



Corzine Recasts Himself in Obama Shadow as N.J. Race Nears End

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By Terrence Dopp



Nov. 2 (Bloomberg) -- **New Jersey** Governor **Jon Corzine** stood in President **Barack Obama's** shadow yesterday, seeking to muster support among the 21 percent of Democrats who a recent poll showed hadn't planned to vote for him in his tight re-election contest with Republican **Christopher Christie**.

Corzine, 62, appeared alongside Obama before a combined 20,000 people at rallies in Camden and Newark, with countless more watching on television. At the same time, as many as 35,000 volunteers worked telephones and knocked on doors in an 11th-hour attempt to increase turnout of new Democrats who registered in 2008 to vote for Obama.

"A year ago people went to the polls just like we will Tuesday and said, 'Yes We Can,'" Corzine told 13,500 Democrats in the **Prudential Center** arena, referring to Obama's campaign slogan in 2008. "President Obama needs us to keep that going."

Corzine is the only incumbent U.S. **governor** seeking re-election this year. **Virginia**, the only other state with a gubernatorial race, will pick a new governor as its Democratic incumbent **Timothy Kaine** is barred by law from seeking another term. Both races are viewed as tests of **Obama** and whether the energy he generated in his 2008 race can power Democrats to victory.

Corzine, pitching himself as the president's proxy, said a vote for him emboldens Obama in his efforts to overhaul the health-care system and mend the nation's tattered economy. Corzine's remarks appeared aimed at the 21 percent of Democrats who didn't back him in an Oct. 28 Quinnipiac University poll.

Media Markets

The rally in Newark, and an earlier one before 6,500 party stalwarts in Camden, played to the New York and Philadelphia media markets that bookend the state. The cities' attention during the weekend was on professional sports that pitted their teams against one another, highlighted by the Yankees and Phillies battle in Major League Baseball's World Series.

The crowd repeatedly chanted "Yes We Can" during the Corzine and Obama speeches, punctuating the president's 20-minute appearance with shouts of, "We love you Obama." The hand-picked crowd waved Corzine signs throughout.

Democrats hold a 700,000-voter registration advantage over Republicans in New Jersey. Along with the governor's office, the party controls both chambers of the Legislature, a majority of congressional seats and both U.S. Senate positions.

Corzine, a first-term Democrat and former chairman of Goldman, Sachs & Co., trailed Christie for most of the race, with voters blaming the incumbent for New Jersey's fiscal woes.

Poll Results

The governor caught the challenger last month in the **polls** and took the lead late last month for the first time in some surveys, with others showed it still a statistical tie. Corzine spent almost three times what Christie did on the campaign, flooding television with advertisements attacking the Republican for his driving record, ethics and ties to President **George W. Bush**, as well as his views on abortion and health care.

Obama carried New Jersey in November 2008, with 57 percent of the vote. The president, resurrecting the stump speech he used in previous visits to the state, called Corzine "my good friend and your governor."

"We will not lose this election if all of you are as committed as you were last year," Obama told the crowd. "You will not only re-elect Jon Corzine for another four years but put the state on a path to success."

Early Republican Lead

Christie, 47, the former U.S. attorney for New Jersey, led Corzine by as much as 12 percentage points in a July poll by Quinnipiac after the incumbent enacted a \$29 billion budget that slashed spending, raised income taxes on the wealthy and boosted excise taxes on cigarettes, wine and liquor.

The Republican also got a boost from the July arrests of 44 people, including state and local elected officials, on federal bribery charges. That temporarily shifted attention from the economy to the state's reputation for pay-to-play politics, and Christie's credentials as a corruption fighter.

The Republican stumbled after failing to articulate specific plans on how he would close the state's budget deficit, lower property taxes and help the economy recover, said **Patrick Murray**, a political scientist at Monmouth University in West Long Branch and director of its polling institute.

Christie never moved beyond the early stages of the campaign, and failed to convince voters there was more to his candidacy than the fact he wasn't Corzine, Murray said. "His race will go down as what not to do."

Independent Candidate

The contest also was shaken up by the popularity of **Christopher Daggett**, who may be the most successful independent candidate in state history. Daggett, 59, had the support of 20 percent of voters in an Oct. 22 Rutgers/Eagleton poll after pitching himself as a better Corzine alternative than Christie. His success largely came at the expense of the Republican.

"It is highly unlikely that any candidate in this race will win a majority of the vote," said **Peter McDonough**, a professor of political science at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics who was press secretary for former Republican Governor **Christine Todd Whitman**. "The effect of **Chris Daggett** is something that we'll study for years."

Obama has spent more time campaigning and fundraising in New Jersey than in Virginia, where Republican **Bob McDonnell** held a clear lead over Democrat **Creigh Deeds** in the weeks leading to the election, according to polls.

Yesterday's visit, Obama's third in the campaign, lasted an entire day rather than the in-and-out stump appearances typically made by presidents. Vice President **Joseph Biden** and President **Bill Clinton** also campaigned on Corzine's behalf throughout the race.

Economic Slump

New Jersey has lost 168,500 jobs since the U.S. recession began in December 2007. The state's **unemployment rate** rose to 9.8 percent in September, its highest level since April 1977, from 4.8 percent in January 2006.

Republicans haven't won a statewide election in New Jersey since 1997, when **Whitman** defeated Democrat **James McGreevey**. Only one sitting New Jersey governor has been defeated in a general election, Democrat **James Florio**, who lost to Whitman in 1993 after voters revolted against a sales-tax increase.

Derrick Way, 42, a truck driver from Newark, is among those Corzine seeks to bring onto his side. Way, who said he is a newcomer to politics, registered as a Democrat last year to vote for Obama.

He said he only made his mind up about a month ago to vote for Corzine after the president's backing piqued his interest in the race.

'Definitely Important'

"That's definitely important," Way said of Obama's campaigning for Corzine. "I didn't pay much attention until then."

Corzine spent \$23.6 million on the race as of Oct. 20, compared with Christie's \$8.8 million and Daggett's \$1.2 million, according to state **Election Law Enforcement Commission** filings. Corzine's first gubernatorial race cost more than \$44 million, his 2000 election to the U.S. Senate, \$60 million.

"Having Obama speak on his behalf has done the governor's campaign a world of good," said Teesha Davis, 38, a sixth-grade teacher from Newark who planned early on to vote for Corzine and said the visits energized the party's base. "Obama is loved in New Jersey."

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