



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on October 11, 2010

Governor Christie Holds Tight for Taxpayers

Last November, Chris Christie ran for governor of New Jersey with a “tough love” approach to government. He promised not to increase taxes. He promised to reduce the size of government, even beyond the standard “cut waste and fraud” approach that nearly every politician promises when running for office. One public expense that Christie said he was willing to support, however, was the planned New Jersey-to-Manhattan rail tunnel.



Christie has hung tough with his pledges not to raise taxes and to confront public employees’ unions directly.

Governor Christie now has taken the gritty step of opposing the New Jersey-to-Manhattan rail tunnel as an expense that the Garden State cannot afford. The cost of this project, which was \$5 billion in a 2005 estimate has now risen to between \$11 billion and \$14 billion, making it the nation’s largest public transportation project. Senator Lautenberg, who helped get federal funds for the project, called Christie’s decision “one of the biggest policy blunders in New Jersey’s history.” Critics have cited the loss of construction and planning jobs related to the project and accused the governor of using “fuzzy math.”

Christie, however, countered his critics with the sort of no-nonsense language that has made him a favorite governor of many Americans: “The bottom line is this. New Jersey has gone too far ... and for too many decades ordering things they they can’t pay for. The project has some flaws to it, but in the end this is a financial decision. When weighing all the options, I simply cannot put the taxpayers of the State of New Jersey on what would be a never-ending hook.”

Few government projects, on paper, look like bad investments to the naïve voter. It is very easy to identify the jobs lost by canceling the project, but harder to see all the jobs and economic opportunities opened up when a costly government project is cancelled and the state’s balance sheet significantly improves. Christie also tackled the tough political task of canceling a project with identifiable benefits. When state governments have faced financial shortfalls, cynical politicians have often pondered public cost savings like removing toilet paper from public libraries, closing state monuments, reducing garbage collection, and the like. It is a way of holding voters hostage by threatening as the first resort those reductions in government that should logically be the last resort.

No politician has suggested in California or Illinois or some other state drowning in debt, for example, to cut the salary of state employees by 10 percent. In the current economic climate, few of these employees would quit as a result, and because personnel costs are so much of the cost of government, significant savings would be realized. Public employees are well organized politically and would surely threaten any lawmakers who tried that approach.

But Governor Christie is beginning to show more timid politicians that Americans no longer want every



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type of candy in the candy store. The best economic policy is to restore the confidence of businessmen, investors, professional people, and savers that their general interest in modest, affordable, and limited government is the new direction of state government. Christie seems utterly untroubled by the hubbub that his actions — canceling the tunnel project is simply the most recent of those actions — cause, which put taxpayers before tax-spenders and make fiscally prudent government the means to a stronger state economy.

Photo of Governor Chris Christie: AP Images



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