

## **Governor Jon Corzine Interview** (October 14, 2021)

*Edited by: JW (01/05/22)*

**Alfred Doblin:** I'm Alfred Doblin. Welcome to the Eagleton Center on the American Governor. I'm here today – October 14, 2021 - with Jon Corzine, New Jersey's 54<sup>th</sup> Governor Jon Corzine. Welcome, sir.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Good to be here and thank you for agreeing to run me through the questions, and thanks Eagleton for doing this project, to make sure that there's an archive that people can hopefully learn from.

**Alfred Doblin:** So, why don't we begin with why you decided to get into public service. You were CEO of Goldman Sachs. You had a storied career in finance. You went into the U.S. Senate, and then you decided to run for governor. What was the reason that you decided to leave the financial world and go into the public sector?

**Governor Jon Corzine:** You know, I think this is an important question, primarily because it's why I *did* get into politics, both as a United States senator and, ultimately, as governor. I've lived a life of opportunity, as a young man that grew up on a farm in Central Illinois, and had the access at running a great company that had had a Jewish heritage. And I'm Christian by background; someone that had a public education, almost entirely, through my life. I know how important it is to make sure that there are the supports of government and other means for people to have access and opportunity. And so that's why I looked for this chance. And I want to say at the start of this, I don't think there is a better job—maybe the presidency is—than being a governor, because you get to focus on presenting opportunity, with equity for everyone, if you're doing your job appropriately. You get a chance to be competent about how you lead, and I think that *how* you lead really determines whether your administration carries itself out with a degree of integrity and, again, competency. So I think it's the greatest job I've ever had, and I hope this conversation can help others learn maybe a little bit about what it's about.

**Alfred Doblin:** Well, before we get into the meat of our conversation, I think people may forget the particular skill sets that you did bring to the table coming from the private sector. At the point that you were elected, previous governors had come out of government, whether they were prosecutors or working as elected officials. There actually was this sort of cry for someone: "Okay, they have actually worked in the private sector. They understand the way money is raised, how it affects people." Can you talk just a little briefly about that unique skill set you brought to the table?

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Well, I think there are two areas that private work experience allows one to help them in public life. One, I think that there is a demand for competency and excellence in the private sector, if you're going to succeed. So it sets a standard, it sets a bar, that I think, for you to be successful in one or the other, you have to meet that bar. And so I think it's a mindset that's important, that you demand that of yourself. Second, I think that, while there's plenty of politics in private life, relationships are very important. And so your ability, particularly when you're in the mode of trying to get other people to use your service or buy your product, or whatever it would be, I think really does help in the long run, in your relationship with the public. Maybe it doesn't help you quite as much in government, although I thought, particularly when I was a United States Senator, it was very, very helpful, because you develop personal relationships. A little more difficult in Trenton, because people didn't spend as much time together, and I was a little more of a foreign element coming in, with perspectives that were significantly different. But I think the competency measure and the relationship-building method are very, very important ingredients that you bring from the private sector.

### **THE FIRST BUDGET**

**Alfred Doblin:** Well, let's get into the meat of our conversation. We're going to break up today's conversation into four blocks, and the first one we're going to talk about is the budget. I think it's more being famous, rather than infamous. The state had a shutdown your first year, with the budget. The term is, "You brought in the mattresses."

**Governor Jon Corzine:** <laughs>

**Alfred Doblin:** I think you brought in a cot. But can you talk a little bit about that whole process? Because you weren't dealt a good hand coming in as governor. I think the projected shortfall—I could be a little wrong—was around 3.6 billion. That's a lot of money.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Out of about a \$28 billion budget, so it's more than—it's double-digit.

