

N.J. corruption scandal: Gov. Jon Corzine on the spot as some call for him to drop re-election campaign

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Chris Hondros/Getty ImagesNew

Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine speaks in Newark Penn Station before signing a bill into law providing development money to his state. Some have called for Corzine to drop his re-election bid in the wake of recent corruption arrests.

Only in New Jersey would it be possible to imagine [a scandal](#) that involves allegations of both political payoffs and illicit trade in body parts.

And when it comes to body parts, there are a lot of Democrats who'd give an arm and a leg to get Gov. **Jon Corzine** out of this race.

There must be some nice country far away that needs an ambassador, they say. If only President Obama would make his old buddy an offer he can't refuse, then the Dems could find a stronger candidate who could take his place on the November ballot against Republican Chris Christie.

Or so the theory goes. But it doesn't go very far, according to those close to Corzine. The website [Politickernj.com](#) reported the other day that Corzine's response to such entreaties was an emphatic "No (obscenity-ing) way!"

The messenger carrying that message was **Mike Murphy**. When I called the former Morris County prosecutor the other day, he confirmed the comment in all its glory. And when I spoke with Assembly Speaker **Joe Roberts** yesterday afternoon, he had a similar report of the governor's mental state.

"I had coffee with him this morning and he's more combative than ever," Roberts told me. "He's completely committed and he's completely in it."

Corzine is also ticked off, said Roberts, at the behavior of his fellow Democrats nabbed in the scandal. I can't blame him for being mad. The "cooperating witness" in this case, **Solomon Dwek**, did everything but bring along a camera crew like "Borat" star **Sacha Baron Cohen**.

As for Corzine, he didn't take the cash, so why should he [take the heat](#)? That seems to be his point of view. And you can't blame him for feeling that way.

As a non-Democrat, let me offer a mild corrective to that point of view. It is indeed true that Corzine can't help it if his party is filled with crooks. But as I pore through the complaints, I notice a common theme. In almost every case, the target of the probe was being asked to help win approval for a project that should have been approved on its merits, especially in this economy. That theoretical hotel on Route 3 in Secaucus would have been a great tax ratable.

The same is true for that high-rise in Hoboken and the projects proposed for Jersey City. In fact when you look at the state's economic situation, the bags of cash should have been going the other way across all those tables in all of those diners.

That excess of red tape should be the real debate in this race. And it would have been if this race had been between a conservative businessman and a liberal businessman, as I had wished. But the GOP hierarchy did not agree. Instead of a businessman, they backed a lawyer, one who made his reputation largely by locking up Democrats.

The Democrats say this isn't fair. I've been on the phone with a lot of them lately, and they all have the same complaint: Given the apparent willingness of Jersey pols to accept bags of cash, why did the sting target so many Democrats? Only one Republican was among those arrested.

The Dems' theory is that the loyal troops in the U.S. Attorney's Office are helping their former boss get elected governor. I doubt that's the case, especially since the FBI initiated the investigation. However as a conservative skeptical of the vast powers of the federal government, I would go further and say that no U.S. Attorney should be permitted to run for elective office for some decent interval after leaving the post.

The libertarian Cato Institute recently published a book containing an essay co-authored by federal appellate court Judge **Alex Kozinski** titled "You're (Probably) a Federal Criminal." In it, Kozinski makes the argument that an ambitious federal prosecutor could lock up just about anyone he went after.

In light of this, many Democrats say, it's not fair for a U.S. attorney to use the office to prepare for a campaign. They've got a point, or at least Don Cresitello does. Back in 2007, the conservative Morristown mayor was pushing for his town's cops to be deputized as federal immigration agents so they could deal with illegal aliens charged with crimes. Christie very publicly inserted himself into the controversy and made a number of highly political statements in what seemed even then to be an attempt to curry favor with Latino voters.

It is now obvious that Christie was getting into campaign mode way back then. So the Democrats have a right to complain. But the complaining will be directed at Corzine if the next round of polling doesn't go his way. If he enters August down 20 points or so, the discussion among his fellow Dems will again revert to body parts.

They'll say he doesn't have a leg to stand on.

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I'm looking forward to seeing Christie get elected. Why? Because I know that means there will be hundreds more politicians getting what they deserve--a jail cell. Even if Christie only stays for two years, he is what we