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In Case You Missed It: Video & Transcripts from Monday's Press Conference Announcing Newark Mayor Cory Booker's Endorsement of Governor Christie's Cap 2.5 Reform Agenda

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Part 1 - Governor Christie: Cap 2.5 Newark

LT. GOVERNOR GUADAGNO: Good morning everybody. My name is Kim Guadagno, I'm the Lieutenant Governor of the state of New Jersey. Welcome to Newark. It is my pleasure to be next door to Ms. Eva's house and Ms. Debbie's house. A site of community activism where people have worked very, very hard to make their communities a little bit better. I'm proud to be a part of a team today and to introduce to you a team. Working together we are going to put a cap on your property taxes. Let me introduce you right now to the Governor of the State of New Jersey, Chris Christie.

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: Hey everybody, good morning. Thank you for being here. Ms. Eva, thank you so much for letting us come and invade your space this morning and I'm happy to be here to talk about Cap 2.5 this morning. It doesn't matter where you live in New Jersey; whether you live in one of our cities like here in Newark or in Patterson or Passaic or Atlantic City or Camden or Trenton. Or whether you live in one of our suburbs like Mendham, where I come from, or Monmouth Beach where Kim is from - all across the state people understood that property taxes have been completely out of control and we need to reign in local government and reign in the property taxes on a permanent basis. We have seen Republicans and Democrats both come up with quick fixes for the property tax problem, one rebate program after another, senior freeze, property tax rebates - especially for seniors, for the disabled, and for regular folks. And what happens is, Trenton pays those rebates for a while and then when budget times get tough, they can't pay them. And property taxes continue to go up - 70% in the last ten years in New Jersey and that's the tax that you have to pay regardless of how much money you have in the bank, regardless of whether you are working or not working, because if you don't pay it you lose your home. And it is a tax that is driving people from the state of New Jersey and we have to stop it. And we have to stop it permanently and we can no longer count on the politicians to fix the problem because both parties have failed us in that regard.

So this is not a partisan issue and I think this morning is another indication that this is not another partisan issue. Mayor Booker and I have worked together for a long time. We worked together when I was U.S. Attorney and he ran for mayor the first time in 2002 and we worked at the U.S. Attorney's office to ensure that that was a fair election where everybody got to vote without the threat of violence or coercion or any cheating. And his campaign worked with us as did Mayor James' campaign to try to ensure that would happen. Then in 2006 when he was elected Mayor, he came to see me right after his election and said that he needed help on the crime issue and he needed federal help right away and we stood up and we partnered together and I think that you've seen some of the results of the small amount of effort that we helped to start on the federal level but of the extraordinary effort that Mayor Booker has put into trying to make Newark a safer place again.

And now we stand together on the issue of property taxes and we do because we both know that Government needs to be put under control and that the people should decide about their property taxes, no longer the politicians. And that's why I want a constitutional amendment to cap property taxes at 2.5%. And that the only exceptions will be for the city to pay their debt service and for you all, if you want, to vote for higher property taxes. Because you're the only ones that will be able to raise your property taxes any longer. No mayor, no counsel, will be able to raise your property taxes above 2.5%, only you would be able to do it. Now I know that there are professional politicians in Trenton that don't like the idea of giving up that power. They want to have the power to raise your property taxes. They want to have the power to decide how your money is spent. And they've been a miserable failure for 30 years, and that's why we sit in the position we sit in today - the highest property taxes in America.

And so I am really gratified that Mayor Booker would reach across party lines with me to do this together. Because this isn't about Republican or Democrat or Independent. It's not about what city you live in, what section of the state. It is about making our state an economic engine again. It's about being fair to the people of every age, senior citizens who have raised their families in a home and want to stay there. Young couples who want to buy their first home but can't because of the property taxes. The middle class folks who have lost their jobs or had their hours cut back, who want to stay in those homes until economic times get better. That's what it's all about. So it's not about any particular class, any particular party, any particular region of the state. It's for everyone in New Jersey and that's why I'm so gratified that Mayor Booker is here today to support out plan. We intend to work with him not only on this but on a variety of other issues that are going to continue recovery of Newark and make it the place that it was when I lived here - from the time I was born till I was five years old. And I'm going to continue to work with Mayor Booker and his administration on all of those things. I want to thank him for his support this morning and I want to introduce my friend, the Mayor of the City of Newark, Cory Booker.

