



## Mar. 23, 2010 - In Case You Missed It: Christie Says It's "A Great Day For Taxpayer" As Bill Takes Bite Out Of State Workers' Sweet Deal

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**Trenton (AP)** - Gov. Chris Christie has signed three bills designed to save taxpayers billions of dollars by making pensions and health benefits for government workers less generous.

The Republican governor signed the reform measures late Monday, lingering at the Statehouse until about 8:30 p.m. when the bills reached his desk. He then held a public bill-signing, approving his first legislation taking office in January.

"Today is a great day for the taxpayers of the state of New Jersey," Christie said. "We've been talking for more than four years about the need for this type of beginning, fundamental reform."

The bills require all government workers to contribute at least 1.5 percent of their salaries toward health care costs, cap the amount of unused sick and vacation time workers can cash out at retirement and bar part-timers from enrolling in the state pension system.

One bill rolls back a 9 percent pension benefits increase the Legislature approved nearly a decade ago so that new employees won't be entitled to enhanced pensions. Another provision stops each worker from having more than one pension-eligible job at a time.

The Legislature tried to enact similar measures before but failed. Efforts in 2006 and 2008 were largely halted by then-Gov. Jon Corzine, a Democrat, who said he wanted benefits issues to be negotiated, not legislated.

Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver said she understood the unions' point of view but insisted the actions taken Monday were to help ensure the long-term financial health of the pension system.

"We cannot continue the track we are on," she said.

Christie said the legislation signed Monday has far-reaching savings. He said two of the bills are projected to save \$8 billion over 15 years. The third bill, which requires a health care contribution from all workers, is projected to save local governments and school boards \$315 million in the coming year alone.

Proponents said the approved reforms will help keep the pension system solvent.

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