



POLITICKERNJ

2016

The Year in Review



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POLITICKERNJ

2016: Year in Review

Welcome to another circus-sized examination of the year in New Jersey politics, one that was as long on laughs and thuds as it was short on intellect and inspiration.

This was the year when Gov. Chris Christie, long accustomed to bulldozing people, got run over by Donald J. Trump.

It seemed harmless enough at first.

As Christie ran for president and Senate President Steve Sweeney pursued the office of

governor, New Jersey kept a political holding pattern for the most part that at least didn't hasten doom. But when the two New Jersey leaders finally did get back to the business of governing, they approved a 23 cent on the gallon gas tax hike, which will add about \$200 annually to most residents' budgets.

No matter. At least we will have a competitive gubernatorial contest next year.

Oh, wait. That's already been decided.

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Politician of the Year

Phil Murphy

“

After his Goldman Sachs colleague Jon Corzine radiated lack of warmth and a particular reliance on cash to offset a personality deficit, Murphy exceeded expectations as a slimmed-down and faster moving Tip O'Neill on the trail.

”

The guy who grew up middle class on a good day proved he wasn't simply watching the *Andy Griffith Show* and *Hullabaloo* and daily strenuously resisting Henry James stereotypes up there in Boston in the 1960s. By the time Murphy was finished with this year's pre-Democratic Primary field, the retired Goldman Sachs executive and former U.S. Ambassador to Germany had unleashed a fearsome, Pamplona-like stampede of the town square. Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop? Roadkill. Senate President Steve Sweeney? Flattened. Veteran Senator Ray Lesniak? Already outside Pamplona City limits on a flight to Paris. Only Assemblyman John Wisniewski was left to dangle hopelessly from spindly arms over the carnage.

Of course, political junkies hated Murphy's early resolution of the contest. Post-Chris Christie, we craved a real collision among Democratic Party heavyweights, and Fulop v. Sweeney represented an especially interesting rivalry, with enough civil war potential to make the pre-Franco era of Spain look like a warm-up act for New Jersey 2017. Murphy shut that down, launching his campaign for governor back in May (to jeers at the time), and relying on a combination of a veteran team of operatives to put together a great conventional battle plan. The Murphy Campaign simultaneously undertook a rigorous public schedule, meeting representatives of key political groups, most significantly in Bergen, Essex and Passaic counties; blanketed the air and web waves with biographical ads; and did sufficient homework on the opposition to gain a vital political edge.

Critically, Murphy himself proved an ebullient retail politician. While Sweeney and Fulop respectively lumbered and roadrunnered around the campaign trail, Murphy ubiquitously backslapped and bear-hugged with aplomb. He was likeable. So was his wife Tammy. After his Goldman Sachs colleague Jon Corzine radiated lack of warmth and a particular reliance on cash to offset a personality deficit, Murphy exceeded expectations as a slimmed-down and faster moving Tip O'Neill on the trail. Someone once said that FDR in a room had the quality of a bottle of just-uncorked champagne. That was Murphy in campaign mode. His critics seethed, irritated by the candidate's willingness to say just about anything to force-feed his message of progressive activism. Murphy's soundbites had to be particularly bothersome to Sweeney, who had staked his own political career on advancing marriage equality in the Garden State.

But Murphy proved effective, as he put together the perfect working combination of winsome grinning



public player and very sharp elbowed backroom team tactician to muscle his way to Democratic Party domination. What seemed to stick as New Jersey tried to get around the Christie/George Washington Bridge scandal era was the candidate's happy warrior persona. "I think the party's relieved that the guy we're putting up as our candidate for governor is a gentleman," veteran Democratic Committeeman Tom Barrett told PolitickerNJ on the same morning that Essex County Democratic chairman Leroy Jones led his county's delegation in endorsing Murphy.



Happy Holidays and Best Wishes for 2017!

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Winner of the Year Josh Gottheimer



Josh
Gottheimer

Look at the history of the 5th District. A Democrat's not supposed to win there, which was why Republican incumbent U.S. Rep. Scott Garrett tormented his liberal critics by running to the right with impunity for 12 years. Gottheimer ended the streak on November 8th, 2016 when the voters told Garrett to clear out his desk and go back to Wantage.

Gottheimer did several things very well. First, he raised the money (\$4 million plus to his opponent's \$2 million), second he exploited the incumbent's weaknesses to keep Garrett's legs tangled throughout the campaign, and third, he ran on a center-left message with the intent of looking like an adult alongside an irrepressibly dangerously goofy Garrett. Gottheimer also enjoyed the benefit of another solid performance by the Bergen County Democratic Committee led by perennially warpaint-wearing impresario Lou Stellato.

Gottheimer smartly stayed on offense against the man he branded "New Jersey's resident fanatic," not only highlighting the Republican's homophobia but making the hard dollars and cents case for why Garrett's ideological resistance to government forces local officials to rely on painful tax hiking measures to pay for vital resources like fire trucks. For years, Garrett had been skating on his image as a Clint Eastwood-like gunslinger from the hills of Sussex. Gottheimer turned that into a case for why the

incumbent was actually a shiftless, listless cowpoke with his hat pulled over his eyes, preposterously unwilling to see any benefit of government partnerships. Garrett had already left some voters scratching their heads over his refusal to accept federal Hurricane Sandy funds. Gottheimer kept on that theme when he made the case for Garrett's dereliction of duty for resisting a bill that would extend healthcare benefits for 911 first responders. Garrett countered with the argument that like everything else in Babylon, federal corruption sinks even the best intended bills.

But it finally didn't resonate.

It may not have helped Garrett either with his base when, with the polls showing him and the Democrat neck and neck, his legs buckled and he said he did not stand with Donald J. Trump's statements and that Mike Pence would have been a better nominee.

That late October event in Hackensack where Gottheimer and the Democrats brought in Gutzon Borglum model U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) gave the campaign a high finish of conquest, and it was an atmosphere that proved prophetic when Gottheimer polished off Garrett, 50 percent to 47 percent. It will likely be hard for the Democrat to hold on in this Republican-leaning district, but his showing against Garrett proved he will, at the very least, be a very tough out.

“

Gottheimer smartly stayed on offense against the man he branded New Jersey's resident fanatic.

”

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Winner of the Year Runners-Up

Bill Layton

The chairman of the Burlington County GOP accomplished something he hadn't in the past: countywide Republican victory in a presidential election year.



Bill Layton

Al Gaburo

Although Democrat Hillary Clinton won the presidential duel in Somerset County, the county Republican chairman successfully steered his candidates to wins to maintain GOP dominance in Somerset.



Al Gaburo

Mike Venezia

Bloomfield Mayor Mike Venezia

Up for reelection to his second four-year term, the incumbent mayor put down an insurrection led by Councilman Joe Lopez.

Perth Amboy Wilda Diaz

First elected in 2008 when she dethroned local legend Joe Vas, the



Wilda Diaz



Andre Sayegh



tough incumbent defeated challenger Joel Pabon to win a third term in office.

Paterson Councilman Andre Sayegh

The 6th Ward councilman defeated credible challenger Al Abdel-aziz to win a third term on the governing body and position himself for a likely third shot at Silk City mayor.

