



Home | Newsroom | Media | Administration | NJ's Priorities | Contact Us

Press Releases | Public Addresses | Executive Orders | Press Kit | Reports

Home > Newsroom > Press Releases > 2010 > Audio and Transcript of Governor Christie's Remarks Regarding "Race to the Top"

Audio and Transcript of Governor Christie's Remarks Regarding "Race to the Top"

Wednesday, August 25, 2010 • Tags: [Education](#)

AUDIO

Audio is available on Governor Christie's website: <http://www.state.nj.us/governor/news/videos/2010/approved/20100825b.html>.

TRANSCRIPT

Star-Ledger, Matt Friedman: Governor, on the Race to the Top funds regarding the 4.8 point mistake, I was wondering if there is a review of how this mistake was made? Are you expecting to, are there going to be any repercussions, is anyone's job at risk? And I was also wondering who ultimately is responsible?

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: First of all I'm ultimately responsible for everything that happens here, I'm the Governor, so I'm ultimately responsible. Let me get through it quickly from my perspective. Obviously, a clerical mistake was made that's what it was and I want you all to have some understanding of the scope of this issue. This is our Race to the Top application, the piece of paper that was included in error was one sheet of paper. In a over one thousand page application, 300 pages of application 700 of appendixes, there was one piece of paper placed in error in that application. It asked for a comparison of 2008 to 2009 numbers, it was placed in there as a comparison between 2010 and 2011 numbers, one piece of paper. That is the responsibility of the DOE for having put the wrong piece of paper in. I'm not going to fire somebody over this, this was a simple clerical error in putting together an application of this size.

Am I happy about it? Of course not. The commissioner isn't happy about it and the folks who are responsible aren't happy about it either. But let's get to the next step. When you are a reviewer in Washington, D.C. and you flip to that page in this application and it says '08 '09 numbers are requested and you see '10 & 11, if you are a normal, thinking, breathing human being you pick up the phone and say 'Hey, you sent this one wrong paper, can we get the information?' or if you are really concerned about what the information is, it's available on the Treasury website for '08 & '09 and you can look it up yourself. But then we went even further, when we went in for the personal interview, two weeks before the decision was made they raised the issue with us. Commissioner Schundler gave them the 08 & 09 numbers two weeks before the decision was made. And the 08 - 09 comparison supports us getting the full number of points under that. This is the stuff, candidly, that drives people crazy about government and crazy about Washington. The first part of it is the mistake of putting the wrong piece of paper in. It drives people crazy and, believe me, I'm not thrilled about it. But the second part is, does anybody in Washington, D.C. have a lick of common sense? Pick up the phone and ask us for the number. When you look at how well this application scored 51 points better that the Corzine administration application that was done in January.

Great scores on reforms, an incredible job done by the DOE. You're not going to grant the award to New Jersey because of a mistake, a clerical mistake, on one piece of paper? That's the stuff that drives people nuts about government and that's the stuff the Obama administration should answer for. Are you guys just down there checking boxes like mindless drones, or are you thinking? Because what you want to have happen is a firestorm of reform of our education system in New Jersey and across the country. Obviously, the answer is they just want to check the boxes. We're the victim of that now and our administration bears responsibility for that because we put the wrong piece of paper in. The money that was supposed to be being spend on education, was being spent on education and it should have gotten us five points on that, the people of New Jersey paid for that. When the president comes back to New Jersey, he's going to have to explain to the people of the state of New Jersey why he's depriving them of \$400 million that this application earned. Because one of his bureaucrats in Washington couldn't pick up the phone and ask a question, couldn't go on the internet and find information, or wouldn't accept the verbal representation of commissioner Schundler when they were down there.