**Alfred Doblin:** So, can you walk us through that? People remember, okay, the government shut down. You brought in the mattresses. You had a victorious moment in the end, but it wasn't easy.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Right. It also had long-run implications, which we can talk about, too. This gets at that competency issue that I talked about. At a state level, as opposed to the federal level, you do have to have revenues that match expenditures. And we had a mess, because we had historically used what were called one-shots in Trenton, one-off revenues to match up a large portion of the budget. And there was never a real willingness to raise serious amounts of money in taxes. One of the reasons I admired [Brendan Byrne](#), he took on the income tax, so you could fund education in this state, and was a tough decision. Generally, Democrats have been left with trying to figure out how we're going to pay for the kind of social initiatives—education, other things—that are on our agenda. And it isn't always put together very well and as you indicated, we started off deeply in the hole. We put together a budget, and I thought that it was appropriate that we raise taxes to help close the systematic shortfalls that we were having. This wasn't a one-time, \$3 billion shortfall; it was every year, and we were robbing from Peter to pay Paul, weren't putting money into a pension system that we were ultimately going to have to pay for. So there were just big financial problems within it. So we tried to restructure it, and it needed new revenues, and the legislature was not inclined to do that. They, by the way, had an election in the subsequent year that this budget was going to be implemented, and they didn't support it. So it was Democrats as well as Republicans who were resisting me.

**Alfred Doblin:** And it was a one-cent increase in the sales tax, correct?

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Well, it was one percent.

**Alfred Doblin:** One percent. I'm sorry.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Went from six to seven.

**Alfred Doblin:** Six to seven.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** One of the reasons that I thought it was reasonable—a lot of people would say sales taxes are regressive—but we have these enterprise zones that were in all of our urban communities, where there are *no* sales taxes. Plus, we had a laundry list of things that are basic needs that people didn't have to pay sales tax on. If you bought toilet paper, you don't pay sales tax on it. Anyway, the point being that you could make it more progressive than it stood on its surface, but you would be able to raise probably about half of what we needed to do to close our budget; not everything that we needed to do, but something. But I got very little support in the legislature, and so we went to the mattresses. There was no budget on June 30<sup>th</sup>, and we had to decide whether we were going to cave in to the proposals that the legislature was making, which were not going to put us on a path that I thought would be sound for the four years that I would be governor. It was

over the Fourth of July weekend. One of the ways that I tried to make sure the public understood the situation was to see the governor sleeping in the State House for five or six nights—I can't remember, exactly—until we were able to solve this budget. We also had special sessions of the legislature every morning at nine o'clock. So we had everybody come in and sit down, and I'd come down and give a brief State of the State, which was, "We need to get revenues to make sure this budget is balanced." And it didn't go so well for a while, but as it dragged on five or six days, people started looking for compromises.

We ultimately got to an agreement that, while we raised the sales tax as much as I had proposed—one percent—half of it had to go to property tax relief, which was okay with me, because you could use it in various ways that would help the citizens; and we'd use the other half for other elements of the budget. So it ended up getting to a conclusion that I think, in the long run, helped me with the public, because they knew I meant business about trying to run the government competently and appropriately, financially. It probably did not help me in the long run with the legislature. It was a little bit... out of the norm in how governors had dealt with the legislature, but I think necessary, if you were going to actually try to restructure the finances of the state. Most of the things we'll talk about have a lot of intersectionality to them. If you talk infrastructure, you're talking about raising money. How are you going to do that? Well, this is one of those things that we thought was a building block that would allow us to get to a long-term stable position, financially.

**Alfred Doblin:** From your perspective now, would you still have done it the same way? Because it's very difficult when people look back, and they sort of forget the way it was at those minutes of, "This is how we *have* to do this." The impact, in terms of the legislators—they just didn't expect you to actually play hardball with them, and you were really willing to do it. Do you think you would redo it now, if you could, or did you really just make the best decision at that moment?

