

Part Of The IBS Network

E-Mail Sign Up

E-Mail WNBC

Search

4 wNBC.com

HOME PAGE

News

Search

Web

WeatherBug	Automotive	Travel	Personals	HotJobs	House & Home	Golf Central	Golf Tee Times	Politics	
News	Weather	Traffic	Sports	Consumer	Health	Tech	Entertainment	Today In NY	WNBC
FeedRoom	Produce Pete	Family	Education	Weddings	Shopping	Legal Center	Real Estate	Food	Yellow Pages

sponsor

[home](#) | [News](#)

 [Email This Story](#) |  [Print This Story](#)

Interview: Senator Jon Corzine Discusses The Medicare And Energy Bills, The Situation In Iraq And Other Political Issues (Nov. 30)

JAY DeDAPPER, host:

In a last-minute, off-to-vacation flurry, Congress got busy, passing a major overhaul of Medicare that, depending on who you ask, will either save it or destroy it. Most Republicans voted for it, most Democrats against it. But who will seniors side with on Election Day and how will voters weigh what's happening in Iraq? American soldiers are dying every day there, and the president's approval ratings for his handling of foreign policy continue to slide. Can Democrats take advantage? Can they beat Bush, win back the Senate and the House? That's one job of New Jersey's senior senator, Jon Corzine, who heads up the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, and he's got his work cut out for him trying to put the minority party back in charge.

Announcer: From Studio 6B in Rockefeller Center, this is a presentation from "News Channel 4," Gabe Pressman's NEWS FORUM. Now your host, senior correspondent Gabe Pressman.

New York:

27°F , Clear

wnbc.com Spotlights

[Weatherbug](#)

[Instant local weather](#)

[Jane's New York](#)

[Let's Hear From You!](#)

[Golf Central](#)

[Golf News and Tips](#)

more categories:

[Win a Trip to Hollywood!](#)

[American Museum Of Natural History](#)

[Central Park Conservancy](#)

[Wednesday's Child](#)

[Advertise With Us](#)

[Watch CNBC Feedroom](#)

sponsor

sponsor

sponsor

DeDAPPER: And good morning, everybody. I'm political reporter Jay DeDapper in for Gabe Pressman. He is on a well-deserved vacation this week. And our guest is the senior senator from New Jersey, Jon Corzine.

You've been in office for four years and you're--three years...

Sen. JON CORZINE (Democrat, New Jersey): Three years.

DeDAPPER: ...and you're the senior senator. Pretty good trick.

Sen. CORZINE: I am now graying all the time about it.

DeDAPPER: We were just talking a second ago. You said when you ran originally that you weren't going to shave your beard. The consultants said shave it 'cause guys with beards don't win. You didn't shave your beard.

Sen. CORZINE: I've had the beard for about 25 years, Jay. I think I would have been sending out a signal that I was not going to be true to myself if I did that, so here it is.

DeDAPPER: All right. This was a very busy week in Washington.

Sen. CORZINE: Sure.

DeDAPPER: Medicare, big victory for--for President Bush. That's the way he's spinning it.

Sen. CORZINE: Sure it was. Sure it was.

DeDAPPER: Was it a big victory?

Sen. CORZINE: I think any time you pass major legislation, the president's going to take credit for a victory if they are proposing it. I think it's bad policy. I think it's very fundamentally flawed, and I think, as Americans, not just seniors, but Americans understand what happened there, they're not going to like it. You're going to have to pay \$4,000 to get a \$5,000 benefit. I think people are going to say, 'Hold it. I'm paying \$4,000 to actually just get \$1,000 of help in this process?' They're going to wonder why they're doing this. They're going to see themselves forced into HMOs or PPOs or PDPs or all kinds of concoctions of confusing private sector providers of Medicare benefits as opposed to traditional Medicare. I don't think they're going to like it.

DeDAPPER: This--this--this was the--the AARP, the biggest organization of seniors, a lobbying group, also an insurance company, backed this. A lot of credit is given to them for doing that and that's why this passed. The argument there was it's better than nothing. It's a good first step. And after all, this was an issue Al Gore raised in 2000, it hadn't come to pass.