So, no I'm not going to fire anybody over this. I'm not happy about it, I wish it would have been different but in the end,

Stay Connected with Social Media



Stay Connected with Email Alerts

LIKE THIS PAGE? SHARE IT WITH YOUR FRIENDS.



can we all use a little common sense? In an application of this size, it just doesn't make any sense to me. We'll take the responsibility we need to take for putting one wrong piece of paper in a thousand page application and I take that responsibility because I'm the Governor, the commissioner takes that responsibility but if you think for a minute, that I'm going to fire some mid-level person at DOE who is putting this application together, because they put one wrong piece of paper in, then you don't know me. That person doesn't deserve that treatment, I'm not even going to give you that person's name because they don't deserve to be called out in that way. I'm taking responsibility, commissioner Schundler's taking responsibility and I'm not going to allow anybody to be scapegoated over this. You want to take shots? Take shots at me.

Reporter: Governor, how much of a setback to education reform efforts is not getting these funds

GOVERNOR: "We would all like more money in education in these difficult times in New Jersey, so obviously I'm disappointed by that. But in terms of reform, the entire legislature supported, through resolution the reforms that are contained in here and so we intend to move forward with education reform this fall and so we intend to move forward with educational reform this fall and if the legislature was serious about what they said and they are committed to these reforms and it wasn't just about the money, then it shouldn't set us back at all and I will make sure that we make the commitment to find the money necessary to institute those reforms. So it's going to be a test to see whether they were really serious about what they said they were going to do when they passed that resolution supporting our application and the leaders of the legislature signed the letter saying they support the reforms in the application. Because you know what, education in New Jersey needs to be reformed. It needs accountability. The president of the United States said himself that the entire goal of race to the top was to have some measure of accountability to make sure we are seeing results in the classroom and that the goal of the race to the top program is accountability. Well, I want to bring that to New Jersey too. And so I hope it won't set us back very far except for the fact that we won't have the money now to - the 400 million dollars. That's certainly a setback but it's not a fatal setback in my mind.

Question: [Inaudible]

GOVERNOR: No, it was a totally separate section. The only changes that were made in, because of our conflict with the NJEA were in Section D which was the great teachers and leaders section. That had nothing to do with this section. It was a totally different section. That part of the application was done and was never changed and so it had nothing to do with the change in the application. And since you brought up the change in the application Dusty, let's point something out about that. We scored 51 points higher this time than the Corzine generated application in January. And specifically in the great teachers and leaders section which is the place I insisted on us sticking true to our principles on reform. We were up 23 points over the Corzine Administration application. If we had watered down those reforms we wouldn't have gotten those 23 points. An NJEA endorsement was worth 14 points so net, net we would have been nine points to the worse if we had gone the way the NJEA wanted us to go. The other way to look at that is this. In places like Florida and New York and Ohio - you know why they got the money? Because their teachers unions supported meaningful reforms. If the teachers union had supported meaningful reforms in this state, we wouldn't be having to have this conversation about a one sheet piece of paper and 4.8 points, because we would have gotten 14 points for the NJEA endorsement and we would have been way over the top and not at number 11 but somewhere closer to the middle of the pack. So you know, I'm here taking responsibility for the one piece of paper that we messed up. I wonder if you walk across the street if they'll take responsibility for not doing what their brethren in New York and Florida and Ohio did and what the President's urged them to do which is accept accountability for what happens in their classrooms. I wonder if they are going to accept responsibility for that. I probably have to pay them to accept responsibility because that's all the teachers union ever responds to.

Question: The democrats were all over this. They were calling this inexcusable and incompetence. Those sorts of ...

