



OUT OF THE ASHES CAME HOPE

# E-CLARION

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## Remembering Brendan Byrne

Editorial By  
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New Jersey lost a good man Jan. 4. Brendan Byrne was a highly respected governor of the state and did a lot to ensure housing was available for residents.

While he may best be remembered for getting the state income tax passed and being dubbed the man “who couldn’t be bought” by mobsters, Byrne also gave a great deal of support to increase the housing stock in the state.

I first met Byrne when he was governor through the issue of housing. Byrne appointed me as a board member to the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA). Attorney General John Degnan and Treasurer Cliff Goldman, who served under Byrne, were on the NJHMFA board and used to come to all the meetings. We worked like a team. They accepted me immediately even though I had a different viewpoint.

Byrne was the successor to Gov. Richard J. Hughes, who created the NJHMFA. Byrne kept that tradition going. The NJHMFA is a very important part of government. Without it, we wouldn’t have had the same production of housing. New Jersey led the nation in creating housing. And Essex County was one of the highest areas in the state to increase the housing stock.

Many thought Byrne’s political career was over after the passage of the unpopular state income tax, but they were wrong. What got him re-elected was housing for seniors.

During his time as governor, Byrne was hands-on. He would go to events related to housing, including ground-breakings and dedications. He came to events for New Community residents as well, including Thanksgiving celebrations.

Byrne has strong ties to Essex County. He was born and raised in West Orange. He attended Seton Hall University briefly before joining the U.S. Army and serving in World War II. He served as the Essex County Prosecutor before becoming a Superior Court judge in Morris, Sussex and Warren counties. He left his judgeship to campaign and served as the 47th governor of New Jersey from 1974 to 1982.

In addition to the state income tax, Byrne is known for implementing public financing for gubernatorial races, supporting a referendum to bring casino gambling to Atlantic City and the Pinelands Protection Act.

While it may not be considered the highlight of Byrne’s administration, we shouldn’t forget his contribution to housing. After all, having a home is one of the most basic human needs.