Sen. CORZINE: Look, I think there are people of goodwill that are saying it's better than nothing. If I were from a rural state where they're putting \$25 billion into the hospitals of those rural states, as opposed to next to nothing in New Jersey or New York, maybe I would have gotten there to support it just because it was a step along the path. But, frankly, it is--got a--it has \$125 billion of the \$400 billion going off to corporate America, to insurance companies, to corporations to kind of beg them to continue to maintain their health insurance policies, whole underwriting of private hospitals. There's just a lot of non-focused debt that we're going to put on the balance sheet of the federal government...

DeDAPPER: None of this is paid for.

Sen. CORZINE: None of it's paid for. You know, it's--it's interesting. You saw a number of very conservative Republicans vote against this, including John McCain. And you saw a bunch of folks who said we need a real benefit, not \$4,000 to get \$5,000 worth of benefit, voting against because we didn't think it was good policy. And so I think time will tell. And you know, the most important thing, and it's the simplest part of this whole bill: It doesn't start until 2006. So I think there is a big political story here that people didn't want folks to see this program until well after the election, claim victory, but I think people are smarter than that.

DeDAPPER: But doesn't that make it hard for Democrats to take advantage of this? If it doesn't take--take effect until 2006, then seniors, if they're going to get angry, as some people suggest--as Democrats say they will once they see what's in the bill, they're not going to get angry until 2006, and by that time George Bush is in the White House for a second term.

Sen. CORZINE: A lot of--a lot of folks will understand that it's been delayed because they didn't want to have a--do the--the politicians didn't want the public to have a good look at it. And, two, I think people actually are smarter than sometimes we give them credit in Washington. They can figure out that this isn't going to be a heck of a benefit. You know, the people who are going to benefit, a lot of them in my state, the

pharmaceutical industry--there are no price controls, there are no cost containment elements in this program. We've got a ballooning deficit in front of us. This is not paid for. And I don't think it's much of a benefit for individual seniors, and that, I think, is going to be a problem when...

DeDAPPER: When...

Sen. CORZINE: ...the people understand it.

DeDAPPER: When the votes came down, more Democrats broke rank than Republicans. Three Republicans voted against it. Lots of...

Sen. CORZINE: No, you're talking about the--the filibuster. There are three...

DeDAPPER: The filibuster.

Sen. CORZINE: The filibuster. The filibuster actually wasn't where the vote, the real vote on this. There actually was a budget point of order that was ...(unintelligible).

DeDAPPER: In the actual vote, more Democrats broke ranks than Republicans.

Sen. CORZINE: Right.

DeDAPPER: What does that say about those Democrats? They're going to be running for re-election? I mean, on one hand, the national party or most of the--all of the presidential candidates will--will be saying this is a terrible bill and these guys, some of whom are running for re-election--and you're the head of the DSCC, which means it's your job to get them re-elected...

Sen. CORZINE: Jay.

DeDAPPER: ...are saying, 'I voted for it.'

Sen. CORZINE: You know, this was one of those kinds of packages that traditional Washington politics came into play, gave a whole bunch of benefit to rural hospitals. You look at the senators that voted for it in the Democratic Party--they come from rural states or places where there is enormous benefit. If you're in the Northeast and you have teaching hospitals or you have high concentrations of low-income folks, unreimbursed

hospital expenses, this does not help you anywhere near the way it would if you were in North Dakota or you were in Louisiana; four times the money and support to hospitals in Louisiana than into New Jersey. I just don't think it's right. Obviously, some people got encouraged to vote for this. Some people might use stronger words like 'bribed into voting for this,' because a lot of money flew--flowed into individual states. It did not fairly flow into New Jersey, New York, the East Coast in my view.

DeDAPPER: I want to ask one last question on this and we'll move on to another subject. On--on this, is there a way to fix this bill later, because that's what--you know, again the AARP and some other people said, 'Hey, this is a start. We're going to go back in and we're going to fix this.'

