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Ms. ANNETTE CATINO (President & CEO, QualCare, Inc.): There is more to the democratic process than campaigns and elections. As citizens, it is our responsibility to understand the key issues affecting life in our state. Hi, I'm Annette Catino. We're proud to support DEMOCRACY WORKS because it helps make sense of the complex issues that matter most to the people of our nation. Thanks for watching.

STEVE ADUBATO, host:

I recently had the opportunity to sit down with New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine for a live call-in where he responded to a range of questions posed by New Jersey citizens. We hope you enjoy this very special edition of DEMOCRACY WORKS, Corzine on the Line.

Announcer: Major funding for Corzine on the Line, a special edition of DEMOCRACY WORKS, has been provided by New Jersey Natural Gas; QualCare Inc.; buildunion.net; The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey; Monmouth University; the New Jersey Education Association; The Fund for New Jersey; The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey; MDA Advantage Insurance Company of New Jersey; Community Education Centers; Saint Barnabas Health Care System; Hill Wallack LLP; Johnson & Johnson; and by The Provident Bank.

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ADUBATO: Jenny e-mailed her question through nj.com. She says, "Governor, you know, I've heard that you in fact are considering giving a discount on college tuition for illegal immigrants. As a college student, I'm appalled that you would even consider this. Why would you want to help those who are in this country illegally and not give more aid to struggling American citizens like me?" That's to Jenny.

Governor JON CORZINE: Well, Jenny, the issue is, is if a young person is here, they've gone to school in our school system, they have done well, and they're not here because they chose to be here but their parents decided to come here, and they have lived and played by the rules, I think we, as a nation which have always opened our doors to immigrants, should welcome these young people. And therefore I don't think it's discriminating against those that are here. I think it is welcoming those that I think didn't make the choice. They came on--because their families are here and they've done well, and they'll contribute to our society through the long run. We've already invested in them, we ought to continue to.

ADUBATO: Do you under--real quick, do you understand Jenny's frustration here? With the economy being what it is, she believes--and listen, I--this is no commentary on my part--she believes American citizens first. You hear her?

Gov. CORZINE: I hear--I hear that. I hear that. But I don't think that America has turned off the spigot on people who have come from other places. That's what our nation is about. And particularly as it relates to young people, I think that, at least in my view--I respect Jenny's view--but I think it is a good thing.

ADUBATO: Judy, thank you for joining us. You're talking to the governor. Where are you calling from?

JUDY: Somerset, New Jersey.

ADUBATO: Watching us on Thirteen?

JUDY: I am.

ADUBATO: Talk to the governor.

JUDY: Governor Corzine, I'd like to know how you can lower real estate taxes so that senior citizens who just have Social Security, no pensions, can stay in New Jersey. And what is New Jersey exit tax?

ADUBATO: Hm.

Gov. CORZINE: Well, I don't know what you mean by exit tax. I will tell you that part of the economic stimulus program that we just put in place was to expand what is called the senior freeze in New Jersey. We just expanded it for seniors who have incomes between 50 and \$80,000. This is a program that if you've lived in the state for five years and you've lived in--lived in--lived in the state for 10 years but lived in your home for five years, your property taxes are frozen at the level they are when you enter the program. That's one step. Then the senior gets the property tax rebate if they meet the income constraints. Most seniors don't earn over 125--\$150,000, so they're eligible for the rebate. And then they also actually, if they have a veteran in their home, they get another rebate. If they--if they pay federal income taxes there's a tax credit there. Many seniors can get as much as \$4,000 against their property tax.

ADUBATO: And that program's safe?

Gov. CORZINE: It's--the senior...

ADUBATO: I mean fiscally. I mean fiscally.

Gov. CORZINE: Senior property tax freeze is absolutely safe.

ADUBATO: OK, Governor, really quick, before we go to Maria in Waretown, New Jersey, on this, are you convinced that with President Obama talking about personal sacrifice that things are never going to be the same, that we all have to find ways to do things differently? Are you convinced with a fiscal crisis facing the state--I mean, one of the quotes here, you said it was a tsunami coming, we got a tsunami coming. Are you committing right now...

Gov. CORZINE: Well, we have a tsunami. Not coming, it's here.

ADUBATO: OK, how about this. Are you absolutely, categorically eliminating the idea that you could propose, would propose raising taxes right now?

