

Governor Jon Corzine Interview (November 10, 2021)

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Alfred Doblin: I'm Alfred Doblin for the Eagleton Center on the American Governor and I'm with former Governor Jon Corzine, the 54th governor of New Jersey. Welcome, Governor.

Governor Jon Corzine: Thank you. Alfred, I do want to start out again by saying thank you to Eagleton for opening up this opportunity to talk about my administration—and the things that we've talked about before in the earlier session. I think we can have a great discussion today.

Moving from the Senate to the Governorship

Alfred Doblin: For people who may be joining us years from now, this is our second discussion and our framework for this conversation is going to be more of the philosophical rather than the actionable. I thought we could begin here: You and I sat down in a restaurant in Washington, D.C., on your last day in the United States Senate [in January 2006] and we talked a little bit about what it was like leaving the U.S. Senate and what it was going to be like coming in as the governor of New Jersey. If you can go back in time to think of us back there, what were your expectations? I mean, you're a man of big ideas, which is something we've talked about.

Governor Jon Corzine: The opportunity to be governor is about action; it's about doing things. Not that the Senate is unimportant, but you're one of a hundred there and the agenda is often presented to you as opposed to developing an agenda, developing a to-do list. As I think we talked about in the first session, I really wanted to be able to create opportunity for the people of New Jersey: a good lifestyle; a great education; to bring forth the kinds of things that I was talking about in Washington—early-childhood education, pre-K and a whole series of things. And to make sure that you had a chance to implement those. So philosophically it was important for me to be in the action and I think a governor's chair is an extraordinary place to take ideas and turn them into deliverables for the people you serve.

Alfred Doblin: But I think what's a little different now than then—and it may be the change in climate in the country—but more often than not people [today] are

not running on a platform that this is what I hope to do or I'm going to achieve; Instead it's, "I'm not the other person" or just sort of believe that I'm going to do something that's going to make your life better. But there were real issues that animated you.

Governor Jon Corzine: That is absolutely the case. The financial structure of New Jersey was a mess and had been for a number of years and it was deteriorating. Our credit rating was going down because we weren't handling our finances appropriately. We were at risk of not being able to maintain the quality education that New Jersey was always known for. Our infrastructure was certainly turning ragged and elements of it were just almost broken. I knew that the efforts that we were talking about a lot with regard to climate change and the environment in Washington could be addressed more immediately and effectively—at least in the near term—through a governor's chair. So there were many things that I understood were addressable problems, some of which I had ideas for, others which—I also knew people who I could bring into my administration who were smarter than me and who could help us address a number of those issues. And that really is what drove me to make the choice that I had a chance to make of going from the Senate to attempting to be the governor of this great state. Fortunately, it turned out positively.

Alfred Doblin: Well, let me read you back something that is from your inaugural address and then I'd like for you to comment on this: "Today courts govern the funding of our schools, the management of our child-welfare programs, our housing and borrowing policies, and oversight of the management of our state's law enforcement. Our U.S. Attorney has stepped into a governance role of our state's medical school and our state is being sued to fulfill its financial obligation for public employee pensions." So that's a lot to just lay out.

Governor Jon Corzine: I used the word "mess." There were a lot of really significant challenges and when you have a challenge I think you have an opportunity to try to deal with those. I think we talked about some of those in our last session. But these are clear issues that I thought I had some skill set to bring to bear on. As I had talked about, for instance, the supervision of our State Police was driven by a severe case of racial profiling on the Turnpike and once that rock was turned over it was very obvious that there was bias in how we were enforcing our traffic laws. There was a distinct problem while "driving while Black" in the state of New Jersey. I had been working on racial profiling in the Senate; it was a very obvious thing that tied with the things that I cared about.

