

Not surprisingly, the proposal for an income tax rate cut and the forceful reiteration of the need for a dramatic and fundamental change in the state's public education system attracted most of the attention, but the more compelling part of Gov. Chris Christie's State of the State address Tuesday was his call for denying bail to violent repeat offenders and keeping them jailed until trial.

Compelling because it was a response to a plea from a woman who lives in Newark and who - along with her neighbors - asked the governor for help in confronting violent street crime, including gunplay, in the city.

The woman sat in the gallery in the Assembly chamber, breaking into a wide smile as the governor recounted his meeting with her and listening to her cry for help.

The usual government response would have been to empathize with her while pointing out that combatting crime is a uniquely local government responsibility, arrange a meeting for her with city government and law enforcement officials and wish her well.

Christie, though, sensed an opportunity to deliver a message of concern over rising crime rates in urban centers, and, as the woman rose from her seat in the gallery and received a standing ovation, the governor soaked up the warm reaction as well.

He destroyed for that moment at least the perception that government is a cold, unresponsive, uncaring group of people interested only in undertaking those things that help them remain in power or satisfy the demands of outside special interest groups.

His response was that one person can make a difference; that it is possible to take your fight to city hall and come away a winner. Government is capable of responding, Christie said in effect, and by acting decisively, it can restore faith in the system.

While conceding it may require an amendment to the state constitution to revise a defendant's right to bail, the governor raged against a system that returns violent repeat offenders to the streets where they can commit additional crimes or intimidate witnesses against them.

By doing so, he placed himself solidly beside those - like the woman from Newark - who experience firsthand the frustrations of seeing a violent criminal placed under arrest only to discover to their shock the same person roaming the neighborhood within days.

community and may even go a long way toward easing the fear people have of stepping forward and assisting police - a major and frustrating impediment to curbing violent crime.

In the current legislative session, the governor's tax-cut proposal and his education reform package will produce controversy, political strife, and heated policy debates. The 2013 gubernatorial and legislative election will never be very far from the minds of those involved. Both parties will maneuver for an edge, the kind of advantage which could make a difference in the outcome.

This past week, though, should be remembered as a time when the lone voice of a woman from Newark was heard. She was seeking help for herself as well as for the people of Camden, Trenton, Jersey City or any other community where the sound of gunfire and police and emergency sirens are part of everyday life.

And government responded.

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