Gov. CORZINE: I think raising taxes at a time of recession is absolutely the wrong policy. I can't say that never, because I have a constitutional responsibility. And if we can't figure out any other actions to take to get the budget balanced, you might be forced into that sort of decision.

ADUBATO: It is an option on the table for you?

Gov. CORZINE: It is not--it is not an active option. I am actively seeking to make sure that we address our budget shortfalls, or our revenue shortfalls, by actions in reducing expenditures. We've reduced both percentagewise and absolute more than any governor in the history of this state. And we'll have to do more. We'll have to do more.

ADUBATO: And state workers--real quick, state workers, you've proposed an 18-month freeze on salaries for state workers, many of whom in the Communications Workers of America, who represent the largest number of public employees, are saying, 'Governor, you've got to be kidding. We have a contract. You can't go back on that.' Governor, you're saying an 18-month freeze for all public employees in the state?

Gov. CORZINE: There was a line in President Obama's inaugural speech that said neighbors ought to think about working fewer hours so other people can stay at work and keep their health insurance. What we have proposed is we can have a layoff that puts...

ADUBATO: Of state workers.

Gov. CORZINE: ...of state workers that puts people out on the street, gets them into charity care and Medicaid and raises our costs, or we can share the burden by having people say, 'We don't need this raise today, we'd rather have us work.' There--another option, we could furlough people one day a month or one day a week or other ways.

ADUBATO: (Unintelligible)...do that. And the state unions have said no.

Gov. CORZINE: So far they have. We are having discussions and hopefully we can get to resolution that there is a shared effort in bringing down the expenses of the state.

ADUBATO: Maria, talk to the governor.

MARIA: Yes, good evening, Governor. I would like to know if you would be willing to put together a committee to look into the medical care management of injured and sick soldiers in the New Jersey Guard.

ADUBATO: Well, is she still there, folks?

Gov. CORZINE: Maria, are you still there?

ADUBATO: Ah, shoot. She's still--I thought we had her.

Gov. CORZINE: Yeah.

First of all, we probably have the most aggressive program, certainly with respect to mental health issues, for the National Guard, for those coming back, of any state in the nation. We think we do a reasonable job of making sure that our guardsmen and guardswomen are actually healthy when they come off of active duty. And by the way, we have 3100 National Guardsmen in Iraq today.

ADUBATO: And you just came--you went to Iraq.

Gov. CORZINE: And I just--and I just was there two weeks ago for two-day trip, visited with five or 600, had a town hall meeting not unlike this. We talked about the economy there, too. They're...

ADUBATO: Soldiers wanted to talk about...

Gov. CORZINE: Soldiers are very worried...

ADUBATO: Oh, by the way, Governor, we actually have Maria back on the line. Keep talking to her, we're glad to have her.

Gov. CORZINE: Maria, we're working on those kinds of programs over and over and over again, and we're working very much with the Department of Defense to make sure that long-term care for anybody that has either physical or mental injury, that they will be looked after. But you know, there are instances where people fall through the cracks. I hope that those people will speak up, because we have the programs that will work with them.

ADUBATO: Maria, can I--is she gone?

MARIA: No, I'm here.

ADUBATO: Maria, can I--can I just ask you a question, Maria? I just have a sense there's a reason why you asked this. Is there anyone in your family close to you connected to the military?

MARIA: Yes, it is my husband.

ADUBATO: Would you--would you tell us--he's been serving, or where is he serving?

MARIA: Yes. My husband was in New Jersey National Guard. He's been a lifetime military man, and he was injured on the job. And it seems as though he is one of the soldiers who has fallen through the cracks. It's a very emotional case for me, of course, but I would love to work with the governor's office to try and get...

Gov. CORZINE: Maria, here's the number. If you'll take this number, call and...

MARIA: Sure.

Gov. CORZINE: ...this'll get right to me.

ADUBATO: You have something to write with, Maria?

MARIA: Yes, I do.

ADUBATO: Go ahead.

Gov. CORZINE: 609-777-2494.

MARIA: Yes. Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: Try it again, Governor.

Gov. CORZINE: 609-777-2492.

MARIA: Yes, I got it.

Gov. CORZINE: And ask for Cathy, and I will follow up.

ADUBATO: Let's go back to a Star-Ledger video; Roland, who talked directly to the governor. Let's go to it.

