

## June 30, 2010 Political Update

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The New Jersey Legislature passed a budget bill Monday night which the Governor signed Tuesday afternoon. This year's budget legislation represents the largest budget cut in state history. For the first time in eight years a Republican has the reigns in the statehouse. However with the legislature still controlled by Democrats, there was much speculation on the possibility of a statewide government shut down while the two bodies fought over budget priorities. This was avoided last night when the Democrats gave Republicans the votes needed to get the budget through the legislature and to the Governor's desk. The budget cleared both houses with bare majorities under a deal in which the Democrats provided just enough votes for the Republican-sponsored measure to pass. It will close an \$11 billion projected deficit, largely through cuts and a skipped \$3 billion contribution to the languishing state pension system. It is well below last year's \$28.9 billion spending plan and the high of \$33.5 billion passed in 2007.

After several hours of debate and several dozen representatives rising to speak both for and against, the Assembly passed the budget early Tuesday morning by a vote of 41 to 37, with all Republicans and eight Democrats voting in favor. The eight Democrats who voted "aye" were Assembly Representatives Nelson Albano (D-Vineland), Upendra Chivukula (D-Franklin Twp.), Albert Coutinho (D-Newark), Joe Cryan (D-Union Twp.), Matt Milam (D-Vineland), Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver (D-East Orange), Ruben Ramos (D-Hoboken), and Caridad Rodriguez (D-West New York). The vote followed a day of political theater and maneuvering that saw two lawmakers who said last week said they would not vote for the plan and fall into line with the rest of the GOP. Both Assemblywoman Alison McHose (R-Franklin) and Michael Patrick Carroll, (D-Morris Twp.) voted in favor after nearly a week of opposition. The Senate passed the budget much earlier in the evening than the Assembly with Democrats Teresa Ruiz, Jeff Van Drew, Sandra Cunningham and Brian Stack providing the votes the Republicans needed to pass the bill.

There were many compromises made between both houses, including keeping Hagedorn Psychiatric Hospital open; giving money to the Old Barracks Museum, The Battleship NJ and the Newark Museum; restoring funds to NJ Libraries; and providing funding to the NJ Stars program for college students.

A thoroughly detailed summary including explanations of the areas of restoration within the budget bill as well as a bit of history on previous budgets can be found at this link: <http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/10/0629/0310/>

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Governor Christie has ordered a special joint session to convene this Thursday to address his proposed Cap 2.5 Reform Agenda. This proposed property tax cap proposal and the thirty-three legislative proposals would be in his "toolkit". He has notified the two houses that the session will begin Thursday at 10am. Democrats were none too happy with Christie's call for the session, vowing that the governor's cap will never see the light of day. The constitutional amendment would require voter approval and lawmakers would need to pass it by July 7 in order for it to appear on the November ballot. Democratic leaders have announced their own version of a 2.9% cap, assigning thirty-four property tax reform-related bills to 12 of their members who will review the concepts over the summer in preparation for legislative action in the fall. Republicans have said Christie is likely to conditionally veto the 2.9% legislation to make it more resemble his plan.

If Christie's version isn't passed by July 7, it cannot go on the ballot for 2011.

Both houses voted Monday on restoring \$7.5 million to support family planning clinics. The controversial bill (S-2139) re-ignited a debate over whether the money would be used surreptitiously to underwrite abortions. The bill finds the funding by moving some of the money Governor Christie set aside to cover an increase in the state employee prescription drug program. The Senate passed the bill Monday afternoon by a 30-10 veto-proof margin, with the help of two Republican women and without much debate criticizing Christie's decision to eliminate the funding as insensitive to women. They said the governor's decision was economically foolish, noting it turns down \$9 in federal funding for every \$1 the state spends. A pre-vote discussion in the Assembly turned testy as Assemblyman Jay Webber (R-Morris) grilled the bill's sponsor, Linda Stender (D-Union), on how the state's money would be spent by the 58 family planning clinics in New Jersey. The Assembly passed the bill 42-22, with 13 abstentions. The bill now heads to the Governor's desk for his signature. He has 45 days to decide if he'll sign this legislation or veto it.

The following article describes in more detail the dialogue in the Assembly:  
[http://www.northjersey.com/news/state/budget/062910\\_familyplanningbill.html](http://www.northjersey.com/news/state/budget/062910_familyplanningbill.html)