**Governor Jon Corzine:** I think you can always do things better, and there were elements of the compromise at the end that I probably would do very differently, where they had some things that they called "Christmas trees," and I probably gave away more than I needed to in those, to try to get folks to come on board. But I think that it was an important statement: that my administration was going to be serious about being financially responsible. Even though we had important ideas about how we wanted to serve the people, with education and social services and lots of good things on our agenda, but we wanted to do that in a financially sound way, not what I perceived as, historically, a lot of gimmicks that had allowed us to get to, I think, a dangerous precipice. And that was showing up, by the way, in our credit-rating agency analysis of the state. And we actually got ready for an upgrade from the credit-rating agencies, and we were still double-A at that time, I think.

Could've been A1. But anyway, we were about to get upgraded, and then the recession in 2008 and '09 came along, and that sort of put all the states back in the box.

**Alfred Doblin:** You also, though, tried to curb the growth of the actual mechanism of state government. I mean, the workforce, you reduced. I think you first reduced the folks within the executive area, but you tried to broaden that.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** I looked this one up. We went from 68,000, when I came in, to 62,000—61,700 or so—on personnel. We did it through attrition. Didn't make me that popular with some of the folks who were very big supporters in the labor movement—public employees—but there was a lot of excess and, I think, necessary restructuring. And there were some things that needed to be added. We put in a comptroller, which was a position that was an independent agency that was checking our bidding processes, and how we spent money. And we put a prosecutor in charge of it, a fellow named Matt Boxer, who did a terrific job; stayed in the next administration and did the same for the Christie administration. The whole point was, there was more than just balancing the books. You had to manage government appropriately. Well, I think we had one fire sale on cars that we were servicing at, I don't know, \$1,000 a year in a contract, and we cut them in half. There was a lot of excess that needed to be pulled out of government, in a lot of different ways, so that we could better afford to do the things that we needed to do on education, social services, healthcare, et cetera.

**Alfred Doblin:** Well, in that sort of intersectionality—which is a cool word—let's move a little more into the financial, which is a good connection to the budget. You tried to do a number of things where I think the term might be that you sort of planted seeds for things that became popular after your term. One was where I believe state employees had to start paying for their healthcare—a small portion. That was revolutionary at that time.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** We raised the retirement age.

**Alfred Doblin:** From 60 to 62.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Sixty-two. Which ultimately should've gone higher, but we got what we could get. We actually started putting serious dollars into the pension system. After my term, people did it more, and recent governors have actually been required, in a statutory sense, to properly fill the pension fund, to make up for *enormous* holes that had built up over the previous 10, 15 years, when we came in. We put more in, in my four years, than had been put in in the last 20 years preceding us, into the pension system. We did that on other—you know, the Unemployment Trust Fund. There were a number of those things. Unfortunately

there was sort of a "before and after"—we had two years of a great economy in 2006 and 2007, and so we had greater ability to make choices. As most of us know, the Great Recession came along, with the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the whole problems of Wall Street in 2008, and we ended up with unemployment going from, I think it was three and a half percent to ten-plus in about six months, and our state revenues collapsed. I think we ended up with a four- or five-billion-dollar hole, even after we'd done all the corrective measures, because there was no income to be taxing, and people weren't spending money on sales.

So we had a different set of problems *after* the recession than we did before, and I ended up having to resort to one-timers, to balance the budget and still keep things going. I didn't like it, but we didn't have any choice. We stopped putting money in the pension system the last year that I was governor. There were very few options, if you were going to keep funding education, if you're going to keep money flowing to the hospitals and other things that we're trying to do. But, you know, long term, we had other plans, and we'll probably talk about this. One of the things that I thought was a really big idea that would straighten out finances for a long period of time, looking forward-- catch us up on the pension system almost entirely, and give us the resources to do infrastructure spending, in an enormous way for a state that is... its heart and soul is actually transportation, because we're a connector state, and people drive through it, and we are a commuter state. It's so vital that we do it. We were going to do the asset monetization project, with regard to the Turnpike, which was going to produce the kinds of revenues that would allow for us to address these long-term problems, and I think would've made a huge long-term difference in the financial capacity of the state to serve the needs of the public.