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MAYOR CORY BOOKER: Thank you everybody. I'm going to do a rare prepared remarks. My staff always laughs at me because I hate to read a speech but I'm actually really pleased to be here in the South Ward and I want to give a particular thanks to Ms. Eva, who is a long time Newark activist who has made profound changes in this community and if we had a 2.5 tax cap for the last five years she literally would have saved thousands of dollars for her family and she is one example of the kind of home owner, the kind of senior - even though in the kitchen she wouldn't tell me her age. I'm going to assume she is a senior citizen because she told me she had great grandchildren who we're here to talk about. So we're here to talk about, at least for me and as the Governor reflected - this is an issue bigger than any individual party. It's issues effect residents all over our state, in all 21 counties and is particularly felt here in the city of Newark. We have escalating property taxes and the rising structural cost of government, there eroding the quality of life in our state, affecting the experience of every citizen in every part of New Jersey and I believe that this reality is disproportionately burdening our seniors living on fixed income and more and more people in New Jersey who especially in this economy, are struggling to make ends meet.

Our ever increasing property taxes and uncontrollable government costs are making our state unattractive to businesses, to residents, crowding out local governments', like mine, ability to meet their community's needs and making tax payers throw up their hands in frustration, aggravation and a mounting cynicism about government's ability to solve problems. I hear this in Newark, all over Newark. Painful stories from the Ironbound to Vailsburg, from Forest Hills to Weequahic section, all over the Central Ward - families who are struggling to stay in ancestral homes to maintain their grip on their American dream and families who are seeing their income stagnate, flatten or decline as the cost of living continues rise. These are issues that have haunted Newark, New Jersey and our state for too long. In Newark, taxes have gone up 76% in the last ten years alone. And it's important to point out that there have been good and valiant initiatives aimed at addressing these problems in the past by admirable leaders but they have not been successful. Despite best efforts we have not slain this beast.

The moment for true reform has finally come. So please know, I believe our state has never truly advanced, look at the history of New Jersey with just some of the people, I am a believer that we can only go as far as we as a state are willing to take each other. At this time of trial, challenge, and I believe, unique opportunity, New Jersey cannot get caught in the trap best evidenced by those who too often put forth almost reflexive divisiveness that undermine the unity we need to move forward. The issues before us, as the Governor said in his remarks, will not be solved on the left or the right. This issue is not Republican or Democrat, it is not urban or suburban, north or south, it is not white, black, Latino or an Asian issue. This is a New Jersey issue. This is a challenge to all of us and it effects our common destiny as a state and thus to solve it, it necessitates now more than ever, a greater degree of cooperation.

And so this fundamentally is an opportunity of historic proportions. I believe we stand before a powerful opportunity that if we seize it, will resonate for generations to come. I believe the moment for true reform has finally come. I believe there is an alignment of interest around our state and this is a time when elected leadership from small town mayors, to big city electeds; from new legislative leadership to enduring long time leaders, great leadership around the state, from the town counsels to the State's new executive, we are more and more saying the same thing and especially the public at large. There's not a speech I give around the city of Newark, there's not communities I talk to that the issue more and more of affordability is coming up and therefore we cannot allow this moment, this historic alignment to pass. We cannot afford to allow our state's residents down. I and Chris Christie have had a relationship for a long time. When I became mayor, he and I stood up and worked together to create some of the most historic declines in crime that we had. We didn't stop and talk about who he was appointed by and what our parties were, we got down immediately, in the days before I took office - almost exactly four years ago in the days before I was sworn in, to talk about aggressive plans to come together and make a difference.

