

OUR POINT OF VIEW

# Budget: Good politics but only a good start

There was both good and bad news in looking at the budget plan Chris Christie outlined last week in Trenton.

The best news for business is, of course, the lack of new taxes and the fact that, rather than pick a divisive and unwinnable fight with Steve Sweeney, the plan includes \$2.25 billion for the long-neglected pension fund.

The bad news is, while there was a lot of talk about "tough choices," the governor really didn't make any.

Yes, \$2.25 billion of a \$34.4 billion spending plan is a significant chunk that drastically limits the education reforms Christie had hinted at in his State of the State address earlier this year. And his hands were tied by the deal he helped broker early in his term — an agreement to fund the retirement system in exchange for a higher re-

No new taxes. That's a nice thing. And no fights about pensions, either. But was there any real movement?

tirement age and other concessions from public workers. But, with his sights still seemingly set on a higher office, he's funding this not through a tax increase or new cuts, but by expecting revenue growth of nearly 6 percent over the current fiscal year. That might not be entirely sensible, given the current budget is pegged at some \$500 million off target.

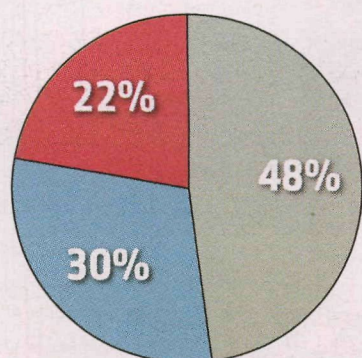
Enter Sweeney, who boldly declared, "If we stay the course, the pension system will be fine — it's not going to bankrupt us. What's missing here is we haven't grown

our economy, and that's the issue." Someone get the Legislature an economics textbook. New Jersey's ability to grow its economy while struggling to meet the crushing obligations of its pension fund is going to look an awful lot like the Charge of the Light Brigade, only with more blood. What executive will commit to coming here when money for schools, infrastructure and the like is all tied up in pensions?

Health care and retirement funding will continue to be the most vicious heads of the hydra that lawmakers must slay in order to create the kinds of conditions that are suitable to economic expansion. As costs for each will continue to rise, lawmakers must be willing to address unpopular solutions, be they further concessions from workers or tax increases. The alternative, as Christie pointed out, is California.

NJBIZ.COM READER POLL

Trenton-Mercer Airport now has nonstop service to 17 destinations on Frontier Airlines. How interested are you in flying out of Trenton as opposed to Newark or Philadelphia?



- Very: Let me see the schedules
- Somewhat: I'm skeptical but I'll give it a try
- Not at all: Too small, only one airline

Next question:

How do you see the pension issue being resolved?

- Nothing will happen; it will stay the same
- A deal will be reach by both sides
- Christie will act with an executive order

WINNERS

N.J. taxpayers

We'll call it — wait for it — a political compromise. Gov. Christie did not cut any taxes or call for any new ones. Both sides got a little something out of it, which is the way good government works.

Mary Jacobson

Simply put, the Superior Court judge who threw Trenton Mayor Tony Mack out of office did the right thing. And did it quickly. "Once you are found guilty by a jury of your peers, not only does the presumption of innocence disappear, but with it comes the stigma and the shadow ... of being found guilty by a jury of your peers of crimes of dishonesty," she said.

The NFL

We've ripped the league — deservedly — for many of the events surrounding the Super Bowl. So we'll praise them for making good on paying \$18K to the Secaucus school district and fire department — a sum they were threatening not to pay after pulling out of plans to lease space in the town.



LOSERS

Recallers

We get it — you're against Senate President Steve Sweeney because he's supporting a bill to reduce the number of rounds in a firearm. But a recall effort? Haven't we had enough of those in this country? The beauty of our system is that we can change our elected leaders at the ballot box. In a regularly scheduled election — not when you disagree with one action.

Turnpike commuters

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority, which operates the two major toll roads, already has paid \$31.8 million in snow removal. That's more than the previous two years combined, and we still have 10 months to go. We can only hope that doesn't mean less money for potholes.



Efe's employees

A couple of small-time thieves swiped a tip jar from Efe's Mediterranean Grill in Princeton recently. The good news? Two arrests have been made in the incident. Surprised to see that neither man is named Costanza.



FACETIME: MEASURED (OR MUTED)

At town halls, in his budget address, in his response to explosive comments by Port Authority Executive Director Pat Foye: Christie has been measured and thoughtful. No name calling, no bombast. It's made for solid governing and certainly is necessary as he rebuilds his reputation (and attempts to rebuild his poll ratings). But we have to admit, we kind of miss the straight-talk statements that endeared him to so many.

TRIPLE PLAY

THREE THOUGHTS FROM A TOP LEADER IN THE STATE:

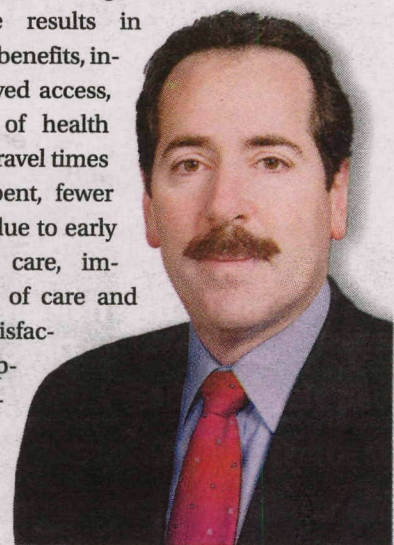
*Dr. Richard Bezozo is the president of MoleSafe, an advanced melanoma screening and surveillance program.*

We asked him for three reasons why the adoption of telemedicine will significantly improve patient care:

**1 Preventive Care:** There are many preventive measures for people who may be at high risk for certain conditions, such as melanoma and other types of cancers, and telemedicine provides greater access to quality care. Getting screened for various types of cancers and enrolling in early detection and surveillance programs will increase one's odds of avoiding cancer or detecting it at the earliest, most treatable and curable stages.

**2 Education:** This is needed for patients and doctors alike, to identify the diseases that individuals may be at high risk for developing and identify early detection programs and preventative care to decrease health care costs and increase the quality of life for all individuals.

**3 Standard of care:** Effectively utilizing technology offered through telemedicine results in several patient benefits, including improved access, reduced cost of health care, reduced travel times and money spent, fewer hospital stays due to early or preventive care, improved quality of care and high patient satisfaction. The adoption of telemedicine will drastically improve quality of care.



QUOTE MARKS

**"New Jersey's unwillingness to be clear on what HGI did wrong makes it impossible for the public to be sure the problems have been resolved. We still don't know if, or how, the state is correcting these problems, and how much more it will cost in money that could be used to actually help people still out of their homes."** — Adam Gordon, attorney at the Fair Share Housing Center, after the state fired the firm of Hammerman & Gainer Inc., which billed New Jersey more than \$51 million for eight months of poorly administrating the state's Sandy housing recovering programs.

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