### **ASSET MONETIZATION**

**Alfred Doblin:** Asset monetization. You and I had a conversation about this [in 2007] before your car accident. It was, I think, a few weeks before, and you were talking to me about how you had this great idea, and you were trying to explain it to me. And you didn't use "asset monetization," but you were trying to explain, it's sort of a little bit like BritRail. That was how you were trying to get me to understand what it was. Do you feel asset monetization was, in some ways, too big an idea for people to grasp? That it was the right idea, but sometimes things are just too hard to understand?

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Sometimes, that can very well be the case, but the problems of the state, with regard to our pension system and the unbelievable needs we have to finance serious addressing of our physical infrastructure. I don't have to tell you. You now work at the Port Authority, and we have a tunnel under

the Hudson River that is 120 years old, w breaks down in a any heavy wind or heavy rain. The electricity malfunctions on a regular basis, and there are all kinds of bridges and roads and things that have not been upgraded for the 21<sup>st</sup> century; sometimes, not even for the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And we had huge, huge capital needs. And so I believe that a big idea was necessary.

Maybe I wasn't the greatest salesman in the world, because I was not able to convince folks that a little bit of short-term cost would lead to long-term benefit for the broad society. And we tried; we went to town hall meetings all over the state, made presentations. But it had one flaw that you could argue very easily in a sound bite: that your tolls were going to go up 800 percent, over 8 or 9 years. By the way, they've already gone up that amount, without the benefits of asset monetization, but it was an easy sound bite at the time, and made it a very, very difficult political sale. There were other issues that were complicated, that people didn't fully understand, but I think it... the benefits were not appreciated, I think, by the broad public as well as they should be, and I blame myself for not communicating that appropriately, because there was a lot to be said about how we would be able to do better in education, have *more* funding; because we'd taken care of our pension problem, and wouldn't have had—the money that was coming in, in the normal course, could've been used for the things that people really wanted. It wasn't *just* infrastructure; it was the ability to do things that government has a responsibility to do.

**Alfred Doblin:** For people watching this conversation, a lot of people just know, "Okay, asset monetization," but they still don't actually know what it was. Could you explain, in a simple way, what would it have done? Because people got caught up on tolls, and they didn't get past that.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Okay. This is actually not a very complicated issue. Matter of fact, it's something that's done frequently, regularly, in the financial world, almost every day. People monetize rental payments. They monetize lottery payments. They monetize car loans. It's standard operating procedure in the financial world. What we did, we have one unbelievably great asset that the state of New Jersey was wise enough to put together in the late '40s. It's called the New Jersey Turnpike. They bought the land, they put the property together. All we were trying to do is, we will go out and receive a payment for the future flow of the tolls and use that money to do the things that we wanted to do. Very simple: use the Turnpike as collateral, with the flow of toll money paying off the bonds that we were going to issue, to allow us to do the things that we wanted to do with the funds. And it... to me, I didn't do a good job of explaining it. I hope I did a better job here, but—

**Alfred Doblin:** Actually, you did. At the time, if I remember correctly, I don't think the word "collateral" came up enough in average conversations. People got caught up in, "Exactly what is asset monetization?" As opposed to, "This roadway is the collateral for us to do other things."

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Exactly.

### **SCHOOL FUNDING**

**Alfred Doblin:** So, one of the great victories, I mean, that I think even your critics would say was an incredible victory, had to be your dealing with the *Abbott* [state Supreme Court] decision [on school funding]. If I recall correctly, *Abbott* began as a very narrow decision involving, I think, four districts. Then, I believe, it was 31. I could have my number wrong.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Thirty-one. *Abbott* had been unaddressed on a constitutionally sound basis, or a constitutionally acceptable basis, for, I don't know, 25, 30 years; almost from its inception.

**Alfred Doblin:** And it was an equity issue, because what were original *Abbott* districts—or part of that 31—like a place like Hoboken had a huge renaissance, huge amount of money coming in.