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N.J. Governor
Chris Christie

Loser of the year **Chris Christie**

We nearly gave this award to Scott Garrett. Garrett deserves it. Almost. But Christie - long the master of finding windows to dive through just in time to stay alive politically - finally fell apart here with sustained dreadful polling numbers that put him in the freefall category, very likely for the duration.

In the fall, Christie posted a 19 percent approval rating, according to Rutgers-Eagleton, and he looked just about bottomed out. Then in December, Fairleigh Dickinson polled him at 18 percent.

The designation found the governor in full-time scramble mode as he tried to evacuate New Jersey for the Trump administration. Christie figured he deserved the courtesy of a Hanoi helicopter rope ladder, for following the death of his own pres-

PAUL J. RICHARDS/AP/GETTY IMAGES

Congratulations to all
of our amazing clients
on victories across
the map in 2016.

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idential bid like a moose in the snows of New Hampshire, he became one of the first members of the GOP establishment to back the billionaire real estate tycoon. Trump made Christie chief of his transition team, but when it counted, Trump dumped him, then didn't want him, repeatedly passing over the tough-talking Livingstonian as he harvested other brand names for his cabinet. Propelled by Bridgegate Trial headlines that made Christie - at best - look abusive and cruel (he allegedly threw a water bottle at Bridget Kelly and crudely cursed at her, according to her trial testimony), and at worst cocooned him in the lane closures conspiracy and suggested the possibility of more investigations to come, the diss compounded those moments during the Republican Primary when Trump appeared to disrespect and humiliate Christie.

That worst moment came when Christie stood ritualistically onstage behind Trump like some fixture in a pagan temple that might as well have been cast in imitation bronze.

Governor Chris Christie on the campaign trail that finally came to an end in 2016.



SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

The governor had become what every Big Apple neighbor who defines himself by brashness privately fears: a New York supersizing of those in-your-face qualities the chest-thumping New Jerseyan believes he best embodies. Having amassed a half decade's worth of YouTube hits, obnoxiously slapping away at teachers, reporters, boardwalk drift and other assorted human flotsam, pirouetting dangerously close to the

edge or over the edge of taste, manners and decency, and rejoicing zestfully with every cannon ball off the high dive demolition of public decorum, the late night talk show circuited New Jersey governor watched Trump usurp the role of Commodus colossus.

The bully had given birth to the myth of himself, and finally become bullied by the man who perfected self-mythification before Christie was born.

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The Women's Political Caucus of New Jersey (WPCNJ), founded in 1972, is a chapter of the National Women's Political Caucus and is the authoritative voice for women in New Jersey politics. WPCNJ is a *multi-partisan* organization dedicated to increasing the number of women in elected and appointed positions in government, protecting reproductive freedom, and promoting equal rights for women.

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Loser of the Year Runners Up



Scott
Garrett

Scott Garrett

Although he wouldn't have had Barack Obama to kick around anymore, a victorious Garrett in the 5th Congressional District would have been able to prop up Hillary Clinton as his next favorite target, but it wasn't to be, as Gottheimer improbably upended the longtime incumbent Republican.



Steven
Fulop

Steven Fulop

On course to be the next governor of New Jersey, the Jersey City mayor exited suddenly and shockingly and endorsed Phil Murphy.



Alex
Blanco

Bill Baroni and Bridget Kelly

A jury issued guilty verdicts in the Bridgegate trials of the former deputy director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and Christie's former deputy chief of staff.



Steve
Sweeney

Steve Sweeney

Building up to his aborted gubernatorial run, the senate president had spent more time in North Jersey than Frank Pallone and in the end had about as much to show for it.



Bridget
Kelly



Bill Baroni

Alex Blanco

The feds busted the former Passaic City mayor on a bribery charge, forcing him to resign his seat. It was a catastrophic end to a once very promising career for the first Dominican American to serve as the mayor of a municipality in the United States.



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John
Wisniewski

Legislator of the year John Wisniewski

You can laugh about it, and say he's going nowhere fast playing Hector to Murphy's Achilles. But most lawmakers fitted for the guillotine in this state simply disappear when the organization wants to get rid of them. They lack the political creativity, follow-through, chutzpah, and warrior street cred to go out on their shields like Boromir. Or like Wiz. While many of his colleagues sat with their heads in their hands, resigned to nothing getting done in presidential and gubernatorial election years and privately relishing legislative down time, Jimmy Stewart lookalike Wisniewski went on political offense. When everyone else endorsed Hillary Clinton, then hit the collective snooze alarm on the prez contest, the Sayrevillian signed on the dotted line to lead Bernie Sanders' campaign in New Jersey. That title gave him the leverage

WILLIAM THOMAS CAN/GETTY IMAGES



“In 2017 the voices of more than 5,000 firefighters, EMTs and dispatchers will be heard at the ballot box.”



necessary to get quoted in nearly every printed Sanders/New Jersey story and to position himself - in the ultimate national anti-establishment atmosphere - as a progressive upstart. As the former joint committee chairman on the investigative committee that uncovered the George Washington Bridge lane closure scandal, he could also bask in furrowed brow good government guy gear as the Bridgegate trial came to a head. And as Sweeney and Fulop imploded dismally in Murphy's political pressure cooker, he could front himself as essentially Murphy's lone human rumble strip left in the Democratic Primary. Maybe we'll never see Wisniewski again after 2017. Maybe we will find the Bernie Sanders revolutionary rebooted as Murphy's completely cubicle-comfortable Department of Transportation chief. Maybe he'll vaporize like Fulop after a three-hour coffee pot sit-down, then endorse the Goldman governor-in-wating. Or maybe he'll hang around long enough to give the state a real Democratic Primary

**John
Wisniewski**



before submitting to the arrows of the orcs of inevitability. But remember this about Wisniewski. Just like his longtime rival and fellow Seton Hall University Law school grad Christie, he finds a way

to stay alive long enough to approximate - in political terms - relevance. That's more than can be said about a machine establishment that so often seems to lack a pulse.

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Chris
Christie

Quote of the Year:

“Governor Chris Christie will have no public schedule.”

THE OFFICE OF THE NEW JERSEY GOVERNOR



Operative AND Strategist of the Year Runner Up:

Adam Silverstein

Silverstein world swept Republicans completely out of countywide power in Bergen and finally rid the state of the homophobic Garrett.



Operative AND Strategist of the Year: Brendan Gill

Memo to Gill's Atlantic City rat pack entourage. It's time for a Wikipedia biographical page for the boss from Montclair. Let's face it. Steven Fulop made his biggest early strategic mistake as a gubernatorial candidate when he opted not to hire Gill. Not only did the Essex County Freeholder - and Errol Flynn-lookalike - offer a sparkling record as a big picture operations guy, the resume included valuable toe-to-toe time with South Jersey in the 2008 Democratic Primary when Gill ran Frank Lautenberg's successful campaign against Haddon Heights Congressman Rob Andrews. In addition to having served as Senator Lautenberg's New Jersey director, Gill presented a diversified statewide skillset, with Cory Booker-handling part of his campaigns and elections portfolio. Then there was the fact that he was an elected official in the most Democratic Party registered voter-rich county in the state, with a history of balancing friendly relations between the fiercely warring factions of DiVincenzo and Codey. Arguably the low-drama, down-to-business Gill's biggest hang-up - like every former Irish Catholic altar boy - is he gets squeamish about self-promotion. And while that perhaps contributed to his not getting hired by Fulop, it gave an opening to Murphy, whose house-to-house combat operations in Essex, Passaic and Bergen, heavy on a handshaking happy candidate with Gill firmly in xs and os mode in the shadows -proved cataclysmic for the opposition.. In that pre-season period of time that Murphy finished off Fulop and aligned the northern party chairs behind him and suffocated South Jersey, top operative Gill also became the state's top political strategist in either party.

