

# **GOP candidate Christie dismisses complaints over campaign's lack of specifics**

**By Claire Heininger/Statehouse Bureau**

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NEWARK -- Under fire for his lack of detailed plans to fix the state's finances, Republican gubernatorial candidate Chris Christie refused to depart from his strategy today, insisting voters can judge the merits of his smaller-government philosophy against the track record of Democratic Gov. Jon Corzine.

Christie also dismissed the candidacy of independent Chris Daggett -- a thorn in his side in public opinion polls and during last week's debate -- as "an amusement."

Christie pledged "drastic" spending cuts staked largely on negotiating with state worker unions, and said Corzine has not revealed his plans to close an estimated \$8 billion budget gap. "The governor gets credit for saying that we know what his general philosophical approach will be, so we don't need to know what his specifics are," Christie told The Star-Ledger's editorial board. "If that's sufficient for Jon Corzine, it's sufficient for me."

Pressure on Christie to reveal more specifics built during last week's debate, when Corzine and Daggett him of having no plans.

"Eleven months into this campaign, the specifics and substance are missing," Corzine said in an interview on Friday.

Christie today struck back with an ad blasting Corzine's "failed record" and saying "exactly what I'll do as governor": cut spending, cut taxes and attract jobs to New Jersey.

He echoed those campaign themes today, promising to cut costs by winning salary and benefit concessions from state worker unions when their contract is up for renewal in 2010. Christie argued he will get a better deal from unions because he can truly wield the threat of layoffs, saying Corzine counts on unions for political support. "I'm not in bed with them and dependent upon them for my political future," Christie said.

Christie also said he wasn't worried about Daggett, whose recent rise in the polls coincided with a narrowing of Christie's lead over Corzine. Daggett has pitched a plan he says would cut property taxes 25 percent by shifting much of the burden to the state sales tax,

"His property tax plan is not something that I'm the least bit concerned with or interested in, and his candidacy is one that's an amusement," Christie said. "He's not going to be governor of New Jersey. We all know that. It's going to be me or it's going to be Jon Corzine, and I'm not really worried about Chris Daggett in the least."

A Quinnipiac poll last week showed 12 percent support for Daggett -- to Christie's 43 percent and Corzine's 39 percent -- before the independent's widely praised debate performance.

Daggett brushed off Christie's comments. "What's amusing is that some people in New Jersey believe that he's running a real campaign, because he has said absolutely nothing," he said.

Former Gov. Brendan Byrne, a Democrat who famously capitalized on GOP opponent Ray Bateman's release of a plan late in the 1977 governor's race, said Christie's strategy makes sense.

"We pushed Ray Bateman and he came out with a bad plan, that's all," Byrne said. "Now if this guy comes out with a good plan, he might save himself."

Carl Golden, a top Republican strategist who worked for former Govs. Tom Kean and Christie Whitman, said Christie may have missed his window of opportunity. "The problem becomes, it gets to be the middle of the month and he tries to do something, it's going to be seen as desperation," he said.