GOVERNOR: It's unfortunate that they are unwilling to be team players in this and that they decide they want to be partisan because all of this is partisan claptrap. They don't, I bet you that the people who put out those press releases don't even know what the real story is beyond what they saw in the newspaper this morning. They don't even know that it's one piece of paper in a thousand page application. They don't know that we verbally gave this information to the Administration. They've had some tough times, the real partisans in the legislature. Now there's a lot of people who are not partisan in the legislature and they've worked with us. But the real partisans in the legislature, they've had a tough time. They're looking for a day where they can kind of jump on my back, have a party, jump on my back and have a good time. I've got broad shoulders. They should in my opinion, if they really want to help New Jersey, they should be writing letters today to the Secretary of Education and to the President of the United States asking them to explain how form won over substance in Race to the Top. And how a democratic administration who says that they want accountability - that our goal in Race to the Top is accountability - Then how is it that they are not standing up with me and saying that this is a ridiculous exercise of form over substance. The reason they're not Jim is for those people who are saying these things, you know, they only want to score political points. I'm not making excuses. I'm standing up here and taking responsibility for what happened. I'm sure you all know that I didn't proofread this, all 1,000 pages, but I'm the Governor and I have to accept responsibility for things that are done in my administration and a mistake was made. But a mistake was made that could have been fixed by DOE if Washington picked up the phone and called on us, by them going on the internet if they were so concerned about the '08 - '09 numbers to see it, or when we gave them the numbers two weeks before saying - oh, well those numbers work because they do. We spend the second most per capita of any state in America.

Question: [Inaudible]

GOVERNOR: During that interview this issue was raised and Commissioner Schundler gave them, in the interview, the numbers for '08 – '09 because the mistake was raised. But they still didn't give us the credit for the points. So what are we talking about? Are you more concerned about whether in '08 – '09 we were spending a sufficient amount of money in education which clearly we were because we spend the second most per capita in America. Or are you worried about whether your bureaucratic head could get around the fact that the box wasn't checked appropriately the first time. So for Democrats in New Jersey now, who want to make hay over this, go ahead. Have a party. What the people of New Jersey are concerned about are results and bipartisanship in getting things done. They want to play partisan games, they can use all the adjectives they want, get out their thesaurus. I'm sure there will be some that they haven't even used in their lives that they'll use today. That's fine. Let them do it. I have very broad shoulders. I said when we talked about the labor EO a number of months ago. When I signed that labor union EO regarding contributions that was overturned by the court. I said I never promised the people of New Jersey that this would be a mistake free administration. I never said that we would bat 1000. I never said that we would never make a mistake. In a government this size mistakes are going to be made. What matters are you going to stand up and be accountable for them and are you going to put in to affect policies that will prevent them from happening again. I was on the phone with Commissioner Schundler this morning and for any further applications of this nature we are going to have two people run over the check list of the appendix rather than one. There was one person that ran of the checklist in the appendix and we didn't have somebody check that person's work. From now on applications of this size, we are going to have two people - One person who does it and does the first checklist and then have a redundant checklist thereafter to make sure that no mistakes were made. That's the lesson that that we've learned from this. We are going to do that going forward. It doesn't fix the problem that happened but for democrats to jump on this just shows you how devoid of ideas and leadership they are. If this is their big day, if this is their big day Jim – then that's why I won the election last year and that's why they should really just get back here and get back to work on substance.

NJN, Jim Hooker: Did you hear the NJEA comment on this yesterday? They were – on pretty much the fallout of the communication between you and the education commissioner.

GOVERNOR: It's stunning Jim, for me. To come to the conclusion after reading that, that they had no idea what they were talking about. But they don't care, because they just talk off the talking points, and that's why the public ignores the NJEA now, because they are – what this application proves by the way, if we had gotten the credit for those four points, is that the NJEA is irrelevant. Because without their support we would have gotten the race to the top money. And so their comments are – candidly, they're asinine. Because the section of the application which concerns this document was done and was never changed because of the change I ordered commissioner Schundler to make. It was in a completely different section, in a completely different part of the appendix. And so, when you're the NJEA, failing along trying to find something to say, that's the kind of stuff you do. But that doesn't really bother me at the end because until they decide that they want to be accountable for what goes on in the classroom, until they decided that they want to be part of the solution and not part of the problem, I will continue to consider them irrelevant.

Associated Press, Beth DeFalco: You said that a couple of weeks ago there was a verbal correction, is there any way to go back to the administration and ask – any kind of appeal process?

