and said, "I have time." <laughs> And so I took him in. He met with all 40 or 50 ethnic editors. He was on the front page a week before the election of almost every one of those papers. If nothing else, it's one of the reasons we carried New Jersey. <phone>

Michael Aron: You say that Dick Cheney was the campaign manager.

Governor Thomas Kean: No. He was the Chief of Staff in the White House.

Michael Aron: Chief of Staff at the White House.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. So he was the one really.

Michael Aron: What was your feeling about him at the time?

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, I liked working with him. He was one of the bright, young people. And he wasn't the Dick Cheney he became. He was the Dick Cheney who was the youngest Chief of Staff probably in American history. He was the Dick Cheney who then went to the house and was the youngest leader ever elected by either party in the house at that point, and elected after a shorter time than anybody else, which shows the respect he had among his colleagues. I liked him. I liked him very much. We had a few differences <laughs> over the years, but--

Michael Aron: Did he change a lot or is he more misunderstood and characterized as something he's not?

Governor Thomas Kean: That's a very good question. I'm not sure. I think he changed. But then I haven't been close to him in recent years. People who are very close to him are saying they don't think he changed that much. But he would seem to have hardened on his positions. And become a more sort of domineering kind of force. With me, he was always, "What do you think we ought to do? If that's what you think, go ahead and do it." He was very, very-- and he was always trying to give me money. I mean, I remember that campaign and I kept saying, "I don't need it. We're doing fine." And he said, "You're the only state who's turned back money." <laughs> So he was trying to do everything he could to help and letting me run it. He was totally, totally, "It's your campaign in New Jersey. You know what to do; we don't know what to do." And a couple of the other interesting things that campaign, Bob Dole came in, who was the vice presidential candidate. And I had two stops for him. In those days the presidents and vice presidents didn't have-- even though Ford had been shot at-- didn't have the security. I took Ford to the Bergen Mall and walked him through the crowds in the mall. Yeah, we're surrounded by sort of a bubble of Secret Service, but you can imagine where security has come today, you just couldn't have done that. And Dole I had the same kind of things for. And then the last minute he said he was going to stay, he could do one more stop. And I said, "Well, let me think about what that ought to be." The Mercer County Republic Chairman has got one for us. Said, "What?" Well, it then was a fair of some sort in the fall in Mercer County. So we'll come to that and they've got a racetrack and they got grandstands. I said, "I don't know anything about that." And they said, "Well, don't worry. It's one thing you don't have to worry about. We'll do it." So I took him to his first two stops, which were enormously successful. Took him to the last one, Mercer County, at this county fair. And here was the racetrack, and they put him in the car, riding in front of the grandstands. Only one problem. There was nobody in the grandstands except about five people. So the picture from the other side was Dole going like this--

Michael Aron: <laughs>

Governor Thomas Kean: --waving in the car to nobody. <laughs> Front page of the Times. <laughs> They fired his campaign manager the next day, that week, who was running Dole's part of the campaign for it all, and it was... <laughs> Put somebody else in charge.

Michael Aron: So when you ran for governor against Bateman in '77, you were coming off of a very intense experience.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: There wasn't a whole lot of down time between '76 presidential election and a primary in '77.

Governor Thomas Kean: No. And I basically brought that young staff with me, most of them, who had worked for the Ford campaign.

Michael Aron: Cicatiella, Stevens.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah. And they, they sort of moved right in. So it was, from that point of view, it was a fairly smooth thing.

Michael Aron: How was the campaign against Bateman? I imagine it was a high-level campaign--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: --knowing the two of you.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. We did some new things. I was the first candidate in New Jersey ever to use television in a primary. But our biggest problem we had was money. Ray, because he was the establishment candidate. Was able to just, on the phone, bring in what in those days, huge amounts of money. And I remember, we went on television to show the power of that medium even in those days. I went on television and ran free, because he wasn't, nobody else was, on television, nobody else ever had been in a primary. I went from about 10 points behind in the polls to seven points ahead, overnight, after those television ads. The only problem was we used all our money to do that. <laughs> And I was obviously not the favorite. All the people who want to <inaudible> give to people because they want to know somebody after they get elected weren't interested in giving to me, because chances were I wasn't going to be elected. Because with 2 county chairmen out of 21, the chances were not great. And so we were getting our contributions of \$20 and \$50 and \$10, that kind of thing. Ray, I remember at one point, picked up the phone, I guess, and got I think it was 20 people to pledge, I think it was something which in those days was a lot of money to me, 20 to 30 thousand dollars each. And just overwhelmed us. I mean, the end, he went, because of television and himself, we couldn't match it or even come close to matching it. But it was interesting. I mean, I was the anti-organization candidate in almost every one of the counties, and that was... <sighs>

Michael Aron: What'd you lose by?

Governor Thomas Kean: Quite a bit. <laughs> I mean, I did better than people expected. It's always, politics is always, a game of expectations. And you always want to do better than they expected. And they did better than expected. But I didn't do very well. I mean, Ray, Ray won most of the campaign. In the process though, I think he damaged himself because that was the year of the income tax. And I said that I didn't like the present income tax. And that if elected, I was going to change it, particularly in regard to school aid. And we'd repeal it and get something new. I remember going to Passaic County to debate Ray. Passaic County was in Republican side, don't know if it still is, one of the most conservative counties in the state. And we were debating it and Ray said, "I will abolish income tax. We will not have an income tax in the state if I'm governor." And I couldn't say that, <laughs> because I thought, "How you going to replace the school aid? I mean, what are you going to do?" <laughs> And so he carried Passaic County after that. Carried the convention, carried everything. But he got hard in that primary on the income tax and the idea that he was going to get rid of it and not replace it. And I think had a Republican candidate been able to run that year on modifying the income tax and changing it in ways that would've made it better and fairer, that he could've won. But-- <recording glitch 17:27 to 17:31; repeats audio from 16:38 to 17:27; resumes at 18:20> taking that hard position that you were going to abolish income tax made people, "So how you going to replace it?" You know, "What are you going to do?" And then when you tried to come up with things, they weren't always credible.

Michael Aron: The famous Bateman-Simon _____--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: --three or four months later.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah. But the roots came in that primary where he really, really came out much harder than I could come on the income tax itself.

Michael Aron: By running for governor, you automatically forfeited your right to run for reelection as an assemblyman, but you told us already that you--

Governor Thomas Kean: Had made that--

Michael Aron: --had decided.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, that decision came first.