Mr. JASON CUMMINGS (Linden, New Jersey): I'm realizing that the price of the tolls have gone up, and I'm just curious about whether there're going to be any more increases in the near future.

ADUBATO: Jason wants to talk tolls, Governor.

Gov. CORZINE: We had a toll hike, you've seen it. You got it.

ADUBATO: What was the biggest lesson you learned from that toll situation when you went ahead and said, 'Hey, listen.' You did a series of town meetings all across the state, you took on every question, every criticism that came your way. You said, 'This is my plan.' It didn't work out. What did you learn from it?

Gov. CORZINE: Well, first of all I learned that the public wants fiscal responsibility. My plan actually had four points to it: One, a constitutional amendment that said you had to go to the bar--to the public and ask for their approval to borrow; two, that we were going to cut spending, and we did; and three, we were going to have recurring revenues or match revenues and expenses on an ongoing basis, and not use tricks and gimmicks to balance the budget. Those three elements were widely accepted, including by the public the amendment to the Constitution that says you got to ask them for...

ADUBATO: Yeah. The toll plan?

Gov. CORZINE: Toll plan didn't work because, you know, it was too aggressive in people's minds with regard to the cost they thought that it was going to bear on them. And I didn't do as good a job of explaining the benefits, which I think would have saved people money. But...

ADUBATO: So what now?

Gov. CORZINE: You know, now we're going to have to work our way out of our debt problem over a much longer period of time, and it will cost little bits and pieces more because our budget is going to be tied up with interest payments to the bankers who own our bonds. We would not have been making those interest payments if we'd actually executed the plan. I understand particularly in the context of a recession--the recession actually started in 2007, fall of 2007. All economists say that now. People were hurting when we were doing this program at the start of 2008. And I--you know, it was very

aggressive and, you know, I listened and we backed away.

ADUBATO: Thank you, Sue, for joining us for Corzine on the Line.

SUE: Thank you. Hi, Governor.

Gov. CORZINE: Hello.

SUE: I just wanted to ask, with the whole new vaccination mandates that New Jersey's passed, how the state expects to pay for in particular the flu vaccine mandate, and all the problems that we're now seeing occur with children being kicked out of school, special needs issues and just how the state plans to continue to foot the bill for more and more vaccines for our kids.

Gov. CORZINE: Well, the--there's a cost benefit that a lot of people have studied extensively with the cost of not vaccinating our children being higher than the cost of vaccination. And by the way, it--the cost is for children who are entering the school system, and it's really the parents' responsibility, unless there is--unless the child is eligible for family care or Medicaid or the insurance programs. So it is spread out over a lot of folks. But almost all of the studies that we have seen show that--and I think this is pretty broadly accepted--that children in general are a lot healthier because they're not exposed to the diseases that come from people that aren't vaccinated. And we have actually made one exception, if there is an issue for religious purposes or moral purposes, we will allow people to step down from those vaccinations. But then the school's got to decide whether the risk of that is appropriate for the kids. We have as many people--we have more people who believe that their children would be safer with everyone uniformly vaccine and--having vaccines. That's why we don't have polio today. That's why we don't have whooping cough. And a lot of times when the vaccinations stop you see these things coming back.

ADUBATO: Got a lot of calls and questions here. Let's go to Iselin, New Jersey, where the Star-Ledger video team took a terrific question, I--we're told by our producers. Let's go to it.

Mr. RAMON REYES (Iselin, New Jersey): Do you have any program on alternative energy for the state of New Jersey? And I noticed that the gas prices have been steadily increasing as--in every day. Are we doing something about that?

Gov. CORZINE: We have probably the most aggressive program on solar energy in the country. Some people would say California's slightly more aggressive than we do. We've been offering rebates to homeowners and--long before I became governor. We've accelerated that program. We're building windmills off the coast of Atlantic City and we are--we are into thermal energy. We really have an energy master plan that emphasizes alternative energy and energy conservation that I think...

ADUBATO: Has the economy hurt that?

Gov. CORZINE: That's one of the reasons that Lisa Jackson got chosen as...

ADUBATO: Tell folks--Lisa Jackson, the DEP commissioner no longer.

Gov. CORZINE: Right.

ADUBATO: Because?

Gov. CORZINE: Well, she was my chief of staff. She had been my...

ADUBATO: She was your chief...

