



A SON OF THE CITY

A biography of Senator Bill Gormley

by John Froonjian

Published by the Stockton University Foundation
in partnership with The Press of Atlantic City.



A SON OF THE CITY

by
John Froonjian

Published by
The Stockton University Foundation
in partnership with
The Press of Atlantic City

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following to “A Son of the City.”

Alyssa Maurice, research director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University, for organizing research and background materials.

Darya Hrybava, staffer at the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University, for technical assistance.

The Stockton University Foundation, especially Executive Director Daniel Nugent, for critical backing of this project.

Buzz Keough, editor of The Press of Atlantic City, for his steadfast support and for publishing this work in serial format.

Diane D’Amico, former journalist for The Press of Atlantic City, for research that was particularly helpful in Chapter 7.

Daniel Grote of The Press of Atlantic City, for his eagle-eye editing.

Edward Wuillermin, director of Creative Services; Geoffrey Pettifer, associate vice president for University Relations & Marketing; and Ryan T. Schocklin and Jena Brignola, graphic designers at Stockton University for developing this work as a book.

Cole Burdek, Communications Studies student at Stockton University, for skilled audio editing work, and senior staffer Michael Zubrzycki and staffer Madeline Perez, both of Stockton University’s School of Arts and Humanities, for their support.

Elaine C. Finn, the author’s wife, for listening to constant talk about this project for two years.

Photos courtesy of the Gormley Family Foundation and The Press of Atlantic City.

And special gratitude to the following New Jersey public servants – legislators, judges, journalists, historians, lawyers, government officials and business leaders – for generously granting interviews for “A Son of the City.”

David Anderson

Joseph Kyrillos

Skip Bronson

Elijah Langford

James Crawford

Raymond Lesniak

Daniel Dalton

Stephanie Lutz-Koch

Donald DiFrancesco

Robert Martin

Joseph Donohue

Peter McAleer

Richard Dovey

Robert McDevitt

Brian Duffy

Rosalind Norrell-Nance

Carl Golden

Michael Pollock

William Gormley

Deborah Poritz

Virginia Gormley

Richard Squires

Robert Gross

Alan Staller

Edwin Jacobs

Thomas Sykes

Leroy Jones

Scott Weber

Nelson Johnson

David Wildstein

Thomas Kean

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to two friends who granted interviews for this biography but passed away before its publication, Carl Golden and Richard Squires.

Carl was spokesman, adviser and strategist to legislators, governors, judges and candidates, having worked in all three branches of state government. His wit made him a favorite of the press corps, and his observations and punditry were insightful and shrewd. He was a New Jersey treasure.

“Dick” Squires served as Atlantic County’s second county executive and was a mainstay of the county’s GOP organization for years. He was the most authentic – and nicest – politician I ever met, genuinely caring for those he encountered and treating even adversaries (like newspaper reporters) with civility and respect.

Carl and Dick loved people as much as politics, and that was the secret of their success. I miss them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
1 A Son of Atlantic City.....	5
2 Meet the New Boss, Not the Same as the Old Boss.....	22
3 Mr. Gormley Goes to Trenton.....	49
4 Lawmakers, Guns and Money.....	70
5 Neon Light at the End of the Tunnel	86
6 Running Out the Clock on Sports Betting	105
7 The Racial Profiling Hearings.....	122
8 Senator Gormley Gets a Life	149

INTRODUCTION

Today's political polarization sure can be depressing. Intense partisanship. Political performance art instead of policy. Gridlock instead of governance. It would be great to find a politician whose priority was getting results for the public.

A bipartisan politician who worked with the opposition to pass legislation.

A fighter unafraid to make the right enemies and take on powerful special interests.

A workhorse champing at the bit to dive into the most complex issues.

Who cared about outcomes, not self-promoting publicity. A Marine who never exploited his military experience for political gain.

Who stood up to his own party when its agenda conflicted with the needs of his legislative district.

And who made all of that a word rarely associated with politics: fun.

They may seem rare, but these kinds of leaders do exist. New Jersey's 2nd Legislative District in Atlantic County had one in recent times: former State Senator William L. Gormley.

I covered Senator Gormley's legislative career for The Press of Atlantic City. I've never met anyone like him: smart, brash, a creative strategist, a huge personality with an ego and temper to match but also a humanistic, caring lawmaker fiercely dedicated to his people. More than a few reporters I've talked to over the years say they have never met a politician quite like Bill Gormley.

Atlantic County has had a surprising number of larger-than-life leaders for a smallish county in the southern end of New Jersey:

- Nucky Johnson, the Prohibition-era boss who inspired the HBO series “Boardwalk Empire”
- Senator and boss Frank S. “Hap” Farley, who secured money for highways, a marina, a racetrack and a college for South Jersey
- Senator and Judge Steven Perskie, who authored the law establishing casinos.

Bill Gormley fits easily into that canon (minus the machine corruption of the first two).

Gormley’s work changed the face of Atlantic City with housing, a convention center, a rail terminal, an events hall, a new road and tunnel, hotels, shopping – all achievements that bolstered the regional economy. His statewide efforts on shore protection, property tax relief, justice and police reform benefited all New Jersey residents.

But the public may not know him because he often shunned the spotlight when doing his most consequential work. He exerted leadership from behind the scenes, using his power and strong personality to move people, agencies or funding into place to allow progress to be made.

The main reason I undertook this biography was the fear that some of Gormley’s less visible accomplishments might be lost to history if not documented.

Also, it might not always be clear how Gormley’s family roots in Atlantic City helped mold the type of leader he would become. This project attempts to chronicle how Gormley’s Atlantic County upbringing and the personal code that evolved from that influenced his major achievements.

The work’s eight chapters are organized not in a strict chronological order but are broken into topics or episodes that defined his career and post-Senate philanthropy.

This digital book is not an adversarial critique of Gormley. That might disappoint his critics, about which Gormley himself might say, “Obviously, not everybody loves me.” This work is more of an appreciation of Gormley’s career. Even so, it attempts to create an honest portrait of the senator, including candid descriptions of his style and times when he didn’t succeed.

But any neutral assessment of Senator William Gormley must conclude that he was extraordinarily successful as a legislator, as a leader and as a vigilant protector of Atlantic City, Atlantic County and its people.

—John Froonjian



The Gormley family, left to right: Bill's grandmother Frances, sister Frances, Sheriff Gormley, Bill, Jerry and mother Margaret Gormley.

1

A SON OF ATLANTIC CITY

William L. Gormley was born in 1946 in Atlantic City. But his origin story begins much earlier with the birth of another Gormley, his father, Gerard, born in 1906 at the Atlantic City Hospital. Gerard graduated from the first class of Holy Spirit High School and served in the precursor to the CIA during World War II.

“Jerry” Gormley was an early riser – a trait that recipients of 6 a.m. phone calls would attest was passed on to his son – and he married Margaret Fagan circa 1933 at 7 a.m. at Our Lady Star of the Sea Church, located caddy-corner to a fire station. To salute the marriage, firefighters lined the streets around the church with fire trucks. Records do not show what Gormley’s mother thought of this demonstration. They do show Senator Gormley’s sister,

Frances, was born in 1934 and his brother, Gerard “Jerry” Jr., was born in 1936, a decade before Bill’s arrival.

The father was an entrepreneur who would dabble in racing and managing boxers, but he was known for running the popular Gormley Funeral Home. It was located on the 2700 block of Atlantic Avenue in Atlantic City, caddy-corner to Our Lady Star of the Sea Church. The funeral experience was a selling point when Republican Senator Frank S. “Hap” Farley, boss of Atlantic County’s political machine, tapped Gormley Sr. to run for Atlantic County sheriff.

Former Judge and historian Nelson Johnson, who wrote “Boardwalk Empire,” a history of Atlantic City, explained why the funeral business could propel a political career.

“See, that’s a huge part of what the Gormley political foundation was built on,” Johnson said. “Over the years, I’ve met more than one funeral director who had success in politics or chose to simply be on the sidelines but have influence in politics.

“It’s because they’re meeting people when they are the most vulnerable and when they’re most needy, and they’re delivering.

“Was the Gormley funeral home influential in the political careers of both the father and son? I can’t envision how it wasn’t,” Johnson said.

The late Richard Squires, a longtime Atlantic County executive and local observer, was interviewed about the Gormleys a few months before his passing in April 2024 at age 91. He agreed that the funeral business was a political asset because funeral directors are well known and respected in the area in which they run for office.

“It was more so with the Gormley name,” said “Dick” Squires, as he was popularly known. “That really meant something, especially for those on California Avenue and in Atlantic City, right across from the main church.”

Hap Farley was a major New Jersey leader and former State Senate president who was directly or indirectly responsible for establishing the Atlantic City Marina, Atlantic City Race Course, Garden State Parkway, Atlantic City Expressway and Stockton University. With Farley's backing, Gerard Gormley beat Tom Henshaw, a former county freeholder, in the Republican primary for sheriff, according to the New Jersey Globe. Gormley beat Edison Hedges, a Hammonton attorney, in the general election, as per the Globe.

Bill Gormley said that after the election, his father made a decision that would become part of the lore of his younger son and future senator.

"He was elected in 1947. He was sheriff for 21 years. My father took it rather seriously," Gormley said. "And there was a home connected to the county jail, which is actually a part of the jail. And he said to my mother, 'We're going to move there, and that's where we're going to live.'"

"So when I was 1 year old, my family moved to the Atlantic County Jail in Mays Landing. From the time – I was one year old – till age 21 or 22, that was my home address."

Young Bill grew up surrounded by Sheriff's Office and Atlantic County government staff. They worked while he played. The interaction cemented a deep respect in Gormley for county employees and staff; he can get emotional talking about what they meant to him as a youth. The boy also interacted with jail inmates, even playing baseball with them.

"Probably one of my best friends growing up, his claim to fame that he was the pitcher for the state prison softball team. Eddie Hurt. He was a great friend," Gormley said in discussing his youth before the Atlantic County League of Municipalities in April 2023.

The mixing of the personal and professional inspired some inmates to suggest a change to the sheriff.

“Some of the prisoners came to him and asked for a favor. They asked that the mailing address for the jail not be the Atlantic County Jail, that it be called Gormley’s Hotel.”

It was never formally called that, but today Atlantic County’s jail bears the name of Gerard Gormley.

“Years later, Dick Squires and the Board of Freeholders named the new county jail after my father,” Gormley said. “That’s where I lived from 1947 on.”



His surroundings didn’t influence only Gormley’s personal development. Observers like Squires and David Wildstein, editor of New Jersey Globe and a New Jersey political historian, noted that Gormley’s training as a politician began as a child with his family immersed in his father’s – and Farley’s – Atlantic County Republican organization.

“He grew up in politics,” Wildstein said. “His father, Jerry Gormley, was the Atlantic County sheriff, very much a key player in Hap Farley’s political machine.”

Squires agreed that Gormley Sr.’s spot in the machine was secure. “He was the sheriff, and everybody in the organization knew it. I mean, there was no other sheriff ever discussed in all those years except Sheriff Gormley,” Squires said.

Gormley said that even as a child, politics fascinated him. He watched the news, which wasn’t always flattering to Atlantic City.

“I was always attuned to politics. I got to stay home from kindergarten to watch Eisenhower get sworn in,” Gormley recalled. “I was aware of the Army-McCarthy hearings. I mean, how many kids are interested in that when they’re six and seven years old?”

Those 1954 U.S. Senate committee hearings pitted Red-baiting Sen. Joseph McCarthy against the U.S. Army and critics of McCarthy's scorched-earth tactics in branding opponents as communist sympathizers. But it was a different congressional investigation known as the Kefauver Committee hearings that taught the child a lesson that was never far from his consciousness.

In 1950 and 1951, a special Senate committee chaired by Sen. Estes Kefauver, D-Tenn., held televised hearings across the country to investigate organized crime. The hearings identified mobsters and crime bosses, including Atlantic City's own Enoch "Nucky" Johnson, who preceded Hap Farley's reign as the region's political boss and who was convicted in 1941 of tax evasion.

"I was aware of Atlantic City's reputation because of the Kefauver Committee and the, shall we say, the investigations they did on Atlantic City," Gormley said. "So at a very young age, I was aware of, let's say, a reputation that Atlantic City's had from time to time. And it's not one of being on the straight and narrow."

Gormley grew up knowing that many assumed Atlantic City and its politicians were corrupt. He would have to defy that reputation to be successful in government.

"That affected me in terms of how I conducted myself in office," he said.

Gormley's wife, Ginny, a former legislative staffer, marveled at his early experiences.

"Politics was a very big deal in their family. I mean, in all honesty, he (Gerard Gormley) was one of Hap Farley's guys, his dad. So he was very used to that," Ginny Gormley said.

She said Bill Gormley was exposed routinely to political meetings, strategy sessions and election campaigns by simply observing what happened around him.

“And I mean, all these people gathered at the family home. The family home was actually in Mays Landing because the sheriff’s family lived by the jail, next door to the jail, which is kind of weird.”

“That was his environment,” Ginny Gormley said. “He told me once when he was in kindergarten or first grade, he was watching the McCarthy hearings on TV or something, which was strange. I mean, I wasn’t watching that, for instance, but it was something that was just part of his life. Elections and all that.

“Not my life, but yeah, his life,” she said.

Gormley said Farley himself didn’t attend meetings at his house, but he remembered accompanying his father to the senator’s home one Saturday morning to discuss something.

“He knew Farley would be home Saturday mornings because that’s when he had a card game,” Gormley said.

He said as a teenager in 1962, he attended the dedication of the new county jail and saw Farley speak. Farley outlined his priorities in Trenton, citing his goal that a four-year college be established in Atlantic County.

“I don’t think anybody in the room knew what he was talking about,” Gormley said, adding: “That’s the problem with having vision. He was a visionary.”

Growing up in the Farley machine taught Gormley the basics of politics, but also what was expected from Atlantic County’s leaders. Author and historian Johnson, who in the 1970s served with Gormley as an Atlantic County freeholder, said learning that loyalty and results were expected in the Farley machine set the bar for Gormley as a politician.

“There was a very strong, powerful, almost omnipresent political organization,” said Johnson, who dedicated a segment of “Boardwalk Empire” to the Farley regime. “If a member of your family gained any sort of rank within that organization,

then you were the organization's family. You were a family of the organization.

"And quite clearly, the Gormley family was an organization family. Bill's father was tight with Hap Farley. He was a key player in the organization. And so, Bill grew up in a household where the Republican Party was viewed as an organization that the family not only revered and respected, but that the family was prepared to work for and to fight for," Johnson said.

Johnson traced the intertwining of Republican machine politics and criminal enterprises from the late 1800s, when boss Louis Kuehnle established and ran both the county organization and various rackets from his hotel at South Carolina and Atlantic avenues, through mid-20th century. Johnson said a recurring theme was the efficient discipline with which the machine was run.

"From the time of Kuehnle, definitely from Nucky right on up until Farley's defeat, you had an organization in which there was no bullshit. You were assigned duties and you performed," Johnson said. "And if you didn't perform, there was somebody right in line behind you to take your place, and you were shoved off the stage, never to be heard from again."

Dick Squires agreed Gormley was raised in an environment of political discipline.

"You had to really pass muster," he said.



Bill Gormley's experience taught him another lesson, one that would influence his conduct throughout his career in elected office. Tourism and entertainment form the lifeblood of his region. Gerard Gormley wasn't elected in just any county. It was in Atlantic County, home to Atlantic City and its colorful history of booze, gambling, show biz and corruption as portrayed in the

HBO “Boardwalk Empire” series based on Johnson’s book. The county had beaches and the Atlantic Ocean, hotels and vacation properties, conventions and entertainment – all of which saw good times and bad. And Gormley’s family connections provided him with a front-row seat.

“It was a fun place to be. I mean, because of my father, I got to be backstage with people like Sammy Davis and Jimmy Durante and whatever, and we had the privilege to go backstage at those shows,” Gormley said.

“It was a fascinating time tied to tourism. My father was involved with boxing, and he staged a fight at the convention center. In the early 50’s, he was the manager of a fighter by the name of Boardwalk Billy Smith. And my father staged a major boxing event at the convention center,” he said.

It wasn’t the only time the former undertaker dabbled in entertainment. In the 1930’s, he owned and raced greyhounds at the convention center.

Entertainment has always been part of Atlantic City’s appeal. It was common for locals to work in the industry and brush against celebrities. The first of what would become the Miss America Pageant was held on Million Dollar Pier in Atlantic City on Sept. 8, 1921. Gormley said his mother carried the train of the gown of the first Miss America, Margaret Gorman. His mother had met other stars as well.

“The story my mother told is that she went to dancing school in Atlantic City. And one of her classmates was a woman by the name of May Clark, who was made famous because she was the person whom Jimmy Cagney crushed a grapefruit in her face (in the movie ‘Public Enemy’),” Gormley said. “My mother was always proud of that.”



Bill's mother, Margaret, who carried the train of the first Miss America's gown, rides in the 1923 pageant parade.



A young Ginny Gormley met Eleanor Roosevelt in Atlantic City.



Gormley met celebrities thanks to his father's connections. Here he meets entertainer Jimmy Durante, right, at Atlantic City's 500 Club.



Young Bill pins an Atlantic County deputy medal on champion boxer Jersey Joe Walcott.



Sammy Davis Jr., left, was one of many celebrities who worked in Atlantic City and who Gormley got to meet.



Sheriff Gormley, also an entrepreneur, managed boxers who trained at a farm he owned.



Young Gormley's connection with politics opened doors in the region's tourism economy.

"Growing up, I'd have a number of jobs," Gormley said. "I was a pool boy. I parked cars at the racetrack. So the economy of the region was something that you were aware of from a very young age because it drove the train. It was a great resort on a downward swing. And I got the opportunity to, shall we say, be around it firsthand."

Squires said a racetrack valet job wasn't commonly available to a lot of common folk.

"That was a very lucrative job for the period of the track being open. You also had to be recommended by major Republicans to get those jobs, and that continued on until the end of the racetrack," Squires said. "I mean, you had to be registered and also well known in order to get almost any job of that nature that involved the tourism area and as well as the political area."

Even as sheriff, Gerard Gormley had side businesses, including a farm on which boxers trained. Sometimes boxers needing side work were hired as deputies.

"The most famous deputy he ever hired was the heavyweight champion of the world, Jersey Joe Walcott. My father had a farm and Jersey Joe would train, actually train at my father's farm before the (Rocky) Marciano fights," Gormley said.

Gormley likes showing a photo of him at age 5 pinning a deputy's badge on the champ. Wildstein of the New Jersey Globe connected Gormley's exposure to boxers with an aggressive personal style in politics and to a willingness to fight battles over policy.

"Gormley learned from his father. He learned from Hap Farley. And the other part of Bill Gormley's training, not to be underestimated, is his dad wasn't just in law enforcement,"

Wildstein said “His father ran a boxing camp, and he trained fighters. Jersey Joe Walcott trained at Jerry Gormley’s camp.

“So Bill Gormley, and I think if you know these two things about him and then you meet him, it all makes sense. Not only did he learn politics from an early age, but he knew how to fight. From an early age, he knew how to throw a punch,” Wildstein said.

A key part of Atlantic City tourism, one Gormley would fight for repeatedly in the Legislature, was the convention industry that brought untold thousands to the old Boardwalk Hall for meetings and events. He learned of its importance, of course, from his father.

Gerard Gormley attended conventions of national sheriffs organizations.

“And my mom and I would go with him around the country. Little Rock, Ark., and New Orleans, La. Every time he went to a convention, he tried to sell Atlantic City,” Gormley said.

“So when I would go with him to these conventions, I would hand out taffy at all the hotels where the conventioners were housed,” he said.

The PR effort paid off. The sheriffs convention came to Atlantic City twice.

“The convention industry was something that he was very attuned to, as everybody was in the region,” Gormley said.

“The industry was the lifeblood of Atlantic City. So everybody that my father would deal with, politically and socially, was in one form or another usually tied to the convention industry because that’s how the town ate,” he said.

Gormley added that reviving conventions was the primary reason New Jersey allowed casinos to operate in Atlantic City. The decline that prompted it had been in progress for years. But it

became more necessary after a public relations disaster moved the industry from lifeblood status to being on life support.

In 1964, the Democratic Party held its national convention to nominate Lyndon Johnson for president in Atlantic City. As a teenager from a connected family, Gormley got a plum job during the gathering in Boardwalk Hall late that August.

“Probably the most unique experience I had growing up was I got a job when the Democratic Convention was in town in Atlantic City. And I was the driver for Huntley and Brinkley, the number one rated news team on NBC News,” Gormley said. “And I got to drive them for the convention.”

For younger readers, Chet Huntley and David Brinkley were The Rock and Kevin Hart of early TV news.

While the '64 convention was a kick for Gormley, it turned out to be a disaster for Atlantic City. The event had been expected to showcase the city as a premier tourism destination. Instead, the Queen of Resorts showed her age. Properties had deteriorated. The streets were dirty. Service was poor.

National reporters wrote about the shabby condition of the hotels and the decline of the city in general.

“The ‘64 Democratic convention was a bad idea for Atlantic City,” Gormley said. “It told the country that Atlantic City was in bad shape. And it really was historic in terms of probably the worst three days the city ever had.”

The worst part for young Gormley?

“Listening to Huntley and Brinkley talk about it. That was even worse than what was in the newspapers.”

Squires said he believed more people attended the convention than was expected, being held one year after President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated. Squires said rooms had to be booked in lower-quality hotels that were not expected to be used

for the event. But the bottom line, he said, was that “there was an awful lot of bad publicity.”

“It wasn’t a good thing,” historian Johnson said. “You had hotels that were still of a pre-World War II vintage. The people who came in were pretty unimpressed. And many wrote negative stories. So it was a kick in the ass.”

He noted that the growing prevalence of car and air travel opened tourism options for East Coast residents beyond New Jersey. Things got “a little bit worse year after year,” Johnson said.

Gormley saw how bad times in tourism and conventions hurt the people of Atlantic County and how important it was to their survival to keep the industries profitable. Atlantic City’s continued decline led to efforts to revive it with casino gaming. Even as casinos later prospered, it was a lesson Gormley would never forget.



But such concerns were temporarily put off as Gormley entered adulthood.

With a strong Irish Catholic background, Gormley graduated from St. Augustine Preparatory School before he attended the University of Notre Dame, where he played rugby and received a BA in history. He attained a law degree from Villanova University Law School and served in the Marines, being discharged honorably in 1975 with the rank of captain.

A proclamation from the Marines honoring Gormley’s service praised his dedication and patriotism but also included an unusual reference noting his “sense of humor.”

“I was very lucky to go to Notre Dame and be a Marine. And those are two affiliations I’m very proud of,” Gormley said, who also praised St. Augustine and Villanova.

“In terms of the Marine Corps, I was the chief prosecutor for the 3rd Marine Division in Okinawa. And I’m very proud of my service. I served three years active duty, and I am categorized as a veteran of Vietnam. But I did not serve in Vietnam.”

Gormley said veterans are categorized by the years in which they served. He draws a personal distinction about how his service is referred to.

“Although I’m categorized by law as a veteran, I didn’t get shot at. And that should be the criteria. I’m proud of it, but I don’t want to make more of it than what it was because it wasn’t actual combat,” Gormley said

After discharge, he returned to Atlantic County. Ginny Gormley said it wasn’t long before Republican leaders were recruiting the son of the former county sheriff to run for office at the level that today is called county commission.

“He came back from the Marines and went to a freeholder meeting. I don’t know why, but he did. And all of a sudden, they announced he was the next freeholder (candidate),” Ginny Gormley said.

“I was lucky. I had a father with goodwill,” Bill Gormley said. “I come out of the Marine Corps. I’m asked to run for freeholder. I was done with the Marine Corps April 1st of 1975; November 10th, 1975, I’m an elected public official.

“I had only six months I wasn’t making money from government,” he joked.

Ginny Gormley pointed out a kind-of false premise on which GOP leaders recruited the former sheriff’s son.

“They thought they had a Jerry Gormley clone. His dad’s boy. He was absolutely not,” she said. “He was a 180.

“And I think that that was kind of interesting. His dad was get-along, go-along. Bill was not. He had his own mind and his own way of doing things,” she said. “And that was to our benefit, actually.”



It was the beginning of a career in elected office that would continue until 2007. But Gormley’s political education began much earlier. He had been schooled in political strategy, elections, how to use power, how to fight, and the overriding importance of the convention and tourism industries to Atlantic County – all while growing up. Gormley’s early experiences would shape and be reflected in his many achievements as a New Jersey state legislator.