The money didn't follow the students' needs, which I think is the core of really what your argument was.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Exactly.

**Alfred Doblin:** And no one had figured out how to do it in a way that actually passed muster with the court. Can you talk a little bit about that, about the success of your administration defending it to the State Supreme Court, but also the equity piece? You know, the goal was that the money would go to where the needy students were.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** This goes back to what I said at the start: Opportunity is the driver of why—*equity* and opportunity are the drivers of why I got into this activity and service. And I believe that what we did was look at where school lunch programs were most utilized by poor students. Not looking at geography or zip codes, but where were concentrations of poverty? We made those kinds of variables. Where were people most heavily using Medicaid? And those kinds of variables were built into our formula, so that you could argue that money was



flowing to where the need was. And then it ended up the formula sent less money to Hoboken, which was an *Abbott* district and shouldn't be receiving as much as it had been receiving, and more money to Rahway, which had a growing population of people that met some of these terms and conditions. And our people did an extraordinary job, both legally and, I think, intellectually, putting together a formula that allocated the resources that the legislature and the governor put forward for educational purposes. Now, it's not perfect, and it needs to be updated, because different parts of the state change over a period of time. I heard one of the candidates running for governor this current time is now arguing that Jersey City looks more like Hoboken, and they are getting way too much money relative to other parts of the state. Those things should be able to be addressed, by making sure that the factors that go into that formula are allocating it by the student concentration of their needs. And I think it ought to be reviewed every ten years, or every five years; upgrade those, to make sure that the factors are sound. But we need to make sure that every child has an opportunity to get access at the system. You can't guarantee outcomes, but you certainly are responsible, I think, in government, to make sure everybody gets to the starting line with an equal opportunity: early childhood education, full-day kindergarten, making sure the class sizes are responsible, that people are going to school in buildings that are not 150 years old, and can't be wired for STEM education. All that needs to be done, and the formula, ultimately, is a mechanism that allows that equity to flow through better into our state than otherwise would be the case.

### **THE ARC TUNNEL**

**Alfred Doblin:** Another huge accomplishment of your administration was putting together the funding for Access to the Region's Core, known as ARC.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** That's that tunnel that we were talking—

**Alfred Doblin:** That tunnel, a tunnel that would've been specifically for New Jersey Transit, would've gone into a new terminal station in Manhattan. You and I didn't always agree on some of the pieces of ARC.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Well, we didn't agree on some of the engineering decisions.

**Alfred Doblin:** But putting it together is an extraordinary lift. It was roughly \$9 billion: \$3 billion from the state of New Jersey; \$3 billion from the federal government, which is a huge lift; and \$3 billion from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which has a "New York" in it, so that is also a huge lift for you, as

the governor, to put these pieces together. Some of that is because of the relationships, I would assume, you developed in the Senate, in knowing how the federal government worked, but people don't talk about you so much as being someone who brokered those great relationships. So, regardless of the fate of ARC, which your successor chose not to continue, it was a huge lift, fully funded.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Well, this is one of those places where both my business background and my time in the Senate did make a big difference, because that \$3 billion from the federal government had to be worked over and over and over again. There was a congressman from Minneapolis, named Oberstar [James L. Oberstar] from Minnesota who I had a good working relationship on other issues. We had worked on some educational issues, and had a good, conversational, ongoing relationship. He was the Chair of the House Transportation Subcommittee, and he put phrases in the House transportation bill that made the tunnel a national priority. And without that, we could've never gotten the federal funds, even if the president said he wanted to, because the law didn't allow it. So, you had to do things like that, which I knew how to do, and we got done. You also had to get the governor of New York, and the political establishment in New York, to sign off on this in Congress. Good relationship with Senators Chuck Schumer and Hillary Clinton didn't hurt one bit in our ability to have that happen. And then you had the Port Authority, where you constantly have to have a good working relationship—or *should* have a good working relationship—with the governor of New York. And in all those cases, we did. And in all three of those parts that you talked about, we were able, over probably three years of negotiations or more—the last year I was in Congress, and the first two years I was here in New York, and then when President Obama came in—we were able to work to get this all to come together. And the president, because Congressman Oberstar put that phrase in, guaranteed us \$3 billion, and the deal was sealed. And we started digging, as you well know, and we have about—almost a mile of that tunnel already dug, but it got stopped.