GOVERNOR: They don't allow for any kind of an appeal process, but in talking with commissioner Schundler today, on of the things that came out was that there is \$100 million dollars left over that they did not allocate from the original race to the top money that they said yesterday. So I asked commissioner Schundler to write a letter to commissioner – secretary of education to say, given this type of clerical error and the strength of our application in the other way, is there a possibility for that \$100 million that still exists, left over to be rewarded in this way. There is nothing the process that allows for that, but there is no harm in asking and I asked the commissioner to do that this morning. Because in the end, I do believe that secretary Duncan, in my conversations with him, wants to encourage reforms, of education systems around the country, and if he really is true to that, and there is nothing else involved here, I would hope that he would be willing to give it a second look. But in the end if he doesn't do it, then we will have to move forward with are reforms anyways.

Reporter John: Governor, speak to another shortcoming that was cited by the reviewers by the lack of support from no just unions, but by local districts. If we had had local districts participating, and they question whether this —

GOVERNOR: Well you know first of all, we had much more support that the Corzine application had the first time around. And so, I am proud of that. You know when you look at the support we had for this application it is of significantly over the Corzine report. And I have some numbers here. 387 of New Jersey's LEA supported us in this regard, that is the local education associations. That's 59% of local education associations in New Jersey. And 1,626 of our schools endorsed the application. This is a significant increase over the first round. But in the end that lack of support John, is at the feet of the NJEA, not at the feet of the administration. Because you can see from the application that if had abandoned merit pay, abandoned meaningful teacher evaluations, abandoned tenure reform as the school unions were demanded of us. We wouldn't have even been on the ballgame. We would have been down in the last third. We wouldn't have been 11th. And so that was my point all along. I was unwilling to compromise the principles of real reform for any amount of money. Not for \$00 million or anything else. And what this application process proves is,

that the teacher's union approach would have been destructive to our ability to get this money. And the approach we took was the right approach to take. So I wish we hadn't made that one mistake, I really do, I would have had a much different press conference today if we hadn't made that one mistake. But you know, the fact is we have to live with what we have to live with. And I do think that everybody should start asking some questions of the Obama administration also. You have a follow up.

Reporter John: Yeah, one of the things that has come up is that a lot of these states have either elections coming up in the fall, or are Eastern Democratic states. Do you want to speak to that at all?

GOVERNOR: You'll have to ask the Obama administration if Ram Emanuel had a check box on this application. There wasn't one that was evident. But I don't know, and I certainly don't want to impugn anybody's motives in this, with no evidence, and I won't do that. I observed that as well when I was looking at the state's that got it. But I don't want to draw any conclusions to that, I think it would be inappropriate to do that. If you want to ask them, then ask them.

Reporter: With the loss of this money, what are you anticipating ---

GOVERNOR: Well first of all, we did not anticipate receiving this funding. And it is not a part of our budget, and we certainly were not anticipating it for FY 12. So it's not like this creates a hole. This would have been an add on to what we are doing at the state level already. And we all would have loved to have, but now we are not going to have it. So the tough choices will be dictated by a number of things. What are revenue picture continues to be in the state. Now in July we hit are targets for revenue. I am hoping we can continue to do that. If we can that will be helpful. Second, it's going to be all about what are the teacher's unions willing to do in the second year now. They have now seen that their greedy and self-interest has caused job loss. They've now, and parents are now going to see, that because of the unwillingness of the unions to take a pay freeze, and contribute to their health benefits, we now have fewer teacher in New Jersey than we did before. Because we can't print money here in New Jersey. So we can only spend what we have. And because of their unwillingness to be part of the solution, they have watched a number of their colleagues pack their boxes, leave, and not come back in September. And so I am hoping that will happen is that they'll change their minds. That they'll decide to be part of the solution and than be the cause of the problem. And if they do, that is going to give us more flexibility to do some things as well. And we are always looking, and commissioner Schundler is looking, and we already have begun to lay out what the process will be for fiscal year 12. So look for ways, we'll work with Senator Ruiz in Senate, and Assemblyman Diegnan in the Assembly, to look for new ways to be inventive and creative to create reforms in New Jersey and finding a way to fund it.