- He learned and understood politics at a gut level, and he was good at it.
- He knew tourism and conventions are the lifeblood of his region, and he had seen firsthand from the 1964 convention what happens when the industries decline.
- It was ingrained in him that leaders are expected to get results, that results are what matters.

These three facts drove his ambitions. And they formed the recurring themes of Gormley’s political career.

In Their Own Words

Audio Highlights from interviews for this book



As a child, Gormley helped sell Atlantic City
as a convention venue.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UozCea3YvkLqH9eQPf2snTfc2cHMHtBK/view?usp=sharing>



Historian and editor David Wildstein notes the
importance of Gormley's father having managed boxers.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1J1IG6QC1g3t9IARvzCiRZACbwZvctj-/view?usp=sharing>



Historian Nelson Johnson explains why being in the
funeral business helped the Gormleys succeed in politics.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/12KPlwRupDTUR9WEmPltz2Cb5fB-kiB6/view?usp=sharing>



Gormley, flanked by Assembly members Dolores Cooper, left, and J. Edward Kline, right, speaks to reporters.

2

MEET THE NEW BOSS, NOT THE SAME AS THE OLD BOSS

Like Republican State Sen. Hap Farley before him, Sen. William Gormley played on a big stage but never lost sight of the needs of the county that sent him to Trenton. Like Farley's achievements – highways, a marina, a college named Stockton – Gormley's work brought buildings and infrastructure to Atlantic County and waves of money to keep the convention and tourism industries afloat.

Farley and Gormley both rose to positions of influence and power both locally and statewide.

Both men were Republicans, and because of the leadership roles Gormley took on and because of his forceful personality, some people looked at Gormley as a Farley-style political boss.

But he was not a boss like Farley or Enoch “Nucky” Johnson before him. For starters, Johnson and Farley associated with racketeers; Gormley was scrupulous about avoiding the taint of Atlantic City corruption. And Farley and Johnson were undisputed bosses of a disciplined Republican machine that had begun in the late 1800s.

Gormley’s challenges were different. The GOP remains dominant in Atlantic County, but the all-powerful Republican machine no longer exists. It went the way of the Steel Pier diving horse in 1971. That was when a Democratic ticket including Joseph McGahn for Senate and Steven Perskie for Assembly ended Farley’s 34-year legislative reign. Unlike Farley, Gormley has had to deal with local Democrats or dissent within his own party.

Rather than issue orders to obedient foot soldiers, Gormley had to charm or bend others through force of will to his agenda. He practiced politics brilliantly and surrounded himself with smart professionals who could do the job. And he had no qualms crossing party lines if it would benefit the 2nd District.

Former journalists Pete McAleer and Michael Pollock, both of whom wrote for The Press of Atlantic City, described Gormley’s approach as pragmatic.

“I think his ideology was the district,” said McAleer, a former New Jersey Statehouse reporter.

“He was a Republican, and I think that was important to him. I don’t know if this is the best analogy, but some people are practicing Catholics and go to church every Sunday and follow every single tenet, and other people feel like it’s part of their culture,” McAleer said.

“I think for Bill, being Republican was maybe part of his culture.”

“Gormley was a Republican politician because he inherited being a Republican the way you inherit the color of your hair,” said Pollock, an adviser and former executive with Spectrum Gaming Group.

Pollock noted that Gormley's father, Gerard, was a Republican in the Farley machine, but Bill Gormley never blindly followed partisan orthodoxy. "He was a problem solver."

Former judge and historian Nelson Johnson, author of the book "Boardwalk Empire" on which the HBO series was based, said Farley had a structure in place that allowed him to concentrate on legislating.

"Gormley didn't have the same sort of freedom that Farley had because throughout his whole career, Farley had no concerns about anything other than simply doing his job. Farley went to Trenton on an almost daily basis to deal not only with legislative issues but administrative issues with various agencies.

"Well, Bill did too," Johnson said. "Bill understood and Farley understood that you have to woo the administrative agencies and you have to be a face that they know."

But unlike Farley, Gormley also had to manage conflicts and make deals with Atlantic City and county politicians and power brokers. "Bill was working with a very different structure than the one his father was in," Johnson said.

Robert Gross was director of the Atlantic County Improvement Authority, a public financing agency, at a time of growth for Atlantic City. He said Gormley had to rely on skills of persuasion more than Farley did to pass legislation. There are now 40 state senators in New Jersey, but Farley had more power because then there were only 21, Gross said.

A 1966 State Constitutional Convention changed the system of legislators representing 21 counties to representing 40 districts that often cross county boundaries.

"He (Farley) got things done and he was very good, but I don't think he had to work as hard with the Legislature by virtue of its makeup at the time," Gross said.

“When Hap Farley was senator, he was the last of the Republican vestige that completely ruled and controlled and there wasn’t such a thing as a Democrat known (locally) to mankind,” Gross said, citing a trend that predated “Nucky” Johnson.

But Democrats held power in Atlantic City and countywide, and factions within the Republican organization sprang up with dissolution of the machine. Gormley approached his leadership role in starkly different terms than was used in a partisan patronage system.

For Gormley, it was essentially: Political hacks need not apply.

“Bill was his own man in terms of all that, which I think a lot of the political machine people didn’t like,” Gross said. “You know what I mean?”

“They expected that if Joe Schmo had put the hours in, he should become the head guy (of an agency) instead of this other guy. But if Bill thought the other guy was better, he got it,” Gross said.

His observation is incisive. A hallmark of Gormley’s style was that he respected and leaned on competent professionals and staff to make things happen. He made sure they filled key positions. And why wouldn’t he? Gormley had gotten to know – and trust – Atlantic County staffers growing up at the jail.

He respected professionals and pulled in a network of competent people with relevant experience to helm agencies involved in finance, transportation, tourism, utilities and the environment. These included people like William Downey and then Gross at the improvement authority.

“If you’re going to get into dealing with complex legislation and getting involved in the issues that I got involved in, you have to deal with people who are talented,” Gormley said. “I was very fortunate because I had an ability out of need to be able to spot talent, shall we say, before they moved up the ranks.

“And those relationships served this county well.”

Gormley-backed professionalism over patronage helped propel Atlantic City progress in development of casinos, housing, hotels and ultimately – in what amounted to Gormley as the holy grail of resort legislative accomplishments – a new convention center.



Another trademark of the hard-charging Gormley is that he starts working before most other people clock in. Architect Tom Sykes recalled getting one particular early-morning call.

“Bill called and he said, ‘Tom, we’re forming a convention center authority. It’ll be one of the most important authorities in the state. It’ll certainly be one of the best funded, and you’re going to be the chair of it,’” Sykes said.

In 1982, Gov. Thomas Kean signed a Gormley proposal to increase Atlantic City’s luxury tax from 7 to 9 percent to pay for renovations to the city’s aging Boardwalk convention center and provide money for future expansion.

Sykes saw one problem with his chairing the new authority.

“I said – this was 1983. And I said, ‘Bill, I’ve never been to a convention,’” Sykes said.

“And he says, ‘Yeah? You’re honest. That’s what we need,’” said Sykes, founder and partner of SOSH Architects in Atlantic City and New York.

At the time, the city government controlled the Boardwalk facility. Gormley felt the operation had to be professionalized to compete with growing destination resorts across the country. That meant getting title to the building – which ran a \$3 million deficit – so the county Improvement Authority could obtain bonding and use city luxury tax revenues to fund construction.

“I had to work with City Council and the mayor at the time to get the deed to the convention center. I had to get that transferred in order for the legislation applying the luxury tax to the convention center to work,” Gormley said.

But city officials didn’t want to give up their power, claiming nothing in the deal benefited city residents.

“It was about the city trying to control the contracts in the convention center that had been given away for years and years,” Sykes said. “And we said that we have to bid them.”

Sykes said vendors convinced city officials to sue to stop creation of the new state authority. The suit failed and the deed was eventually transferred.

But it was only an early battle in a long slog to obtain what Gormley believed the city needed: a new convention center to replace an events hall that couldn’t be updated to modern standards.



Gormley worked multiple tracks in his efforts to revitalize Atlantic City. The law sponsored by former Sen. Steven Perskie to authorize casinos looked at gaming as “a unique tool of urban redevelopment.” Casinos paid 8% of their gross revenues in taxes to the state. But how to also translate casino investments into tangible construction and improvements on the ground?

In 1984, Gormley sponsored major legislation requiring casinos to invest in public-minded projects or pay higher taxes. The law created the N.J. Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, or CRDA, to oversee investments spread out over 25 years on a sliding scale. More money was to be invested in Atlantic City first, then in South Jersey, then throughout all of New Jersey.

Gormley turned to legislative staff to craft the complex bill.

“I had a great appreciation for the staff, which was key to all the things that I accomplished,” Gormley said. “They had great staff at the Office of Legislative Services (OLS) in Trenton. ... And I learned that the best thing you can do in Trenton is to ask them what they would do and ask for their ideas.

“There’s a lot of knowledge there and a lot of good ideas if they’re given the opportunity to explain them to people,” he said.

Former journalist McAleer said relying on smart people didn’t bruise Gormley’s ego because he was focused on getting results.

“He loved pulling in experts,” McAleer said. “Bill loved people from OLS. He married someone from OLS. Right? He loves smart people. And so if you know your stuff, Bill wants to take you out to dinner and talk to you.”

Gormley worked with staff to craft a complex bill that established formulas and sliding scales to divvy up casino investment money and created a new state agency, the CRDA, to make investments in public projects. Casinos were to invest 1.25% of gaming revenues into redevelopment.

Negotiations with North Jersey lawmakers over the CRDA were intense. Everyone wanted a piece of the pot, but Gormley had to protect Atlantic City.

Finally, the majority-party Democrats scheduled his bill for committee consideration, but at an inopportune time for Gormley: It was set for the Monday after he was marrying Ginny, his former aide, and departing for England. Gormley figured the Democrats would rewrite the bill in his absence to take money away from Atlantic County for northern New Jersey.

“I was supposed to go on my honeymoon. We delayed it for four months to come back that Monday to work on the bill,” Gormley said.



Ginny and Bill Gormley postponed their honeymoon when a bill to create the CRDA was scheduled right after they were married.

And how did the new Mrs. Gormley feel about that?

Gormley paused. “She was a good sport about it.”

Ginny Gormley said she knew political drama would be part of the deal of marrying the senator.

“He was very concerned about our district, for South Jersey not getting overlooked and all the money going to the north. He and everybody knew that (would happen),” she said. “They also knew we were getting married the end of November ‘84. November 24th it was.

“And then a week’s honeymoon following that. We got word because you have to give three days’ notice for an agenda,” Ginny Gormley said. “We got word the day before we were married that

they were listing the CRDA bill on the following Monday. Oh, great. We were flying off to London that day.

“Guess what? We didn’t do it,” she said.

Gormley made a surprise appearance at the committee. The bill became law. The CRDA has since financed billions of dollars of redevelopment throughout the state. Gormley later passed an extension of the time in which casino investments could be used. He sold it as good for all of New Jersey, but didn’t mention that it also directed more money to Atlantic City.



As Gormley’s father had taught him, conventions were the life blood of non-casino tourism. The law legalizing casinos, authored by former Senator Perskie, cited conventions as a reason to allow gaming. Tourism and conventions were always in his sights, and Gormley felt a big move was needed to keep the local economy humming: a new convention center.

“The convention center at the time was both our convention center and special events arena,” Gormley said. “So if you had the Miss America Pageant, to set it up and break it down and whatever, you couldn’t use the hall for conventions for four or five weeks because it only had one loading bay.

“When you moved from one event to another, you would have cars backed up all the way to Albany Avenue. It just was unwieldy and not competitive.”

Before he would ask state leaders to fund Atlantic City improvements, Gormley wanted to demonstrate local competence. After all, there was a list of corrupt officials who had gone to jail as long as the Boardwalk.

Sykes said Gormley used his influence at the CRDA to finance and build middle-class housing in the blighted Inlet section of the resort. Housing was also a priority of city Mayor James Usry.

Governor Kean attended an October 1989 groundbreaking to ultimately construct 3,000 housing units and retail space.

“The whole Inlet housing was the only successful housing that’s really been built over the last 40 years,” Sykes said.

“They raised the ground, they respected flood laws. They literally brought the middle class back into town and firemen, teachers, policemen of all races, creeds and colors could get a place there,” Sykes said. “And they wrote down the cost to get you in. Bill made that project happen.”

Former City Councilwoman Rosalind Norrell-Nance, a Black leader, called the project a boon to a diverse population.

“Many of the homes were purchased by people of all races in the Inlet area of the city,” she said.

Having influenced the new CRDA to help build credibility in Trenton, Gormley then set out to secure funds for a renovated events arena and a new convention center. But he would have to do it with opposition Democrats in charge. Democrat Jim Florio succeeded Kean as governor and brought in a Democratic legislative majority. It would take Florio’s entire term in office before the opportunity for Gormley to strike presented itself.



A pause in the saga of the convention center is warranted to talk a little about Bill Gormley’s style. Again, he didn’t have a machine like Farley. But he had a big, assertive personality. He was a physically large ex-Marine who would sometimes literally talk in your face. And he had an Irish temper. Sometimes he vented angrily to blow off frustration; other times, his temper was a strategic tool to get what he wanted.

Both McAleer and Pollock independently said Gormley reminded them of a particular political leader: Lyndon Baines Johnson.

“When you talk to him, he would get very close to you, sometimes grab your arm,” McAleer said. “Which reminds me, I’m reading Robert Caro and his LBJ series and ‘Master of the Senate,’ and that’s what he did.

“LBJ would grab you by the arm while he was talking to you. I said, man, that’s just like Bill Gormley,” McAleer said.

Pollock recalled seeing Gormley “many years ago” reading a book on the beach in Margate.

“And my recollection is that he was reading one of the Robert Caro biographies of Lyndon Johnson,” Pollock said. “And I could see him adopting some of LBJ’s (mannerisms). Sort of putting his nose within like three inches of someone else’s nose to say, ‘You will do this and you’ll get this done.’

“It wasn’t old-style patronage where people’s jobs depended on him. It was just his force of personality coupled with the power of his ideas,” Pollock said.

Deborah Poritz, who would later become state Supreme Court chief justice, recalled meeting Gormley for the first time as Kean’s chief counsel. She knew he could be intimidating.

“Bill Gormley had a reputation, I remember, as the kind of guy who was kind-of in your face. He got up close and personal sometimes,” Poritz said. “I’m a woman about 5-feet, 1-inch tall. I’m very small. He’s a large, tall man. And he walked into my office.

“I stood up to greet him, and he got right into my personal space as I was standing there, very up close and leaning over me,” she said.

Poritz decided she needed to balance the power dynamic somehow. There was a chair for visitors in the counsel’s office.

“I pulled the chair over and I climbed up on it. And I was close to him, but I was over him. I was taller than he was, and I was in his

personal space,” she said. “And he laughed and he said to me, ‘We are going to be friends.’”

Former Improvement Authority Director Gross expressed confidence that Gormley’s assertiveness resulted in progress.

“First and foremost, he was a leader. There’s no question. Maybe his style was not liked by some. He certainly was direct and got his point across,” Gross said.

He said government is filled with politicians who are all talk. Gormley is different.

“There’s a lot of wordy guys who talk a lot and get nothing done. Bill’s one of those guys that gets stuff done. And it’s kind of fun to work with a guy like that,” Gross said, “even though it can be very exasperating because he’s tough when he’s on a mission or when he’s focused on something.”

He added: “He’s always focused on something. He wants results.”

Gross recalled that directorship of the Improvement Authority was a plum job that many political insiders wanted, but Gormley supported him and his predecessor, William Downey, because he prized competence over patronage.

That didn’t spare Gross from occasional bursts of anger.

“You know, he never once sold me out. Or did anything that wasn’t 100% loyal. He got mad as hell at me,” Gross recalled. “I mean, he’d fight with you and tell you you’re an asshole and hang the phone up.

“And then he would call you back up so he could hang the phone up on you again.”

Gross said even people who didn’t like Gormley’s in-your-face style admit he got a lot accomplished in Atlantic City through state funding and creative ideas.

“If you really want to get something done, you have to be dogged. You have to annoy people sometime, but you’ve got to get it done,” Gross said. “And when Bill was at it, he was at it. I mean, he was a fullback up the middle. He’d hit the line 32 times – it didn’t matter, 50 times – if he had to get one yard. But that’s what makes things happen.”

David Wildstein of the New Jersey Globe agreed that intimidation could be used as a strategic tool. Having an angry Gormley talking inches from your face could be unsettling.

“Yeah. Lyndon Johnson comes to mind, that same sort of, you know – when Bill Gormley would be in a conversation with you, there was no respect for your personal space at all. He would get right up into your face, and he could be a little scary,” Wildstein said.

David Wildstein of the New Jersey Globe agreed that intimidation could be used as a strategic tool. Having an angry Gormley talking inches from your face could be unsettling.

“Yeah. Lyndon Johnson comes to mind, that same sort of, you know – when Bill Gormley would be in a conversation with you, there was no respect for your personal space at all. He would get right up into your face, and he could be a little scary,” Wildstein said.

He said Gormley was not a “delicate step-on-your-toes kind of guy.

“One thing about Gormley is I wouldn’t describe it as much as stepping on toes as dropping an anvil on somebody’s foot,” Wildstein said.

“It’s sort of a rite of passage in New Jersey. You really weren’t anybody of consequence if Bill Gormley didn’t yell at you,” he said.

At one point, Wildstein's former news website began selling buttons that read: "I was yelled at by Bill Gormley." In a 2023 speech to the Atlantic County League of Municipalities, Gormley adopted a tone of mock victimhood regarding the buttons.

"A website (years ago) tragically put out a button for sale that was a high seller. It read, 'I was yelled at by Bill Gormley.' So I read about this. It was online. People were buying it," Gormley said. "I decided to go home for sympathy to my beautiful and brilliant wife, Ginny," who was in the audience

"I went home and I said, 'Did you hear about this? They've got this awful button. It's all over New Jersey.' She looked at me and said, 'I know. I bought one.'"



The ability to keep hitting the line was invaluable during the years spent seeking a new Atlantic City convention center. Gormley and his network of professionals worked to renovate the old Boardwalk Hall for events and construct a state-of-the-art building for conventions. Gormley had secured using city luxury tax revenue to back construction, but proponents needed a site.

They wanted to build near the old hall, but in the early 1980s, that property was held by a casino owner and future president.

"So we know we want to build a new convention center. And we thought we would build it right across from Convention Hall," recalled Sykes, the unsalaried Convention and Visitors Authority chair. "We thought it would fly across Pacific Avenue and go right up to Atlantic Avenue. We would combine the historic with a new hall across the street.

"And as we're discussing that, (Donald) Trump buys up all the property and makes it available. He buys it for something like \$80 to \$90 a square foot. And he made it available to us at \$300 a square foot!" Sykes said.

“There’s nothing illegal about that, but it was a real problem. And that’s how the convention center ended up where it is today,” he said, noting its location at the foot of the Atlantic City Expressway.

Sykes said Trump would later complain that the new structure and its convention traffic were placed farther away from his Trump Plaza casino.

“And we said, you just raised the price to \$300. You tripled the price. More than tripled, four times the price in a week,” Sykes said. “So we’re out of here.”

Trump and his representatives did not respond to multiple requests for an interview.

So where could the new building go in a city fairly well developed? Gormley would address a difficult challenge by embracing even more complexity.

“As we looked around town, it became apparent, at least to me, that the only place you could build would be at the base of the expressway because you needed like 13, 17 acres,” Gormley said. “You needed acres in Atlantic City, and you couldn’t buy casino ground at the time because the cost of casino property was inflated.

“That would be an understatement,” he added.

Here was an example of Gormley’s creative approach. Then-Congressmen William Hughes and Jim Florio had secured federal funds to revitalize the Atlantic City rail line. But New Jersey was required to fund and build a rail terminal in Atlantic City. It didn’t have a funding source.

Gormley proposed merging projects.

“Congressman Hughes and Congressman Florio, to their credit, got money to revitalize the rail line from the federal government.

However, the state had to come up with a new rail terminal, and the money didn't exist," Gormley said.

"And I guess that's when I had my first idea to make something a little more complex. I then said we'd merge the two buildings and the rail line would be combined with the convention center. And therefore the money that we had set aside for the convention center, a portion of it could be used to build the rail terminal," he said.

The plan was adopted. But Gormley still needed state approval to fund and build the convention center. It would still take years of work to get to that point.

And Gormley would have to get a Democrat-controlled Legislature and governor to approve it. Actually, Jim Florio was pro-Atlantic City, but some Republican lawmakers opposed the cost. Complicating matters was a political earthquake that shook New Jersey in late 1991.



State and local officials break ground for a new A.C. convention center and rail terminal.

Voters were angry that as governor, Florio had raised state taxes by \$2.8 billion. In the November 1991 election, they tossed out legislative Democrats and voted in Republicans. By the end of January, Republicans who opposed convention center-rail terminal funding would be in charge and could block the bill.

But the end of the 1990-91 legislative term was a wild free-for-all.

Facing loss of their seat or minority-party status, Democrats posted for consideration hundreds of bills in lame duck sessions. Democrats flirted with revoking all of the new taxes to make Republicans have to deal with a gaping budget deficit. Emotions ran high.

Gormley saw opportunity.

The senator knew the N.J. Sports and Exposition Authority, which runs the Meadowlands, was hurting financially. He proposed a complex bill that would relieve its debt and let the agency bond for more than \$400 million – and \$165 million of it would finance the new convention center construction.

Gormley essentially lived at the Statehouse during the lame duck sessions. He brought in unemployed construction workers to plead for the convention center bill. He button-holed lawmakers, one at a time, promising support for their bills, or occasionally browbeating them till they gave in. He worked across the aisle with Democrats who were friendly to labor. Shrewdly, he touted the bill as including \$28 million for a new Rutgers University football stadium, a sacred cow in New Jersey whose moo was a siren call for many legislators.

Local 54 union leader Bob McDevitt praised Gormley's legislative skill.

"There has been nobody who has done more for the people of Atlantic City publicly and done it quietly in my lifetime," McDevitt said.



Gormley, who worked 14 years to bring a new convention center to Atlantic City, speaks at the building's dedication.

Nelson Johnson and Mike Pollock exalted Gormley's skill as a legislator, his ability to size up odds, know the pressure points to push and to cut deals with other lawmakers.

"He knows the strengths that people have, and he does his best to bring them together. And he's the secret sauce, because he gets it," Johnson said. "He gets everybody playing through the same music. But you know what? You've got to have a conductor."

Pollock said few politicians have combined skill at legislating with the vision to see the big picture.

"His individual pieces of legislation were parts of a body of work," Pollock said. "Think of this like a theme that ran through a series of Picasso paintings.

"They're individual paintings, but they all work together. So the legislation to build a convention center and to create the CRDA and create the credits that led to Borgata and The Quarter and so forth were all of a piece," Pollock said.

The effort paid off. Gormley shepherded the bill through committees in both houses, then through the full state Assembly and Senate. Florio signed the plan into law. A Press of Atlantic City analysis then said Gormley "showed he could play with the big boys." When the convention center finally opened in 1997, it marked 15 years since Gormley had first started working on building a new center.

"He effectively saved Atlantic City at some crucial periods of time, and the most crucial being in the '80s and '90s when Atlantic City had lost its monopoly in the East. Attention and investment dollars were going elsewhere. And he put in some really creative solutions," Pollock said.

Gross agreed.

“The one thing I’ve told people over the years about the convention center, and this is the truth, it just wouldn’t have happened without Bill. It would not have happened because there was a tepid, lukewarm interest in doing it. And you need a leader, a guy with power, a guy who can get things done to really believe in it and to really want to get it done,” Gross said.

When someone is the driving force behind a project, that project is often named after them. It doesn’t appear that the CRDA, the convention center’s owner, has sold naming rights to that building. Just a thought.



Anyway, the convention center-rail terminal was Gormley’s biggest contribution to Atlantic City’s development, but not every accomplishment involved infrastructure. Rick Dovey, an environmentalist who formerly headed the Atlantic County Utilities Authority, recalled Gormley rescuing the ACUA – and county taxpayers – from a multi-million-dollar debt.