“

Gill presented a diversified statewide skillset, with Cory Booker-handling part of his campaigns and elections portfolio.

”



Josh
Gottheimer

Best Campaign of the Year **Josh Gottheimer**

Have Hudson and Essex Democrats been tested and demonstrated the campaign creativity and ingenuity the way Bergen Dems have over the last three years? The answer is no.

JASON KEMPIN/GETTY IMAGES

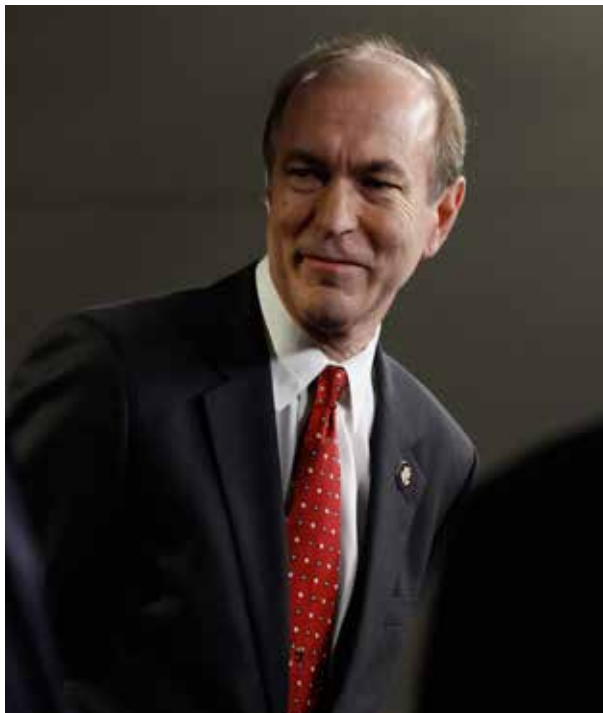
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Scott Garrett

Worst Campaign of the Year

Scott Garrett

What a mess. The campaign he ran might have been fine, if you were the character played by Lee Van Cleef in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

Worst Campaign Runner-Up

North Jersey Casinos

They got killed.

CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES



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Mike Aron

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Mike Aron

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JOSEPH SINNOTT/WMET

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Who's *UP* and who's *DOWN*



Craig
Coughlin

Craig Coughlin

As 2016 came to a close, the likeable Democratic assemblyman from Woodbridge appeared poised to land the speakership of the general assembly.

Kevin McCabe

After having gotten behind Murphy early, the Middlesex County Democratic chairman looks like the favorite to succeed John Currie as chairman of the state Democratic Party.

Mike Doherty

The movement conservative senator from Mountain Man country was the first voice in the legislature to issue a clear-throated endorsement of President-elect Donald Trump.

Joe Pennacchio

The state senator from Morris County was right behind Doherty with his own Trump endorsement.

Leonard Lance

Once a mild-mannered moderate who adored the environment, the 7th District congressman signed on early as a Trump backer, while burnishing his edge as a Republican representative who voted dozens of times to repeal Obamacare.

Phil Murphy

Democrats insist he's not Jon Corzine, and they believe it!



JEFF ZELEVANSKY/GETTY IMAGES

Kim
Guadagno

Kim Guadagno

The Republican lieutenant governor gets the baton from a Republican governor with a job approval rating of 18%. Three words: going nowhere fast.

Bob Menendez

Hoping for a justice department culture shift, allies of the indicted U.S. senator sought a Hillary Clinton victory in the 2016 presidential contest and get stuck with Donald Trump, who also wants to investigate Clinton.

Bernie Sanders

What do Gary Hart, Barack Obama and Sanders all have in common? They ran out of the progressive wing of the party



Bernie
Sanders

MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES

and couldn't penetrate the machine politics of New Jersey in a Democratic Primary. Obama came closest, of course, losing to Hillary Clinton in 2008 by ten points. Hart took a 15-point drubbing to Fritz Mondale in the Garden State (30-45%) in 1984. In 2016, Bernie ended up getting his socialist butt kicked in Jersey garbage time: 37-63%.



Who's UP and who's DOWN



Bob
Torricelli



Bob
Menendez

Cory Booker

2020, baby. Don't laugh. The country rejected Christie, but embraced Christie on steroids in the candidacy of Donald J. Trump. New Jersey is still the nation's trend-setter - at least according to New Jersey.

Bob Marino

Few people or companies faced the kind of firestorm that he and Horizon did when the clock struck 2016 and in the end, when all was said

and done, much was said but nothing was done.

Joe Kyrillos

The classy, retiring Monmouth County state senator goes out on his own terms, leaving a legacy of civility even as his party spends prodigious chunks of time chewing up scenery.



Leonard
Lance

Bob Torricelli

Steve Fulop's flame-out didn't help reignite The Torch.

New Jersey

Trump's campaign trail bullying of Christie reasserted the most fearsome stereotypes for New Jerseyans who detest Big Apple bigfooting narratives.

Paul DiGaetano

Ok, we know it's not really

the new Bergen County Republican chairman's total fault that Scott Garrett lost, but it did happen on Paul's watch. The allies of former Chairman Bob Yudin have already donned the warpaint.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GILBERT CARRASQUILLO/GETTY IMAGES; BRENDAN SMALOWSKI/AFLO/GETTY IMAGES; MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES; BILL CLARK/CORBIS OUTLINE

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Who's UP and who's DOWN

DOWN



The George Washington Bridge

Kevin McCabe



Loretta Weinberg

"I am Lioness, hear me roar."
The state's great Senate Majority Leader gets more done with her little finger in the way of public advocacy, then most of the rest of Trenton.



Joe Pennacchio

Bill Stepien

The Republican operative dove clear of Bridgegate into Trump world, where - as of this writing - he appeared D.C. bound.

Jose "Joey" Torres

The mayor of Paterson spent the better part of 2016 stuck to a News 4 investigation of his alleged use of city workers for personal job details.

Democratic Party Campaigns and Elections

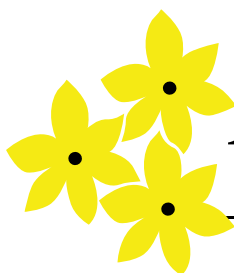
Phil Murphy's pre-primary victory all but assures a return to Trenton of almost every Democrat there now. No primary battle means

incumbents can hit the snooze alarm come campaign time. The same can't be said of the GOP, which appears poised for a Guadagno v. Ciattarelli bloodletting.

Gary Schaer

The brilliant Assemblyman - chair of the Budget Committee - would have been speaker had Steven Fulop prevailed in his bid for governor. It's only a nick in the armor for Schaer, however, who will be back.

