



Corzine Faces Chris Christie in New Jersey Race (Update1)

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By Terrence Dopp



June 3 (Bloomberg) -- Former U.S. Attorney **Chris Christie** will face New Jersey Democrat **Jon Corzine**, the only incumbent in the nation up for re-election as governor this year.

Christie beat his closest challenger, ex-Bogota Mayor **Steven Lonegan**, 55 percent to 42 percent, in yesterday's Republican primary election, according to results posted on NJ.com, the Web site affiliated with the state's largest newspaper, the Star-Ledger.

Republicans haven't won a statewide election in New Jersey since 1997. The party aims to take control after Corzine wrestled this year with record-low approval ratings amid a growing **budget deficit**. The incumbent has proposed spending cuts, including worker furloughs, and tax increases, in an effort to balance state revenue with expenses.

"If Republicans have any shot of winning that seat, this is it with the economic storm and the governor's low approval ratings," said **Joseph Marbach**, a political scientist and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Seton Hall University in South Orange. "But any Democrat will have a fighting chance. It's just a matter of whether Corzine can rehabilitate his image and recapture the independent voters."

The governor had a disapproval rating of 53 percent in a May 20 **poll** by Quinnipiac University, just shy of a record 54 percent in April. The poll of 2,532 New Jersey registered voters, which had a margin of error of 2 percentage points, had Christie leading Corzine, 45 percent to 38 percent.

Obama Ties

Corzine, the former chief executive officer of **Goldman, Sachs & Co.**, runs a state where Democrats and independents combined make up 80 percent of the registered voters. He's also allied with President **Barack Obama**.

Vice President **Joe Biden** joined Corzine last night for the official start of his re-election campaign. Tomorrow, New Jersey rocker **Jon Bon Jovi** will perform at a Corzine fundraiser in Newark.

"This November, voters will have a very clear choice between very different sets of values," Corzine told supporters last night. "Our opponents may think they have answers, but their values are out of step with New Jersey."

Marbach said the New Jersey vote will be a "national battleground" that both parties will likely treat as a referendum on Obama's handling of the economic crisis.

Millions Spent

Corzine, 62, who faced no major primary opposition, has already contributed \$3 million toward his second-term bid, campaign finance **filings** show. He spent more than \$44 million running for governor and \$60 million for U.S. Senate in 2000. Christie spent about \$3 million before the primary compared with **Lonegan's** \$2.6 million.

Christie's positions are at odds with those of Lonegan, who advocated ending property-tax rebates and instituting a flat-income tax rate of 2.9 percent, said **Brigid Harrison**, a professor of political science at Montclair State University in Montclair, New Jersey.

"**Jon Corzine** has made bad choices, choices that have plunged New Jersey deeper into debt, increased the tax burdens on working families and driven businesses from this state," Christie told supporters last night. "That is unacceptable. I will be a very different governor."

Christie's and Lonegan's appeals to Republicans during the primary may backfire in the general election, said **Ingrid Reed**, who directs the New Jersey project at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics in New Brunswick.

Republicans Unite

Tom Kean, minority leader in the state Senate, said he expects Republicans to unite behind Christie and unaffiliated voters to disregard claims he is too conservative.

"People are frustrated and they're angry," Kean said in an interview. "The focus of the upcoming campaign will be on who has the better solution for New Jersey going forward."

Corzine promised in his 2005 campaign to use his Wall Street expertise to improve New Jersey's finances. Since he took office, unemployment rose to 8.4 percent in April from 4.8 percent in January 2006 and consumer spending slumped as the credit-market freeze triggered by the collapse of subprime mortgages eliminated Wall Street jobs.

"Tough times require tough decisions, but more importantly, they require the right decisions," Corzine said last night. "That's what this election is all about: choosing what is right for New Jersey's taxpayers. Let the Republican party talk all it wants. When it comes to credibility, the voters will decide who really gets things done."

New Jersey's tax collections have dropped more than 12 percent in the past two years. Corzine's administration is projecting **revenue** will fall to \$27.3 billion in the next fiscal year without his tax measures, below \$28.7 billion when he took office in January 2006.

Corzine "is certainly going to have a tough campaign," Reed said. "Is he dead? Not at all. At this point it's too early to say that."

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