**Alfred Doblin:** I know that the conversation today is on trying to move the Gateway Tunnel, which is a different project. It's similar in some ways; another trans-Hudson tunnel, this one that would be used—

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Solving the same commuter problem that is fundamental to New Jersey's needs.

**Alfred Doblin:** But the difficulty today—you know, infrastructure used to be this bipartisan thing, and in the last administration, state and federal, everyone kept thinking, "Infrastructure deals are about to happen," and they seem elusive, for some reason. From your viewpoint now—I mean, forget that ARC wasn't built. You put the package together. What's missing? What would be needed now, to take

those lessons, that people should look at what you did, and say, "Okay, this is how you do it"?

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Well... I don't want to use the term "art of the deal," because it's somewhat tarnished, but you do have to make tradeoffs with the various parties that come to the table. You can't just demand everything from yourself. That's the art of politics. It's the art of business, as well. And so... and if there's too little money to start with for the project, if there was only \$5 billion on the table when we were trying to put together our tunnel project, the ARC tunnel project, we could negotiate and have all the best relationships in the world; we couldn't do the deal, because it wasn't enough money. One of the problems that you have at a national level, now—or *had*—is that there never really were enough resources on the table. That's why some of the projects that are now being talked about in the Biden administration make a lot of sense, because they're big enough that everyone will get a piece of that pie. Whether it's equitably distributed remains to be seen, but there is enough money to be able to get a lot of people to the table of negotiation. That's what we had happen with regard to the ARC tunnel. And, by the way, it also led to the Port Authority putting money into LaGuardia and other things. We had to agree on a transactional nature of things that were equitable among the two states. You always have to look for reasons that the other person might want to join this effort, and I think that's what we did well, and I think that's what historically hasn't been done, starting with the not enough money; and then, B, I don't think people always are as cooperative as they should be.

**Alfred Doblin:** Well, to go back to the original part of our conversation about skill set, more, I think, in New Jersey than in other states, it's a very parochial view. New Jersey is very much New Jersey. The fact that you came from a huge financial institution, and then the Senate, do you think that skill set really helped ARC in many ways, beyond the actual people that you knew, but the understanding that it's a very large transactional process? It's not horse-trading among New Jerseyans; it's figuring out, "How do I sell New Jersey to the federal government? How do I sell New Jersey to an equally parochial New York, when it comes to their \$3 billion?" Do you feel that goes back to that unique skill set?

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Well, I think it helps. I'm not... I don't think it was the only cause. I mean, there's a fundamental need that was very obvious. For instance, the tunnel helps relieve the pressure on Amtrak, which goes up and down the East Coast, so there were lots of people that didn't like the fact that Amtrak is a broken railroad in many ways, and was not functioning properly. So you had different connectors that I think played to our advantage, and I used them to our advantage. And there were—there's another tunnel in Baltimore, so we were able to get some of the folks who were interested in the Baltimore tunnel getting fixed—another 100-year-old-plus effort—we got them to be on our side, so that we could

be there. I think that it takes real work and trying to put yourself in somebody else's shoes, to try to get your projects, your initiatives, endorsed by other people. And I think business helped do that. I think working in the Senate helped do that.

**Alfred Doblin:** When you were in the Senate, I think many people saw you as very progressive.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** I think [New Jersey Congressman] Bob Franks called me "Mr. Universal," for healthcare, a whole series of things.

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM & SOCIAL EQUITY**

**Alfred Doblin:** But there were many areas where you had very strong interest in, for better phrase of anything, "social equity."

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Right.

