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In Case You Missed It: Governor Chris Christie – “Our basic principle is this...parents and children deserve a choice.”

Tuesday, May 4, 2010

Governor Christie was the keynote speaker at the American Federation of Children National Policy Summit Dinner in Washington, D.C. on Monday, May 3, 2010.

Links and transcripts to the four videos produced by NJ.com of the Governor's speech are provided below.

Christie speaks in Washington DC

Posted by Andrew Mills/The Star-Ledger on May 3, 2010 at 11:15 PM

GOVERNOR CHRSTIE:

In New Jersey we say this. With a teachers union collects \$130 million in dues a year from its 200,000 members across our state. In a state that has been dominated politically by a state NJEA in every way an interest group can dominate a legislature and a series of Governors. If we can make this happen in New Jersey over the course of the next four years, there is no excuse for anyone anywhere not to get this done. We're going to lead the way. <Applause>

Our basic principle is this, and I know this is yours, parents and children deserve a choice. Now this a very, very simple straight forward principle that you would think in the abstract, that no one can disagree with. But let's not stop there, let's add the layer onto it, that parents and children who are being failed by a public school system who's cost are exuberant, and who's results are insulting, deserve a choice. <Applause>And you know we don't have to look far around the country from where we are right now to know that voucher programs and experiments in school choice are working that they're producing results. You know here in D.C... <Applause>...D.C. here those in that program are now reading 19 months ahead of their colleagues. Who are outside that program. This isn't a coincidence. We know that it's not a coincidence. We know that there's over five million children trapped in over ten thousand failing public schools around America, and I use the word trapped and I use it directly. They are trapped by an educational bureaucracy. They are trapped by a selfish, self-interested, greedy, school union. That cares more about putting money in their own pockets and in the pockets of members than they care about educating our most vulnerable and needy children around the country. <Applause>

And by those children I mean very clearly, as you know, by 50% of those children that we are talking about are in our largest cities and they do not graduate. 50% of the children in the largest cities in America never graduate from high school. Now in New Jersey, in the city of Newark, We are spending \$24,000 per pupil in public money for an absolutely disgracefully public education system, one that should embarrass our entire state, but because my predecessor was in the pocket of the teachers union <Applause> he was <Applause> I watched it. That's why they spent \$3 million last fall on negative campaign ads against me because they knew that I was going to stand for one simple thing, one simple thing, our children deserve the very best education they can get no matter who is giving it to them and it should not be restricted to public school teachers when a public school union cares more about how much they are paying for their health insurance than they care about whether about our kids in our cities are graduating, that's disgraceful. <Applause>

Chris Christie, a Newarker by birth, recalls his early years in the city

Posted by Andrew Mills The Star-Ledger on May 3, 2010 at 11:19 PM

GOVERNOR CHRSTIE:

I was born in the city of Newark. I was born there in 1962 and I lived there for the first 5 years of my life. And Newark was a very different city back then, in the five years prior to the Newark riots in 1967. And I worked in Newark for the last 7 years before I campaigned for Governor and now serving as Governor working with a United States attorney with my main office there. And I did a lot of visitations to schools as US Attorney around the city of Newark to visit with kids who were being confronted with the struggles of gang violence, drug trafficking, and domestic violence, to talk to them about a different vision and a different hope for them. But what I found when I went to each and every one of these schools were children who were frustrated and when parents were there- parents without hope.

Now, for any of you who have seen the movie The Cartel, another great advertisement for the State of New Jersey, I have lived some of those particular issues. There is an outstanding charter school, there's a number of outstanding charter schools in the city of Newark, but there is one in particular called the Robert Treat Academy. And if you've ever been a witness either on TV or on film or in person to the lottery that's conducted for admission to the Robert Treat Academy, the

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Robert Treat Academy has 4,000 children on the waiting list; 4,000 children on the waiting list. And you watch the lottery in the gymnasium at the Robert Treat Academy and you watch the parents who have their number picked out of that barrel jump and yell and scream for joy. The joy that only a parent can feel when they have realized that their child now has a limitless future.

And then you watch the children and their parents, when the last ticket is picked out of the barrel and their number was not selected and you see children crying and parents sobbing - literally sobbing. And I was first acquainted with this not at one of the lotteries but at an event at Robert Treat where I met one of the parents of a student there who was in the third grade. And I asked the mother about her experience so far at Robert Treat Academy and she said to me - Mr. US Attorney, I'll never be able to describe for you exactly the way I felt the night that my son was admitted but I knew if his ticket was picked out of that barrel, that was the difference between him going to college or going to jail.

From a mother in one of the wealthiest states in America. From a mother in a school district that spends \$24,000 per pupil, per year. From a mother who believed in her heart that the luck of pulling a ticket out of a barrel was going to be the determining factor of whether her son was going to be a college student or whether her son was going to join the ranks for the incarcerated.

