

What will New Jersey's post-Christie GOP look like?



Gov. Christie, new chief of the Republican Governors Association. N.J. party officials say he has laid groundwork to build on. (ROSS D. FRANKLIN / AP)



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Gov. Christie last week took over the chairmanship of the influential Republican Governors Association, which will let him build relationships across the country as he campaigns for candidates in the 36 states with 2014 gubernatorial elections.

But as candidates in those states seek to reap the benefits of Christie's charisma and fund-raising prowess, prospects for Republicans at home in New Jersey are far less certain.

Even as Christie cruised to reelection this month with a 22-point victory, his popularity did not sweep more Republicans into the Democratic-controlled Legislature. Some critics say he did not campaign enough with fellow Republicans to give them a lift.

Disadvantages in redistricting and fund-raising make GOP gains over the next four years unlikely, Trenton observers say.

Instead of appearing unified with the party after his victory, Christie unsuccessfully sought to oust state Senate Minority Leader Thomas H. Kean Jr., a possible successor, from his leadership position, resulting in a rare public condemnation from Kean's father, former Gov. Thomas Kean Sr.

The Republican bench looks thin, analysts say, and, in the case of Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno, largely hidden from view.

October's special election for an open U.S. Senate seat drew little interest from Republicans. The nominee, tea party favorite Steve Lonegan, was panned by political observers as too conservative to win a statewide race. After losing a closer-than-expected race to Democrat Cory Booker, Lonegan said he would retire from politics.

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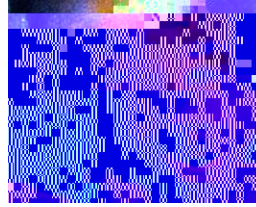
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