Sen. CORZINE: Well, you have to identify where the mistakes are first, and that's going to have to be talked about if you're going to get on to a program of fixing it. I think it is the responsibility of those of us who have strong views about how it could be made better to speak about it. You know, we need to take the \$14 billion of subsidies to the insurance companies and put it in to closing what's called that doughnut hole and make sure that it's--maybe it's \$2,500 for a \$5,000 benefit. It is--it--it seems to me that there's a--lots of things that we can talk about that I--are positive. I voted for the Senate prescription drug bill, which was a bipartisan bill as well. It was a lot better than what finally ended up. I think we need to talk about that. I think a lot of folks will get behind making real changes. That'll be a part of the debate in 2004.

DeDAPPER: The other big bill this week that didn't get passed and was not a victory for the president: the energy bill.

Sen. CORZINE: Right.

DeDAPPER: What happened there and--there are Democrats and Republicans who kept that from happening.

Sen. CORZINE: Well, once again, this was less about the title of the bill, energy, and more about providing support to the petroleum industry, the oil and gas industry. There were about \$32 billion worth of tax breaks embedded into this, straight into the pockets of corporate America. Just hard to believe. And then there were things like--and which is really important for New Jersey and New York--there was a provision that was going to exempt the producers of what's called MTBE, which is a chemical that's been used in gasoline, but once it gets into

the groundwater is a carcinogen. It--it turns water into an ugly smelling liquid, and the fact is is no one was being held accountable. They're given a waiver to it. And actually they're giving \$2,000--\$2 billion to the producers to sort of clean it up with no liability. And it just offended everyone--I mean, Republicans and Democrats alike. This was a classic case of special interest trumping public interest, and people just said this is too much.

DeDAPPER: The president put a major push on this. The Senate may take it up again on December 9th. Does this have a chance of becoming like a second Medicare bill, one that--one that a couple of tinkering around the edges, a couple of...

Sen. CORZINE: December 9th will not be the day when they've passed because this--we're not actually coming back into session. It's--there--there will be a formal reopening of Congress but there won't be formal debating of issues. This is something that we will fight out in 2004 in front of the election. I suspect this MTBE piece will have to be pulled from the bill, or there won't be any chance of this bill ever being able to be pushed through Congress.

DeDAPPER: And--and MTBE is--is an additive to gasoline...

Sen. CORZINE: Gasoline.

DeDAPPER: ...that helps reduce pollution in the winter months?

Sen. CORZINE: Supposedly. It--it actually is supposed to make the gasoline perform better, provide--push less pollutants into the air.

DeDAPPER: Right.

Sen. CORZINE: But, meanwhile, if it gets into the groundwater, it's actually a carcinogen.

DeDAPPER: OK. Iraq. Had this not been a week with Medicare and the energy bill, this probably would have been the only thing we would have talked about. The situation continues to be dire there. From your standpoint?

Sen. CORZINE: You know, Jay, I think, as much as one wants to talk about the economy and, you know, there's some good things going on there, although jobs aren't growing as fast as I think anybody thinks they should; as much as you want to talk

about Medicare and energy policy, all fundamental, we're losing men and women every day. And we see a very, very challenging environment in the war on terrorism, not only in Iraq but around the globe. We lost folks in Afghanistan this week. There's real need for movement towards dialogue in the Middle East, Israeli-Palestinian discussions, and I think it is absolutely essential that we stay focused on this. I'm one that didn't support entry into Iraq, voted against the use of force, but absolutely believe that now that we're there, we have to stay the course, we have to make sure that we get the--provide the resources to make sure that we don't have another hot spot that's going to be a breeding ground for terrorists. And right now I don't think we've planned well enough to stop that from happening, and we see it happening.

DeDAPPER: OK. We'll come back in--in a minute here and we'll talk more about the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Middle East, as well as other subjects with Senator Jon Corzine. Be right back.

(Announcements)

DeDAPPER: And we're back with our guest, Senator Jon Corzine from New Jersey.

