

## Anger powers Christie's win

By DEREK HARPER Statehouse Bureau | Posted: Wednesday, November 4, 2009 |

*With related story on Christie's effect on Ocean County races*

**TRENTON** - A day after Chris Christie's election as governor, voters suggested that Jon S. Corzine's unpopularity was a primary factor in Christie's victory.

Greg Mallick, a business owner in Mays Landing, said he pulled the lever for the Republican - even though he realized on Wednesday he did not agree with the former U.S. attorney.

"When I think about it, I don't really like Christie," Mallick said. "But he got my vote, because I'm so dissatisfied with Corzine."

In Pleasantville, employees talked about the race at Community Quest Inc., a job-placement nonprofit. Fear of future cuts was mixed with the memory of the past year's state budget woes, which diminished the group's funds.

"I just think there was a level of anger at Corzine," said Tiffany Mayse, a Democrat who said she had liked independent candidate Chris Daggett. "And even I hadn't seen what he had done to deserve another term."

The mood was mixed: Democratic Galloway Township Commissioner Meg Worthington was swept off the governing body after 24 years, but Republicans managed to pick up only one seat in the Assembly, even though the GOP specifically targeted Democrats Nelson Albano and Matt Milam, D-Cape May, Cumberland, Atlantic.

Domenick DiCicco, a Republican who has never held elective office, will take over for Democratic Assemblywoman Sandra Love, who did not run for re-election in the 4th District. Democrats have held the seat, which covers parts of suburban Camden and Gloucester Counties, since 2003. DiCicco's win brings the party breakdown of the Assembly to 47 Democrats and 33 Republicans.

Corzine had no events planned for Wednesday or today.

The Governor's Office released photos of a casually attired Corzine in his Statehouse office speaking on the phone, a paper coffee cup next to a stack of newspaper clips and his Blackberry. A spokesman said that the governor spoke with Christie about the transition.

Christie toured the Robert Treat Academy in Newark. He announced that David Samson, state attorney general under former Democratic Gov. James McGreevey, would chair his transition team, according to a release.

He also named former Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeff Chiesa the executive director of the transition team.

Locally, Corzine held onto Cumberland County while losing Atlantic County, as well as the Republican strongholds of Cape May and Ocean counties.

The Ocean County totals were key because it gave Christie a 70,254-vote plurality over Corzine. That was more than three times the 21,710-vote edge Republican candidate Douglas Forrester carried out of there in 2005.

Ocean County Republican Chairman George Gilmore said the party had thousands of people working on the campaign as soon as the primary concluded in June. The county party also coordinated with local offices.

Four years ago, Corzine won Atlantic County by a 6,535-vote margin.

Christie's unofficial 2,634-vote margin over Corzine marked the first time a Republican gubernatorial candidate won Atlantic County since 1997. That year Republican incumbent Gov. Christie Todd Whitman carried the county by 2,273 votes.

Atlantic County GOP Chairman Keith Davis attributed it to lingering resentment from the 2006 government shutdown, as well as early Corzine statements considering racetrack slot machines. He compared it to Christie commitments that he said included signing an executive order designating casino inspectors essential, opposition to expanded gaming and redirecting Casino Reinvestment Development Authority funds to Atlantic City.

County Democratic Chairman Patrick D'Arcy said larger issues held sway, while saying there was relatively light turnout in Democratic strongholds in Atlantic City and Pleasantville.

"Look, people are unhappy. The economy is in terrible shape," D'Arcy said. "I think there is a light at the end of the tunnel, but people wanted a change."

On an Election Day that saw Republicans gain in Virginia, the only other state electing a governor this year, Democrats downplayed national implications.

"I don't think anybody went in to vote against (President Barack) Obama other than some strong, right-wing conservative, you know, the guy who'll get a jolly out of that," Senate President Richard Codey on Tuesday night. "The average person doesn't care less about Obama today. It was about Corzine or Christie, and it was as simple as that."

But Republicans suggested national fiscal issues also motivated people.

Gilmore recalled a lightly announced Sept. 11 visit to Toms River by the anti-tax "Tea Party Express." Walking the three blocks from his office in the rain, he was startled to see several thousand people rallying. He recognized barely any as active Republicans. He marveled, "It was a rainy night and 3,000 people showed up."

Political scientists, however, discounted any wider meaning.

"People were voting on New Jersey issues, not on Obama's issues," said Ben Dworkin, director of the Rebovich Institute of New Jersey Politics.

He said while Corzine was able to make Christie a less-attractive candidate, he was never able to articulate his accomplishments and improve his standing among voters.

He said Obama had tried to up the partisan stakes, under the theory that in a state with more Democrats than Republicans, the Democrat would win in a party-line vote. Democrats made a huge get-out-the-vote effort, he noted, but "the effectiveness of that effort was somewhat negated because the product they were selling was a governor who wasn't getting more than 75 percent of his party (to vote for him, according to polls) and 40 percent of the people overall."

Similarly, Sharon Schulman said the race was a referendum on Corzine.

"It wasn't like the (former Gov. Jim) Florio years, when it was 'get rid of everybody,'" said Schulman, the director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. She agreed that Corzine's message that the state was better off with him in charge didn't resound.

"People aren't thinking that deeply," she said. "They're thinking the about the security of their own jobs and their own problems."

Jeff Tittel, executive director of the state Sierra Club, attributed the win to demoralized Democrats staying home and avoiding voting for Corzine.

"The first rule in politics is be true to your base," said Tittel, who supported Daggett, "and Jon Corzine wasn't, and he lost."

At the end, many voters may have agreed with Mallick, who said Eden, his four-year-old nursery and garden design business in Mays Landing, was buffeted by the economy.

"We just wanted change, didn't we? That's what New Jersey wants and says it wants," he said.

"That's the anger that voters are trying to express."

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