



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

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

Home > Newsroom > Press Releases > 2010 > What They Are Saying: Editorial Boards, Educators, Business Leaders, And Mayors Agree... Governor Christie's Budget Plan Has The Difficult, But Necessary Reforms That New Jersey Needs

What They Are Saying: Editorial Boards, Educators, Business Leaders, And Mayors Agree... Governor Christie's Budget Plan Has The Difficult, But Necessary Reforms That New Jersey Needs

Wednesday, March 17, 2010 • Tags: [Budget and Spending](#)

Editorial Boards

Home Tribune News, "Is right that he is doing what he was elected to do, and more importantly, what New Jersey needs."

[Link to Article](#)

State budget hurts, but it's the right treatment:

The details are ugly in some way for virtually every New Jerseyan. But from a broad-brush perspective, Christie is right that he is doing what he was elected to do, and more importantly, what New Jersey needs. He is introducing spending restraint on the state level. The hope now is that it will filter down - in part by necessity - to local officials. Christie will indeed be demonized, as he has been already on several fronts. But all of the interested parties need to take an honest look beyond their own concerns and their own departments and ask themselves a simple question: What else was the governor supposed to do?... It would be a stretch to say we exactly liked what we heard from Christie Tuesday, only because there wasn't much about which to be happy. To echo the governor's own medical analogy, it was like hearing your doctor detailing everything that's wrong with you - and in New Jersey's case, it's a long list. But the medicines are being prescribed, and while they may not all work as well as intended, this recovery process is a whole lot better than doing nothing and waiting for all of the problems to get worse. We urge the Legislature to work with Christie to refine the budget and smooth out the rough spots, rather than attacking it with predictable rhetoric about it savaging every hard-working and vaguely vulnerable person in the state. This is a just a start toward some fiscal sanity; it's the legislators' responsibility to help make it a good one, instead of defending their own past mistakes.

Courier-Post, "He's trying to decrease the spending. It's the right choice. The only choice in the face of an historic deficit."

[Link to Article](#)

Budget Is Detox For Addicted N.J.:

For New Jersey, Gov. Chris Christie is that doctor. In his budget address Tuesday, he diagnosed how bad things have gotten in this state. It's stuff we all know already: the highest overall taxes in the country; the highest property taxes, by far, in the country; a mountain of debt (more than \$33 billion) from years of reckless borrowing to maintain spending; and now, a nearly \$11 billion budget deficit heading into the 2011 fiscal year. It's a deficit brought on by the national recession but made worse by years of overspending and overborrowing. You don't blame the doctor for delivering the grim diagnosis, not when you know it's true. You blame the behavior that got you there. More importantly, you quickly move past the blame and work on changing the behavior to get healthy... But Christie won't do what so many governors and Legislatures have done before -- raise taxes and borrow money -- to pay for increased government spending. Instead, he's trying to decrease the spending. It's the right choice, the only choice in the face of an historic deficit.

Philadelphia Inquirer, "The governor faces no good options. This day of reckoning has been years in the making. He is on the tough but right course."

[Link to Article](#)

Editorial: New Jersey's medicine:

Gov. Christie's vow yesterday to force New Jersey government to "live within its means" is a welcome change in Trenton. The state's finances are in shambles. Due to perennial overspending and a weak economy, Christie inherited a budget shortfall of at least \$10.7 billion for the fiscal year that begins July 1...This crisis requires belt-tightening from Trenton to Cherry Hill. The cuts outlined by Christie yesterday will be painful, but widespread pain is mandatory. As the newly elected Republican said, "the bill has come due"...The governor deserves credit for trying to spare some safety-net programs, such as aid to food banks and hospitals and eligibility for food stamps...The governor faces no good options. This day of reckoning has been years in the making. He is on the tough but right course.

The Star-Ledger, "Gov. Chris Christie's budget for the coming fiscal year is balanced, and it does that the only way one can - with massive cuts in the areas that consume most of the state's expenditures."