**Alfred Doblin:** That phrase of "equity" really wasn't being used back then, but you can look at a number of things that happened during your administration that were huge. One of the first things I'd like to touch on: New Jersey State Troopers. The federal government was keeping an eye on what was going on after a horrible incident.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** No, we were under a consent decree.

**Alfred Doblin:** A horrible incident with troopers, I believe, during the Whitman administration. Three people were wounded.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** A bunch of young men coming back from a basketball camp. I used to play basketball, so it caught my attention, and they were very innocent young men.

**Alfred Doblin:** But that decree was lifted during your administration.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Right.

**Alfred Doblin:** So, can we talk a little about that?

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Well, I'm pretty passionate about this, because when I was in the Senate, along with a congressman named John Conyers [Michigan], who ran the Judiciary Committee—he was a congressman from Detroit—we wrote the

Racial Profiling Act. We never got it passed, but we had it's a forerunner of much of the reform that you hear talked about now. Criminal justice reform in the current era was embedded in that bill. And so I got very... I studied the issue a lot. And New Jersey has many, many inequitable, or *had*, and I think we've made real progress, not only in my administration but subsequent administrations, towards addressing some of the injustices in the criminal justice system.

But racial profiling was a fact, and we addressed it. Under my administration, we put cameras in state police cars. We had to do a lot of things to get out from under the Department of Justice overseeing the administration. We changed the makeup—broadly changed the makeup—of the State Police. But we have lots of other issues that are just as important. Racial profiling wasn't just a state police problem. We have, what, 600 municipalities in this state? I wouldn't say all of them had problems on these issues, but we had a major, major issue, where 70 percent of the people incarcerated in New Jersey when I came in were, more or less—I don't know the exact number—were people of color. We had the entrails of the Rockefeller initiatives on drug sentencing. Minor drugs guaranteed you five years in jail. We had laws like, if you were caught within 250 yards of a school, you would be sentenced—mandatory sentencing of—with drugs, a mandatory sentencing for five years. You know, there's not a city in the state of New Jersey that almost the whole city isn't within 250 yards of a school. I mean, that's not entirely true, but generally, if you lived in a city, you were subject to it.

### **DEATH PENALTY REPEAL**

There were just a whole host of things that we needed to address. We took it on. We instituted drug courts. We instituted major changes in how parole was implemented. So it wasn't just racial profiling on the Turnpike. You had to go after this in a very, very serious way. Who we put on the bench. We diversified the bench, so that there would be greater sense of understanding of some of the issues that were coming up. And as you know, probably one of the things that I was most passionate about, almost my whole life, was the death penalty. And, while it hadn't been utilized in New Jersey for a number of years, I think 70 percent of the people who were subject to the death penalty were people of color. And if you went across the country, it was—it's just—it's disproportionate justice handed out to a narrow segment of our society. Just wrong. I've been against this since I was a teenager, frankly. But it is—we were proud to be the first state in the last, I don't know, 25, 30 years to do away with it, and we subsequently had a whole flush of other states join us. And I think it represented a real commitment that reflected what was going on in more detailed ways, with regard to criminal justice in the state of New Jersey. I'm very proud of it.

If you look at any chart—any chart—of the prison population, it started coming down in 2005; and, to the credit of my successors, it's continuing. We were right at the top of the country in incarceration rates per 100,000, and now we're down towards the middle of the pack, and we're falling relatively rapidly. And I'll just say one other thing, another proud little detail. Camden, New Jersey, is one of our poorest communities, mostly people of color. We had the "great" idea, back in the Rockefeller era—I'll pick on them, as opposed to a New Jersey governor—and we plopped a prison right down in the middle of downtown. Right in the middle of downtown. And it virtually destroyed the commercial activity and the housing activity in the area, and we tore that thing down. And it was emblematic of saying, "We're going to address the disparities that we have about how our system works for various peoples," both—we did that both literally, but we also tried to use symbols that would allow people to understand that we were serious about this.

