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## In Case You Missed It: N.J. Gov. Chris Christie opens NGA meeting with censure of public-sector unions

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By Dan Balz

The Washington Post

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BOSTON -- Republican New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie blasted public employee unions here Friday, arguing that states must scale back scheduled pay increases and health benefits for state workers to avoid a long-term fiscal crisis.

Christie used the opening press conference at the summer meeting of the National Governors Association to bring a battle he has been waging in his state to a national forum.

With state budgets wrecked by the recession, governors and legislators in some states have begun to confront the sizeable long-term liabilities of public employee contracts.

Christie, who was elected last November and faced an \$11 billion deficit, said it's time for significant changes in the compensation and benefits of public employees. "The public-sector unions need to become part of the shared sacrifice and they're refusing to," Christie said.

Other governors have taken steps recently to confront the unions. In California, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R), who is dealing with huge budgetary problems, has taken the lead by renegotiating contracts with several smaller unions in an effort to reduce long-term obligations to public-sector employees.

Christie said private-sector unionized workers in his state are enduring high rates of unemployment while being asked to pay higher property taxes to fund, in part, salary increases and free health care for public sector employees.

"Should there be one specialized sector of our society that is sheltered from the recession?" Christie said to reporters at the statehouse in Boston. "My view is they shouldn't be. I'm not asking them to do any more than the private sector folks have already been enduring for the last 18 months or so."

Christie's new budget includes reforms for future public-sector employees and he said he and legislators have agreed to take on the issue of the costs for current employees between now and this fall. "The time has come to bend the benefit curve," he said.

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