And you could say that about a number of those issues. I know how to deal with the rating agencies. I'd been working with them in finance for a very long time so there were specific factors that needed to be addressed and actually relatively

quickly and that drove policy in a number of those instances that you're talking about. I'll tell you one that I didn't put in there but was equally important is that I believe that we had a reputation for—I think it's sometimes overdrawn—but that we were a corrupt state, that we were not dealing with problems for the service of the public but for the service of the people who were in political office. And I knew, since I was independent of a lot of the campaign finance complications that people had to go through, that if I brought objectivity to it and the right people to execute those kinds of initiatives in government and the disciplines in government, you could begin to turn that reputation.

And I think with the help of a lot of great people including our now Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New Jersey, Stuart Rabner, we really sent out a signal that this was not going to be business as usual. We're going to sign contracts and we're going to have billion-dollar budgets, 28 billion-, 30-billion-dollar budgets, but it was going to be spent for the service of people, not to pad somebody's pocket. There were lots of things that we did. They had dual office holding all over the state. We ended that mostly—we gave some forbearance to people who were already in office—but it's actually ended and winding down except for very, very few people. We put a comptroller in, an independent person, to observe the contracting process and how money was spent and investigate any charges. And that person wasn't responsible to the governor; that person was responsible to the public. Nominated by the governor, but approved by the legislature and then stood on their own beyond the term of the governor. A fellow named Matt Boxer was the first, came out of the U.S. Attorney's Office, was a dynamo in making sure that ethics was on the agenda of the governor's office and people in state government in general.

Alfred Doblin: Do you think you were somewhat naïve in terms of what you thought you could accomplish? You can control a piece of what the executive office is doing, and you can try to move the needle statewide, but it's like trying to turn the Titanic. There is that iceberg; but the ship is going to move very, very slowly. I think you repeatedly used the phrase "Hold me accountable" in that inaugural address. Did you think that you might really be able to move the needle because you were incredibly successful in the private sector? When you look back do you think you might have tried it a little differently? Because it still is New Jersey government.

Governor Jon Corzine: A couple of observations: First of all, I wouldn't use the word "naïve." My parents probably would have said their son was ambitious, and we took on an agenda that maybe was aggressive. And I had people in my group of insiders who consulted with me on politics that thought it was too big and that we didn't always explain it well enough. Even when we won on issues, we didn't explain it to the public enough. So that's the second point, is it's not just good enough in a political world when you're an elected representative to get things

done. You also have to be able to make sure people understand that you're doing those things. Agenda-wise I feel like we were ambitious and appropriately so, given the needs of the state. But I also think that there was some weakness in the administration—and I'll take responsibility for that. I'll hold myself accountable for not necessarily making sure that people understood either the—sometimes not the agenda but certainly when we won on a lot of things, making sure they knew what we did.

Alfred Doblin: There have been other individuals I will not name in New Jersey politics who certainly have never been shy about trumpeting whatever it is they've accomplished, even if it's not big. I think what's interesting is people say they want a leader to present them exciting new things or to acknowledge the truths that they're living. But then when they actually have that, they just sort of want whatever will make it better for me. And this is really going to be hard because some of what you were talking about was hard to accomplish. They were not easy things.

Governor Jon Corzine: And some of it didn't impact people's lives directly, unless you were, for example, on the short end of a racial-profiling incident on the Turnpike. One of the problems that all politicians face is that there are issues that are vital for society to deal with but they may not impact everybody equally in society, so there's the people who are not impacted by it. Let me give you a clear example: Educating our kids is really, really important for the parents who are voters, but maybe a little less important for seniors. Not that they don't care about education but it's not going to be the motivating issue. Maybe taxes will be more important. My whole point is that it takes strong political skills to make sure that you bring together the intersection of those both: needs and understanding of why you're doing it even if it doesn't impact everyone all at once.

Car Accident

Alfred Doblin: I want to move to a turning point that you had no control over, really, in your tenure, which we would call "the accident." You were ready to roll out what was going to become asset monetization before that.

Governor Jon Corzine: Probably my biggest idea.