[....]

Star-Ledger, Matt Friedman: Have you talked to any of the state's congressional delegation, the senators, about the funds, about this one little error, about maybe putting some political pressures now on the Obama Administration?

GOVERNOR: Well, no, Matt. I mean I literally found out about this as you all did. I got a call from Secretary Duncan yesterday afternoon at about 12:15. So that's when I found out about it. And, no I was not working on this yesterday and I, certainly at that point, we still did not have a complete handle on exactly all the reasons why. We didn't even have the scoring at that point, we got that a little later in the afternoon as you did when the department of education released that to the public. So we've been looking at this yesterday afternoon, last night.

And listen, if it helps, if they are listening out there Senator Menendez, Senator Lautenberg, members of the congressional delegation want to call the President and call on Secretary Duncan, this will be a good test. You know, do you want to be partisan or do you want to be pro-New Jersey? Now, if you want to be pro-New Jersey then you stand up and say "come on, this is ridiculous and defies common sense. So let's make a change here and let's get back on track and let's get some money to New Jersey so we can help to fuel these reforms that we want to make."

If you want to be partisan you'll see more of what Jim [Hooker] was reading off of his blackberry from democratic members of congress. Oh, this is an awful mistake, it's Armageddon. I see the front page of the ledger this morning and thought it was VE day. You know, it's kind of silly. It's not to minimize the fact that we should have done a better job on that one piece of paper, okay? But I wanted you all to see the application so you had some measure of the scope of this and the ridiculousness of bureaucratic Washington, DC. And they wonder why across the country the voters are in revolt? This is why. This is why they're in revolt. Stuff like this where they say to themselves, "Does anybody think down there? Does anybody have common sense about what we should be doing? IS anybody allowed to make a clerical mistake anymore?"

I mean, I could understand if we hadn't spent the money of the people of the state of New Jersey to try to have a top flight education system, then we deserve to have the points deducted. But we spend the second most per capita in America on K-12 education. And because a mid level person at DOE put the wrong sheet of paper, one sheet of paper, in these two binders, you're going to deny the people of new jersey \$400 million, by the way of their tax money, are you kidding?

This is the stuff that makes people go nuts, this is the reason why people want to throw everybody the hell out of congress, this is why people are angry at the President of the United States, because of this kind of stuff. This kind of foolishness, this kind of lack of common sense. And it angers me too. And so, I'll take my responsibility for this government making a one page mistake in a 1,000 page document, if we can hope to see at some point the president or the secretary stand up and say, "I apologize to the people of New Jersey for the bureaucrats in the department of education abandoning simple common sense on something like this."

So, you know, I understand the partisan stuff will come now. I get it. I know how this town works and boy the democrats have just been waiting ,those partisan democrats have just been waiting to do a little pile on. So ok, have the dog pile, pile on for a little while. And then let's move on because we got business to do.

And if they really want to be part of the solution, they want to be pro New Jersey rather than pro-partisan, then they should all get on the phone today, get their pens working on letter to secretary Duncan to say, "come on, Arne. Let's get with it." You know, are you gonna reward form over substance, or are you really going to want to make New Jersey one of the examples in the country of reforming an education system that is so ill-serving so many of our communities, especially our urban communities, that you know its driving people to despair and a lack of hope. And stuff like this doesn't help. So I thank you all very much.

###

Press Contact:
Kevin Roberts
609-777-2600



Statewide: [NJ Home](#) | [Services A to Z](#) | [Departments/Agencies](#) | [FAQs](#)
Office of the Governor: [Home](#) | [Newsroom](#) | [Media](#) | [Administration](#) | [NJ's Priorities](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Copyright © State of New Jersey, 1996-2012
Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000

[Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Legal Statement & Disclaimers](#) | [Accessibility Statement](#) | 