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Who's UP and who's DOWN



Assad Akhter

"Drain the Swamp"

Trump's mantra during the presidential campaign became Republican upstart Joe Rullo's battle cry for his 2017 gubernatorial bid.

Assad Akhter

The longtime Bill Pascrell deputy chief assumed the oath of office as Passaic County's first Muslim freeholder, the replacement for Hector Lora, who became acting mayor of the City of Passaic after Alex Blanco's crack-up.

DOWN



Carlos Trujillo

The Artist formerly known as the Elizabeth Board of Education

Ray Lesniak and his team of bulldozers this year cleared longtime BOE and Fajardo loyalist Carlos Trujillo out of power.

to be frozen out of leadership but for a return to the throne of Senate Power by Steve Sweeney of South Jersey.

Union County

Tangled up in its nest of warring factions at home, Democrats here lagged behind other county organizations that made themselves relevant early by jumping aboard the Phil Murphy Express.

Essex County

Unless Leroy Jones and Joe DiVincenzo have some unseen cards up their sleeves, the woolly mammoth county looks



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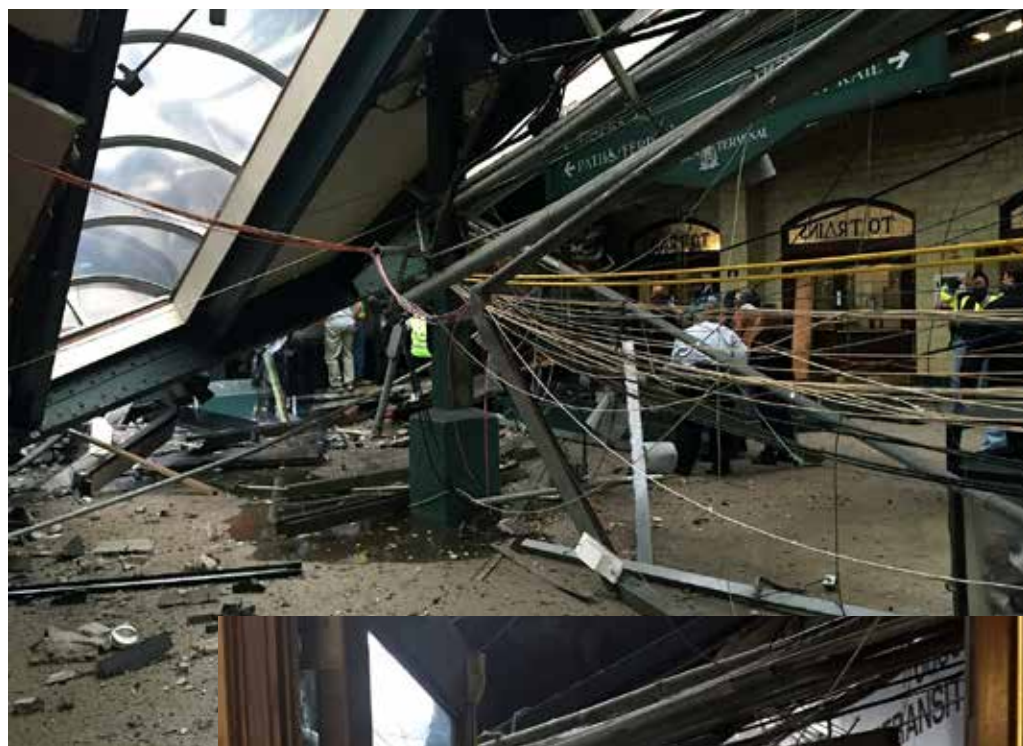
Political Stories of the Year

The Hoboken Train Crash and the Hustle to Pass a Transportation Trust Fund Fix

Christie's long absences from the state gave Senate President Steve Sweeney and Speaker Vincent Prieto ample opportunity to scream about the depletion of the TTF. As he mounted his doomed presidential campaign bid in a Republican Primary, the governor ran from a proposed gas tax as a proposed solution for New Jersey's wobbly transportation infrastructure. Then Christie's campaign ran off the rails in New Hampshire and a deadly crash in Hoboken forced both sides quickly to the table. The Governor and Democrats passed a controversial 23 cents on the gallon gas tax hike along with an elimination of the estate tax.

The Sudden Resolution of the 2017 Democratic Primary for Governor

It came in shocking fashion: Phil Murphy's tap out-inducing chokehold of Steve Fulop and overnight alignment of the North Jersey Democratic chairs that reduced Steve Sweeney to rubble. In 48 hours, Murphy had positioned himself as the 2017 frontrunner to succeed Chris Christie as governor.

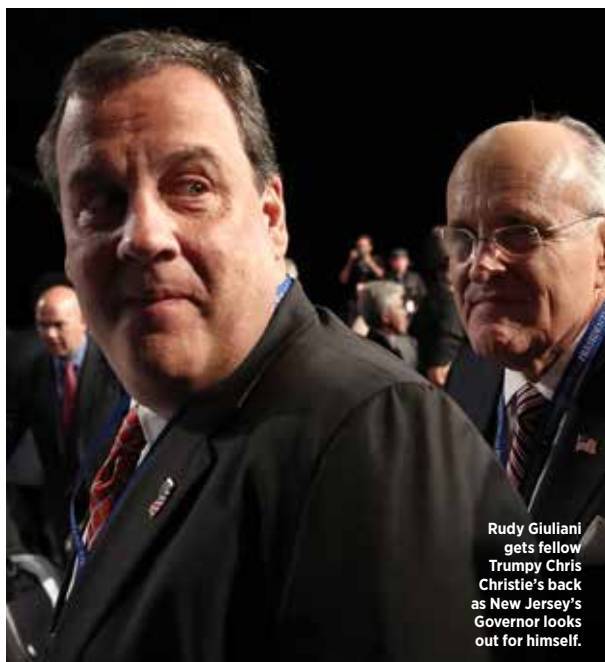


The actual train wreck that exposed New Jersey's Transportation Trust Fund political train wreck.



PANCHO BERNASCONI/GETTY IMAGES

WIN/MCMANEE/GETTY IMAGES



Rudy Giuliani gets fellow Trumpy Chris Christie's back as New Jersey's Governor looks out for himself.

Chris Christie's Political Implosion: The continuing story since 2013

Christie posted the lowest job approval rating by a sitting governor in 20 years. The collapse was particularly stunning when compared with Barack Obama. The prez was supposed to be the guy primed for scandal, coming from politically rough and tumble Chicago, while Christie was - in the eyes of many 2009 voters - the corruption buster. But as they got ready to stagger step into history, Obama was scandal-free and cresting a 55% job approval rating, while the ravaged Christie trailed Bridgegate and water bottle tossing-gate with an 18% job approval.

The Book Deal

The world is absolutely dying to find out what Governor Chris Christie has to say about politics, life, and that peculiarly confounding human challenge of what it means to be an outsized talent while trying to live on Planet Earth with other people. People furthermore are eager to put aside their own feelings of disgust at having to watch Christie party in Jerry Jones' private box, rack up bills at luxury hotels around the world, and hound Trump for work, for a chance to add dollars on top of the annual \$175,000 they already pay the governor. Those same cash and time-strapped residents are also angry and genuinely tired of having Trenton staffers making less than top dollar for their considerable government services. This was one of the feel-good, late breaking stories of the year.