Alfred Doblin: Well, you did a lot of things in terms of equality and education in the state, but asset monetization was sort of—and actually it was why people elected you, to bring a new financial idea, or not a new idea but one they just hadn't heard of. But I remember you and I met in a Starbucks in Newark about a

week, week and a half before the accident. You talked a little bit about asset monetization and we talked about that in our previous conversation. And then the accident happened. For those who don't remember, you were coming up from south Jersey to try to broker a peace between Don Imus, who was a radio personality if people don't know who he was, and some offensive things he said about the women's basketball team at Rutgers. The first news reports sounded like you broke your leg—

Governor Jon Corzine: I basically wanted him [Imus] to apologize.

Alfred Doblin: But you almost died. Can we talk a little bit about, as you recovered from that, how you sort of figured out, "How am I getting back into the groove of governing the state?" You also did a PSA—a very powerful, incredibly sobering PSA—about not wearing a seat belt. You were not wearing a seat belt.

Governor Jon Corzine: Right.

Alfred Doblin: Just so people understand that also.

Governor Jon Corzine: Well, let me frame it. I take responsibility for not wearing a seat belt. I was actually having a meeting with my staff and we had a conversation going on, but I should have had the seat belt on. But I was turning around a lot. We were also in a situation where I had meetings in western Pennsylvania, in Bergen County, in Atlantic City, and ending the day in the governor's mansion in Princeton, at a meeting that was designed, as you suggested, to try to bring a little bit of recognition for these terrific young women on the basketball team that had been sullied on national radio. And so we were driving faster than I would have thought, but it was a rainy night and we lost control of the car. And I really thought I was about to meet my maker. I was thrown out of the car and fortunately my leg caught in between a seat and a window, broken multiple places. I ended up with—I don't know—18 or 19 broken bones and all my ribs and I was put into an induced coma after a terrific response by the State Police to protect me while I was on the ground and to get me to a great hospital, Cooper Hospital in south Jersey.

They induced a coma and brought me back. I was, I think, two weeks in the coma, another two weeks in the hospital. And then you get a little antsy because once you're awake, you start reading the papers; all that ambition and desire to get back in public life happens. But you're really not at the same skill set. You're a little slower. You're on medication for pain. And that actually, I think, had some impairment in my ability to accomplish some of the things that were on my agenda that we were working on. We talked about the monetization, for example—in the immediate aftermath. I do think—you bring up this PSA that was nationally run for

almost two years, where I said, "I'm Governor Jon Corzine and I should be dead because I wasn't wearing a seat belt. You don't want to have the same experience I had." And it was actually very, I think, very compelling in its use by the national Transportation Department to try to encourage people to wear seat belts. And so I felt we turned what was a messy situation into at least one positive. But at the end of the day, I wasn't wearing my seat belt and it ended up having implications well beyond the event, I think, because of both time lost and I think probably a little less energy and effectiveness in my ability to communicate, in particular with the public, about some very complicated issues that we were taking on.

Alfred Doblin: We met once or twice when you were in Drumthwacket, where you were recovering. You're a very energetic person. I don't think people who don't interact with you know that. And you were in sort of fighting shape—and I mean that in a good way—before the accident. And I don't think you do "idle" well. Can you talk a little bit about that kind of frustration while you were sitting in Drumthwacket and everybody was speculating on what's going on?

Governor Jon Corzine: Well, you know, you give up the governorship. I had to step back because I was not capable of doing the things that needed to be done.

Alfred Doblin: And there was no lieutenant governor back then.

Governor Jon Corzine: No. The Senate president, which at that time was [Dick Codey](#) (D)—who had also been in that role [as governor] after Governor Jim McGreevey resigned in the previous administration—took over for about six weeks and he did a very good job. I have absolutely nothing to say but good things about what happened, but it's very frustrating when you're the governor but you're not really the governor. And so my family, my wife-to-be, Sharon Elghanayan, had to keep me toned down because I was chomping at the bit to get back sooner than I think I was able to, but even when that all came to pass—it was about six weeks after the accident—it was probably premature from a health standpoint, but also reflects what you were suggesting about me as I'm pretty aggressive about trying to address the issues that I think were in my mind to try to be the best governor I could be.

