

Politifax editor, publisher analyzes gubernatorial race

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By Ahmad Hamidullah / Contributing Writer

A dominating personality, bipartisan appeal and a sense of sympathy all make Gov. Chris Christie dominant in New Jersey state politics, according to a panel held yesterday at the Eagleton Institute of Politics.

Nick Acocella, editor of Politifax, and Matt Katz, reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer, held the panel which focused on the upcoming N.J. state elections.

Both spoke about Christie's projected victory in the gubernatorial election and his dominant status in politics.

Despite Christie's expected landslide victory against Democratic gubernatorial candidate Barbara Buono, Katz said most New Jersey voters disagree with him on every issue.

People simultaneously disagree with and love Christie due to his charisma after he handled the Superstorm Sandy crisis, he said.

"I also think the fact that he is a Republican and not perceived as crazy goes a long way in 2013," Katz said.

Acocella and Katz said Christie's work with President Barack Obama during Sandy six days before the national election helped him win the support of New Jersey voters.

"He has something that Bill Clinton had," said Acocella, publisher of Politifax. "He knows how to share your pain."

Christie's upcoming gubernatorial election is important for his potential 2016 presidential bid, said Katz.

If Christie is able to capture traditionally democratic demographics in the gubernatorial election, he will be able to utilize his bipartisan appeal to gain conservative support at the Republican national convention, he said.

Acocella said Christie is masterful at changing the subject when attacked on sensitive issues, such as high property taxes and unemployment rate. He compared Christie's ability to deflect criticism with Wonder Woman's ability to deflect bullets.

Christie is also adept at media control, Katz said. He masks more complicated and interesting issues by distracting the media attention with controversial laws. For instance, he vetoed gun control laws and signed a ban on gay conversion therapy in the same day.

"The guy's made out of Teflon," said Acocella. "The eggs don't stick."

Katz said he saw a 70-year-old woman walk up to Christie at the Edison Diner and ask him about his position on gay marriage. Christie talked with the woman about his views on gay marriage for four minutes, which is highly unusual for a candidate.

The elderly woman dropped an f-bomb and said she would not vote for Christie, Katz said.

Both Acocella and Katz said they were certain Christie would run for the president in 2016.

Elizabeth Matto, assistant research professor at the Eagleton Institute of Politics, said New Jersey politics are difficult to follow because the state's neighbors get more news coverage, even within New Jersey itself.

The challenge in discussing politics with students is helping them understand how political decisions affect their daily lives, Matto said.

“I would argue the decisions that are made at the local and state level have an even greater, more direct impact [than national decisions], especially here at a state university,” she said.

Matto said the biggest challenge for both campaigns in the upcoming senate elections is making voters aware that a special election is taking place. Mail-in ballot deadlines, voter registration deadlines and a Wednesday voting date all differ from normal senate elections.