

From the BULLY'S PULPIT 20

July 5, 2010

Christie, Sweeney Kill Negotiations

From Politicker NJ

[Deal reached between senate and governor](#)

By [Darryl R. Isherwood](#) | July 3rd, 2010 - 4:21pm

Gov. Chris Christie and senate Democrats have reached an agreement on a property tax cap bill, but Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver has reportedly not yet signed on. Democratic sources said Oliver wanted to vet the deal with her caucus before agreeing.

The agreement, announced by the governor in a press conference Saturday, calls for a 2 percent cap on property tax increases, but carves out exceptions for healthcare costs, pension costs, debt service and capital expenditures and emergency allocations. Voter approval of 50 percent plus one vote would be required to exceed the cap.

In a flurry of press releases Republican lawmakers crowed about the agreement, calling it a victory for the governor and for the taxpayers. "The agreement announced by the governor finally puts New Jersey on the road that will return fiscal sanity to our state," said Assembly Minority Leader Alex DeCroce. "Voters will now have a say on how their tax dollars are spent, instead of Trenton politicians. This is a key component in our effort to cap government spending."

The full legislature will reportedly vote on the bill Thursday.

On Tuesday, Christie will issue a conditional veto on the cap bill passed by both houses of the legislature last week. That bill imposes a 2.9 percent property tax increase cap with similar exceptions.

Senate President Steve Sweeney, (D-West Deptford), who sponsored that bill in his house, also said he was happy with the agreement and called Saturday a momentous day in the state's history of soaring property taxes.

"Hopefully today will go down as the day when New Jersey was finally able to declare independence from its onerous and broken property tax system," said Sweeney. "This debate has never been about whether or not New Jersey needs a property tax cap – it does – but how best to enact a cap that will protect both taxpayers and our quality of life. I applaud the Governor for not only pushing this issue, but for being willing to work towards a compromise."

Though Oliver reportedly has not yet signed onto the bill, Assembly Budget Committee Chairman Lou Greenwald (D-Vorhees) said the agreement is moving in the right direction, but still needs to be fine tuned. "The concessions are a byproduct of our hard work," said Greenwald. "We have been endorsing the 2.0 cap and a number of these exemptions for a couple of weeks. They are absolutely moving in the right direction." **Greenwald said while Christies was eager to take credit for the compromise, the concessions were actually a result of hard work on the part of the Democrats and the legislature.**

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Schundler on "Furlough"??? Puppet Master Spins the Story

[Budget Committee Democrats want Schundler, who's unavailable](#)

By [Max Pizarro](#) | July 2nd, 2010 - 1:43pm

Trying to nail down a statutory cap at the request of Gov. Chris Christie, the Assembly Budget Committee today heard from Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Lori Grifa, but Democratic legislators wanted Department of Education Commissioner Bret Schundler, who wasn't available.

"He's on furlough," explained Christie Press Secretary Michael Drewniak.

The act of sitting in a hearing room on a Friday without the ability to engage a key member of the administration enraged Budget Committee Democrats. "Any reasonable person would feel insulted by what is going on here," said Assemblyman Albert Coutinho (D-Newark). "The governor has used his legal authority to call the legislature in yet administrators critical to the process aren't available. There is no excuse for Commissioner Schundler not to be available to the budget committee. "What are we doing here?"

Grifa went to the budget hearing room at the request of Assemblyman Lou Greenwald (D-Voorhees), who fired off a letter to the governor's office yesterday demanding expert testimony from the Christie administration in response to Christie demanding legislative action.

"I request that representatives from the following agencies be present at the Assembly Budget Committee's meeting on July 2, 2010 beginning at 10 a.m.," wrote Greenwald, listing his desire to see "a representative from the Division of Pension and Benefits to discuss costs to local governments associated with their services; a representative from the Department of Community Affairs familiar with the work of the local finance board related to cap waivers and exemptions; and a representative of the Department of Education familiar with the workings of the cap on school district property tax levies."

In addition to being dismayed over the absence of Schundler, Coutinho described as wholly inadequate testimony provided to the committee by the administration. "No one from the division of pensions and benefits was available to the committee," Coutinho griped. "Commissioner Grifa's testimony raised more questions than it answered."

