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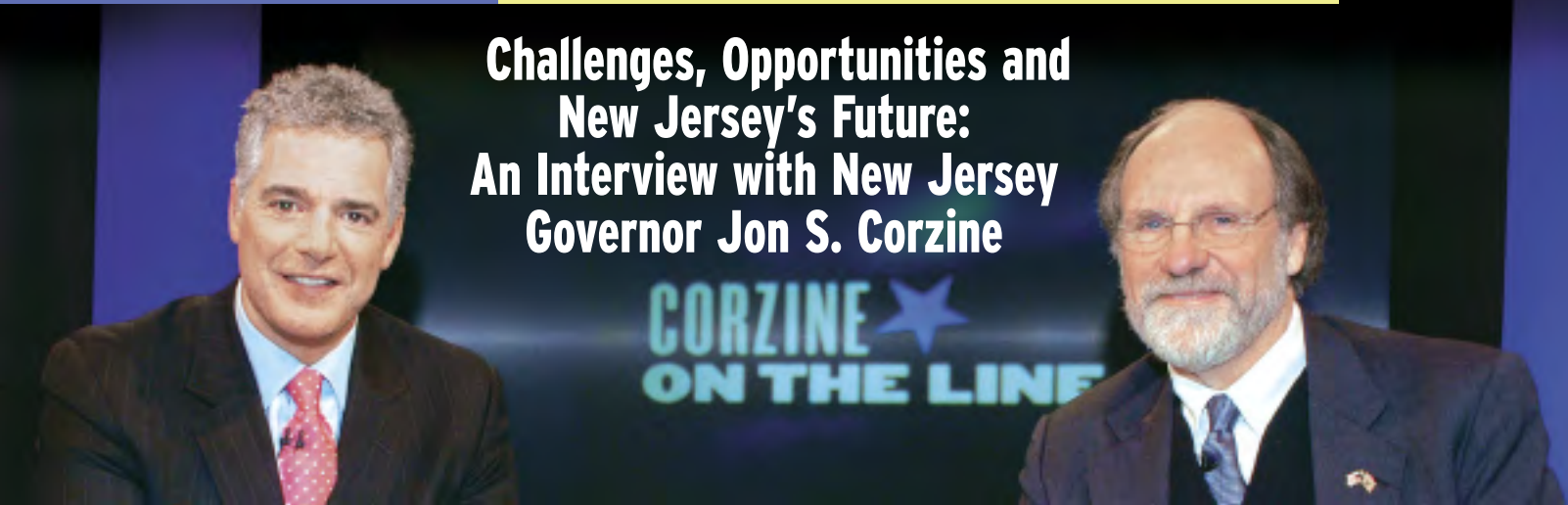


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Challenges, Opportunities and New Jersey's Future: An Interview with New Jersey Governor Jon S. Corzine



BY STEVE ADUBATO, PH.D.

New Jersey Governor Jon S. Corzine is interviewed by Emmy Award-winning Anchor Steve Adubato, Ph.D. Photo: Bill Blanchard Photography

DURING A LIVE CALL-IN PROGRAM CALLED “Corzine on the Line” on Thirteen / WNET (PBS)—which was simulcast on WHYY TV12 and WHYY 91 FM in Philadelphia, and also streamed on the *Star-Ledger's* Web site at NJ.com—I had the opportunity to interview New Jersey Governor Jon S. Corzine. At this November 2007 electronic town meeting, citizens were able to ask questions as well. The following is a combination of my interview with the governor and some of the questions asked by listeners and viewers.

COMMERCE: *In the speech that you gave at the NJ League of Municipalities event in Atlantic City, you proposed cutting the debt from \$32 billion right in half. How are you going to do that so quickly?*

GOVERNOR CORZINE: There is one plan that I know will allow us to get the resources...it is not going to be free. There will end up being charges on the toll ways that will be troubling for some. But I think [it's necessary] for the reduction in the debt and its implication for our ability to spend on investments such as the [New Jersey] Turnpike [instead] of paying this interest in principal debt, like people have to pay on their mortgages. Each citizen has about \$3,300 of debt from the state that is their per-capita share. That is every man, woman and child, not just each family. It would be a lot larger for a family. We need to reduce that so we have the fiscal capacity to do the things they expect us to do—protect them, educate their kids and make sure we provide a social safety net for the most troubled in our society.

Q. *What are you going to do to make health insurance more affordable for working families?*

A. The most important thing we need to do is get our friends down in Washington to get off their tails and do something about universal health insurance. That's what I've been arguing about since I got into public life.