Michael Aron: Okay.

Governor Thomas Kean: <Inaudible>.

Michael Aron: And on primary day in June of '77, you say that one assumed that the Republican winner was going to beat Brendan Byrne in the fall.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Aron: Then what happened?

Governor Thomas Kean: Well, after you lose a primary, you go away. <laughs> So my wife and I went away. Got out of the state.

Michael Aron: Where'd you go?

Governor Thomas Kean: Went to a place that she'd been as a child called Fishers Island that she loved.

Michael Aron: Off New York, part of New York?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. Part of New York, off New London Connecticut. You get there by ferry. And she had a couple of old friends there because she'd been there as a child.

Michael Aron: You used to go there as governor and the press used to--

Governor Thomas Kean: That's right.

Michael Aron: --twick you for it.

Governor Thomas Kean: Used to twick me for--

Michael Aron: For not going to the Jersey Shore.

Governor Thomas Kean: Exactly right. And after that we've sort of gone up on a regular basis, but this was first time we'd ever gone, and she took me away sort of as a rescuer <laughs> campaigning. Because it wasn't that I'd lost a primary. That was not unexpected. But I had to stop and think what I was going to do at that point. Because I've been in politics now for 10 years, in legislature for 10 years. I was running a small business but it's not what I want to do with my life. So had to give it some thought.

Michael Aron: How much time did you spend at Fishers Island?

Governor Thomas Kean: I guess about three weeks. Sort of recovering from everything. And then we came back to New Jersey. And I remember, the next day, I got in the car all by myself and drove to the Bateman headquarters. Knocked the door and said, "What do you want me to do?" And they had no idea what to do with me. That you sort of don't expect, <laughs> I don't think. The campaign people didn't expect me to suddenly knock on the door and say, "Put me to work. What can I do?"

Michael Aron: Was that something that you had arrived at while on Fishers Island, that you--

Governor Thomas Kean: No. I'd been brought up in politics that way. I mean, as long as it's fair and decent, and Ray Bateman was a very good friend. I think Ray Bateman would've made a great governor. And so I thought, "That's my obligation." I don't know whether I wanted to do it or not. It was my obligation to, to do everything I could for him.

Michael Aron: Was it also implicitly a decision on your part to stay in politics?

Governor Thomas Kean: No. No. Just to work for Ray. In fact, I didn't want a position in the administration when he won. And I remember that he said to me, late in the campaign, he said, "I want you very close to me when I'm elected." And I said, "Well, we'll talk about that when you're elected." <laughs> But I wouldn't have taken it. I didn't want to be a member of the Cabinet or what have you, or

Chief of-- I don't know. I don't even know what he had in mind for me when he was... I know Bill Taggart, who was very close Ray at that point and working for him, said, "Ray wants you right in the governor's office with him working on policy." So I don't know whether he had visions--

Michael Aron: Why didn't you want to?

Governor Thomas Kean: I'd never worked for anybody else in my life. Strange thing to say. I don't mean to be that arrogant, but I never had. Had always been my own boss, so... Ever since I used to run that camp. I mean, I ran a small business, you know, leader in the legislature. I'd never really ever worked for somebody else. And I knew, I knew what that meant. That if you accept a position in an administration you've got to do everything that leader wants, whether you agree or not. I just didn't want to do that. I mean, I thought I'd agree with Ray on most things, but I just didn't want to do it. I didn't want to commute to Trenton every day either. I mean, we lived in Livingston. It's an hour and a quarter, an hour and a half away, depending on the traffic. Just not what I wanted to do. So I would not have done that.

Michael Aron: Before we get to what you did do, and I think we're going to take a break shortly, but let me just ask you about that campaign. Why did Brendan Byrne, who was expected to lose, win a second term and Ray Bateman failed at unseating him?

Governor Thomas Kean: <sighs> Obviously, as everybody says, the lack of credibility in income tax issue was a big thing. And Brendan turned out to be a very good and a tough candidate, which nobody expected. He'd never really had to run before. I mean, he'd run against a guy called Charlie Sandman the first time and Sandman proved to be no competition whatsoever. So he never really had to do a campaign. And so nobody thought at that point Brendan was a very good speaker. He was unpopular in the state. And I don't think people expected him to put together a very good campaign. But thanks to Herald Hodes and Dick Leone and a number of people who were with him at that point, he developed into a very, very fine candidate. Ray had problems. I don't think he had the very best campaign staff around him. He was too dominated by Republican county chairmen, who may be good in their own counties but aren't always very good. <laughs> They could look at the state picture as a whole. He had very few people with him who understood I think the kind of state New Jersey is outside the Republican party, you know, the kind of things you... Candidate you've got to be if you really want to win a majority in the state and not just win the Republican side. I think they took it for

granted, frankly. I think they thought, they read, the polls. And thinking, "We're going to be elected." And I was, when I went into that headquarters and started volunteering, there were too many people in headquarters talking about what their jobs were going to be. Frankly. And, "What I'm going to be. Am I going to be in the Cabinet? Am I going to be this, I going to be that?" That's what they talk about. And I thought, <laughs> "That's not good," but... So I don't think he had the best group of people. But he had some young people who I got very close to. That was the time Roger Bodman and I became friends. The guy who drove me around when I was speaking was a young guy called Chris Daggett. I liked those two tremendously at the time. Al Fasola was another guy who was working for Ray at that time who I really liked. Bobby Franks, who I'd known for a long time, but had been very involved with the Bateman campaign at that point.

Michael Aron: And all of these would become key members of your--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: --team in the next decade.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. What I did is, frankly, after Ray lost, and I did decide, which took me a while to decide to run four years later, I cherry picked. I mean, I knew, because in volunteering for that campaign being in the headquarters, he had a lot of people, frankly, who I thought were totally incompetent. <laughs> Really incompetent. Important jobs in that campaign. But he also had this young group. Was the Daggetts and the Bodmans and young, young-- could be Bateman. And a bunch of people who I really liked. And I thought, "These people--" a young Chris Brady, their people were good and they were young and they were energetic. So I wanted these people in my campaign and I frankly went on a, once I decided to run, went on a personal campaign to try and talk them into my campaign. And because we had worked closely together on Ray's campaign and liked each other in the process, it wasn't too hard.

Michael Aron: Governor, what did you do from '77 to '81?

