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Braun: Former N.J. Assembly Speaker Joseph Doria survives the 'slings and arrows' Published: Oct. 19 Signed-in readers now can

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By Bob Braun/Star-Ledger Columnist



on his Bayonne home and Trenton office.

For all that time, the U.S. Attorney's Office had a statement from a key witness — alleged bagman Jack Shaw — saying "Joe Doria never saw a dime and never asked for a dime" from scammer-turned-informant Solomon Dwek.

a federal probe first revealed in spectacularly public FBI raids

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name of Gov. Chris Christie, under whose tenure as U.S. attorney the so-called "Bid Rig III" investigation began. Christie had already left his federal post to run for governor when the raids were executed in July 2009. "How is it going to help anyone?" asked Doria in an interview, the first since he received the letter, at the Chatham office of

his lawyer, John Azzarello. He said he'd rather talk of his

achievements as a public official.

impassioned about what he believed led indirectly to his ordeal - what he called the "corrupting" and "depersonalizing" influence of money on politics. Advertisement Reach your potential

But Doria, a former Assembly speaker and state senator, was

FIND YOUR NEXT JOB ➤ "I was caught up in this even though I wasn't raising money for anyone," said Doria. "This was all about raising money for political campaigns." Doria, the former Bayonne mayor, was Gov. Jon Corzine's

community affairs commissioner the day of the raids, July 23,

2009. The same morning, 44 people — mostly politicians or

officials — were arrested. Many charges dealt with payments

made by Dwek, wired by the feds and posing as a developer

willing to bribe. If Corzine had a chance of winning, it vanished that morning. In the face of damaging images of agents carrying evidence boxes from Doria's home — empty boxes, it turned out — he

demanded, and received, Doria's resignation, but lost to Christie anyway. Advertisement

"People in politics no longer know each other as people — we

are treating each other only as political opponents who must

be defeated," he said. "We are demons, stereotypes. We're no

longer men and women of good will who see things differently,

The depersonalization, he said, begins with reliance on political

and media consultants for hire and is aggravated by what he

"We don't walk door-to-door through neighborhoods, meeting

thousands of dollars to hire consultants who conduct negative

people and raising a little money. Politicians now must raise

called the "anonymous" medium of the internet.

we're enemies."

something corrupt."

support them."

himself met with Dwek.

research, conduct marketing campaigns that depersonalize your opponents. Those consultants cost money, and that money has to be raised. Advertisement

"Disagreements just aren't disagreements anymore — if you disagree with someone, then that other person must be corrupt. If you're for compromise with someone, then there's

got to be something corrupt about you — you must have done

"depersonalization" of politics. "Politicians are going to rely on

outsiders to vet people they meet with - and they're not going

Many of the charges arising from the 2009 busts were based

on videotapes of meetings Dwek held with politicians. Doria

Doria said he wanted his legacy as a public official to be known

for his willingness to compromise with those who disagreed

He said the fallout from Bid Rig will serve to worsen the

to want to meet directly with those who say they want to

with him. He cited his sponsorship of legislation creating charter schools, greater autonomy for colleges and universities, insurance payments for longer stays for maternity patients, takeovers of failing public schools. Advertisement

"None of that would have been possible without a willingness to compromise, on both sides," he said.

"We're fine, we had a lot of support," he said. "Those who knew

During the two years, Doria continued to teach government and

political science at both Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute

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of Politics in New Brunswick and St. Peter's College in Jersey

me and liked me knew I did nothing wrong. Those who didn't

Doria, 65, played down the personal impact of the last two

years on himself, his wife and his daughter, now 12.

like me weren't going to like me no matter what."

City, where he is an alumnus and was a trustee.

arrows and the negative perceptions. I told them we need good people to get involved in public service. If they don't, the system will not work." Doria wasn't the only politician whose life was put on hold by the revelation of an investigation that ultimately resulted in a

"I tell my students they have to put with up with the slings and

municipal attorney. But, like Doria, Bennett won't criticize federal officials. "I won't go there," he says. Advertisement

in the Bid Rig cases, says a "terrible injustice occurs" when

"The innuendo is that the person has committed a crime that

Zegas also says defense attorneys won't criticize prosecutors

- and don't want their clients to - because they don't want to

caused a judge to sign a warrant permitting the search," he

said.

"reawaken" interest in their clients' activities. Doria said he had no plans to return to politics, but wants to continue to teach and encourage young people to become

involved," he said. Related editorial: U.S. DOJ should clear Sen. Robert Menendez as it did Joseph Doria

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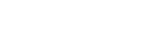
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letter clearing him. Republican John Bennett of Little Silver, the former state Senate president and acting governor, waited four years for such a letter. "I lost two careers," he said, referring to his political activities - including gubernatorial ambitions - and his work as a

Alan Zegas, a prominent criminal defense attorney not involved searches are publicized or investigations leaked.

involved in politics.

"You have to be optimistic as long as good people want to stay

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