Gov. CORZINE: ...Department Environmental Protection leader for two and a half years, we brought her over chief of staff and President Obama took her down to be the Environmental Protection Agency administrator.

ADUBATO: What does that mean to New Jersey, by the way?

Gov. CORZINE: Well, first of all, she's going to serve the nation. She's not there to serve New Jersey.

ADUBATO: What does it mean to the New York, New Jersey, Connecticut region and Philadelphia, as well?

Gov. CORZINE: Well, I think that recognizing the specialized problems. We have the most Superfund sites in America right in New Jersey, and there haven't been the proper funding for cleaning them up, there haven't been the proper attention to cleaning up things like Ringwood, which is going to take big, big dollars to be able to actually clean up. And we have a number of those sites. So I think there will be a recognition that particularly in the old industrial areas across the country that there needs to be investment dollars and attention spent. She has been a champion on clean air, global warming, and we've got, again, some of the most aggressive programs in the world, not just in the nation. Part of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, RGGI, which is trading carbons. There's all kinds of initiatives...

ADUBATO: OK. Real quick, Governor, tell folks what it means...

Gov. CORZINE: ...and she's going to bring those to Washington.

ADUBATO: Tell folks real quick, Governor--and I don't--I don't want to get the year wrong. By 2000 and--get it right.

Gov. CORZINE: Twenty.

ADUBATO: By 2020 the commitment that you have made, the goal...

Gov. CORZINE: Twenty percent reduction in carbon emissions.

ADUBATO: Translate that in English.

Gov. CORZINE: Just means that we're going to change fuel mileage standards, less carbon-oriented, more hybrids. We're going to change how we produce energy. We'll do more what the gentleman talked about in alternative energy.

ADUBATO: Right.

Gov. CORZINE: And we're going to conserve the use of energy. I just signed a piece of legislation yesterday where we're going to convert energy consumption in our schools and public buildings across the state, where we're working with private sector investors who will make the investments to buy new boilers, put in new lightbulbs, new thermostats.

ADUBATO: You're into this.

Gov. CORZINE: I love this stuff. And we're ahead of the country on this, and we're ahead of the country on alternative energies.

ADUBATO: Ramon, you got your money's worth there, even though you didn't have to pay for that. Now, Ramon, you got a--got a direct answer from the governor.

Hey, let--let's do this. We got how many minutes, guys? We have about 10 minutes left? Nah, seven. Governor, let's--tight on the questions, tight on the answers, and I'll be quiet.

Ray in Pompton Plains online asked this question: "Governor, New Jersey state workers have too much influence in the elections because they raise so much political money, they distribute them to the union-endorsed candidates. Aren't they simply too powerful?" the public employee unions. You say?

Gov. CORZINE: I think that there has been a history of a lot of political power with both parties--by the way, the Republican Party in 2001 gave a 9 percent increase in pension benefits to our public employee unions. There's always been a competition among the parties to see who would be the most favored political group with those organizations. I would say that that influence has diminished because of the needs of the state. The common good of the state requires that all of us who are in public life think about the benefit of everyone. That's why we've raised the...

ADUBATO: And those contracts still lucrative, Governor?

Gov. CORZINE: We just signed a contract 18 months ago, right before I had my car crash, that saved the state \$6 1/2 billion over 15 years. Unheard of givebacks by the unions. I think they recognize, the public employees, that there has to be compromise, that they have to step back from these needs.

ADUBATO: I broke my rule. Ahmad, who is a high school student--I said I wasn't going to talk. That's it, I'm done.

Ahmad, go ahead. Time is yours.

AHMAD: Hi, how are you, Mr. Corzine?

Gov. CORZINE: Hi.

AHMAD: I am a high school student in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and as a high-achieving student I would like to know what New Jersey can do to help me and my family.

Gov. CORZINE: Well, Ahmad, we have expanded our programs of financial aid for students. As you probably know, we have a STARS program which helps students who have a high grade point average in high school go to community colleges. It's the best program in the country to make sure that young folks who don't have the resources can get started in education. Then we have made sure that our four-year colleges are aligned with our community colleges and have to accept the credits. We give out more money to low-income students than almost any state in the nation, again, on tuition assistance grants. And we're really working to try to provide aid for young people like yourself, I

presume, who want a chance at the American promise through a higher education.