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Jared Kushner

The Rise of Jared Kushner in National Politics

Yeah, yeah, yeah, he's the publisher of PolitickerNJ Observer, we get it. But that should not take away from his Greg Louganis-like high dive into political history as chief-nibbler-on-the-ear of his father-in-law, President-elect Donald J. Trump. All year long, Kushner - the husband of Ivanka Trump who grew up in Livingston - made headlines as the most svelte operative in the Trump brain trust.

Christie's and the Legislature's Slap at Newspapers

After a hiatus caused by Christie's run for president, legwork for candidate Donald Trump, and then (ultimately unsuccessful) post-presidential bid for a cabinet post with the Trump Administration, the governor and Democratic-run legislature

liplocked on a common passion: disdain for the media. Acting on orders (unspoken or otherwise) from Mr. Upstairs, Speaker Vinny Prieto and Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick tried to push a bill that would eradicate public notices from newspapers. Recorder Newspapers co-publisher Steve Parker called the measure "an existential threat."

The Death of North Jersey Casinos

The State Takeover of Atlantic City

The Bridgegate Trial

Samson Pleads Guilty

The Emergence of Kellyanne Conway

Atlantic City contented itself with negative headlines to generate attention in 2016.



SAUL LOEB/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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From Top:
Larry Hamm, Kristine Corrado
Jeniffer Beck
Craig Coughlin

People to watch in 2017

Bergen County Republican Chairman Paul DiGaetano

He'll show the world once and for all whether his heart is in chairing the party or getting back to the legislature.

Passaic Clerk Kristin Corrado

The 40th District candidate for state senate may have to get through DiGaetano in a GOP Primary.

Assemblyman Declan O'Scanlon

The passionate 13th District Monmouth County Republican lawmaker will run for Joe Kyrillos' senate seat in 2017.

Assemblywoman Amy Handlin

The respected Monmouth County GOP brand name from the 13th District plans to take a crack at Kyrillos' senate seat next year.

Senator Jennifer Beck

The veteran GOP leader from Red Bank lost her running mates in 2015 and will have the warpaint on in 2017 as she attempts to stare down a challenge by bucked up Democrats.

Monmouth County Democratic Chairman Vin Gopal

The future 6th District Congressman may take a crack at Beck.

Assemblyman Craig Coughlin

He looks poised for assembly leadership.

Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter

The lower house lawmaker appeared positioned as the Democratic Party's most likely candidate for lieutenant governor in a ticket with Phil Murphy.

Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver

There was talk at the League of Municipalities in Atlantic City about the bosses from South Jersey and Essex dusting off the speaker emeritus for a stab at the LG seat.

People's Organization for Progress Director Larry Hamm

Watch him. The ultimate un-reconstructed rebel looks poised for a future Newark City Council run.

Camden Mayor Dana Redd

Word on the street is that the respected urban executive plans an exit from elected office.

Tom Kean, Jr.

Sources tell PolitickerNJ that Republicans are ready to maneuver the senate minority leader into the 7th Congressional District seat and offload Leonard Lance into judge's robes.



STEVE ROCKSTEIN

From Top:
Sheila Oliver
Shavonda Sumter
Vin Gopal

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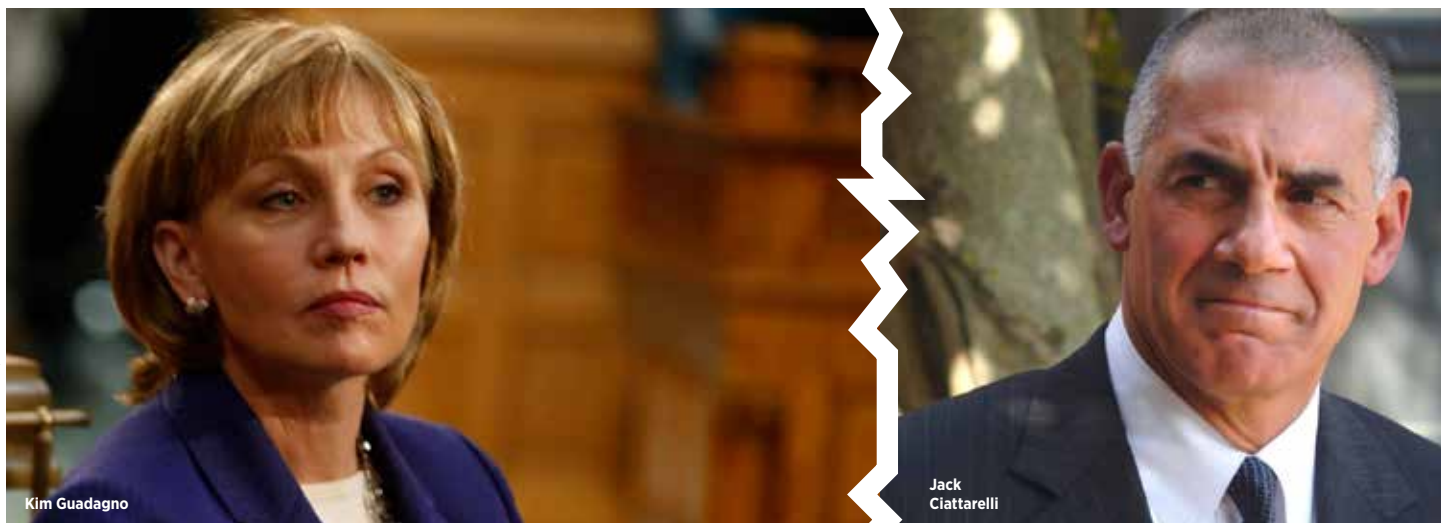
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Cage Matches

JEFF ZELEVANSKY/GETTY IMAGES



Kim Guadagno versus Jack Ciattarelli

Poised for 2017, the lieutenant governor finds herself up against an aggressive Republican Primary challenger for governor in the person of Somerset Assemblyman Ciattarelli.



Steve Forbes versus Chris Christie

In this all-New Jersey prez contestant sumo contest, Forbes crushed Christie, earning 1.8 million votes and two states or 11.4% of the total GOP Primary vote when he ran in 1996, compared to the 58,000 vote, no states, and 0.18% total primary vote won by Christie in 2016.



Steve Sweeney versus Steven Fulop

Murphy people cried about how we didn't like their guy. No. We just love contests, and the state had a great one in the iron-willed senate president against the upstart Jersey City mayor. We loved the political calculating that went in to their every move. Too bad it ended as soon as it did.



Joey Torres versus Andre Sayegh

The mayor of Paterson defeated the Ward 6 councilman in their 2014 contest, but this year found himself dangling at the end of a News 4 Investigation, which opened the possibility of a 2018 (or special election) return by his old rival.

Pedro Rodriguez versus Alex Mendez

The former deputy mayor and at-large councilman respectively will duke it out for the Latino vote in Silk City.



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Bill Matsikoudis versus Steven Fulop

Seeking revenge for what the sitting mayor did to his boss in 2013, Jersey City's former corporation counsel last month declared his 2017 mayoral candidacy.

George Norcross versus Steven Fulop

Gearing up to run for governor, the Jersey City mayor slapped publicly at GN3, the powerful insurance broker from South Jersey. Norcross in turn went to Fulop's breakfast at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia and tried to intimidate the mayor.