Governor Thomas Kean: Well, I stayed with my little real estate firm, generally. And then did a bunch of things that sort of interested me. I became a commentator for "New Jersey Nightly News." I used to do a-- Dick Leone, who had been Brendan Byrne's treasurer, and I had become friends over the years. And Dick and I had a back-and-forth. <snaps> A Conservative-Liberal kind of a thing, although it wasn't

always Conservative-Liberal, it was... But we'd find ways to disagree on whatever the subject was. <phone> And so we did that. I covered the--

Michael Aron: Once or twice a week on the news?

Governor Thomas Kean: Once a week.

Michael Aron: Once a week.

Governor Thomas Kean: No. Maybe it's twice. Maybe it's more than that. It may have been two or three times a week. Yes. It was more often than that. Yeah. And we enjoyed doing it. We became closer friends in the process and we found out, by the way, that we got to be better known than we thought. Now, I thought, you know, New Jersey Network is a great institution, but we thought, "How is--" you know, people were really recognizing us. And what we didn't realize was that in those days, they would put our commentary on just before they gave the lottery results. And so we were probably among the most watched <laughs> things on the network. But we did it for a number of years and it was fun to do and they taught me, what it taught me, was how to do television. Because I remember we had a head of New Jersey Network at that point, or either the News Bureau, maybe it was, remember his name.

Michael Aron: Herb Bloom.

Governor Thomas Kean: Herb Bloom. Really sat me down and said, "No, you don't--" you know, I was trying to be Walter Cronkite. I was saying, <gruff voice> "No. This is what we're going to--" And he said, "No, no, no." <laughs> "Calm down and talk naturally," and so on. He just really taught me how to do television.

Michael Aron: Was keeping your statewide profile high a motivation for doing this or...

Governor Thomas Kean: No. I think it was--

Michael Aron: Or a result of doing it?

Governor Thomas Kean: I think, yeah. I think it was a result of doing it, but I was doing it as a result of having a statewide profile. I mean, I think New Jersey Net was looking for somebody to represent the Republican side who wasn't in office. Who nevertheless knew the issues and was somebody who was accepted by the party. And I fitted that category, as Dick Leone fitted it for the Democrats, since he'd left state government also. And there weren't lot of other choices, I don't think, if they wanted to do that kind of a program. And for me, I enjoyed sort of keeping my hand, in a sense, in the issues. And I knew that my old friends in legislature listened to us <laughs> and would comment. And it was fun. It was fun. I enjoyed doing it with Dick. We're still pretty good friends to this day.

Michael Aron: You ran for the U.S. Senate nomination in '78 against Bill Bradley and failed. I suppose that this started after that.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes. Started after.

Michael Aron: Yeah.

Governor Thomas Kean: It was a great shock to Dick, because this is what <inaudible>. He was the point man for Governor Byrne. So people who needed things in administration came to Dick. And if you haven't been around government, he hadn't been. He was a graduate of Woodrow Wilson School and he hadn't been around politics or government that much. Dick, Dick thought these people were all his best friends. And so when he ran for senate, he thought they'd all support him. <laughs> And I remember talking to him. He said, "They're all bums." <laughs> He said, "They were all coming in because they wanted something out of Byrne. <laughs> Well, as soon as I was out of the administration they didn't have the time of day for me. Bradley was heading the polls. I said, 'Bother Bradley.'" <laughs> So it was a lesson for Dick as to what politics can be really like. But the thing I did do is I kept doing my party chores. Because I wanted to keep alive. I didn't know whether I wanted to run for governor or not and... Again. But I wanted to keep alive the possibility. So I kept on accepting invitations to the small Republican clubs around the state. I kept contact with the kind of people that supported me in the last campaign. And we'd talk about it and so I was out least a couple of nights a week, going to some Republican affair or other. I was always at the big affairs. I had a debt left over from the campaign. Gerry Ford was nice enough to come in and do a dinner for me. And we made up the debt that evening.

Michael Aron: You came to New Jersey in '78, which was when you and Dick Leone probably started that. And I used to watch the news every night because I needed to. And I'm now in the position that Herb Bloom was--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: --in then.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: And I would just like to say, for the record, that that was pretty good stuff you and Dick Leone--

Governor Thomas Kean: Well...

Michael Aron: --use to dish out. And then--

Governor Thomas Kean: Well, yeah.

Michael Aron: --if I could find two people as high level as the two of you today, I'd love to have them on regularly.

Governor Thomas Kean: <laughs> Yeah. Well, it was fun. We did get a viewing. I knew a lot of people watched, because they'd comment on it to us. And it was fun. It's like it's fun because you had to keep your hand in the issues. You had to recognize what was going on. You had to be quick enough to comment against a very bright guy. We didn't rehearse ahead of time what we were going to say to each other. We just, we'd let us know the topic, and then we'd go at it. And so I never knew what Dick was going to say, he didn't know what I was going to say, and Dick was very bright, still is very bright. So it wasn't easy. <laughs> And he's also got a good sense of humor, which is a little difficult sometimes too to deal with. <laughs>

Michael Aron: So you ran your real estate business, you stayed active in Republican politics, you did some television commentary. Was there anything else in that period of time?

Governor Thomas Kean: Almost accepted a job as-- that was the period I almost accepted a job with the Metropolitan Opera. I was looking. I was looking for what I wanted to do with my life at that point. And--

Michael Aron: When did you decide you wanted to run for governor again?

Governor Thomas Kean: Fairly late. I remember having dinner in New York with Dick Leone. And certain things stand out in that year before. And we were talking. Dick didn't know what he was going to do with his life at that point. Because he was also at a crossroads. I said I didn't want to stay, I didn't want to run that little real estate firm, much as I liked it, for much longer. And I was talking about some of the things that I might do. And Dick was talking about some of the things he might do.

Michael Aron: When do you think this was?

Governor Thomas Kean: <sighs> Probably in 1980. And I said, you know, one of the things I was thinking of doing, obviously, is re-running for governor. And Dick said, "Is there anything right now you want to do more than that?" And I said, "No. I haven't got anything else I really want to do at this point." He said, "Then do it." <laughs> He said, "Do it." Ah, I thought about it in those terms. I mean, this is, of all the possibilities, what would running for governor again mean? And I got closer and closer to doing it, and, of course, again, I had these wonderful people who have been with me way back in some cases since the Ford campaign or... And Carl Golden, people like that, who are urging me. And I gradually came around to the fact that I probably ought to do it. It was again, you know, the party never supported me. I mean, I could not get the support again of a party organization. I think that when I first ran I had two county chairman. This time I think I got four. Out of 21.

