

Interactive Forum Examines New Jersey's Future

Distinguished speakers offer suggestions for making New Jersey a better place to live and work

On Wednesday, October 15, 2008 at the Trenton Studios of New Jersey Network, the Leadership New Jersey (LNJ) Graduate Organization sponsored an interactive forum entitled: Clean Slate, Fresh Start: A 21st Century Model for State Government. Michael Willmann, LNJ '01, welcomed participants and viewers noting that NJN was simulcasting the proceedings around the world.

Ideas were catapulted at the gathering of 150 New Jersey's leaders in the NJN Studio and through the live video stream and podcast. Speakers included Bob Franks, former Congressman and CEO of the HealthCare Institute of New Jersey; two former Governors of the State of New Jersey, Brendan Byrne and James J. Florio; and a host of other distinguished guests, each of whom was allotted three minutes to express their views on new ideas for New Jersey.

A unique feature of the Forum was its use of interactive Consensor® touchpads, which allowed attendees to answer multiple choice questions. Questions were asked following each speaker and the results were immediately displayed and recorded. A Consensor poll revealed that the audience was 14% Republican, 58% Democrat and 25% Independent. The majority were upscale, with nearly 75% claiming a household income over \$100,000 (31% over \$200,000). Most were from Central NJ (55%), with 31% from Northern counties and 14% from Southern NJ. Some 58% were current or Graduate Fellows of Leadership New Jersey.

Bob Franks opened the Forum saying, "For the first time in my adult life, I fear for the future of New Jersey. Unless we make significant, substantial revisions to the way in which we govern ourselves, our standard of living will inevitably decline."

The need for change begins with the State Legislature, "a branch that has lost its

way," according to Franks. "I would pay our legislators between \$100,000 and \$125,000 a year and ban all outside earned income. I would also limit the time that the legislature could be in session to 90 days per year", Franks recommended. "Each legislator should have only one public job. Legislators should also be prohibited from becoming lobbyists for at least two years after serving in the legislature."

Franks said, "We need to realign districts so that Senate and Assembly districts do not overlap, allowing an individual to overcome the strength of a party apparatus, especially in primary elections." Franks said, "There should be periodic votes on whether or not to hold a Constitutional Convention and the election rather than appointment of the state Comptroller.

Finally, Franks insisted we need to address the judicial system in New Jersey. "They are not only directing the Legislature to create massive new programs, but also telling them how much and where to spend that money," he says. "We need to give the people the power to vote on the tenure of Supreme Court Justices."

Some 80% of the attendees agreed on higher pay for legislators while banning outside income, while 78% agreed on limiting legislative meeting time. The majority agreed with a ban on post-employment and multiple public jobs, as well as making assembly districts more competitive and voting on Constitutional Convention and Supreme Court Justice tenures.

The People's Choice

Patrick Murray, Director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute and LNJ Fellow from the Class of 2008, provided the Forum a base of current public opinion on which to build. He reported that 64% of respondents to the latest poll think the state is "off on the wrong track



and that the structure of New Jersey government is broken and needs major changes." They gave Governor Corzine only a 44% approval rating, with grades of "D" on his handling of property taxes and the cost of living and a "C-" overall. Some 47% also disapprove of the job the State Legislature is doing, while only 29% approve. Property taxes were rated the state's most serious problem with a score of 8.7 on a scale of 1 to 10. Complete poll results are available online at www.monmouth.edu/polling.

Can Government Be Improved?

Big ideas continued to flow. Tim McDonough, Mayor of Hope Township, set the stage with his observation that local government works well and instead of consolidating services at the county level, we should eliminate county government.

Dianne Brake, LNJ '90 and President of PlanSmart NJ, asked how we can best deliver services, especially those relating to land use, suggesting allocation to which entity of government that can perform most efficiently, to eliminate duplication of services.

