

By Carl Golden , September 6, 2012 in Opinion

While most of the state's leading Democratic figures were in Charlotte, awash in the enthusiasm and euphoria of the party's national convention, Essex County State Sen. Dick Codey brought them thumping back to earth --- some say reality --- with his comment on the condition of the party in New Jersey:

"We've got to stop letting party bosses dictate our agenda and enabling Mr. Christie, when he's wrong, to succeed."

While Codey loves to crack wise about people and politics, when he turns serious he chooses his words carefully, assesses their impact, and anticipates a reaction.

There's not a great deal of political insight required to determine who Codey had in mind when he spoke of "party bosses" --- South Jersey leader George Norcross who masterminded Codey's ouster as Senate

Codey could only be looking toward the gubernatorial and legislative election of 2013, subtly suggesting that the party's chances of retaining legislative control and possibly re-taking the governor's office will be diminished if they are perceived as responding to the wishes of "party bosses" rather than addressing the needs and concerns of their traditional constituencies.

Codey, of course, has been mentioned as a gubernatorial candidate and his comments could be construed by some as an opening move to position himself as an outsider --- ironic in light of his 38 years in the Legislature --- but one unbossed and not indebted to regional or county powerbrokers.

He received generally favorable reviews for the year and a half he spent as acting governor following the resignation of Jim McGreevy and seriously considered running for the office in his own right in 2005. He abandoned the idea when then U.S. Sen. Jon Corzine let it be known he was willing to spend \$60 million of his own money on his gubernatorial campaign. To this day, there are Democrats who remain convinced Codey would have been elected rather handily, would have compiled a record far superior to Corzine's, and would have been a better than even bet to defeat Christie in 2009.

Should Codey decide to seek the party's nomination next year, the bad blood that exists between him and Norcross in particular, along with his differences with DiVincenzo and Aduato, present a considerable challenge. Primaries are party-managed elections in which base and organization are crucial (along with a good deal of money, naturally), and Norcross, DiVincenzo and Aduato possess all three.

The primary may be a crowded one as well, with the likes of Newark Mayor Cory Booker, State Sen. Barbara Buono, party chairman John Wisniewski, and Sweeney mentioned as possible contenders.

It could simply be, though, that Codey's comments were intended to put potential nominees on notice that distancing themselves from the "party bosses" would be a wise move.