Michael Aron: Course, there were many candidates.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. Oh, yes.

Michael Aron: Seven or eight.

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, yes. That's right. That's right.

Michael Aron: Okay.

Governor Thomas Kean: The favorite candidate was a guy called Pat Kramer, who had been a very good mayor of Paterson, Republican mayor of Paterson. And had the support of the business community, all the top people in Newark and all of that. Ran the firm, supported Pat. And another guy from my own county, which is always difficult, called Bo Sullivan, who had been a successful businessman, and Bo had a lot of money and was spending a lot of money. So he didn't. He was going to outspend everybody. And everybody knew that was always difficult. Bo was an attractive guy too. And then there were a bunch of others in the race who were good people. I mean, Rich McGlynn had been friend of mine for a long time, but decided he wanted to be governor. Tony Imperiale, who added some spice and interest to the...

<laughter>

Governor Thomas Kean: To the race. Was seven of us. Barry Parker. Who'd been a friend of mine from the legislature for a long time. Carl Golden worked for him in the primary.

Michael Aron: Hmm.

Governor Thomas Kean: And--

Michael Aron: Had Carl Golden worked for your '77--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes. Yeah.

Michael Aron: --run?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes.

Michael Aron: Had he worked on the Ford campaign in '76?

Governor Thomas Kean: No. He was in the legislature then still, I think. I think with the legislature, I think that was the position Greg Stevens did.

Michael Aron: Okay.

Governor Thomas Kean: But it was a time when a lot of in my mind very, very good people who had supported me at one time or another, who said basically, "We don't care what our county organization thinks. We want you to do it and we're for you." And I was able to combine those people who had always been with me with people who I'd gotten to know in the Bateman campaign. Like Chris Daggett. And I went on a real campaign to woo Roger Bodman. Because I knew how important a campaign manager was. I didn't have one. Nobody had one. <laughs> Nobody had somebody who was good and who could do it. And I'd worked with Roger in the Bateman campaign. He was then Jim Courter's AA in Washington. And I thought he would be the best person. Which meant that I had to go and woo Jim Courter to get Roger Bodman. And so I did. And ended up getting the two of them, which was terrific. Because Roger became my campaign manager and Jim Courter became my overall campaign chairman.

Michael Aron: He was a congressman at the time.

Governor Thomas Kean: He was a congressman at the time. Yeah.

Michael Aron: I remember that the presidential convention of 1980 was a place where the Republican candidates for governor started making their intentions known, Bo Sullivan through a--

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: --fancy party, Pat Kramer probably through a--

Governor Thomas Kean: He did.

Michael Aron: --reception as well.

Governor Thomas Kean: They all threw parties. They all threw parties.

Michael Aron: You were there as a commentator for NJN.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: People sometimes joke about that, that the other guys spent all the money--

Governor Thomas Kean: That's right. <laughs>

Michael Aron: --throw the beach parties, but you were the one who was seen back home on television.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Aron: Some truth to that?

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, yes. <laughs>

Michael Aron: By design, was it?

Governor Thomas Kean: No, no. Not by design. I was asked to do it and I hadn't been... I'd been, because party the NJN thing, I hadn't been active in partisan politics, in a sense, that much that year at all. And I didn't... One, I couldn't have competed with some of the parties that size, and two, I'd never liked them. And I'd never thought that did much good or was what you should be doing to run for office. And NJN gave me an excuse not to do it. But I was fairly good. I interviewed them all. <Laugh>

Michael Aron: Covered.

Governor Thomas Kean: Covered, covered.

Michael Aron: You interviewed your rivals?

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, yeah, covered the party. See, I hadn't declared for anything yet. I don't know if I'd even decided to run at that point yet.

Michael Aron: Really.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. I mean, that was very much in my mind, but I know I hadn't made a final decision.

Michael Aron: Do you remember when you did make a final decision?

Governor Thomas Kean: Pretty late, pretty late.

Michael Aron: What does that mean, December, January?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, in that period. Yeah. Some of the others already declared, and I knew at that point that I wasn't going to get the party support again, although I also knew that I was going to get more than I had the time before. And, yeah, I think people thought it was going to be between Pat Kramer, Bo Sullivan. I mean, there wasn't a poll between the time I declared, and the primary, and the general election that showed me ahead; never showed me ahead in the primary, never showed me ahead in the general.

Michael Aron: Really.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. One of the reasons-- we used to wonder why I didn't have a great use for pollsters, and the reason was I never found them to be that accurate, as far as I was concerned in my campaigns.

Michael Aron: Do you remember when you declared your candidacy?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. I guess it was around end of January, beginning of February.

Michael Aron: Do you remember where?

Governor Thomas Kean: No. I remember making the first television promo, but I don't even remember where our center was in Essex County, probably at the Livingston Holiday Inn, or somewhere around there. Generally most candidates declare around their home base, and I think I probably did. It was very important

for me because, see, Bo Sullivan tried to buy my county away from me. If I hadn't had my home county support it would have made it almost impossible to run.

Michael Aron: Who was the county chairman then?

Governor Thomas Kean: The county chairman was John Renna.

Michael Aron: Still.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes.

Michael Aron: He was a long standing.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes.

Michael Aron: He served for a long time as county chairman.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, and nobody.

Michael Aron: You put him your cabinet eventually.

Governor Thomas Kean: I did, yeah, that's right. Nobody needs money more than a Republican Chairman of Essex County, and Bo was his biggest contributor by far for every one of his dinners, for every one of his fundraisers, had been for about three, four years. And so I looked at Renna and I thought, "I don't know. This guy's good." He's funding the party organization, and he thinks that means he's going to get their support. Maybe he's right.

Michael Aron: What did Renna do?

Governor Thomas Kean: Renna supported me, and I think it was tough for him, because a lot of his own people in his county-- I remember his town chairman said, "You know, we depend on Sullivan to run the party here, and you're going to support this other guy."

Michael Aron: What were your personal relations with Pat Kramer and Bo Sullivan at that point in time?

Governor Thomas Kean: I didn't have many relationships with Bo Sullivan, because he had been-- you know, at some of the fundraisers that I attended, he would have five tables, or whatever, you know, but I didn't know him that well. I knew Pat Kramer. I'd always gotten along with Pat. Pat and I were sort of the same stripe, Republican, and agreed on most things, and I guess I'd helped him out from time to time while I was in the legislature.

