

# Christie Trying to Put the Screws to Negotiations

**Tool Box Initiatives a Tool for Stopping Your Salary Increases  
"Last Best Offer" Would allow Boards to Delay and then IMPOSE  
Contract Settlements.**

From the Westfield Patch  
By [John Celock](#) | July 22, 2010

A proposal from Gov. Chris Christie to overhaul teacher contract negotiations has gained support from management while further angering the state teachers union.

As part of his proposed toolkit to reduce property taxes statewide, Christie is calling for the move back to allowing "last offer/best offer" in negotiations. The system would allow Boards of Education to unilaterally impose a contract on a local union in the event negotiations broke down. The system was allowed in New Jersey until banned by law in 2003.

Frank Belluscio, a spokesman for the New Jersey School Boards Association, said the proposal would provide assistance to school boards by allowing them to impose final offers when negotiations drag on. Current policy allows boards and teachers unions to go to a binding arbitration, which Christie and municipal leaders have said resulted in larger compensation awards to unions.

The last offer/best offer proposal is part of the arbitration reform component of the toolkit, which is being decided by the legislature this summer as part of Christie's effort to control property taxes. The proposal is separate from the arbitration component, which would allow for changes in how arbitration is handled and require settlements to fall in line with the recently passed two percent hard cap on property tax increases.

Michael Drewniak, Christie's press secretary, declined to comment on the specifics of the last offer/best offer proposal, saying the bill is still being written.

The proposal has gained strong opposition from the New Jersey Education Association; with a union spokesman saying it would hurt the idea of collective bargaining between labor and management. The union and Christie have been locked in a war of words for months over state education aid and salary issues.

"That is a bad idea," NJEA spokesman Steve Baker said. "It eliminates the concept of collective bargaining when one party can stall the process and then impose its will. That's not collective bargaining."

Baker said data used by the NJEA show that the last offer/best offer resulted in higher salaries as well, something Belluscio disputes, noting the compensation has grown larger than the Consumer Price Index since the elimination of last offer/best offer in 2003.

This year's contract between the Westfield Board of Education and the Westfield Education Association passed in March in a quick fashion, compared to neighboring districts like Cranford, which has gone a

year without a contract. The deal calls for a 3.9-percent annual pay raise for teachers and a greater employee contribution to health care.

During a town hall meeting on the school district budget in April, Schools Superintendent Margaret Dolan said she and the Board of Education have been looking for changes in arbitration rules to be passed as part of the toolkit to allow for greater freedom in negotiating by the BOE. In her remarks at the town hall meeting, Dolan noted that she knows of districts that ended up in arbitration and have large pay raises awarded to teachers. She did not reference last offer/best offer at the time.

Baker said there have been no teacher strikes since last offer/best offer has been implemented, a notion that is illegal in New Jersey. Belluscio said the NJSBA would like to strengthen the strike law in the state with the implementation of New York's Taylor Law in New Jersey.

The Taylor Law, signed by former New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller in the late 1960s, prohibits striking by public employees. The law subjects public employees or public employee unions, which engage in strikes with large fines. The law was last enforced in 2005 during the New York City subway strike when the Transit Workers Union faced million dollar a day fines.

Belluscio said the NJSBA wants the law strengthened since the current rules are based on court orders and not as strong as the New York law.

"It would give the boards more power at the negotiating table and prevent using job actions to influence negotiations," he said.

Baker said the NJEA opposes the idea of the Taylor Law coming to New Jersey, saying it would have a long-term negative impact on public employees.

"They would like to have a situation where they will prevent strikes and have the public employees have no say in their salaries," he said of the NJSBA proposal.

It is not clear if Christie or the legislature is planning to consider the NJSBA proposal.

Derek Roseman, a spokesman for the Senate Democrats, said the caucus has no opinion on the last offer/best offer proposal or the Taylor Law proposal since the legislature has not been written. He said the caucus is waiting for a final proposal to come from the governor's office.

Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (R-Westfield), the number two Republican in the Assembly, said he needs to review a specific proposal on last offer/best offer, but he wants the arbitration aspect addressed as part of the toolkit. He said he agrees with Christie that the current situation does not help property tax relief.

