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Governor Chris Christie - "What they [Republicans] have to do is what they say they want, and we're doing it in New Jersey: smaller government, less spending, less regulation, lower taxes."

Monday, November 08, 2010 • Tags: [Other](#)

Only 43 Days Left to Enact Governor Christie's Reform Agenda

Governor Christie on 'Meet the Press'

Governor Christie on 'Meet the Press' - Part 2

Transcript

DAVID GREGORY: We now turn to the aforementioned Republican who has emerged as a leader of his party, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie.

Welcome to the program.

GOVERNOR CHRIS CHRISTIE (R-NJ): Thank you, David.

GREGORY: Good to have you here.

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GOV. CHRISTIE: Happy to be here.

GREGORY: When you talk about the response from the voters on Election Day, something's very curious. We know some of the feelings about the Democrats, about President Obama's policies, but look at this from the exit polls in terms of the opinion of political parties. Republicans didn't fare too well either; 52 percent unfavorable rating. What does that say about the Republican Party today?

GOV. CHRISTIE: You know, I think what it says is what I was saying all over the country, that's it's put up or shut up time for our party. You know, we lost our way last decade, David, we did, and people expect us to do better. And if the Republican Party wants to come back, they're going to have to do what they said they were going to do. I mean, because if they don't, we're going to be sent to the wilderness for a long time, and we're going to deserve it.

GREGORY: What does that mean? What do they have to put up?

GOV. CHRISTIE: What they have to do is what they say they want, and we're doing it in New Jersey: smaller government, less spending, less regulation, lower taxes. That's what the public is saying that they want. And if you look at what we've done in New Jersey, David, we're delivering on that. We're not fixed yet, but we're on the track to being fixed, closing an \$11 billion budget deficit without any new or increased taxes, cutting the corporate business tax. We're doing things to try to create an environment where private sector jobs can grow.

GREGORY: And, and I want to talk about some of the choices you made in New Jersey. But, you know, you heard Senator DeMint, and there's a lot of Republicans talking about cutting the deficit, cutting the budget, but they're not specific. He wasn't specific. He talks about Paul Ryan, who has some ideas about Medicare and changing the way that's structured, indeed, making some cuts. Paul Ryan in the House, he's from Wisconsin, doesn't have support among establishment Republicans. There are 15 Republicans who stood up behind him in terms of making these cuts. Are Republicans really making good when Senator DeMint and others aren't specific about the cuts they're going to make to entitlements or to defense, to the big ticket items that really move the budget?

GOV. CHRISTIE: Well, let me tell you what's—where the leadership's going to come from. You have 11 Republican governors and a Democratic governor, Andrew Cuomo in New York, who have said we can't raise taxes and we have to cut spending in everything. In New Jersey what we did was we cut spending in every department, a 9 percent cut in real spending, not projected spending, real spending year over year. Find another state that did that and, and we'll go and talk about it. I mean, we made real hard decisions, and I cut some programs that we would've liked to have kept.

GREGORY: Mm-hmm.

GOV. CHRISTIE: But we're broke. We don't have the money anymore. And so I hope that what these governors, Republicans and Democrats, will show Washington is you can do this and you have to do it.

GREGORY: I asked Senator DeMint about sacrifice, and he said, 'Oh, we don't want to, we don't want to break our promise to our seniors. In your state, what are you telling people they have to sacrifice and what do Republicans around the country have to tell Americans they have to sacrifice if they want to bring the size of government under control and the deficit under control?

GOV. CHRISTIE: We told everybody there has to be shared sacrifice among everyone, and let me be specific. We cut every department of state government. We cut funding to K to 12 education. We are proposed real pension and benefit reforms on public sector workers, increasing the retirement age, eliminating COLAs, things that are really going to bring the pension problem back under control. We cut all of this spending in the state in every state department, David, every state department. From environmental protection, to military and veterans affairs, all the way through had to sustain a cut. Those are the type of things you have to do to show people you really mean shared sacrifice. Everyone came to the table and everybody had to contribute.

