



For His No. 2, Christie Needs to Think 'Reinforce,' Not 'Balance'

By Bill Pascoe | June 16, 2009

Two decisions late last week by New Jersey GOP gubernatorial nominee [Chris Christie](#) offer clues to what may turn out to be a crucial campaign decision for him: Whom to nominate as his running mate, for the new post of lieutenant governor?

On June 11, [Christie](#) anointed 37-year-old first-term [Assemblyman Jay Webber](#) of Morris County to serve as chairman of the state's Republican Party.

Webber is a Ronald Reagan conservative -- so much so that several years ago he began organizing New Jersey Reagan Day, an annual celebration on the anniversary of Reagan's birth.

He is a graduate of Harvard Law, opposed to abortion, and has shown political courage -- enough to have challenged a senior Republican state senator in a primary in his first run for office.

Though that first run for office ended in defeat, Webber's challenge, obviously, was noticed in the right places -- the lead consultant for the liberal Republican state senator who defeated Webber in that 2003 primary was none other than [Bill Palatucci](#), who's been at the top of the New Jersey GOP for two decades, and who now (coincidentally?) serves as one of [Christie's](#) key strategists.

[Christie's](#) selection of Webber will sit much better with disappointed conservative supporters of defeated challenger [Steve Lonegan](#) than they had any right to expect and any hope to believe.

On June 12, [Christie](#) followed that decision with a second nod to conservatives, when he announced [he would not seek the endorsement](#) of the New Jersey Education Association.

The NJEA is the largest and most powerful political organization in the state.

They are also one of the main reasons that state residents pay the highest tax burden of any citizens in the nation.

Flipping them off is not a decision to be taken lightly.

But [Christie](#) did it anyway, in what appears to be a bid to cement an image as a candidate Determined To Take on the Powers That Be in Trenton.

Taken together, these decisions free him, under conventional thinking, to move left with his lieutenant governor pick -- toward state Sen. [Diane Allen](#) of Burlington County, or County Clerk [Kathleen Donovan](#) of Bergen County, or possibly to state Sen. [Jennifer Beck](#) of Monmouth County.

But will [Christie](#) be bound by conventional thinking? Or will he surprise us by going beyond the bounds of convention?

For the non-New Jerseyans who read this blog, a little history:

New Jersey is one of just a [handful of states](#) that doesn't have a lieutenant governor.

Under a quirk in its current constitution, the president of the state Senate becomes the acting governor when the governor is not present -- even if the governor resigns the position permanently (as two of the last three elected governors did, leaving the Senate president in charge of both the executive branch and one half of the legislative branch of government for more than a year at a time).

Not surprisingly, this notion of leaving one person in charge of both the governor's office and the state Senate simultaneously did not sit well.

This routine of "If it's Tuesday, the Senate president must be the acting governor, which means he's really the king" finally wore a bit thin, and New Jersey voters decided via a 2005 ballot initiative to amend the constitution to create a new position of lieutenant governor.

But nominees are not chosen by the respective parties' primary electorates; they are chosen by the party nominees, after they themselves have been chosen in primary elections.

In making the choice, the party nominees can accept or disregard the counsel of whomever they wish -- friends, advisers, consultants, party hacks. They are beholden to no one, and the only qualifications put on the lieutenant governor nominee are the same as those put on nominees for governor.

Conventional thinking suggests that one use a running mate pick for "balance," however one wishes to define that term -- it could be regional balance, or gender balance, or ideological balance, or (in New Jersey), sports-team-fan balance (Yankees vs. Phillies, Giants vs. Eagles).

By this logic, any one of the three female pols named above -- Allen, Donovan, or Beck -- fits the bill.

Each supports abortion rights and skews to the more moderate side of the party, ideologically.

Each has experience in government.

And each comes from a strategically important power center for a Republican trying to cobble together a statewide victory.

Allen is a former Philadelphia TV newswoman, and still has residual name ID throughout Philadelphia's South Jersey viewing area.

But she has had a falling out with local party leaders in Burlington County, and her selection might not bring all the votes Christie strategists would count on.

Donovan, on the other hand, comes from Republican-rich Bergen County, a county that once was known as the crown jewel of GOP politics in New Jersey, but which has lost its GOP power base over the last several years.

Donovan, too, is a proven vote-getter in a strategically vital area of the state -- no Republican has won a statewide race in New Jersey without winning Bergen County -- but the recent schism in the Bergen Republican organization leaves an open question as to whether or not even Donovan could deliver her home county.

Beck comes from Monmouth County, one of the two huge Shore counties Christie will need to carry by large margins to offset expected Democratic wipeouts in Hudson, Essex, and Camden counties.

And she is relatively new to Trenton -- she won election to the General Assembly in 2005, then moved up to the state Senate in 2007, following a scorched-earth campaign where Democrats outspent her 7 -to-1.

The problem with each of these choices, however, is this -- they do next to nothing to reinforce Christie's chosen message as the "outsider who's going to shake up Trenton."

In fact, selecting any one of the three -- or anyone else whose first name is "Senator," or "Assemblyman," or "Freeholder," for that matter -- is going to be a missed opportunity to differentiate Christie from incumbent [Jon Corzine](#).

Rather than *balancing* his ticket, Christie should think instead about *reinforcing* his ticket.

In 1992, Bill Clinton defied conventional wisdom and chose Al Gore -- like Clinton, a moderate Southern Baby Boomer -- to reinforce his campaign message.

Christie should heed Clinton's lesson, bypass the pols, and roll the dice on an outsider like himself.

Like, maybe, [this guy](#).

Disclaimer: When I write about the politicians in my past, CQ Politics says I have to turn the cards face-up. Back in my campaign operative days, I consulted for Jay Webber's 2003 campaign, and in 2002 I worked for a candidate who ran against Diane Allen for the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate.