



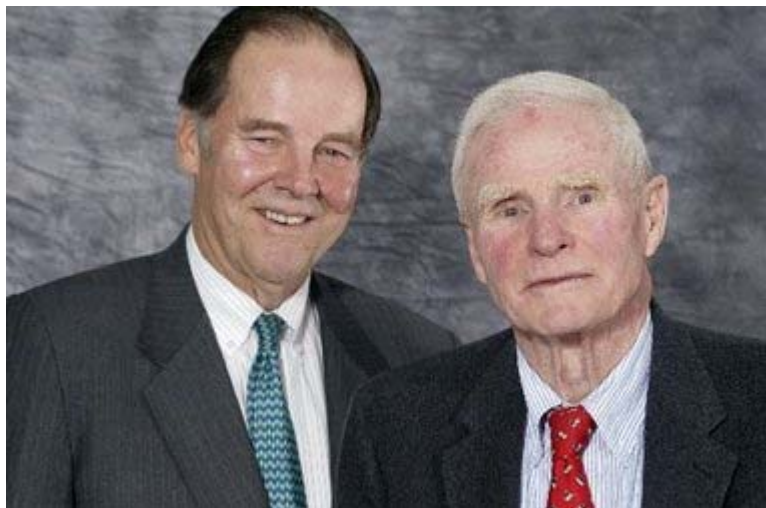
Everything Jersey

Kean, Byrne: 'Good and decent' not enough for high court

Published: Monday, June 04, 2012, 8:03 AM



By Gov. Tom Kean and Gov. Brendan Byrne/For The Star-Ledger



Star-Ledger file photo

Former Govs. Tom Kean and Brendan Byrne

The following exchange between former New Jersey governors Brendan T. Byrne and Tom Kean took place in a teleconference on Friday.

GOV. BYRNE: First, I would like to thank those people who displayed their flags over Memorial Day weekend. Very few people do.

GOV. KEAN: That's right. And even the parades are disappearing. You and I remember when there were Civil War veterans in the parades.

Q: How did you feel about the Judiciary Committee's rejection of the Supreme Court nominee Bruce Harris?

BYRNE: The committee acknowledged that the nominee is a good and decent man, but that's not enough. The Supreme Court nominee should be someone who is an outstanding member of the bar, and there are a number who meet that qualification. But "good and decent" is not the test.

KEAN: This nominee and prior nominees are just as qualified as a number of past justices who were confirmed unanimously. This was done on partisan grounds. I guess there's not a price to pay for that, but rejecting a nominee on partisan grounds is not good for the state.

Q: Do you think the publicity and the sentence in the Dharun Ravi case were sufficient to create any sort of deterrent effect for others in the future?

BYRNE: I don't think this case is a precedent for anything in the future. It was unique and we haven't seen the issue in the past, so I think we count this one as sui generis, meaning a thing by itself.

KEAN: This case had a good judge and he made the right decision. You can't deter stupidity and you can't deter cruelty, and both were on display in this case.

Q: A new Boyd Company survey found New Jersey the fifth-most expensive place for companies to do business. Does New Jersey have assets that make it worth that cost?

BYRNE: Sure, we have assets. We're the most ideally located state for business because of location, transportation, education and all those good things. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to lower the cost of doing business in New Jersey, and I think we are. I think we're sensitive to the cost and we're trying to lower it — and will keep trying. But we're not going to sacrifice the things that have made us a good state in which to do business.

KEAN: New Jersey is a great state for business, but in recent years, the costs have risen to a point where we're having trouble attracting and keeping jobs. The governor is aware of that, and the Legislature ought to be, and I think they're doing all they can to lower the costs so we're at least comparable to other states in the region. And the easiest place to do that is on the tax side.

Q: A bill is moving through the Legislature that would virtually decriminalize possession of small amounts of marijuana. Is this a good idea or bad?

BYRNE: It's a good idea.

KEAN: I agree.

Q: The current Meadowlands developers say their theme park will be up and running by late next year. Could something good come out of what, to this point, has mostly been a mess?

BYRNE: I think it's going to be a greater mess if they complete it. We're not in a position to handle the amount of traffic it would generate. Anyone who reads this column and travels in New Jersey knows we haven't even kept up with the transportation needs for what we have.

KEAN: Can you imagine trying to get to a Jets or Giants game with a huge shopping center and amusement park next door? It's going to take four hours to park. This hasn't been a good idea from Day One, and it wouldn't be happening if every lobbyist in the state hadn't been supporting it.

Q: On the presidential race, do you see any polling trends at this point that seem to mean much?

BYRNE: I think the fact that so many of his colleagues have been ripping Romney apart and that he's still within a point or two is a bad sign for Democrats. I also think any analysis has to be state-by-state and not countrywide, because in a state-by-state analysis, Romney stands a much better chance of being president.

KEAN: I don't think polls in June or July mean much. But the fact that they're extraordinarily close will energize both parties, and probably bring even more money into the field. But polls don't mean much until after Labor Day.



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