GREGORY: So, as you, as a national Republican with national influence now—and you've met with congressional Republicans and talked about issues—does everything have to be on the table?

GOV. CHRISTIE: What I told them was they'd better come up with a plan that's credible like we did in New Jersey, and the public's going to be able to smell real quickly if you're not credible. And if we are not credible, then we are really going to be in trouble as a party, and I think the numbers you showed indicate that.

GREGORY: What about the tea party, the tea party's influence on the Republican party? Net positive, net negative? What do you think?

GOV. CHRISTIE: Net positive. Listen, the core that drives the tea party, in my view, are those four principles I talked about before—less spending, smaller government and less intrusive government, lower regulation, and lower taxes. And when Republicans are at their best, those are our core principles. And so I think that, at bottom, it's a positive influence. Listen, you're going to have variances around, around the country. I endorsed Mike Castle in the primary...

GREGORY: Right, in Delaware.

GOV. CHRISTIE: Yes.

GREGORY: Right.

GOV. CHRISTIE: Because I felt he was the best person.

GREGORY: Is that a wake—do you agree with Lindsey Graham from South Carolina or Jim DeMint from South Carolina, that Delaware is a wake-up call for Republicans?

GOV. CHRISTIE: I think Delaware was a missed opportunity to have a really good United States senator in Mike Castle, and that's why I endorsed him in the primary.

GREGORY: Let me talk a little bit more about New Jersey and taxes and spending. And I want to talk specifically about the--this ARC tunnel, this rail tunnel that would've connected New York and New Jersey and the controversy surrounding this. To boil all of this down, the federal government, as I understand it, offered you a deal. You were worried about cost, cost overruns, and they said, "Look, we're going to take care of that. New Jersey's not going to be responsible." So critics have used...

GOV. CHRISTIE: Whoa, let me stop you right there.

GREGORY: Yeah.

GOV. CHRISTIE: No chance. That never happened. The federal government said \$3 billion is what they were going to give us, and I had to sign a contract saying every nickel over \$3 billion was the responsibility of the federal government. All the federal government offered me in the interim two week period, between the time when I first canceled the tunnel, was the ability to get federal loans...

GREGORY: Mm-hmm.

GOV. CHRISTIE: ...that we'd have to pay back.

GREGORY: They weren't going to shift this to...

GOV. CHRISTIE: No.

GREGORY: ...private companies to be able to take care of it?

GOV. CHRISTIE: No. It was federal loans or, if we wanted a public-private partnership, we had to have increased fees on all the train tickets, for all the commuters, all across New Jersey, including ones that weren't using the tunnel, to be able to repay it. No matter what, David, this was going to fall on the people of the state of New Jersey, and the worst part was, it was a blank check. No one could tell me how much this was going to cost. We had already put \$5.7 billion up from the state of New Jersey, and we were talking about \$2 billion to \$5 billion in overruns now. I mean, we could not sustain that. We're broke.

GREGORY: Is this a matter of ideology for you, or simply a pragmatic issue that you don't have the money? And by that I mean, should the federal government be involved in big infrastructure projects like this?

GOV. CHRISTIE: Sure, they should. And you know what? I gave the federal government two weeks to come back to me and say if this is a project of such national importance, then put more money on the table for it. But, you know, they didn't. In, in Florida, where they're building high speed rail, Florida's being asked to give a 20 percent match to an 80 percent for federal. In this project, New Jersey was picking up 70 percent of the cost, the feds 30 percent and nothing from the state or the city of New York. Listen, this is about fairness and about what we could afford, and I'm not going to sign blank checks on the taxpayers in the state of New Jersey for a project that, as laudable as it might be in some respects, we simply can't afford now. When we talked to the campaign, David, about tough choices, this is an example.

GREGORY: Tax cuts. You've got a millionaires tax in New Jersey, which I know that you're opposed to.

GOV. CHRISTIE: Not anymore, we don't.

GREGORY: Not anymore because...

GOV. CHRISTIE: No.