Assemblyman Declan O'Scanlon (R-Little Silver) shrugged off the criticisms and said Democrats' public mugging belied their private reconciliation with reality. "Democrats seem to have accepted that 12-15 hours notice to appear was pushing it," he said. "Grifa was great and handled all their questions well. They don't get the concept."

Called for comment, Drewniak said, "Senate President Sweeney's 2.9% cap traveled through the committee process at warp speed and Democrats did not ask for any input from the executive branch.

"We determined last night (after receiving the letter from Greenwald) that Lori Grifa would be the most appropriate person to respond to all of the committee's inquiries," the spokesman added. "Her department is most infused with the issue."

From NJEA. **Calls, Emails Needed Again**

July 3, 2010

FROM: Barbara Keshishian, President
Vincent Giordano, Executive Director

RE: **URGENT: Sweeney makes caps deal, Oliver still deciding**

After promising a careful, deliberative process to discuss and consider various proposals for a new property tax cap plan, Senate President Steve Sweeney today struck a deal with Gov. Christie on a radical new cap which is far more restrictive than either the current 4% cap or the

new 2.9% cap the Legislature passed earlier this week. Click [here](#) for press coverage of today's events and an outline of the Sweeney-Christie deal. Scroll down to see NJEA's statement to the press.

As of this moment, Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver has not yet committed to the new deal. It is imperative that NJEA members reach out to their representatives to urge them to STOP Sen. Sweeney's closed-door deal from becoming law.

We must take action today! We need you to do **THREE THINGS**:

- 1. Call Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver. Urge her NOT to sign on to the Sweeney-Christie deal. Contact Assemblywoman Oliver at 973-395-1166 and AswOliver@njleg.org**
- 2. Call and email your Senator and Assembly members. Tell them to say NO to the Sweeney-Christie deal. A [roster](#) of legislators and a district [locator](#) are attached to this email.**
- 3. Please FORWARD this email directly to your MEMBERS, and urge them to call and email Assemblywoman Oliver and their own legislators.**

We need to let legislators know that we are paying attention, even on a holiday weekend in July. We need to let them know that they will be held accountable for the damage that is caused to our schools if this deal goes through.

Thank you!

NJEA press statement on Sweeney-Christie tax cap deal

NJEA President Barbara Keshishian issued this statement, following a rushed agreement struck between Senate President Steve Sweeney and Governor Christie on a new property tax cap:

"Senate President Steve Sweeney and Governor Christie have reached an agreement for a new tax levy cap. On a holiday weekend in July, with only a handful of legislators even present in the Statehouse, they have struck a closed-door deal on a property tax cap limitation proposal that will devastate New Jersey's public schools and community services. This governor came to Trenton claiming that his administration would not do "business as usual," but the old Trenton tradition of backroom deals is becoming all too common in his administration.

"As has happened so often in recent months, a critically important policy decision has been made in a rushed, secretive manner, with limited opportunity for careful study or public input. Moving so quickly is the height of irresponsibility; school and municipal budgets which will be affected by this legislation will not even be set until next year. Surely, legislators could have taken time this summer to do the job right, as their leaders assured the public they would just 24 hours ago. They could have carefully and responsibly studied and considered these proposals before agreeing to them. Instead, Senate President Sweeney rushed through a deal with Gov. Christie that would never have withstood public scrutiny and reasoned debate.

"The consequences of this deal will be grave. It contains no exception for rising special education costs in local districts, so parents of students with special needs should prepare for

fighting with districts over the services their children need. It contains no exception for inflation, including the cost of fuel, textbooks or supplies. As school budgets, which have already been slashed this year, are stretched tighter, deeper cuts in staff and even larger class sizes are inevitable. Parents should prepare to see extracurricular programs eliminated and higher fees imposed on previously affordable activities.

"This is a dark day for democracy and public education in New Jersey."

P.E.A. *News Note*

While the "cap limit" excludes some areas from the cap, negotiations, from what we see, are not among the list. Last year, the increment cost in Paterson was 2.3%. As any third grade math student can figure out, that's .3% ABOVE THE CAP PROPOSED BY THE BULLY.

It is more important than ever to reach out to the members of the Assembly to seek their opposition to the Senate's cop out to the Governor.