



In Case You Missed It: N.J.'s Christie is Blunt -- and Right -- on Fiscal Control

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(CNN) -- Governors' press conferences rarely go viral. But a spirited exchange between recently elected New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and a columnist for the Star-Ledger has become an instant YouTube classic at a time when fiscal battles are brewing in states around the nation.

The tough-guy governor and former prosecutor took the columnist to task for asking Christie, a Republican, whether he had adopted a "confrontational tone" in his budget battles with Democrats in the state legislature and with politically influential teachers' unions.

Now, we've seen plenty of the politics of confrontation and incitement over the past year; calling political opponents communist or fascist has become disturbingly commonplace at protests, obscuring underlying policy debates. But Chris Christie did something different. He didn't demonize the people he disagreed with: Instead, he showed a sense of humor - and unapologetically stood his ground. [Take a look for yourself.](#)

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"Here it is [he holds up a Democratic press release]: Bigger government, higher taxes, more spending. I believe in less government, lower taxes and in empowering local officials who are elected by their citizens to be able to fix their problems.

"Now, I could say it really nicely. I could say it in the way that you all might be more comfortable with. Maybe we could go back to the last administration where I could say it in a way you wouldn't even understand it, OK?...

"This is who I am. Like it or not, you guys are stuck with me for four years and I'm going to say things directly. When you ask me questions, I'm going to answer them directly, straightly, bluntly and nobody in New Jersey is going to have to wonder where I am on an issue -- and I think they've had enough of politicians who make them wonder. I came here to govern, not to worry about re-election. I came here to do what people sent me here to do, and so 'blunt,' 'direct'? Maybe you might say 'honest and refreshing.' Maybe we could see that in your paper tomorrow."

This exchange matters not only because it actually was "honest and refreshing," but also because it might be a sign of coming attractions to a state near you.

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But despite the recent Democratic dominance of statewide races, weeks after Christie narrowly beat incumbent Gov. Jon Corzine, a Quinnipiac poll asked how the state should balance the budget. The results showed support for fiscally conservative solutions. Seventy-five percent of respondents said they supported a wage freeze for state workers, 68 percent said they would rather cut services than raise taxes, and 61 percent backed public sector layoffs.

Christie inherited a nearly \$11 billion deficit when he took office and proposed a tough prescription of fiscal discipline, consistent with his campaign and the will of the voters. He resisted the tax hikes that previous governors had tried to close the chronically out of balance state budget. Instead he proposed that state workers contribute 1.5 percent into their health plans -- up from zero -- matched by a pay freeze and a property tax cap.

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But what's clear in the Garden State, as in so many others, is that the time for gamesmanship and fear-mongering is over. We cannot pass the buck to another administration, let alone another generation. State governments must learn to live within their means, just like the citizens they represent.

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