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**From Politickernj.com**

## **Republicans Begin Attack on Sick Day Buy Backs as Part of Christie's Tool Kit Initiative**

### **Not Satisfied with taking from Future Staff; Bullies Turn their Focus to Current Employees**

State Sen. Joe Kyrillos (R-Middletown) was at the Statehouse this morning presenting testimony in favor of his toolkit property tax reform bill, S-2173, which would set a uniform limit on the cash payment for public employees' unused sick and vacation leave.

The Senate Budget Committee did not intend to vote on the bill today, which would restrict to \$15,000 the payment of supplemental compensation at retirement for accumulated sick leave for "current and future

officers and employees of boards of education and local governments." The bill would also limit the carrying forward of vacation leave to just one year.

"This past spring, the legislature enacted several pension and benefit reform bills," Kyrillos said in written testimony, which he gave to *PolitickerNJ.com*.

"One of those bills, S-4, put limits on vacation and sick leave in place for all new local, county and school district employees. It was a good idea that received strong bipartisan support. Now it is time to expand it to include employees that were hired prior to that bill's effective date."

Kyrillos cited egregious examples of unused sick time resulting in public sector "jackpots," including \$132,000 for the Freehold High School superintendent; \$172,000 for a retiring Avalon police chief; \$184,000 of accrued vacation and sick time for a Keansburg super; and \$8 million in accumulated leave costs in Atlantic City in 2006.

"These unacceptable payouts cannot continue," said Kyrillos. "New Jersey taxpayers cannot afford it. They represent a major reason why property taxes have continued to rise year, after year, after year. We need to take a balanced approach by capping retirement packages."

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From NorthJersey.com

## 'You ain't seen nothing yet,' Christie says at rally

**Monday, July 19, 2010**

BY CLAIRE HEININGER

STATE HOUSE BUREAU

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LACEY TOWNSHIP - Pounding a favorite theme of defying expectations, Governor Christie promised bolder steps ahead during a rally Monday night marking his six-month anniversary in office.

"It's our time not to let up," Christie told a jubilant crowd of more than 200 crammed inside a community center in Ocean County. "I did not come here for failure. I came here for success."

He said to expect drastic public employee pension and benefit reforms this fall, saying of an initial round of changes that affected new hires: "You ain't seen nothing yet."

He leaned on the Legislature to pass his "tool kit" of bills that would help towns cope with a recently passed 2 percent annual limit on property tax increases.

And when a mention of President Obama's name drew scattered boos, he said: "I hear you. We'll get to that in 2012." (He was quick to add he's not planning his own presidential run.)

But while stressing that "we've got a lot of hard work to do," the governor also admitted his start has been better than even he envisioned when he was sworn in on Jan. 19.

"Hell, I would've signed up right away for this," said Christie, who was joined onstage by his wife Mary Pat and three of their four children. His father sat in the front row.

Democrats, meanwhile, criticized the Republican governor for taking "victory laps" as a nonpartisan projection showed the state still faces a \$10.5 billion budget deficit next year despite Christie's vast spending cuts.

In GOP-friendly Ocean County - which gave him a margin of more than 70,000 votes in last year's election - Christie said he would work to elect Republicans John Runyan and Anna Little to Congress in competitive races this fall. Little, a Tea Party-backed candidate who beat the GOP establishment candidate in the June primary, needs full party support, Christie said.

After running through the laundry list of his early achievements, Christie was mobbed by supporters as he made his way out of the community center. One was Diane Bauernhuber, a third-grade teacher who helped lead the charge for a teacher wage freeze in Lacey Township - the first district to heed Christie's call for a voluntary pay freeze to help absorb his big budget cuts to school aid. Few local teachers unions followed suit.

"You're gonna have more scars than I will," Christie told her.

"It was a bumpy ride," Bauernhuber said later of the wage freeze. "First I thought he disliked the teachers. I still hope I did the right thing...I hope he keeps going."

Others had less serious topics to discuss, with several women gushing over the governor's purple tie. "You gotta be bold," Christie said.

Staff writer Lisa Fleisher contributed to this report

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**Bottom Line ... We have to Be Ready for  
These Battles.**

**“We must all hang together or we will  
most assuredly hang separately”**