Bill
Matsikoudis



George
Norcross

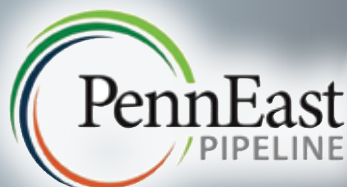


Steven
Fulop



ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

KEN BETANCUR / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



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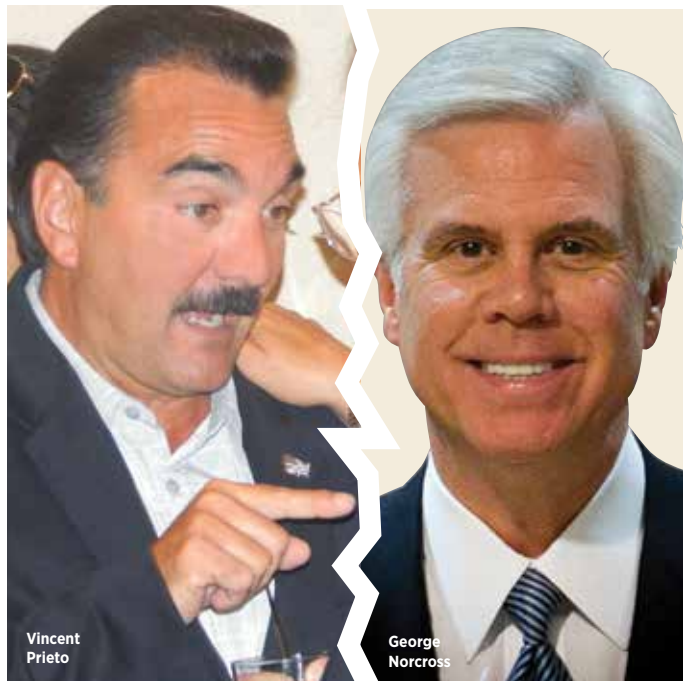


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Vincent Prieto

George Norcross

ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Vincent Prieto versus George Norcross

The speaker of the General Assembly warred openly with the South Jersey boss but could not summon the votes to stymie the Norcross/Christie Atlantic City takeover bill.



Bill Baroni

Bill Baroni versus Bill Baroni

The good government state legislative version stuck by his guns on paid family leave, clean elections and marriage equality, while a jury found the Port Authority version guilty of conspiring to snarl traffic on the George Washington Bridge.

PolitickerNJ.com Awards



Jack Ciattarelli

The Favorites For New Jersey Governor 2021

LLOYD BLANKFEIN

The CEO of Goldman Sachs lives on Manhattan's Upper West Side, which is great. He won't have to pretend to live in New Jersey. We don't know if he's a Democrat or not, but it doesn't matter. All we know is the New Jersey Democrats will try to recruit him.



Bill Pascrell III,
Kevin Hagan

GARY D. COHN

The president and CEO of Goldman Sachs is a sure shot for the governorship if Blankfein opts out of the contest. Cohn is also a strong favorite for 2025.

M. MICHELLE BURNS

The Goldman Sachs executive officer is well positioned to take a crack at NJ guv if Blankfein and Cohn

decide the company... er, the state, would be better served with her leadership. Burns can also probably sit tight for 2029.

Rising Stars 2016

NONE

There are no rising stars in New Jersey politics, just an endless recycling of establishment players and their retainers.

The Woodrow Wilson Award

This coveted award goes each year to the person from New Jersey who shows the greatest potential to follow in the steps of Wilson to be the next governor from New Jersey to serve as president of the United States. This year's award recipient is the same as last year's, and the same as the year before that and so on, all the way back to the casting of the bronze bust of Woodrow Wilson that stands in the Statehouse. This year's award recipient is once again that bronze statue of Woodrow Wilson. Congratulations!

Quote of the Year Runner-up

"I grew up middle class on a good day."

After a guy like **Jon Corzine**, it feels great to have a gubernatorial candidate who, by God, is like us, and didn't grow up with a silver spoon in his mouth. Thanks for the constant reminder, Phil.

Best Message

Phil Murphy's *I am not Jon Corzine* campaign drew favorable compari-



Lloyd Blankfein



Gary D. Cohn



M. Michelle Burns

sons to the late Leonard Nimoy's autobiography entitled *I am not Spock*. Some doubtful New Jersey politics fans insisted that Murphy unveil a second version of his campaign titled *I am Jon Corzine*.

The Sgt. Rock Lookalike Campaign Kickoff Award

Shaved for childhood cancer research, the bullet-haircut wearing **Jack Ciattarelli** strongly resembled the WWII comic book super hero when he launched his 2017 campaign for governor earlier this year.

The Patterson-Gimlin Bigfoot Award

Denied space in Trump's cabinet, **Gov. Chris Christie** landed in Atlantic City at the annual League of Municipalities Conference, his entourage landing practically on top of Lieutenant Governor **Kim Guadagno**. Christie's sudden appearance required Guadagno to dispose of remarks that her allies said rivaled the Cross of Gold Speech by William Jennings Bryan.



Phil Murphy

Awards continued...



Geraldo Rivera



John Wisniewski



Sue Altman

The David Copperfield Incredible Disappearing and Reappearing Politician Award in Honor of Whip Wilson

JOHN WISNIEWSKI

After apparently strategically vanishing, Wiz showed up for work at the Statehouse in time for the Atlantic City takeover bill after the evacuation of Assemblywoman Eliana Pintor Marin.

The Geraldo Rivera Capone's Vault Award

Mired with an 18% job approval rating, Gov. Chris Christie sent pulses racing when he scheduled his cryptic press conference in the rotunda last month. Was this finally the long-awaited moment when the governor would let us know of his departure from New Jersey? No. Just a \$300 million renovation of the Statehouse.

The Revenge of Marco Rubio Award

SUE ALTMAN

The heretofore unknown South Jersey teacher manhandled Christie in their town hall debate, prompting the irritated, overmatched governor to throw a microphone.

The How to Deal with a Governor Who Throws Things at You Award

SUE ALTMAN

The two-award recipient needs to coach former Christie deputy chief of staff Bridget Kelly, who told Bridgegate jurors that the volatile chief executive threw a water bottle at her. When Christie tried that sort of thing with Altman, angrily sling-ing a microphone in her direction, the teacher showed Mike Piazza reflexes and caught it with no effort.