Here’s a simplified version of a complex matter: The ACUA and other agencies around the state were required to pay off debt related to constructing county trash disposal facilities. The Christie Whitman administration ordered the agencies to assess the cost to county property taxpayers. The ACUA did, and collected \$9 million. It was the only county authority to actually collect the money and pay off its debt.

However, a court overturned the state’s order to collect the money and ordered county agencies to return it to the taxpayers. But there was a problem. The ACUA had used the \$9 million to retire the debt. It might have had to borrow \$9 million to repay taxpayers.

“Well, we didn’t have the money,” former ACUA Director Rick Dovey said.

Gormley stepped up. He brought Dovey to a Senate budget committee hearing during a lame duck session, right before a new Legislature was sworn in. The committee was busy with a rush of proposals, but Gormley pushed the members to provide \$9 million to the ACUA. He emphatically insisted that the state should reward the ACUA for doing what it had been told.

“And you know, in just a few minutes, it was gaveled down. ‘Yes, that’s approved,’” Dovey said. “There wasn’t any opposition. There were a lot of lobbyists in the room.

“And they were going, ‘What the hell just happened?’” Dovey said.

Atlantic County homeowners and businesses were reimbursed for those tax payments, certainly a rarity in government.

But Gormley’s biggest achievements directly affected Atlantic City, which drives the region’s economy. Working behind the scenes, as was his typical MO, Gormley has influenced most major developments in the resort.

- He tweaked the CRDA law at one point to allow an increase in the number of hotel rooms built.
- Boardwalk Hall was renovated into an events arena.
- A road and tunnel to the Marina area were built, allowing development of the Borgata, a story that will anchor a later chapter.
- He was a player in Stockton University expanding into Atlantic City.
- And as Tom Sykes said, he helped bring in the Cordish Co.’s successful retail outlets, The Walk, now known as Tanger Outlets Atlantic City.

“Cordish looked downtown for commercial and did a brilliant job with the Walk. That Walk was the first new retail this town

really saw,” Sykes said. “And thank goodness Bill negotiated that deal. The Walk happened. A lot of people were involved, but that was Bill at the heart of it making the Walk happen.”

How?

“As the senator, he had a lot to say about how the CRDA functions and which funds go where,” Sykes said.

In his Atlantic City accomplishments, Gormley showed he had learned the lessons taught by his father, Sheriff Gormley, and Hap Farley. The senator has to deliver. Tourism is king. Everything you do has to benefit your district. And Gormley didn’t showboat. He didn’t seek gratuitous publicity. He wanted only results.

Attorney Scott Weber, who would work for Gormley in a special project years later, said Gormley’s lack of interest in publicity makes for a fascinating dichotomy.

“In some respects, Bill is a walking juxtaposition. He’s got this really big personality, but it’s rare that that big personality comes out in public,” Weber said. “And his dedication to the state is remarkable.

“And I think it’s in his DNA when you realize his upbringing. His father was the sheriff, and he grew up next to the jail. And the notion of public service is at his very core.

“I really saw Bill in action,” Weber said. “And again, despite his big personality, his action was almost always quiet in how he went about doing it.”



A reliance on professionals and experts was a strategy
Gormley practiced to solve complex problems.



Sen. Frank Farley, center, presents President Dwight D. Eisenhower with a certificate as an honorary Atlantic City lifeguard.



Sen. Frank S. Farley, who didn't have to contend with rival Democrats,
cuts the ribbon to open a Knights of Pythias center in June 1971.

In Their Own Words _____

Audio highlights from interviews for this book



Gormley tells the Atlantic County League of Municipalities about how his temper spurred sales of a button.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qIm0Sgxiq6x3rQ5n6EOmrl9IVoUjhPKz/view?usp=sharing>



Gormley describes his strategy for funding a new Atlantic City convention center.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iA1NxJ8w67Isg_rP7MYQL1ncVJu4PDJd/view?usp=sharing



Bob Gross explains how Gormley's county leadership differed from the past patronage system.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QDAVXbwIb9Ptug0x2QG1DlvDlEWGhKAY/view?usp=sharing>

Former Improvement Authority Director Bob Gross on how Gormley's style got things done.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oGHu7JSiCQJvf0rUxK9kSI0NuTbjCER/view?usp=sharing>



Gaming consultant Michael Pollock says Gormley's achievements effectively saved Atlantic City.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZPeWbvEeOnRUjpaacZepbZpeuXUABx7/view?usp=sharing>



Former convention authority chairman Thomas Sykes credits Gormley as the force behind successful A.C. housing.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uBECAQyYnV4WQfs6J5LPk4ojjmVJ8WQ/view?usp=sharing>



Gormley's early endorsement of Tom Kean and his problem-solving skills earned him influence when Kean was governor.

3

MR. GORMLEY GOES TO TRENTON

The Atlantic Ocean once covered more land along the shore than it does today. But the coastline changes, and over the decades more oceanfront property emerged. People and companies wanted to own this land.

But there was a problem.

The State of New Jersey could claim this land as public property, and it took its sweet time to make such claims. This frustrated people up and down the Jersey coast. They couldn't get title insurance to own beachfront property. And in 1981, Bill Gormley – then in just his second term as a state assemblyman and in the minority party – did something about it.

“I sponsored a bill to put a statute of limitations on riparian rights claims ... because what was happening was the Tidelands Council wasn’t settling riparian claims with beachfront properties,” Gormley said. “You couldn’t get certainty in terms of your deeds. You couldn’t get title insurance.”

He proposed to amend the state Constitution to limit New Jersey government to one year to claim any land that had been dry for 40 years or more as public property. The governor, Brendan Byrne, opposed the amendment.

“I still got it on the ballot,” Gormley bragged.

In New Jersey, a ballot question must include a statement explaining to voters in plain English what it does. The Legislature had approved Gormley’s clear explanation. But Byrne’s secretary of state, Donald Lan, instead approved a statement muddying the water, saying the amendment could cost the state revenue for schools.

“It was meant to kill it. We sued the secretary of state,” Gormley said. “Darrell Todd and Bill Nugent were the lawyers volunteering to do it. And we won. And they had to change the interpretive statement.”

Voters approved Gormley’s proposal.

Young Assembly members don’t often notch such major statewide policy wins. (Okay, Steven Perskie authored the act allowing casino gaming in his third term in the Assembly. He also represented District 2, and it’s still a rare feat.) The amendment was only the first of multiple times Gormley would establish or change state policy.

But as often would be the case, Gormley’s actions statewide were also good for Atlantic City. If a Gormley bill affected all of New Jersey, it probably had a special benefit for his district. And in fact, his effort was worth it because an Atlantic City casino project hung in the balance because of a tidelands matter.

“Riparian rights. Now, that sounds pretty boring,” Gormley said. “However, they would have never been able to build the Playboy casino unless we got that passed.”

Deborah Poritz, a former Supreme Court justice and attorney general under Gov. Thomas Kean, said despite the casino connection, Gormley’s amendment had far-reaching impacts that protected the rights of all New Jerseyans who want to use the beach.

“His interest in riparian rights had an Atlantic City component, yes. But it was for the whole Jersey Shore and had a lot to do with shaping the use of the Jersey Shore by the general public,” Poritz said.

She said the change protected beach access for people who didn’t own land.

“That was a long battle in New Jersey, as in many coastal states. And he was instrumental in making sure that was a fair battle,” she said.

Years later, when Gormley amassed power as chair of the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee, he would undertake a daunting statewide policy challenge that might be called The Biggest Property Tax Relief Program Nobody’s Ever Heard Of. But with the ocean touching the 2nd District, coastal issues were a priority for Gormley. They provided him the opportunity to not only affect state policy but to demonstrate his creativity and ability to master complexity as a legislator.

Former Sen. Joseph Kyrillos of Monmouth County said he worked with Gormley to establish a creative way to fund beach restoration. Shore legislators had to constantly battle for budget funds to address beach erosion even though the state reaps sales tax dollars from tourism. Kyrillos spelled out the challenge and uncertainty the lawmakers faced.

“How do we carve out a chunk of the state budget each and every year that wasn’t at the whims of future budget committees, future legislatures?” Kyrillos asked. “It was hard.

“Well, this is the kind of specialty that Bill Gormley has. He thought about it, he plotted, he schemed, and he came up with a great formula,” said Kyrillos, a former Republican state chair.

Some policymakers look for the simplest solution. Gormley went the other way and would try to make connections between seemingly dissimilar concepts. In this case, he connected beach erosion with a state realty transfer tax charged when properties are sold.

He and Kyrillos proposed that \$25 million a year would come out of the realty tax to fund shore protection. The bill included a “poison pill” that would eliminate the entire tax, which funded housing programs, if the shore funding were not budgeted.

“If that money wasn’t appropriated, there’d be a poison pill mechanism enacted, and all affordable housing programs would cease,” Kyrillos said. “As a result, you had a very unique coalition of urban legislators (typically Democrats) and shore legislators (typically Republicans) that came together to ensure that the shore protection fund remained healthy and solvent.

“That poison pill, which was a Gormley invention, has stood the test of time,” he said.



Gormley’s creativity wouldn’t have mattered if he were a back-bencher in the Legislature. But he was ambitious and he was driven to solve problems, including problems of other lawmakers or governors. Those officials sometimes discovered the solution to their problem also somehow included an Atlantic City payoff. But Gormley earned a reputation as someone who could work through some of the thorniest policy issues.

Former Governor Kean benefited from an early Gormley endorsement in the crowded 1981 GOP gubernatorial primary. Gormley led a few Republicans to team with Democrats to end the practice of awarding favorable ballot positions – the “county line” – to candidates favored by the county party. The courts later overturned it decades before Rep. Andy Kim, now a U.S. senator, successfully challenged the system. But the 1981 change helped propel Kean to the GOP nomination and then the governorship. Gormley had an in with the administration going forward.

Kean called Gormley the Republican Party’s “idea man.”

“When there was a difficult problem, Bill Gormley would come up with an approach that was usually unique and very often creative and finally, something that might even work to get a very difficult problem solved,” Kean said. “So he’d come up with these ideas, but there were practical ideas there.

“Sometimes they were very complicated. Sometimes they involve six or seven pieces, different parts of the board and putting them all together. Very creative. But you need that in government. You need somebody who can come up with those kinds of ideas,” Kean said.

The late Carl Golden, who died in July 2024 but had been interviewed for this project, had been chief spokesman for the Kean administration.

“Not only did he represent Atlantic City, Atlantic County, well at the highest levels of government, but dang, this guy knew what he was doing and why, and he knew what the ramifications were going to be,” Golden said. “He knew what the backlash was going to be, if there was one. And that’s not a common trait in a lot of people in government.”

Deborah Poritz observed Gormley while serving in various legal roles for Kean, including chief counsel.

“His central interests, I think certainly early on, were focused on Atlantic City and improving Atlantic City and making it a viable, thriving city. It’s his home,” Poritz said. “But he looked broadly across New Jersey, and the things he did affected all of us.”

Republican Donald DiFrancesco, former state Senate president and governor, was impressed with Gormley’s approach to legislating and chairing the Senate Judiciary Committee.

“He was brilliant in a lot of ways, and I relied heavily upon him with respect to legislation, ideas, vision. Not necessarily garnering the (Senate) votes, because that was my thing, getting the bills passed,” DiFrancesco said. “But he was really sharp in coming up with legislation and convincing me of the merits of a particular piece of legislation.

“So I relied a lot on Bill. And he was chairman of Judiciary, and I didn’t really have to worry about him at all because he was terrific chairman, a terrific legislator, one of the best,” the former Senate president said.

Even Democrats like former Sen. Dan Dalton offered grudging praise.

“Personally, he’s a piece of work, as you know. He’s funny, he can be brash, he can piss you off,” said Dalton, who had represented South Jersey’s 3rd District. “But he certainly is a person of his word and that’s why I always respected him.”

Gormley said he enjoyed the challenges state issues presented and that his skill set and personality were well suited to the Legislature. New Jersey Globe editor and state political historian David Wildstein said such collaboration paid off for his district.

“That was one of Bill Gormley’s specialties, that he could bring a lot of money from other parts of New Jersey into Atlantic County,” Wildstein said.

Gormley said he could pursue his own style by having strong local support from his colorful Atlantic City district “because most normal counties, they’d say, whoa, this guy’s a little too intense.”



Sometimes Gormley joined battles that didn’t affect him directly. That helped when he needed votes for Atlantic City.

“I think we really did well in the legislative process, but that was based on the fact that we were always available for other districts to help them out. For example, I was asked to help with the Wildwood Convention Center,” Gormley recalled.

“So for about two or three months on Saturdays, I would go down for Saturday morning meetings with Wildwood, North Wildwood or Wildwood Crest to put together the legislation to build their convention center.

“I obviously genuinely enjoyed the competition, or I enjoyed having the idea. I enjoyed having a strategy. I enjoyed circumstances where people said there’s no way it’s going to happen. Okay, let’s see what we can do now,” Gormley said.

Help with issues is nice. But Gormley also used a tool that no other legislator had that could win him support: cold, hard cash.

Gormley had placed a network of loyal policy professionals at state and local agencies in Atlantic County. As senator, he wielded enormous influence at the state authority that invested casino money in public projects all over New Jersey. Agreement to vote for a Gormley bill could result in a casino investment in your district.

Former Senator Robert Martin was impolitic in describing how valuable such leverage was in Gormley’s legislative success.

“Bill had something different than any other senator. He had the ability to move money that was designated from the casinos into whatever they called it, the slush fund, and then distributed it throughout the state,” Martin said.

Um, that would be Casino Reinvestment Development Authority funds, which is entirely legal. Another way to describe their use might be “practicing politics.” That kind of deal-making seems lost in today’s hyper-partisan and ideologically driven environment. But it has long been a staple of getting things done in government.

“Bill understood that if you wanted support of people in Essex or Bergen County for something in Atlantic City, you had to find something in Essex or Bergen that you could help them with,” Kean said. “I mean, you help somebody with something in their area, you get a debt, and that’s a debt you can collect.”

The politically alert may have noticed that Gormley the Republican worked with lawmakers from counties that elect ... Democrats. It didn’t matter. Gormley’s approach was bipartisan. He worked with anyone if it would pay off for the 2nd District. Sometimes that rankled other Republicans, and that was a factor in Gormley not winning Republican primaries when he ran for higher office.

Wildstein noted that Gormley wasn’t universally loved by all fellow Republicans. Again, without a strong machine behind him, Gormley had to compromise and improvise. That may be a sin in the current tribalism, but it reflected his skill at legislating.

“The guy knew how to craft a deal. He knew how to put together a legislative package to get votes even when the other party controlled the chamber,” Wildstein said.

“He was the master of the Senate, and there have been a few like that over time. But not everybody gets that Lyndon Johnson-type distinction where you go to the Senate and you just dominate, and you dominate not just for your own power, but to get things done for a region,” Wildstein said.

Former journalist Michael Pollock, a gaming consultant, agreed that Gormley's deal-making, whether it was through use of CRDA funding or coming up with ideas, set him apart.

"He was a master. I think of him as an artist whose medium was legislation," Pollock said. "He knew how to solve problems through the legislative process. That's a skill in and of itself. "



But Gormley had a rule that trumped many others. He recognized that New Jersey's governors, by virtue of their vast patronage and appointment powers, were among the most powerful executives in the country. He made himself useful to whoever was governor, Republican or Democrat.

"You can be very creative. You can have the most unbelievable ideas," Gormley said. "If you don't have the governor, it doesn't matter."



The senator and former Gov. Thomas Kean enjoy hoagies from Atlantic City's White House sandwich shop.

Before she married the senator, Ginny Gormley was his legislative aide. She knew a key strategy of his was “cozying up to whoever was governor.

“It doesn’t matter who was governor,” she said. “One of the jokes when we were in Senate sessions, Gormley was not in his seat. And somebody would say to me, so where’s Gormley? And I’d say, he’s probably in the Governor’s Office.”

Kean was impressed by Gormley’s regular presence in his office.

“You’d be sitting there and someone would say, Bill Gormley is in the outer office. He would come in and say, ‘I was thinking, I know you’ve got this problem on your desk, and I was thinking one way to solve it might be this,’” Kean said. “And nobody else did that.”

Former Atlantic County official Robert Gross told the story of being in the Statehouse with Gormley as he worked to negotiate a new convention center. Gross was amazed at how familiar a Republican senator was with Democratic Gov. Jim Florio’s staff. Gross and his agency attorney were meeting in the treasurer’s office when Gormley heard something he didn’t like.

“I’ll never forget,” Gross said. “He grabbed us and, like, pulled us into the Governor’s Office, which was right next door, and I mean, pulled us in. We went right past the guards and I’m (worried about) getting shot.

“When we got into the Governor’s Office, Joe Salema, who was chief of staff, was there and he saw Bill and he just, like, put his head in his hands and he goes, ‘Okay, Senator, what is it this time?’ Like, he knew he was getting the crap knocked out of him,” Gross said “And it was so funny because here’s this guy, his head went right into his hands.”

Former Gov. Jim McGreevey was unpopular after he announced he was a “gay American” and that he would resign in a few months. Republicans demanded he leave immediately. But

Gormley understood that McGreevey needed a friend, former journalist Pete McAleer recalled, and McGreevey might help Atlantic City in the time he remained governor.

“The Republicans hold a press conference saying you (McGreevey) needed to leave now. And while they’re holding that press conference, Bill is in Atlantic City for McGreevey’s first appearance since the announcement that he’s going to resign. And he’s standing side by side with him, and there’s a whole lot of money that’s about to go to construction in the Atlantic County area,” McAleer said, laughing.

“And that to me is classic Bill Gormley. He knew that McGreevey had, as he would say, had the (bill-signing) pen for another couple of months, and there’s a chance to make deals, there’s a chance to do things for the district,” McAleer said. “He was an extremely practical politician.”

One time, Gormley voted against a stalled bill that would have established a needle exchange trial at a time drug addicts were getting AIDS using dirty needles. McAleer was disappointed; after all, people were dying. Gormley’s response was essentially: Hey, I can’t vote for every liberal cause. I am a Republican. And an election is coming up.

“He had plenty of issues where he crossed ideology on, and this one was just, you know, to the left, pretty far to the left,” McAleer said. “But it was an important health issue.”

Gormley would at other times vote for needle exchange bills. But in this instance, he knew where the levers of power lie (Hint: they’re kept in the Governor’s Office.) and he knew he could work them without angering conservative voters with a recorded vote.

Hours after McAleer had approached him, Gormley stuck his head into McAleer’s bureau office on Press Row in the Statehouse. He said, “I got him.”

Got who?

“He said, ‘McGreevy. He’s gonna sign an executive order to do a pilot program for needle exchange.’ And it happened. Atlantic City was one of three cities that became the pilot program for needle exchange,” McAleer said.



In late 1991, external events developed that sent Gormley’s political stock soaring. After Democrat Florio raised state taxes, voters made Republicans the majority party in Trenton. Gormley landed a key role: chairman of the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee, which holds advise and consent power over all state-level appointments. Suddenly, any state nomination, including judges, had to go through Chairman Gormley. The senator influenced legislators through CRDA funding, collegiality or bullying, whichever worked best, and influenced governors through problem-solving and the Judiciary Committee.

By multiple accounts, though, Gormley held to the same no-hackery rule he used in building a local professional network.



Then-Assemblyman Gormley wins the State Senate race in 1982.

Kean said he was sometimes asked to appoint somebody's unqualified brother-in-law.

"Bill never gave me a bad recommendation. And after I'd worked with him for a while, if Bill gave me a recommendation, I just put it right in," Kean said. "Some of my finest appointments were people Bill recommended."

Defense attorney Edwin Jacobs, a former state bar official, said Gormley was scrupulous about letting only qualified candidates for judgeships pass through his committee.

"Bill always knew that the entire judiciary isn't worth anything if it's not populated by good, solid judges," Jacobs said.

"Political patronage, unfortunately, is the rule, not the exception. Not just in New Jersey, but all over the country. And Bill didn't buy into that. As a matter of fact, it was the exact opposite," he said. "Nobody became a judge unless that person was endorsed (by the bar) as a merit selection."

Poritz said Gormley also used his influence to promote more women and minorities to the bench. In fact, she would rise to the highest judiciary post, the first woman to be chief justice of the state Supreme Court. She would play a role in a major challenge Gormley took on at Judiciary, one that would change New Jersey courts forever and provide property tax relief.

Gormley proposed to unify 21 separate county courts into one statewide judiciary. It was a massive undertaking – but one, once Gormley decided to take it on, that would have to wait for a football game to end.



As late as the 1990s, property taxpayers funded the cost of the Superior Court in each New Jersey county. The courts struggled with low budgets in the poorest counties, and the administration of justice was unequal based on the affluence of where people

lived. Then-Chief Justice Robert Wilentz was calling to merge the county courts into one statewide system. Wilentz was truly a giant in New Jersey politics, but he found little support for such a massive project, recalled David Anderson, former director of the court's Office of Professional and Governmental Services.

"I remember driving Chief Justice Wilentz to a Budget Committee hearing where he all but begged the Legislature to please consider funding the courts, that the burden on the counties was unfair," Anderson said.

Gormley, newly minted as Judiciary chairman, embraced complexity and pondered how it could be done. Then one day he had an idea. Excited, he called Anderson and asked him to get the chief justice on the phone.

"The day I had the idea, it was a Sunday, and I was dwelling on, how can I do this?" Gormley said. "I thought, I'm going to do a constitutional amendment. Let me call the chief justice.

"And he wouldn't call me back."

Anderson explained that Wilentz had a rule that applied to Sunday afternoons.

"The rule was with Chief Justice Wilentz, you did not call him when the New York Jets were playing football because his brother-in-law owned the team and he was a big Jets fan," Anderson said. "And here it is, 3 o'clock, and the Jets are losing. And Senator Gormley thinks I'm going to call him and interrupt him now?

"No. I'll wait," Anderson said.

Gormley couldn't believe it. "He said, 'You can't call him while the New York Jets are on,' or the Jersey Jets, or whatever they're called. I said, what? I can't call him during a football game?" Gormley said.

"Anderson said no, because he's related to the Hess family, his relatives or distant relatives, whatever they might be. They own

a piece of the Jets. You can never call him during a Jets game,” Gormley said.

The Jets lost. Anderson waited until after 7 p.m. to call Wilentz. “What do you want?” Wilentz demanded. Anderson told him that Gormley wanted to discuss unification of the court system. Wilentz told Anderson to “tell him a week from Monday.” The connection had been made.

A week later, Wilentz spoke to the full Judiciary Committee with Gormley walking him through why the courts should be unified.

“Bill was a master, asked him relevant, important questions on how do you operate a court that’s underfunded, funded over three or four different funding sources. Actually it was about 25 different funding sources when you get to the various personnel issues. And Wilentz did a fabulous job with no notes,” Anderson said.

Gormley was sold on the challenge. He told Anderson two weeks later of his idea to force the merger by asking voters to amend the state Constitution. Anderson called Wilentz to gauge his support on the idea.

“I called and he said, ‘Well, I guess starting today you work for Senator Gormley.’”



The logistics were daunting. People doing the same job had different titles and different salaries in different counties. About 100 labor unions represented workers in multiple departments. Jurors pay varied. So did the way judges were ranked. Even parking costs had to be looked at.

“It was way more than we ever thought of when we started,” Anderson said.

But one of Gormley's strengths is his ability to bring together experts and like-minded stakeholders to work through complex issues, said historian Nelson Johnson, a former judge.

"I've never met anybody who comes close to him with regard to the ability to connect the dots, to achieve a goal and to bring together disparate people and disparate pieces and, you know, basically take 4 and 4 and make 9 out of it," Johnson said.

It took a year of staff from the judiciary and the Senate working through such details to even propose a unification plan.

Once a plan was devised, Gormley had to sell legislation to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot. Some elected officials and judges who liked the patronage status quo opposed it. Gormley was like the fullback hitting the line over and over.

"He made no friends during a lot of this because he has a heavy hand, he has a heavy foot," Anderson said. "But he needed it."

"I have to admit that I got very singular, very focused," Gormley said. "I apologize to people all the time. When I get that way, I might walk by you and I should have said hello, but I didn't see you. It's what you're dealing with.

"It's game time," he said.

Gormley focused on senators from counties that would benefit from unified standards and pay, as well as others who saw good-government value in the proposal. Gormley worked on both parties.

The cost to the state, about \$350 million then, was a sticking point. Gormley had the idea to phase in the transfer of costs to the state over five years, allowing state budget leaders to plan for the increase.