Alfred Doblin: Well, let's talk a little bit about the best governor you could be because you had victories and you had things that didn't come out the way you wanted. I think that's just the way it works. You have to play the hand that you're dealt. I think it's interesting, because you were on your way to try to broker a peace. Well, actually, that's not the right phrase because the women's basketball team had been maligned.

Governor Jon Corzine: They deserved an apology and it needed a forum where that could be done privately and not in a spectacular public-relations format, but sincerely delivered to the individuals.

Marriage Equality and Taking Risks

Alfred Doblin: As governor-elect, you inserted yourself in what became the subject of a documentary named “Freeheld”—and then I think it became an actual commercial film. The documentary dealt with a lesbian investigator for Ocean County, Laurel Hester, who was dying of cancer, was near death, and it was up to counties to decide whether they would bestow benefits to their spouse or their partner. And in Ocean County, they were not. Impassioned pleas regarding state equality sort of rose; that was their moment to become really more seen in the state. The Ocean County freeholders were not moving and you inserted yourself as the governor-elect to change that. Why did you do that?

Governor Jon Corzine: Well, first of all, as you and I have talked about several times in these two conversations, a couple of things drive me: creating opportunity and the other is equity, often called justice or fairness. This is an equity issue. There was no reason that two people who had committed to each other and lived with each other shouldn't be able to have those benefits and I felt strongly about that. I was a United States Senator for the state so I felt like I had a right to voice an opinion about it and I think one of the things that good political leaders should do is never be afraid to be involved in personal issues that actually represent or are a metaphor for something broader. I had come out in favor of gay marriage in my run for the United States Senate in 2000 and I felt this was an object lesson for society in general and I thought I should use the bully pulpit. And it was the right thing to do. It's just pure and simple.

Alfred Doblin: But there were not a lot of folks at your level saying that. They certainly were not in south Jersey. But I think it's more what we just touched on: as a governor, is it also about those small issues that are happening county by county? It's not just big legislation. Big ideas really happen in the small universe of people's homes and counties.

Governor Jon Corzine: Well, there are multiple roles for a public servant. Certainly idea creation, team building, communication. But I think recognizing the humanity of the people that you're serving is important. I think this was at the time of the height of Iraq, Afghanistan battles and we lost 18 or 20 young men—they're all men in this instance—and I went to maybe a dozen or fifteen of those funerals or wakes for the individuals because as a leader I think you have to show your

compassion for the things that are important to the public that you serve and particularly when it brings a light onto an issue that you want to make progress on. And certainly how we dealt with our society on the question of gay marriage and marriage equality—I believed this was a responsible place. People understand pension payments going to spouses. It’s not a hard concept. And so it seemed very fair to take that issue on, both to help the individuals but also to raise that issue significantly in the public’s mind.

Alfred Doblin: When I look at the governors before you and your immediate successor, “vulnerability” isn’t a word I think they would have used. [I don’t know] that they would have seen that as [as you are suggesting] not just a quality, but a prerequisite for leading the state of New Jersey, that you actually have to be open to the pain and the experiences that people have. That’s who you are, but that may have actually not been the best political thing.

Governor Jon Corzine: It’s possible maybe other issues or—I think our society was moving in this direction [towards marriage equality] at a pretty good pace. I’m sure it moved a long time before that, but I don’t think that was a political handicap. I don’t think it cost me votes and it may have actually won support in some communities. But there are things that you have to do as a political leader—or should do in my view—that are not always going to be popular or necessarily going to garner votes just because you do it. It’s pretty clear to me on some of our polling before we got into the asset monetization that this was going to be a heavy lift. It was the right thing to do in my view, but it was going to be a heavy lift. It was the responsible thing to do for the financial shape that the state was in and the incredible needs that we had, to make sure that in this corridor state, this commuter state that we could do the things that need to be done to make this a great place to live.