Michael Aron: What were you running on or as in that primary?

Governor Thomas Kean: I guess I was running as a middle of the roader, I think. I mean, there were people running certainly far to the right of me. Bo Sullivan, I remember, he and a couple of other people were competing for the Right to Life vote, and I don't remember who the Right to Life candidate was, but Bo coming in and saying, "I'd forbid all abortions, any time, not affecting the life of the mother, or rape, or incest, anything." I thought, "Ooh." But he was competing with someone, who the other person was. There was somebody else in the race competing for the Right to Life vote.

Michael Aron: Were you pro-choice at that time?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. You know, and that was difficult, because I've always been pro-choice, because I've never been able to bring myself to tell a woman what to do, even though I'm antiabortion myself. I don't like the whole thing, but, you know, I've just never believed you should tell another person what to do. I'm also a Libertarian in a lot of other ways. And I remember a couple of county chairman came to see me, including the county chairman of Middlesex, and this was a primary that was going to be very close. And they said, "Will you spend some time with us and hear a little bit about Right to Life?" "Sure." So they took me, brought somebody from national who talked to me, showed me some of those awful movies of fetuses and all that, and said, you know, "If you support Right to Life, I will guarantee you Middlesex County," and I think two other counties.

Michael Aron: Who's saying this?

Governor Thomas Kean: The county chairman of Middlesex. And, you know, Right to Life has always been very strong in the Republican Party. And they said,

“We want to support you, but we need you to be Right to Life, and we support you in every other way.” And so I went home and thought about it, and just couldn’t do it. I called him up the next day and said, “Look, we’ll just have to disagree on this.” And he went out and supported somebody else. I don’t think it was Bo. I don’t remember who the other one was, but there was somebody else in that race who was also strongly.

Michael Aron: Wallwork.

Governor Thomas Kean: No, Wallwork wasn’t. Wallwork was the con-- well, it was a funny campaign. He ran as the most conservative candidate, except his wife wouldn’t let him be Right to Life. I think it was his wife, so he never was Right to Life.

Michael Aron: Jim Wallwork we’re talking about. He was also from Essex County.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes. He was my state senator. I was in the Assembly for years, and years, and years. He was my commander when I was in the National Guard. Yeah. He was at West Point. That’s why we all hated him. You know how National Guard guys are. He’d come, you know, spit and polished, and say, “Hey, you’re boots aren’t polished enough,” and so. We didn’t like that at all, so I like when he ran against me. I think I got the whole National Guard vote.

Michael Aron: Why do you think you won that primary?

Governor Thomas Kean: I had by far the best campaign. People said sort of walked in the door, you know, people like Lenny Coleman, and people I didn’t know that well, sort of moved in, walked in that campaign to volunteer, just because they liked the kind of things I was saying. I had a better kind of campaign operation. I already had a base. I had a very strong conservative support. I mean Jack Kemp came in, that kind of conservative, not the social issue conservative, but the economic conservatives. Jack Kemp came into campaign for me in the primary. This is a Republican candidate for president coming into a primary to campaign for somebody because he liked what I was saying about I was going to bring the cities back, which everybody else in the campaign thought I was crazy in a primary talking about cities, but Jack Kemp, yeah, Kemp. Fact, I talked about having enterprise zones, and Kemp came and campaigned for me, because of some of those positions. And so I think I had better positions on some things that attracted people. I had a conservative base of support, based on those people who had been

for me for a long time, because they thought of me as antiestablishment. I'm still the antiestablishment candidate, and I certainly wasn't being supported by the establishment of the Republican Party that was supporting Pat Kramer. And I think I did well in things like debates, and those kind of things. There were seven of us. We traveled like some kind of a pack, and it was funny. I mean, poor Rich McGlynn I think who ended up spending more money than anybody had in a primary and got less votes for the money, and Tony Imperiale, who was, you know, sort of half a joke, but not a real joke, because he was a racist in the process. But I remember going into Princeton one night with him in that primary, and seven of us would give answers to everything. And a woman asked us how we felt on the death penalty, and so everybody in a Republican primary, most people were generally supportive, and Tony Imperiale was the last one. He looked and said, "You know, getting sort of dark out there. You know, all these people are telling you how strong they are in law enforcement, death penalty, and everything else. You know, it might not be too safe out there, you know. You all have to get home tonight. Would you rather go home with one of these guys or with Tony?" So he had his serious moments, but it was an interesting campaign, and we all interestingly enough one of the best things I did in that campaign, which I've always been able to do with campaigns, which other people don't, I don't know why, but other people don't seem to be able to do it. I've generally made friends with my opponents in a funny way. For instance, when I ran for governor, almost every democratic opponent I had for the Assembly ended up supporting me in my Assembly races. And in that primary, when we finished, Pat Kramer-- first of all Bo Sullivan, which was very gracious, brought over his whole family to my campaign headquarters that night to pledge their support. Pat Kramer called me the next morning and said, "I'm going to have a barbecue at my house Saturday night, next Saturday night. I'm inviting all seven of us, and each of us wants to tell you how we're going to help you." And so we did that. We had a barbecue at Pat's house, and every candidate, including Wallwork, who I don't think loved me, because we'd been from the same legislative district, even in the Assembly, and I think he always resented the fact that I would be the nominee. But they all pledged. I had a totally united party the week after the election, which usually a candidate has to work a while to get a party united, and some of them didn't like each other, but they all seemed to get along with me.

Michael Aron: Were you perceived as the ethics in government candidate in that field?

Governor Thomas Kean: You know, I suppose, because I'd been interested in a lot of that. I mean, in the legislature I had been known for that, and I'd talk about it some. And I guess in that-- yeah, probably in that field.

Michael Aron: Does it help, do you think?

Governor Thomas Kean: I like to think it does. I never know. I mean, a lot of candidates run on ethics, and they'll do very well. I wish they did, so it's definitely part of my campaign, definitely part of my presentation very often. But I really don't know. The issue became in that campaign, even more so in the general election, became jobs. We were in the worst recession since the Great Depression at that point, and New Jersey had factories closing. When we were campaigning, one of my ads was done in a spot in Bergen County where there had been an automobile factory, and there was grass growing in the parking lot. I did my campaign and showing the grass and saying, "You know, if I'm governor, we're going to have new jobs in this place."

