

# Golden: Sweeney's pension plan strategy comes with a risk

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With the aggressive move to enact President Trump's executive order to declare public employees pension benefits a constitutional right and require state government to adhere to a payment schedule, a clear message was sent to potential competitors for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination: He intends to be the lead voice on the issue and he'll go toe-to-toe with Governor Christie on behalf of the issue.

Planting the flag on the fiscal beleaguered pension item, weene drew the immediate support of organized labor, a potent force politically, organizationally and financially in Democratic primary contests.

More telling politically, though, is the message weene's move sends to potential opponents in 2017: Acknowledge the inevitability of the pension funding problem and respond to it.

In a quiet but deliberate manner, he is challenging the two individuals most often mentioned as moving toward a candidacy — Jersey City Mayor Steve Fulop and former assemblyman and Governor Philip Murphy — to step forward with suggestion and recommendation to deal with the issue.

Both Fulop and Murphy realize the intense interest on the part of organized labor and the need to how intensify efforts to deal with it. With his constitutional amendment proposal and his running battle with Christie over funding the item, the Senate president has established himself as the leading voice on the issue and, for the moment at least, has cornered labor support.

While his action solidified his role as a leader in the debate over what will surely be a dominant issue in the 2016 legislative election, it does not come without risk.

Lack of enthusiasm

For example, Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto, D-Hudson, was considered a less than enthusiastic supporter of the proposal, suggesting that it was one of several that could and should be considered. Prieto seemed to be holding out hope that the Democratic leadership could negotiate a package with Christie, despite the governor's insistence that benefits are too generous and further concession on the part of public employees must be a part of any solution. His recent foot-tapping, arm-waving rant in which he called public employees "pig" and accused weene and Democrat of selling them out to the union was vintage Christie.

Their arrogance of someone who earns a lot of money is a three-ring circus.

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