We can do some important things at the state level. That's why we've been fighting to keep the Children's Health Insurance Programs in place in the structure we have been able to have them in New Jersey. The president has vetoed the bill, and is cutting back and has gone directly at the State of New Jersey trying to cut down low income parents—they are trying to cut back kids that are in families that make \$70,000 or less. It is a huge mistake. We have been fighting with our administration over this and hopefully we can stall him until he is out so we can work with the next president, whoever that may be.

Q. *Many perceive that crime is rising in New Jersey's inner cities. How are you going to work with local leaders to address this problem?*

A. In the month of October, we had a series of presentations [about] initiatives regarding some of the problems we see related to gangs. We talked about enforcement issues; we've got to [make] changes [to combat] gangs. Witness intimidation rules need to be strengthened; we need to be sure that bail money is not dirty money. We need a whole series of rules lengthening out prison sentences to those who are using guns in violent crime; we need a very strong enforcement program. But we also need to make sure that we are preventing our children from getting into circumstances where they feel that gangs are their only alternative. That [means] after-school programs, higher quality mentoring in our schools....

Another area we are working on is prisoner re-entry. About 2/3 of the folks that go off to prison, come back and then go back into [the] jail [system]. We need to come up with a program to be sure that we work with these individuals both in the prison and that we are working with the individuals when they come out—so they can get jobs, have their records cleaned up and so that they have the ability to go to work. All of those things need to be pulled together. We need the community to help. Without our families saying that we want to

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stop violence and bring discipline to the streets, we've got a real challenge ahead of us to see this crime problem break down.

Q. *For people thinking of leaving New Jersey because of taxes and the cost of living, how can you convince them it's worth staying?*

A. We are doing a lot of things that are important for New Jersey. We have the best school system, so if you have children and you want your kids to go to college, we have one of the highest rates of children going off to college. We have



"We are doing a lot of things that are important for New Jersey," says Governor Corzine.

the highest graduation rate, and if they are young kids, we have the best pre-school system in the country. So there are reasons to stay here. Secondly, we just instituted one of the most aggressive property tax relief programs, and that translates into sending out an average of \$1,000 to 1.8 million New Jerseyans. That is up from about \$300 on average in previous years. That is real tax relief that was provided. We are going to fight [so] that it continues to be provided year after year.

Q. *Are you are going to sell or lease the Turnpike, and how much will tolls increase?*

A. First of all, we are not going to sell the Turnpike. That is one of the fundamental principles and regardless of what other politicians tell you, there will be no sale of the New Jersey Turnpike and the New Jersey public will continue to own it. There will be no lease of the Turnpike to a private entity or a foreign entity, and as soon as I know what schedule increases in tolls will be necessary to put this program together, I am going to go out and talk to the public about what that increase will be.

Q. *But there will be increases in tolls, right? Because if there are not, where is the money going to come from for this other entity to pay back the state, so you can pay down on the debt?*

A. By the way, there will be increases in tolls whether we implement my plan or we don't implement my plan. We've already signed up to widen the Turnpike from Exits 6 to 10. But the fact is...there is no money for that. There is no money for fixing bridges. There are no resources to build tunnels under the Hudson River. We make commitments and have made commitments for the last decade...there aren't the resources [available] to be able to fulfill those promises. If we are going to do the things necessary to have our economy strong and to relieve the pressure on the debt of this state, then we need to come up with a plan for doing it. Some people say, "Raise the gas tax 10, 20 or 25 cents." I don't think that is as wise as trying to figure out a proposal that will capture the value of what our Turnpike has the ability to produce—capture that—and make those investments in paying down the debt and investing in our infrastructure.

Q. *Is there something about New Jersey and those who serve in government in New Jersey where there seems to be a disproportionate number of elected and appointed officials who wind up either indicted or convicted?*

A. I think we have a very, very fragmented political system—organizational system—in our state. We have more government than most states have, so the opportunities for people who are not willing to live up to the standard that people should be a lot [more plentiful]. We are working in our Attorney General's office and the U.S. Attorney's office to let people know that if you break the law, you will be held accountable.

Q. *If you could have done something differently in your first two years of serving as governor, what would it be?*

A. I think we could have done a better job in getting the finances of the state in order sooner. I wish we had pushed a little harder, a little sooner, to get that job done. ■

Steve Adubato, Ph.D., is an Emmy Award-winning anchor for Channel Thirteen / WNET (PBS) who is also a media analyst for MSNBC. A much sought-after speaker on leadership and communication, Steve is the author of the book, Make the Connection (Rutgers University Press). For more information, or to book Steve, log on to www.stand-deliver.com. Steve can be reached at sadubato@aol.com.