

## Opinion: N.J. Gov. Chris Christie has played the tax cut proposals to his advantage

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By **Times of Trenton guest opinion column**

By **Carl Golden**

When he abandoned his proposal for a cut in the state's income-tax rates and threw in with the alternative proposed by the Democratic legislative leadership, Gov. Chris Christie displayed his pragmatism, but he also revealed a political calculation allowing him to claim victory if a tax cut is approved and blame Democrats if it fails.

The governor's call for a 10 percent across-the-board cut in income tax rates turned out to be the opening play in a high-stakes game whose outcome will have a substantial and potentially decisive impact on the gubernatorial and legislative election in 2013.

He's taken an ownership stake in the plan offered by Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-West Deptford) to provide a credit of up to \$1,000 against individual income tax liability based on the amount of property taxes paid.

The issue has been complicated by the steep decline in tax revenues from initial projections, creating a shortfall that, by the administration's own reckoning, exceeds \$700 million and that the Office of Legislative Services, the Legislature's research arm, estimates could be as much as \$1.4 billion by next year.

While these numbers brought some tax-cut enthusiasts up short, neither the governor nor Sweeney has wavered from the view that New Jerseyans want and deserve a tax cut, no matter how modest, and from the assertion that the governor has recommended a series of budget re-adjustments to absorb the additional revenue loss.

The largest and most controversial of the budget revisions involves diverting \$260 million from transportation capital



Tony Kurdzuk/The Star-Ledger

Governor Chris Christie (left) smiles and offers a handshake to Senate President Stephen Sweeney as the two sit on the stage waiting to speak at the ground-breaking ceremony for the new Cooper Medical School of Rowan University in a file photo.



He's paid a price for those compromises, not only from the organized labor base of his party but internally, as well, from those who grumble he's too cozy with the governor, labeling him a "Christiecrat."

His leadership skills and ability to achieve party unity will be put to the test as the tax cut debate unfolds. If he's successful, he'll receive credit and more than likely avert serious political consequences in next year's campaign.

It is, however, the order of things in New Jersey that, while it may be Sweeney's bill, it will be Christie's tax cut.

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