So I think you take risks on that. I took risks in the U.S. Senate. I was one of 23 senators that voted against the war in Iraq and I watched my poll numbers go from high 50s to high 30s. They bounced back as time went on and it looked better but—and sometimes you have to make choices about this; I think you and I have had this conversation. If you make too many tough choices, then you’re not in office to do the things that you wanted to do. If you lose elections, there’re a lot of things that you might have been able to do further but you didn’t win the election so you don’t do that.

We had a tunnel, we had built a mile of it or so, and it got changed because the next administration saw things differently. We wanted to deal with property taxes by really taking on home rule and we put in incentives for consolidation of communities, or at least fire departments or other things that would have saved money and I think had impact on local taxation. We got one thing done; we got

Princeton and Princeton Borough to merge. <laughs> They, as you know, had a donut hole, which is the Princeton community around Princeton Township. We got them to merge and stop wasting a lot of money, but there was a lot more to do in that area; a lot more. There was probably another run at some kind of asset securitization effort. Maybe not the Turnpike but other things. So if you lose elections you don't get to follow through on the agenda and somebody else may have different priorities.

Anti-Corruption Efforts

Alfred Doblin: We'll touch more on that as we finish this conversation a little later, but one of the things that was unique when you look at how you fit in between the administration before and the administration after, without getting into any of the personalities of those individuals: There was not a lot of scandal or corruption in your administration and that's not always the case in the state of New Jersey. I'm sure people will be shocked to hear that, but how did you make that happen? That's not an accident that either an administration is sort of free of that or an administration is plagued by that.

Governor Jon Corzine: Well, as I said earlier in this conversation, it's one of the things that encouraged me to get into the campaign to become governor. And how you address that, I think, is who you surround yourself with and then also how you behave when there is a taint or a possibility of something that appears to be close to or corrupt. I sent a very strong signal day one. The chief prosecutor in the U.S. Attorney's Office was Stuart Rabner, who as I said is now the chief justice; we brought him in as my counsel. He reviewed all contracts, observed all of the activities that were going on in the governor's office, and there is not a straighter shooter in the world than Justice Rabner. And it was a very unpopular decision because generally counsels to governors are people who are close to the business community, the political community, typically have godfathers out and about and have worked to make things work more smoothly across the state. And we probably took some heat politically, but I think we sent a clear message that we were going to play by the rule book and we had people who were going to observe that who had a reputation for being very disciplined about those kinds of things and it wasn't just Stuart. We had an attorney general—

Alfred Doblin: Anne Milgram

Governor Jon Corzine: —who's now running the DEA—I'm talking about in 2021 for the Biden administration—who followed Stuart in all these affairs. He went on up to the New Jersey Supreme court; she went into the attorney general's office. We

tried to send those signals regularly and if anything probably too quick on some situations because I think one of my biggest mistakes—one of the finest people I knew in public life was a guy named [Joe Doria](#), the Mayor of Bayonne. I brought him in to run [the Department of] Community Affairs and in the midst of the election there was a so-called roundup of corrupt politicians—that happened to actually be more about another issue in another community—but there were a number of politicians that were either under investigation or were being charged. Most were Democrats. And there was a situation where Joe was being investigated. And Community Affairs happens to be the department that has the most to do with how money is distributed in the state to the localities and I felt like it was going to be very hard for him to do his job. But in fact, there wasn't a single scintilla of issue with what went on in that circumstance. I don't have any understanding why he was ever drawn into it other than potentially to attempt to embarrass our administration. And that is as close as we got to anything and in fact if I think back on some of my shortfalls, it was going too quickly on that issue with Joe Doria.

Alfred Doblin: Were there any huge surprises in the people that you put into office—good or bad? That people just excelled in a way that you couldn't have imagined or, if you're comfortable talking about it, someone where you just thought there was going to be this star that didn't happen?