Eventually Gormley had enough support to move his legislation. What had started as a 12-page bill ballooned to 100 pages crammed with specific details and assurances. Court unification

went on the ballot and voters approved the change in the 1992 general election.

The Legislature and governor enacted a Gormley bill implementing the merger in 1993. It took another year to pass a bill formally transferring 7,800 county court employees to the state payroll.

Former Chief Justice Poritz praised Gormley's work – and noted that hers was only starting once the merger was approved. Wilentz was ill and passed the baton to Poritz to implement the new laws when she succeeded Wilentz in 1996.

"I had known Chief Justice Wilentz and I saw him in one final meeting before he passed away of brain cancer. And one of the things he said to me was, 'Bill Gormley got this statute passed, and I have a lot of work to do to unify the courts. You need to finish it,' Poritz said. "And I spent the first year as chief justice trying to finish that work."

She said Gormley's success in unifying New Jersey courts created a judiciary model for the entire country.

By the way, today the state Judiciary budget is over \$1 billion. Of course, taxpayers still fund the state budget. But most would agree the system is fairer than making homeowners pay for the courts through the local property tax, moving the burden from property owners to a broader base of revenues paid by more people.



One final example of Bill Gormley as a statewide leader involves one of his last efforts before retiring in 2007 as a senator. In 2006, Jon Corzine was governor, and he had a hole in the state budget that he planned to fill by increasing the sales tax. Democrats in control of the Legislature balked; they were up for election the following year. The June 30 budget deadline passed, and Corzine ordered state government to shut down.

That meant Atlantic City's casinos had to close. They cannot operate without state inspectors present. Suddenly, tens of thousands of Gormley's constituents were thrown out of work.

Budget time is usually special for Gormley. He basically lives at the Statehouse, wheeling and dealing to gain something for his district. Bob McDevitt, then the president and still a leader in the Local 54 hospitality workers union, Unite-HERE, said that this time, Gormley was truly on a mission even before the shutdown.

"He was completely focused on supporting South Jersey. I mean, he was laser-focused," McDevitt said.

McDevitt became emotional talking about the hardship the shutdown caused his union members, many who lived paycheck to paycheck. "They're my neighbors," the Atlantic City resident said. He said lawmakers voted later to pay state workers – and themselves – while government was shut down.

"My members were never going to recoup that money. And this is a statistic people don't talk about. The shutdown was three full days. But for my members, the shutdown began a week before and lasted almost two weeks after," McDevitt said. "Because what happened was people started canceling their reservations. This was the beginning of the summer season.

"So business started dive-bombing the week before. It reached a crescendo when the shutdown started. And it took almost two weeks to get us back to a regular business," he said. "Everybody else got paid."

Who didn't get paid? Housekeepers, waitresses, bartenders – "single mothers, people that really need their paycheck went without it," McDevitt said.

Former journalist McAleer said Gormley worked the Statehouse halls, buttonholed legislators and met with Corzine's staff, brainstorming ways to reach a compromise – even though the Democrats were in charge.

“I feel like he must have gotten a cot and slept there. Like he was there prowling the Statehouse hallways 24/7,” McAleer said.

One of the caucuses – McAleer believed it was the Assembly Democrats – instituted a special knock to enter the rooms. They didn’t share it with Gormley.

“So if that knock didn’t happen, they wouldn’t open the door because Bill is a guy that will just walk into the room and start telling you what he thinks,” McAleer said.

Gormley worked with Corzine officials to blame lawmakers for the mess and pressure them into passing a budget, suggesting strategies and proposals. In the early morning of July 8, after the casinos had been closed, a compromise budget increasing the sales tax from 6 to 7 percent and providing property tax relief was approved and signed by Corzine into law. As he had done before, Gormley influenced state policy because it had affected his district.

“When I worked with Governor Corzine and got his budget through, I was the legislator standing next to him when he announced it and came out to sign it,” Gormley said.

“It’s about Atlantic City. This isn’t real complicated. People in Atlantic City have to have jobs. This isn’t artificial intelligence, this isn’t real complicated. There’s no theory behind it. Okay? People have to eat and you have to have jobs. And we had a hospitality industry, and we had to make sure people were working,” he said

McDevitt, at one point a past Gormley critic, remains grateful to this day.

“There is no doubt in my mind that if he was not involved, it would have gone beyond three days,” said McDevitt, who also lobbied lawmakers during the shutdown. “We were both getting everyone’s focus on the absurdity of putting people into unemployment over a stupid fight in Trenton.”

A few years later, Corzine and several administration officials discussed his governorship at a Rutgers University panel. As some patted themselves on the back, Corzine paid a rare compliment to a senator from the opposite party.

As he singled out specific individuals who had helped, he said, “People make a big difference.

“Without getting Bill Gormley’s help, over and over again actually, in the first two years,” Corzine began before starting anew. “When he retired, it left a big, big hole in our administration going forward.”

In Their Own Words _____

Audio highlights from interviews for this book



What Senator Gormley was like when he got laser-focused on an issue.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1B8hWIZiI14Eg4EWSiBrk2SUvEMyYdFJ/view?usp=sharing>



Court official David Anderson holds off calling Chief Justice Wilentz for Gormley because of a football game.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iDwOcxfbTTjVpSIITas1ZGU9e82dgudR/view?usp=sharing>



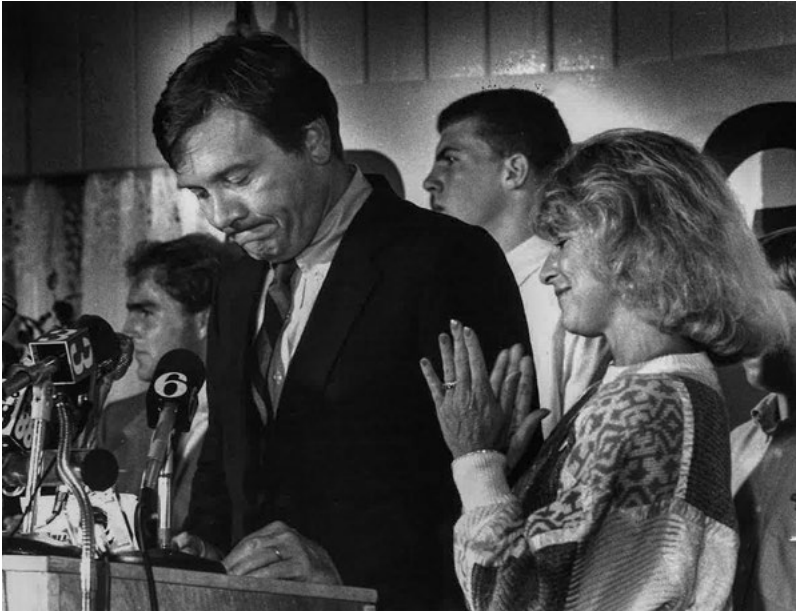
Historian and editor David Wildstein says Gormley mastered the skill of legislating.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-PEmFPAXJsYKCUGQk5P8wcfTokBTbv/view?usp=sharing>



Ex-Gov. Thomas Kean explains how Gormley built political capital throughout New Jersey.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BDVOQPkNsFglqvcR7zWgX09HXUVWrloo/view?usp=sharing>



Wife Ginny consoles Gormley after he finished fourth
in the 1989 N.J. GOP gubernatorial primary.

4

LAWMAKERS, GUNS AND MONEY

On January 17, 1989, a disturbed young man carried an AK-47 rifle onto the playground of Cleveland Elementary School in Stockton, Calif. He opened fire, killing five children ages 6 to 9 and wounding 30 students and teachers.

It was America's first mass shooting at a school. And it deeply affected Democrat Jim Florio, a South Jersey congressman who was running for governor of New Jersey. Florio won, and as he told Stockton University students in March 2020, he decided to do something about semiautomatic assault weapons.

"Stockton, Calif. In early 1989, we had a crazy fellow in a schoolyard shooting people with an assault weapon, shooting children," Florio told political science students in the university's Campus Center Events Room.

“I became the governor at the end of 1989. And I said to myself, this is something we want to try to avoid. We should get some laws passed to try to control some of the use of guns, especially these types of guns, military assault weapons,” said Florio, who died in September 2022.

Florio’s election had brought in a Democratic majority in both legislative houses. Within four months of taking office, votes were scheduled on a bill to ban ownership in New Jersey of semiautomatic rifles. But former Sen. Dan Dalton of Gloucester County recalled that his party had a problem. Republicans opposed the bill, and Democrats could afford to lose support from only two of their members. They were short by three. Democrats needed 21 Senate votes to pass the ban.

“Just the simple math put us at 20 votes. And so we understood that we had to reach across the aisle or get somebody from across the aisle to support the ban,” Dalton said.

Enter Republican Sen. Bill Gormley.

Gormley never mentioned his military service to score political points. After all, he had not seen combat. But he relied on his experience as a Marine to help him decide the issue.

“I had been a member of the United States Marine Corps from 1972 to 1975. Even though I was a lawyer, you have to qualify as a platoon commander,” Gormley said.

“And after I graduated from law school, you go to basic for six months. And during that time, and a lot of people did, but I qualified as an expert on an M16. Okay? So that was my experience.

“So it was 1990, and I had had this experience in the Marine Corps, and it seemed like a no-brainer to me. And I wasn’t doing anything to hunting in the state of New Jersey,” Gormley said, adding: “I was a marine. I fired M16s. Wait a second. It seemed pretty logical to me.”

During the Senate vote, Gormley ignored the GOP party line against the bill and provided the only Republican vote to ban assault weapons in New Jersey.

It was the 21st vote, and it put the bill over the top to pass.

“I personally wasn’t shocked when he voted with us on the assault weapons ban,” Dalton said, “because I knew he had that sort of political gumption, and he was willing to take tough stands.”

“Gormley never put himself into one column or the other. He was his own man,” said David Wildstein, New Jersey Globe editor. “He was the, you know, sort of the epitome of a guy who marched to his own drummer and didn’t always care what people thought of him because he was able to build this organization where he led Atlantic County.”

As Ginny Gormley had said, Gormley was not the go-along, get-along kind of politician his father was in the Farley machine. He would be his own man, she said.

Former Governor Tom Kean called Gormley’s vote an act of principle, but one that carried risk.

“He’s got a lot of courage and he wants to do what’s right,” Kean said. “And sometimes that gets him into trouble, because sometimes what’s right requires some politically difficult choices. And he’s generally put good government ahead of politics.”



The ban – and Florio’s success in vetoing a later Republican effort to repeal it – enraged the National Rifle Association, long one of the toughest lobbying groups in America. New Jersey’s ban became a rallying cry, and the NRA – whose affiliate in the state was the Coalition of N.J. Sportsmen – spent freely to get revenge in the 1991 state legislative elections.

“Well, I knew that would just, you know, you were really poking the beast as far as the NRA was concerned,” Dalton said.

Former Sen. Robert Martin of Morris County was a Republican assemblyman during the gun ban battles. An Army veteran, he also saw no use for assault weapons in hunting or home defense and supported the ban. The NRA targeted Martin.

“I was told by an NRA zealot that they had a national convention in California. And among their activities was a fundraiser in which they identified five politicians around the country who they detested the most, put a label on them, and then had a pig shoot,” Martin said.

“They take rifles and go out and they shoot these pigs with certain names on them. And I heard where I was one of the pigs that was shot in the fundraiser,” said Martin, a Seton Hall University law professor.

The worst experience, though, was when NRA supporters called the Martin home.

“I had three daughters at home. And the oldest was a young teenager at the time. And they received a couple phone calls that – the guy said that they were gonna shoot me,” Martin recalled.

He called the local police department but there was little they could do about an anonymous call. Florio heard about it and called the assemblyman to the Governor’s Office.

“I’d never spoken to Florio about this at all. But he caught wind of it, you know. He said, ‘I will give you protection. I’ll have the state troopers monitor your home for a while. Do you want that?’

“And I asked my wife,” Martin said. Gee, wonder what her response was. “She said yes.”



But the NRA's biggest prey in the '91 election was Bill Gormley.

"It was a rough campaign because – I don't want to get into particulars," said Gormley, ever the stoic marine. "But they have no boundaries in terms of when they're doing stuff like this.

"They obviously deny, deny, deny the whole time. And it was hard. It's harder on the family than it is on the candidate. I enjoy the rigors of a campaign," the hyper-competitive Gormley said. "But for family members, it can be quite distressing. And the tactics that are used are designed many times to have an impact on the family and make it hard on them."

Ginny Gormley revealed only slightly more.

"Going head-to-head with the NRA, that was rough. That was rough on him. It was rough on me. It was rough on – we had two teenagers at that point. ... And we got, I got some weird phone calls, and the children were being followed, two of our teenagers," she said.

"So that was rough."

Consultant Roger Stone was and is known in political circles as a practitioner of the dark arts. Before he was associated with Donald Trump and efforts to overturn the 2020 election, Stone worked often on New Jersey election campaigns – usually against Democrats.

But former Judge Nelson Johnson, author of the book "Boardwalk Empire," recounted a surprising proposal that he said Stone offered to him in late 1990 or early 1991. A mutual friend set up a meeting at Stone's Margate City condo.

"He said, 'I'm here to offer you a quarter of a million dollars – and I'm listening to this – from the National Rifle Association if you will run against Bill Gormley,'" Johnson said. "And I said,



Gormley learned of the destructive power of semiautomatic rifles when he who qualified as marksman in the U.S. Marine Corps.



Former Judge Nelson Johnson, author of "Boardwalk Empire," said he was offered NRA funding to run for Senate against Gormley.

‘Roger, you didn’t do your homework.’ And he says, ‘What do you mean?’

“I said, ‘I happen to like Bill Gormley. I like him a lot. We served together on the county board of freeholders, and I came to admire his political talent. And so I wouldn’t be inclined to run against him.’”

He said Stone pressed him to consider.

Johnson said he replied: “Look, you really don’t know me. First, I wouldn’t run against Bill Gormley. But second, I wouldn’t take a nickel from the National Rifle Association. They’re not my kind of people.’

“And he was like, ‘Oh, well, I guess this is going to be a short meeting.’”

It was.

At the time, Stone denied involvement in the attempt to take out Gormley, although the late former Atlantic City Committeeman Edmund Colanzi also claimed that Stone had recruited him to join the NRA’s primary challenge to Gormley. His claim was backed by a city school board member who said he attended the meeting between Colanzi and Stone. Colanzi said he declined the offer, according to Press or Atlantic City reporting.



Gormley’s opponents settled on a political unknown, a resort shuttle bus driver named Domenic Cappella, who was also president of the Jitney Association, to run in the 1991 Republican Senate primary.

“They came up with a candidate named Dominic Capella, who was a jitney driver. I mean, it may be fair to say he was the Ed Duerr of the 1991 Republicans,” Wildstein said, referring to an

unknown truck driver who defeated former Senate President Steve Sweeney in 2021.

His opponents figured they couldn't beat Gormley straight on, so they quietly funneled NRA funding through a complex scheme involving PACs started by Camden County Republicans who, like Stone, backed Christie Whitman to run for governor two years later. Whitman denied any knowledge of the plan.

It's interesting to note that over the years, Gormley frequently battled Camden County Democrats to limit their influence in Atlantic County. It was highly unusual that Camden Republicans went after a member of their own party.

The Camden County GOP was just one piece of a complicated campaign finance maneuver. But former Press of Atlantic City Statehouse reporter Joe Donohue exposed the scheme right before the primary vote.

"What nobody realized at the time was that some of the supporters of Christie Whitman decided to launch a sneak attack on Bill and try to take him out in the primary because nobody really expected any (serious challenge)," Donohue said. "The guy they ran, Dominic Capella, was a jitney driver from Atlantic City, not well known. I don't think anybody thought there would be any kind of contest.

"Well, they used the classic Watergate technique of moving money through one PAC in Camden County to two PACs in Cape May County. And then they rolled the money into Dominic Capella's campaign," he said.

A total of \$73,500, including nearly \$40,00 provided by the NRA, was funneled from Camden County through the two Cape May County PACs, according to Press reporting at the time and N.J. Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC) records.

Donohue said the funds were hard to trace because the PACs didn't file finance reports before the primary election, effectively hiding the war chest Cappella would use to beat up on Gormley. ELEC later fined the Camden PAC, Committee for Sensible Government '91, for violating a campaign finance disclosure law.

"Some of the money was spent on Cappella's behalf. Like, the NRA did polling and mailings. There were a lot of anonymous attacks. There was a series of really scurrilous newsletters that were put out about Bill (alleging) all kinds of dirt," Donohue said. "It was like a whisper campaign."

Cappella blanketed the airwaves with ads attacking Gormley. As he returned from a West Coast conference, Gormley was surprised to learn a virtually unknown opponent could afford sophisticated attack ads.

"I land in Philadelphia, get in my car, I hear this radio ad. 'Bill Gormley's taking away guns.' You know, it's awful. I said, wait a second, I didn't do anything to hunting in the state of New Jersey," Gormley said.

Other ads hit Gormley for voting for Florio's \$2.8 billion in increased taxes, which he had actually opposed.

"The NRA was funding races but not talking about gun issues," Wildstein said. "Their objective was to defeat Gormley, not to convert Atlantic County voters to the beliefs of the NRA. So they used that money to talk about taxes, about Gormley's record."

"They alleged that's I voted for Governor Florio's income tax and sales tax, which I voted against" Gormley said. "But it didn't matter.

"That was my primary opponent. Then I had two general election opponents, and they were all conveying the same false message," he said.

It's been mentioned Gormley didn't always have a gentle bedside manner, and some local Republicans embraced the chance to knock him down a peg. Gormley won the primary by only about 800 votes. But he wasn't out of the woods.

A local Republican state assemblywoman, Dolores Cooper, ran as an independent Senate candidate. Former City Committeeman Colanzi claimed that Stone had also recruited her, which Stone and the Cooper campaign denied. Though both Republicans were on the same legislative team, there was little love lost between the late Cooper and Gormley.

"Assemblywoman Cooper was a big personality also, and those two in the room together, there wasn't a whole lot of oxygen left," Wildstein said. "So eventually they came to blows."

Press of Atlantic City reporters during that campaign noticed similarities between the Cappella and Cooper campaigns. Attack press releases put out by Cooper were identical to those done by Cappella in appearance, style and tone, filled with the same personal insults and unusual misspellings. Cooper received \$20,000 in direct contributions from the NRA, according to ELEC records. Gormley supporters suspected Stone's work; he and Cooper denied it.

Cooper eventually dropped out but moved her campaign funds to a new PAC and spent them on ads attacking Gormley. Her campaign said the transferred money was to be spent on behalf of Democratic Senate candidate Meg Worthington, meaning all three candidates Gormley faced received or benefited from at least some NRA funding.

Worthington's campaign said Cooper made a mistake in saying she would spend her funds on Worthington's behalf, but a recent check of ELEC records found no amendments to Cooper's filing.

The NRA endorsed Worthington in the general election.



In the end, Gormley won the general election, 53% to 47%. Two years later, Governor Florio wasn't so lucky. A similar dynamic played out.

Florio's opponents focused on \$1.8 billion in tax increases he had approved. An anti-tax group, Hands Across New Jersey, campaigned hard against the tax hikes and were aided by anti-Florio rhetoric on the statewide 101.5 FM radio station. Florio lost one of the closest elections in state history to Christie Whitman in 1993.

It came out later that Hands had been supported with rally expenses and organizing help by the NRA.

Even though Gormley won his election, many agree the episode damaged his viability to run for higher office. He had been seen as a rising star, having placed fourth in the crowded 1989 Republican gubernatorial primary. But he lost a South Jersey congressional primary against Frank LoBiondo in 1994. And the late Congressman Bob Franks squeaked by Gormley in a 2000 Republican U.S. Senate primary.

Some say the assault weapons vote underscored for Republican critics that Gormley was not a doctrinaire conservative.

"I think it hurt his higher ambitions. It caused some damage," said Donohue, currently deputy director of ELEC.

The late Carl Golden, a political pundit and spokesman for governors and the state Supreme Court, noted that South Jersey has long leaned to the conservative side. The assault weapons ban did not sit well with rural voters.

"That was a tough vote. I mean, you're coming from an area of the state where as somebody from Wyoming once said, gun control means being able to aim steady," Golden said.



Gormley wins his 1991 Senate re-election
despite being targeted by the NRA.



Gormley provided the critical vote for a ban on semiautomatic
weapons enacted by Gov. Jim Florio, right.

“So that was a tough vote for Bill with a Democratic governor. But that was one of those where I think we could legitimately say that it was really a vote of conscience, knowing what the pushback would be.”

Former Governor Kean said Gormley and New Jersey were probably better off that he didn't go to Washington, but he speculated on what might have been.

“This is a guy who, in retrospect, was right on so many issues. That's true. That's absolutely true. But it's a shame he never got elected to higher office,” Kean said. “He would have made a fine governor.”

“I think some of those positions that he took over those years made that task, made that road impossible,” Kean said.

Wildstein put a finer point on it.

“I always thought Bill Gormley was a better general election candidate than a primary candidate. You know, he never kowtowed to the right. He was very much, I'd say – I don't want to call him a liberal Republican, but either a moderate or slightly to the left of center.”

Gormley supporters have said he probably would not have been happy as one of 435 House members, and the state would have missed his behind-the-scenes leadership, where he was often most effective.

The senator has come to terms with his record.

“I wouldn't say that my votes over the years were ideal for primaries, to say the least. They certainly had a limiting effect on some of the other times I ran for office,” Gormley said.

As for the specific assault weapons ban vote?

“It obviously infringed on my political aspirations in elections in other years, but I would still vote the same way,” he said. “And in retrospect, I think a lot of people around the country would probably agree with the vote I made.”

In classic Gormley style, he expressed mock sympathy and understanding as he unsheathed his dagger for his 1991 critics.

“Unfortunately, some of the people who opposed me who were pro-NRA, they didn’t have the experience of having served their country. So I guess they didn’t get a chance to fire an assault rifle and realize what it did,” he said.



As a post-script, Bill Gormley never speaks badly of Roger Stone; it was just politics. He even made peace with Dolores Cooper, sponsoring a bill to name a local bridge after her.

And Stone apparently held no grudges against Joe Donohue, the reporter who exposed the NRA sneak attack on Gormley. In fact, the two met for dinner sometime after the 1991 election.

“I walked into the restaurant and as I was sitting down,” Donohue said, “Roger signaled to the waitress and said, ‘Waitress, could you get some strychnine for my friend?’”



Ginny Gormley recalled threatening anonymous phone calls after the senator voted to ban "assault weapons" in NJ.



When Gov. Jim Florio, right, proposed banning ""assault weapons" in New Jersey, Senator Gormley provided the crucial vote.

In Their Own Words _____

Audio highlights from interviews for this book



Gormley's military background informed his decision on the vote to ban assault weapons.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/10Wlpyguxue6eMDCN1wA3RZ3YMrpnTCI7/view?usp=sharing>



Ex-Senator Bob Martin on NRA threats when he supported New Jersey's assault weapons ban.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/157qH2GqZbqzYb8TpPtnFPoqLGuwjhhkqd/view?usp=sharing>



Bob Martin recounts how he was almost literally targeted at an NRA fundraiser.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/16KAov2VzDodILpZRimNtSeIes944QZgn/view?usp=sharing>



Ex-Senator Dan Dalton says Gormley wasn't afraid to take political risks.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qVVe-UQbfnVqhbusu7FzPl6gTqVWTJ_l/view?usp=sharing



Gormley speaks with an unidentified person as then-casino owner Donald Trump, center, looks on.

5

NEON LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Atlantic City's casino industry thrived financially in the 1980s. But it suffered a different kind of loss in 1987 when casino mogul Steve Wynn, fed up with New Jersey's strict regulation and Atlantic City corruption, decided to sell his Golden Nugget. It was among the resort's most profitable casinos, but Wynn left Atlantic City to build The Mirage in Las Vegas.

So it was big news in the 1990s when Wynn signaled his intention to return to Atlantic City. His company, Mirage Resorts, along with Circus Circus, would build a billion-dollar gaming complex in the city's little-developed Marina District. He promised a world-class operation and thousands of jobs, something Sen. Bill Gormley said was sorely needed if Atlantic City were to remain competitive.

“It was all about jobs,” Gormley said. “And Wynn at the time was the premier operator of casinos. He was the gold standard.”

But Steve Wynn had a price.