Chris Christie, because of him, helped us bring the FBI, the DEA, ICE and other people around the table where there used to not be trust to actually thrust forward and do some significant things that are helping us get double digit percentage shooting reductions in our city. And so I believe central to this debate actually is Governor Chris Christie. Central to all that we're talking about is him. He is our Governor, but as I like to call him more recently, he is the provocateur and chief in the State of New Jersey. No one can accuse this man of being timid and I believe more than ever he has demonstrated guts and focus on an issue that all of New Jersey is interested in. I believe that because of his leadership we are in a position of knowing that it's no longer a question of whether we are going to achieve property tax reform, it's merely how, and how enduring and indelible that reform will ultimately be.

We can see clearly the legislative leadership, as he and I were talking up in the kitchen, in Trenton is moving as well including State Senate President Sweeney and Assemblywoman Speaker Sheila Oliver. They agree, in conversations that I have had with them, on the severity of the problem and the necessity of a strong solution and I am deeply grateful that they are stepping up. While there may be differences in the details, we have arrived at a rare moment of verging consensus in New Jersey and I will not be silent during this moment. Elected leadership and specifically our new leaders in Trenton, I believe, are poised to deal with this problem and I want to make sure that everyone understands where I stand on this issue. And it's important to me that we begin to show that demonstrated unity like today.

And so I stand here with the Governor to endorse two of what I believe are essential elements of tax reform to achieve a new day of New Jersey government. I believe, and this has all been getting lost in the coverage, that essential is the Governor's tool kit to hold down the ever growing cost of government. The tool kit is critical and that we also should have hand in hand - one without the other will not achieve our goals - but that we also should have a hard cap of 2.5 percent and we must have both a tool kit and a cap again, we must simultaneously eliminate the upward pressure that spikes municipal costs - trust me I'm wrestling with those pressures every single day - and we must have the downward pressure of a cap to keep taxes there and stimulate what I call the moral creativity that is essential for change. One again, will not be effective without the other. I want to emphasize the tool kit - arbitration reform, pension reforms, personnel reforms, shared service reform - these things are essential for us in local government to begin to rein in costs and be able to abide by a 2.5 percent cap.

Combined with the imperative provided by the cap, the tool kit will bring about, as I said, the needed moral creativity and the capacity at the municipal level to begin doing those things we all know we need to do. Everyone talks about shared services, but the imperative and the urgency have been lacking. We need a cap to give that urgency and produce creative partnerships amongst governments, amongst non-profits and government, public-private partnerships and

philanthropic innovations like we have been showing are possible here in the city of Newark. Already, as Ms. Eva was reminding me in the kitchen, its those public-private partnerships that are helping to restrain healthcare costs right now in the city of Newark.

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This is a solid and essential beginning to a process and again, I applaud the Governor. Before he was in that office in our mutual conversations, he and I are text messagers like crazy, putting any teenagers in high school to shame - that he and I have been talking about beginning to get these costs in shape in order to create a real effective framework for reform we must establish and unmistakably meaningful cap and I believe, with the Governor, that it should be constitutional and we must enact a tool kit of reforms that go deep and remedy municipal cost burdens.

And even after we pass that two part package, we must go further to continue to address structural problems that persist in growing government costs and taxes in this state. There is no magic bullet, as the Governor and I both believe, we must enact a tool kit of reform now, and in my view, we must move on to undertake deeper reforms that get at the most embedded causes of government increases - from looming healthcare costs to rising utility costs. Another layer of unfunded mandates. Intensive work on shared serves and other creative inter-town strategies must be done. In other words, these cap and tool kit reforms which I stand here to talk about today with the Governor are absolutely necessary and go a long way but we cannot rest on our morals because they are not the end of the story. They are necessary but not fully sufficient. We must build an ever stronger bipartisan ongoing partnership to remedy what fiscally ails our community as a whole.

I want to say again, I am grateful that the Governor is here in Newark. He began his leadership as Governor in this city and he and I, we are going to begin to transform this city. We need to have a bold unfettered partnership in Newark. We need to ignore the invisible lines that separate us and find our common ground. There are issues, as we were talking upstairs, he told me called the small strokes - event within this reform package that he and I may not agree with, but if we allow our disagreements to define us we will lose the common ground that could advance us all forward and that's why I am standing here today. Thank you very much.

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Press Contact
Michael Drewniak
609-777-2600



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Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000

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