You are going to be headed to the Middle East. We were just talking about the war a second ago. Tell me a little bit about the trip and--and what you expect to accomplish.

Sen. CORZINE: Well, it is--the general topic is fact finding, both in Afghanistan and--and the other hot spots, Iraq and around the Middle East. But I think--just tying together what we were talking about before the break, I think there's a serious question if you believe we have to win this war in Iraq, which I absolutely believe. Now that we're there, we have an obligation. We broke it, we fix it. That's sort of the Tom Friedman view.

DeDAPPER: You voted--you voted--you voted not to go in.

Sen. CORZINE: Initially, but once we've begun that process, I don't think we have any choice now. And if that's the case, then do we have adequate resources on the ground? Do we have enough troops? Are we doing the right things to make sure that we can turn this over to the Iraqis? What kind of timetable should that happen? Those are real questions that I think Congress needs to be asking. I think we need to make sure that the president has good answers to it. Our planning has not

been good. You know, we--we--I think it's going to be haunting for the president to deal with the 'mission accomplished' argument that was made on May 1st, because I don't think we put the plans in place ahead of time for securing and then obviously re--restarting Iraq on the pathway to democracy. And we've--we've changed course two or three times and then--and just--in the last three weeks we've accelerated the time frame in which political change was going to take place on the ground. So I--I--I think it is important that Congress ask thoughtful questions, supportive questions of our troops quite obviously. And actually, I wonder whether we shouldn't have more troops. That's what John McCain...

DeDAPPER: Do we--do we need more troops in?

Sen. CORZINE: That's--that's one of the questions that I want to examine on this trip that I'll be taking.

DeDAPPER: The--the--the Army--some of the leading staff in the Army say that we can't go for more than another six, nine months with troops over there...

Sen. CORZINE: Well, we could have...

DeDAPPER: ...before we simply--we--we don't have a choice; we've got to pull them out.

Sen. CORZINE: Jay, we have an incredibly complex issue of rotation, of the troops on the ground to get new folks in. And we're going to end up having many, many more reservists and National Guards folks playing front-line roles than was ever, ever anticipated for a lot longer. And I think that we need a fundamental examination of--of both the rotation policies and the absolute numbers. And we--if--if we don't have the right numbers, then we're going to have to look for other steps to provide those, and those are going to be tough choices for the American people to live with.

DeDAPPER: Well, we talk about the reservists. One of the stories that is not told very much is that these reservists who have full-time jobs and families back here and who thought they'd go over for a three-month or six-month stint are ending up there for a year and--and may come back for a few months and have to go back.

Sen. CORZINE: Right.

DeDAPPER: There--there are a lot of people in the military...

Sen. CORZINE: There are real...

DeDAPPER: ...who think that's unfair.

Sen. CORZINE: There are real problems with the planning process that preceded what we were about. We didn't take into account that this was going to be a long, drawn...

DeDAPPER: If you want to put more troops in now, what I'm saying is...

Sen. CORZINE: You're still going--well, we are still going to have...

DeDAPPER: ...where are they coming from?

Sen. CORZINE: ...to make those kinds of tough choices. We're gonna--we don't have a draft and I'm not advocating one, but if we--we're either going to have to expand the number of manpower on our standing armies or we're going to have to more fully utilize our Reserves and National Guard, which are already stretched. We can't do everything we need to do without some cost. And so I think it's important that those of us in public life tell the public what the real costs of the war are going to be. And since--I think most people--there is a consensus that we can't cut and run, we better start being straight with the American people about what those costs will be.

DeDAPPER: So the president and the administration now, it seems, wants to get the troops out faster. This is kind of a thumbnail sketch--get the troops out faster, turn security over to the Iraqis, more security over to the Iraqis and get an independent government--a semi-independent government installed more quickly. Is that realistic?

