



October 19, 2009

UPDATE: Biden stumps for Corzine, talks economic recovery

Watch former President Bill Clinton live tonight on MyCentralJersey

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Vice President Joseph Biden was among political friends Monday, speaking at a rally at Middlesex County College in support of the re-election bid of Gov. Jon S. Corzine.

On Tuesday, former President Bill Clinton will speak at a Corzine rally at the the College Avenue Gym on the Rutgers University campus in New Brunswick.

The rallies in Middlesex County will do little to convince those in attendance to change their vote. It was clear by the applause lines and the chants that Biden was preaching to a political choir.

In his 22-minute speech the vice president described the event as an "old-fashioned get-out-the-vote" rally.

The purpose of the event, Middlesex County Freeholder Ronald G. Rios said, "is to energize the base."

"If we lose Middlesex County, we lose New Jersey," Freeholder Stephen J. "Pete" Dalina said.

It is simple political calculus that draws leading Democrats to Middlesex County.

"What these visits tell us is that turnout is going to be a very serious concern for Democrats. They want to go to the sources of traditional Democratic support. Clearly, Middlesex County is ground zero," said Ross Baker, a professor of political science at Rutgers.

"It's a county that Democrats running statewide have always counted on for turnout. The other targets, obviously, would be Hudson (County), and the area of urban Essex (County) and so on. But Middlesex (County) in some ways is one of the more fruitful areas of Democratic strength in the state ... but only if they turn out," Baker said.

"Turnout really is the story. The Democrats have a very healthy registration edge, but that in itself is not enough to put Corzine over in a very tight race," Baker said.

"Democrats need a strong plurality coming out of Middlesex County in order to win," said Ben Dworkin, director of the Rebovich Institute for New Jersey Politics at Rider University.

Dworkin noted that in 1993, when Democratic incumbent Gov. Jim Florio faced Republican challenger Christie Todd Whitman, Florio had a margin in Middlesex County of fewer than 2,000 votes. Whitman won the election statewide by 26,000 votes.

When Corzine defeated Republican candidate Doug Forester four years ago, he led by 32,000 votes in Middlesex County and won statewide by 239,000.

"The turnout in a governor's race tends to be fairly low. One of the critical components to winning is getting the people inclined to vote for you to actually go out and vote," said John Weingart, associate director of Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.

"The reason for scheduling these events (in Middlesex County) would be high-profile for Democrats to go to an area where there are a lot of Democrats and try to remind them they like Obama and Corzine is linked with them."

Baker said the main issue in the gubernatorial campaign will be the economy.

"The real division in terms of campaign messages, is the Christie people want to make to make it a referendum on Jon Corzine. The Corzine campaign wants to make this race a choice between Corzine and (Republican Party candidate Chris) Christie," Baker said.

Road to recovery

Biden allowed how the governor has spent the latter part of his term grappling with the worst economy in eight decades. The economy is on the rebound, he said. "Now we're talking about the shape of recovery."

If voters give Corzine another four years to govern in better times, Biden said, the governor will be hailed as "one of the great governors in the United States of America."

It was a congenial event Monday with U.S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., hailing the vice president as "plain good guy Joe."

The list of speakers included candidates for the Middlesex County Board of Freeholders: Rios, H. James Polos and Carol Barrett. Speakers also included two area congressman, Rush D. Holt and Frank J. Pallone Jr., and

state Sen. Barbara Buono, D-Middlesex.

During his speech Corzine spoke of how he differs from Christie.

Corzine said he is for such measures as a woman's right to choose, embryonic stem cell research, preschool education and has the support of public service unions, including police officers, firefighters and teachers.

"These are role models, not enemies," he said of the public employees.

He compared the philosophy of the Democratic Party with Republicans, who believe, said Corzine, "It's tough out there. You can make it on your own."

Corzine criticized Christie for suggesting he would reject federal stimulus money, likening Christie to former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin and South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford, who have been critical of the federal stimulus program.

According to Biden New Jersey has already received \$6 billion in stimulus funds with the promise of more to come.

Prior to the start of the event, a group of about a dozen students identifying themselves as members of New Jersey College Republicans carried signs critical of the governor.

Rutgers freshman Corina Talavera of Old Bridge held a sign: "If you want change, change governors."

She said her support of Christie is based on his promise to ease burdens on small businesses, such as the business her parents operate.

Staff writer Gene Racz contributed to this story.

Additional Facts

On MyCJ.com:

VIDEO REPLAY: [Joe Biden campaigns for Corzine in Edison](#)
