

## INGLE: Christie's smart playing to the right

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(Photo: Molly Riley, AP)

TRENTON — Don't believe for a second Gov. Christie made some kind of gaffe when he made flippant remarks about the minimum wage issue before a Washington audience this week. He knew what he was doing and it was calculated to get the response it got — publicity for him.

"I'm tired of hearing about the minimum wage. I really am," Christie said Tuesday in a speech to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.



The pundits ran to their Twitter accounts declaring that Christie had done himself in, that that could be used against him in a 2016 general election should he get the Republican nomination for president.

Thing is, no one gets a chance to use it against him unless he is in a general election, and to do that he would have to win a primary against several other Republicans, a primary that is controlled by the right wing of the GOP. That group always had doubts about Christie, and now he just isn't as popular as he used to be with others as well.

Let's review recent surveys:

- A Rutgers-Eagleton Poll found almost 40 percent of New Jersey voters say "trustworthy" no longer applies to Christie, compared to 22 percent who say it describes him "very well."

Before his re-election in November 2013, 43 percent said trustworthy applied to Christie very well and 32 percent said somewhat well with 20 percent saying it did not apply at all.

- A Fairleigh Dickinson University PublicMind Poll released Thursday showed Christie's job approval had dropped to 41 percent, with 47 percent disapproving. Krista Jenkins, poll director, said the results indicate voters would "prefer to see his post-governor years end in political retirement, rather than continue on a national stage."

OK, so that's New Jersey people ticked off at what they see as a lack of progress in the Christie administration and his being out of the state too much. There are those who say he couldn't carry deep blue New Jersey in a national election anyway, so why should he care?

Iowa is an important state for presidential hopefuls, what with that early caucus. A Bloomberg Politics/Des Moines Register Iowa Poll of likely 2016 Republican caucus-goers shows that the party's 2012 nominee, Mitt Romney, leads the pack with 17 percent. Christie is in the back with 6 percent, behind Romney, retired doctor Ben Carson, U.S. Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and Texas Gov. Rick Perry.

Back to that Washington speech. Think about when Christie first burst onto the national scene. He was all over TV saying outrageous, flippant and blunt things. People thought that Jersey brashness was adorable. He cut through the clutter. His star was rising.

He would like to be there again.

It certainly isn't a coincidence the comments about the minimum wage appeal to his party's right wing. "I don't think there's a mother or a father sitting around the kitchen table tonight in America saying, 'You know, honey, if our son or daughter could just make a higher minimum wage, my God, all of our dreams would be realized.' Is that what parents aspire to?" Christie said.

Well, no. He could have said that these days minimum wage is earned by more than high school kids in part-time jobs, as it once was; that what we need to do is create more jobs, better educate the workforce and provide opportunities for advancement. But that kind of reasonable talk doesn't reach the audience he needs on his side for a primary.

It is easy to make those remarks before a group like the Chamber of Commerce when nobody there has to rely on the minimum wage to raise a family. Do you think he would say the same thing before an audience in Newark or Camden?

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