Sen. CORZINE: Great idea as long as who we're turning it over to actually have some democratic support, that there's real credibility, and they have the ability to govern in a substantial way. And probably the most important question: Are this--are these troops, these people that are coming in to security forces in Iraq, are they real or is this just eyewash? Are we just hiring a bunch of Pinkerton guards that look like the folks that used to handle our air traffic at the airports before, which we felt like we had to change into a more substantial force for security

purposes. I think there's a real question about whether we're getting eyewash or whether we're getting reality. And based on what has happened so far with regard to our plans, I think it's reasonable to be questioning about these things.

DeDAPPER: Is--is there a political element here? Do you think the administration is changing gears and--and trying to do this because they look at the--they look at the calendar and say, 'We've got an election coming up and the American people don't want to see, you know, men and women dying in Iraq.'

Sen. CORZINE: Jay, actually--Jay, I think the fundamental issue is not political. I do believe that everyone's on the same page in believing that we have to establish a secure govern--a secure Iraq from having it become another Afghanistan, a breeding ground for terrorism in the overall war on terrorism. How that gets presented I believe does mesh with politics. I think that's why we had the landing on the Abraham Lincoln, the 'Mission accomplished.' I don't think anybody can deny that people don't use some of the elements that occur politically. I don't think that's the fundamental driving force.

DeDAPPER: Democrats want to use it politically, too, though.

Sen. CORZINE: Well, I think...

DeDAPPER: Isn't that a major issue? I mean, you--you are the head of the DSCC, Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. Your job is to get Democratic senators elected. Isn't the war going to be a political issue?

Sen. CORZINE: My first job is to protect the people that I represent, the people of the United States; to make sure that we're having questions, that we don't have another 9/11. I not--I'm not so politically focused that I think that that isn't--that that supercedes the top priority of protecting the American people. That said, I think there is every right to debate the policies that we have in place, whether they're actually doing what is the number-one priority, which is protect the American people. And if we pull our troops out too fast, we leave a vacuum there. We put in place people who are not democrats--small D dem...

DeDAPPER: Small democrats.

Sen. CORZINE: Small D democrats and there--there turns out to be more instability in Iraq rather than greater stability over the long run, then I think we have failed in doing our jobs as

politicians, and I think that--and senators--and that is absolutely essential for us to--to have a debate about.

DeDAPPER: OK. We're going to take our last break and we'll be right back with Senator Jon Corzine.

(Announcements)

DeDAPPER: And we're back with Senator Jon Corzine.

We were just talking about the economy. Generally, the perception earlier this year was, 'It's the economy, stupid.' That's going to be what this campaign in 2004 is run on. The economy seems to be getting better. They're talking about a great Christmas shopping season, personal income's up, all the economic indicators seem to be going in the right direction. Is the economy a dead issue for Democrats?

Sen. CORZINE: No. First of all, we haven't seen the kind of job creation that I think most Americans would expect. We've lost two and a half million manufacturing jobs. I think on the ground, real people know that that good news that we're seeing in the aggregate's not necessarily translating into their own lives. When I say that, the economy is doing better and I think it will be, and I hope it does, regardless of what the political--politics are. But we've done--we've done--we've stimulated this economy at a very high cost. We have a \$400 billion budget deficit this year. We have about a \$500 billion projected deficit next year. And our spending in Washington is out of control, and that's being led by a Republican Congress and a Republican president who have no discipline on this whatsoever.

DeDAPPER: You sound like a Republican here from the--from the mid '80s.

Sen. CORZINE: You know, I worked with Bob Rubin in the mid '80s, and I came in and worked with President Clinton. We balanced the budget and had a strong economy. I think they have been very profligate in how they have managed the economy. I think the American people understand it.

Two, I--I think that there are a lot of issues that we'll be talking about in the election in addition to just the economy. The environment is a mess and this--this administration has pulled back from even acknowledging whether global warming is a reality. They have weakened clean air, clean water standards, so a lot to talk about there. I think that there is a whole issue of personal freedom and civil rights that will be embedded in

the Patriot Act, which I think'll be hard for the administration to talk about. So I--I--there are a number of issues that I think Democrats can take out on the stump in 2004.