He doubted gamblers would drive through Atlantic City’s congested streets to find his new casino, so he demanded that a new road be built bypassing the center of town and connecting directly from the Atlantic City Expressway to the Marina District.

To Gormley, the jobs were worth the cost of infrastructure. The late Jim Whelan, then mayor of Atlantic City, also supported the proposal. However, the idea of diverting customers away from existing Boardwalk properties enraged casino executives Donald Trump and Arthur Goldberg of Bally’s.

They vehemently opposed the plan. What ensued was a knock-down, high-decibel donnybrook waged by larger-than-life characters with massive egos and a taste for the jugular.

The battle over a 2.4-mile roadway and tunnel, fought in the media, in courtrooms and in the streets of Atlantic City, would rage for five years. And in the middle was Gormley, working behind the scenes to manage the combatants, negotiate a deal, get Gov. Christie Whitman and the Legislature to approve it and secure the prized jobs and development.

“What I had to do is I make sure the governor was for it, but I had to make sure we kept all the Republicans on board,” Gormley said.

But he secured a valuable position of authority: “The governor allowed me the leeway to negotiate the deal,” Gormley said.

The late Carl Golden, Governor Whitman’s spokesman at the time, said in a 2024 interview that he had never seen anything like the Marina tunnel spectacle in Atlantic City.

“With the people involved, it became almost a point where there was more interest in watching the personalities than there was in building a road,” Golden said.

“You know, this wasn’t just a clash of personalities. This was more like a nuclear exchange,” he said. “And with all of those egos floating around out there, Wynn and Trump, obviously, even Senator Gormley, who’s a very good friend of mine, his ego was out there as well.

“And boy, when they collided, it bent the needle on the Richter scale.”

Steve Wynn’s representative in Atlantic City, businessman and podcaster Skip Bronson, later wrote a book about the clash of titans. He called it “The War at the Shore.”

“There was also acrimony between Donald and Steve that went beyond this,” Bronson said. “It’s almost like two people get into a fight and they’re in the fight for so long and they’re fighting so hard, they forget the reason they were in the fight in the first place.

“They had some bad history in terms of some executives that had been, you know, taken from one company to the other. So there was more to it.”

Bronson said that occasionally Wynn became frustrated over the drawn-out back-and-forth. Wynn would call and utter the three words Bronson didn’t want to hear.

“Shut it down. Shut it down,” Bronson said Wynn told him, continuing: “Forget it. We’re out. We’re done.”

“I’ve never said this, and I’m still very close to Steve,” Bronson began, but then said how he used the bitter Trump-Wynn rivalry to keep the tunnel proposal on track.

“I’d say to him, ‘Steve, really? So you’re going to let Trump win? So Trump wins. He’s the winner, you’re the loser, and you’re okay with that.’ And there’d be dead air for a while.

“Then all of a sudden he’d say, ‘Well, you think we can win this thing?’ And then it was, okay, guys, we’re still alive,” Bronson said.

Gormley said the experience fit neatly in Atlantic City’s colorful history, including the era of old-time boss Nucky Johnson that inspired the HBO series “Boardwalk Empire.”

“Nucky would have loved it. I mean, it was classic Atlantic City,” Gormley said.



Skip Bronson was president of Wynn’s New City Development, a subsidiary of Mirage. A long, difficult effort to build a casino in Connecticut had just collapsed, and in 1990, Bronson was exhausted. But Wynn immediately sent Bronson to Atlantic City to guide the new casino and tunnel projects through City Council.

Bronson noted that Wynn had told him they would love him in Atlantic City. Right after his arrival, Bronson attended a meeting of community residents at City Hall.

“I went there and it was an angry mob,” he said.

“And I got up and I explained who I was and how we were going to create this project that would create great jobs and tax revenue and be the greatest thing that could happen,” Bronson recalled. “And I was getting literally booed, yelled at, threatened. It was amazing.”

Finally, a uniformed cop took the microphone.

“And I thought to myself, phew, he’s going to calm everybody down. He got up and he said, ‘I live in this community that’s going to be impacted. And before I will let them put a brick on our property, I will ...’ And he started to go into this thing. I’m like, this guy just put gasoline on the fire.”

Welcome to Atlantic City, Mr. Bronson.

“They love me there so much that at one point, I had a full-time bodyguard, you know, a former member of the Secret Service who accompanied me wherever I went,” Bronson said.

Bronson and Wynn turned to Gormley for help.

“Before Wynn’s people contacted me, they had tried to get it through the city of Atlantic City and lost by unanimous vote. And I was wondering why they hadn’t called me, but whatever,” Gormley said.

After meeting with Bronson, the senator agreed to try to orchestrate funding and approval of the project. He urged the Whitman administration to appoint a committee to study the feasibility, cost and environmental impact of a new road including a tunnel. Gormley wanted to develop factual ammunition, and he told the governor: “We’re going to have to do a lot of selling to get this done.” Gormley’s reliance on experts and professional staff was well-established, and he knew exactly who he wanted to head the committee.

James Crawford was a transportation expert and director of the South Jersey Transportation Authority (SJTA). He was surprised to learn of a new assignment heading this committee when Whitman announced it one day during a speech in the city. The committee went to work as Gormley and supporters sought to build momentum.

“We met and we came up with a solution that called for tunneling under an area that looked at that point to be the most probable way to connect between the two locations,” Crawford said about what would be known as the Brigantine connector.



Technical challenges were numerous. The project would have to address flooding problems around the proposed road. Crawford barely had time to consider engineering matters when tensions were already brewing.

“Even before we sent the report off to the governor, there had been a lot of back and forth. Wynn was threatening that if he didn’t get a good connection to the expressway, he was not going to build,” Crawford said.

“Trump was arguing that without some way to make sure the people came into Atlantic City and saw his casinos first, that there was no way to keep from destroying the Boardwalk casinos,” Crawford said.

Despite the focus on big personalities, Bronson said that with competition growing, the real issue was that Atlantic City was at a crossroad. He said the stakes for the region’s tourist industry couldn’t have been higher.

“This was not me versus Donald Trump. This was actually something even bigger than that,” Bronson said. “This was a battle for the heart and soul of Atlantic City.”

Crawford and the SJTA took the lead on environmental and physical planning for the tunnel. Carl Golden laid out the policy considerations on which Whitman would base her decision to build the tunnel.

“Trump was attacking this as corporate welfare. That it was an abuse of taxpayer dollars to build this thing just to benefit one potential developer and his competition,” Golden said. “And the counterargument was that this opened a tremendous economic growth opportunity there.

“In addition, it would help with the infrastructure, taking some of the traffic off the surface streets there,” Golden said. “The city

was clogged with people coming down there. It was only going to get worse.”

But personalities dominated the debate more than policy did.

“Trump wanted to be sort of the only casino industry leader in Atlantic City and in New Jersey. He didn’t want to have to share anything with a high-profile guy like Steve Wynn,” Golden said. “You know, when that spotlight goes on, Trump wants to be the only guy standing there.”

Former Atlantic City Councilwoman Rosalind Norrell-Nance remembered a meeting in Mayor Whelan’s office that almost spun out of control.

“We had a meeting in the mayor’s office with Trump’s people and Steve Wynn’s people, and they got to arguing and fighting with each other so bad that the mayor had to stop the meeting and go into his office for people to cool down,” Norrell-Nance said.

As it does now, the media flocked to Trump, who used his megaphone to hurl insults, air complaints and predict doom for the casino industry if the state built a road for Wynn. Opponents went to court to stop the project. Cars were vandalized. Protesters showed up at events. One tunnel protestor once told Bronson he had been paid \$20 to show up.

“Donald Trump did not want this tunnel under any condition because he felt that Steve would be more than a formidable competitor,” Bronson said. “So he was going to do everything he could do.”

Golden and David Wildstein, editor of New Jersey Globe, said Gormley was up to going toe-to-toe with Trump. Gormley’s role was to push the more positive message.

“He and Trump, they were constantly butting heads. And Bill, to his credit, he could deal with the media very, very well,” Golden said.

“He didn’t have to do what Trump did, which was go out every day and bellyache and gripe and groan and complain and insult people and belittle people. Bill let the media carry it for him in many ways,” Golden said. “And they knew that obviously the relationship he had with Trump was pretty dicey.”

Wildstein said the two big personalities could get along when their interests merged.

“Trump and Gormley probably shared some of the same characteristics in terms of their desire to get things done,” he said. “Gormley was always happy to work with Trump when it was in the best interest of the city.

“But when (Trump) was in the casino business and making decisions that weren’t in the interest of Atlantic City, Bill Gormley didn’t hesitate to take him on.”

Wildstein said Gormley’s bulldog demeanor garnered respect, or at least trepidation.

“You’ve got to imagine that whether it was Steve Wynn or Donald Trump, they didn’t view Bill Gormley as a rube,” Wildstein said. “They didn’t view him as a local hack politician that they could intimidate or make big campaign contributions to.

“They had to have recognized Gormley’s own personality and his force and his dedication first to the county, and they had to have known the risk of pushing him around,” he said.

Gormley wasn’t the only one who would balk at being pressured. Norrell-Nance supported the project, but she agreed to meet with Trump and give him a chance to make his case. They met in her City Hall office. Near the end, she thanked him for the meeting and said she would think about his position.

“He said, ‘Think about it?’ I said, yes. And he said, ‘What the f--- do you mean, you’ll think about it?’” Norrell-Nance said. “And the schoolteacher in me came out.

“I had a ruler on my desk, and I slammed the ruler down. I said, ‘Sit back down in that chair. Who do you think you’re speaking to? And don’t you ever come in here or go to any of my other Council and Council members and use that kind of language.

“I told you I’d think about it, and that’s what I’m going to do. Now you can go,” she said.

She added that a city lawyer who attended the meeting sat looking white as a ghost. When she asked what was wrong, she said the lawyer responded: “When you picked up that ruler, I thought you were going to hit him with it!”

Neither Trump nor his representatives responded to multiple requests to be interviewed for this project. He was running for president at the time.



Gormley was good at schmoozing reporters to counter Trump, but he saw the late Bally’s CEO Goldberg as formidable because he had strong influence with Democratic lawmakers in Trenton who would vote on any deal. And there was no agreement on who would pay for the roadway, a fact tunnel opponents could exploit.

“Donald obviously was a very tough opponent. The world understands that now,” Gormley said. “But Arthur Goldberg, in my mind in the late ‘90s, was the most powerful non-elected Democrat in New Jersey, period. He had an understanding of New Jersey politics. He had grown up in New Jersey politics. He was a brilliant businessman.

“And he had a great network – so great a network that he made sure that the Democratic Party was opposed to the tunnel. Now this is totally illogical,” Gormley said. “I’m the Republican, I’m for the tunnel. I’m fighting the party of labor. And they were against it.”

Bronson agreed with Gormley's assessment. He said while Trump received most of the attention, Goldberg also brought an edge to the battle.

"He was more mean, if you will, than Donald Trump. I mean, he was impossible," Bronson said. "Arthur Goldberg made the snowballs and put rocks in them and then handed them to Donald to throw. And Goldberg was very happy to be behind the scenes making the snowballs, and Donald was very happy to be in there firing them."

"They were mean spirited," Gormley said. "It was very mean spirited, but that's politics. Donald is gifted at a political fight, and Arthur Goldberg was just a brilliant, brilliant foe."

While Goldberg influenced legislative Democrats, Trump reportedly worked at creating dissent within the Whitman administration. Former SJTA Director Crawford and Gormley said they believed Trump had gotten in with the Department of Transportation commissioner, Frank Wilson. Crawford said the DOT attempted to take over the project from the SJTA.

"All of a sudden, the commissioner of the DOT interjected himself and basically said, no, no, no, no, no, no. We will design it and we'll build it," Crawford said.

Gormley was annoyed because nobody in the administration had talked to him. Then he found out they had not gone to the governor either.

"Trump apparently had been meeting with Wilson and had convinced Wilson that this was the way to go," Crawford said. Of course, the new DOT plan would push motorists past the Boardwalk casino area and around some kind of loop to get to the proposed tunnel.

"That, of course, didn't sit well with Wynn, and the two of them were not talking to each other. So I was sort of caught in the middle of this," Crawford said.



Skip Bronson, president of Steve Wynn's New City Development company, knew Gormley was serious when he literally got in your face.



Senator Gormley worked with state, local and transportation officials for five years to secure a roadway and tunnel for a new Marina casino.

Gormley said the move was an attempt to kill the project, and not the only attempt at the administration level.

“He (Wilson) said, we need two tunnels. Now, one tunnel was – I could barely breathe in the morning with one tunnel. But he said, you need a second tunnel for traffic flow or something,” Gormley said. “Well, I immediately dismissed that as a methodology to kill it.”

There was even disagreement over what to call the new infrastructure. Golden said at one point late in the game, Wilson told him the state wasn’t building a “tunnel.”

“I was stunned,” Golden said. “You mean you’re not going to build a tunnel after all of this?”

He said Wilson responded: “No, it’s going to be a depressed roadway with a roof over it.”

“And I said, oh, you mean like a tunnel?” Golden said. “And he said, ‘No, no, it’s a depressed roadway with a roof over.’ And I said, ‘Commissioner, with all due respect, you can call it whatever you want. But if you think I or the governor is going to stand in a room full of reporters and describe it this way, you’re taking leave of your senses.’”

Whitman pushed the DOT to work cooperatively. It validated Gormley’s principle of always working closely with whoever held the Governor’s Office.

“And the governor, by the way, was great. She was wonderful. She really put her neck on the line for this,” Gormley said. “So you can give me credit for getting certain things accomplished. But if you don’t start with the governor of the state of New Jersey, it’s a non-starter.”

Multiple attempts were made through email, social media and internet directories to locate and interview Wilson, but he could not be reached for comment. Wilson passed away on March 2, 2025, according to an obituary on [legacy.com](https://www.legacy.com).



The battle was complicated by the fact that nine houses owned by Black Westside residents would have to be condemned to make way for the roadway. That was painful for the project's supporters. Opponents attacked the plan as destroying a stable minority neighborhood. Wynn's Mirage bought out five homeowners at above-market rates, news reports said.

Other Westside residents sued with financial support from Trump to stop the project, according to media reports. The suit was eventually dismissed.

Bronson said he believed eminent domain became a focal point for a number of varied local grievances and a feeling that residents had not benefited enough from casino gambling.

"I think it was because of anger that went beyond (the tunnel). Because when I started going to these community meetings, they were raising all these issues," Bronson said. "They (other issues) had nothing to do with this project – nothing.

"It was, 'They didn't do this, and we didn't get that, and we don't get the right jobs.' And it had nothing to do with this particular issue," he said.

Norrell-Nance agreed that general resentments and individual agendas muddled the debate. Residents who felt left behind used the tunnel issue as a vehicle for other complaints.

But she felt the project's benefits outweighed the negatives, not only because of jobs but for quality-of-life improvements as well.

"When the Taj Mahal opened in Atlantic City, I had 300 buses a day driving down the street where I lived, and I had a brick house. And the vibrations knocked the house off its foundation," she said.

“I had a neighbor who had the plaster from her ceiling fell on her while she was in bed. So we knew that if didn’t build a tunnel and those buses were going to be coming through their neighborhoods, there were going to be more problems,” she said.

What the residents’ complaints meant was that the effort to bring Steve Wynn back was even more complex than it appeared on its face. The battle was multi-faceted, with business and economic interests, partisan politics, local grievances and celebrity egos all clashing and intersecting.



After years of stalemate, proponents were no closer to agreement on how to fund the project. Wynn felt the state should pay for it, and lawmakers who thought funding would indirectly subsidize a casino opposed it.

Crawford recalled feeling pessimistic. One day Gormley called him from Trenton after a series of fruitless meetings. He told Crawford not to leave the office, that he was driving directly there and they were going to keep working. Once Gormley arrived, they made calls and brainstormed, and then the senator came up with an idea.

“He says, ‘Okay, here’s how we’re going to do it. The expressway is going to pay for a third. We’re going to use the casino money through CRDA to pay for a third, and we’re going to get Wynn to pay for a third. And that will put the whole thing together and we’ll have to buy all the rights of way,’” Crawford said.

“He got on (the phone) with the governor. The governor wanted assurances that he thought he could really make this work. He gave her those assurances left, right, and center,” Crawford said. “And the next thing I knew, I’m getting a call from the Governor’s Authorities Unit saying this is the plan, as if I had never heard it.”

Gormley “made it happen,” Crawford said, and let the parties and professionals negotiate the specifics.

“He left others to work those details out. He just wanted to make sure that they worked them out in a way that was acceptable to him,” Crawford said.

Ultimately, one-third of the funding would come from the casino developers, one-third would come from state government, and Crawford’s transportation authority would finance the rest with backing by expressway tolls. It was a compromise nobody loved, but everyone eventually agreed to it. Gormley just had to get it through the Legislature. He used his tools of charm, persuasion and intimidation.

“I’m not calling him a lobbyist, that isn’t true. But it is in a sense,” Golden said. “If it came to a description of lobbying hard and very hard for the city and the people, yeah, Bill was there. No question about that.”

“Was I aggressive? Yes,” Gormley admitted.

“We were trying to get the bill through for the tunnel, and I knew that one senator was wavering. So I just sat behind him (in the Senate) and was just right there with him the whole time because I knew he was vulnerable to changing his mind,” Gormley said. “

“I sat behind him at committee meetings, looking over his shoulder, and I would monitor the lobbyists for Goldberg and Trump and him trying to pass a note. ... I was just there right next to his staff, ready to answer any question he might have.

“So it got very granular, to say the least,” he said.

The bill passed. Governor Whitman signed it. And the years-long “War at the Shore” finally ended.

As participants in the drama looked back, they credited

Gormley's leadership. He was like the quarterback, or the conductor of an orchestra, working to get all the players on the same page.

"Bill was the ultimate senator in this. He used his power where he needed to," Crawford said.

"Without Bill Gormley, that tunnel would never have been built and that connection to the Marina area would never have worked successfully," he said.

Bronson said the experience, including working with Gormley, was intense.

"I got used to it (Gormley's temper) after a while, and I knew that it was just, you know, blowing off steam," Bronson said.

"But when he got really mad – he's a face talker, right? So he'd get right up in your face, like, right up in your face, literally inches away. And he'd say, 'Listen to me. This is what you need to do.' He was, like, very emphatic about it," Bronson said. "That, to me, was worse than the yelling."

So did that sour Bronson on Gormley? Far from it. As a prominent business leader, Bronson respected results.

"He was great. I can't say enough about it. He was completely honorable, smart as a whip. Certainly, he knew the area and he knew strategy. He was amazing."

Bronson added: "He was right about almost everything."



Ironically, Steve Wynn never built his casino.

His company was sold to MGM Grand. But MGM Grand in partnership with Boyd Gaming did build the Borgata Casino, one of the premier casino properties in America, on the Marina site. It opened in July 2003, creating jobs, easing downtown traffic and

making life easier for residents of nearby Brigantine because of the connector route that was built.

“It wound up that Wynn didn’t build it. He turned it over to Borgata. But they did a great job. People who walk into that facility today say it looks new, which is a compliment 20 years after it opened,” Gormley said. “So it worked out. It did what it was supposed to do. It kept its promises.”

Even Donald Trump did okay. He negotiated that his renamed Trump Marina casino in the newly developed area wasn’t left out when he settled lawsuits he had filed.

“Donald being Donald, he made sure that the first exit off this new expressway went right into his property in the Marina District,” Crawford said. “So when people say that he lost, you could argue he lost, but you could also argue that he won in some ways.”

Need further proof?

“And then at the end of the whole thing, after the project was open, I got a call one day and my secretary said, ‘Donald Trump is on the phone.’ So I pick up the phone and he says, ‘I wanted to congratulate you on doing a good job.’ Like he had been behind it the whole time!” Crawford said. “He was going to take credit for it even if he had opposed it all throughout.”

Gormley said the whole ordeal was brutal. But he felt that as senator, it was his job to protect Atlantic City and its residents and to promote the tourism industry that employed thousands of his constituents.

“Listen, can I say I enjoyed it? No,” Gormley said. “But did I find it fascinating, the working on the project and the nuances to the project and dealing with the personalities?

“Oh yeah, absolutely,” he said. “Absolutely.”

In Their Own Words

Audio highlights from interviews for this book



Gormley outlines his approach to having a transportation expert lead on infrastructure in getting approval for the A.C. tunnel.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-xdWVpotsyVyxMSxcjG0SzwJ4zeb7Cxc/view?usp=sharing>



Carl Golden describes the atmosphere as egos clashed over the building of a road and tunnel in Atlantic City.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1q3ATyXBkENynUm6Un93IwnKQcRyRRkqP/view?usp=sharing>



Historian and editor David Wildstein describes Gormley as not being intimidated by powerful people.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/15tMc9hEmTo8sGsk1s9HSw7ntx3r26LKE/view?usp=sharing>



Former SJTA Director Jim Crawford relates Gormley's plan to fund the A.C. tunnel project.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GfD_YECLq-rs6IWvmd1bWBkqJQBG1HRR/view?usp=sharing



Former Mirage official Skip Bronson describes his first meeting with the Atlantic City community over Steve Wynn's plans to build a road to his proposed casino.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1M0G1Nl22tm6dQ6FC2iEG9ZDjRKbQZ-nT/view?usp=sharing>



Gormley knew sports betting would not pass in '93 but had to push for it when another senator proposed a bill despite having no support.

6

RUNNING OUT THE CLOCK ON SPORTS BETTING

In June 2024, gamblers wagered nearly \$750 million on sporting events in New Jersey. After paying off winning bets, the state's casino industry realized \$60 million in revenues. What's interesting is that June was an off month, a bit disappointing compared to the take in other months.

In fact, New Jersey's casinos raked in more than \$1 billion in revenues in 2023, the most since sports betting was legalized in 2018. And 2024 topped that number by nearly \$100 million. So that poor June showing may have been an outlier. In fact, sports betting was up 31 percent the following month.

That form of gaming clearly has been an economic winner. But for a long time, it looked like New Jersey would never have sports betting.

That's because in 1992, Congress passed a law prohibiting wagering on sports unless a state already had it – Congress wasn't going to hurt Nevada's main industry – or unless a state authorized it before a deadline passed.

New Jersey allows such gaming today because former state Sen. Raymond Lesniak, a Union County Democrat, challenged the constitutionality of the federal ban in 2009 – and he won. He claimed it was unconstitutional to hold different states to different laws.

"They had said no state can authorize sports betting. That was the law," Lesniak said. "Well, they can't tell New Jersey that we can't do that. That's against the 10th Amendment.

"However, if they had said sports betting is illegal in America, then we would have no challenge because they're not saying the state can't authorize it. They're saying nobody can have it," he explained. "But that would have prevented them from protecting Las Vegas and Nevada."

New Jersey could potentially have been realizing billions of dollars in gambling revenue for the prior 25 years. Former U.S. Sen. Robert Torricelli – the Torch – had secured an amendment giving states time to enact sports betting. In fact, there was a short but frenzied effort to have Garden State voters legalize sports betting before the federal ban took effect.

And if you're wondering where Sen. Bill Gormley fits into this story, well, he was in the thick of the battle to get it authorized – albeit reluctantly – before the ban became law.

Spoiler alert: Gormley didn't win this battle. But it's an instructive tale because it revealed a lot about who Gormley is, what he prioritized and how the needs of his Atlantic County

district so often affected and tied into public policy for the entire state of New Jersey.



Gormley had no plans to push a sports betting bill in the Senate in 1993. He knew that the Assembly speaker, the late Garabed “Chuck” Haytaian, opposed it and would not schedule an Assembly vote. Gormley would not raise false hopes by proposing a bill for show.

However, another state senator, Union County Republican C. Louis Bassano, proposed a bill to ask voters that November to enact sports betting. He committed what Gormley considers a legislative sin: he publicly announced it even though it had no chance to become law. Gormley, protector of all things Atlantic City, could not allow the resort and casinos to be embarrassed in defeat.

Against his better judgement, he felt he had to join the fray and try to get it passed. To this day, though, he is still annoyed that anyone would hold a press conference without having the votes to pass a bill. Gormley’s style was to work quietly behind the scenes to get the job done.

“It’s more important to get the bill passed,” Gormley said. “Some people want to go through a lengthy process and do a bunch of press releases. No, no, we just wanted the result in Atlantic City.

