

State of the State: Christie praises incentives, omits Transportation Trust Fund

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Namedropping recent incentive-driven projects involving the likes of Subaru and the Philadelphia 76ers in Camden and Forbes Media in Jersey City, Gov. Chris Christie said in Tuesday's annual State of the State address that the streamlining of incentives under the Economic Opportunity Act has "better targeted them to areas of our state that need investment most."



Gov. Chris Christie delivers his State of the State address Tuesday.

"And the verdict is in — and the early returns from the Economic Opportunity Act show that it is working to attract and retain businesses," Christie said.

But drawing on the recent announcement made by Mercedes-Benz USA that it plans to leave its Bergen County corporate headquarters for Atlanta, Christie said that even the most attractive incentive offerings cannot stand alone in attracting and retaining businesses.

"Economic incentive laws help, but lower taxes are better," Christie said. "We will not win the fight to keep and create good paying jobs for our middle class families in New Jersey unless we lower taxes."

Christie noted that he has previously vetoed four income tax increases and vowed to do the same to any additional increases put before him.

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That stance earned Christie high marks for his speech from members of the business community.

John Boyd Jr., principal of the Princeton-based Boyd Company, said Christie's decision to lead "with the very telling departure of Mercedes powerfully framed the decline of the (New Jersey) business climate over the past 30 years."

"The reality is that politics matter (and) his pledge to hold the line on taxes is essential," Boyd said. "Our clients not only want to see property tax reform and pension reform, but they are concerned about new regulations like mandatory paid sick leave. Our clients want to make HR decisions like paid sick leave on their own, not dictated by politicians in Trenton."

New Jersey Chamber of Commerce President Tom Bracken applauded Christie for pledging to fight further income tax hikes and for giving a “realistic assessment of the state’s job and economic growth during his years in office.”

“We absolutely agree with the governor, because we have been advocating for both less-intrusive government and lower taxes for a long time,” Bracken said.

“The governor has the right diagnosis when it comes to high taxes hurting our business climate,” New Jersey Business & Industry Association President Michele Siekerka added. “Lowering taxes is the cure, and there is no better place to start than with the state’s estate and inheritance taxes.”

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Christie struck a noticeably national tone in addressing other broad economic challenges, attempting to draw parallels where he could between New Jersey-based and national issues.

He used the rest of the address to touch on topics ranging from improvements in Camden to pension and prisoner reform.

But in what some who listened to him speak Tuesday in the Assembly Chambers perceived to be glaring omissions, Christie declined to mention anything pertaining to the state’s depleted Transportation Trust Fund or the turbulent local economy in Atlantic City, where an unprecedented four casinos closed down in the past calendar year.

“The governor had the chance to accurately acknowledge the state of our state,” said Gordon MacInnes, president of liberal think tank New Jersey Policy Perspective. “Unfortunately, he passed on the opportunity.”

“Gov. Christie did not even try to spin away five years of failed policies in his address,” said New Jersey Working Families Executive Director Analilia Mejia. “He simply ignored them. New Jerseyans don’t need platitudes about bipartisanship. We need real solutions for our state’s sluggish job growth, sky-high foreclosure rate and a botched Sandy recovery. Instead of offering speeches without substance or chasing presidential aspirations at Cowboy games, the governor should focus on reversing policies that have benefited the state’s wealthiest residents and corporations at the expense of nearly everyone else.”

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