That is obscene. It is an obscenity in America today to have that situation be confronted by any parent. It is an even greater obscenity in the state that spends more money per pupil than any state in America on public education. That's what we are here to stop. <Applause>

Christie on increasing the number of charter schools and his decision to send his kids to parochial

Posted by Andrew Mills/The Star-Ledger on May 3, 2010 at 11:27 PM

GOVERNOR CHRSTIE:

It would be funny it was not so sad and true, that they care so much more now about their own pockets and so little about the education of our children. So what's our agenda in New Jersey, what's the agenda I will pursue with my commissioner of education. First of all its about more charter schools in New Jersey, we have 36 applications for charter schools now and Bret Schundler commissioner of education will make sure that those charter schools are given assistance by the department of education, not have hurdles put up at every place to ensure that they fail. We'll reach out a hand to ensure their success so they get started in 2011. <Applause>

We want to have a robust public inter-district choice program so that those districts that are succeeding are encouraged and incentivized to allow children from failing districts to come there because the bottom line is we want all types of choice for folks. We also have a bill that will finally get a hearing in the legislature in the beginning of May, the Education Opportunity Scholarship Bill, we are in favor of it <Applause> this bill is going to permit, I believe, over the course of time, thousands and thousands of children to pursue educational choice that my wife and I made the decision to send our children to parochial school.

Who know how this works. I am a public school student, I went to public school all through my career, from kindergarten right through to graduation from Livingston High School in New Jersey. My wife Mary Pat, is a graduate of the Villa Maria Academy in Pennsylvania. So when we got married and had children there was a choice. Are going to send our children to parochial school like their mother, or public school like their father. If there's any doubt in your mind left as to who the most powerful member of the Christie family is, that should determine the answer for you. All four of our children go to catholic school in New Jersey because we have made the choice that we want them to go to a place that will not only give them a robust education but also reinforce the values that we're trying to teach them at home. That was our choice. And despite the fact that we pay \$38,000 a year in property taxes in New Jersey, 80% of that towards our public school system in our town we have made the decision, because we have the means to do so, to make that choice for our children.

A single mom in Newark, working two jobs to keep a roof over her child's head, should have no less of an ability to make that choice than my wife and I had to make that choice for our children. <Applause> Her child's life is no less precious than ours. Her child's future is no less promising than ours. And the great things that her child will do with his or hers education, will mean just as much to the great state of New Jersey as what our children will do with their education. And this delineation, this class warfare being waged by the education bureaucracy in New Jersey and across the country, is the other thing that drives together two different political philosophies in our country and in New Jersey.

Christie to school choice advocacy group in DC: 'This is our moment'

Posted by Andrew Mills/The Star-Ledger on May 3, 2010 at 11:31 PM

GOVERNOR CHRSTIE:

Two weeks ago, three weeks ago, I was asked a question at a press conference. They asked me, if teachers weren't willing to take a pay freeze and contribute 1.5% of their salary towards their full family medical, dental and vision health coverage, which by the way they get for free in New Jersey, well not for free they get from the tax payers. If they were unwilling to do that in that district in our school board elections on April 20, Governor, what would you suggest to the people in that district they do? Now, I hadn't really thought about this, and if you've see why my chief of staff is getting wrinkles by the day after a 105 days, I just stood up there and said well I'd tell you what I'd do. I would never vote for a budget in a district where teachers didn't take a pay freeze.

I was out on the road, and I came back, and this had been reported back to my chief of staff and the rest of my crew when I got back there. And Rich is a very deliberate guy, and he came into my office and said, 'so we're against the school budgets?' <Laughter> And I said, yeah-yeah-yeah, I just decided that baby. <Laughter> And he looked at me, and said to me, 'you know that, traditional in New Jersey the school budgets pass like 75% of them pass on average, for last couple decades.' I said, uh-huh. <Laughter> And he said so, you know were putting are political capitol out on line

for it to be less. I said yes. And here is the great thing about my chief of staff, he said okay let's go. <Laughter>

And my wife and I sat on my couch on election night and we had the laptop computer on the coffee table in front of us, and we started to watch as the returns came in. And I turned to her and I said this district went down, that district went down, that district went down, 15 out of the 17 districts in Somerset County, one of the most affluent counties in America, the budgets went down. We went from a 74% pass rate in 2009, to a 41% pass rate in 2010.

Now, not only that, but historically the turnout in New Jersey school board elections is anywhere from 10-12% state wide. The turnout last Tuesday, on April 20, which of course all of us associate with election day <Laughter> the day picked by the teachers union, in most school districts across New Jersey, you don't vote where you vote in the regular general election they make you go and vote someplace else. And in most districts, polls are open from 4:00 in the afternoon to 9:00 at night. No joke. Despite all those hurdles, turnout went from 10-12%, traditionally, to 25%, it more than doubled because the people of New Jersey, heard the call to action, felt the failure of the school system, and felt for the first time since 1976, that it was time to stand up and say no.

Now let me tell you, if went from 74% pass rate to 41% in New Jersey, that should be a cannon shot across America. The state that has been the most generous with public money in America, in fact in the world, for K-12 education, from wealth district to impoverished district, from Republican district to Blue-Collar Democratic district, all across New Jersey voted no. This is our moment ladies and gentlemen, and we cannot for a minute, blink, hesitate, for a minute. It is time for us to get going to engage in this fight, to press our advantage, to not only to lead, but to give voice to the frustration of the people who are too busy working to put food on the table, to give voice to it for themselves.

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