“In this case, I had a sponsor who – there’s two ways to handle legislation. I like getting it done. I didn’t do a press release. I wanted it signed by the governor,” he said. “Other people, ‘Oh, I’m introducing a bill today. Oh, the bill moved out.’ No, I’m all about the signing. I could care less about preliminary publicity. It was a matter of results. And I like to think that’s my reputation.”

Former journalist and gaming analyst Michael Pollock agreed. He said Gormley's lack of interest in self-promotion was a defining trait.

"While he was an artist at crafting legislation and figuring out how to solve a problem through the legislative process, I think one of his weak points was that he was never able to really sell Bill Gormley to the public, even though he was reelected and reelected," Pollock said. "That sounds odd for a politician who's certainly never been shy. He's not shy, but he was not self-aggrandizing."

Gormley would soon battle casino executives Donald Trump and Arthur Goldberg of Bally's over a roadway to a casino proposed by mogul Steve Wynn. But Trump and Goldberg fought on the same side as Gormley on sports betting. Still, they were opposed by the heavyweight sports leagues – the NBA, NFL, MLB and NCAA – who insisted gambling would taint sports.

"Yeah, they made the same arguments against my effort, that this would destroy the integrity of professional sports," Lesniak said. "Fast forward a few decades when I took on the challenge to overturn (the sports betting ban). They said the same thing."

Lobbyists for the sports leagues sounded the alarm that gambling would cause fans to not trust the integrity of the games. They sometimes add an afterthought, saying it wasn't fair that others would profit from their games.

"Well, yeah, I always thought that they wanted a piece of the action," Lesniak said.

Former Republican Governor and Senate President Donald DiFrancesco recalled how intensely the leagues fought the measure.

"There was fierce lobbying against it. It didn't bother me. It never really got to me, quite frankly. But as an aside, I can tell you that coach Joe Paterno called me. I went to Penn State. Lou Holtz

called. Bill went to Notre Dame,” DiFrancesco said. “They were told by the NCAA, probably, to make those calls.”

It didn’t help that iconic New York Knicks star and popular U.S. Sen. Bill Bradley was opposed. That helped with influential Democratic Sen. Dick Codey of Essex County.

“You had Senator Codey, who is a big sports fan, and obviously, Bill Bradley was opposed to it. Bill Bradley talks to Dick Codey,” Gormley said.

“I think those are the types of connections (opponents had). They had the Hall of Fame coaches showing up, they had the NBA players showing up,” he said. “And I’ll tell you, I was somewhat outmatched on that degree.”

The effort to corral 21 votes, the minimum needed to pass a bill in the Senate, was stressful because of the long odds against it.

“That was the most intense I ever was because usually I had the votes lined up,” Gormley said.

“I knew that it wouldn’t become law that year. I knew that Haytaian wouldn’t list it if it ever got to the Assembly. I also know it was very rigorous,” he said. “It didn’t have the support in the Senate.”

However, Bassano’s Republican Party held the majority in both legislative houses, and his bill was scheduled for a vote. That fact spurred Gormley into overdrive in trying to get it passed. And he buttonholed his colleagues on the floor of the Senate literally during the session in which the vote was held.

“I couldn’t allow or cause a vote on Atlantic City to go down. I couldn’t do that,” Gormley said. “So what happened is he had the bill listed, and then I worked the floor for three hours, person by person.”

Seemingly by sheer force of will, Gormley muscled the bill through state Senate approval. He said Trump and Goldberg

believed from conversations with Speaker Haytaian that he would allow an Assembly vote if the Senate passed sports betting. Gormley speculated that Haytaian probably felt he could give that impression because sports betting was originally opposed by a majority of the Senate.

“Chuck thought he had the best of both worlds. It wasn’t going to pass the Senate,” Gormley said.

“And I truly believe, because they (Trump and Goldberg) related this to me, because Arthur and Donald were with me on this. Obviously,” he said. “They said he promised to do it. They said, ‘Bill, when this gets through, it’s just going to sail through the Assembly’

“I said, I don’t think so.”



Those who think policy is decided on the merits should know this: politics affects every aspect of government. And raw politics played a role in sports betting’s defeat. Republicans parroted the leagues’ claims about tainting the games, but privately they feared what the impact might be of having a sports betting question on the ballot in the 1993 election.

However, then-Assemblyman Dick Kamin – to use a modern political cliché – said the quiet part out loud: Republican Christie Whitman was running for governor, and Republicans believed that if sports betting were on the ballot, campaign spending by casinos to get out the vote would spark a huge turnout in populated urban areas.

Those areas, with heavy minority populations, largely vote Democratic. Democrat Jim Florio was running for re-election.

“With Bill Gormley leading the way in the Senate, we passed it,” Lesniak said. “But the Assembly never put it up for a vote. And that was because of the genius of Chuck Haytaian as a politician.



Notre Dame's rugby team in Ireland meeting Irish president Éamon de Valera in 1968. Gormley is in the back row.



Gormley met with then-Texas Gov.
George W. Bush at the governor's mansion in 1999.

“He realized that the Florio-Whitman election was going to be close and that if we had sports betting on the ballot, the casinos would pour tons of money into urban areas to support it and therefore boost the Democratic vote.”

Just making sure: Lesniak wasn’t being sarcastic when he called his leading opponent a genius?

“No, no. It was political genius,” Lesniak said. “It hurt the state of New Jersey, but based on pure, you know, New Jersey politics, if you will, he was right on top of it.”

Gormley agreed.

“Haytaian was right,” he said.

“Would the people from the Casino Association have geared up a drive to turn out the vote? I assume they would have,” Gormley said. “Obviously you focus on urban areas when you do that. I know I would have.”

Gormley noted that other than limited betting in Delaware, Atlantic City would have been the only sports betting venue east of Nevada.

“I don’t have any question that there would have been quite an organized get-out-the-vote.”

Because most Republicans declined to publicly discuss possible impacts on the election, it allowed sports betting supporters to charge racism, saying Republicans wanted to suppress the minority vote. Others, like then-Senate President DiFrancesco, were simply uncomfortable mixing the two issues.

“I don’t know if I should say this, but I will anyway. Somebody later on told me that Governor Whitman did not want Chuck to (schedule a vote) on the theory that it would hurt her chances of winning the governorship because certain people would come to the polls that might not vote,” DiFrancesco said.

“I didn’t buy into that at all,” he said. “I thought that was not a good argument. I was shocked that somebody would say that or that they would have that concern. I don’t think it (minority voters) would have had any effect on her election.”

DiFrancesco said he believed what were then still called Reagan Democrats, many living in the suburbs, would have supported sports betting more than urban voters.

“Not necessarily minorities, but the blue-collar vote. Because those are the people that buy lottery tickets today, the people that were booking those days,” he said. “They would come out in greater numbers and vote Democratic.”



Perhaps the sports betting battle was waged so fiercely because it lasted only a few months. Assembly Republicans certainly didn’t want to drag it out. But the intensity only grew with the action shifting to the Assembly.

Trump and Haytaian went on Bob Grant’s radio show on WABC in New York to debate sports betting. It reminded no one of Lincoln-Douglas.

Trump immediately attacked, saying defeat of sports betting would hurt taxpayers.

“Chuck Haytaian, a big man for wanting to raise taxes throughout the state of New Jersey because what he wants to do in this case is not have sports betting approved,” Trump said, an odd accusation against someone who had repealed Florio’s sales tax hike.

“I don’t care how much money he’s got. I don’t care how much of a schmoozer he is,” Haytaian shot back. “And I don’t really care how powerful he thinks he is. We have a process and we’re going to follow it.”

He gave Trump an opening for his trademark mockery: "I'm a small guy from the Bronx who grew up (understanding) integrity and honesty," said Haytaian, who unlike Deborah Poritz was not diminutive. "And one of the things I believe in is the process we work under. He can't accept that and that's all of it in a nutshell."

Trump moved in. "We're not dealing with a baby over here. He says he's a small guy from the Bronx. Maybe politically that crap works with some people. ... Oh, like he's this little angel. This little angel."

Haytaian accused Trump of denigrating Atlantic City and his own casinos by praising the riverboat casinos other states were approving.

"Why don't you stop talking about riverboat gambling and start talking about your beautiful hotels? You know something? You have no competition from riverboats. How could anyone say that a riverboat is better than the Taj Mahal? You have a beautiful place. Why are you knocking Atlantic City?"

His response was classic Trump, hinting at impropriety without explicitly making an accusation.

"Chuck Haytaian's in the casinos all the time," Trump said. "Spends lots of time there, spends lots of hours. I've seen him there a lot. I'd like to know why he changed his positions all of a sudden. How much time do you spend in the casinos, Chuck?"

Um, and how did this relate to sports betting? Trump argued sports betting would insulate New Jersey from growing competition.

"I'll tell you what. You have Connecticut (casinos) coming on, you have New York coming on, you have the Indians coming on," Trump said. "And you don't want to give Atlantic City a fair shot."

Haytaian insisted he had helped Atlantic City. But there's a term in broadcast for when guests drown each other out shouting at

the same time: cross-talk. “Cross-venom” might have been more appropriate. The two yelled simultaneously at each other in the largely indecipherable segment.

Haytaian: “Well let me tell you what we did so far, pal.”

Trump: “You want to raise taxes for everyone in New Jersey.”

“... 24 hour gambling was voted in ...”

“... how many years, after 12 years...”

“Listen, I can talk over you just as well as you can talk over me,” Haytaian said, but not really.

“Gentlemen one at a time,” host Bob Grant implored.

“Bob this is not a discussion if he’s not gonna let me talk,” Haytaian said, seemingly channeling Joe Biden 25 years into the future.

“Our wonderful listeners can’t hear you,” Grant told the combatants.

But so what? The “debate” seemed more a personal argument over grievances and hurt feelings than a policy discussion.

The 15-minute segment rounded the bend with claims Haytaian personally wouldn’t let sports betting advance, while he claimed it was a committee’s decision.

“You didn’t have to put it in a committee,” Trump said. “He put it in a committee to kill it.”

“We had 37 hours of committee hearings,” Haytaian said.

“He controls the committee. He tries to pretend he’s this innocent little lamb from the Bronx ... this little angel.”

At another point, Haytaian said: “He wants me to circumvent the committee process.”

“Ah, that’s a lot of crap,” Trump groaned.

“Donald you’re losing your credibility. Let me talk.”

“If I were in your district, I would vote you out of office so fast ...”

“Well then why don’t you come up here?” Haytaian asked. It actually sounded more like an invitation than a threat, but then he was drowned out.

“I think you’re a disgrace,” Trump said in conclusion.

But Haytaian had already signaled that sports betting advocates had lost the larger war.

“Mr. Trump, this one is over,” Haytaian said. “This one is finished. Period.”



Under intense pressure, Haytaian allowed the Assembly Appropriations Committee to vote on the bill. Gormley appealed to the committee to let voters decide the issue. He argued it would spur economic growth, create jobs and bolster state taxes.

But the panel’s Republican majority wouldn’t budge in their opposition. Gormley’s temper flashed. He made a cutting remark to the chairman. The late John Gaffney, then a 2nd District assemblyman, asked that the bill be held, but his fellow Republicans refused. After the hearing, Gaffney was sputtering mad and accused the committee of violating promises, which he later took back.

But Gormley simply stood quietly, arms folded, and glared at the committee Republicans as they voted sports betting down. The question did not appear on New Jersey’s 1993 election ballot. Republican Whitman won the election by one razor-thin percentage point.

Gormley's willingness to offend his own party when Atlantic City's needs were at stake was one reason he would have difficulties in Republican primaries for higher office. But former Democratic Sen. Dan Dalton of Gloucester County said Gormley often stood on principle over partisanship.

"You don't go in the politics being afraid to lose your seat. You're not there forever and you're there to make a difference," Dalton said.

"And Bill Gormley personified that. He played a role in a lot of significant legislation, and he was there for 25 years. But he wasn't there to make friends with folks that he disagreed with," Dalton said.



Years later, Lesniak sued to overturn the federal law that banned sports betting as unconstitutional. He won, and Atlantic City casinos started talking bets on games almost immediately after Gov. Phil Murphy signed enabling legislation in June 2018.

Supporters lamented the lost opportunity and lost revenue sports betting could have brought.

"I always felt that Atlantic City, we, would have had an exclusive for like 20 years," DiFrancesco said. "Of course, we had Nevada, but in the Northeast, we had an exclusive. It was too bad, really."

Lesniak said he believed if sports betting had passed in 1993, it would have had a greater positive impact than only boosting revenues.

"If we had passed it at that time, if Chuck Haytaian put his politics aside and it was up for a vote – and it certainly would have been approved – I believe that Atlantic City would now look more like Las Vegas than how Atlantic City looks now," Lesniak said.

He and others noted the sports leagues, having teamed up with betting companies, are profiting from sports betting.

“And as of right now, I think the NBA is, shall we say, benefiting from betting because of the contracts they’re getting,” Gormley said. “There’s tens of millions of dollars. And this is one of the reasons why.”

He predicted online sports betting has positioned Atlantic City and New Jersey for new high-tech gambling.

“It’s very helpful to Atlantic City right now because we’re moving away from land-based casinos and we’re getting up in the cloud,” Gormley said. “And the more that Atlantic City can do to participate in the cloud, it will hopefully create opportunities – through Stockton University, as an example – for jobs in the cloud.”

So ... Bill Gormley didn’t save the day this time. But the episode revealed something about the senator.

He learned as a child that Atlantic County and its residents, his people, depended on tourism to live, and it was the senator’s job, as it was Hap Farley’s, to protect and promote that industry. The lessons of the 1964 Democratic convention were not forgotten.

It showcased Gormley’s consummate skill as a legislator. Sports betting was DOA in the Senate, but it passed only because of Gormley’s persuasiveness and forceful arm-twisting.

And when it came to Atlantic City, Bill Gormley wasn’t going to go along to get along, as Ginny Gormley said, even with his own party.

One final positive note: At least as gambling ads now saturate every pro sporting telecast and the leagues are getting their cut, fans and gamblers no longer have to listen to pious lectures about the evils of their preferred entertainment choice.



Gormley meets with the Notre Dame president
while attending his 50th college reunion.

In Their Own Words

Audio highlights from interviews for this book



Senator Gormley knew a sports betting bill wouldn't pass but had to get involved when another senator got one listed for a vote.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xwc0t8hsyH7shO0Mdm1OoHkD-JoxI8w6/view?usp=sharing>



Casino executives Trump and Goldberg believed the Assembly speaker would allow a vote on sports betting, Gormley says.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xjB28GPq3A-T6lCE6H_5D2mX1MZQXGVp/view?usp=sharing



Ex-Gov. Donald DiFrancesco reacts to GOP concerns about sports betting's impact on Christie Whitman's election.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/11eb9PSrJnpIZBgXTxaKFZer dX2QE0E4N/view?usp=sharing>



Former Sen. Ray Lesniak explains the politics surrounding a public vote to legalize sports betting in 1993.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zd5QUMeNKXHrx9s_UXqNABLDNsxAVFC/view?usp=sharing



Listen to the 1993 “debate” over sports betting between Donald Trump and Chuck Haytaian on WABC radio:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrIOk8oPwb8>



Gormley, sensing that the Senate Judiciary Committee he chaired had been misled, launched hearings into the practice of racial profiling.

7

THE RACIAL PROFILING HEARINGS

During the 1990s, critics charged that state troopers stopped motorists on the New Jersey Turnpike based on their skin color, race or ethnicity, a practice called racial profiling. One particular incident thrust that practice into the national spotlight. It set in motion a series of events that would prove racial profiling existed, end the judicial career of a sitting state Supreme Court justice and lead to reforms.

And Sen. Bill Gormley orchestrated those events by overseeing a tense, dramatic series of Senate committee hearings. In one of those hearings, a courageous state trooper named Thomas Gilbert would provide damning testimony that destroyed claims that state officials didn't know racial profiling was being practiced.

On April 23, 1998, two troopers pulled over a van for speeding on the Turnpike. Inside were four minority men in their 20s, three Blacks and one Hispanic, all hoping to develop into star basketball players. During the stop, the van suddenly went into reverse. The driver said it was accidental. The troopers feared the driver was trying to run them over. They fired their weapons into the van 11 times, wounding three of the men, two seriously.

New Jersey Democratic State Chair Leroy Jones, at the time a state assemblyman, said Black and Latino legislators tried to focus resulting outrage on the use of racial profiling. He said innocent minority motorists were being treated like criminals under the practice.

“That (incident) opened the door to an investigation of continued stops along the Turnpike, particularly one segment down in the southern portion of the state,” Jones said.

“Records showed there were an inordinate number of minorities, African Americans and Latinos, that have been stopped, that have been just unnecessarily harassed and oppressed and disrespected,” he said.

After the shooting, critics demanded that Republican Gov. Christie Whitman take action. They accused her attorney general, Peter Verniero, of ignoring the problem or denying it existed. The Black and Latino Caucus scheduled hearings on racial profiling.

“It was out of frustration that we called for those hearings because the Whitman administration at that time just kind of developed a deaf ear and just ignored the fact that this hideous practice was taking place within the State Police,” Jones said.

But the Black and Latino Caucus hearings lacked the authority to force Attorney General Verniero to testify about racial profiling. The administration ignored their calls for reform.

In 1999, Whitman nominated Verniero, a sharp lawyer and confidante of the governor, to sit on the N.J. State Supreme Court. Around that time, a grand jury indicted the two troopers who had fired on the van on charges related to the shooting; they had already been charged with falsifying records in the incident.

Some questioned whether the indictments were a public relations ploy to deflect criticism as Verniero's nomination went before the Senate Judiciary Committee, which Gormley chaired. Committee Democrats pounced on Verniero, who insisted he had no evidence that profiling existed. Gormley vouched for his Republican colleague and secured his Supreme Court appointment in a split partisan vote by the committee.

But within the year, a judge dismissed charges of attempted murder against the troopers, saying inappropriate political considerations tainted their indictments. A New York Times article suggested Verniero had misled Judiciary about not knowing racial profiling was being practiced.

Committee Republicans had egg on their faces – not a good look with Gormley as chairman.

“At that hearing, he had been asked profiling questions. And it came to light in a New York Times article,” said Gormley, who read about it during a West Coast trip. He knew some of the resulting anger would be directed to the committee and its chairman.

“I said uh oh, he knew. Or the article led me to believe he knew. And naturally the Democrats were saying, ‘And you let him go through’ and whatever, whatever. And I wanted to get to the bottom of it.”

Gormley said it wasn't just that he personally had vouched for Verniero. The U.S. Attorney and Justice Department were becoming interested in New Jersey's policing practices.

“This went to the integrity of the Senate. This is somebody that I voted for to be on the Supreme Court,” Gormley said. “Three years later, it appeared to me that he had not been truthful in his testimony at the time. And profiling had been swirling for years.

“And I said, let’s see what we can do about it.”



Gormley announced that his Judiciary Committee would investigate racial profiling and hold hearings as thorough as anything the Legislature had ever done. Gormley enlisted the legendary Albert Porroni, head of the Legislature’s professional staff, to provide technology and support. Gormley signaled the seriousness of the effort with a surprise staff pick.

He convinced Michael Chertoff, a former U.S. attorney who George W. Bush would select as the nation’s first Homeland Security chief after 9/11, to head the investigation and question witnesses as special counsel. And Gormley secured subpoena power from Senate President Donald DiFrancesco. These factors put the Judiciary hearings in a different league than the Black and Latino Caucus hearings.

“I talked to Al Peroni at Legislative Services, and I wanted to do something that demonstrated that we were going to really get into this issue of racial profiling. And it came together,” Gormley said. “I had the idea to contact Michael Chertoff. We had been friendly. Let’s just say it meant a lot to me that a U.S. attorney trusted a political figure in Atlantic County. I’ll just leave it at that.

“So I called him and he said, yes. I said, you said yes? Because he was at the time incredibly highly regarded,” he said. “We had Mike Chertoff and subpoena power. And we had a bipartisan committee, and it had never happened before. It just never happened before.”

Gormley emphasized that legislators understood it was only a few troopers who were engaging in the racist practice. But people were being wrongly stopped, with some charged with crimes, and Gormley felt the law had to be followed.

Former journalist Pete McAleer said Gormley meant business. Which meant he would be focused.

“I just thought he was going to get to the bottom of this issue and was going to do it in a way that didn’t spare any feelings, didn’t spare any reputations, and ‘We’re going to fix this thing,’” McAleer said.

For the investigation to have credibility, it had to be nonpartisan. Gormley needed to convince the Democrats led by then-Senate Minority Leader John Lynch, D-Middlesex, it would not be a partisan hack job or PR window dressing. Having Chertoff investigate, depose witnesses, review 100,000 pages of documents and interrogate witnesses helped convince the entire committee it was for real.

“I thought he handled them fairly,” Jones said of the hearings.

“I thought he was tough on his questions. I mean, that’s been him, you know, since I served in the Legislature and watched him on the other side of the aisle. He did not show any partisan leaning one way whatsoever. He was concerned about focusing in on the problem and the individuals that may have contributed to the problems,” Jones said about Gormley.

“He was a no-nonsense guy.”

“I needed a situation where we were far better armed than the Legislature usually is, or you would just have some hearings and nothing would go anywhere and whatever,” the results-oriented Gormley said. “And I think when people saw the nature of the hearings and the recordings that we were doing, people realized this isn’t like the Legislature’s typical hearings.”

He added Chertoff's participation added star power and firepower.

"I think people were shocked by Chertoff. I'm sure they were," Gormley said.

"Before there was artificial intelligence, there was Mike Chertoff. He was unbelievable," he said. "His memory – he had one yellow sheet in front of him, with one sentence on it. And then six hours later, he'd be done."

Chertoff's assistant, attorney Scott Weber, worked for months on the investigation with Lynch's Democratic staff lawyers before hearings even began.

"Senator Gormley was very clear in his charge, which was basically leave no stone unturned," Weber recalled. "This isn't political. This is an investigation. And the reason why he went to Mike Chertoff – I was Mike's associate – was because of Mike's impeccable reputation as the former U.S. attorney in New Jersey and really as being not political."

"This was as close to a pure investigation as one could get. And it was in large measure because Bill Gormley set the stage," Weber said. "He had John Lynch agree with him, and they made very clear to the rest of the committee that this was going to be a real deal, straight-down-the-middle investigation with no partisan politics."



The committee held nine public racial profiling hearings, extensively covered by the media, over March and April 2001. Some Republican Judiciary members, like former Sen. Robert Martin, started out unsure if the effort was necessary. After all, police were trying to stop the flow of drugs through New Jersey.

"I had mixed feelings. When the hearings started, I knew the general consensus was that there was rampant drug dealing and

the New Jersey Turnpike especially was a conduit from New York to the south,” Martin said.

“There was trafficking going on,” Martin said, and troopers were told to stop it.

Martin, a Seton Hall law professor, said he thought a few rogue cops were profiling drivers by race but that it was not a systemic problem.

But the Judiciary hearings provided testimony that could not be discounted.

Former Assemblyman Jones, who testified before Judiciary, said the stories Gormley’s committee heard echoed what the minority caucus legislators already knew.

“As a younger Black man at the time that racial profiling reared its head in New Jersey, one could only feel what history has been like for African Americans in this country,” Jones said. “That was disappointment, dejection, humiliation, and often a cry for the freedoms this country has claimed to offer all people.

“I mean, story after story, it was gut wrenching. It just left an empty feeling in you,” said Jones, who also said it was a minority of cops who abused their power.

Trooper Emblez Longoria, a 13-year veteran, testified that he was pushed to make highway stops based on a driver’s race.

“Throughout my tour, I was repeatedly pressured to go out and make profile stops,” Longoria told the committee. “In fact, on my very first midnight shift, my squad sergeant told me that he knew I wasn’t happy to be here and ‘maybe if you give them what they want, they’ll think you’re a good guy and leave you alone.’”

Longoria said the Fort Dix station commander sent him on patrol with another trooper who would school him on how to monitor the Turnpike.

“This junior trooper would show me the ropes and teach me how things work out here,” he said. “Within hours of being on patrol, this trooper parked perpendicular to the roadway and turned on his high beams to illuminate the interior of passing vehicles, thus exposing the race of the drivers.

“After a few minutes, he pulled out and said, ‘This looks like a good stop,’ as he proceeded to stop the vehicle” driven by a young Black man.

The trooper searched the car’s trunk without obtaining consent from the driver. Finding nothing illegal after stopping the car without probable cause, the trooper issued two summonses and let the young man depart, Longoria said.