[Link to Article](#)

For New Jersey, no real alternatives to Gov. Chris Christie's 'tough love':

The days of wine and roses are over, but the New Jersey hangover has just begun. Gov. Chris Christie's budget for the

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coming fiscal year is balanced, and it does that the only way one can - with massive cuts in the areas that consume most of the state's expenditures. Schools and municipalities have all been among the major recipients of state largesse year after year...The options available to New Jersey are few. We have the highest property taxes in the country...Christie's cuts are necessary, if only as a form of shock treatment; large numbers of people have come to believe their government is dysfunctional, if not simply corrupt...We have poorly run government institutions, and they have been plagued by employee groups that know how to play interest-group politics as well as any sector in American life. The state needs to deal with those facts. But we need also to generate some revenue in creative ways for development and growth in the future.

Asbury Park Press, "Most of the reforms proposed by Christie are long overdue."

[Link to Article](#)

Christie delivers harsh medicine:

Gov. Chris Christie spent almost the first half of his 50-minute budget address Tuesday explaining why the pain he was about to inflict on taxpayers, public employees, senior citizens and everyone else in this state was necessary. It was a comprehensive exposition of how New Jersey got into its fiscal mess, how much worse off New Jersey is than other states and how things could get far worse if the state doesn't act to turn things around now. Most of the reforms proposed by Christie are long overdue. He is correct that New Jersey must change course. Everyone knows that. It's time, as Christie put it, "that we jump off the cliff together." Indeed, the pain must be shared. How best to achieve that will be an enormous, agonizing challenge for the Legislature.

Herald News, "We agree with the governor that the state needs a major course correction and we look forward to the dialogue"

[Link to Article](#)

A No-Nonsense Budget Address:

We applaud Christie for his description of the state's authorities and boards as a "shadow government." He is spot on. Many of these boards and authorities are nothing more than patronage mills for pension padding and health benefits. Clean them up or eliminate them...A key component to the governor's plan may eventually help: a proposed constitutional amendment that would cap annual property tax growth at 2 1/2 percent. The governor also wants an equal cap on the growth of state spending. This could be a revolutionary change, something that could drastically reduce property taxes in New Jersey. At this stage, we do not know all of the ramifications, but it is an idea that merits robust debate...But we agree with the governor that the state needs a major course correction and we look forward to the dialogue...There is something to be said about a daredevil approach to impending calamity. The governor's message is one of shared sacrifice. And if indeed the sacrifice is shared by all - including those most capable of making financial sacrifices and not just the middle and poorer classes - than Tuesday's address is a map toward a more responsible and affordable New Jersey.

The Gloucester County Times, "Gov. Chris Christie is right about cutting the state budget and putting New Jersey on a path toward fiscal sanity."

[Link to Article](#)

'Party's Over' budget justified:

Gov. Chris Christie is right about cutting the state budget and putting New Jersey on a path toward fiscal sanity. New Jerseyans ought to take as an especially hopeful sign the sustained applause the governor received when he said teachers and other school employees "should pay for some reasonable portion of their health care costs, just like every other New Jerseyan." The 5 percent state aid cut to school districts Christie proposed is probably better than what school boards were expecting under New Jersey's dire fiscal circumstances. If school districts can get concessions on perks like totally free health benefits, they might be able to cover the aid cuts without sacrificing educational quality. Municipalities, too, can't expect to rail against aid cuts unless they try harder to achieve economies. Doing away with the separate "extraordinary aid" program, whose criteria have been subject to political whims, is also overdue."

Philadelphia Inquirer, "Its brilliance lies in the fact that it defines "shared sacrifice" by holding municipalities, school districts, and state officials to the same standard - for eternity."

[Link to Article](#)

Christie lobs a budget bomb at N.J. spending:

The fix is in. I speak of "Proposition 21/2," a constitutional amendment to cap the rise of property taxes and state spending at 2.5 percent a year. Consider Christie's proposal the government equivalent of putting your household budget in blood. Its brilliance lies in the fact that it defines "shared sacrifice" by holding municipalities, school districts, and state officials to the same standard - for eternity. Given that state spending grew 59 percent between 2001 and 2008 - a painful period when my own property taxes jumped 41 percent - limiting future increases to just 2.5 percent seems like a dream. New Jersey residents, after all, are the most overtaxed people in America. If legislators run and hide, Christie can blame them for refusing to provide the single constituent service all of us crave...Christie clearly believes government will thrive being leaner and meaner.