GREGORY: ...you vetoed it.

GOV. CHRISTIE: Yes.

GREGORY: You've got high taxes across the board.

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GOV. CHRISTIE: We do.

GREGORY: How do you deal with that as a Republican governor of New Jersey?

GOV. CHRISTIE: Well, first you say, "No more." And the Democrats sent me an extension of the millionaires tax that would have not only hit individuals but small business in New Jersey, and I vetoed it. And I'm not going to increase taxes on the state that the Tax Foundation has said is the highest burdened tax state in America, especially if you look at our unemployment rate, David, ours is higher than any state in our region. The reason is, over the last eight years under Corzine and McGreevey, we raised taxes and fees 115 times. We put a wet blanket on the economy of New Jersey, and that's why our people are still out of work disproportionately to everybody else in the region. New York is a point lower. Pennsylvania is more than a point lower. I mean, we, you know, we did this to ourselves with all these increased taxes.

GREGORY: What about the Bush tax cuts and extending those? You've said that should happen at all levels for a couple of years, but you've said only a couple of years because there is a day of reckoning here. Can you have tax cuts

when you also want to balance the, the budget? Or do you have to consider tax increases at the federal level at some point?

GOV. CHRISTIE: Well, you know, I've been watching you for weeks talk about extending the Bush tax cuts. Drives me crazy when I'm sitting at home. This is about maintaining the current tax structure in a time we have a very weak economy. And so I favor extending these for another two years, extending the current tax system and not having a tax increase...

GREGORY: But those, I mean, wait a minute. It may drive you crazy, and I know other Republicans that feel the same way. But I've also talked to Republicans. I've talked to economists like Alan Greenspan who say there is no free lunch here. You cannot have tax cuts at this level and not have them be paid for. And other Republicans say, yes, they should be pay for. So you do agree they should be paid for.

GOV. CHRISTIE: Well, obviously--well, listen, I've, I'm walking the walk in New Jersey, David.

GREGORY: OK.

GOV. CHRISTIE: I mean, when I said we're vetoing the millionaires tax, I found spending tax to pay for that.

GREGORY: So you can have existing tax policy, but it still has to be offset.

GOV. CHRISTIE: Well, listen, and I'm not disagreeing with you, David.

MR. GREGORY: OK.

GOV. CHRISTIE: But I'm--what I'm disagreeing with you is you characterizing what's happening here as a--as tax cuts. This is maintaining the current tax policy in a weak economy, and what you're, what you're advocating through your question is tax increases.

GREGORY: Right. I'm not--that's not fair. I'm not advocating. I'm, I'm questioning whether or not they have to be paid for.

GOV. CHRISTIE: Well, when you call the, when you call the tax cuts, what I'm saying is the--I take the position as the opposite of that.

GREGORY: Right. Right.

GOV. CHRISTIE: The opposite of that is it is a tax increase in a weakened...

GREGORY: But they are set to expire.

GOV. CHRISTIE: ...weeks in, in a weakened economy. And what I'm saying is you should keep the current tax structure in place until our economy gets stronger.

GREGORY: That's fine. But they're set to expire, so if you're going to re-authorize them, they're, they're, you're voting for tax cuts.

GOV. CHRISTIE: No, you're not voting for tax cuts. You're voting to maintain the current tax structure.

GREGORY: I understand, a continuation.

GOV. CHRISTIE: That's a...

GREGORY: But there's...

GOV. CHRISTIE: And then we agree.

GREGORY: And there's still an offset issue.

GOV. CHRISTIE: Well, then we agree.

GREGORY: OK. The, the issue of where there's room for negotiation, is there room for negotiation in your mind? Should the president make a deal here on, on these things for a certain period of time? Does everybody, then, in a couple of years have to come to this and say, "Maybe these aren't the best ideas. Maybe we also have to think about tax increases at some point"?

