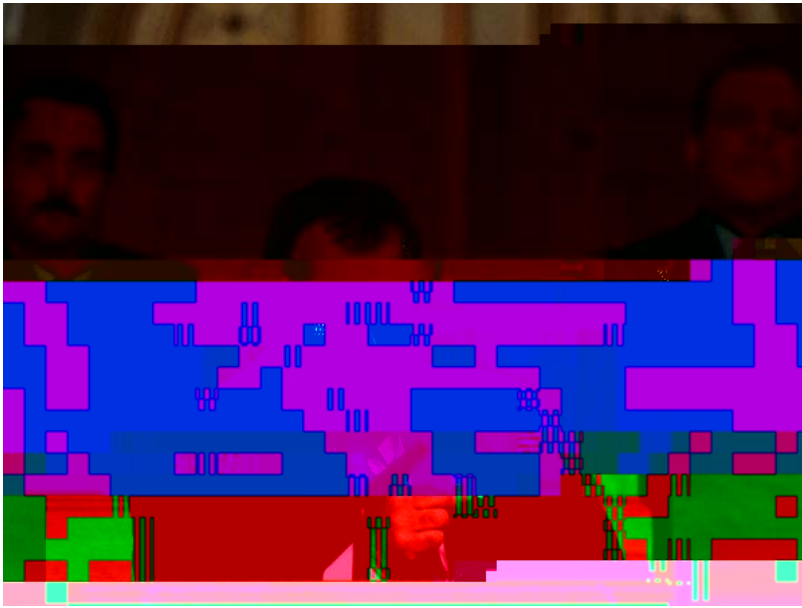


36 COMMENTS



Gov. Chris Christie gives his State of the State address in Trenton on Jan. 13, 2015. Behind him are Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto (left) and Senate President Stephen M. Sweeney. ( TOM GRALISH / Staff Photographer )



GALLERY: Christie touts his record, offers few new ideas

Maddie Hanna and Andrew Seidman, *Inquirer Trenton Bureau*

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TRENTON - Gov. Christie pledged his commitment to New Jersey in his annual State of the State address Tuesday, but his declaration that the nation was "beset by anxiety" signaled bigger ambitions ahead of a widely anticipated presidential campaign.

Christie, who has been considering a run for president in 2016, called for "a New Jersey renewal and an American renewal," describing a "palpable" anxiety he had witnessed while traveling the country last year as chairman of the Republican Governors Association.

Without attacking President Obama by name, Christie said the nation's leadership had been "called into question because of a pattern of indecision and inconsistency." And he criticized "leaders in Washington" who "would rather stoke division for their own political gain."

"We need to renew the spirit and the hopes of our state, our country, and our people," Christie said.

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As he spoke of national problems, Christie also touted his leadership of New Jersey, focusing much of his speech on the last five years - and too little of it, critics said, on his plans for the year ahead.

The governor advocated for passage of a school-voucher bill, promised more measures to combat drug addiction, and urged the Democratic-controlled Legislature to cut taxes.

Christie did not address some of the state's largest challenges, including the recent casino closures in Atlantic



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"You don't recognize obvious failures, and that's one of them," Sweeney said of the Sandy recovery.

A Fairleigh Dickinson PublicMind poll released Tuesday found 39 percent of New Jersey registered voters surveyed approved of the governor's job performance, while 47 percent disapproved. More than half - 53 percent - of voters surveyed said Christie was more concerned with running for president than governing the state.

One key issue Christie and lawmakers must address this year is how to replenish the fund for transportation projects.

Christie didn't discuss the matter Tuesday, but Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto (D., Hudson) said lawmakers had had "productive" conversations with the administration regarding the funding crisis.

All revenue from the state's 14.5-cent-per-gallon tax on gasoline goes toward more than \$1 billion in annual debt service. Next fiscal year, which begins July 1, the Transportation Trust Fund will run out of money for road, bridge, and rail projects.

Solving that problem could require raising the gas tax or finding another source of revenue, which could pose political problems for Christie as he tries to woo conservative voters in a Republican presidential primary.

If Christie bows to the interests of conservative voters in

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