Michael Aron: While seven of you on the Republican side were running around, I believe eleven Democrats were competing for the nomination. Congressman Jim Florio, who had also run in '77 won that primary. How did you regard him at that point in time?

Governor Thomas Kean: We'd served in the legislature together, and we got along. He wasn't my best friend. We disagreed strongly on some issues, always had. I knew he was tough. I knew he was hard. I knew he was going to have support of his party. I mean, he was the favorite, I think, all along, so opposed to our primary, I think a favorite emerged at the end of theirs. And I knew it would be a very, very tough campaign, plus which because of the recession, and because believe it or not Ronald Reagan was unpopular at that point. This was the beginning of the administration, the middle of a recession, and people looked-- he'd been in office a year, I guess, and the economy is getting worse, not better, and people always blame the incumbent. So he was well below fifty percent at that point in the polls. In fact, interestingly enough, it's hard to think of now, reckoning how popular Reagan became, that my campaign people asked me not to have him in, thought he would be a liability.

Michael Aron: Did he come in or not?

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, yeah. I said, "You're crazy." President of the United States wants to come and you're going to tell him to stay out? So I said, "Yeah, of course," and Ronnie came in.

Michael Aron: Well, that would happen twenty years later. People didn't want George W. Bush to come in and campaign for them at the end of his presidency, or Bill Clinton, maybe, at the end of his presidency.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. Well, that's true. I thought it was insane, so if the president wants to come in, I think we always should welcome the president. But as long as the president realizes you might disagree. But Reagan, there was about a month or so in the White House he wasn't speaking to me, because he had a fellow called James Watt in his cabinet. Now, I've always been Constitutionally an environmentalist, a conservationist in those days, before it was ever anything. I mean, I always loved the outdoors. I loved to get involved. I think every important environmental bill in my time in the legislature I sponsored and wrote a lot of them. And so most people would tell you in those years I was the leading environmentalist in the legislature, and perhaps in the state. And this guy, Watt, was just the opposite. So somebody asked me what I'd do about Watt, and I said, "He's an abomination. He should be fired."

Michael Aron: He was Interior Secretary.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. I said I'd get rid of him very fast. And the White House didn't like a Republican candidate saying you should fire a member of his cabinet, and so he just cut off communications. So usually I could call the White House and get a little help here or there, nothing for a month or so. It was a punishment.

Michael Aron: But all was forgiven by the time you were the nominee?

Governor Thomas Kean: No, no. This was after I was the nominated, yeah, after I was nominated. Oh, yeah, oh, yes, yeah. No, no. It was over the summer, and by the fall they were fine, I think, and I wasn't going to back off. I mean, I thought I would have fired Watt. I mean, I think he was a bad guy, certainly for anybody interested in the environment. But the other thing I did in that campaign that the Republicans thought was foolish was I guess it was called in those days the "moral majority," or whatever. And they said they wanted to come endorse me as their Republican candidate, and I said publicly I would not accept their endorsement, because I didn't agree with them or believe in what they stood for. And people thought I'd committed suicide, because they thought this was a national thing. They thought I was going to get Christians mad at me, or whatever. Didn't make any difference, I don't think.

Michael Aron: The moral majority are what we would call today social conservatives?

Governor Thomas Kean: No. It was the Christian Right. Who was it, Jerry Falwell at that point, maybe, or one of those people was head of it. I just didn't agree with them on anything, and I didn't see why I was going to accept an endorsement from somebody I thought who'd drive away the center, who were the very people I was trying to campaign to get.

Michael Aron: You say that we were in a deep recession. Reagan was unpopular, and yet we had just had eight years of Democratic governance at the state level. Were you counting on some kind of natural swing, a natural pendulum swing back to Republicanism?

Governor Thomas Kean: I thought I was probably going to lose. I wasn't counting on anything. I'm sort of a natural pessimist anyway, and things like that. And, you know, I was going to give it my best, but, you know, I believed both, in a sense, in a way. I mean, everybody said I was going to lose. The Democrats were running pretty well nationwide. I ended up being the only statewide Republican to win that year, and I just, you know, I was not optimistic about the thing. Florio was ducking me every chance he got.

Michael Aron: Did you want to debate him?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. Well, he finally agreed to a debate and then he scheduled it in August, because he figured nobody was back from vacation. Nobody was paying attention that early. I think he said he'd do two or three debates, something or other, but very much his schedule just to agree with him, so we debated in August in Monmouth County. And Jim was a tough guy and a good debater, and I'd been known sort of as a nice guy, maybe not the greatest speaker in the world. And everybody assumed that Jim was going to really take me apart in that debate, and he didn't. I think I won it, but at least I ran way ahead of expectations. And even though it was August, and even though it wasn't covered that much, that was a huge turning point in the campaign. I was still maybe fifteen points behind the polls at that point, but that debate really resonated. It was early enough to resonate, so it changed a lot of perceptions, and I think that was the point at which I started to really come up in the polls, after that debate. In retrospect it was a bad decision by Jim. He should have debated me later rather than earlier, because he gave me a chance to get some credibility quite early on. And I think Jim made a lot of mistakes in that campaign, but that was one of them.

Michael Aron: What was another one?

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, he's fixated on keeping a schedule. You know, he always tried to be, you know, do his ten stops in a day, and twenty minutes in each one, and what have you.

Michael Aron: Well, you were famous for being the opposite.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Aron: You were dilly dallying at every stop in order to shake every last hand.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. I think you should spend time with people, and I think you don't make much of an impression just speaking, running in and out of a meeting. I think when you stay and talk to people they get to know you, what you stand for, what you believe in, and if you answer all they're questions you can have a chance at getting their vote. And I believed that not only about people. I believed it about editorial boards, because I used to drive the staff crazy, because in those days New Jersey had a lot of the small newspapers, and I would stay at those editorial boards 'til every last question got answered, sometimes well an hour over the time that was allotted, and there'd be something else waiting. But I ended up with the endorsement of almost every newspaper in the state.

Michael Aron: Really.

Governor Thomas Kean: Against a liberal Democrat. Yeah. The only paper I didn't get was "The Bergen Record." He made a couple of other mistakes. He, you know, he was leading fifteen points in the polls. "The New York Times" asked us to come in. He said, "I'm busy in South Jersey." He never came, so I was alone with "The New York Times."

Michael Aron: Of course, they endorsed you.