Speakers and attendees all agreed on the need to restructure New Jersey government, although not necessarily on exactly



Bob Franks -President, HealthCare Institute of New Jersey (HINJ)

how to accomplish that goal. Jack Tarditi, Vice Chairman of Conner Strong Companies, suggested that, “We need a Constitutional Convention conducted not by the legislature, but by people like us, to make state government more efficient and more accountable.” Sixty percent of the attendees polled agreed with him. Harry Pozyski, Chairman of the Center for Civic Responsibility, said, “We need to empower ordinary citizens of New Jersey to implement change,” and 76% of the attendees agreed. Jon Shure, President of New Jersey Policy Perspective, insisted that “We have too many municipalities and too many school districts,” with nearly 70% of the attendees agreeing with him. Joan Verplanck, President of the NJ Chamber of Commerce, suggested that, “We need to take the best practices of other government units from throughout the country and overcome the objections of home rule to incorporate them into New Jersey government,” with 68% of attendees agreeing. Tom Byrne, Chairman of Byrne Asset Management and recently appointed to the NJ Tax & Fiscal Study Commission, further suggested that, “We are driving our best and brightest out of NJ by overtaxing them. We need to place effective limits on borrowing,” with which 81% of attendees agreed.

Barbara Heisler Williams, LNJ '03 and Executive Director of the Fund for an OPEN Society, suggested that, “We need to promote not only racial diversity in housing, but also age, ethnic and income diversity and have an integration impact assessment.”

Pam Mount, a township mayor and farmer/owner of Terhune Orchards, representing the private sector, suggested that, “Town government should be responsible only for a few basic things like police, fire and infrastructure.” She also proposed that municipal government and schools should merge.

Land Use & Transportation Policy

Tom Wright, Executive Director of Regional Plan Association proposed “not cutting property taxes but simply keeping them from increasing.” Tom Carver, Executive Director, NJ Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, said,

“Government needs to be more proactive and politicians must tell people the truth, not promise to cut their taxes. We need to invest in infrastructure with a special emphasis on transportation,” which drew an approval rating of approximately 80% from attendees. Susan Zelman, LNJ '96, Sussex County Freeholder and Chair of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, cautioned, “We need more intermodal transportation. Funding decisions should be bipartisan based on cost/benefit, not political pork.”

Tania Nash-Laird, Executive Director, Trenton Downtown Association, said, “We need to encourage market rate development in urban areas and to encourage businesses to locate in cities,” with which over 75% of attendees agreed. Veronica Vanterpool, Associate Director, Tri-State Transportation Campaign, on the other hand, cautioned, “We need to stop raiding the Transportation Trust Fund. Stop widening roads and invest instead in public transportation, urban revitalization and bike/ pedestrian paths.”

Steven Sacks-Wilner, Senior VP, Capital Public Affairs said, “New Jersey is broke. We have an affordability crisis with residents deserting the state. That is decreasing our buying power, our tax base and our national political influence. We need to revise our tax policy, which currently mandates against educating our children.” Only about 50% of attendees favored raising the income tax to fund education, however, about 35% opposed it.

Governor's Panel

Former Governors Brendan T. Byrne (1974-1982) and James J. Florio (1990-1994), Christopher Daggett, former Deputy Chief of Staff to Governor Kean, and Roland Machold, former State Treasurer under Governor Whitman, were on a panel moderated by Kent Manahan, NJN News Anchor. The panel was introduced by Ann Limberg, President, Bank of America, New Jersey, who said, “LNJ plays a valuable role in strengthening the leadership of our state and that's why we're here today.”

Manahan kicked off the discussion by saying, “We need to talk about what we need to do to move forward.” Byrne opened with, “New Jersey's problems can

be summed up by the expression, ‘If you're not getting something for nothing, you're not getting your fair share.’ We need to change that attitude.”

Machold agreed that, “We need to come to grips with the attitudes that infinite demands can be placed on finite resources, and that every expenditure is good, and every fundraising effort is bad.” Florio, however, cautioned that, “We need to overcome the notion that government is of no value in helping to solve the current economic crisis.”

Daggett reminded us that, “There is no magic bullet – when you're dealing with government, you're dealing with a number of things simultaneously.” He went on to say the State must confront the difficult issues of pensions, health care costs, aid to municipalities, and aid to schools. “The opportunity now is to not be quite so partisan as we have been. We need to bring people together and address the real issues.”