GOV. CHRISTIE: Well, I think the first thing that the president has to focus on is building private sector jobs again in this country. And I don't think, by increasing taxes, that's the way to--that we're going to get it done in the short term. And so, sure, there's areas for compromise, I'm sure there are, between Republican leaders in the Congress and the president. But the president has to lead on this. And I think that the message is really clear, I got the message from the election, it's about putting people back to work. And you will not put people back to work in private sector jobs by increasing the cost in the private sector.

GREGORY: A couple more areas. I want to--you've become an YouTube star, as you well know, because you've had some, some interactions with voters, including when you were campaigning for Meg Whitman out in California. Let me show that moment.

(Videotape, September 22, 2010)

GOV. CHRISTIE: You know what, you want to yell, yell at me, but don't give her a hard time. We're here. We're here talking about the future of the state of California and the future of our country. And you know what?

Unidentified Man: And you're just talking about the truth that's she's lying about.

GOV. CHRISTIE: And you know what? And you know what? Let me tell you, and let me tell you this. You know what? It's people who raise their voices and yell and scream like you that are dividing this country. We're here to bring this country together, not to divide it.

(End videotape)

GREGORY: So what's the balance? On to a style question. The balance for you being a straight talker, you know, taking on the corrosive conversations we have about politics, and then your image as being a little too brusque, bullying, you know, Governor Wrecking Ball? How do you, how do you straddle that line?

GOV. CHRISTIE: Well, I am who I am. I don't straddle the line. And I think what people in New Jersey appreciate about, appreciate about me is I don't send smoke signals. They know who I am. They know how I feel about issues. Sometimes they agree with and sometimes they don't, but all I think that that clip indicates is that when I have something on my mind, I'm going to say it. I'm going to say it directly. And I think that we have too little of that in politics, David. And when, when I sit around and watch the way some people in political life talk, it, it fogs me over. And I think it fogs people in America over too. They want to hear somebody say, "If you feel a certain way, say it and live with the consequences." I'm willing to let the chips fall where they may on that issue.

GREGORY: So the question is whether you're going to say all this stuff at a national level. You've ruled out running for president in 2012. But you're also acting like a guy who's increasing your national influence. You're campaigning for congressional Republicans. Why do all of that? Why, especially in tight races, if you're not looking down the line at running?

GOV. CHRISTIE: Because I care about my country, and because I felt that those people were the absolute best candidates to help make our country a better place. And so that's why I campaigned for them. I have no other agenda. And to the extent that New Jersey over the last year can serve as an example to people that say, "Listen, you can cut spending. You can balance a budget without tax increases. You can make hard choices and not only survive politically but thrive politically." Then I want to try to set that example for folks so that these other new governors who are coming in, members of Congress...

GREGORY: Mm-hmm.

GOV. CHRISTIE: ...that they will act boldly and be strong.

GREGORY: Shermanesque statement, you're not running in 2012?

GOV. CHRISTIE: Absolutely.

GREGORY: You wouldn't be on a ticket at all as VP?

GOV. CHRISTIE: Can you see me as somebody's vice president, David, after, after that question about governor wrecking ball? I would feel bad for that poor man or woman.

GREGORY: What about down the line, beyond 2012? What, what criteria would you use in making a decision about whether to run for president?

GOV. CHRISTIE: Well, first I have to decide whether I run for re-election in 2013 in New Jersey, and that's going to be determined by how good a job I do and whether the people in the state of New Jersey want me back. So before you ever get to anything beyond that, you know, my mother always taught me first things first. Do your job. Do your job that the people of New Jersey gave you. I love being governor and I'm got to be governor until 2013, then we'll see what the verdict of the people is of the job I did on 2013.

GREGORY: So fair at least to say the door is open beyond 2012.

GOV. CHRISTIE: I'm going to need a job, David, after 2013, you know? And so whether it's going to be being governor of New Jersey or doing something else, I have four kids between 7 and 17, I'm working the rest of my life anyway. So it's going to be doing something, David, so maybe it'll be that. Who knows.

GREGORY: Governor Christie, thank you very much.

GOV. CHRISTIE: Thank you, David.

GREGORY: Appreciate it.