Governor Thomas Kean: They endorsed me. They don't usually endorse a Republican. They endorsed me. I think if Jim had shown up, I'm sure the "Times" would tell you they just liked me better, or something, but I mean, you don't show

up for "The Times" they get a little annoyed, and the only other paper that didn't endorse me was "The Philadelphia Inquirer." I think I got every in-state newspaper, except "The Bergen Record." I split "The Times" and "The Inquirer." And I think that was because, as much as anything else, that I spent a lot of time with them.

Michael Aron: What did you say about taxes in that campaign?

Governor Thomas Kean: I was against them. I didn't like taxes, but I said, "You can't get rid of the income tax," but we're going to-- actually I said we got to have a tax position here that's competitive. At that point a number of people, very much like now, a number of businesses had rated New Jersey as one of the worst states to perform in, and part of it was taxes; part of it was just climate; part of it was they didn't think they were treated very well. And the economy was the issue in a recession. And we had an economy that was really going downhill, and you could see jobs disappearing almost week by week. And so every single thing I said in that campaign had a basis in the economy. I talked about the environment. I talked about the environment in terms of having a place people wanted to live, that if you didn't preserve open space, and have clean water, clean air, and so on, that would attract businesses and attract people. I talked about exploding the budget on tourism. I talked about it because it was our largest employer in the state, and we couldn't let that go. We had to keep it. I talked about the arts. I talked about bringing in three dollars for every one that you spent on the arts, and why we were so cheap on the arts, how much it was hurting particularly urban economies. I talked about cities. I said if we don't revive the cities you're never going to really revive the state's economy. If you're really going to do it, you got to start where the people need the jobs the most, and that's the cities. And every single thing I talked about. I talked about education in terms of the economy. I'd always been interested in education, but I talked about, you know, if you don't educate-- the one thing that we have in New Jersey is we have an educated citizenry. That's how we compete with the right to work states in the south, because even though we have higher salaries, and higher pensions, and all of that, it's a much more educated workforce, and we can show that, demonstrate it. So education is very, very important, particularly education of people who are economically disadvantaged, because we're wasting them otherwise, and the economy is going to have to take educated people. And so everything I said about higher education, about the nexus between higher education and the research facilities in New Jersey, the drug industry, all of that, every single thing I said in that campaign had its roots in bringing jobs back to the state, some of them long term, some of them short term, but everything.

Michael Aron: Is it possible to say what Florio was offering the public, or what issue he highlighted?

Governor Thomas Kean: My memory is Jim was fixated on Washington. He was very, very opposed to Reagan's economic policy, just thought it was wrong. That's what he wanted to talk about. So we ended up that first debate, a lot of the debate was on Ronald Reagan, not about the state, and what Ronald Reagan's, what supply side economics was.

Michael Aron: Were you a supply sider in that campaign?

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, yes; oh, yeah. I was one of the first supply siders in the country at that point. I had read Laffer. I had read all of that stuff. I believed it. I mean, I believed it. I still believe that if you don't stimulate the supply side, particularly in states, it's not going to work.

Michael Aron: If you lower taxes you increase revenues?

Governor Thomas Kean: You can, yes, yes, and just the opposite. If you raise taxes, particularly beyond that of a neighboring state, you lose revenues, and that it's very much a balance. I always felt, and don't know if I said this in the campaign, but I always felt as governor when I needed to worry about taxation, I'd always look at what Connecticut was doing, Pennsylvania was doing, New York was doing, because it was the states around us who were competing. Somebody wanted to move down to a right to work state in the south, you couldn't compete with that if that's what they really wanted to do. But particularly when people leave New York City, a lot of them don't want to leave the area, so it's New Jersey, or it's Connecticut, or Pennsylvania, or one of those states, so I always looked very carefully at what their tax structure was, and made sure that our tax structure was just a little bit below them, and that's what I meant by supply side in the states. I'm not sure it always works in the federal level. In the states it does. You've got to make things incentives. People do operate on incentives, and if you're thinking about locating a business here, one of your big costs is taxes. One of your big costs is transportation. When you look at what the costs are, and if you can make sure those costs are lower than neighboring states, you help enormously. I mean, when I was elected it was the middle of the, say, the worst recession since the Great Depression. We had a billion dollar budget deficit, which in those days was a lot of money. I cut a business tax or two in my first year in the face of that just simply as a sign to the business community that things were changing, and we had to start to do things to get them back interested in the state.

Michael Aron: You say that after the first debate you felt the dynamics shift a bit.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: Did you feel through the month of October that things were narrow?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yes, oh, yes. There was no poll that showed-- by our own internal polls, nobody showed I was going to win, but no question it was getting, move in the right direction.

Michael Aron: What did you think on election day was going to happen that night?

Governor Thomas Kean: I had composed a concession speech, and that's all, particularly on election night when, in those days people didn't wait for the exit polls, for the polls to close for the exit polls revealed, so two of the three networks by seven o'clock had declared Florio the winner. I guess one by seven, one by eight. So, you know, what do you think? You've been behind in the polls all day long, two of them say you've lost, and one of them said, you know, it looked as if Kean was coming up in the polls. That only didn't happen, and he's going to lose by more than anybody thought he was going to lose by.

Michael Aron: Do you remember where you were that night?

Governor Thomas Kean: At home.

Michael Aron: You were at home?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah.

Michael Aron: You didn't have a campaign?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. I had a campaign at Livingston, but I took the returns at home, then I went down to headquarters, and I wrote a concession speech, and went down to the headquarters, and said to Roger Bodman, who was my campaign manager, I said, "Roger, I don't believe in these candidates who want

to get in the eleven o'clock news, and when they've lost just wait around." I said, "Look, let's give Florio a nice night. He deserves it. I'd like to concede now." It's about eight fifteen, eight thirty. And Roger said, "Can you just wait a little while? You know, there's some interesting returns coming in from some of the Democratic areas, you know. He's not running as well in Democratic areas as Democrats should. You're running much better in Democratic areas than a Republican should." And all that campaigning I'd done in the cities in the campaign, when I totally ignored everybody's advice and campaigned hard in the cities.

Michael Aron: I was struck by rereading our previous interview. You said when you win a vote in the cities as a Republican, that's two votes.

Governor Thomas Kean: Oh, yeah. I went places no Republican had gone. I went places no candidate ever gone.

Michael Aron: Like where?