Governor Jon Corzine: Well, I don't believe that all great ideas start here [points to his head]; they start from teams. You bring people in. And I wanted our people to make sure that in their area of expertise that they were pushing the envelope to address those challenges that we were talking about, whether it was in child welfare where [Kevin Ryan](#) did an incredible job of getting adoptions to replace foster care. Or Lisa Jackson who was actually the creator of the regional energy credit system trading in the Northeast called RGGI [Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative]. She went on to great fame, being the EPA director for President Obama and now is virtually the chief of staff to Tim Cook at Apple. [Heather Howard](#) did incredible things on our healthcare initiatives. There were a whole bunch of people. There were some areas—I'm going to leave those names out—where I don't think people were as creative. They were administrative in how they ran their offices and sometimes there was turnover and sometimes we didn't always address it immediately, but we tried to get really forward-thinking, creative people into these roles and leaders for the various areas and I think we did. I feel very proud of the group of people that we had and I think that was—they made me look a lot better than I had any right to be.

Relationship with the Legislature

Alfred Doblin: Did you get enough legislative support? In our first conversation you sort of alluded to the first budget battle, which was an extraordinary victory for you in terms of saying, “We can’t just do it the way we’ve been doing it.” And in that previous conversation, you talked a little bit about the Christmas-tree things where you have to give something back to the legislature where there’s a pet project that gets in there but [limiting that] might have somewhat tainted your relationship with the legislature early on in that first year. Did that improve or did it stay the same? You weren’t an insider; that’s why people elected you. That was your strength.

Governor Jon Corzine: I think that it got better as time went on. I will say that in the early days of my administration I had two or three kingmakers, if you will, on the Republican side that helped me out. A guy that comes to mind is Senator Bill Gormley. And when I needed help on an important issue, he was somebody you could go to. Later Kip Bateman was another guy that you could go to on the Republican side on some important issues and I always found them helpful. I got along with Leonard Lance. We did actually a terrific thing about putting statutory requirements on going to the voters on unfunded borrowings that the legislature was authorizing but needed to actually have voter approval. I’m very proud of the bipartisanship. So individuals, as you got to know each other, we ended up getting more things done. I will say when Senator Gormley retired—I think it was two years into my term—it made it a little harder for me to go across the aisle because he was—he’d do my work. But you had to have those kinds of relationships on both sides of the aisle.

Alfred Doblin: Well, that was the key to [Governor Kean](#) (R, 1982-1990), where he had more support from key Democrats in the beginning than from Republicans. I think it’s also interesting, if you look objectively at the Governor Chris Christie (R, 2010-2018) administration, a lot of the successes he had with the Democrats in the beginning, or at different moments, was that he was pitching something they wanted to do anyway, the people who were in power. Whereas you were presenting some new stuff that people had to sort of process. Like the change in school funding, which was something that people talked about but it didn’t happen [previously]. We’ve talked a little, not in this conversation but in some of our conversations prior to this, about what would happen if you had that second term. Because you were an outsider coming in, you didn’t start with 20 years of back-room—what was that restaurant by the train station in Trenton that’s gone now where everybody ate? [ed: *Pete Lorenzo’s Café (or “Lorenzo’s”) closed in 2009 and was demolished in 2013.*]

Governor Jon Corzine: It just shows you. I didn’t go to that restaurant. [Laughs]

Alfred Doblin: But I was a journalist. You went where you could chat with people, like Pals Cabin [in West Orange, NJ], which is now a CVS, which is sad. When you think of what could have happened in that second term, would that have been the moment where all those relationships that you were building up could have come to fruition? You got to plant the seeds but you didn't get to see any fruit.