“Later that evening, the same trooper made a derogatory statement about a Black man who was waiting at the tolls looking for change,” he said. “As the night unfolded, this trooper again made another profile stop by using the right (auxiliary) light to illuminate the interior of a sports car. Occupying the vehicle were two Black males. This trooper remarked, ‘This might be something’ as he made the stop.”

After searching both men and the vehicle, the trooper allowed the motorists to leave without any summonses, Longoria said.

His testimony pulled back the curtain on how racial profiling was practiced in the field. It didn’t prove the attorney general knew about it. That would fall to another trooper, Sgt. Thomas Gilbert. But Longoria’s stories showed a failure to adhere to protocol and that supervisors condoned it.

Other witnesses told the committee of incidents that had escalated into violence.

Two Black attorneys, Laila Maher and Felix Morka, told Judiciary about a harrowing Turnpike traffic stop they endured in 1996. Maher said she was a passenger one night while Morka drove her car and troopers made them stop.

“As Felix was trying to get his driver’s license out – he had his seat belt on – and he was reaching into the left-hand pocket, the other officer said something to the effect of, ‘I said show me your – give me your driver’s license.’

“And within less than a few seconds, he started to – he grabbed Felix by the collar of his sweatshirt and started to violently shake him, knock his head against the steering wheel,” Maher said. “At that point, Felix was dragged out of the car.

“I had gotten out of the car to see what was going on,” Maher continued, “and the officer that was on my side of the car – the next thing I knew, I was under my car, trying to see what was happening to Felix on the other side.

“And I looked up, and there was a gun to my head, about one inch from my head. He was standing like this,” she said as she demonstrated from the witness table. “I couldn’t understand what was going on. I kept asking, ‘What did we do? We didn’t do anything wrong. We didn’t do anything wrong.’”

She said that when Morka also asked later what they had done, one trooper told them: “People like you shouldn’t be on the road anyway.”

Maher said she was ordered to get back in the car or be arrested. But Maher told the trooper – “I screamed, actually” – that she wanted to witness what the other officer was doing to Morka.

“At that point, he took my right hand and twisted it behind my back and threw me against my car and put my head, slammed my head against the top of my car. So I was like facing traffic as it was coming by,” she said. “Then he forced me back into the car.”

Morka described his perspective of the incident to the committee.

“He reached in with both hands through the window and grabbed my sweatshirt around the neck area, around my collar, and began to pull and throw me back and forth between the seat and the steering wheel,” Morka said.

“As he was doing this, he was saying, “When an officer tells you to do something, you better do it.” He just went on and on, back and forth, and was just really talking to himself, like muttering things I couldn’t comprehend,” he said. “And in the process, my face was, like, lined with a lot of liquid from his mouth. And he just went on and on in a fit of rage, just kept banging back and forth.”

Morka said that he feared being injured or worse.

“I knew that I had to do something. I quickly reached between his grip and stuck a couple of fingers between my throat and his grip, just to let some air in, because I was beginning to choke,” he said. “And then, he let go for a moment, opened the door, and then came back in, grabbed me again around the neck, and continued the same motion: just going back and forth, knocking me back and forth, and saying all kinds of things, which I couldn’t understand.

“And then finally, I struggled and I reached down, unfastened my seat belt, and he pulled one more time, and I was out of the car. Once out of the car, I mean, this fellow is big, much bigger than I am. ... He didn’t let go and just continued to throw me and bounce me against the car,” he said.

“It went on like forever.”

Maher told the Judiciary Committee that the cops never even searched their car. Once they were let go, the lawyers drove to a State Police barracks, but no one was interested in pursuing the matter. They filed a complaint against the troopers, but it was ultimately ruled unsubstantiated.

Maher said the incident had a devastating impact on her feelings of security.

“It’s had a huge effect on my life in many ways. I live in New York City, and at this point, whenever a police officer is anywhere near me, I get very nervous. If they’re behind me in a car, I get extremely nervous. I also do not like to drive on the Turnpike.

I'm on the Turnpike as little as possible," she said. "I feel like the world is no longer safe."

Mahe said such episodes have a corrosive effect on the relationship between police and the public.

"Once an incident like this happens with the police, and they're supposed to be there to protect you, you no longer feel like that anymore," Mahe said. "So if I'm ever in a situation where I need protection, the last thing I would do at this point would be to call a police officer."

"Because I'm now afraid that they're going to do something to me," she added, "because of my skin color."



Despite such emotional testimony, Chertoff and Weber still had to prove statistically that racial profiling was being practiced. They made a key decision not to rely on statistics that showed the percentage of minority motorists stops well exceeded their share of the population.

Why not? Speeding is a legitimate reason to stop a car, and almost everyone speeds on the Turnpike. That gave cover to pull over anyone on the Turnpike. Chertoff and Weber needed proof that troopers were knowingly treating racial minorities differently.

"The stop data wasn't the most reliable data," Weber said, "because how could you say that a law enforcement officer stopped a car based upon the race of the occupants of the car when the car is going 65, 75 miles an hour down a highway and it's nighttime?"

"They said that virtually everybody sped on the Turnpike," committee member Martin said.

"From my own experience, I know if you don't drive at least five miles over the speed limit, it's dangerous."

“But what that did allow, as the experts pointed out, was that the state troopers then could stop virtually anybody under the pretext or the reason of speeding,” Martin said.

It didn’t matter that the drivers weren’t going faster than anybody else. It simply provided troopers with an excuse to pull a car over and look inside.

The special counsels concentrated on the number of times troopers requested consent from motorists to search their cars, an action they are required to report. Making that request was a judgment call made after the trooper knew what the stopped motorists looked like, Weber said.

And that data was revealing.

“The consent-to-search data showed that the percentage of minority motorists, Black and Hispanic in particular, (who were asked) for consent to search their car was double, sometimes triple, that of cars where the occupants were White,” Weber said.

The consent-to-search data showed consistently more than 80 percent of the searches involved Black or Hispanic motorists. That information was important because the decision of whether to ask to search a car was made after a driver’s race was known. The motorists’ race wasn’t open to chance the way it was with troopers pulling over speeders.

The question then became: Did Attorney General Verniero and State Police leadership know racial profiling stops were being made? In 1999, some in the Department of Law & Public Safety suggested the State Police had never shared data that clearly showed a problem. Suspicious types might wonder whether someone could end up as the fall guy in this controversy.

State Police Sgt. Thomas Gilbert worked in the 1990s in the division’s human resource bureau. And he was given an important task after a Superior Court judge ruled in 1996 that race-based traffic stops by troopers violated the equal protection and due

process clauses of the 14th Amendment. Gilbert began collecting and analyzing data about State Police stops along the N.J. Turnpike.

What he found was so damaging that, testimony showed, some officials preferred to ignore it. Gilbert was entering the prime of his career. At 42, he had a master's degree from St. Joseph's University and had served 19 years in the State Police.

But he potentially risked his career by saying out loud and in public that not only had he uncovered statistical proof of racial profiling, but he had supplied it to officials who would basically do nothing about it.

A transcript of a Judiciary Committee hearing on March 19, 2001 showed Chertoff led Gilbert through questioning that essentially provided a smoking gun.

Citing a report that showed the number of minority stops in South Jersey had not declined, Chertoff asked: "Is this a reference, as you understood it, to precisely the information that you were developing in the audits – you and the State Police – that you were regularly passing on?"

"Yes, sir. That's correct," Gilbert said.

"So ... it confirmed in your mind that the Office of the Attorney General was fully aware of your information on the audits that you were passing along in 1996?"

Gilbert replied that he would not have needed confirmation because "I would have known that to be the fact."

Chertoff produced a draft document from the Attorney General's Office that referred to information being provided by the State Police.

"You would agree with me that this passage in the draft ... confirms that the information that was being developed was being passed along?" Chertoff asked.

“Without a doubt,” Gilbert said.

Gilbert testified that during a May 1997 meeting with superiors in the Attorney General’s Office, statistics that suggested that racial profiling was occurring were discussed, but the potential problems that presented were promptly ignored. And he told Chertoff that none of his superior officers discussed addressing the problem showed by the data.

Chertoff went straight at the suggestion that the Attorney General’s Office was unaware of what Gilbert had found.

“At any point in time did you make a decision to conceal any material information from any of those men in terms of what you were doing gathering this information for the State Police?” Chertoff asked.

“No, sir,” Gilbert said. “I had an obligation not to do that.”

Chertoff returned to the topic to drill it home.

“I really want to give you this opportunity, I guess, to publicly defend yourself or put yourself on record with respect to this,” Chertoff said. “You have no doubt that, with respect to any material facts as it related to these numbers and these comparisons, that you consistently conveyed that stuff to the Attorney General’s Office?”

Gilbert had not a shadow of a doubt.

“No. I feel I had both personal and professional obligations to the people I was dealing with,” he said. “I think I did a good job of conveying the information.”

Chertoff’s assistant, Weber, said Gilbert’s heroic testimony was devastating.

“There was no question that racial profiling was occurring. The consent-to-search data bore that out,” he said.

Weber said it was “equally disturbing, if not more” so, that law enforcement superiors received the proof while the U.S. Department of Justice was investigating the State Police for civil rights violations. The State Police had done their job by reporting the data up the chain of command.

“And the Attorney General’s Office not only did nothing with it, but they tried to hide it,” Weber said.



Weber said that between Chertoff’s attention to detail and Gormley pushing the team, the months leading to and during the Judiciary hearings were intense.

At one point the three stayed at an apartment in Trenton to be close to the work. Gormley was an early riser, out jogging at 5 a.m. and champing at the bit. Weber recalled waking up on a couch only to find a fired-up Gormley standing over him.

“Oh, good, you’re awake,” Gormley reportedly said.

Weber said he asked if he could use the bathroom before they started working.

But over months of painstaking investigation – the deposing and public questioning of witnesses, review of tens of thousands of document pages, connecting the dots – the special counsel team had methodically built a case. Gilbert’s key testimony showed the data was provided to Verniero’s office starting in 1996.

And the evidence suggested Verniero either got it wrong or at worst misled the Judiciary Committee about when he knew racial profiling was practiced during his 1999 Supreme Court confirmation hearing. That knowledge heightened the stakes over Verniero’s explanation.



Michael Chertoff, U.S. Attorney for NJ in 1993 and later Homeland Security chief, served as general counsel for Gormley's racial profiling hearings.

Verniero voluntarily agreed to return before the committee, which could have subpoenaed him if he refused. Those who attended that hearing said the tension over his appearance was palpable.

Verniero's hearing was Pete McAleer's first assignment as a Trenton Statehouse reporter.

"There are certain hearings that there's like a, just an intensity in the air as soon as you walk in," McAleer said.

"And that was the case with the racial profiling hearings. You know, particularly when Attorney General Verniero testified, it was just a real intensity and it felt like there was a new revelation almost every day," he said.

Weber agreed.

“I just remember there was this air of anticipation and anxiety in the room all at the same time,” Weber said. “Here you have a sitting justice of the Supreme Court and former attorney general who’s about to testify on a very important and emotionally charged issue. And no one really knew what to expect.

“It was a crazy day in every sense of the word,” he said.

Weber extolled Chertoff’s intensity and skill as a trial lawyer.

“I tried cases with Mike. We did the hearings. I have never worked with a more accomplished and skilled trial lawyer than Michael Chertoff to the point where I knew what’s coming by his body language,” Weber said.

“I would say to some that it’s sort of the finger of God. When Mike is cross examining someone, about two or three questions before the killer question, he starts to lean forward. And then the question before the killer question is when the finger of God goes up. It seems like his pointer finger is 100 feet long in the air,” Weber said. “And then the killer question comes.”



Verniero testified on March 28, 2001, just over a week after Gilbert appeared. He answered questions for 11 hours from Chertoff, Weber and committee members. But anyone hoping for an explanation or admission of culpability was disappointed.

What the Supreme Court justice said, over and over, was that he basically couldn’t remember when he learned that racial profiling existed. He couldn’t recall who attended meetings or who had said what. And if he had contradicted himself in his previous Judiciary Committee hearings, he may have misunderstood the questions.

Chertoff asked Verniero about a Christmas Eve 1996 meeting in his office during which profiling was discussed.

"Now, did you have a meeting Christmas Eve with respect to the discovery, or the information requests, by the Civil Rights Division?" Chertoff asked, according to a hearing transcript.

"I may have, yes."

"Well, is there a doubt in your mind that you had it?"

"Well, I know I had it because I've reviewed my schedule," Verniero said. "But if you were to ask me, do I have an independent recollection, I would have to say no."

Verniero could not state definitively if two high-ranking subordinates attended the meeting.

"And was Sgt. Gilbert there?" Chertoff then asked.

"I don't recall," Verniero said.

At one point, Weber asked an assistant to search a live transcript for the number of times Verniero claimed he couldn't remember something.

"And I thought it was probably 50 or 75 times. (He) came back to me and he said, 'Scott, it's a grand total of 320 times. And I remember really being taken aback,'" Weber said.

Senators Gormley, Martin and others were incredulous.

"He just didn't recall. He didn't recall an issue that was always a hotbed of contention in the state of New Jersey," Gormley said. "This was the most sensitive issue in the state of New Jersey. And he didn't remember anything."

Martin said he thought anyone would remember meeting on such an important subject the day before Christmas.

“I remember saying to him in the hearing, ‘Mr. Verniero, how can you not recall on the afternoon of Christmas Eve when every other state employee was given the afternoon off and you had to attend a meeting and called guys in. What was given to you and what went on?’” Martin said.

Martin parroted Verniero’s frequent response to answer his own question: “I can’t recall.”

In retrospect, Martin said, it seemed to him that Verniero essentially planned to “take the Fifth, so to speak, and let it fly.”

Verniero declined a request to be interviewed for this project. “Respectfully, I have no comment,” he said. Verniero said he has declined all similar interview requests over the years.

The late Raymond Zane, a conservative Democratic senator from Salem County and a Judiciary Committee member, chastised Verniero during the March 28 hearing. He said voters watching the hearings live on TV found his testimony unconvincing.

“Justice Verniero, no witness so far, in the two days of these hearings, has testified like you have,” Zane said, recounting the number of times Verniero had also said he couldn’t remember when he was questioned during his Supreme Court confirmation.

“And I indicated to you also at that time that I was very disappointed with that,” Zane said. “Today, I’m also very, very disappointed.”



During that long hearing, Gormley asked few questions, ceding the spotlight to the special counsels and other senators. But in a compelling climax, Gormley spoke near the hearing’s end. His questions, focused and at times confrontational, put an exclamation point at the end of the extraordinary session.

Asked by staff if he had questions, Gormley set the tone with a rhetorical zinger about Verniero's indictment of the two troopers who had fired into the van as a way to distract attention from the state's record on racial profiling. A judge dismissed those attempted murder charges.

"This won't be lengthy," Gormley said. "Aside from (the two troopers), did you have occasion to have any other public relations indictments?"

"I do not accept the characterization, Senator, that they were public relations indictments," Verniero said.

"That's all they were," Gormley replied. "Next question."

Gormley focused on a discrepancy in which Verniero, during his Supreme Court confirmation, incorrectly answered a question from then-Sen. John Mattheussen, a Camden County Republican. Matheussen had asked when Verniero knew that data showed profiling existed. His response placed that revelation much later than when Sgt. Gilbert testified it occurred.

"I may have been mistaken," Verniero said, saying he may have been referring to data the state began collecting in 1998 when he answered Matheussen.

"Based on its face, it could be construed that it was misleading because ..." Gormley began.

Verniero tried to interrupt.

"Let me finish," Gormley said. "You took your own definition and your own restrictions to a question asked by Senator Matheussen. You later today said it was a mistake. Now, the question that I would have is, was it misleading or was it a mistake? What's the difference?"

"Well, there's a big difference," Verniero said. "Misleading suggests some intentional decision on my part to mislead the committee, which I assure you, I did not have."

Gormley noted that the day when Gilbert and higher ups met in Verniero's office on racial profiling was extremely important, and not only because it was almost Christmas. Gormley suggested that Verniero's lack of recall defied common sense and undermined his credibility.

"That was a pretty big day in your life," Gormley said. "And as you've talked about, you are Peter Verniero. Everybody was watching you. Everybody was watching you that day.

"So to unilaterally qualify in your mind a question of a state senator on such an important date, doesn't that seem to you to be an extreme use of license on your part?" Gormley asked.

Verniero repeated what he had said earlier, that he may have been thinking about different data than what the senator had asked of him.

"That's not what – excuse me. That's not what he asked," Gormley insisted.

Was Verniero mistaken, or did he purposely mislead the Judiciary Committee? Verniero pleaded ignorance in how he responded at his confirmation hearing.

"I was not the scrivener of the report," he said. "I did not sit down and actually write the report, and perhaps I should have been more intimately familiar with the report to fashion as accurate answers as I could have fashioned.

"But there was no intent to mislead this committee. Never."

Gormley chose his words carefully.

"As of right now, based upon – and I – this is just my individual reading of what we read from earlier and what your testimony was today. It is – I just find it hard to comprehend, and I'll tell you why.

"I wish I was the detail person you are. I mean, you're very focused, very bright – very bright," Gormley said, his tone a mix of regret and controlled frustration. "And you were paying, I thought, very close attention that day at that hearing. You were very well prepared.

"Now, it didn't happen with just one question. It happened with approximately three or four questions that day, that same compartmentalized answer, that answer that was based upon a conclusion that only you drew, not based upon Senator Matheussen's question or the other questions that were asked that day."

Gormley spelled out his bottom line.

"And on its face, it's misleading. It still is misleading," he said. "And I don't know how you get around that."

Verniero suggested that the committee give him time to think about the issues and supplement the day's testimony with an affidavit.

"That's why I brought it up now," Gormley said. "So we have other days of hearings scheduled. I wanted you to know, between mislead and mistake, at this moment in time, I fall to mislead.

"But obviously, I would want to afford you, before the end of these hearings, the opportunity to clarify, by additional testimony if you should choose, after you refresh your recollection, to provide whatever other facts that that would demonstrate why this wasn't the case."

"That's fair enough," Verniero agreed, but he didn't want to have to return in person. "I would ask the committee to consider, as opposed to a repeat performance, sworn written testimony."

"Well, I'll take it up with the committee," Gormley said. "But I can only tell you, my vote would be that you have to come back in."

And the 11-plus-hour interrogation ended then with a swift bang! of the chairman's gavel.



Verniero did not return to the Judiciary Committee in person. But the hearings Gormley chaired – nine total in March and April of 2001 – had impact.

Within days of the Verniero hearing, the full State Senate – including all 11 Judiciary Committee members and a total of 10 Republicans – signed a letter to Acting Gov. Donald DiFrancesco calling on Verniero to resign from the state Supreme Court. The Senate also asked the State Assembly to impeach Verniero, but the lower house took no action.

Verniero resisted calls to immediately resign. Even so, he did not finish serving his full seven-year term on the Supreme Court. He resigned five years into his term. If he were nominated by the governor for lifetime tenure on the court, he would have had to undergo another Judiciary Committee grilling over racial profiling.

Instead, he opted to go into private practice.

Verniero went on to have and continues in a high-level career in corporate law at the elite Sills Cummis & Gross Corporate Investigations and Integrity and Appellate Practice Groups. But his governmental downfall represented a loss of a rising star to New Jersey, to the courts and to the state's Republican Party. By all accounts, he was a thoughtful and impartial justice who, then in his 40s, stood to make significant future contributions to the state's judicial process.

As Gormley had noted, Verniero was intelligent, organized and disciplined, the kind of person the public should want to attract to public service.

But for critics, Gormley's hearings and their fallout represented some accountability for allowing the practice to fester and place New Jersey in a negative light. The hearings had other impacts as well.

At the least, heavy media coverage left no doubt that racial profiling existed in New Jersey. OLS Director Porroni's technical support allowed the proceedings to be viewed and archived, and they created a record so that the public understood what profiling meant and what its effects were.

The Legislature and governor enacted reforms that criminalized racial profiling in the state and led to use of dashboard cameras in trooper patrol cars. Gormley said he believed the biggest outcome was a change in state trooper training.

"And people said, well, what did it do? Here's what it did," Gormley said. "Obviously, we made recommendations. What happened is, the nature of the training changed. People who are nominated and are lucky enough to be admitted to the (State Police) training academy, this is drilled into them from Day One.

"That would be, I think, the major result because it's really preventative. It's not about, you can punish them, but you've got to beat it into trainees, that it is like really dumb to do this. And with the technology today in terms of cameras and everything, that only enhanced the message from the hearings," Gormley said.

As for Thomas Gilbert, his profile in courage did not derail his career. As of this writing, he is Lt. Col. Gilbert, chief of staff and second in command of the State Police.

Finally, the Judiciary Committee hearings reflected the integrity, fairness and thoughtfulness of both parties – but especially of New Jersey Republicans – on racial issues often used nationally as a cultural wedge. The state's Republican Party has often been more moderate and pragmatic than the national party, which

over the decades had campaigned for states' rights on segregation, opposition to civil rights and voting laws and ads about Willie Horton.

But here was a committee led by Republicans tackling a sensitive racial issue and demanding accountability, even if it embarrassed a Republican administration. Of course, the Democrats did the same, but racial minorities are a strong part of their electoral base. There was more political risk – and it probably required some political courage – for the GOP to do what members felt was the right thing.

Gormley, never one to showboat, demonstrated his seriousness about problem-solving and enacting good public policy.

Former Gov. Kean preached “The Politics of Inclusion,” the title of a book he wrote. He applauded the approach taken. In an interview, he was asked to react to it being hard to imagine someone in today's national Republican Party striking such a blow for justice.

“Well, that's a problem. That's a problem with the Republican Party,” Kean said. “I mean, it's the kind of thing we should be doing. And Bill was always there.”

In Their Own Words _____

Audio highlights from interviews for this book



Gormley describes special counsel Michael Chertoff.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GbXB9xFpn56lSIYoINiBVKh6oFutb04i/view?usp=sharing>



Ex-Senator Bob Martin reacts to former
Justice Verniero's memory lapses.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Zk06Db8V77fxAUhsaQVoz0sRg-PqPiyo/view?usp=sharing>



Michael Chertoff questions State Police Sgt. Thomas Gilbert during a Judiciary Comm. hearing about whether proof of racial profiling was being passed on to the N.J. attorney general.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sA5xkwdYI7IrgLp3Rz5ggEDex3_pFtC/view?usp=sharing



Justice Verniero tells Michael Chertoff during a Judiciary Comm. hearing he cannot remember details from a meeting on racial profiling.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OjvHnoJOFwqlmXHJw1nleFb78d7hSm1U/view?usp=sharing>



Lawyer and Judiciary hearing witness Laila Maher discusses the impact of a harrowing racial profiling stop.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1stDyqbUM2bbUBD4610P4jgnEglraiYme/view?usp=sharing>



Former journalist Peter McAleer describes Gormley as chairman of the Senate Judiciary racial profiling hearings.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pR8WIRbuM6d9PyUs3qrO3etATiO_d8v5/view?usp=sharing



In response to Justice Verniero's explanation, Gormley explains why he believes his responses misled the Judiciary Committee.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zapphFnqJ5QVhdZ11C30GzstJJEDvIHn/view?usp=sharing>



Gormley visits his childhood home, which was the sheriff's residence attached to the Atlantic County Jail.

8

SENATOR GORMLEY GETS A LIFE

In 2006, New Jersey state government shut down over a bruising budget battle between Democratic Gov. Jon Corzine and Democrats in the Legislature's majority – with Republican Sen. Bill Gormley trying to mediate the conflict.

The Democrats disagreed over Corzine's proposal to raise the sales tax. When government offices closed, the state withdrew its regulators from Atlantic City's casinos – which then also had to close. Gormley prowled the Statehouse hallways for days, pushing his way into meetings, proposing solutions and advising Corzine's staff. (Remember, power in New Jersey lies with the governor.)

"I think it's safe to say he was right in the middle of helping develop strategy," said former Statehouse reporter Pete McAleer.

“I think it was a lot of coordinated political gamesmanship. And Bill knows how to do that.”

McAleer recalled that all the players, including legislators and reporters, retired to a bar in the Trenton Marriott at the end of each day of fruitless negotiations. A Democratic assemblyman spoke to Gormley the night before the shutdown ended.

“And (the legislator) says, ‘You know, this is great because this is how this is going to get solved. Everybody’s sitting around talking over a couple of drinks and, you know, figuring, hammering out a solution. This is how it’s going to get solved,’” McAleer said.