Educators From Across The State

Monmouth County Teacher Kristin Hennessy

"Governor Christie is making the best of a bad situation. Last year's level of funding relied on over \$1 billion in one-time federal funding that is unavailable to the state this year. With the continued recession, substantial state budget deficit of \$10.7 billion, and the loss of those federal dollars, anyone would be hard-pressed to craft a balanced budget that did not affect education funding. I am confident that the decisive and responsible leadership of Governor Christie will enable our state to continue with its tradition of excellence in education that all New Jerseyans have come to know and expect."

Elizabeth Board Of Education Member Rafael Fajardo

"Even though the aid reductions in this budget will be difficult for everyone, the Governor is making the best of a bad situation in limiting maximum aid reductions to 5% of school budgets. Nobody is saying this is easy, but it necessary for us to protect the future for generations of students and taxpayers of this state. We will be working with the local community and our education association in an effort to ensure that we protect the interests of our school children. The Governor's proposed reforms will allow for stable budgeting in the future and will make New Jersey prosperous again. Our state government needs to turn around our economy and make New Jersey affordable again. The Governor has shown courageous - bold leadership through these initiatives and we join together to bring these changes to stabilize school funding and make sure tax dollars make it to the classroom for our students."

Vineland Board Of Education Member Anthony Fanucci

"Governor Christie continues to demonstrate the leadership New Jersey needs to fix its budget crisis and get back on the path to economic recovery. The Governor's budget proposal is a bold, responsible proposal that makes the tough choices needed to balance the state budget, while also providing the education committee the tools needed to hold down costs and mitigate property tax increases. We will all share in the sacrifices ahead, but in time we will establish a return to prosperity and fiscal stability under Governor Chris Christie."

Business Leaders

New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Chairman Dennis Bone

"The administration should be applauded for tackling long-term systemic issues that, if addressed, will lead to job creation, economic growth and fiscal stability for the state."

Morris County Chamber of Commerce President Paul Boudreau

The Morris County Chamber of Commerce is committed to helping the governor and our state legislators as they begin the painful but necessary process of making our state competitive again. We cannot tax and spend our way to prosperity and we want to be the "state of choice" when investors and employers want to grow their businesses. There is much work to be done and we applaud the governor for standing up today and laying out a new vision for New Jersey.

Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the Chamber of Commerce of Southern New Jersey Kathleen Davis

The governor also urged both parties to pass a constitutional amendment that would prevent the trust fund from being used for anything but jobless claims in the future. "We are open to any plan that would mitigate this increase. Billions were raided from the fund over the years because nobody wanted to believe there would come a time that our economy would be in such dire straits that we would need to support an 10 percent unemployment rate," said Kathleen Davis, vice president and chief operating officer of the Chamber of Commerce of Southern New Jersey.

New Jersey Business and Industry Association President Philip Kirschner

Said the governor wants to end a perpetual cycle that has put the state in debt. "What the governor is saying is it's time for government to make the same tough decisions that business owners have made."

State Director of the National Federation of Independent Business/New Jersey Laurie Ehlbeck

Christie's proposed cuts will be difficult but doable, said Laurie Ehlbeck, state director of the National Federation of Independent Business/New Jersey. "Small businesses throughout New Jersey have dealt with much worse in weathering this recession. And if our smallest employers can find ways to cut back and find savings to keep their doors open, so can state and local government," she said.

Chief Executive Officer of Withum Smith & Brown PC, a Princeton-based CPA firm, Bill Hagaman

Rampant tax increases, like last year's one-year hike that boosted the top personal bracket to 10.75 percent on taxable income of more than \$1 million, "helped to fuel the perception that New Jersey is hostile towards businesses," said Bill Hagaman, chief executive officer of Withum Smith & Brown PC, a Princeton-based CPA firm. "We see companies moving out, including one client that fled to Florida to escape New Jersey's taxes and took 30 jobs with him. It may not sound like many jobs, but the numbers run up fast when it's one company after another." If Christie follows through on his vow to veto any proposed hikes, "it would help put a dent in the state's negative image," Hagaman added.

