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Christie Has Key Senate Ally in Longtime Friend

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Updated 1:00 PM EST, Sat, Jan 30, 2010

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[New Jersey](#) has a new Republican governor, who assumed office on a mandate of curbing spending, slashing debt and making the Garden State more affordable. Among those commissioned to help make this vision a reality, none will wield more influence in the Legislature than Sen. Joe Kyrillos.

Kyrillos, R-Middletown, is a 22-year veteran of the Senate and Assembly who knows his way around Trenton as well as any politician. He chaired Gov. Chris [Christie's](#) successful campaign for governor, considered an upset in Democratic-leaning New Jersey. He's a previous chair of the Republican State Committee, has been a key adviser on the new governor's transition team and spoke at his inauguration.

A trusted confidante of Christie's, Kyrillos is perhaps the only lawmaker who will find the governor's door always open to him.

"I'm sure we'll continue to have a very special relationship going forward while I'm governor on both a personal and professional level," Christie said. "He's certainly someone whose advice I'll often seek out and often listen to as well because I think Joe's a pretty smart guy."

Christie, who never held statewide elected office before unseating former Gov. Jon Corzine in November, will rely on Kyrillos to help him establish relationships and strike deals with the Democratic-controlled Legislature, which just began a new session.

Without legislative cooperation, Christie will be stymied from moving his agenda forward.

"Joe will be someone Chris can count on to send his message to fellow senators," said Bill Palatucci, Christie's former law partner, key consultant and close friend. Because he's unencumbered by a Republican leadership post, Kyrillos will be freer to twist arms on issues he -- and Christie -- feel strongly about.

"He will be able to carry a lot of water for Chris in the Senate and help get things accomplished," Palatucci said.

Kyrillos, 49, who was one of Christie's earliest and most ardent supporters, knows he's a bridge between the governor and the Legislature.

"I view myself as doing what I can from my perch in the Senate to help move the Christie agenda through the legislative process," Kyrillos said.

Christie has an ambitious agenda that includes solving budget and property tax problems, reforming the government pension system, government consolidation, creating jobs and making New Jersey competitive for businesses again.

"My interest in helping my friend and fixing New Jersey wholly and completely intersect," Kyrillos said.

[Ingrid Reed](#), director of the New Jersey Project at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, said such relationships are usually beneficial.

"All governors need truth-tellers," said Reed. "You'd wonder if someone in a leadership position didn't have some people with whom he could feel comfortable discussing the subtleties of things and getting advice."

Christie is loyal to his friends, having already named many with whom he has lengthy ties to key positions in his new administration. He and Kyrillos, 49, go back nearly 20 years to when Kyrillos was running for Congress against Frank Pallone and Christie was a young lawyer working on George H. Bush's re-election campaign.

Christie was doing advance work on a Kyrillos' fundraiser that the president was to attend. An advance team co-worker, Susan Doctorian, met the candidate the same night Christie did.

"The next year, Mary Pat (Christie's wife) and I went out with Joe and Susan on their initial date. So, he owes me big-time," Christie said. "He married way over his head. That's how far back our relationship and our friendship goes."

Kyrillos and his wife, who have two children, continue to socialize with the Christies, who have four kids. Kyrillos and Christie talk by cell phone often.

Palatucci said Kyrillos will be to Christie what former [Nevada Sen. Paul Laxalt](#) was to [President Ronald Reagan](#); Laxalt was sometimes referred to as "first friend" when Reagan was in the White House.

"When Reagan was president, everyone knew his closest adviser in the Senate was Paul Laxalt," said Palatucci. "They won't always see eye-to-eye, but people will know, when Joe speaks, he probably has thought a lot about what the governor is thinking on an issue."

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First Published: Jan 30, 2010 12:43 PM EST

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