In their closing remarks, all members of the panel agreed on the need for a less adversarial environment and more of an effort to work together to solve the state's problems.



Richard McCormick, President of Rutgers University

Challenges In Higher Education

Richard McCormick, President of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey said, “Our colleges and universities are addressing our most pressing problems,

including climate change and the quest for alternative sources of energy.” McCormick maintained, “With the decrease in state funding, however, we must seek alternative sources of revenue.”

Sharon Schulman, Director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Richard Stockton College, cautioned that, “We need less regulation and more monitoring, with market and result-based compensation for public employees engaged in education,” drawing 79% audience agreement, “and statewide – rather than local – negotiation of teachers contracts,” with which 61% of attendees agreed.

Philip Kirschner, President, NJ Business & Industry Association, drew nearly 75% agreement with his suggestion for more state colleges and 68% for more scholarships enticing New Jersey students to attend them. Roland Anglin, LNJ '90, Director of the Initiative for Regional and Community Transformation at Rutgers likewise suggested that, “We need to devote more money to inner city schools and to help our charter schools become more efficient,” with which 58% strongly agreed and 27% moderately agreed, “and to community colleges,” with which 66% agreed.



Roland Anglin (LNJ 1990), Rutgers Initiative for Regional/Community Transformation

The New Demography

Dr. James W. Hughes, Dean, and Joseph J. Seneca, Professor of Economics at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University said, “Between 1980 and 2000, New Jersey gained on average 437,000 private

sector jobs per decade,” Hughes stated. “Since December of 2000, we have lost 14,900 private sector jobs. New Jersey has gone from demographic lion to demographic lamb.”

“New Jersey’s population increased 3.2% from 2000 to 2007, a gain of 291,000 people,” Seneca noted. “The nation’s population growth over the same period was 7.2%. North Carolina replaced New Jersey as the 10th most populous state in 2005, when New Jersey’s average housing cost was 57% above the national average while North Carolina’s was 10% below.”

Jim Maley, Mayor, Borough of Collingswood, argued that, “Property taxes are our only source of revenue. We need to be able to use other revenue streams and to control costs by moving from defined benefit pension plans to defined contribution plans,” with which a whopping 95% agreed. Peter Kasabach, LNJ '97, Executive Director, New Jersey Future, added that, “We need to get serious about land use and elevate planning to department status,” drawing nearly 70% agreement. “We also need to give the State Development and Redevelopment Plan real teeth and line up state regulations and investments behind where we want to grow,” he suggested and nearly 90% of the audience agreed.

Energy & The Environment

Stephen E. Morgan, President of Jersey Central Power & Light and LNJ Fellow 2005 said, “Deregulation stems from a perception that energy prices are too high. In fact, the price per unit of energy has decreased while total consumption has gone up, increasing the total amount you pay for energy.”

Jeff Tittel, Director of the NJ Chapter of the Sierra Club, called for balancing environmental concerns with the need for growth. He said, “New Jersey is the number one state in the nation in miles of stream segments that are considered impaired by pollution and in the number of Superfund sites. We need to scrap the State Plan and substitute the concept of growth boundaries.” He gained 73% audience agreement with doing permitting and environmental reviews up front.

Spurred by a number of speakers’ suggestions, attendees were asked to vote on two proposals:

- Mandate an increase in the state income tax to address any gaps between the cost of government and the revenue available to fund government on an annual basis. 33% voted in favor, 44% opposed.
- Put the Attorney General’s office into receivership and into the hands of the U.S. Attorney’s office, treating it like an underperforming school district. 33% in favor, 56% opposed.

Bringing the Forum to an end, there was an interactive conversation between state legislators and some champions of social and environmental reform, moderated by Katherine Kish, LNJ '03, including Assemblymen Upendra Chivukula, LNJ '98, and Jon Bramnick, along with Senators Bob Gordon, LNJ '87, and Thomas Kean, Jr..

