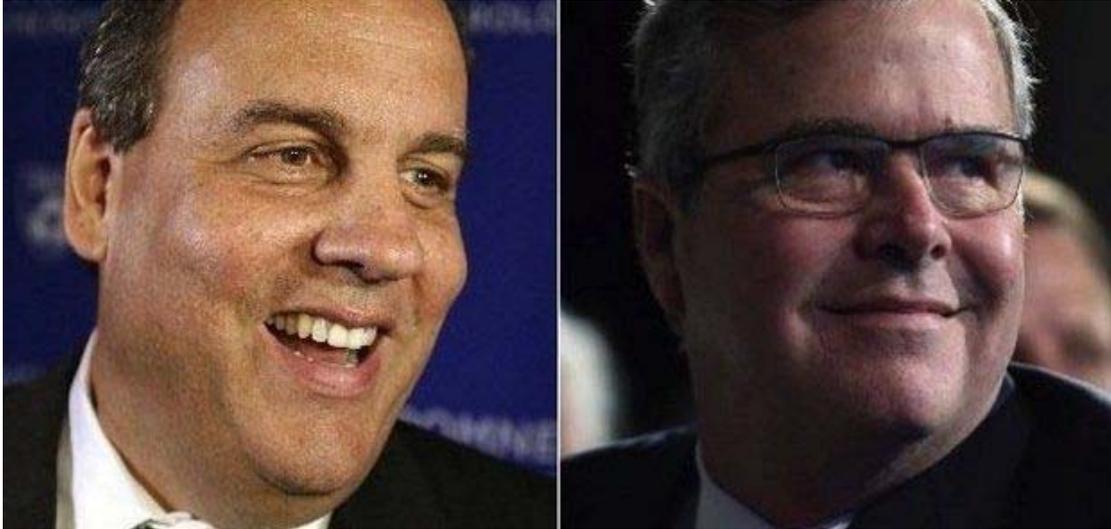


Chris Christie vs. Jeb Bush: Where they stand on guns, education, and more

2016 Presidential Race

December 29, 2014



New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie (left) and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush could face off for the Republican nomination for president. *(File photos)*

TRENTON — At first blush, they're both two-term Republican governors from presidential bellwether states on the East Coast, but lately, and perhaps for exactly that reason, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie has been keen to stake out the areas where he appears to contrast with former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush.

Here's where the two men stand — and differ — on several big issues.

MORE: [Bush leads Christie by 10 points in new 2016 poll](#)

GUNS

Bush: As Florida governor, Bush approved an enhanced concealed carry law, and backed a measure that would allow out-of-state visitors who had concealed weapons permits to carry their guns in Florida.

But since the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012, there is perhaps no more famous gun statute in the country than the one Bush signed into law in 2005: The "Stand Your Ground" law, expanded the rights of Floridians to use guns or any other deadly force to defend themselves even in places outside their homes.

Bush said the NRA penned bill should not apply in the case against George Zimmerman, and, in fact, none of the controversial parts of Stand Your Ground law were applied to the Zimmerman trial, but it remains a lightning rod for gun control — and for Bush.

Christie: New Jersey has the second toughest gun laws in the country, and in the wake of the Sandy Hook elementary school shootings, Christie did little to make them any tougher.

After the tragedy, Christie refused to meet with the families of the victims of Sandy Hook, and drew criticism for vetoing a gun control bill that would have reduced the permitted size of high-capacity magazines.

In its place, however, Christie offered up several changes to the state's mental health system, ultimately signing into law 11 pieces of gun violence and firearm-related mental health legislation, like one requiring the submission of certain mental health records to National Instant Criminal Background Check System and another creating new standards for involuntary commitment based on a history of lack of compliance with treatment.

If Christie runs for president, he'll have to do well in rural, gun-loving states like Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina, which recently amended its gun laws to allow firearms even in bars and restaurants. Last week, Christie said in an NJTV interview that, "Gun laws in New Jersey might be a little too strict."

EDUCATION

Bush: The Florida governor signed a bill into law that created the first statewide school voucher programs in the nation, making him a darling of many religious conservatives.

But unlike so many in the GOP who are gravely suspicious of any effort to federalize control of education, Jeb Bush is also strongly in favor of the so-called Common Core approach, creating national standards in place of the locally-controlled hodgepodge that currently exists.

Despite the fact that the Tea Party wing of the Republican party outright despises Common Core as something that wrests curricula from local control and dumbs down math standards, Bush told Fox News in April, "I just don't seem compelled to run for cover when I think this is the right thing to do for our country."

Christie: He has mostly been mum on the topic of Common Core, until very recently taking a wait-and-see approach. In July, he slowed down Common Core rollout in New Jersey, creating a commission that will review tests aligned with the Core standard's and examine their impact on local school districts. That committee's report isn't due for another six months.

But in an interview on NJTV last week, Christie professed that "I have real concerns about Common Core," though he didn't elucidate what those concerns were.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Bush: Jeb Bush's thinking on the topic of same-sex marriage has evolved considerably.

In his 1995 book "Profiles in Character," Bush derisively wrote "modern victim movements – the gay rights movement, the feminist movement, the black empowerment movement — have attempted to get people to view themselves as part of a smaller group deserving of something from society."

Over a decade later, in 2006, then-Gov. Bush said that he favored changing Florida's constitution to insert a ban on same-sex marriages.

But by 2012, the same year Christie vetoed New Jersey's marriage equality bill, Bush appeared on PBS' "Charlie Rose" and took a far more conciliatory stance, saying that while he favors traditional marriage, he also supports recognition for gay couples.