Bridget Kelly



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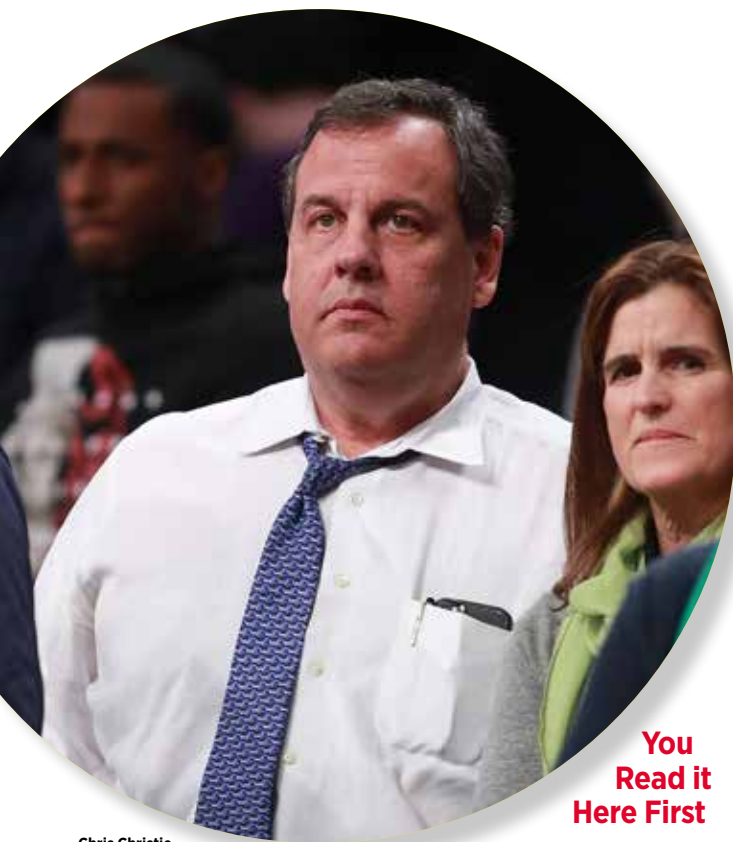
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Congressman Tom MacArthur
Congressman Leonard Lance
Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen
Congressman Tim Walberg
Congressman Dave Trott
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The Ocean County Republican Organization
The National Republican Congressional Committee
The Republican Governors Association
Borgata Hotel Casino and Spa

Best Wishes and Happy Holidays.



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Awards continued...



Chris Christie

**You
Read it
Here First**

We feel that we can safely call this now. **Senator Brian Stack** won his 2017 reelection bid with 99.9% of the vote. He would go on to win the general election by an even greater margin.

The Good Government Award for Expanding the Frontiers of American Literature

SENATOR NICK SCUTARI

Earlier this month, the Assembly and Senate Appropriations Committees released a bill to help Christie land a book deal. The bill would allow the literary-minded governor to make money from inking deal while still in office, a contravention of current state law, which forbids Christie from making income other than his salary as governor.



Senator
Nick Scutari



Kevin
O'Toole

The Norman Mailer Award for Literary Achievement

CHRIS CHRISTIE

Overawed by the example of his New Jersey literary predecessor, Christie vowed to title his autobiography *Tough Guys Don't Dance Part II*. But after again watching Christie's first post-Bridgegate press conference, the Governor's literary agent suggested they run with *Tough Guys DO Dance*.

The Honorary New Jersey Award

JOHN LEWIS

If you're a Democrat and you want to win a congressional campaign in New Jersey, make sure you find a way to wheelbarrow in human Mount Rushmore section Congressman Lewis. You'll recall that the Civil Rights hero helped **Bill Pascrell** win in 2012 and this year came in late to assist Josh Gottheimer.

The Ray Liotta Lifetime Achievement Award

RAY LESNIAK

The incredible political animal celebrated his final appearance in the statehouse this year by reenacting - frame for frame - the last, manic **Henry Hill** sequence in *Goodfellas*.

The Baze Malbus Lookalike Award

KEVIN O'TOOLE

The retiring state senator told PolitickerNJ that he wants to spend more time in the coming years on his film career, particularly refining his role as the heavy hardware-toting Baze in the sequel to *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*.

A Special Thanks to Senate President Steve Sweeney

You didn't win the governorship, but you did make it fun and interesting along the way. You were also

always a gentleman, too, and we appreciate it.

We also appreciate the political intelligence your team displayed throughout the pre-Democratic Primary season. A lesser talent with a lesser stable of players would have taken time off during **Gov. Chris Christie's** prolonged excursions out of state. But you stayed on offense, and kept it real, with the forays into North Jersey, the roundtables on issues Democratic Primary voters care about, and an overall master capitalization of your bully pulpit.

Throughout, you never talked down to anyone and took defeat like a man.

Best wishes, Senate President Sweeney, to you and yours in the holiday season.

The Passion of Chris Christie

I stood onstage and the world laughed, but a lesser man might jump into the arms of a Kasich or a Rubio, anybody but **Donald J. Trump**.

They told my story at the Bridgegate Trial, about how I threw temper tantrums then stuck the buck with Bridget and Bill and boogied while they faced jail crumbs.

I tracked through the wilderness with sleddog focus, the prez bug absolutely undying until I got upended in that New Hampshire snow, my own shadow accused of lying.

I hitched my sleigh to the Trump Express, and it ran me over, not even The Donald could stand me in the end, though the same imperious crown we had fondled.

The people out there loved me once, when I beat up bad guys and whipped Sandy.

They even still dug my demolition of Marco as a hyped-up debate society dandy.

I couldn't get around ten credit downgrades, the GWB scandal, and my own temperament.

But as a GOP populist, I'll give the rest of the party their one - and take my 18 percent.

Awards continued...



Chris Christie

The George Foreman Beat-Down Award Runner-Up

CHRIS CHRISTIE

Let's dispense once and for all with this notion that Christie doesn't know what he's doing. He knows exactly what he's doing. The Governor's New Hampshire demolition of Florida Senator **Marco Rubio** of Florida should be required viewing for anyone looking to mix it up in a debate. If Rubio came apart under pressure from Christie, imagine him trying to stare down **Vladimir Putin**. He'd disintegrate.



Ray Lesniak



Kim Guadagno

The William Tecumseh Sherman Award

RAY LESNIAK

He wasn't running for reelection. Then he was. Then he wasn't. Then he was.



Jerry Green

The Patience of a Saint Award

JERRY GREEN

In honor of the Union County Democratic Committee chairman's ability to gracefully negotiate the vicissitudes of **Ray Lesniak**.



George Norcross

The Shirley Chisholm Unbought and Unbossed Award

JOHN WISNIEWSKI

There's nothing like a **Bernie Sanders**, people-power progressive to show a boss-bullied state like New Jersey how it's done. Receiving his official plaque of recognition, **Wiz** started his speech with the following inspirational words, "I'd like to thank **George Norcross** for giving me this opportunity..."



John Wisniewski

The Book of the Year THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF CHRISTOPHER J. CHRISTIE

He hasn't finished it yet but we did get an exclusive sneak peak at the dedication page, which reads: "To **George**, thanks for the memories. And if you ever get a chance to talk to **Donald Trump**, let him know that this is the true art of the deal."



Donald Trump

The Marcus Tullius Cicero Award for Oratory

KIM GUADAGNO

Deprived by Christie of her one, annual microphone moment in Atlantic City at this year's League of Municipalities, the lieutenant governor proceeded to carry on in duct-taped acquiescence, a routine that prompts laughter from cynics and awe from those who value sphinx-like economy of language.

The "Run, Kim, Run" Award

2016 ended with a flurry of emails from those supporters of the lieutenant governor's projected gubernatorial bid. Already committed to **Phil Murphy**, those urging **Guadagno** to "Run, Kim, run" included every Democrat in the state.



