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Governor Governor Christie's Full Opening Remarks From Today's Press Conference: Only The Senate And The Assembly Can Get A Budget To My Desk, Send Me A Budget

Friday, June 30, 2017

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Governor Christie's Full Opening Remarks From Today's Press Conference

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Transcript:

Governor Christie: Good afternoon. I just completed a few minutes ago a meeting with Speaker Prieto, Senate President Sweeney, Budget Officer Sarlo, Budget Officer Schaer, and Majority Leaders Weinberg and Greenwald, and then met with Republican Leader Kean, Senate Budget Officer Bucco, Republican Leader Bramnick, and Assembly Budget Officer O'Scanlon to review where we are currently. As far as the meeting is concerned I think there was consensus in the room to move forward with the bills that were passed in the Senate, and to get a budget on my desk and get everything resolved. By consensus, I mean the majority of the people in that room believe that's what we should do, only one doesn't, and that's the Speaker. I have to tell you, I went through with him and the other members in the room all the various ways that I've tried to compromise in this area. I said yesterday when I was here there were 30 items of spending but I told you I wasn't sure. There's actually 73 items of spending that total over \$325 million that I'm willing to agree to that are in the main Democrat priorities for the budget, in addition to my budget and what I proposed in my budget, in February. In return, we need to see change in transparency at Horizon, and the Speaker for whatever reason is opposed to it. I know this has been reported and we already knew about it that in 2006 the Speaker was actually a sponsor of a bill that would have taken excess reserves from Horizon and given it to charity care. Now, you know, I can't say that I'm stunned by hypocrisy in Trenton, but it's outrageous, and so I don't think we can assume

any longer that the Speaker's reticence to do this has anything to do with principle because he had a bill that did nothing. Assembly bill 1771, it did nothing on transparency. It did nothing on improving governance. All it does is take excess reserves from Horizon and give it to charity care, to the state government to pay for charity care. So we need to find out why the Speaker's really doing this, but I can tell you very clearly that what happening in that meeting was the Speaker refused to discuss Horizon. Not just he wouldn't post it, he refused not just me but the other members of his own party in the room to engage in a substantive conversation about what his concerns were about the bill. Senator Weinberg any number of times attempted to engage him on, okay so what about the bill don't you like, because maybe we can change it to make it more to your liking? And he said, I will not discuss the bill. So New Jersey state government absent something happening in the next eight hours is going to shut down, and it will be because of Speaker Prieto. I want to make it clear to the people of New Jersey, I'm ready to sign a budget, and quite frankly I don't care which budget comes to me. I'll deal, as I said yesterday, with whatever budget they send me, I'm ready to sign a budget by midnight tonight. They send me a budget with Horizon and with the lottery, then these 73 spending items will stay. If they send me a budget without lottery and without Horizon, I will still sign a budget, but then many of these 73 items will go. So no one can claim that we're shutting down government, because I'm willing to work either way, but I wanted to be absolutely transparent and clear about what I would do so there would be no surprises, because as the Senate President will remember, and former Speaker Oliver, we didn't have an agreement in 2011, and I then line itemed significant items out of the budget, which angered the Senate President to the point where he said some really unspeakable things about me on the front page of the Sunday Star-Ledger, as I recall. So since that time my arrangement with the Senate President and Speaker Oliver, and the Senate President and Speaker Prieto up to this point has been, let's have no surprises on the budget. Let's negotiate things beforehand, let's decide what you are going to ask for, I'll tell you what I'm going to keep in and what I'll take out so that there's no surprises about it. So I'm offering, I've offered exactly the same thing here, but the Speaker didn't have the votes. He had 24 votes yesterday for his budget, 24 votes in a chamber where he has 52 votes. So I'm at a loss as to what to do here. I've offered them a number of different alternatives but none of them cause either the Senate President or the Speaker to send me a budget, so I'll be here. If I have any indication from them that they're willing to send me a budget tonight, I'll consider that budget along those principles, when it reaches me. If they don't send a budget, then the Speaker has closed down state government, but you can't claim when you have a Governor standing here saying send me a budget, and I'll sign it. You can't ask me also to sign away all my constitutional authority as well. That's just not appropriate. The people of this state elected me and elected me and gave me through my oath the constitutional authority to act on the budget as I saw fit, and I'm not going to sign away my authority to do that without an agreement. And if I can't have an agreement, then send me a budget the other way, but I don't believe that's what the Senate President wants to do because of the priorities and how deeply he and Senator Weinberg and others, Senator Sarlo, care about these priorities, which include school funding, and the changes of school funding and so they've got to convince Speaker Prieto that he needs to explain to people why he's doing this, because it makes no sense to me. Especially after he was a sponsor, along with Assemblyman Greenwald, of Assembly bill 1771 in 2006 that took excess reserves and gave it to the state government. Now, was this not a money grab by state government when he was trying to do it in 2006? But when I recommend it in 2017 it's all of a sudden a money grab? Either it is or it isn't, and you know he reminds me very much, the Speaker today, of that great former Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry who was for it before he was against it. So now he's against it, but he used to be for it, not only was he for it but he was a sponsor of it. So I will be meeting at 5:30 this afternoon with members of my cabinet to prepare for the possibility that the legislature will not act. Prior to that I'll be meeting with members of the Assembly and Senate Republican caucus to give them the briefing directly from me so that they don't have to worry about it getting filtered by anyone else, and it was very kind of leader Bramnick and leader Kean to invite me to come speak to their caucuses, and I will. Very rare that I've done that in my eight years, I think it's two or three other times in my eight years that I've actually been invited down there to speak to them directly and have gone so I'm going to do that, come back and meet with the cabinet, and then if there is an unusual fit of sanity on the part of the Speaker, and they send me a budget tonight, I'll be here to sign it. If they leave tonight, I'll leave when they leave, but I'm not happy about this, this is completely avoidable, this is a fit of complete hypocrisy and arrogance by the Speaker, and I have to tell you, I don't know, we've got to find out the real reason as to why he's doing this, because we've now unmasked him as to principle, because this unmasks it. The most offensive thing according to him about my proposal on Horizon, which by the way is not the Vitale proposal, the Vitale proposal represented a compromise on my part off of what I wanted. He sponsored what he has said is the most offensive part of my original Horizon proposal, so now we know this is not a matter of principle. So if it's not principle it's politics, and so what is the motivation? He refused to answer that question today, and it was not just put to him by me it was put to him by other members of his own party, because no one could understand why he refused to even discuss the substance of the bill. Senator Weinberg, Senator Sarlo, Assemblyman Greenwald were all attempting to get him to say, okay, what about the bill don't you like? That's what we're all around this table for. Let's negotiate about what you don't like about the bill so maybe we can come to some kind of resolution with the Governor on it. He said, I will not have any discussion about the bill, until after a budget is passed. So there's nothing left for me to do, guys, I'm waiting for a budget to be passed. He doesn't have the votes to pass a budget. He proved that yesterday three times, opened up the board and then had two roll calls after it, a completely embarrassing thing to watch a Speaker put up a bill and he could only get 24 votes in his own caucus. So I think they understand this isn't rational either. I'm not happy about it, but I'm here to execute my constitutional responsibilities, and in doing that I refuse to give away constitutional authority, unless I have a deal in place, where we all know what's going to happen. If there's anything left to the unknown then I can't do that. I won't do it and I can't. but the Speaker has to explain to people why he's acting the way he's acting. I meant to sit up there with the leaders of the legislature and refuse to even have a conversation about the substance of the bill, flat out refused and every time he said, no, put his finger up and said, no, I will not discuss this bill until after the budget is passed. So that's where we are, and we'll see where we go from here.

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