

Asbury Park Press

EDITORIAL: Christie says no again to good public policy

Asbury Park Press, September 11, 2014

Gov. Christie's national ambitions have gotten in the way of good public policy in New Jersey yet again, this time with his veto of a bill that would have banned smoking in public parks and limited it at many beaches.

The proposed ban was overwhelmingly supported by the Legislature, and it's really nothing more than a common-sense public health measure. There are dangers from secondhand smoke even in open-air places, and the ban also would have reduced litter and fire hazards.

But none of that matters to Christie. He explained the veto with predictable and tired blather about unwanted government intrusions on local jurisdictions — even though he's perfectly happy to intrude when it suits him.

Everything Christie does these days is done with a singular purpose: to please the national conservatives he is courting for his presidential run. That's it. Conservatives, and especially the ideologues on the farther right who may hold Christie's fate in their hands, don't like anything that carries even the faintest of big-government scents. So the governor bowed down and did as he was told.

Christie also knelt at the altar of Big Tobacco in slapping down his veto, as visions of nicotine-laced sugar plums and fat donations danced in his head. Visions that apparently did not dance through his head were those of people sickened by the hundreds of toxic chemicals and 70 carcinogens found in secondhand smoke at a cost of \$6 billion a year, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

With so many potential benefactors to please, a sensible public-health measure that would benefit New Jerseyans but displease those benefactors didn't stand a chance.

That's too bad, because it's a worthy bill. Originally proposed as an outright ban on public smoking at all public parks and beaches, the measure was eventually amended to allow for a 15 percent section of beaches to be reserved for smoking at the discretion of local officials. But while the changes might have won over some lawmakers, they were irrelevant to Christie. The governor drew a random line in the sand on this one, deciding this was an instance when locals with their own peculiar reasons for supporting public smoking should be allowed to endanger public health.

The possibility of a veto override isn't even worth discussing. Christie has his collars wrapped so tightly around the necks of his fellow Republicans that most of them wouldn't dare even think of crossing their master on an override vote. And those few with a more independent mind aren't likely to use this particular issue as cause to tug on Superman's cape.

So down goes the smoking ban, where it will likely stay for the duration of Christie's gubernatorial tenure — or at least until Christie's presidential campaigning runs its course, whichever comes first.

In the meantime, remember, Christie isn't governing for any of us, even though that's his job. He's governing for himself. You may not mind when you agree with him, but wait until you don't. Then you may not be quite so content with a governor for whom his own home state is an afterthought.

<http://www.app.com/story/opinion/editorials/2014/09/11/editorial-christie-says-good-public-policy/15472743/>