



Everything Jersey

Gov. Chris Christie's cabinet: Where are the conservatives?

By Paul Mulshine/The Star Ledger

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AP Photo/Mel Evans

Gov. Chris Christie, center, speaks at his first Cabinet meeting in Trenton.

What a difference a year makes.

Exactly one year ago today, **Chris Christie** kicked off his campaign for governor. He positioned himself as the true conservative in the three-man primary, making the case that he was even further to the right than ex-Bogota mayor **Steve Lonegan**.

That's a tough challenge. The only politicians I ever met who were further to the right than Lonegan lived in Latin America and considered 9mm pistols to be mere junk jewelry.

But the voters bought it. **And now Christie's governor.** So how's he scoring on the right-left scale? Let's look down his list of cabinet picks and see how many conservatives there are.

Okay, there's **Bret Schundler** running Education. Bret's a solid conservative. And let me see . . . Who else?

Certainly not that **Dr. Ruth** doppelganger he chose the other day to run the Department of Children and Family Services. **Janet Rosenzweig** certainly seemed like a pleasant enough sort when the governor introduced her at a Monday news conference. But when I got home and did a bit of research, I found out that her most recent job was as executive director of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality.

I read some of the society's brochures. Its primary activity seems to be holding conferences in places I wish I was right now, like Puerto Rico. I think I'd skip the seminar on "Turning Problems into Theory: A Model of Wanting and Not Wanting Sex," though. Instead I'd head directly to the poolside party, or perhaps take the tour of the Bacardi Rum factory.

Not that there's anything wrong with studying sex for a living. It just sounds more like what you'd expect from an appointee named by a liberal Democrat.

You could say the same for other key Christie appointments. He chose a Democrat from Essex County, **Paula Dow**, as attorney general. I can't see how that's going to work out if he gets into a brawl with the people who really run New Jersey at the moment, the judges on the state Supreme Court.

And then there's the Schools Development Authority. So far the SDA has blown through more than \$7 billion in borrowed money while building just a fraction of the schools scheduled. The SDA will soon be asking to borrow about \$4 billion more to build schools in the so-called "special needs" districts. So did Christie choose some skinflint from the suburbs to put an end to the program? Nope. He chose a guy from one of the cities splitting up the swag, Irvington. Attorney **Marc Larkins** could be a great guy for all I know, but his city is slated to get more than \$100 million in free schools. If he cuts off the cash flow, he'd better leave town and not come back.

Then there's the other major problem area, the state's megalomaniacal affordable-housing bureaucracy known as COAH. During the campaign, Christie promised to shut it down by January of this year. Now he's named as the head of the department that administers COAH a woman who served in the McGreevey administration as chief of staff to the attorney general. Lawyer **Lori Grifa** was last in the news for bailing out Assemblyman **Joe Cryan's** ex-girlfriend at the behest of **Jon Corzine**. That's a matter too complicated to go into here, but suffice it to say that she is just one of many Christie appointees who could just as easily have held the same jobs under the two prior Democratic governors.

This sort of thing is applauded as bipartisanship — at least by the hacks in the hallways of the Statehouse. And that's the problem. It was bipartisanship that created the current mess, particularly in the area of property taxes. The taxpayers want conservatism, at least if the most recent Monmouth University poll is any indication. About 71 percent of respondents say they will be upset with Christie if property taxes are still high four years from now.

The thinking inside the mainstream GOP is that Christie had to run to the right to win the primary, but once he had accomplished that, he could move back to the center. And so he has surrounded himself with moderates. But there is no moderate way to cut property taxes. There's no moderate way to get rid of COAH, close down the SDA, fix the pension problem or do any of the other things Christie has to do to restore fiscal sanity to this state.

I suspect the governor will figure that out soon. But if he needs a clue, all he has to do is dig up some of his old speeches from this time last year, and then try to figure out how the guy who made those speeches would run the state.

NOTE: GET A CLUE. COMMENTERS: I notice a lot of commenters are asking why I insist on applying the label "conservative" in assessing these appointments. Do your research. I'm not the one who was running around the state this time last year insisting I was the most conservative candidate for governor. Chris Christie is that guy. He set the standard, not me. So don't criticize me for holding him to it. Instead try and think deep thoughts on just how he's going to keep his promise to cut taxes.

And answer this question: Do you believe Christie will end COAH, as he promised? Do you believe he will borrow another \$4 billion without voter approval?

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