



In Case You Missed It: Video & Transcript of Governor Christie's Interview with Jake Tapper on ABC's 'This Week'

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GOVERNOR CHRIS CHRISTIE ON ABC'S THIS WEEK

FULL TRANSCRIPT

JAKE TAPPER: And joining me now is someone who also knows from budget challenges, New Jersey's Republican governor, Chris Christie. Governor, thank you so much. Welcome to "This Week."

GOVERNOR CHRIS CHRISTIE: I'm happy to be here.

TAPPER: So, Governor, your victory last November in the very blue state of New Jersey was heralded by Republicans nationally, seen as a blueprint for their victories. Now, a lot of Republicans who wanted you to win and admired your campaign said that you won mainly by criticizing incumbent Democratic Governor Corzine, not necessarily by a specific, detailed agenda.

And I'm wondering if, first of all, you agree with that. And, second of all, how do you see your victory in the context of what Republicans can do this November?

CHRISTIE: Well, first off, Jake, I think what we did in New Jersey last year was say very specifically what direction we wanted to take the state in. We said we wanted to have less spending, smaller government, lower taxes, and commonsense regulation that was going to help to grow private-sector jobs.

And so I didn't go line item by line item through the budget during a campaign, and I didn't think it was the right thing to do.

Now, in terms of what it tells us going forward, I think Republicans across the country need to get back to our brand, and I think that is the Republican brand. It's why I became a Republican: less government, lower taxes, less spending, and commonsense regulation that grows private-sector jobs.

And so I think if my win tells anything, it means if we get back to basics as Republicans, then we speak to some of the concerns people have in New Jersey and across the country.

TAPPER: You know, the biggest item on your agenda so far has been dealing with the budget and the huge deficit in New Jersey. Here you are on CNBC.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

CHRISTIE: We passed a budget that cuts \$11 billion from our state's budget, balances it without any new tax increases on the people of the state of New Jersey.

(END VIDEO CLIP) TAPPER: Now, Patrick Murray, director of polling at Monmouth University, says, quote, "That's a nice talking point, but it's absolutely untrue. There are a lot of legal obligations that the state has that the governor just simply ignored." And the Star-Ledger reported, "Budget analysts say the \$11 billion deficit was closed largely by avoiding massive costs. The budget skipped a \$3.1 billion payment to the pension fund, continuing a decade-long pattern Christie had criticized, and did not pay \$1.7 billion to schools under the state's formula for education aid."

So these billions that you're not funding, are you doing this just by executive fiat? How does this work? Because they're legal obligations, right?

CHRISTIE: No, listen, the legislature passed this budget. The budget I presented on March 16th has \$11 billion in less spending than was projected to be done through the Corzine administration.

And so Patrick Murray is a pollster, and he's OK as a pollster, but he's not going to be all that great as a governor, because what we did here was we took \$1.7 billion less in education funding. Well, a billion of that was federal stimulus money that had been spent in one year by the Corzine administration, and we were left with \$1 billion hole. Really what we did was we reduced it by about \$820 million in educational spending.

Across the board, Jake, we had to reduce spending. Every department of state government was cut. And so there are going to be some cuts you make you like and some that you like less, but when you have an \$11 billion hole to fill, you have to fill it.

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Finally, on pensions, I wasn't going to put \$3 billion into a failing pension system. We need pension reform. I passed some already for new hires in March, and now this fall we're going to go after current employees and pension reform and health benefit reform because we're going broke.

TAPPER: Now, one -- in that clip, you said that there were no new tax increases on people of the state of New Jersey, but also your budget did not fund \$1 billion in direct property tax rebates, the homestead rebate. That means that people's property taxes are going to go up.

CHRISTIE: Well, no, what we did, Jake, was we did a couple of things. First, we changed it from a property tax rebate program to a direct credit. We spent about \$20 million a year in processing these checks and borrowing the money to send out to people. We've eliminated that.

And what we did was we skipped three-quarters of that payment in the current fiscal year as part of the shared sacrifice that everybody was going to have to make. I wasn't going to cut just programs for the vulnerable; I wasn't going to cut just programs for the rich, but programs for the middle class. Everything had to be cut.

But that program will be back as a direct tax credit in the fourth quarter of fiscal '11.

TAPPER: Now, that shared sacrifice -- I mean, is that not a tax increase, even if it's a -- I mean, if you're -- if you're taking away a tax rebate, even temporarily, that's a tax increase, isn't it?

CHRISTIE: No, I don't -- I don't see it that way. And in addition, what we did was we're giving the tools now to municipalities with a 2 percent property tax cap that we passed this July by me calling the legislature back into special session and with the tools that we're going to be passing this fall for them to cut spending even more at the municipal level so that people are not going to see a huge increase over the course of the next four years in their property taxes at all.

TAPPER: OK, there's been a lot of tension between you and teachers, as you've been wielding your budget ax. Here's one example from a recent town hall meeting.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

(UNKNOWN): You're not compensating me for my education and you're not compensating me for my experience. That's...

CHRISTIE: Well, you know what? Then you don't have to do it.