Governor Thomas Kean: I remember night I was at a, I think it was called "A Night Owl." It was a bar. I think it was Springfield Avenue in Newark, and I went down there with one of my campaign workers. It was late at night, and I walked in. I was the only white person in the place, which is not unusual with a lot of places, and walked in. God, I never got such a cold reception, you know, just nothing, bartender sort of, they started turning their shoulder, and things. I started shaking, nobody even wanted to shake hands. I turned to the guy with me and said, "There's something wrong here. I don't think we really belong here." And he said, "No. These guys, these people are usually very friendly. Something's going on here. Let me talk to the bartender a minute." Talked to the bartender; bartender came over and shook my hand. "I apologize," he said. "The last white guy to come in here was from the ABC, tried to close me down." He said, "I thought you were one of those guys." So, you know, I campaigned hard in Central Ward of Newark, South Ward of Newark, and then Democratic areas in Middlesex County, and paid off, I mean, because I remember Jim Florio took the Italian areas in Essex County, my home county, for granted, with the North Ward, and Nutley, Bellville, part of Montclair. I didn't very well in those areas. He took them for granted, hardly ever came. He thought they were so heavily Italian, he was going to be the first Italian-American governor elected, and he thought that would do it.

Michael Aron: So we went through that whole night not knowing who won the election. Did you both declare a victory the next day? What happened?

Governor Thomas Kean: No. I don't either of us did declare a victory. Both of us said the truth, you know. I'm remember going home at two o'clock in the morning and slept through the thing. I said look, "Look, we're a little bit ahead, but who knows? We're not going to know this at least tonight, and thank you all. Go home to bed, and we'll hope for the best in the morning." And I went home and first time I realized something. The same happened to Jim, I think. Florio got home and there was a State Policeman in the front hall. I said, "What do you want?" He said, basically, you know, "You made be governor, and you've got us for a while." "Do I?" And they were with me from then on, but the same thing with Jim for a while. After about four or five days, they rededicated, I don't know, one of the Hiltons I think, maybe on Route Ten, and they wanted the new governor. We both showed up to cut the ribbon. There was a picture of us both with scissors cutting the ribbon.

Michael Aron: What was that period? It was a three-week recount.

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah, yeah

Michael Aron: What was that period of time like, excruciating, exciting?

Governor Thomas Kean: Well, it was excruciating. It was silly in retrospect. I mean, funny things had happened. I mean, we had all sorts of-- a lot of people were-- his people were watching the recount, watching the polls in the counties houses, was the thing for a recount. And I remember Roger thought that some of our people didn't understand well enough, so we rented a voting machine and brought it into the headquarters so that we could train the people who were watching the recount as to what to watch for. And somebody saw us counting the voting machine in the headquarters and the police came, and so the Democrats had called the police, said, "You know, they've stolen an election machine, and they're counting themselves," and silly things like that. And they'd call you, you know. You'd get a call from the County Clerk, and they'd say, you know, "We've recounted." The Republicans would all call me first. Democrats probably all called Jim first, and they'd say, you know, "We've recounted this and that town, and you gained three votes or you lost three votes," what have you.

Michael Aron: I seem to recall one of your confidants telling us they wanted these sessions, that your side did something very clever, I'm not sure at what point in time, by declaring the victors and thereby changing-- declaring yourself the winners and thereby changing the perception in the public. Does that ring any kind of bell?

Governor Thomas Kean: I did that. I did that. Yeah. I waited.

Michael Aron: At what point?

Governor Thomas Kean: I waited until the recount, it was when the recount was over. And when the recount was over, I picked up votes, so it got up to a thousand six hundred votes, whatever it was.

Michael Aron: Sixteen hundred and a eleven, I think, was the final number.

Governor Thomas Kean: But I picked up two, three hundred over there, which usually happens. Recount finds thousands and thousands of errors, but if it's a fair election, they usually balance out so the winner usually stays the winner, and that happened in my case. And Jim was talking about whether to challenge it in the courts, so you'd have a Florida situation, I guess, and I couldn't have that, because at that point I believed I had won. And that we'd had the recount, and I had to pick a cabinet. You know, this was three weeks. You know what little time you have between you're elected, anyway, and the time you take office. So I figured I had to get going. I had to pick people. I had to start doing all the things you have to do to prepared to be governor, and I hadn't done any of them. We had no cabinet. We had nobody. And I promised nothing to anybody, so there weren't even any expectations out there, so I had a blank slate if it was going to be. And I only had at that point, I don't know, seventy days before I had to have a cabinet in place, in office. So I figured I had to get going. And I waited a while. Jim did not concede, so I went down to Trenton, had a press conference, and said I seem to be the governor, and this is how I'm going to proceed from here on in.

Michael Aron: Did he concede after that?

Governor Thomas Kean: Yeah. Jim conceded maybe a week or two later. I don't know when he finally figured. I think he looked at it, and I think there is another procedure where you go county by county, but it becomes expensive, and I think at that point the candidate has to pick up the expenses. And he just didn't-- I think he thought his chances of winning at that point were so, so small, that it didn't make sense anymore. But he would have-- if he contested it in the courts it would have created an uncertainty, which would have made it very, very difficult to govern, and so I owe him a debt of gratitude for not doing that. He could have done that.

Michael Aron: So when you finally declared yourself the winner, how did you feel?

Governor Thomas Kean: Like something hit me. I mean, it's unreal, one because I hadn't expected to win, but all of a sudden, you know, I'd always had tremendous respect for the governor of New Jersey, you know. Dick Hughes had been my model in some ways. I had worked with him when I was first in the legislature. And, you know, I'd been friendly with Brendan Byrne, but Dick Cahill I'd worked with when I was his leader in the legislature, so I always had tremendous respect for the governor. There was also a sense of mystery about the office, what the governor really did, and the fact that I could walk into the Governor's Office as governor was just-- and it took a couple of weeks after the recount was over for me to get it. I mean, I was going through the motions of being the Governor Elect, but in my head I'm the governor? It was really very, very difficult to conceive, and it was a tough time for me just intellectually getting my head around it in addition to the fact we were already behind, and the Democrats were preparing a welcome for me which was not going to be very warm, because they didn't think I'd stolen the election, but they thought they should have won it, you know. And they should have, you know. They should have won it. I mean, they had everything going for them that year. They should have won it.

Michael Aron: That's a good place for us to leave it for this session, and pick up with you getting adjusted to being governor next time.

Governor Thomas Kean: Okay.