"I don't think people need to be discriminated against because they don't share my belief on this," Bush said, "and if people love their children with all their heart and soul and that's what they do and that's how they organize their life that should be held up as examples for others to follow because we need it. We desperately need it and that can take all sorts of forms. It doesn't have to take the one that I think should be sanctioned under the law."

Christie: Nominally, Christie's position on same-sex marriage has not changed since he campaigned for office. As a Catholic, he said that he's opposed to it, and he remains so today. But his actions as governor consistently suggest a willingness to go along the majority of the state, which, as with the US electorate, polling shows supports the freedom to marry.

Shortly after being elected governor in November 2009, Christie promised to put a "big red veto" across any marriage equality bill that reached his desk arguing that his personal beliefs demanded as much. He also said that such broad "historic" societal change should come not from the governor's office, the legislature or even the courts, but from a direct referendum by New Jersey's voters.

Sure enough, in January 2012, Christie formally called for the Legislature to put the issue on November 2012 ballot as a referendum, and a month later, when a gay marriage bill reached his desk, he vetoed it, promising that he would also veto any subsequent attempts to legalize gay marriage. Christie's rationale was again his Catholic faith, and his belief that strengthening the state's already-existing civil union law would offer sufficient protection against discrimination.

But before the legislature could attempt to marshal an override of his veto, in October 2013, the New Jersey State Supreme Court refused to put a temporary hold on gay marriages after a state Superior Court judge had ruled the state's five year-old civil unions law violated the "due process" clause of the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and struck down the remaining barrier to gay marriage.

Christie initially sought to appeal the larger gay marriage case, but abandoned the effort when the New Jersey Supreme Court refused

to put a stay on gay marriages until the case was heard, and gave strong signals as to how it would rule by declaring: "Same-sex couples who cannot marry are not treated equally under the law today."

What's more, polling indicated that the issue would be a loser for Christie even if the referendum were to be held: Sixty percent Garden Staters said they favored voting for marriage equality, according to a June 2013 Rutgers-Eagleton poll.

DRUGS

Neither Bush nor Christie approve of legalizing pot or medical marijuana.

Bush: Last month Bush came out strongly against a Florida ballot initiative to allow medical marijuana: "Florida leaders and citizens have worked for years to make the Sunshine State a world-class location to start or run a business, a family-friendly destination for tourism and a desirable place to raise a family or retire," Bush said, "Allowing large-scale, marijuana operations to take root across Florida, under the guise of using it for medicinal purposes, runs counter to all of these efforts."

In 2004, Bush pushed for the creation of a prescription drug tracking system that would punish unethical medical providers and prevent addicts from obtaining the drugs they abuse. It went into effect in 2009, two years after he left office.

Drug abuse has hit close to home for Bush. In 2002, while he was governor of Florida, Jeb Bush's daughter, Noelle Bush, was caught smuggling crack cocaine into the court-ordered drug treatment facility she'd been previously ordered to attend for prescription fraud and theft.

Bush spent his time as Florida's governor opposing treatment instead of jail for nonviolent drug users (with the notable exception of his own daughter) and pushed for mandatory prison sentences for drug offenders, including a minimum of three years in prison for any person convicted of possessing or selling as little as 4 grams of heroin. Bush also opposed a proposed ballot initiative that would send an estimated 10,000 nonviolent drug offenders into treatment instead of jail.

Christie: Legalization will "never" happen on his watch as governor, and he calls medical marijuana "a front for legalization."

In October, Christie expanded the state's voluntary prescription monitoring program to share New Jersey physician's prescribing records with doctors and pharmacists in Delaware and New York to prevent people from "doctor shopping" in surrounding states.

Drug abuse has also hit close to home for Christie. In April, Christie lost an extremely close friend and former classmate at Seton Hall University School of Law to a downward spiral of prescription pill and alcohol abuse.

Christie has a differing response to the problem of illegal drugs than Bush. Christie has made de-stigmatization of drug addiction and drug sentencing reform one of the lynchpins of his administration. He's expanded existing drug court programs to require drug treatment for low-level offenders who would otherwise serve time in prison, broadened the types of crimes that can be considered as criteria and made treatment mandatory.

In September, Christie publicly declared making drug and alcohol treatment "more available for everybody" was "part of government's job," and assailed mandatory sentencing guidelines for drug offenders.

"With 23 million folks addicted, it's not working," Christie said of the nation's current drug interdiction policy. "There's gotta be a separation between the criminal act (of using illegal drugs) and the disease."

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SECURITY

Bush: Those who enter the U.S. without authorization do so because they lack other means to provide for their families, and that their doing so is "not a felony" but "an act of love. It's an act of commitment to your family," Bush has said.

Bush argues that "I honestly think that that is a different kind of crime. There should be a price paid, but it shouldn't rile people up that people are actually coming to this country to provide for their families."

Christie: Shortly before winning re-election in November 2013, Christie announced his support for the Dream Act, which allows the children of immigrants who came to the U.S. illegally to pay in-state tuition prices at New Jersey's colleges and universities. He defended the move, saying that even those who are "cold-hearted" about immigration can't argue with the economic benefits of allowing students in whom the state already invests tens of thousands of public education dollars to pay in-state rates, arguing "an investment made should be an investment maximized."

Christie has also repeatedly assailed Obama on immigration and border security, calling his refusal to visit the Mexican border "an indication of (his) unwillingness to lead." But he's deemed the issue as a federal topic, and therefore one not within the purview of a

state governor. Christie promised to remain mum on the issue unless and until he becomes a candidate for president

"What would I do exactly? Like, you know, bring troops with me, or something? I mean come on," Christie said of his taking a pass on visiting the U.S. border last fall. "This is silliness. If I went down there and looked at it, what steps am I supposed to take exactly? Send the New Jersey National Guard there?"

MORE POLITICS

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