### **DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**Alfred Doblin:** You also made tremendous reforms for youth services. You moved it, if I remember correctly, into its own...

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Made it its own standalone department [NJ Department of Children and Families].

**Alfred Doblin:** Because that was a very plagued government agency.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Right.

**Alfred Doblin:** And it improved it.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Well, it was a plague on our *children*.

**Alfred Doblin:** Yes.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** I mean, you're an old newspaper guy. I mean, half of the headlines in the newspapers, in the late '90s and turn of the century, were kids that are in foster care being abused and sometimes killed, and it just was unacceptable. And, you know, Governor McGreevey worked on this, and [Governor Codey](#) and my predecessors, but we went after this, tooth and nail. I had a gentleman named [Kevin Ryan](#), who ran that department, who is one of *the* experts on child welfare in the country, and we went from a foster-care-oriented system to an adoptive system for taking care of our kids. The foster-care system is filled with injustices. Has many good people in it. It also has people who abuse the system for financial gain,

at the detriment of our kids. And it's—we retooled it. Caseworkers were dealing with 80 and 90 people. This was one of the places where we added people, not reduced the number of employees, because you had to get their workload down to a level where you could actually pay attention to the kids in the foster system. So, I'm pretty passionate about this. And we also worked with school districts to make sure that they were red-flagging situations in a much more professional and disciplined manner. And we were under another court order there when I came in. That one, we didn't get, although we had made huge progress by the time I left the governor's chair.

**Alfred Doblin:** We'll talk more about the philosophical aspects of your administration in another conversation, but in terms of the action items, for want of a better expression, what are you most proud of when you look back at your term? I mean, because there are many things that I think people don't recognize, like the end of the death penalty happened under you, reforms for the state police. But what gives you the most sense of personal pride, that you feel you changed people's lives for the better?

### **CORZINE EXECUTIVE STAFF**

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Well, one of the things I'm most proud of are the people that I worked with, because they were a lot smarter than me, knew their work. I talked about Kevin Ryan, but I could talk about Lisa Jackson, who went on to run the EPA for President Obama. I had really great people. And I think what I'm most proud of is they kept track of that objective of equity and opportunity in how we tried to govern, to how to create programs and do things. It wasn't just in one area; it was across the board. We also... we really tried to do that with integrity. I think... I think there was no hint of financial scandal or anybody within the till, and when we had anybody close, we took pretty strong action, pretty quickly, about how we responded to those things. I think people have to trust their government to do what it says it's trying to do. So I'm very proud that I think we sent a message that we were governing for *their* interests, not for *our* interests, and with equity always in mind in that process. I could talk about—you know, we haven't talked on social services. We did paid family leave. You know, equity isn't just a racial issue; it's a gender issue. We had 50 percent of our Cabinet were women. We had... we made strong steps. I sort of criticize myself. When I ran for the Senate, I was for gay marriage; one of the few people that took that on in 2000. We only really were able to get to civil unions in my administration, but we put together a court that made judgments that led to the kind of marriage system that I think reflects that we're all equal in this world, that you shouldn't be discriminated against.

**Alfred Doblin:** There was protection for transgender people, also, in your administration.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** But, you know, you have to look at... equity as being something that *everybody* should have access at, and not make judgements about other people, if they're not interfering in how *you're* living your life. I feel very, very strongly about that, and I think we're a lot happier, as a society, if we all bound together on those kinds of feelings about how the world works. And we will get a lot of people who have incredible talent, that can get ahead and contribute to everybody's benefit, if they have equal access. And I think that's what—it's those principles that make me the proudest of the people that I work with, because they work for that every day.

**Alfred Doblin:** Well, thank you, Governor. I think this is a good stopping point for this conversation.. Again, thank you, former Governor Jon Corzine. I'm Alfred Doblin, doing this for the Eagleton Center on the American Governor. Thank you.

**Governor Jon Corzine:** Thank you.