



Remember those rebates? Another broken property-tax relief promise

By Paul Mulshine/The Star Ledger

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AP Photo/Mel Evans, File

Chris Christie during the campaign: When he tells you the check is in the mail, don't camp out by your mailbox.

With all the attention being paid to Chris Christie's St. Patrick's Day Massacre of suburban taxpayers, I haven't had the time to focus on another broken promise from the new governor.

And that concerns those rebates. You know, the annual checks that Christie promised to preserve during the Republican primary at this time last year?

They're gone. And now thanks to Christie, suburban taxpayers will face a double whammy: a big hike in property taxes to make up for the school aid he took away from them. And no other tax relief from Trenton to make up for it.

In a **recent column** on his hypocrisy, I recalled the debate at this time last year:

At this time last year, the issue of property tax reform was the burning issue in the GOP primary. Both Merkt and former Bogota Mayor Steve Lonagan said they would end the rebates and instead change the funding formula so state aid is distributed equally. Lonagan termed the rebates "a scam." Merkt termed them "a feel-good political

boondoggle" and "an excuse for not fixing property taxes."

Christie defended the rebates.

"This is not a gimmick," Christie said in one primary debate. "We're in the middle of a recession, and people are struggling to pay their bills, and I am not going to favor anything that takes away relief from people who are struggling right now to pay their mortgages and to pay their bills."

At the time Christie was promise to protect the rebates, they represented \$1.9 billion of the state budget. A Star-Ledger article said of the rebates then in effect: "more than 1.3 million rebate checks were sent out -- averaging more than \$1,000 to household and tenants earning under \$150,000."

That's the program Christie proposed to protect.

But what about that direct tax credit he proposes? Doesn't that replace the rebates?

Only if you're as bad at math as the Governor admits to being.

A Star-Ledger article says that program "includes \$275 million for rebates," a mere pittance compared to the program Christie was defending at this time last year.

"That means the average eligible homeowner would get a \$258 rebate, while the average renter would get \$172 -- but not until May 2011. Last September, the average check was \$1,035 for homeowners and \$688 for renters," the article states.

By the way, the "average eligible homeowner" has to make under \$75,000 a year. Imagine if Christie had stood up at a GOP primary debate and told the truth: That he would eliminate rebates for most of the middle-class homeowners who vote in Republican primaries.

At that point, voters would have started looking at the other candidates and their two property-tax plans. Both Merkt and Lonegan proposed changing the state property-tax relief formula so that every town gets the same amount. That would mean property taxes would plummet in the suburbs.

Christie by comparison is cutting aid to the suburbs. Even his own home town is losing 99 percent of the paltry aid it receives. Suburban property taxes will soar under Christie.

In other words, if Christie had told the truth last year about his property-tax plans, he would not be governor today.

But he didn't tell the truth. When Chris Christie tells you "The check is in the mail," don't wait by the mailbox.

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