



OPINION: CHRISTIE SUFFERS RARE SETBACK TO PUSH KEAN ASIDE

CARL GOLDEN | NOVEMBER 12, 2013

Blocking governor -- and Senate President Sweeney -- GOP reaffirms own legislative leadership



Gov. Chris Christie is fond of reminding gubernatorial campaign, he promised to "bring the state government back down." In his successful reelection bid last year, he'd fulfilled that promise and would carry on for a second term.

It's unlikely that when Christie made his move to change the culture of state government, he intended to be so busy selecting the Republican legislative leadership.

Two days after his 22-point victory over state Sen. Barbara Buono, though he did not intend to become very publicly involved in a contest for the post of Senate minority leader, he was seen publicly pressuring senators to support Essex County state Sen. Kevin O'Toole to replace Sen. Thomas H. Kean Jr.

He lost.

It was a rare political misstep for Christie and, because it was so unusual, it drew a lot of attention from the media and from those who wondered aloud about the consequences that would be delivered to the Governor by his own party.

After all, Republican senators under Kean's leadership had stood steadfastly behind him and his agenda for the past four years, sustaining his vetoes and supporting his policies when there was political risk in doing so.

Where every prior governor had refused to tread --- becoming involved in prerogative of legislators selecting their own leadership --- Christie barge individual senators to his office in full view of reporters and leaning on the another term as their leader.

His attempt to replace Kean was perceived as a desire to mollify a remark Senate President Steve Sweeney who was so incensed by Kean's recruitment oppose him in his Gloucester County district that he wanted him punished governor's help to do it.

Kean, however, quickly lined up support in the party caucus and intensified releasing a letter signed by 10 of his colleagues pledging their votes to his term.

Whether Christie miscalculated the depth of resentment his efforts created unclear, but a majority of Republican senators quickly deduced that ousting tantamount to ceding to Sweeney the power to select their party's leader.

No matter their years of unquestioning loyalty to Christie, the perception their party to the Democratic leader was too much to swallow. Accepting be the equivalent of a political neutering.

Middlesex County Sen. Sam Thompson, one of the few Republicans willing that if Sweeney was allowed to claim

As predicted in virtually every poll, Christie's influence on the legislative on the ballot simply didn't exist. His was a personal victory rather than a Kean, aware as everyone else that there were few competitive districts, expected of party leaders -- he directed funds to Republican candidates who were slender at best, but where the possibility of catching lightning in a A disappointingly low turnout, a legislative district map tilted toward inc spending on behalf of Democratic candidates doomed Kean's efforts. Rat gratitude for bucking the odds and extending himself in behalf of his part perversely blamed him for the losses.

While some speculated that Christie's failed effort to replace Kean was t lame duck governor, it's far more likely that his second term agenda will Republicans.

Resentments may linger, but they won't get in the way of issues of subst: a tax cut that it is anticipated Christie will pursue aggressively, as well a: local governments with tools to rein in property taxes.

As the new legislative session unfolds in January, the confrontation over minority leader will fade, dismissed as the kind of political "inside baseb ignored by voters.

Speculation will instead turn to Christie's national ambitions, whether he year term, and whether Sweeney will move to position himself as the Der governor.

"Turning Trenton upside down" may continue to be Christie's goal, but for at least t y a caucus vote of 10 6 will remain upright much to Sweeney's dismay.

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