Governor Jon Corzine: Well, we did get a lot of things done. We have paid family leave, the first state in 40 years that instituted it, and it's now a national debate topic. We did early-childhood education for our at-risk kids. We did a lot of things. So I'm not embarrassed by what was accomplished. On the other hand, I think there was a lot more to do, a whole host of things. For instance, school construction was something I got really fired up about. It had been at least tainted with a sense of corruption in previous administrations. We brought in a Puritan to run the project. We got 13 schools built, most in inner-city situations where kids were going in desperately poor facilities, almost no ability to have effective STEM education in those schools. I could have done a lot more on that. I think that working with the Obama administration, we would have gotten that tunnel done, along with a lot of the other infrastructure issues, because we would have had that cooperative relationship with the administration that I think would have benefited New Jersey enormously. I campaigned on dealing with the issue of gay marriage and that got ultimately taken care of by the courts, but not in the way that I think it most appropriately should have been done: the governor should have proposed and the legislature should have supported it so that it had complete political underpinnings. But there were a number of issues like that. We were in the midst of our criminal-justice-reform agenda, where there was much, much more to do. And as I've said before I think my successor, Governor Christie, did a pretty terrific job of following through on a lot of those elements, but I was fired up about that and had been from the start of my administration. I think that the first two years of a second term can be very, very productive, should be at the height of your political power, political abilities, given that you have gone to the people and asked them for support and won it.

Alfred Doblin: What about the courts? I think we've talked privately about how people look at the state supreme court in the same way that they look at the U.S. Supreme Court but it's the bench below that really impacts people's lives on the federal level and state level. What would you have liked to have done if you had had that second term?

Governor Jon Corzine: Well, one of the things that we had on our plate when we came in is more vacancies than historically had ever been in place—which was strange since Democrats controlled the legislature—and the proposals just weren't getting through. We got most of that straightened out. We also put together a judicial-review board by former state supreme court justices and well-respected

lawyers around the state to screen all of our nominees before they even went to the legislature. We had the ABA do their normal screening but we really—we had them put together a list of people that then we would look to as potential nominees. So we had first-class people that you put on the court. Diversity. I'd done a lot of this in the Senate, too, because you were responsible for federal district court judge appointments and so I felt very strongly about fulfilling it. I am under the impression that we've gone back in our old ways and we're not getting those seats filled. Justice unaddressed is injustice and if you believe in equity then you have to have a court system that works appropriately. Now again this is not an issue you're going to win an election on; it's just—it's not on most people's agenda. But it has to be. We started drug courts so that we pulled out nonviolent crime issues, drug issues, and put them in a different venue and it made a big difference in the agenda.

Alfred Doblin: As we're talking, it's a little bit past the 2021 election and there's lots of that Monday-morning quarterbacking about how people get elected/don't get elected. Governor Phil Murphy won his second term as a Democratic incumbent. In 44 years there have only been two incumbent Democrats who have actually run, which I find kind of interesting. Maybe we can just talk very briefly about this, but it seems that it's more eight-year cycles of a *party*; we have eight years of a Republican and eight years of a Democrat. If you put that in reverse, you had Byrne, you had Kean, you had one term of Florio who raised taxes and people were toilet-papering their trees, then eight years Republican. There were then eight years of a Democrat, just four years for your term and part of that was McGreevey and Codey [before you]. Do you think that New Jerseyans are just inclined—that it's eight years and then we want to just try somebody new of a different party, and regardless of what you're doing. Because none of those Republican incumbents, when they finish their two terms, are followed by another Republican.

Governor Jon Corzine: Alfred, I'll accept your assumption here and say it wasn't my fault I was just there after eight years [of Democrats].

Alfred Doblin: You were the wrong part of the four years.