DeDAPPER: We mentioned earlier you're the head of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. There are a lot of races; a third of the Senate is up every--every two years.

Sen. CORZINE: Right.

DeDAPPER: Analysts look at this math and say Democrats are going to have a hard time retaking the Senate. A lot of Southern seats, a lot of Southern Democratic seats retiring.

Sen. CORZINE: We--right now we have 15 incumbents who are running and four open seats on the Democratic side, and the Republicans have three open seats--roughly three open seats on their side. Unfortunately, our open seats are in the Southeast, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. We have great candidates there. It's going to be very competitive for us. We--if we hold two of those four seats, we'll take back the Senate 'cause I know where we're going to win four seats: in Illinois, Alaska, Oklahoma and hopefully Colorado. And all of our incumbents are well ahead on head-to-head races in those other 15 states. I think we're in much better shape than the pundits talk about. Conventional wisdom is a hard thing to talk about a year ahead of an election.

DeDAPPER: It's a--it's a long way out. An issue dear--near and dear to sports fans. The Nets--you've been involved in trying to keep the Nets in New Jersey. Some people in Brooklyn...

Sen. CORZINE: That's--that's the right...

DeDAPPER: ...would like to see them in Brooklyn.

Sen. CORZINE: That's the right issue.

DeDAPPER: What's happening there?

Sen. CORZINE: Keep them in New Jersey. I think--my whole interest in this, as a minority shareholder in a--in a bidding group, is to make sure that New Jersey continues to have sports teams that--for at least a substantial piece of our population--I don't know whether it's 20, 25 percent, 30 percent--care about making sure that we have things that pull us together, a magnet for identity in the community. And I

think the Nets are one of those. They're a quality team. There's no reason that we shouldn't be able to put together an economic package that keeps the New Jersey Nets right here at home.

DeDAPPER: Last question. You ran four years ago as a political neophyte. You'd been an investment banker involved in the world of high finance. You've now been in the Senate for three years. Are you going to run again, do you think, in 2006?

Sen. CORZINE: I can't imagine the circumstances where I wouldn't run again. I love what I'm doing. I hope that the public things I'm doing a good job. I care deeply about these issues. We talked about a whole bunch of these things. You know, on a week ago Sun--a week ago today, I rode in on the PATH train into the World Trade Center. Ten people in my hometown died in 9/11. This is one of the most challenging responsibilities I think anyone could ever imagine. I love doing what I'm doing.

DeDAPPER: Thank you very much for coming on today, Senator Jon Corzine.

That's NEWS FORUM. Have a good weekend, and we'll see you next week.

Copyright 2003 by [WNBC.com](http://www.wnbc.com). All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.



[Email This Story](#)



[Print This Story](#)

wnbc.com WeatherBug

Real-time weather conditions direct to your computer!



[Get the Bug Now!](#)

WNBC.com Now

› **News**

- 📄 **MSNBC News Chief Jerry Nachman Dead At 57**
- 📄 **Editor-In-Chief Of MSNBC-TV Dies**
- 📄 **Democrats Storm Into New Hampshire**
- 📄 **Small School Bus Overtakes In New Jersey**
- 📄 **Analysis: A Whole New Race**
- 📄 **Brooklyn Woman Decapitated By Garbage Truck**
- 📄 **Gephardt Abandons Presidential Race**
- 📄 **Long Island Man Shot Dead Near His Home**

› **Sports**

- 📄 **Williams: Alcohol Not Factor In Shooting Of Limo Driver**

› **Money**

- 📄 **Police Seeking Suspect In West Caldwell Bank Robbery**

› **Health**

- 📄 **Pataki Would Cut Services, Asset Transfers**

› **Technology**

- 📄 **Travel Ease On Christmas Eve Despite Orange Alert**

› **Entertainment**

- 📄 **Secretary: Pope Never Endorsed Controversial Christ Film**

© 2004, [Internet Broadcasting Systems, Inc.](#)
[Click here for the privacy policy](#), [terms of use](#).
[Click here for advertising information](#).

[Site Map](#)