



Christie's relationship with Sweeney has quietly annoyed some Republicans, particularly in the aftermath of Christie's landslide victory in which he failed to help his party gain a single legislative seat.

The strength of the Christie-Sweeney alliance will be put to the test early on in the new legislative session should the governor - as anticipated - propose a tax cut, either an across-the-board income-tax reduction or one granting a property-tax credit.

The governor has been adamant in his demands for a cut, while Sweeney has offered encouraging comments but has insisted that state revenues must be sufficient to offset the loss a reduction would produce.

There is little doubt that both desire a tax cut. Campaigning as a tax cutter - Republican or Democrat, for president or governor - is an enormous advantage.

While the administration's revenue estimates have consistently been overly optimistic, the gap has narrowed. Should the trend continue and Sweeney detect a sliver of sunshine, he'll go all in on a tax cut, make an affordability argument and bring his caucus with him.

Christie confronts other difficult issues as well: agonizingly slow economic growth, chronically high unemployment, and an anemic job-creation rate that has recovered little more than half of the jobs lost in the downturn of four years ago.

The likelihood of budget cuts remains, along with demands for increased state aid to school districts and municipalities to maintain services and hold off property tax increases.

There will be potential political restiveness as well. Resentment over Christie's involvement in the attempt to oust Kean still lingers, and there are questions about whether Senate Republicans will remain united in support of gubernatorial vetoes, particularly as the reality of his lame-duck status becomes clear.

Christie has managed to keep his distance from the increasingly bitter dispute between Kean and Sweeney, but pressure may grow for him to intervene and broker a truce to knock it off the front pages.

So, while voters across the state will troop to the polls this November to choose who will serve in the House of Representatives, they'll do so with the lion's share of their political news having originated in the Statehouse.

It's just another of democracy's afterthoughts.

*Carl Golden is a senior contributing analyst with the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.*