Governor Jon Corzine: But circumstances dictate the electability of an individual candidate. And we have a very strange electoral system here because Virginia and New Jersey elect their governor the year after the presidential election, and as most people probably do know in the congressional elections after a President is elected, they usually get beaten pretty good in the House of Representatives and it's almost worse for those off-off-year elections between the congressional and after a presidential. And we have some pretty good data that show that you only get about 55, 60 percent of the voter turnout in that off-off year election versus the presidential and it's a little higher versus the congressional election. But Democrats

do a lousy job of getting out our voters in off-off-year elections. Young people don't vote, which tend to be more inclined to vote Democratic, and for reasons that—very frustrating because a lot of the needs of our citizens are in our urban areas—but the turnout in our urban communities is dramatically lower. I'll give you an example: For 2021 the difference in the Democratic vote for governor this year for Governor Murphy was about a million three less than it was for President Biden, the top of the ticket the year before. For me in 2009 it was almost a million two less and we had the complicating issue that I had a fairly successful third-party candidate [Chris Daggett] who got almost 140,000 votes. So you have circumstances, fact patterns that exist in this environment that I think make that turnover more possible. Republicans' base and the people who tend to lean that way tend to vote in all elections and Democrats have a much more difficult time in motivating their voters in nonpresidential, non-congressional elections. So I think it's absolutely got to do with that—and by the way it doesn't help when unemployment goes from 3-1/2 percent to about 10.2 in about nine months because of the Great Recession that we had [during my reelection campaign]. So I certainly believe that I could have run a better campaign, gotten more of those people out to vote, but circumstances end up dictating a lot of how these things happen, particularly in low-turnout elections.

Alfred Doblin: Being this is philosophical, as we'll be closing up our conversation soon, do you think your 2009 [loss] was sort of a bellwether of the change towards populism becoming much more important? When you look at the candidates in terms of difference in style, you were very much about specific programs and policy. That was not the message that was selling to voters, and as we've seen in subsequent years—right now [we'll see whether] we cycle it in another way again—but there was a definite rise in populism. Do you think New Jersey is a bellwether?

Governor Jon Corzine: Well, you covered politics in New Jersey and observe it across the country. We had the rise of the Tea Party that was associated with the introduction of Obamacare, or the national healthcare program, that President Obama initiated. And it was in full rage in 2009 when people were mad about the economy because it was in the tank and there were also many people who thought Obamacare was next to socialism and so there was a rise-up that expressed itself in the Tea Party. And we had a few of those people here in New Jersey. Matter of fact, we had some key organizers of that approach at that point in time and they were effective in mobilizing the energy of the base vote. That carried through. President Obama did win reelection but I think that that movement led to what many people would say was the populist election of Donald Trump even though he didn't actually get the popular vote; he won on the electoral college.

Successes and Disappointments

Alfred Doblin: Let's go back to the beginning. What would you say—and this would be the order I'd like you to respond—are your greatest disappointment and greatest success or fulfillment?

Governor Jon Corzine: I have to say that not winning reelection is a pretty disappointing exercise. I will tell you that I don't think I ever worked harder nor did I enjoy what I was doing more, other than being with my family, than being governor. It presented me the opportunity that I could serve other people in a way that was just really very, very motivating and to have that up and go away on Election Day is a very hard thing. And there's a little bit of rejection in it. You feel it as a human being. I don't think anybody who's lost an election can speak otherwise so let's put that one into that category. Seeing the people that I surrounded myself with and seeing how they have continued to contribute—and I think to some extent because we laid a foundation for their careers—makes me feel really, really proud because I think they're making a difference in other people's lives the way I intended to try to do as governor. And so when I see Anne Milgram taking her skills that she honed as an attorney general, she was also my counsel in the Senate and she did a lot of things in my administration, deputy attorney general before she was attorney general, taking that to the role. I talked about Lisa Jackson. Heather Howard's a professor in Princeton now and she's probably the foremost consultant on Medicare, Medicaid and Obamacare in the country. I love the fact that Stuart Rabner has made one great, trailblazing decision after another in the Supreme Court. I feel really good about the people I had and I love seeing their careers blossom as we go forward.

Alfred Doblin: Well, I think this is a good place for us to conclude this conversation. Thank you very much Governor Corzine.

Governor Jon Corzine: Thank you.