ADUBATO: Let's go to the Star-Ledger video team real quick and get one more quickie in here for the governor.

Mr. ALAN D. BOWMAN (West Windsor, New Jersey): Please discuss what you think the prospects are for a healthy recovery by the economy.

ADUBATO: Good one. Big picture question.

Gov. CORZINE: We always recover from economic recessions and depressions. The issue is the timing. The new administration, I think, is exactly spot on in putting together a very large stimulus program that will substitute for the fall off of activity in the private sector, either in consumption or investment by business. And I think that's happening. I think that the new administration will instill a spirit of confidence and a sense of well-being that I think, for better or worse, just didn't exist over the last two or three years.

ADUBATO: Do we expect too much from a president?

Gov. CORZINE: Well, I think a president can instill confidence that you are competently addressing these problems. That's why passage of this economic recovery program that the--President Obama is now working with Congress to deliver, and doing it on an expeditious basis, will build the confidence of the country, it will build demand in the country. And I think over the next 12 to 18 months we will see the economy recover.

ADUBATO: Real quick, Governor, I don't know if--I hope you can give a quick answer to Raymond, who's in Manalapan--you know where that is, right? He says, "Governor, why are you against offshore drilling? It's safe, it generates thousands of jobs and revenue, and above all it helps--excuse me--helps satisfy the millions of taxpayers who want it." Why are against offshore drilling?

Gov. CORZINE: I--I'm not against offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, I'm off--against offshore drilling off of the New Jersey coast. First of all, there were studies done in the '70s, there is no identifiable high--highly available oil supplies off...

ADUBATO: It's going to take about 10 years, 15 years to get anything there.

Gov. CORZINE: Ten years. Yeah. And--but I think...

ADUBATO: But is that worth it?

Gov. CORZINE: I think there are a lot greater supplies identified already in the Gulf of Mexico and in other places across the country. I don't see why we would want to take the risk--he says it's safe in the assumption of the question.

ADUBATO: Right.

Gov. CORZINE: That's not guaranteed. Matter of fact, there are a lot of people that say oil spills happen on a regular basis, and it ends up destroying our 100 and--if it ends up destroying our 127 miles of shoreline, or a portion of it, that's a big part of our economy. I don't think the

risk/reward makes sense.

ADUBATO: All right. We got a minute left to black, guys? Minute left?

Governor, real quick, you got more money than most people can imagine, and you spent a lot of money to get elected first time; re-elected, if you will. You're going to do it again. Do you have any questions as to whether you want this job, since most of your job is telling people no and doing real tough stuff and cutting the budget, instead of doing the kind of creative things you want?

Gov. CORZINE: No question that I like what I'm doing. We've reformed the child welfare system, got more kids going into adoptive homes and foster care than ever before. We have one of the best education systems and we're improving it. You know, we have lower crime rates, lower death on the highways, lots of good things that make a difference in people's lives. I want to keep trying to do it and fix our finances.

ADUBATO: And the governor will come back either way and engage us in a discussion throughout the campaign, if in fact he runs, and if he's re-elected he'll be back.

Listen. One more time, Governor, I want to thank all of our partners: Thirteen/WNET, where we're doing the program, the PBS flagship; WHYY news and information down in Philadelphia, south Jersey; on the radio, WHYY 91 FM; also, WBGO Jazz 88 FM; the Star-Ledger video team; nj.com. And also, watch us again tomorrow night--excuse me, Friday night, 10:00 on NJN. An internat--I was going to say international electronic town meeting.

Governor, I want to thank you so much, mostly because you came back and did this.

Gov. CORZINE: Thank you.

ADUBATO: Come back again.

Gov. CORZINE: Will do.

ADUBATO: Great job. This was fun.

Announcer: If you would like more information on this program, or if you'd like to express an opinion, e-mail us at democracyworks@caucusnj.org. Or visit us online at democracyworksnj.org.

Corzine on the Line is a production of the Caucus Educational Corporation, celebrating over 20 years of broadcast excellence; WHYY news and information, and Thirteen in association with wnet.org.

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Ms. JOYCE POWELL (President, NJEA): There's more to the democratic process
than campaigns and elections. As citizens, it is our responsibility to
understand the key issues affecting life in our state. Hi, I'm Joyce Powell.
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complex issues that matter most to the people of our nation. Thanks for
watching.