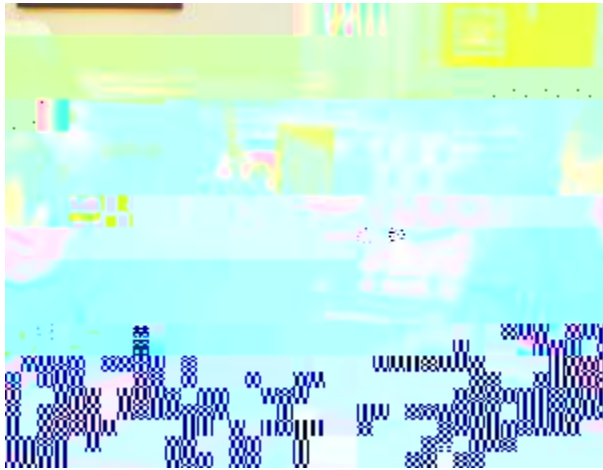


IN ANOTHER two months, the Christie administration will begin in earnest crafting the fiscal year 2014 state budget. The numbers crunchers and bean counters in the Department of Treasury and the Office of Management and Budget will huddle in their cubicles, crunching and counting, while Cabinet officers will busy themselves compiling their wish lists — most of which will go unfilled — to submit to the governor's office.



Governor Christie signing the 2013 Budget in his office in Trenton last June.

AP PHOTO / GOVERNOR'S OFFICE / TIM LARSEN

Governor Christie signing the 2013 Budget in his office in Trenton last June.

This year, the task of constructing a spending program in excess of \$30 billion will be played out against a background of a depressed economy, slower than anticipated and hoped for growth and an unemployment rate just short of 10 percent.

It is also Christie's first election year budget, guaranteeing that immediately upon its delivery to the Legislature in early February, politics rather than fiscal policy will dominate the debate.

Tax revenue has fallen short of administration projections,

although the amount is a matter of dispute, raising the prospect that spending cuts will be required in the current budget to maintain an adequate surplus heading into next year.

The Democratic-controlled Legislature scuttled Christie's proposal for a 10 percent cut in income tax rates, pledging to move ahead with a tax reduction program only if the administration's revenue estimates were reached by the end of the year — an unlikely outcome.

The governor has pretty much conceded that the rate of growth he initially projected — the most optimistic in the nation — won't be achieved but has steadfastly maintained a tax cut remains affordable and a reduction is vital for the state's economic competitiveness.

Christie vows veto

Christie upped the ante recently when he promised to veto any spending bills the Legislature sends him, no matter the program involved, until a tax cut is approved. He lit into Democrats, characterizing them as hypocrites and accused the media of complicity for publishing or broadcasting Democrats' criticisms and raising doubts about the state's ability to absorb the revenue loss a tax cut would reduce.

The news media likes nothing more than an ongoing public partisan political brawl, and the governor's attack on it certainly won't change or mute any of the coverage. If anything, media attention will rise to new levels if the governor issues a flurry of vetoes and Democrats mount override efforts to not only step up their criticisms but attempt to place Republican legislators in a politically embarrassing position of publicly voting to sustain the vetoes.

Christie's latest salvo came only a few days after he vetoed bipartisan legislation to require his administration to produce monthly revenue reports, even though the legislation merely codified an executive order he signed last year. In his veto, he also recommended a \$10,000 fine be imposed on anyone who disclosed information about the

be reached behind the twin glass doors just beyond the first floor rotunda in the Statehouse — the ones with the gold leaf “Office of the Governor” on them.

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