“And Bill says, ‘I’ll tell you how it’s going to get solved. Gross rating points. Tomorrow Corzine is going up on TV and he’s going to crush you guys and this will be over.’

“You know, they say some people have no chill. That’s Bill!” McAleer said, laughing. “So (the assemblyman) said, ‘Yeah, you’re probably right.’”

The story resonates because it’s an example of how Gormley often affected policy and politics from behind the scenes, advising the governor in private. But it’s also important because Gormley’s work ending the shutdown was the last significant action he took as a legislator.

Gormley did not run for re-election and retired from the Senate when a new Legislature was sworn in the following January. He went out on top and on his own terms, said David Wildstein, a New Jersey political historian and editor of New Jersey Globe.

“He said, ‘It’s time to go. I’ve done a lot.’ He’d been in public office for 30 years,” Wildstein said. He said Gormley probably could have beaten Hap Farley’s long tenure in the State Senate if he had stayed in.

“But he was able to say, I’ve had enough. There are other things in my life that I want to accomplish. ... He devoted a lot of his attention to philanthropy and just left without worrying about what could have been had he stayed,” Wildstein said.

And in retirement, Gormley quietly faded away, no longer influencing policy or helping to improve lives in Atlantic ...

Yeah, right. If you believe that, we have some Jersey swampland to sell you.

Gormley did avoid overt political activities, and he continued working at DLA Piper, an international law firm, as he had since 2003. But he has never stopped working to put together deals, promote smart people with expertise, and influence developments to improve Atlantic County. In some ways, it has not been much different than the way in which he operated out of public view as a senator. But his focus has changed.

Gormley and his wife, Ginny, have pursued philanthropy. Their donations have made a difference in youth programs, education and health care for vulnerable populations. Instead of securing funding for hotel development, a convention center or a rail station, the Gormleys’ work has focused almost entirely on investing in human capital.



Wildstein was a teenager when he met Bill Gormley, then a new state assemblyman. Wildstein came away with an impression that isn’t always publicly associated with Gormley, but it was accurate then and never more so than in the years since he left the Senate.

“He’s always been philanthropic,” Wildstein said.

Wildstein, then in high school, served as a young aide to a legislator, and he was chair of the New Jersey Teenage Republicans in the 1970s.

“And I would walk around the floor of the Senate and the Assembly and ask legislators if they would give me \$5 to invest in the future of the party,” he said. “And I remember Bill Gormley opened up his wallet and he gave me a 20.”

Accounting for inflation, \$20 in 1978 is worth nearly \$100 today.

“This was just a guy who always felt if you’re going to make an impression, make a big impression, do it in a big way,” Wildstein said, adding: “He had that potential to be a hugely compassionate man.”

He said Gormley routinely went to bat for constituents or nonprofit groups who needed help. He said Gormley’s generosity of spirit may seem at odds with his reputation as a tough political brawler.

“Bill Gormley would fight to the death if he had to. But very few had as big a heart as he did.”

Former journalist McAleer agreed, saying many in the public didn’t see Gormley’s compassionate side when he was a hard-charging senator. But it has always been part of his persona.

“I think that people don’t recognize that so much, because the first thing you think of when you think of Bill, you think of this guy who could be brash, he could bark at you. He was a fighter,” McAleer said.

“But I think he also had this side that cared about the people in the district, the people of the state, just cared about people in general,” he said.

Renowned defense attorney Edwin Jacobs recalled that Gormley invited him to Thanksgiving dinner – even though they had just met – because Jacobs was alone and new to the region.

“You know, lawyers, good lawyers generally have a tough side. And he’s not just a lawyer. He’s also very active politically, as

you know,” Jacobs said. “So you’ve got to have a tough side, but that doesn’t mean you can’t be a warm and caring and generous person, as he is.

“He’s the kind of person who genuinely has a warm, compassionate, generous core. Usually that doesn’t translate well to being a lawyer or a politician,” Jacobs said.

Shortly after leaving the Senate, Bill and Ginny Gormley established the Gormley Family Foundation, which they fund entirely.

“There are no fundraisers,” Gormley said.

The foundation teams up with longtime Atlantic City attorney Lee Levine, a partner in Levine Staller, whose Levine Family Foundation often matches Gormley contributions.

Architect Tom Sykes, a longtime Gormley associate, said Bill and Ginny Gormley have been generous.

“Bill is a major philanthropist right now, and he’s always been like that to people in need,” Sykes said. “He’s always been generous with his time, with his funds, and with his influence.”

Here’s an example of building human infrastructure:

Ginny’s brother, the late Paul Aiken, loved music. He was lead violinist in the state orchestra for high school students. The main prize of the South Jersey Arts Awards is named after him. To honor his memory and encourage the arts among urban students, the Gormley Foundation began donating new musical instruments to schools in Atlantic City.

Medina Peyton, then principal of Sovereign Avenue School, saw the potential.

“I talked to the principal, who is great. And she got it, and we eventually got more and more involved,” Gormley said. “And she set up a music academy. And we donated musical instruments.”

In addition, the foundation has paid to send students to arts performances. In late February 2025, it funded a student trip to see the play “Aladdin” on Broadway. But donating pianos and other instruments can have a more lasting effect, as it did in one case. A donated violin some years ago was given to an Atlantic City student. She wrote to thank the Gormleys.

“She said she named the violin Amadeus,” Gormley said. “Five or six years later, she sent us another note.

“Amadeus was at Stanford,” he said, visibly moved. “Wow.”



Gormley remains active in retirement in trying to improve quality of life and create opportunities in Atlantic County.

Area officials have debated what to do with Atlantic City’s Bader Field property, site of the former Atlantic City Municipal Airport. In January 2021, the Gormley and Levine foundations offered \$40,000 to study the feasibility of converting the site off Albany Avenue into a park.

“It would create a park more beautiful than Liberty State Park,” Gormley said at the time. “It would be our Central Park.”

He pushed to create a mural honoring Jacob Lawrence, the first Black artist to gain prominence in America, who was born in Atlantic City in 1917. The mural, located at the Atlantic-Cape Community College campus in the resort, was completed in 2023.

Gormley raised money to build a facility for the Milton and Betty Katz Jewish Community Center in Margate and supported organizations including Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Big Brothers and Big Sisters and the Sisters of Christian Charity.

In October 2021, the St. Augustine Preparatory School awarded Gormley its Gregor Mendel Medal, the highest honor bestowed by Gormley's alma mater, for his many contributions to Atlantic County.

And Gormley has supported Stockton University. Tom Sykes remembers getting a call from Gormley while he was visiting Italy with his wife, Peg.

"I pick it up, Bill, how you doing? He says, 'Tom, I got it. We're going to bring Stockton into Atlantic City.' I said oh, I like that idea, let's talk some more," Sykes said.

"So we were on the phone for about an hour and we're talking about what it would take to bring Stockton into Atlantic City and where it would best go and how we experiment with other places it could be located," he said. "We talked about the right site and ...we looked at a variety of sites, and we were all over. And then it narrowed down to where it's built now, right at Albany Avenue.

"And that was Bill."

To be fair, a number of people over time have claimed credit for suggesting Stockton's Atlantic City location. And Sykes said a huge number of people and Stockton leaders were involved in the Herculean effort to build an Atlantic City campus.

"But Bill's call, I'll never forget. 'Let's talk about where it should go, let's talk about how it would happen.' And boom, eight years after that call, that university opened in Atlantic City," Sykes said.



Gormley's work in the community has spanned many areas and issues, but among the most meaningful have been efforts to create opportunities for disadvantaged youths.

Stephanie Lutz-Koch is a senior manager at Deloitte Consulting and a Stockton University trustee. But it was in her previous role as CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City that she witnessed Gormley's commitment to helping the city's youth.

When they met in early 2020 at a community event, she proposed creating labs to boost children's exposure to science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM) to help them compete in today's high-tech marketplace.

"I said my plan is to develop STEAM labs at all of the buildings. And he said, 'What's a STEAM lab?'" Lutz said. "My idea really was about the Benjamin Franklin Institute and how my children when they were young had hands-on exploration thanks to our visits to that museum and how wonderful it would be to provide the same thing to Atlantic City youth.

"And he loved the idea," Lutz said. "And he said, 'I know someone who I think would also be interested in this STEAM lab idea.'"

That person was Lisa Jackson. Before she joined Apple as an executive, Jackson came to national prominence as head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the Obama administration. But before then, she served as commissioner of the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection under Corzine. When her nomination came before the Senate Judiciary Committee, some Republican senators planned to grill her, Gormley said.

"I looked at her resume and I said no, no no," he said. "And I just went up to her and said, 'It's a miracle we have someone with your qualifications doing this job.' She's just brilliant. And we developed a relationship."

Gormley also saw Lutz as bright and uber-competent. He knew if he connected her with Jackson at Apple, something positive would develop.

“I said, well, any leader at Apple is a friend of mine,” Lutz said.

First, they needed a plan to present. Lutz and her staff wrote a detailed program to create STEAM labs. Gormley introduced Lutz to Phil Guenther, superintendent of Atlantic County Institute of Technology (ACIT), which shared its robotics curriculum. Gormley put together funding through his and Levine’s foundations and other sources. He felt that established some credibility in approaching Jackson.

“It wasn’t that I was a politician asking (Apple) for money. I was giving. That kind of disarms a lot of people,” Gormley said. “So Lee and I provided the funds and Stephanie and (staff) wrote up the program, which was unbelievable.

“And then I had a comfort level forwarding that to Lisa Jackson.”

Meeting on Zoom, Lutz and staff presented a proposal for Apple to support the Atlantic City project, and “they knocked it out of the park,” Gormley said. Apple’s scrutiny of the plan was rigorous and took days. But Apple signed on and provided equipment and expertise. And while the club buildings were temporarily closed by the pandemic, construction began on new STEAM labs.

“We kind of latched onto (ACIT’s) robotics curriculum and then paired that with Apple,” Lutz said. “So young people were able to build robots using iPads, learn how to code, develop movies starring the robots, and this is all happening during COVID.

“Thank you, Bill Gormley, and his entire ecosystem of supporters.”

Creating opportunities for Atlantic City youth is a recurring theme in Gormley’s current life, whether it involves Boys and Girls Club technology or introducing urban youth to rowing.

“I think he recognizes that the workforce opportunities in Atlantic City are very narrow. They’re very focused on hospitality, which we know can be a volatile industry to jump into,” Lutz

said. “And so he sees opportunities not exactly for young people to leave, but to invest in with the hope that they will return and strengthen our community in that way.

“And the rowing club, the rowing program that he started is the same thing. How do we create pathways for young people to have sustainable futures?” she asked. “And rowing and scholarships associated with it are one way.”



Spend five minutes with Gormley and he will probably bring up rowing. He has supported the rowing community for decades. His son, Sean, attended Temple University on a crew scholarship. He said rowing has been big in Atlantic County since forerunners John “Doc” Holland started the Viking Rowing Club in Ventnor in 1957 and coach Stan Bergman guided Holy Spirit High School to national championships in the 1970s.

Gormley knows experience with crew helps students get into college, and he and others created a program teaching rowing and swimming to Boys and Girls Club youths.

“People don’t realize the economic impact of rowing in Atlantic County. The amount of college scholarships that have come in for (both) boys and girls because we have rowing is huge,” Gormley said, adding that crew is typically seen as a sport for affluent elites.

“We’re a blue-collar county, okay? Usually you go to these meets and it’s many times elite private schools that are rowing,” he said. “Not so in Atlantic County.”

Gormley, a longtime rower, has worked to create the same opportunities rowing provides for rich kids to students in Atlantic City. That included teaching crew to youths at the Boys and Girls Club.

Alan Staller is a respected attorney at Staller Levine in Atlantic City, but one morning in August 2023 at Holland's Boathouse in Ventnor, he was simply a rowing coach. He said exposing urban students to rowing helps build basic life skills.

"There's no secret to rowing. If you work hard, you get better. It doesn't require incredible physical abilities. You just have to be strong and want to do it," Staller said. "The harder you work, the better you get. It's a ratio."

Isn't that true of a lot of things in life?

"Yes! It extends beyond rowing," Staller said.

"You learn that if you work hard, then you're going to do better. And that relates to school too. If you can work on the erg (rowing machine) and work hard rowing and do better, you can work hard at school and do better. And when you get out of school, you're not intimidated by difficult things.

"That's all, very simple," he said.

Staller agreed that one goal of the rowing program is to give Atlantic City's young people educational opportunities.

"If you really do this well, you can get into a better school. You can get money. You can do all this," Staller said "My mentality is to get them to like it (rowing). If they like it, then they have the other opportunities."

The way to get them to like it was to put the students in boats and set them out on the water. Elijah Langford, recreation director for the Boys and Girls Club, said despite living near the ocean, many urban youths are unfamiliar with water sports. The boathouse rowing program helped broaden their experience, and just might help them in their careers.

"So they're coming here, they're actually going on the water, learning all the techniques of rowing a boat," Langford said. "It's



Gormley with his grandson, Sean Jr., at Convention Center basketball tournament.



Gormley competes on the rowing machine at a rowing conference he organized and was proud of completing 500 meters in 1:51.

big for us because being an African American community. This is a sport that we're not very familiar with.

"We're pretty much ignorant about it or have been, at least historically speaking. So it is our hope through this collaboration just to give our kids another outlet, another opportunity at a sport.

"The hope is for some of these young men and women to go on and be able to receive athletic scholarships. We need to do our homework. But I believe that for every one or two basketball scholarships that are given away, two are giving away for rowing," Langford said. "So for us, we just want to capitalize off of that."

"The rowers I know that went to school aren't intimidated by anything," Staller said.

Staller and Langford credit Gormley's passion for the program with creating opportunities for Atlantic City's young people.

"He's been a tremendous driving force to this program," Langford said. "You know, his love for rowing and him understanding the bigger picture has made this partnership seamless."

"He's absolutely tireless. He's using the energy he used to use in politics without getting all the press. He's really devoted to this," Staller said. "And that helps because I don't have his energy. Very few people do."

Gormley took rowing to a new level when he helped bring a major event to the Atlantic City Convention Center in January 2024. He called other rowing enthusiasts, including Sykes, to find and attract the right event and worked with convention center staff.

"I said I'd like to do a crew event in Atlantic County. And it snowballed," Gormley said. "And we got the indoor national championships to Atlantic City, along with their national convention. The convention is important because it brings 300 coaches to Atlantic City."

Those coaches would meet local coaches and their potential recruits and learn of a concentration of rowing expertise in the county, he said. Eight hundred rowers competed on erg machines, including Gormley, who at 78 was proud of his time.

Even though at one point he slipped off his seat (ouch!), he completed 500 meters in 1:51.



The Annie E. Casey Foundation, an advocacy group, puts out an annual report rating the economic, health and educational well-being of women and children in each New Jersey county. The ratings are based on data documenting factors including low birth rates, infant mortality prenatal care and many others.

“Atlantic County was always rated 21 or 20,” Gormley said.

That’s out of 21 counties, meaning Atlantic was often the worst.

Rosalind Norrell-Nance, a former Atlantic City councilwoman who ran programs for the AtlantiCare health system, said Gormley pushed for concrete solutions, such as creating maternal health centers.

“Those reports were why he was really pushing for getting these family centers. And instead of two family centers, we ended up having four,” Norrell-Nance said. “And they started with kindergarteners and children who weren’t even in school yet and went up to high school students.

“We were really low on the list in regard to children in Atlantic City being vaccinated. And he helped us get money to start (a program) to work on that with We Care. And we were able to have a mobile vaccination unit that went into the neighborhoods and vaccinated the children,” she said.



The Gormleys, including Bull's sons, Sean, left, and Ryan, celebrate the Atlantic City Convention Center dedication in May 1997.



Ginny Gormley is credited with influencing the senator's work on women's and children's health issues.

She credited Gormley with helping poor and vulnerable people on a problem that probably provided little to no political payoff for him.

“It provided health care and addressed issues that were really traumatic in Atlantic City. The maternal death rate was high. The children’s health issues were just beyond belief,” Norrell-Nance said.

“And I say all the time, there was never anything that I asked Bill Gormley to help us with that he said no. And he never, ever asked me for anything in return,” she said.

Norrell-Nance also credited a specific source for helping to guide him on these issues.

“I think one of the best things that ever happened to Senator Gormley was when he married Ginny,” she said. “He kind of took on that rough exterior, you know. And I always say that Ginny brought all the kindness out in him. And many of the programs that we did were things she supported.”

Gormley, a smart man, would no doubt agree that marrying Ginny was his greatest accomplishment. But he also credited a particular health official with teaching him about major health needs in Atlantic County.

The late Betsy Gilbertson was a nurse who headed the health care program for the UNITE-HERE Local 54 union. Her advocacy led to Local 54 partnering with AtlantiCare to address the problem of diabetes through better nutrition.

“Betsy’s the one who, shall we say, beat into me that the problem is diabetes. The problem is diabetes. And that has been the major health care burden for the union’s insurance programs over the years,” Gormley said.

At the urging of Sen. Vincent Polistina, R-Atlantic, Gov. Phil Murphy had provided food trucks through AtlantiCare to deliver and sell more nutritious food to residents. The Levine and Gormley foundations gave \$50,000 in 2024 to discount food that's sold by the trucks for people with diabetes.

"Some years, we purchased summer lunches because kids didn't get their meals when they weren't in school," he added. "We've purchased freezers to store meals."

And how do the foundations honor the memory of nurse Gilbertson?

They provide two \$5,000 scholarships to AtlantiCare employees and Local 54 members who want to become nurses. Gormley noted many of these workers could not afford college on their own.

"If they didn't get this \$5,000, they probably couldn't finish their degrees," he said.

The AtlantiCare Healthplex on Atlantic Avenue in Atlantic City was named after Gormley in July 2008.



In February 2025, Gormley sat for the last of multiple interviews he gave for this biography. It took place at the Atlantic County Clerk's Office in Mays Landing, which meant Gormley could see his childhood home. The old county jail and the sheriff's residence – where Sheriff Gerard Gormley lived with his family – is located immediately behind the county building on Main Street.

The jail and residence fell into disrepair over the years. But under contracts totaling about \$3 million approved since 2019 by the Atlantic County Board of Commissioners, the county is repairing and restoring the buildings as a historic site.

Doors were locked when Gormley visited. The white paint had peeled and turned black on the columns and door frame in front of the sheriff's residence. A forbidding "DO NOT ENTER" sign adorned the front door. "I've come back a few times," Gormley said. But it was still a nostalgic moment as he stood out front on a warm afternoon.

"You don't want to be mushy about it, but it was my home," he said. "And very seldom when people get to my age, you go back to your house and it's still standing."

The visit brought back memories.

He named individuals and families from Mays Landing he remembered from childhood. He spoke warmly about the county employees and even inmates at "Gormley's Hotel."

"They weren't hardened. These were county, okay? I played basketball with the prisoners."

Gormley said his childhood birthday parties were the best.

"I mean, when you invited kids to a party at the jail, boy, they showed up."

He took pains to say the county was restoring the property because of its historic value, not because of the Gormley family.

"It's not exactly Monticello," he quipped.

He remembered one time when he was 9 driving onto the property with his father when someone shouted a racial epithet at a Black man. Gormley's father, whom he described as an outgoing, tolerant man, sat him down.

"My father explained to me on pain of death that he had better not ever hear that word come out of my mouth," Gormley said.

"Being raised adjacent to a jail building, I was exposed to people of different races and creeds and colors. It was just unique," he

said. "And I like to think that it had an effect on public policy decisions I made."

No doubt.

Looking back at those decisions, the accomplishments, the positions taken on principle that sometimes rankled his party, it's possible to trace the highlights of Gormley's career back to those formative years in a family that was integral to the Hap Farley machine.

He battled in the Statehouse to advance Atlantic City's economy, as his father had promoted conventions and sponsored events to bring in tourists.

He was responsible for construction of a new convention center and renovation of Boardwalk Hall, knowing the devastating impact of the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

He pursued accountability on racial profiling, remembering his father's embrace of Atlantic County's diversity.

He fought hard like his childhood hero, Jersey Joe Walcott.

He promoted and worked with the best and brightest professionals, knowing the media or perhaps a modern Kefauver Commission would expose incompetence and corruption.

He took on the NRA, knowing through his service in the Marine Corps the lethality of semiautomatic weapons.

He was unafraid to mix it up with big shots, having learned to be comfortable with powerful politicians and entertainment stars backstage at Club Harlen and the 500 Club in Atlantic City.

And he gained power and used it to benefit Atlantic City, as he had learned watching Hap Farley and his father, the sheriff.

During one interview, it was mentioned that Gerard Gormley was truly a son of Atlantic City, and he was asked if he also was

a son of Atlantic City. Reporters who have covered Bill Gormley know he is a master of diversion when he doesn't want to answer a question, especially personal ones.

"I've been lucky because if it wasn't for Atlantic City, I would not have had the opportunities I've had to be around government, to be around great public officials, and I owe that to Atlantic City and Atlantic County," he said.

Okay, right. But like your father, are you also a son of the city?

"Yes," he said. "I guess I am."

In Their Own Words _____

Audio highlights from interviews for this book



Historian and editor David Wildstein discusses Gormley's generosity.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/18tVwT4acMd_b8wWHQsXCDba2e4k6UR7a/view?usp=sharing



Eli Langford of the A.C. Boys & Girls Club says African American youths are largely unfamiliar with water sports.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WS6zHSr-aRt3lmAxxRCYToQH-AG_YYhv/view?usp=sharing



Former A.C. Councilwoman Rosalind Norrell-Nance praises Ginny Gormley's impact on the senator.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/10foPIMElstvBwNHqFrIK8u5X_i0GewYh/view?usp=sharing



Architect Thomas Sykes recounts a call from Gormley about getting Stockton University into Atlantic City.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1g45_-8jNDj235nwlmJv5bJ1x-iCPfM-G/view?usp=sharing

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John Froonjian worked for 32 years as a journalist for The Press of Atlantic City, including as a New Jersey Statehouse political reporter and bureau chief, investigative reporter, long-term projects reporter, database journalist and city editor. He covered politics at every level of government. Froonjian, who won at least one journalism or writing award every year from 2000 to 2009, served as the newsroom's writing coach. He has also published several fiction short stories.

In October 2011, Froonjian joined the staff of Stockton University, where he established and managed the Stockton Polling Institute. Furthering his experience in public policy, he organized candidate debates, panel discussions on topical issues and created student research internships. He served as executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy 2019-2024.

Froonjian received a doctorate from the Organizational Leadership program at Stockton University and a Master of Public Administration degree from Rutgers University-Camden. He received his B.A. degree in journalism from Glassboro State College, now Rowan University.

STOCKTON UNIVERSITY

Stockton University was founded in 1969 as Richard Stockton State College, a public four-year college within the New Jersey system of higher education. A residential institution with students drawn from across the state, Stockton is located at the edge of the New Jersey Pinelands, 12 miles northwest of Atlantic City and 50 miles southeast of Philadelphia. The largest campus in New Jersey, Stockton's award-winning buildings are set within 1,600+ acres of forest, streams, and lakes.

The University first offered instruction in 1971 and currently offers distinctive baccalaureate programs in liberal arts, professional studies, and general education as well as master's and doctoral degree programs designed to stimulate and challenge students intellectually. Stockton is strongly committed to preparing graduates for careers and advanced education, a commitment that encompasses helping students acquire interest in lifelong learning and in contributing to society.

Stockton's faculty members have gained a national reputation for their teaching, accessibility, and scholarship. In addition, faculty members actively mentor students, involving them in original research, hands-on learning, and community engagement. Through academic and co-curricular programming, faculty members guide undergraduate and graduate students to develop their independent and critical thinking skills both inside and outside the classroom.

STOCKTON UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION

The Stockton University Foundation, a non-profit organization founded to support innovative University programs, provides the means for individuals, organizations, and corporations to make gifts, grants, and bequests to the University. This private support enables the University to finance programs not typically funded through State appropriations.

Gifts donated to the Foundation support student scholarships, faculty and student research fellowships, improvements to equipment and facilities, and enrichment of student services and cultural programs. These offerings enhance the University's excellent record recruiting dedicated faculty, retaining students, and engaging friends.

The Chair of the Foundation's Board of Directors is Dr. Brigid Callahan Harrison '88. For further information on the Stockton University Foundation, contact Daniel Nugent, Vice President for University Advancement and Executive Director of the University Foundation, at Daniel.Nugent@stockton.edu.