



In Case You Missed It - New York Post - 'We Have No Choice'

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By Governor Chris Christie

New York Post

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Adapted from Gov. Chris Christie's remarks to about 200 mayors at a meeting of the New Jersey League of Municipalities.

When I started in office, I had to close a \$2.3 billion shortfall in the \$29 billion annual budget -- and only \$14 billion was left. Of that \$14 billion, \$8 billion could not be touched -- because of contracts with public-worker unions, bond covenants and commitments the state made in accepting federal stimulus money.

We had to find a way to save \$2.3 billion in a \$6 billion pool of money. The treasurer's office presented me with 378 possible freezes and lapses to balance the budget; I accepted 375 of them.

While public pay booms, private-sector work is tough to find: Waiting to speak to recruiters at a Rutgers job fair earlier this year.

There's a great deal of discussion about me doing that by executive action. Every day that went by was a day where money was going out the door such that the \$6 billion pool was getting less and less. Something needed to be done -- and the people didn't send me here to talk; they sent me here to do.

As we look ahead three weeks to my fiscal year 2011 budget address, you all need to understand the context from which we operate.

Our citizens are already the most overtaxed in America. You mayors know that the public appetite for ever-increasing taxes has reached an end.

So we're going to reduce spending at the state level -- because we have no choice.

We also have an obligation to work with the Legislature to give mayors the tools to reduce spending at the municipal level. The pension and benefit reform package just passed in the Senate is only a beginning. We need to change the rules of arbitration to level the playing field. The ever-increasing raises being given to public-sector workers as a result of the arbitration system tells us that.

By the same token, I'm tired of hearing superintendents and school-board members complain that there are no other options than raising property taxes. There are other options.

After a two-year negotiation, Marlboro gave teachers a five-year contract with 4.5 percent annual salary increases -- with zero contribution to health-care benefits. Yet I'm sure there are people in Marlboro who've lost their jobs, who've had their homes foreclosed on, who can't keep a roof over their family's head.

There's something wrong.

At some point, there has to be parity between what's happening in the real world, and what's happening in the public-sector world. The money doesn't grow on trees outside government buildings. It comes from the hardworking people of our communities who are hurting right now.

In this instance, the political class (of which all of us here are members) is lagging behind the public. The public is ready to hear that tough choices have to be made.

They're not going to like it. But they're tired of hearing, "Don't worry. I can spare you from the pain." They've been hearing that for a decade, as we have borrowed and spent and taxed our way into oblivion.

State government has done every quick fix in the book. Now we're left holding the bag.

All of you know in your heart that what I am saying is true. You know that we can't afford these raises that are being given to public employees of all stripes. You know the state can't continue to spend money it doesn't have. And you know that the appetite for tax increases among our constituents has come to an end.

So the path to reform and success is clear. We just have to have the courage to go there.

What we're doing is showing people that government can work again for them, not for us. It has worked for the political class for much too long.

There's no time left. We have no room left to borrow. We have no room left to tax.

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Forget about the next election, the next newspaper editorial, the next angry letter or phone call from someone who wants something for nothing. It's time for us to show courage and resolve.

We can do it -- because we are from New Jersey. And I have never, in all my travels around the country, met a group of tougher people.

Chris Christie is New Jersey's governor.

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