Kish began the discussion by asking, “Has government grown too big, too unwieldy?” Panel members agreed that in some situations, it has, but that there are others, such as pollution, where government intervention is necessary. Individual speakers were then given an opportunity to ask questions of the panel. “We need to address the issue of immigration,” said Robert Patten, Mayor of the Borough of Hightstown. “How would members of the panel do this?”

Kean felt that, “Immigration is really a federal issue, and Congress has failed to address it, leaving it up to state and local government.” Gordon agreed, saying that, “Leaving it to the local level increases costs because they are not set up to do it. There are too many municipalities, too many school districts, each with its own concerns and interests.” Chivukula added that, “Once the immigrants are here, it is the responsibility of the state to provide services like education, healthcare and driver’s licenses,” while Bramnick stated that, “We need to make the state more business friendly, in part because many of our new businesses are started by immigrants.”

Kish asked whether there is a potential conflict between growth and the environment.

David Pringle, Chief Strategist, NJ Environmental Federation, said, "There is no conflict, but we need clear rules governing smart growth and the interests of developers versus environmentalists." Captain Bill Sheehan, Hackensack Riverkeeper, added that, "Water is at the crux of every problem in NJ. If we want people to live in cities, we need to make sure that they have enough water to live on."

Kish concluded the Forum by asking the panel, "As 21st century leaders, do our opportunities outweigh our challenges or is it the other way around?" Panel members responded unanimously that any problems that exist can be solved through a combination of bipartisan cooperation and new technologies.

The event was made possible thanks to the support from more than 20 sponsors, including lead sponsors Bank of America, BD, NJN, FirstEnergy/JCP&L, Birdsall Services Group, Gibbions PC, Godwin Pumps, Princeton Public Affairs Group, and Valero Energy. Details on the 2009 Forum on the future of New Jersey will be posted on www.leadershipnj.org

LNJGO Forum Steering Committee

Chairs:

Michael Willmann – LNJ '01,
WMSH Marketing Communications

Dianne Brake, LNJ '90, *Plan Smart N.J.*

Katherine Kish – LNJ '03,
Market Entry, Inc.

Program and Logistics:

Andrew V. Sinclair – LNJ '01,
Princeton Public Affairs Group, Inc.

Michael Willmann – LNJ '01,
WMSH Marketing Communications



The luncheon panel at Leadership NJ's Forum on the Future of New Jersey featured a distinguished roster of participants. From left: Roland Machold, former state treasurer; former Gov. Brendan Byrne; Anne Limberg, market president of Bank of America, which sponsored the panel; Christopher Daggett, chair of the NJDEP 2008 Permit Efficiency Task Force; former Gov. James Florio; and Kent Manahan of New Jersey Network, who moderated the panel.

Sponsors:

Bob Marshall, LNJ '05,
Atlantic City Electric

Jennifer Farrington, LNJ '07,
Becton Dickinson

Abbey O'Neill, LNJ '01

Heather Cheeseman, LNJ '08,
Borough of Fieldsboro

Communications:

Ted Deutsch, LNJ '05,
Deutsch Communications Group

Katherine Kish, LNJ '03,
Market Entry, Inc.

Phil Salerno, LNJ '02,
Children's Specialized Hospital

Patrick Murray, LNJ '08,
Monmouth University Polling Institute

Consensor®:

Ignace Conic, LNJ '01, *Prudential*

Scott McCauley, *Prudential*

Credits:

Leadership New Jersey thanks Steve Morgan and his supporting staff at FirstEnergy/Jersey Central Power & Light for their generosity in printing this brochure; our writer, Bob Baker, from Copy to Go Inc; and our photographer, Gary Gellman, from Gellman Images. NJN provided a live streaming video on the web. A podcast was produced by Steven Lubetkin, from Lubetkin Communications, LLC and can be accessed at our website: <http://www.leadershipnj.org/ffnj.html>

For more information, contact:

Thomas G. Dallesio LNJ '98

Executive Director, Leadership New Jersey
176 West State Street, Trenton, New Jersey 08608
Tel: 609.802.0880 x2 • Fax: 609.802.0883
E-Mail: tom@leadershipnj.org
Web: www.leadershipnj.org

