

Chris Christie Democrats Fear Few Reprisals From Party For Endorsements

John Celock

Little retaliation is likely for New Jersey Democrats who have backed Republican Gov. Chris Christie in his bid for reelection this year.

Although New Jersey Democratic Party rules would impose immediate consequences for the [37 Democratic elected officials who have backed Gov. Chris Christie \(R\)](#) for reelection, the reality is that those officials have suffered few reprisals to date.

The [state Democratic Party constitution](#) requires that Democratic officials who endorse a candidate of an opposing party be immediately stripped of all party positions, along with party support for campaigns. And while Democrats have started to abandon Democratic gubernatorial nominee Barbara Buono, the consequences that so-called renegade Democrats may face is unlikely to be so severe, or widespread.



"The larger the number of Democrats endorsing Christie grows, the less likely there is any retribution," John Weingart, associate director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, told The Huffington Post.

Sea Bright Mayor Dina Long, a Jersey Shore Democrat who has praised Christie for his response to Hurricane Sandy, lost the chairmanship of her town's Democratic party following her endorsement of the governor. Monmouth County Democratic Party Chairman Vin Gopal, who asked for Long's resignation, said that other Democratic officials in his county who have endorsed the governor will lose party support to serve as county Democratic committee members in the 2014 election cycle. County committee members handle campaign tasks for the party but often have little clout.

Long said she understands that Gopal was doing his job in asking her to step down, but noted that Democrats in Sea Bright want her to stay. She said she did not take politics into account when she made her decision, and does not fear the loss of party support in a future campaign.

"I was not concerned about my own political future. I was more concerned with the friendships I made in the party over the last 25 years," Long told HuffPost. "There are some friendships that are not friendships anymore as a result of my actions. I found that hurtful, but that's politics."

Gopal said that he has not made any determination whether renegade Democratic office holders in his county will lose support for any future political campaigns.

State Sen. Brian Stack (D-Union City) and Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo, two state Democratic powerbrokers who are longtime Christie allies, [have both backed Christie](#) but are unlikely to face any immediate consequences.

Stack, who also serves as Union City mayor, is seeking reelection to his Senate seat this year, but with his district being largely Democratic, a loss of party support should not hurt. Stack, who is known for being available to his constituents around the clock, commands a powerful political operation and any retaliation against him would likely destroy the fragile peace that holds together the various fiefdoms that constitute the Hudson County Democratic Party. Democrats have attempted to deny Stack support before, to little meaningful effect.

DiVincenzo is not up for reelection until 2014, but he sits atop his own powerful political operation, which has been flexing its muscles locally since the county executive's 2010 reelection. Both Stack and DiVincenzo have backed Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Cory Booker this year.

Stack and DiVincenzo's offices did not return calls for comment.

Concerns about the growing number of renegade Democrats, along with near-constant struggles with Democratic leaders, have overshadowed Buono's campaign since it began. New School political science professor Jeff Smith, a former Democratic Missouri state senator who now lives in New Jersey, suggested that Democratic support for Christie means several things for Buono, a state senator who trails the governor by 30 points.

"First of all, it says that she doesn't have a chance," Smith said. "Second of all, it says that she isn't particularly powerful in the Senate. Third of all, it suggests that she doesn't have deep relationships with politicians throughout the state."

In a statement to HuffPost, state Democratic Party Chairman John Currie said that Democrats need to focus on defeating Christie and not on punishing party members. He also suggested that Democrats who back Christie are doing so to gain benefits and not out of ideology.

"I don't approve of these short-sighted -- and in some cases transactional -- endorsements," Currie said. "I have a responsibility to help unify the Democratic party and work with state Democratic leaders on plans to win the upcoming

elections. Party leaders should leave any potential condemnation for another day."

The transactional theme has been brought up by other Democratic insiders, who have said the renegade Democrats are casting aside core party issues.

Long stressed that she does disagree with Christie on a number of issues, but said those were not part of her decision. She said that she was more concerned about addressing the needs of her town and her residents, who are still recovering from Sandy and in need of shelter and food.

"One of the things I really value about the governor is no bulls**,**" she said. "When you are recovering from a natural disaster, you don't have time for bulls****."

Smith warned that the 37 current endorsements are likely just the tip of the iceberg for Christie's true Democratic support.

"For every Democratic elected that's endorsed Chris Christie publicly, I can pretty much guarantee you that there are three who have told him or his close advisers, 'Don't worry, I won't do a thing for [Buono],'" Smith said.

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