(UNKNOWN): Teachers do it because they love it. That's the only reason I do it.

CHRISTIE: That's good. Well, then -- well, and you -- and, listen, and teachers go into knowing what the pay scale is.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: I know you said your issue is with teachers' unions and not with individual teachers, but what do you say to residents of your state who say that they like your stance on taking on the teachers' unions, but a clip like that makes it seem like you don't really respect the teaching profession.

CHRISTIE: Well, I do respect the teaching profession. I'm a product of the public schools in the state of New Jersey, and I care deeply about our public education.

But here's what we can't have any longer: We can't have one sector of our society sheltered from the ravages of the recession at the cost to the people who have been hurt by the recession the most.

For instance, the building trade unions in our state, they have unemployment at 35 percent to 50 percent. They're getting no raises. They're getting no benefits any longer, yet their property taxes continue to go up to pay for 4 percent and 5 percent salary increases demanded by the teachers' unions in a 0 percent inflation world and that most of the teachers in New Jersey, because of their unions, pay nothing towards their health benefits from the day they're hired until the day they die.

Now, I have to tell you, Jake, we can't have one set of rules for one small sector -- the public sector unions -- and a different set of rules for everyone who's being hurt by this recession and say that those people are being hurt the most by the recession. By the way, you pay for this special treatment.

I mean, now, that may be tough talk to people, and it's direct, but candidly, that's what we have to do if we want to get budgets under control in New Jersey and around the country.

TAPPER: You're -- you've been known in the statehouse and nationally for a blunt style. Here's an example of that.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

CHRISTIE: 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.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: That's a high bar, so let's do it. Directly, straightly, bluntly, should New Jersey join the lawsuit that other states have filed against the Obama administration over the individual mandate in the health care reform bill?

CHRISTIE: I have both my attorney general and my commissioner of health studying two things: first, what are the chances of succeeding in the lawsuit? Because with limited resources in New Jersey, I'm not going to throw good money after bad. And, secondly, what's the effect of this 2,000-page bill going to be on the people of New Jersey? When I get answers back from them, I'll make a decision.

TAPPER: What's your impulse?

CHRISTIE: I don't have an impulse. I'm waiting to get briefed on it.

TAPPER: Immigration reform. You've said this issue is too important to demagogue. Who is demagogue-ing in the Senate right now? And what is the solution to immigration reform?

CHRISTIE: Well, first of all, on demagoguing, I wasn't talking about anything that's going on now. That's a 2-year-old quote, and there were some things going on in New Jersey at the time while I was U.S. attorney that I thought was demagoguery, and I called it that.

Listen, this issue is a federal issue that should be handled by the feds and should be fixed finally. As a former United States attorney, I had to deal with these issues for seven years, and we simply didn't have the resources to deal with them effectively.

So the president and the Congress have to step up to the plate, they have to secure our borders, and they have to put forward a commonsense path to citizenship for people.

And until they do that, states are going to struggle all over the country with this problem, and so is federal law enforcement, who doesn't have the resources to do it effectively.

TAPPER: Is the Republican Party in Congress been a help or hindrance to that cause for immigration reform?

CHRISTIE: I think it depends on which Republican you're talking about. I don't think the party has had a generalized stance. I think there's been, you know, folks who have been all over the map on this issue. And, candidly, I don't think there's one general Republican position.

TAPPER: Well, there are Democrats offering a bill, and they can't -- they can't get any Republicans to join them.

CHRISTIE: Well, listen, the fact of the matter is that they have to find a way to build consensus. And I think that's what the president said he wanted to do when he came to town, and I think that's the challenge for those who are in the majority: find a way to build consensus.

That's what I've been doing in New Jersey, Jake. We have a Democratic legislature. I've passed a budget with those \$11 billion in cuts with a Democratic legislature, a property tax cap with a Democratic legislature, pension reforms with a Democratic legislature.

If you want to lead and build consensus, you can, and it's on the obligation of those people in charge to build consensus.

TAPPER: Two more quick questions. One, the stimulus bill. Net positive for New Jersey or negative?

CHRISTIE: I think short-term positive, and we're now feeling the negative.

TAPPER: Lastly, I know you like to talk about New Jersey's cultural icons. You prefer to talk about Springsteen, but the New York Times today has this profile of Snooki from "Jersey Shore."

CHRISTIE: Sure.

TAPPER: MTV's "Jersey Shore," positive for New Jersey or negative?

CHRISTIE: Negative for New Jersey, I mean, because it -- what it does is it takes a bunch of New Yorkers, who are -- most of the people on "Jersey Shore" are New Yorkers -- takes a bunch of New Yorkers, drops them at the Jersey shore, and tries to make America feel like this is New Jersey.

I could tell people, they want to know what New Jersey really is? I welcome them to come to New Jersey any time. The Jersey shore is a beautiful place, and it's a place that everybody should come on vacation this summer. We've got another six weeks or so of summer left. Come to New Jersey.

TAPPER: Governor Christie, thanks so much for -- for sharing your views.

CHRISTIE: Thank you, Jake.

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