Dick Codey

The Wilfredo Benitez Stare-Down Award

GEORGE NORCROSS

This is the one where you just slightly tilt your head back and menacingly stare down your nose at a man who is about the same size as yourself, so that you appear more physically imposing. The ever-creatively intimidating **Norcross** attempted to put this move on Jersey City Mayor **Steven Fulop** at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia - from a seated position.



Sal Rizzo

The 'This is the Way Things are and I don't intend to Make a Fool out of Myself Pretending Otherwise' Award

DICK CODEY

Bigfooted out of the governor's office by a Goldman Sachs guy over a decade ago, the former acting governor and inveterate Irish every man resuscitated his political career this year - by getting behind the gubernatorial campaign of a Goldman Sachs guy who packaged himself as an inveterate Irish every man.

The Powers Boothe Cool Guy from Texas Award

SAL RIZZO

The veteran Bergen Record reporter - a Texas transplant - fits in seamlessly with New Jersey, offering some of the most incisive, balanced, and hard-hitting reporting in the state. Thanks for all the great work, **Sal**.

The Becoming a Senator with No One Knowing Award

PAT DIEGNAN

The amiable South Plainfield lawmaker ran for a senate seat formerly occupied by **Peter Barnes**, whose retirement was first noted just now in this publication.

The Honeymooners Rap Award

JON BRAMNICK AND JOE PISCOPO

The Assembly Minority Leader filled in for **Eddie Murphy** in a 2017 ticket test drive with former SNL funny man **Piscopo**.

The Matt Friedman Shout-Out Award

You know there's a problem when reporters become more interesting than the people they cover. Politico NJ **Friedman's** scruffy sense of suffering at the general dumbness of the human condition never completely hardens over into unredemptive cynicism. There's still crisis at the heart of his inquiry, as if indeed it all does matter in the end. He's one of the few journalists out there who appears not to need the drag time most writers require to pretend to be smart in front of the camera. His free-form expressions sound like beatnik prose poems, or the spoken equivalent of Marcel Duchamps paintings, and often have the effect of being more interesting than conventional news pieces.

The Up and Comer Award

ANDREW CHRISTIE

He's better looking, smarter, better educated, politically shrewder, more ambitious, and altogether a better fit temperamentally for politics than his

Awards continued...

governor father. And he's got a higher approval rating and is, by far, the better ball player!

The Paulie Cicero Award

NICK SACCO

The state senator from North Bergen showed why he's the boss when he threw in with Phil Murphy and helped turn the north in the direction of the former Goldman Sachs banker.

The Emilio Barzini Award

JOHN CURRIE

The state party chairman from Passaic County showed why he's the boss when he threw in with Phil Murphy and helped turn the north in the direction of the former Goldman Sachs banker.

The Tom Hagen Award

KEVIN MCCABE

The state party chairman from Middlesex County showed why he's the boss when he threw in with Phil Murphy and helped turn Northern New Jersey in the direction of the former Goldman Sachs banker.

Casting *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* Jersey-style

KIM GUADAGNO AS JYN ERSO

Living under imperial rule and in the shadow of the Death Star, the lieutenant governor must mobilize a ragtag band of warriors and mount a scrappy rebellion against an establishment otherwise known as Democratic-Republican rule.



JACK CIATTARELLI AS

CASSIAN ANDOR

Ciattarelli was originally cast to play Han Solo in *The Force Awakens* before Harrison Ford relented and opted to return to the part. Ford again outdueled Ciattarelli for the role of Rick Deckard in the sequel to *Blade Runner*, a part Ciattarelli nearly won on the strength of his strong resemblance to the main character at his campaign kickoff earlier this year.

PHIL MURPHY AS ORSON KRENNIC

The back-slapping and relentlessly congenial nice guy actually turned out to be

lieutenant commander of the Galactic Republic and director of the advanced weapons research division.

JOHN WISNIEWSKI AS K-2SO

Captured by the rebels and reprogrammed, the former GN3-monogrammed imperial droid became a key rebel ally and Bernie Sanders banner-waver.

AL ABDEL-AZIZ AS BODHI ROOK

The Paterson Ward 6 teacher, coach and Democratic Party stalwart found himself caught up in the rebellion with something to prove.

RAS BARAKA AS SAW GERRERA

It had to be Ras. The ultimate unreconstructed rebel from Newark quietly led the rebellion from the Alderaan-like ruins on the rise of Brick City.



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Passages

Mayor Richard A. Mola

The popular Republican mayor of Elmwood Park served as the Bergen town's top elected official for 45 years. He was 80.

Mayor Lizette Parker

The mayor of Teaneck died in April at the age of 44. The Democratic had a reputation locally as "the consummate professional," according to The Bergen Record. She was the first black woman to serve as mayor of a Bergen municipality.

Al Koeppe

The chief executive officer of the Newark Alliance and former

president and chief operating officer of both Public Service Electric and Gas Company and Verizon died earlier this month at the age of 70.

Mercer County Democratic Chairman

Richard McClellan

The longtime Democratic Party insider and friend to political reporters died in October at the age of 61.

Barbara McConnell

The Democratic Assemblywoman served in the Legislature in the late 1970s



Bill
Gaughan

and early 1980s, and later in the cabinet of Governor Jim Florio. She was 80.

Bill Gaughan

The former Jersey City Councilman was a beloved figure locally; an all-around wonderful guy whose presence at a Hudson County political event signified its authenticity. He was 78.

Bill Perkins

The former Jersey City Assemblyman died in February at the age of 76. He left behind a strong legacy as a high school sports star, attorney and Democratic Party politician.

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Passages

Len Morano, Jr.

The former Democratic mayor of Barnegat died in November at the age of 75.

Jaime Vazquez

The former Jersey City councilman died in October at the age of 67. The Jersey Journal cited him as “a longtime voice for the city’s Latino and veterans communities.”

James A. Wallace Jr.

The Metuchen councilman died in November at the age of 75. He was a former fire chief and a retired Metuchen police sergeant, and the Middlesex town’s former Office of Emergency Management director.

Lincoln Green

The Pleasantville councilman and dedicated public servant died in August at the age of 85.

J. Herbert Leverett

Hackensack’s first African-American councilman died in October at the age of 87. Mr. Leverett was a mechanical engineer and veteran of the Korean war.

Eskil “Scott” Danielson

The Andover Borough Councilman and emergency medical technician died in January at the age of 49 after responding to a crash and treating his daughter.

Jon Erickson

The Highland Park councilman was 67 years old when he succumbed to lung cancer.

Paul Elia

The Cliffside Park councilman was the patriarch of a prominent football family, according to his August obituary in The Bergen Record. He was 89.

Gloria Kolodziej

The former mayor and longtime councilwoman of Clifton died in December at age 77. “Mom dedicated her life to fighting for the greater good and for people who needed a helping hand,” her son, Joseph, a Clifton councilman, said in a statement to the Record.

Francis Hunter

The former Ramapo Councilwoman, a retired school principal “known for promoting diversity,” died in August. She was 84.

Victor B. Villalta

The Democrat who served Harrison as Second Ward councilman, died in May at the age of 67. a native of Peru, he was a Marine Corps veteran of Vietnam who earned the Bronze Star and Purple Heart combat medals.

Leonard Connors

The beloved Republican from Ocean County served in the state senate from 1982 to 2008. He was 87.

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Thanks to all who helped make the
2016 Year-In-Review a success!

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!