Director of Economic Research at the Roseland-based CPA firm J.H. Cohn, Patrick O'Keefe

Christie also is allowing the 4 percent corporate income tax surcharge to end June 30, a move applauded by Patrick O'Keefe, director of economic research at the Roseland-based CPA firm J.H. Cohn. "It may not sound like much of a tax, but the 4 percent is on top of an already high level of tax, so it is significant," he said. "Also, New Jersey is competing with other locations around the country and the globe that want to attract business. One more tax is simply another straw on the camel's back, and in our case the camel's already sprawled out on the ground and can't get up because of the weight."

Hospital Alliance

Hospital Alliance applauds Governor Christie for preserving the healthcare safety net. In a time of unprecedented budget turmoil, the Governor demonstrated strong leadership by making access to healthcare a top priority. Hospital Alliance has long advocated for creative funding solutions to preserve important programs like charity care. While we have yet to see the details, we welcome innovative approaches to maximizing federal matching dollars and are pleased that 100% of these dollars will be dedicated to sustaining healthcare programs for our citizens. Hospital Alliance has served as the voice of NJ's urban hospitals for nearly 17 years. As hospitals that provide the lion's share of charity care and Medicaid to NJ's citizens, our members serve as a safety net. As large employers in NJ's cities, our members are economic engines that provide jobs.

Mayors

Galloway Township Mayor Keith Hartman

"Governor Christie continues to demonstrate the leadership New Jersey needs to fix its budget crisis and get back on the path to economic recovery. The governor's budget proposal is a bold, responsible proposal that makes the tough choices needed to balance the state budget, while also providing municipalities with the tools we need to hold down costs and mitigate property tax increases. The governor's proposed reforms will allow for stability in our budgeting at the local level and slow the growth of local government spending - a critical step in stopping ever-increasing property taxes on our residents. These bold reforms, including a strict cap on property tax increases and local spending, collective bargaining and benefits reform, and civil service reform, will provide us the needed flexibility to find cost savings and make it more affordable to live in the state. I'm proud to support the governor and his initiatives and urge the legislature to act to pass the Governor's budget and these key reforms as soon as possible. The governor has started the painful process that we sent him to Trenton to start. The recognition of the need for collective bargaining reform is refreshing. Local governments often are left to deal with bargaining agreements forced upon them by arbitrators. This economic collapse has hit government agencies particularly hard and it is good to finally be working in the same direction with Trenton to solve the problems in this State. Our residents and businesses cannot be taxed any more. As elected official we must make the difficult decisions that we were elected to make. Pushing off our problems to future years with budget gimmicks and one time fixes can no longer be tolerated. I am once again optimistic in the direction we are heading. It will be a tough road to recovery but failure is not an option."

Hoboken Mayor Dawn Zimmer

"We did not dig the hole in which we find ourselves in a day or a year. The massive gap between our resources and our appetite has built up over twenty years. It has been dug by a lack of discipline and unwillingness to say no; made deeper by poor policy choices along the way and quick fixes to avoid tough decisions.....In recent years, we have allowed the problem to become bigger through a series of one-time gimmicks that have worsened our situation." The Governor was speaking about the State of New Jersey but he could just as easily have been describing the state of the City of Hoboken...The State's fiscal difficulties have made it necessary for the Governor to propose significant cuts in aid to municipalities such as Hoboken. To help us cope with the diminished resources, he has promised to give us the tools that we will need to control our own spending, in the form of reforms to our collective bargaining and civil service systems. I urge the State Legislature to move quickly on these reforms, so that municipalities can end the destructive cycle of increasing costs that has led us to where we are today. But my hope is that these tools will not be necessary for Hoboken to make the changes that we need to make. It is time for all of us to recognize that we need to adapt to the realities of the present and future, and make the shared sacrifices that are called for by our difficult times.

New Jersey Conference of Mayors Executive Director Albert LiCata

Says the mayors are pleased to see that the state and local governments are in the same boat - where everyone will feel the pain of the cuts.

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