

# In N.H., Chris Christie says he's 'Telling It Like It Is'



ELISE AMENDOLA/AP

**New Jersey Governor Chris Christie shook hands with a potential voter at the Pink Cadillac Diner in Rochester, N.H.**

**By James Pindell** | GLOBE STAFF JULY 04, 2015

SANDOWN, N.H. — Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey, in the middle of a five-day presidential announcement tour in New Hampshire, travels with a campaign banner that says “Telling It Like It Is.”

But the “it” Christie talks about these days is mostly himself.

This week Christie became the 14th Republican to announce his intention to run for president in 2016. Two years ago Christie led the field, but he is in a much weakened position today.

Under his watch, New Jersey has undergone nine credit rating downgrades. The state is ranked 48th in private-sector job growth. He faces a public employee pension crisis. In addition, the so-called Bridgegate scandal, involving his once inner circle of aides, is still not over.

And when it comes to issues, Christie, a moderate, is hardly a darling of the Republican base.



## From Clinton, a multi-generational message in N.H.

Hillary Clinton kicked off her holiday weekend by speaking about her mother and granddaughter at Dartmouth College.

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As a result, in his presidential announcement launch and during five straight days of campaigning in the Granite State, Christie has treated the presidential contest like a season of “The Bachelorette”: trying to win over voters with charm and personal rapport.

His answers to voters’ questions are laced with “man” and “buddy” and “let me tell ya.” When Hillary Rodham Clinton and Jeb Bush released their announcement videos, they featured everyday people talking about their lives. Christie’s pitch was two minutes of the candidate talking about the moment his mother died.

He has repeated the story at town hall meetings in New Hampshire. He has given marital advice, revealed how often he gets a test for prostate cancer, and told a lengthy story about his daughter’s Notre Dame tuition bill.

“The first thing that came to mind after seeing him is that he has a strong personality,” said New Hampshire state Representative Joe Hagan, a Republican from Chester, who attended Christie’s town hall meeting in Sandown on Tuesday night.

Privately his aides note that Christie is trying, in part, to use the playbook of Republican John McCain’s win in the 2000 New Hampshire primary.

Like McCain back then, he is essentially skipping Iowa, running an underdog campaign on the cheap, and hoping his big personality will win people over at endless town hall meetings at VFW halls, schools, diners, and even bars.

Whether this approach will work is unclear.



DOMINICK REUTER/REUTERS

**Chris Christie spoke with supporters after an event in Sandown, N.H., on Tuesday.**

Sarah Crawford Stewart, a key New Hampshire aide to McCain in both his 2000 and 2008 victories, said Christie faces a more complicated campaign than McCain did 16 years ago.

“Back then, McCain was the only Republican really going after independent voters who can vote in the Republican primary,” Crawford Stewart said. “I think there is a lot of opportunity in that space this year, and more Republican candidates are going to be going after that group later in the campaign than even these candidates realize.”

Still, Christie’s performance at the 138 town hall meetings he has held in New Jersey made him a prominent national politician. Christie aides believe they can recreate the magic of his YouTube town hall moments in another state.

“Christie is an excellent campaigner in small groups — he is engaging and funny, and can connect,” said David Redlawsk, who heads up the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll in New Jersey.

Jodi Nelson, vice chairwoman of the Derry Republicans, said Christie is standing out by being a truth-teller.

“At this point in the contest, people are just trying to get a sense of all of these candidates, and Christie is someone out trying to meet everyone,” Nelson said.

Boston College political science professor Dave Hawkins says Christie is bringing a different style of campaign than McCain did.

“Their approach to what they call ‘straight talk’ is different,” Hawkins said. “McCain used humor and tried to

bring everyone together. He called for campaign finance reform and an end to pork-barrel spending as a way to demonstrate he was an honest broker against the system.”

Comments

Christie tries to earn points by going after political opponents — liberals, Democrats, and teachers’ unions, Hawkins said.

“McCain also had an inspiring war hero biography that was central to his story,” he said. “When people think of Christie, they think of a brash New Jersey guy who yells at people.”

But these days Christie is doing less yelling. His style, he says, is “take or leave it.”

“I am going to tell you what I think. If you like it, great. And if you don’t, my goodness, there are 13 other candidates to pick from, so you will find somebody who you agree with more than you agree with me. But you need to know what you are buying,” Christie said.

To Jeff Pattera of Sandown, that approach puts Christie in the top tier of candidates he might support in the February presidential primary.

In modern politics, Pattera said, Christie’s personality “is refreshing.”

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